

# WHY BROLGAS BIRDS DANCE

## A tale from Australia

A long time ago in the Australian outback there lived a girl named Brolga who loved to dance. This was a problem because, in those days, girls were not allowed to dance. They could only clap their hands and stamp their feet while the men did the dancing.

One night, as the men danced, Brolga couldn't contain herself. She jumped up and began dancing with them. The people of her tribe were shocked at this behavior. At first they were very upset. However, when they saw how beautifully Brolga danced, they let her continue.

Eventually Brolga became a famous tribal dancer. People came from near and far to watch her dance. Several men became infatuated with Brolga and wanted to marry her. She refused all offers because she wanted to dance, not cook and clean and bare children. One magician, named Broolie-Broolie, wouldn't take no for an answer. He watched Brolga's every move waiting for an opportunity to capture her.

Brolga's friends noticed Broolie-Broolie and warned the girl to stay close to camp. At first she did; but soon she became careless and danced away from the others. This was Broolie-Broolie's chance. He turned himself into a whirlwind and followed Brolga. He picked her up and swirled her around and around. He asked her to marry him; but she refused. This made Broolie-Broolie so angry that he changed her into a bird and dropped her into the middle of the desert, far away from her people.

When Brolga realized she had been turned into a bird, she became very sad. She thought she wouldn't be able to dance any more. However, as she got used to her new body, she realized that she could dance. Her wings helped her balance herself so she could now dance even more beautifully than when she was a girl.

When the tribe realized that Brolga was gone, they began to worry. Almost immediately they sent out a search party to look for her. When they came upon a strange dancing bird, they didn't recognize her as Brolga. They were about to chase the bird off, when they recognized the moves she was making as one of their sacred tribal dances.

Now they knew that the bird they were looking at was Brolga. As sad as they were that their friend was no longer human, the tribe still felt responsible for her. They ask the bird to return to camp with them. They promised to look after her.

Brolga agreed.

From that day on, one can see brolga birds dancing around the places where Aboriginal Australians make their camps. These birds are welcomed by the Aboriginal people who feed them and never chase them away.

Brolgas are one of several species of cranes. They live in the wetlands and plains of north and east Australia. They are famous for their courting ritual that looks very much like a dance. One of the Aboriginal ceremonial dances is based on the brolga courting ritual.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta.

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