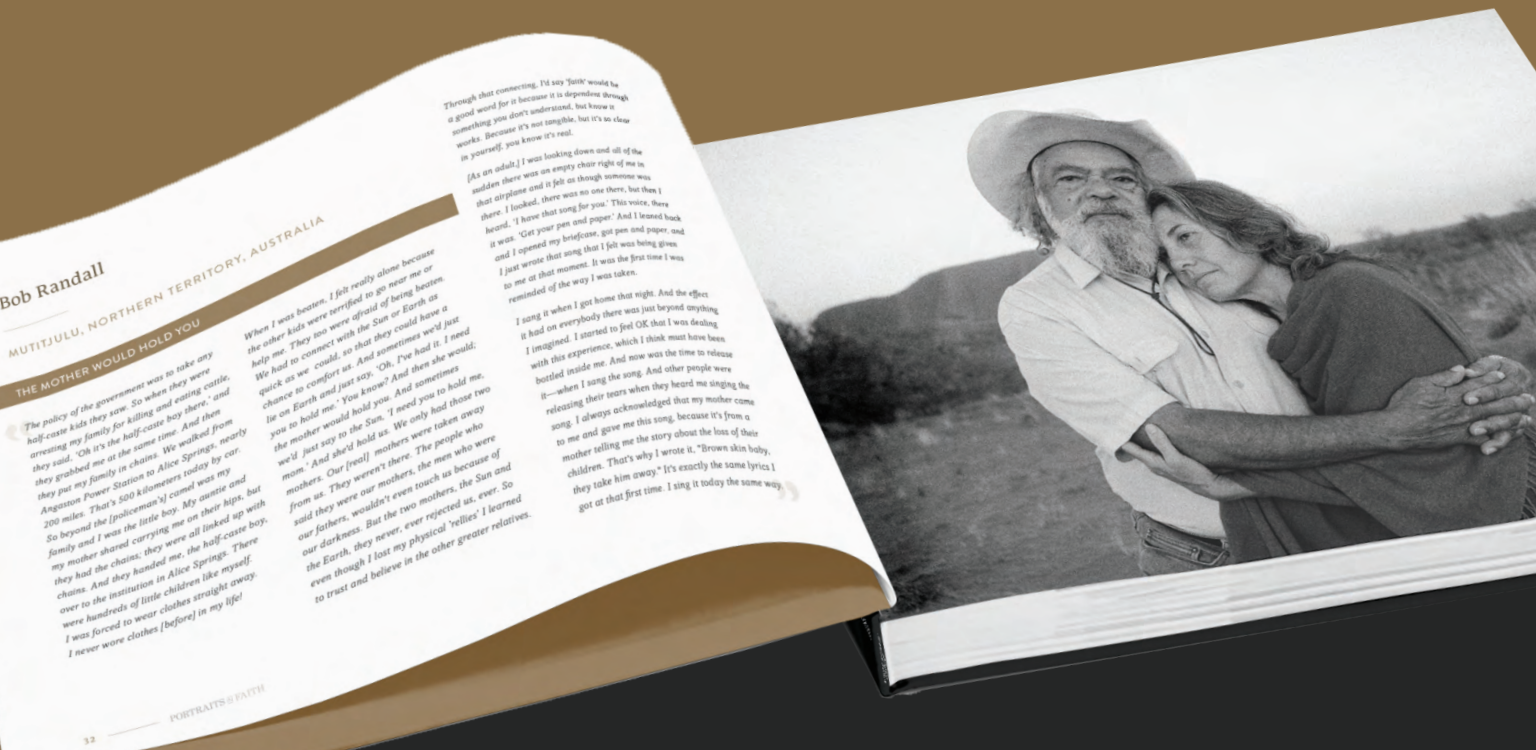


## 125 portraits of faith and spiritual journeys from around the world

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Bob Randall

MUTITJULU, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA  
THE MOTHER WOULD HOLD YOU

The policy of the government was to take any half-caste kids they saw. So when they were arresting my family for killing and eating cattle, they said, 'Oh it's the half-caste boy there,' and they grabbed me at the same time. And then they put my family in chains. We walked from Angaston Power Station to Alice Springs, nearly 500 kilometers today by car. So beyond that 500 kilometers I came with my family and I was the little boy, the half-caste boy, my mother shared carrying me on their hips, but they had the chains; they were all linked up with chains. And they handed me, the half-caste boy, over to the institution in Alice Springs. There were hundreds of little children like myself. I was forced to wear clothes straight away. I never wore clothes [before] in my life!

When I was beaten, I felt really alone because the other kids were terrified to go near me or help me. They too were afraid of being beaten. We had to connect with the Sun or Earth as quick as we could, so that they could have a chance to comfort us. And sometimes we'd just lie on Earth and just say, 'Oh, I've had it. I need you to hold me.' You know? And then she would, the mother would hold us. We only had those two we'd just say to the Sun, 'I need you to hold me.' And she'd hold us. The people who mothers. Our [real] mothers were taken away from us. They weren't there. The people who said they were our mothers, the men who were our fathers, wouldn't even touch us because of the Earth, they never, ever rejected us, ever. So even though I lost my physical 'relties' I learned to trust and believe in the other greater relatives.

Through that connecting, I'd say 'Faith' would be a good word for it because it is dependent through something you don't understand, but know it works. Because it's not tangible, but it's as clear as yourself, you know it's real.

[As an adult,] I was looking down and all of the sudden there was an empty chair right of me in that airplane and a job as though someone was there. I looked, there was no one there, but then I said, 'I have that song for you.' This voice, where there, 'Get your pen and paper.' And I looked back at it was, 'Get your pen and paper, get pen and paper, and I opened my briefcase, got pen and paper, and I just wrote that song that I felt was being given to me at that moment. It was the first time I was reminded of the way I was taken.

I sang it when I got home that night. And the effect it had on everybody there was just beyond anything I imagined. I started to feel OK that I was dealing with this experience, which I think must have been bottled inside me. And now was the time to release it—when I sang the song. And other people were releasing their tears when they heard me singing the song. I always acknowledged that my mother came to me and gave me this song, because it's from a mother telling me the story about the loss of their children. That's why I wrote it, 'Brown skin baby, they take him away.' It's exactly the same lyrics I got at that first time. I sing it today the same way.



“When we hear the word faith, many of us think of words like theology and orthodoxy. But thanks to Daniel Epstein's beautiful new book, perhaps in the future more of us will think of two new words: biography and photography. Portraits in Faith invites us to see faith embodied in people's stories and faces, and as I go from page to page, I feel reverence, awe, humility, wonder, and joy. A beautiful gift for anyone you love, and a masterpiece to grace any coffee table or library.”

~ Brian D. McLaren, former pastor, author, activist