

# Maya Cifali

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When I arrived in Central Australia in 1985, a whole world opened up which reminded me of my childhood in Egypt and without thinking any further, I gave up a glorious job in Canberra and got a job in Alice Springs. I am still here, 32 years later.

I was born in Alexandria, the city founded by the thirty years old general of Macedonia, Alexander the Great. He knew what he was doing leading his troops on a long journey across the sea to conquer vast continents. Alexandria was the transition from the Arabian deserts to the civilized and democratic Athens. Today, she is still breathing the hot dry sands of Africa as well as the salty mist of the Mediterranean. It is the city that never dies. Once you have felt her magic spell, it is in your soul forever.

At the age of 18, having completed a French Baccalauréat, I left my home-town to go to Paris and further my education thinking that I would come back for the usual summer holidays: beach days and

surf and sun-tan and parties and camping with school friends on the sands of the Western coast.

But in 1956 political events decided otherwise, and I was denied the going back home. For the next 30 years I lived in some sort of limbo not knowing where I belonged. This exile took me here and there, fantastic places for work and easy living in France, Switzerland, Papua New Guinea, and even Canberra the so young capital city of the so young Australia. I married as people do, had two lovely daughters, who in turn gave me three grand-sons. I even lived through my next revolution, in Iran.

And one day I came to Alice Springs, for a visit and a short holiday. Here, the people of the land, the colours, the sky, the flavours, the sand, the hot sun and even the gum trees in the dry rivers, the fluffy wattles and the rocks of the McDonnell ranges were similar to the desert landscapes of the Western coast of Egypt and its Bedouins.

The similarity gave me joy. I had finally found the place where I felt a deep connection, I was satisfied and I stayed. This is now where I belong. I have a

garden with little white walls and citrus trees, jasmine and oleander, a back veranda looking onto palm trees and gum trees. My garden of Eden.

Central Australia is the real heart of Australia. It has retained the authentic spirit that disappeared from the rest of this island-continent. The Tropic of Capricorn 30km North of the Alice is equivalent to the Tropic of Cancer that marks the Pharaohs temples of Upper Egypt. The same energy gives me life. Red and Yellow are the colours of the unfinished lines.

