



Joyce Fong  
Grandmother

Melanie Howard  
Granddaughter

## The Mystery of Blachan

Liz Janney interviews Melanie Howard

With the introduction of indentured Asian Labour to Broome in the early 20th century, came the foods and recipes of their homeland. Blachan is the colloquial Broome term for the Malay Sambal Belacan. This sambal is a staple in most Broome 'kriol' households and is served with seafood, curries, over rice or as a snack on bread. Sambal Blachan is created by mixing the shrimp paste, with fresh chilli, garlic, shallot, tamarind paste, dried fish and prawns and then preserved in oil. Its smell is distinctive and its taste is intense, as is the mystery of the Blachan recipes that Broome's 'kriol' families hold close to their hearts.

I was curious to find out more about Blachan and Melanie Howard's interest in maintaining the cultural traditions of her colourful heritage.

*"Food and the cooking process is not so much about the recipe but the alchemy. What type of mood you are in, what type of ingredients you have at hand and that determines how it is going to turn out. What makes Blachan and the kriol food so unique is it's tied to the whole idea of family, culture and tradition and the mealtime together.*

*When I was a kid Grandad Fong (Percy) was this big robust man, in stubby shorts and a pot belly like a buddha, and he would be in the kitchen from morning to late evening, so Nan would go out fishing to Crab Creek, she was the hunter gather. She would have a dozen grandkids in tow on the mudflats collecting cockles, shooting ducks and fishing, then she would come home with the catch. Grandad had woks and pots everywhere in this massive kitchen and he cooked all day. We would sit down at the table and there would be food from one end to the other, always using local produce and what was in the garden with fresh caught fish.*

*Chinatown was our playground and all my relatives had shops, so we would go from one to the other, then play down at Streeter's Jetty and in the afternoon climb up a tamarind or a mango tree and feed on the fruit.*

*Blachan is to my family as it is to many Broome kriol families, the tomatoe sauce of the dining table; it complements everything!"*