



## Nona & Me

*Clare Atkins*

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They are also best friends. It doesn't matter that Rosie is white and Nona is Aboriginal: their family connections tie them together for life.

Born just five days apart in a remote corner of the Northern Territory, the girls are inseparable, until Nona moves away at the age of nine. By the time she returns, they're in Year 10 and things have changed. Rosie has lost interest in the community, preferring to hang out in the nearby mining town, where she goes to school with the glamorous Selena, and Selena's gorgeous older brother Nick.

When a political announcement highlights divisions between the Aboriginal community and the mining town, Rosie is put in a difficult position: will she be forced to choose between her first love and her oldest friend?

## **Nona & Me Details**

Date : Published September 24th 2014 by Black Inc.

ISBN : 9781863956895

Author : Clare Atkins

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Cultural, Australia, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Nona & Me for online ebook

### DonutKnow says

It was interesting to read and learn about the Aboriginal culture through this book and to see how connected they are as a people- particularly how family transcended blood and race. It was a deeply heartfelt novel, complete with teen angst and its uncertainties, as well as growth and rediscovery of one's identity after taking a close look at their values.

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### RitaSkeeter says

**I've delayed, procrastinated, and altogether avoided writing this review for a few weeks now.** The reason? This is a perfect book, and it deserves the perfect review that will make everyone go out and read it (only a little over \$2 in the kindle store at the moment peeps), but I can only write an imperfect review for it.

**Atkins has that amazing skill of being able to write for adolescents (and grown ups...) without talking down to her audience,** or having stilted syntax. I love fiction aimed at a YA audience, but reading someone who writes as ably as Atkins is a rarity.

Atkins writes a seemingly simply told story, but there are layers upon layers upon layers in this book. The more you think about it and pull it apart, the more that is there. It's possible some may find the author heavy handed in her political message. I didn't find that the case. I thought she wrote a very powerful novel. **It may be difficult for some white Australians to hear the messages she gives, but that makes it even more important for us to listen.** The book is set during the intervention in the Northern Territory, but there is clear applicability to current politics with plans for the forced closures of indigenous communities.

**This book should be read by every Australian.** It should be on high school reading lists. Someone should force Tone to sit down and read it. It's an important book politically. But it is also a very powerful, moving book.

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### Carolyn Gilpin says

Nona & Me is so sad and beautiful and achingly real - there are not enough YA books involving indigenous Aussie characters, let alone set in 'country' as they call it. It reads beautifully, is engaging in that the teenage (& white) protagonist (Rosie) is just that - a typical teen who is trying to fit in with the cool girls at school.

But Rosie is different to them in that she was born & raised in Yirrkala, a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. Her parents have split, but she lives with her eccentric art teacher mum in Yirrkala and goes to school in the local mining town. Dad, another white teacher, lives further away in an even more remote community & she doesn't see him often but feels she is closer to him.

Nona turns up right at the start of the story when she turns up to attend Rosie's school. She & Rosie were born at Yirrkala only days apart & their mums raised them as family. That's what the Aboriginal communities do - adopt people they like as family. But then Nona went off to live at Elcho Island after her

father died, and the sisters (---) grew far apart. Rosie is embarrassed to see her old friend, because her new (white) schoolfriends are racist, if not always openly. And she's got a massive crush on her best & coolest friend ---'s older brother Nick, so she's very distracted.

Then Nona overhears Rosie's response to --- that they once were family but now it means nothing. A throw-away teenage line that is meant to help Rosie fit in with her new friends, but alienates Nona, who decides to leave school again. Rosie continues on with her new partying life, going out with Nick, trying to be more grown-up, and worrying her parents greatly. Then Nona's family starts to disintegrate with her mother drinking heavily and a terrible tragedy striking.

The book moves neatly between 2001 when Nona & Rosie were innocent little kids together, to 2007 and the disastrous Federal Government Intervention (sending the Army and various medical professionals into remote Aboriginal communities to 'clean' them up). Rosie is drawn back in reluctantly to the community, and discovers just what her boyfriend thinks of the indigenous people, her father's secret life, her mother's unhappiness, and the extent of her bond to Nona's family.

This is such a delicately written book in its ability to portray so much of Aboriginal culture, in particular the Yolngu people of Yirrkala, without lecturing. Having Rosie grow up in the community allows her narrative voice to drop in Yolngu words and explain culture unobtrusively. I only took so long to read this book because I had to read a couple in between for book clubs, and also because I dreaded reading about the Intervention, which I did not agree with, and which did not really help the communities in any way.

Clare Atkins spent some years living with her husband & kids in Yirrkala, and she has written the experience skilfully into 'Nona & Me' of being an outsider accepted into a very different and welcoming culture.

While Nona's story is sad and moving, Atkins makes sure there is a positive note and I can see that her independent spirit won't be defeated by her circumstances - I can picture her doing great things for her community, most likely alongside Rosie, whose journey is one of acceptance and growth. I loved this book, and the sights and sounds of the earthy, tough but loving Yolngu life stayed with me long after finishing.

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### **Tara says**

A very real story of friendship and family and courage to be yourself. I loved reading about Rosie's adopted family with the stories and tradition. Her journey left me feeling sad yet happy.

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### **June says**

This novel was thought provoking. It provides an insight into what life might be like for a teenage girl, Rosie, living in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. Although Rosie is not an Aboriginal she has lived in the community all her life. Her parents are separated and she lives with her mother and still has contact with her father. The novel is set in 2007 when John Howard was in power and his government launched an 'emergency intervention' into the Northern Territory in response to the Little Children are Sacred report.

Rosie attends a school in town where many of the students are the children of people who work in the mines

and have quite an unsympathetic attitude towards the members of the aboriginal community, and/or simply ignore and avoid them as much as possible. She is torn between trying to fit in at school and interacting with the Aboriginal community more closely.

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### **Pauline says**

4.5 stars. There is a great deal to recommend in this book but I have also have one problem with it that stopped me from giving this 5 stars which I will explore in the spoiler section.

I think many schools will study this novel – it is particularly relevant for year 10. It addresses many issues of relevance for teens – identity, finding your place at school, home and in the world and belonging. The push/pull phase of adolescence is dealt with quite well – Rosie wants her independence, wants to be her own person yet also at times needs/wants/craves her parents' advice – even if it is to reject it. Her problems are compounded as she has a foot in both worlds – town and community – and at times she feels she doesn't belong to either. It is also the stage where teens question their parents' ideology and motives and Rosie is realising that her parents had lives and dreams and aspirations before she was born. Her growth to maturity foreshadows the acceptance of her parents as being individuals who are not always right and who do make their own mistakes. It is also difficult sometimes for the children of those whose parents are particularly politically active - Rosie feels the weight of their disappointment in her when she disagrees with their sentiments so at times they are not really encouraging her to form her own opinions.

This is quite beautifully written and very evocative of both time and place. Atkins has created wonderful descriptions of the town and the community, most clearly from her own experience of living in the area. She doesn't hold back with her descriptions of the positive and negative aspects of both the Napaki (Anglo) and Yolngu (Aboriginal) lifestyles. At times she makes a good case for explaining the feelings of division and historical events in the area.

Atkins also explores the developing relationship between Rosie and Nick in a very authentic manner – the anxiety, tension, exhilaration and emotion of young love are very realistic. It is with this relationship though that I have a problem. (view spoiler)

Having said all that, Atkins has a lovely style and I am looking forward to reading more of her work.

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### **C.G. Drews says**

**Well, that was seriously bittersweet.** It's a gorgeous tale, though, with nice writing and a heart-tugging message about racism and some fabulous character development. If you actually want to know about Australia and the indigenous people and how STINKIN' HOT it is in the Northern Territory? Read this book.

**So it's about racism, basically, which is one heck of a touchy subject.** In the back of my head I always think "Racism? Pfft. That was so in the 50s." BUT IT'S NOT. Racism is still an issue today and it probably will be forever. I think cultural differences are a huge factor. *Nona And Me* really dug into the heart of the

matter. Our bonnie lass narrator, Rosie, isn't racist per se...but her boyfriend is and she's struggling with balancing the beliefs she's grown up with versus what she wants to think for herself. **It's a story about growing up and using your brain for yourself.** Totally well written.

**We really got to explore Rosie's thought process.** She's 15 and...well...15 year olds are not notorious for their incredible intelligence. They seem to think they Know Everything. (I was, of course, never like that when I was 15. No no. I was perfectly agreeable.) So Rosie just makes incredibly DUMB DECISIONS. Lots of them. Drinking, lying to her mum about where she is, going out with people she shouldn't, abandoning her childhood friend, Nona, because Nona is indigenous and Rosie is trying to be cool...blah blah and etc. Plus Rosie has a rather Plain Jane voice. She was your Typical YA Lady Who Needs Learn A Lesson. Every time she made a bad decision I thought...

I mean, her boyfriend made some cracker racist remarks and Rosie stands there and defends him? I THINK THIS RELATIONSHIP IS A TRAINWRECK. I won't tell you if I'm right or not. But the warning bells rang so loud they gave me a concussion.

**The book actually talks about politics of Arnhem Land and what's happening in government and protest too.** It wasn't *huge* on it, but the facts were there. Interesting, although I didn't always keep up.

**I was there to see Nona and Rosie!** Did I get them? Um. Well, the book is divided into chapters of back-flashing to Rosie's past with Nona as her BFF. But the present? Nona is basically *not* in the story. I wanted a huge Happily Ever After and a reuniting and something totally heartwarming. I got a mixture. Mostly reality. **I appreciate how down to earth this book was.**

But really? Living in the NT without an air-conditioner? I'm melting just thinking about it.

**This is a totally impeccable book.** It's a touching story and SO well written. It's not hugely goopy though and it deals in realism not perfection (huzzah!). And it actually talks about taboo topics, like racism, and handles it brilliantly. But ultimately it's a coming-of-age story where a 15 year old grows a glorious brain and starts making better life decisions.

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### **WatermeLoonie says**

Okay, this is NOT one of your same old 'friendship' books where they're best it's but then they fight and they have to deal. NO WAY. Never could anyone ever think that this book would stoop so low after this. It should have a genre on its own.

And the cover! The coooooverrrrrrrrr gonna buy this book AQAP. And meet authrorrrrrrrr?!?! I  
REALLY HOPE SO

Just loved everything. Was also really shocked at some points. I never really realised how mistreated some Aborigines are, even now. I mean, down South, I don't really meet many of you/them, which is a real shame. This very week we had a test on the aboriginal rights movement, and it was fascinating seeing it all through the novel. Like the mining and the apology.... Quite an eye opener.

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## **Pocket Full of Pages says**

‘Nona & Me’ by Clare Atkins.

Publisher: Black Inc

Published: September 24th 2014.

Page Count: 288 pages.

Genre: YA Contemporary.

Synopsis:

Rosie and Nona are sisters. Yapas.

They are also best friends. It doesn’t matter that Rosie is white and Nona is Aboriginal: their family connections tie them together for life.

Born just five days apart in a remote corner of the Northern Territory, the girls are inseparable, until Nona moves away at the age of nine. By the time she returns, they’re in Year 10 and things have changed. Rosie has lost interest in the community, preferring to hang out in the nearby mining town, where she goes to school with the glamorous Selena, and Selena’s gorgeous older brother Nick.

When a political announcement highlights divisions between the Aboriginal community and the mining town, Rosie is put in a difficult position: will she be forced to choose between her first love and her oldest friend?

Review:

Firstly, a huge thank you to Black Inc Australia for sending us a gorgeous copy of ‘Nona & Me’ to review.

Nona and Me is based on the lives of Nona and Rosie who grew up together as Yapas (sisters) in Yirrkala, a remote community located in the Northern Territory of Australia. A series of events pull the girls apart, until now. Nona after leaving the town returns to attend Rosie’s school. In a time when racial barriers are raised Rosie believes that she has finally found her niche, whom just happen to appear as the popular girls at the school, and the guy she’s been crushing on finally starts to notice her. The last thing she accounts for is to be reminded of her past including her ties with her aboriginal family and Yolnu people.

This book takes place in chapters bouncing back and forth between the past and present. We see how close Rosie and Nona’s relationship was and how far apart they have become. Being portrayed from Rosie’s perspective readers recognize common teen struggles such as embarrassment over family connections, struggling to follow parenting rules, peer pressure and trying to become someone you’re not. Meaning Rosie constantly ignores Nona at school.

We found that Rosie was extremely easy to relate to. She’s a normal teenager that struggles to find her own identity. She is so overcome with fear and peer pressure to fit in and not feel like outcast. Her insecurities are often very overwhelming which makes her really difficult to like, particularly when she tries to ignore Nona and her aboriginal family when they have lovingly and willingly opened their arms to her. We loved how

Clare Atkins showed Rosie evolving and learning throughout the novel to appreciate her mother, family, her community and to recognize what kinds of people she is truly associating with in her friendship group.

Even though we don't often see much of Nona in the present chapters there is no doubt that she plays a crucial importance in the storyline. There is a certain beauty of reading the chapters from the past. They are delicate and striking retellings of the strong childhood friendship between the two girls. The author has done a beautiful and magnificent job of finding a balance between intricacy and tension, so that when you read from the past to the present you will remain anxious waiting for the moment of when Nona has to leave Rosie.

Nona and Rosie are the centre of this stunning story. As we turned each page we were devoured with the love and heartbreak of their intriguing relationship. We just adored these main characters and gave into our never-ending emotions after this gorgeous read! We loved that we learned about aboriginal communities and cultures throughout this plot!

We absolutely recommend this beautifully told story which is fascinating and rich in insight to YA Contemporary readers.

Book Rating: 4/5 Stars.

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### **Bree T says**

Rosie and Nona have grown up as close as sisters – they are sisters despite the fact that Nona is Aboriginal and Rosie is not. Nona's family members have been adopting Rosie's family members for generations now and the two families are as one. As children, Rosie and Nona laugh, learn and play together. They are inseparable until they are nine when Nona moves away.

When she returns at age 15, things are different. Despite the fact that Rosie still lives in the remote Aboriginal community with her mother, she no longer goes to the school there. Instead she goes to the high school in the nearby mining 'town' and has moved on to other friendships. Rosie's social life revolves around the popular and confident Selena as well as Selena's good looking older brother Nick, neither of whom have good opinions about the local indigenous population.

It is 2007 and the year that John Howard announces his infamous and controversial "Intervention" policy which puts the mining town population at odds with the Aboriginal communities. Rosie has been struggling to fit in because of her upbringing – she's been brought up to think differently about the Aboriginal people and their lifestyles. Now she finds herself in the unenviable position of having to choose where her loyalty lies: with her best friend, her sister, the one who is supposed to be her family forever or her new first love.

In a word, this book is powerful.

It begins in 2007 when Nona returns to the area she left 6 years ago and Rosie sees her at the high school. At 15, Rosie is on the cusp of many things and she's struggling with her place. She's been raised on a remote Aboriginal community with parents who respect and cherish their way of life. She learned smatterings of the local dialect, had her own Aboriginal name given to her and spent much of her time playing with Nona, her Aboriginal yapa (sister) or spending time with her extended family. However since Nona left and Rosie moved to the high school in the nearby mining town, things became different. There's not the same sort of

tolerance, understanding and respect for the indigenous community that she was raised with. At times there is judgement, stereotyping and blatant racism.

Rosie is torn between a desire to be ‘normal’ like the other kids – to be able to live in town and go to the pool, or the shops for a coffee whenever she wants. To go to a party and wear a normal dress bought from a store instead of something her mother made for her by reusing some other household cloth item. She wants to have friends, maybe a boyfriend in the handsome and older Nick. At the same time, she can’t bear to hear the sentiments that these town people often express. She is half ashamed of where she lives in front of them, but at the same time feels the need to passionately defend both the community and its population when they are disparaged.

I could really understand Rosie’s conflict, I think that desire to fit in and be accepted is present in all of us in some way or another, most definitely when we’re in the awkward teenage part of our lives. She’s already on the outer not living in the mining town and being limited when she can get in and out to social events and she knows that voicing some of her real opinions and even some truths will get her seen as an outcast. When she begins seeing Nick, the older brother of her friend Selena, it’s very clear that they have different ideas and that Nick will never really be able to understand Rosie’s upbringing and relationship with the Aboriginal community. You always want the people you care about to understand you, or to at least be able to accept your differences and it becomes obvious that Nick and Rosie are going to really struggle to find this harmony.

As well as showing the close relationship between Rosie and Nona and the similarity of their childhoods, this book also shows the divide that their lives have taken. Rosie has stayed in school and is already thinking of the College of Fine Arts in Sydney when she graduates in a couple of years. By contrast, despite wanting to become a nurse after a stint in hospital as a child, Nona has missed a lot of school and will need much in the way of help and support if she is to be able to graduate and complete the training that she will need. Despite being only 15, she lives pretty much an adult lifestyle, just another difference in the two cultures and this is something Rosie does struggle with. She doesn’t see how this can or should happen to a girl who is the same age as her, despite having grown up within the culture and probably having seen it before. It also takes time to highlight the other problems that Aboriginals in remote communities face, such as drinking and “sniffing” (petrol or glue) and the ways in which some are attempting to help them, rather than jailing them or punishing them.

Nona & Me highlights really just how far we still have to go. I know it was only 7 or 8 years ago but I’d actually totally forgotten about the “intervention” policy until it appeared in this book. It showed me just how far removed I am from the communities in the Northern Territory and other outback areas and how little I know about what it’s like there. This book gave me a glimpse into that: the oppressive heat, the remoteness, the hunting and fishing they do for both fun and food and the bonds that can develop between two very different families. I would have loved Nona’s side of the story as well as Rosie’s, I find myself wondering about her long after I’ve finished the book.

Highly, highly recommend this one....to everyone.

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### **Kate says**

This book is aimed at mid-teens and I read it as a potential text for teaching in 2016. By the end of the first 50 pages I was designing a whole unit around it.

The story is about two girls who are sisters in the Yolngu kinship sisters told from the perspective of Rosie. There is your usual teens stuff peer pressure, popularity, boyfriends, but behind it is a story of lost identity and indigenous culture. Rosie, when she was little, was involved in Yolngu life, but after the departure of Nona floated into a Western lifestyle and is trying to find a way to live in both.

The novel jumps between 2 time periods: 1999-2001, and 2007-2008, which means it also covers some important contemporary moments in indigenous history, leading to some great teaching points.

For any Catholic school teachers, this is a teen novel with no sex in it (though there is some deliberation on the topic) so it will be suitable. Apparently there are also teaching notes available.

Overall it was a beautifully written novel with a lot of depth.

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### **Annie says**

If you are looking for a quality YA Contemporary read.. THIS WOULD BE IT!!! A FANTASTIC book!! very well written and the storyline was so insightful.. it explored multicultural diversity among white and indigenous Australians, socio-economic differences and prejudices, different types of families, coming of age, maturity, change... words can't describe how much I love this book, this may have to be one of my favourites for 2016!!! I also loved the backstory that was intertwined with present day and the insight into Aboriginal culture.. amazing!!! well done to author Clare Atkins!!! I hope I get a chance to commend you personally on this book!!

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### **Miffy says**

3 1/2 stars. This is a gentle novel. The narrator is Rosie, a white teenage girl living with her single mum in the community of Yirrkala in the Northern Territory. Primarily focusing on Rosie's struggle to acknowledge her Aboriginal family ties, I was far more interested in the relationship between Nona and Rosie as kids, which was only touched upon. The emotional manipulation, denial of true friends, and romantic problems in Rosie's life were all pretty standard, but the explanations of the community and how they all work together as family was really fascinating, as was the language and lifestyle. Good, but so much more potential, IMHO.

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### **Nara says**

Despite, being called Nona and Me, I feel like this book was very much focused on Rosie and the journey she takes to define her own identity as a white girl split between the town where her best friend and boyfriend live and the Aboriginal community into which she's been "adopted". In fact, Nona didn't really have that large a role to play for most of the story, and featured mostly in flashbacks. I suppose I didn't mind too much that this was the case, although it would have been nice to learn a bit more about Nona.

As teenagers go, Rosie makes quite a lot of foolish decisions that either had me sighing in disappointment or clenching my fists in frustration, but I don't see this as a bad thing. It was simply something that made her a more realistic and relatable character. It was also great to see both her parents at various points in the novel.

Too often, "disappearing parent syndrome" features in Young Adult, but I'm happy to say that wasn't the case in *Nona and Me*.

The way the Aboriginal aspect of things was handled was very culturally sensitive, and I feel like I've learnt a lot more about Aboriginal culture from the book, despite the fact that education didn't seem to be a major aim of the story.

If you're looking for a bit of diversity, or simply a YA book set in Australia for a change, this book is definitely worth checking out.

#### Ratings

Overall: 8/10

Plot: 3/5

Romance: 3.5/5

Writing: 4/5

Characters: 4/5

Cover: 4/5

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#### **Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says**

*Nona and Me* was an incredibly deep and emotional story of two childhood friends who reconnect again as almost adults. Uniquely Australian, I loved being transported to the small community where the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child', no truer words have been spoken. Rosie's parents are separated, but keep in contact. Both are strong in their beliefs of supporting their local communities and have raised Rosie to be accepting, respectful and treat others with dignity. But once Nona, her childhood friend moved away, Rosie lost her way and became another small minded girl who just wanted to fit in with the crowd. Old habits die hard and when Nona returns, Rosie goes as far as to hide her association with her, for fear of being the center of gossip among her friends and losing the keen eye of Nick. My heart broke for Nona, Rosie cared far more about others impressions of her than wanting to reconnect with her sister.

Nona was a lovely character, free spirited and as beautiful as she was quick witted. I would have loved to have seen her point of view and learnt more about where she'd been and how her life was growing up away from Yirrkala. The storyline is set in an era where an 'intervention' was introduced into the Northern Territory, restricting the choices of Native Australians and all based on the misinformation of the government in power at the time. *Nona and Me* addresses the issues within the community, the lack of job opportunities within the fictional town, leading to depression and suicide. It was incredibly raw and moving, and highlighted the injustice and many forms of racism that run rampant within the fictional town and the wider society as a whole.

Nick's character is one example of a boy who has formed his own opinions from that of his parents, his wealthy father seeing the Indigenous community as second class, not worth his time or patience and passing the same bigoted beliefs onto his son. It isn't long until Nick shows his true, misguided opinions, seeking his father's approval at the expense of others. Sadly, Rosie stood idly by and excused his behavior. In one particular chapter, where Nick was introduced to Rosie's father, where like the government at the time, Nick's opinions were based on misinformation and preconceived notions of the community. Rosie's father is a phenomenal character. Sensitive, educated and opinionated.

**We're all fundamentally human. We all feel, bleed, hurt, love.**

I loved it. It was moving, emotional and gave me a sense of righteousness that Rosie was able to make her own independent decisions, while learning a tough life lesson. Beautifully bittersweet.

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