

# Short and Sweet -

## A "Sneak Peek" Inside

### Margot's Finke's Latest Books



Take a quick ride on  
Margot's *Magic Carpet* of Books

<http://www.margotfinke.com>

[mfinke@frontier.com](mailto:mfinke@frontier.com)

**Read** back

Samples from the following published books:

[Taconi and Claude](#) – *Double Trouble* – young teen adventure set in the Aussie outback.

[The Revenge of Thelma Hill](#) – young teen ghost mystery set in Oregon.

[Down Under Calling](#) – Grandson and Grandma come together across an ocean.

[Kangaroo Clues](#) – rhyming picture book - part of my *Wild and Wonderful* series.

[Mama Grizzly Bear](#) – rhyming picture book - another in my *Wild and Wonderful* series.

[Horatio Humble Beats the Big D](#) – PB that helps and encourages dyslexic kids.

[Ruthie and the Hippo's Fat Behind](#) – PB shows how sudden change can affect kids.

[Rattlesnake Jam](#) – rhyming PB that is pure BOY fun.

[AMAZON](#) + Kindle – [Powell's Books](#) – [Publisher](#) – [Margot's Website](#) – [Barnes and Noble](#)

\*\*\*\*\*

## COMING SOON

### SAMPLES

from soon to be published books.

\*[Trial by Walkabout](#)—a sequel to *Taconi and Claude*. **NOW PUBLISHED**

\*[Oscar Needs a Friend](#)—story showing this Tasmanian Devil is WAY different.

\*[Kobi Borrows a Pouch](#)—story book about a koala getting lost in the bush.

### PLUS:

The other rhyming picture books in my *Wild and Wonderful* ebook series.  
Now being re-published in SOFT COVER and eBook.

\***Dreamtime Man** – rhyming tale tells how Aussie Aboriginals suffered when the white man arrived

\***Never Say BOO to a Frilly** - 3 separate stories: Frillneck Lizard- Rainbow Birds-Tasmanian Devil.

\***Don't Eat Platypus Stew** - 3 separate stories: Platypus- Koala – Kookaburra.

\***Prairie Dog's Play Day** - 3 separate stories: Prairie Dogs- Bald Eagle- The Stinker (Skunk)

\***Humdinger Hummers** - The hummers in our summer gardens.

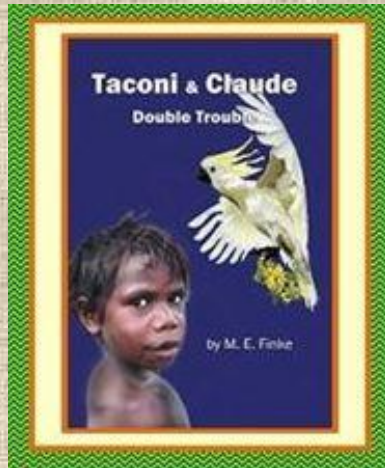
\***Squirrels Can't Help Being Nuts** – 3 separate stories: Squirrels-Kitty Kats – Bumblebees.

**TITLES in RED** are now published - [Amazon](#) and Margot's [Website](#).



# Taconi and Claude - Double Trouble

Available in soft cover – Amazon – Powell's Books  
KINDLE – my Website (and as an e-book)



A young teen coming of age story set in the Aussie outback of 1950. Adventure, a man ceremony, Dreamtime Spirits, a fun and chatty cockatoo + a crazy Dad. And major decisions for aboriginal boy Taconi to make.

\*\* Glossary of Australian and Aboriginal words included.

## CHAPTER ONE

*Outback Australia, sometime in the 1950's.*

*The full moon cast a cold light on Taconi's naked body as four wizened elders pinned him on the ground close to a blazing fire. Sweat rolled off him, and his heart raced the thump, thump, thump of the feather drums: faster and faster.*

*The Medicine Man slid out of the shadows, a ceremonial spear in his hand. Firelight flashed across the wrinkles on his painted face. His bony old limbs ducked and bobbed to the ancient rhythm of the drums. Eagle, kingfisher, and cockatoo feathers swayed on his headdress. The Old Man plunged the tip of his spear into the flames, holding it there while he mumbled an age-old mantra.*

*When the tip of the spear glowed red, Taconi's arms and legs dissolved into mush. There was no escape. The man ceremony was about to claim him. His insides threatened betrayal. N-o-o-o . . . mustn't pee, mustn't pee. . .*

*The Medicine Man thrust the glowing tip of the spear under his nose. Taconi felt the heat, sniffed its acrid smell. The tip sizzled, hovering over his reluctant flesh, poised, ready to burn him into manhood.*

*The singsong voice of the Medicine Man grew faint. The Old Man's eyes stared into his, blazing with the power of timeless ritual. The stars—a billion sparkling eyes—whirled overhead, cold and uncaring. Taconi shut his eyes, waiting for his flesh to sear—waiting for the pain.*

**CHAPTER TWO** (beginning)

*Taconi held his breath. He waited . . .*

*When the pain didn't come, he risked a quick peek. Smoke from the fire blotted out everything except the eyes of the Medicine Man. His burning stare hung over Taconi for a moment, before the smoke claimed him. Bathed in sweat, Taconi jolted upright. "By Cripes, what's happenin'?" Relief flooded through him. He was safe in his bed.*

*Outside in the cool pre-dawn air, Coorparoo Cattle Station's feathered alarm clock, a sulfur crested Cockatoo named Claude, rasped, "Wakey, wakey. Rise and shine!"*

*"Crikey," he muttered. "That man ceremony dream would scare the hide off a croc!" Ever since he found out about his upcoming man ceremony, the recurring dream had haunted his sleep. He glanced at the other bed and frowned. "Bed's Empty. Dad musta left early for the homestead kitchen."*

*He couldn't understand what drove his dad to cook white folk's muck for the Boss and the Missus. This was an outback size worry. If his dad got the cookie job, permanent like, there'd be no time for hunting together or throwing the spear. If he was to become a man of his tribe, Dad must teach him these things. The idea of his dad as cookie sat on Taconi's shoulders like a giant termite mound.*

*He stared out the small window of the hut he shared with his dad. The vast expanse of Coorparoo Cattle Station waited for the day's first sunlight. "Coor-par-oo," he murmured, liking the feel of the word on his tongue. The soft sounds mimicked the gentle call of doves.*

**SEQUEL** titled "Survival by Walkabout."

Read [SAMPLE](#)

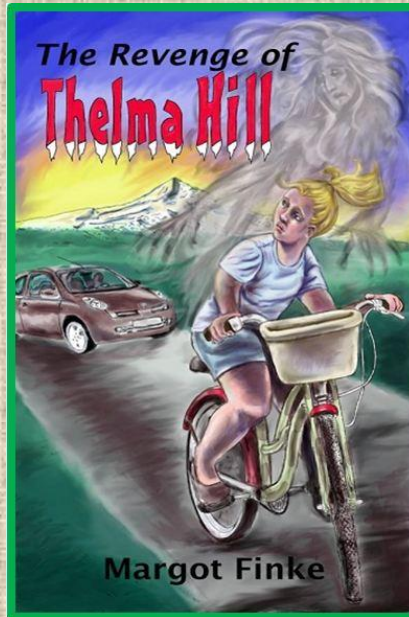


**Coorparoo Cattle Station Homestead.**

[BACK](#)



## The Revenge of Thelma Hill



Kindle – Smashwords – Nook etc  
A ghost mystery set in Oregon

When Frannie’s dad is transferred to Portland, Oregon, her only worry was making new friends, the sibling rivalry between her and her twin brother, and the whereabouts of her missing mom. But the ghost changed all that. Frannie finds herself agreeing to help the ghost trap her killer, as well as face a very jealous giant arachnid in the scary basement of their old house. Reluctant twin in tow, she plans a trap for the killer, and hopes she can find out where their mom went.

### CHAPTER ONE

Hoblin, goblin, killer ghost,  
Which of these scares you the most?

*Frannie James often dreamt about her missing mother. Nothing warm and fuzzy of course, more like reruns of a half forgotten TV series. It was happening again. Her hands clenched as she slept. Would Mom smile? Just one loving smile. . . Please.*

*She wondered why her mother always stayed back, her face a distant blur? Wait. . . This time was different. Her mom was walking closer, pale hair swinging about her shoulders, her oval face clearer with every step. Warm brown eyes gazed at Frannie with affection.*

*Click. Like turning off the TV, the mother dream went blank. A bone-snapping chill penetrated Frannie’s sleep. Jerking awake, she sat bolt upright, muddle-headed, longing to return to the dream and her mother. “Oh Mom. . .” she whispered, “Where are you? Why did you go away? Was it my fault?”*

*Her mom had slipped out of their lives years ago, yet Frannie still longed for her. She wanted to know why, after that first year, her mom never answered their letters.*

*Tears pricked her eyelids.*

*Ice-cold, Frannie tugged the blankets around her. A sudden chill wind blew through the room surprising her. But how. . .? The window is closed!*

*"Brrr." Frannie tugged the comforter higher. Her sleep muddled thoughts rambled. Lacy moonlight on the carpet. . . Dark shadows. . . Wind. . .? She definitely remembered closing the window.*

*A startling gray mist writhed deep within the shadows near her closet. Frannie caught her breath. A gaunt figure emerged from the swirling mist. Gathering gray veils around it, the figure floated toward her. Half hidden in veils, it halted at the foot of her bed. The figure pulsed in-and-out, in-and-out, as if gasping for air.*

*Frannie forgot to breathe. "NO! NO! NO!" she whispered. "Ghosts are NOT real!"*

*A moan, high pitched and eerie, came from the apparition's gaping skeleton mouth.*

*Frannie gawked, her mouth dry, her heart skipping beats. "Wake up!" she told herself, ducking beneath the blankets. She counted to twenty, then flung back the covers.*

*Oh, no-o-o-! It's still here.*

*The figure, now clearer, was draped in veils - gray and translucent, like a spider would spin. It drifted closer, and hovered, its bony arms reached out. Closer. Closer.*

*This isn't happening! Another blast of wind from nowhere. Icy fingers stabbed at her flesh. A dusting of frost, crisp and white, covered every surface in her room. Frannie tried to scream, yet barely a gurgle escaped, squeezed between her chattering teeth. Scooting back until her head banged the headboard, she cowered, unwilling to believe in the nightmare before her.*

*The apparition had her trapped. Frannie watched, bug eyed, as the skeleton moved beneath the folds of the spider-like veils. Long white hair floated around its skull. The only living thing about the creature was its dark luminous eyes. They held her gaze, impossible to look away.*

*Ice replaced the blood in Frannie's arms and legs. I have to wake up. Nightmares go away when you wake - right? She pinched her arm - hard. It hurt, but the gray-gowned skeleton did not go away.*

*Bizarre thoughts crowded into Frannie's head. Thoughts that did not come from her. Thoughts that whispered, "Trust me. Please, stay calm."*

*Holy bee-boogers! This "thing" is plugged into my brain!*

*"No Way" she said aloud. "No flippin' way!"*

*The skeletal figure floated closer, its cobwebby gown swirling across the covers. Bony hands clasped, it gazed at Frannie with intense eyes, as if reading her mind. Its mouth never opened, yet a gazillion words zoomed into her brain.*



*Confusion and fear, plus a pounding headache, hit her instantly. Frannie gasped, "If you don't stop, the top of my head will fly off!" Moaning, she rocked back and forth, hands pressed over both ears. "Please. . .!"*

*Slowly, bit-by-bit, the presence withdrew from her mind, leaving only the echo of fear and confusion. What would come next? Frannie didn't dare move.*

*Then, at a snail's pace, deliberate and measured, words began to flow into her brain.*

*"Help me, Frannie James. I have waited many years for you. You are the one."*

*Frannie found her voice. "Who. . .? What are you? What do you want from me?"*

*"I want revenge. I want my killer to pay for what he did to me. I want to leave this half-life, and go beyond, to the Great Reward."*

*A gust of cold wind rattled her picture of Madonna, and whipped the curtains into a frenzy. "Maybe I'm not dreaming." Frannie trembled from head to foot.*

*The gray veils frothed around the skeleton's figure. More words flowed into Frannie's head. "You have the power, Frannie James. Only you. There are many astral levels between life and death. Your power can help me out of the limbo I have endured. In addition, my power can help you. Reflect on this. You will need my help."*

*Again, the spidery veils swirled and frothed, faster and faster, quickly hiding the bony frame within. Its hypnotic eyes glowed, then vanished into the mass of shadows beyond the foot of her bed.*

*"Soon Frannie. I will return soon-n-n-n-n." The words echoed inside Frannie's head. She shuddered. Were the words a threat or a promise?*

*The wind and frost vanished with the apparition.*

*Wide eyed, a fist crammed into her mouth, Frannie peered into the corners of her room. Tentacles of fear squeezed her chest. She fought the urge to scream.*

*"This would never happen back home." She sobbed. "I want to go back to Iowa!" Tugging the comforter around her ears, Frannie wedged her hands under her armpits to steady and warm them.*

*Hands warmed, she plucked up enough courage to lean over and turn on the bedside lamp. The glow of the light, and the warmth of the covers, didn't help much. The layer of frost had disappeared, leaving only familiar things in the lamplight. Bookshelves, a dresser, a desk and a chair: everything perfectly normal. Yet every time the old floorboards creaked, or the wind scraped a branch against the wall, Frannie trembled.*

*Will the thing return? Maybe it's NOT real. . . Maybe it's just me? Am I nuts? Mmmmm. . . I was pretty sane in Iowa. Two weeks in Oregon couldn't make me crazy – could it? A shiver rushed over her. Huddled beneath the covers, Frannie's brain couldn't wrap itself around the idea of*

*ghosts, let alone helping one. The only thing wilder than helping one was needing help from one. Totally outrageous!*

*Frannie tried to comfort herself. "Should I tell Dad I've maybe seen a ghost?" She pictured his raised eyebrows and doubtful expression. "Huh, Dad would want proof. He'd worry, too - think my mental marbles were fused. Nope, Dad's out!"*

*Tears threatened. "I wish Mom was here. Stupid idea! She's never here when I need her. Nothing new there." The dim memory of her mom often comforted Frannie in her dreams, but not tonight. Tonight she needed real, right-here-and-now, loving arms around her.*

*"That leaves brother, Jeff." She closed her eyes. Jeff was her twin and a full half an hour older. He was also seriously weird. "Yeah, right, I'll tell Jeff -- not in this lifetime!" Frannie could almost hear his doubtful snickers.*

*Mopping her tears with impatient dabs from the sheet, she longed to be back in Iowa. The town of Tigard, Oregon, was unfamiliar, and getting scarier by the moment. Why didn't the bank transfer Dad to somewhere in Iowa? And summer vacation was no help, either. There'd be zero chance of making new friends until school began in early September.*

*"So what? You're almost thirteen - deal with it!" Frannie's pulse tap-danced. Chewing over her alternatives, she kept an eye on the gloomier corners, just in case. Seems Dad had dragged them from Iowa to Oregon, without a friend to their name, and dumped them in a haunted house.*

*"That "thing" sure looked real. . . But what do I know?" She remembered a TV program about ghosts haunting old English Castles. "This is Oregon and my own bedroom. No way!"*

*Tomorrow she would find the library. Tigard must have one. A bit of research on ghosts and psychic phenomenon would help. No nightmare, or ghost, or whatever would take over her bedroom.*

*Dad had told them both, "Knowledge is power." I'll just arm myself with some other-worldly knowledge, in case that thing IS real, and decides to return.*

*Calmer now, her heart almost beating normally, she went over-and-over what the apparition had told her.*

*Me need help from a ghost? Not gunna happen!*

*Frannie tossed and shivered. The sheets and blankets looked as if she had wrestled a bear. Sleep came in snatches, broken by uneasy peeks around the room.*

*Will daylight ever come?*

*Exhaustion dropped her into a deep sleep just before dawn.*

\*\*\*\*\*



*The Gray Ghost returned to Frannie's room immediately before the sun threw first light on Oregon's Cascade Mountains. Moaning softly, the phantom hovered over Frannie. Fleshless fingers stroked her hair. Its wispy gray veils drifted in the air, smelling faintly of earth and damp.*

*"You and I will prevail, Frannie James. When our powers join, we will expose doers of past evil and ease troubled souls." The ghostly figure channeled gentle and calming strength into the mind of the sleeping girl. "You must accept me first, Frannie dear. Only then can our combined powers execute our will."*

*As dawn's rosy glow flooded Oregon's Mt Hood with light, the Gray Ghost patted Frannie's cheek.*

*"Soon, Frannie dear."*

*The Ghost vanished in a whirl of diaphanous veils.*

## CHAPTER TWENTY

**A basement housing person's dead,  
Causes sleepless nights in bed.**

*The Ghost of Thelma Hill, one brittle hand clamped onto Frannie's ankle, slowly dragged herself out of the grave. When fully materialized, she removed her hand. Dropping to the floor like a rag doll, Frannie gasped for breath. It felt as if a giant vacuum cleaner had sucked up all her insides.*

*Her mouth dry as dirt, Frannie whispered, "If you want my help don't ever do that again."*

*Thelma Hill looked as surprised as her skeleton face would allow. She shook her head, causing the gray veils to swirl. "My dear girl, I had no intention of frightening you. Your physical presence, so close to my resting-place, made my emergence difficult." Thelma moved closer, and the intense cold flowed around her.*

*Frannie's brain absorbed Thelma's first rush of thoughts. She threw up a hand, "Please, slow down. You take hold of my mind and bring horrible cold air with you. It's like being trapped in a freezer full of moldy old food." She shuddered. "Even this sweater isn't much help. And when you grabbed me like that, it felt as if you were dragging me into the grave with you." She rubbed her arms, trying to warm them. "A touch from you is an instant popsicle maker!"*

*"Oh my goodness, Frannie. I had no idea." Thelma sounded genuinely upset. "Understand, it is always more difficult to materialize in daylight. My hand usually goes right through humans - strange it didn't do that with you. You can rest assured I will not touch you again. Good heavens, child, you are my friend."*

*The Ghost fluttered over the assorted junk: a demented gray moth. She finally settled on an old corner table. "I see you have brought your brother. I don't think he believes in ghosts. Just look at him, dear - he thinks you're a little mad talking to yourself."*

*Jeff said, "Wow! This place is spooky, plus! Yeah, I was a bit scared at first. And you going into that trance didn't help. But I don't see any ghost. Hmmm, sure is cold and smelly." His loud sniff made the rats squeak. "Do you always talk to yourself when you're down here? Better watch that. People will get the wr-o-o-ng idea." He laughed.*

*A terrified expression suddenly settled on his face. Both hands covered his ears, and he let out a pitiful whimper.*

*"What's happening to him?" Frannie hurried over and patted his arm. Jeff pulled away, and let out a long, mouse-like squeak.*

*"Thelma. . .?"*

*"My goodness, Frannie, I have reached him. He cannot see me, but my thoughts are in his head." She took a fast zip around the ceiling, making the cobwebs flutter. "Because he only half believes, I can only half reach him -- the thought transference half."*

*"Wow! That really IS ten shades of cool." Frannie's laugh rattled around the basement walls. "Now he'll have to believe in you." She became serious. "Listen, you'd better calm him like you did me, or he'll blow a fuse. I know that feeling."*

*The ghost looked at Jeff for a moment. He sighed, and slumped against the back of the chair. Frost settled on his hair.*

*"Frannie. . .? I heard voices in my head." He staggered to his feet, rubbing both hands over his hair and face. "Is this what I think it is? Is your ghost in my head?"*

*"Yes, Jeff. She's here now, by the old sofa in the corner. Apparently your belief isn't strong enough to see her, but you can catch her thoughts."*

*"No way!" He peered at the sofa and shook his head. "You mean for real?"*

*"Oh-ho, yes, or you wouldn't be hearing Thelma, loud and clear." She turned toward the ghost. "I want Jeff to help us trap your murdering husband. That's why I dragged him down here. I hoped you'd do something to convince him ghosts were real."*

*Frannie glanced at Jeff's quivering lips and pale face. "You've convinced him already." She added, "And you'd better dig out that tennis racket, bro. That's why Dad thinks we're down here - remember?"*

*Jeff sat in the chair and tried a dash of bravado. "Listen, T.H., I'll bet you could use someone smart like me to get you out of this mess. Just go slow with the thought transference. I don't want my brain cells fried like Frannie's." His smile was pathetic.*



*"T.H.? Mmmm, I suppose that stands for Thelma Hill. It is brief, if nothing else. You can call me that if you like, Jeff." Thelma winked at Frannie.*

*Frannie choked and coughed.*

*"I see what you mean about this young man, my dear. Just let me know if he gives you any more trouble. I can zap him the way I do Adolpha. I find zapping keeps the most difficult creatures in line."*

*Frannie almost felt sorry for Jeff. As the "zap" message reached his gray cells, he cringed, eyes bulging like hard-boiled eggs.*

*"Thank you Thelma." Frannie kept a perfectly straight face.*

*"Ho-o-o-ly. . . What the devil's zapping?" Jeff's voice rose, high and twittery.*

*Thelma Hill floated to the ceiling and hung with the cobwebs. She did not attempt to explain zapping. Moments later, she plunged to the floor and slid back under her brick headstones.*

*For a few moments Jeff sat stiff in his chair, nervously peering into the darkest corners. "I'm outa here!" He sprang from the chair, grabbed his tennis racket from a dusty shelf, and shot up the stairs. His baseball bat remained on the floor, forgotten. Frannie picked up the bat and followed more slowly.*

*When the basement door closed behind her Jeff poked a finger in her chest. "Just what did T.H. mean by zapping? You must know."*

*"All I know, is that there's a giant spider down there. Thelma calls it Adolpha. It's a sort of "familiar" for ghosts – the same way witches have black cats. Thelma zaps the spider whenever it gets out of line - whatever that means. I only saw her zap Adolpha once. Oh boy! I'm telling you, Jeff, you don't want to be zapped."*

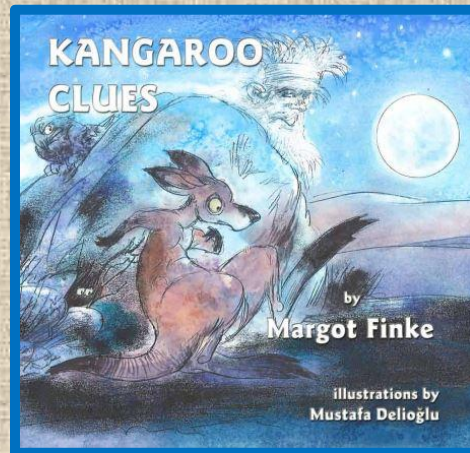
*"Stop right there! You never mentioned anything like a giant spider. No one forgets a critter like that, so. . .?"*

*"Would you have gone down there if I'd told you about Adolpha? I don't think so!" Frannie laughed at the expression on his face.*

*"Look, it's simple. Be nice to Thelma and she won't zap you. I hate to admit it, but I need your help. Put your brain to work on how we can trap this Paul Richards." She peeled off her sweater and tossed it onto a kitchen chair.*

[BACK](#)

## Kangaroo Clues



Illustrated by Mustafa Delioglu

**How Old Man Roo tricked the wild dingoes that were chasing him.**

*Aboriginal spirits made all things,  
Like kangaroos and birds with wings.  
But I've a tale that's just for you.  
It tells the secret of Old Man Roo.*

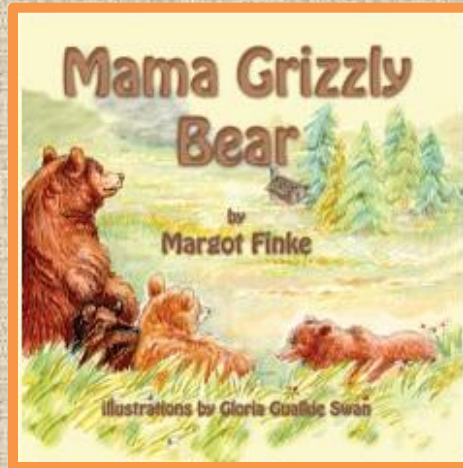
*Near a shady billabong cool and clear,  
A nesting Emu heard a sound to fear.  
The Platypus dived - the Goanna hid.  
Kookaburra laughed. That's ALL he did*



[BACK](#)



## Mama Grizzly Bear



Illustrated by (the late) *Gloria Swan*

Publisher: *Guardian Angel Publishing*

Soft cover and e-book + Amazon – Powell’s Books – my Website.

Mama guards her cubs with a fierce love, while teaching them what they must know to survive.

*The great grizzly mama is awesome and wild,  
She'll tear you to bits if you threaten her child.  
With her shaggy coat flying, she hunts down a meal,  
Her sharp teeth and claws make it look like a steal.*

*Sometimes bear feels lazy -- she just wants to doze,  
And that's when she steals meat from under wolf's nose.  
Fat elk are for filling a tummy that rumbles,  
Who cares if the wolf has a fit of the grumbles?*

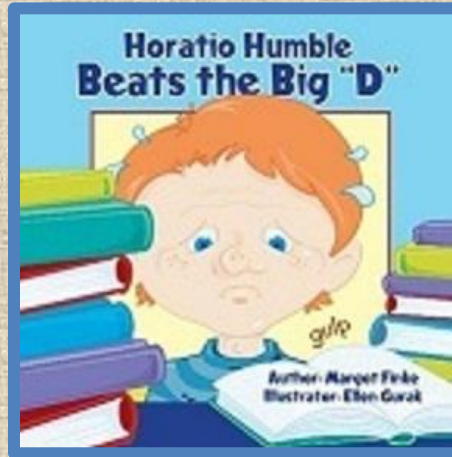


[BACK](#)

## Horatio Humble Beats the Big D

(dyslexia)

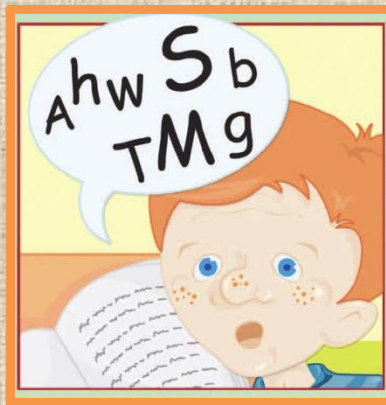
Read Horatio Humble to your dyslectic child. If Horatio can triumph, so can your child.  
This story is fun, and also offers encouragement and help.



Illustrator: Ellen Gurak

*When Horatio Humble read words out loud  
There were snorts and giggles from the classroom crowd.  
The teacher would frown and say, "Tut, tut!"  
And Horatio's mouth would close - tight shut.*

*While Horatio struggled to read the words,  
The letters all clumped into frightening herds.  
As his tongue jumbled words without success,  
What came from his mouth was a mangled mess*



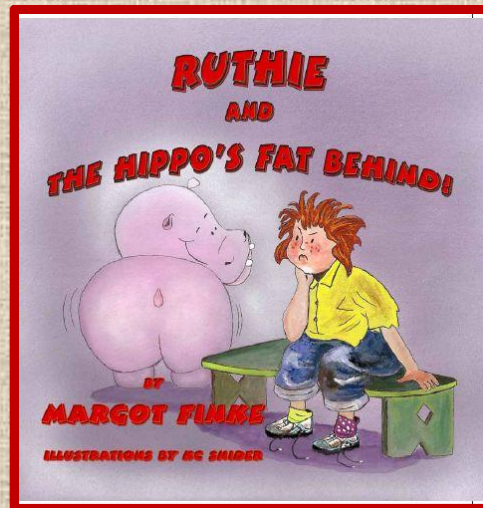
Helpful parent-teacher guide included.

[BACK](#)



## Ruthie and the Hippo's Fat Behind

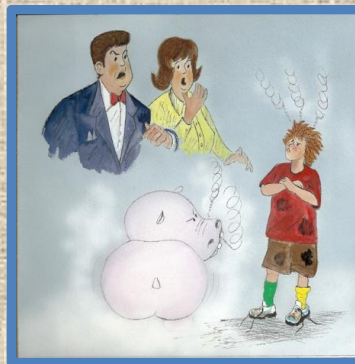
Ruthie became a brat. Her parents tore their hair. Nothing stopped her rude ways until. . . a magic moment turned her back into their sweet little girl again. A sudden big change was to blame for ALL of it.



Illustrator: K. C Snider

*Young Ruthie's mood changed overnight, her smiles slunk off in gloom.  
She wouldn't talk to Mom or Dad. She refused to leave her room.  
Her parents scolded, begged and coaxed, but Ruthie paid no mind,  
Her moods grew big and ugly – like some Hippo's fat behind!*

*Young Ruthie hated everything, her house, her room, her Mom!  
She thought her dad a weirdo, and her clothes were NOT da Bomb!  
When grownups asked for Ruthie's help, she'd shout a rude, "NO WAY!"  
A constant scowl made grumpy lines that lingered every day.*

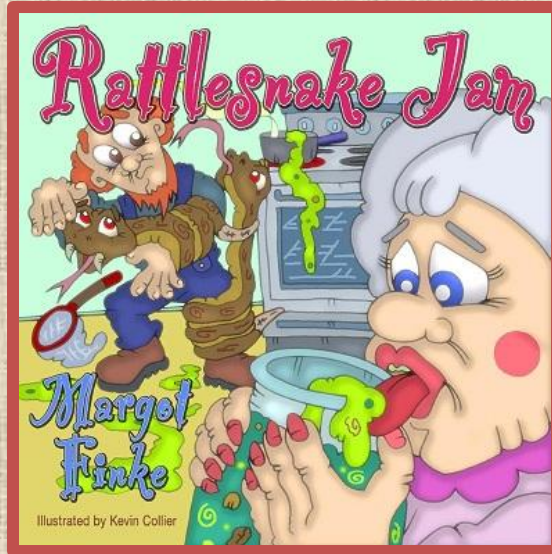


Helpful parent-teacher guide included.

[BACK](#)

## Rattlesnake Jam

**Fun with Gran and Pa. Pa hunts rattlers, and Gran cooks 'em up into goeey green jam. But will Gran ever cook Pa the rattler pie he craves?**



**Illustrator: Kevin Scott Collier**

*For year-after-year, our crazy old Gran,  
Nagged Pa into filling her best cooking pan.  
Gran cooked up some doozeys, but her best of all scam,  
Was the bottling and selling of rattlesnake jam.*

*Pa hankered for rattler served hot on a plate.  
He surely deserved it, so why the long wait?  
But snake cooked for Pa was not in Gran's plan.  
She dreamed of them sweetened and made into jam.*



**A fun rhyming story written with BOYS in mind.**

**[BACK](#)**

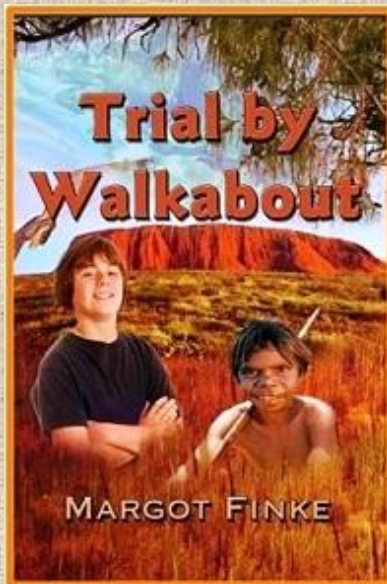


# Trial by Walkabout

A sequel to *Taconi and Claude*

## Read SAMPLE Chapters

It all began with sibling rivalry between two brothers. Then, two big lies made matters far worse. Locked out of Coorparoo Homestead by his older brother, Josh Howard and his friend Bindi go walkabout into the unforgiving Queensland outback. Josh soon realizes he would be dead without Bindi's bush smarts to protect them. A crazed Medicine Man wants Josh dead, wild dogs almost have them for lunch, and the lies marinate, causing Josh and Bindi to fight, and almost lose their friendship. A tribal Elder helps both of them when all seems lost, and Josh returns to Coorparoo Cattle Station determined to discover why his brother hates him so much.



Two chapters to dive into and enjoy:  
The first chapter + a tense one from the middle of the book.

## A LIT FUSE

*Josh Howard stared out the kitchen window at the distant red mountains. Simmering smells from the hot baked earth, eucalyptus and wattle trees, drifted through the kitchen window. His parent's property, Coorparoo Cattle Station, was a part of the Australian outback territory. The wild emptiness and aboriginal history surrounding the mountains fascinated Josh. Gotta be secrets out there just waiting to be discovered.*

*If his brother weren't such a jerk he would be out there now, exploring. He turned away from the window. "Look Tom, I just want to go out a little way and see things for myself, alright? What's wrong with that?" Tension crackled between them. "Jeez! Ever since Mum and Dad went off to Brisbane you act like you're the boss."*

*Tom's lips pressed into a thin line. "Quit naggin', kid." The next words spat from Tom's mouth, slow and clear. "I AM the boss now. Dad put me in charge."*

*Taking two slices of toast from the toaster, Tom gave an exaggerated sigh. "You're clueless about the outback. It's not some kiddie park. Blokes die out there." He slapped the toast onto his plate, buttering it while he spoke. "Only an idiot goes out there without the right gear lined up - water, food, guides. So shut up about it unless you want a good thump." He frowned. "Go pick your nose or something."*

*Josh sat at the table, sturdy body tense, brown hair flopping onto his forehead. "Yes sir, master!" He made a rude noise, his eyes daring Tom to hit him. "You're worse than Mum. I've heard the outback stories. B-I-G deal! I'm no dumbcluck."*

*"Yeah? Could have fooled me," sneered Tom.*

*"What's eating you anyway? These days you're meaner than a croc." Josh flicked a spoonful of dry cereal at his brother before sloshing milk into the bowl. "You used to stick up for me. Now you rat me out every chance you get."*

*Tom shrugged.*

*"Sneaky beggar! You told Dad I wasn't up to mustering the cattle. Always onside with Mum and Dad, that's you."*

*"Yeah, well you're spoiled rotten Joshua Howard. Just stay outa my face." Tom grabbed the jug and poured milk into a big glass. "Remember what dad said - stay inside the home property. It should be big enough for even a whiny kid like you." Grabbing his toast and milk glass, Tom slammed out of the kitchen. Milk slopped onto the floor.*

*"Maggot," muttered Josh. "Just my luck - other kids have older brothers they actually like! Me, I'm stuck with a parent suck-up."*

*It was then that a badass idea struck him like a lightning bolt. If reason wouldn't work, maybe blackmail would? Josh's blue eyes held a hard sparkle. He shouted, "If you don't let me go out and look around out there, I'll tell Dad you took that hundred dollars from the study."*

*A shudder drove through him. "I'll say you spent it all on that girl. The one you said had "forever" legs. I'll say . . ."*

*He got no further.*

*Tom was on him. A long arm flashed across the kitchen table and grabbed a fist full of Josh's*



*shirt. His brother's angry face was only a hot breath away. "You're dead if you tell lies about me Josh - dead meat!"*

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Detonation!**

*Dragging Josh across the table, Tom shook him like a cat shakes a rat. The milk jug, butter, and cutlery crashed onto the floor. Cereal, smashed china and milk, squished beneath their feet. Gasps and panting sounds filled the kitchen.*

*"Quit it, or I'll break your arm!"*

*The threat sank into Josh's fevered brain. He stopped struggling. Tom dragged him out of the kitchen, down the hall toward the back door, shaking him every step of the way.*

*"Hey, I saw you take it!" Josh yelled and squirmed. "If I were bigger you'd have a fight on your hands."*

*"I'm not a thief, and you know it." Tom stopped and glared down at Josh. "I planned on paying it back before Dad knew. Tell Dad now, and I'm . . ."*

*"Screwed, mate. Royally screwed! Mom and Dad'll freak if I tell them. They'll kill you, Thomas Howard, count on it!"*

*"Little worm! I just borrowed the money." A puzzled expression came over Tom's face. "Why are you doing this?" His hands loosened their grip and Josh wiggled free.*

*There was a moment of silence. Josh realized he had power over his brother. The thrill of it made him feel ten foot tall. "Well, you get to try and prove you're still their "honest" darling boy. Me. . .? I get to say you're a lousy thief."*

*Tom's fists clenched.*

*"Got your attention now, smartass." Josh's eyes glittered. This was the most notice his brother had taken of him in years.*

*Tom pushed Josh against the wall, but Josh squirmed free. "We used to be mates. You know, have fun and do stuff. Soon as you went to boarding school the cow dung flew. You've been a mean, rotten brother ever since."*

*"No reason to lie about me." Tom's cold gray eyes stared into his. "Get real, chicken brain. It'll be my word against yours."*

*"So what? I've made you sweat!" Josh's grin held no humor.*

*"Cockroach!" Tom lunged, fists balled tight.*

*Josh tried to dodge, but at twelve, he was no match for his brother's sixteen year old height and muscle. He wiggled and heaved as Tom shoved him closer to the back door. Their rough grunts and ragged breathing were the only sounds.*

*One handed Tom dragged open the door. "Want to get closer to the outback? Fine! Go fry in the*

*sun. Might cook some sense into you." He whirled Josh around to face him.*

*One look at his brother's bulging eyed red face, and Josh shut his mouth with a snap. This was no time to throw further insults.*

*"Outside you!" A hard shove shot Josh out the door flat on his back in the dirt. The door slammed shaking the frame. "You can stay out there 'till the rains come for all I care." Tom's voice faded as he moved further indoors.*

*Scrambling to his feet, Josh rattled the doorknob. No good, it was locked. "You wait, Tom Howard. Wait 'till Mom and Dad get home. I'll tell Mum you beat me up. You freakin' weirdo!" Tom's reply was the sound of hard rock music pounding out of his room.*

*A fast inspection of windows proved the house was sealed; tight as the final bid on a prize bull. "I'll get you, Tom," he yelled, giving the door a viscous kick. Daggers of pain shot up from his foot. "Oh, cripes!" Hopping on one leg, he imagined Tom laughing his stupid head off. Dumb move that: kicking a door in thongs.*

*Limping around to the shade of the front porch, Josh tried the door there, just in case - locked. He plunked himself on the front steps. Small chunks of sleep clung to the corners of his eyes. His shorts and faded blue tee shirt showed signs of yesterday's food.*

*Like a cruel mirage, pictures of his mom's hot meat pies popped into his head. Josh's stomach lurched and rumbled. Her lamington cakes, soaked in chocolate, and drenched in coconut, followed. When he closed his eyes, he could smell them. "Ahhhhhhh. . ."*

*Well Josh Howard, you're in the bull dust now. What's next? The nearest neighbor was fifty miles away.*

*"Take it all back," urged a small inner voice. "Tell Tom you were just kidding."*

*"No way!" He frowned. "Tom's ignored me for years. Been mean and nasty, too." His loud words startled a couple of sulfur crested cockatoos in a nearby gum tree. Flying away, they offered squawks of protest.*

*The Queensland outback stared Josh in the face.*

-----

#### **\*\*NOTE:**

**When his brother locks Josh out of the homestead, Josh's aboriginal mate Bindi comes along. He persuades Josh to go walkabout with him. Josh just wants to disappear for a while and scare the living daylight out of Tom. But Bindi lies about how long they will be gone. Many scary and dangerous escapes force both boys to re-examine their friendship. The following chapter shows how much Josh must rely on Bindi's bush smarts to stay alive.**



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### The Killers

*"If this is some sort of joke, it's not funny. You're scaring me!"*

*"Think you can climb a tree real quick?" Bindi picked up the wrapped snake and tucked the boomerang into the thong at the small of his back. His manner frightened Josh.*

*"Climb a tree? Why?"*

*"You climb now, Josh. Go plenty fast." Before he could say 'boomerang returns,' Bindi shinnied up a nearby tree. His face, full of dread, peered down.*

*Josh climbed fast. Toes and knees helped hands and feet haul him upward to the safety of a high branch. He left a little blood and skin behind as he climbed. Better that than staying below to face whatever scared the stuffing out of Bindi. Puffed and breathless, he clung to the rough bark of the tree trunk.*

*"You be quiet. Not even peep," Bindi warned. "Somethin's on the run, mate. Better 'it' than us." Bindi never took his eyes off the distant view.*

*Josh's hold on the tree made his knuckles white. A breathless plea from Bindi whispered across the space between their two trees. Josh listened in shocked silence.*

*"Great Spirit of Dreamtime, we both bad boys. But we be good now. Josh won't hurt brother, Tom. We throw bad lies to dogs. Let wild dogs grow fat on lies."*

*Josh understood that Bindi pleaded for both of them. Whatever approached, its power had rattled his friend's soul.*

*"Holy spitweed!" The lie Josh had threatened to tell his parents sat on his heart like a rock. Do Dreamtime spirits have the power to punish a lie? No way! And I haven't actually told the lie. Still . . .?*

*An icicle of fear stabbed into him. His heart raced, and his breathing choked. Dreamtime. . . it was something uncanny aboriginals believed in, yet whites knew little about. Was the Dreamtime powerful enough to punish a white boy's lie? Shuddering, he almost lost his grip on the branch. Bindi thinks so, or he wouldn't have put me in his plea. Oh cripes, what have I done?*

*His high perch offered Josh a wide view. To the east, he could see the cause of the barking. They were dingoes. Heat made their red tongues loll. The ragged looking brown dogs chased a creature that hopped ahead of them in jerky spurts. What was it. . .?*

*A hush fell on the nearby wild birds as the panting dog pack raced closer. It was a wallaby.*

*When the small kangaroo-like creature staggered, Josh could see a froth of pink foam dribble from its mouth. It tired fast. The lead dog sped up and snapped at the wallaby's tail. That dog fell back, and another took its place. With a quick running dive, the new lead dog ripped at the creature's leg.*

*"They're going to kill it!" As if superglued open, his eyes watched the hungry dog pack and the misery of their victim.*

*The wallaby tried to hide. Blood flecked and gasping, it limped among the boulders beneath their trees. Even with fingers stuffed in his ears, the death cries of that gentle creature stabbed into Josh's brain.*

*Shutting his eyes, he pleaded over-and-over, “Make them stop! Make them stop!”*

*Finally, the victim grew silent. A sob escaped Josh. The slobbering sounds made by the dogs of death filtered up to him. He tried not to hear the soft, tearing noises. And the smell. . . The stench of every creature these four-legged killers had ever slaughtered rose from them in putrid waves.*

*Time stopped ticking while Josh huddled in the branches. Then, the slobbering stopped and the smell faded. He opened his eyes and looked across at Bindi, watching from the safety of his tree. His black eyes were large and sad. His skin had faded to a charcoal gray.*

*“I think it safe now. Gotta be sharp in outback mate. Mean lot dog pack.” Bindi’s voice petered out.*

*Without another word the two boys climbed to the ground. They stood among the scattered remains of the cruel feast.*

*“We’d have been torn to pieces and eaten alive like that.” Josh’s voice wobbled. He kept his eyes away from the scattered pieces of gray fur.*

*“Wild dog is much feared. They hunt in pack. Elders, they tell stories. You can’t outrun dogs. They chase ‘till you drop, then tear you to bits. All happens real quick. You climb tree fast, or you die slow.”*

*Bindi kicked a small chunk of fur with his foot. “We plumb lucky trees near. They catch us . . . You not hafta worry ‘bout Tom no more.” A laugh came out of him, and then choked off.*

*Josh thought about that for a moment and then put his arm around Bindi’s shoulder. His friend’s quick actions had saved both their lives. “Thanks mate. Let’s get out of here.”*

*Neither wanted to talk. Their shady resting spot had become a nightmare place to leave in a hurry.*

*They kept walking. Wild thoughts scuttled through Josh’s head. He told himself he was lucky to have his skin in one piece. Blimey, alone out here I’d be fly food in no time. Panic hit hard. If anything happened to Bindi, he’d have no clue how to survive, let alone find his way back to the homestead.*



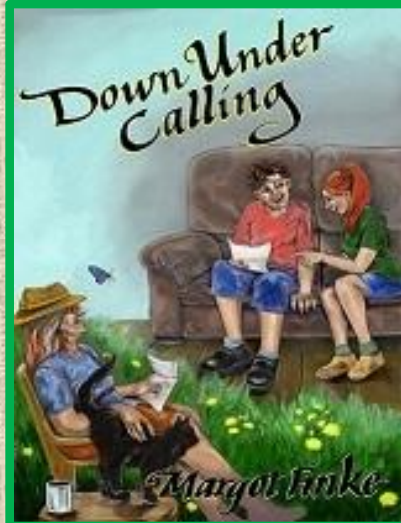
Dreamtime Spirits and the Tree of Life.

[BACK](#)



**NEW**

## **Down Under Calling**



Cover by Awesome Agy Wilson

When Andy was pressured into writing to his Grandma Rose in Australia, amazing things began to happen. He was soon Googling the critters that visited her garden, sharing her letters with friend Kelly, and discovering other ways to spend summer vacation. And Grandma Rose’s tales of growing up Down Under shocked and amazed Andy. No TV! No dishwasher! No microwave or computer! His grandma must be as old as dirt. Yet sneaky Grandma Rose soon had both of them hooked.

### CHAPTER ONE

#### Grandma Rose

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, where water lapped the sandy eastern shores of Australia, Rose Larkin slept. She lived on the edge of the Queensland bush in a small town called Morningside. At sixty plus Rose was a light sleeper, so the sound of the rifle crack snapped her awake.

Silence. This was followed by the mutter of distant voices. Rose’s cat, Lady, sleeping at the foot of the bed, had not twitched a whisker.

“The same hooligans again I’ll bet,” Rose muttered, “Shooting at whatever moves.”

Stiff from sleeping, Rose threw on a dressing gown and headed for the back door. Outside the door she grabbed a long handled garden fork that leaned against the wall. She hefted it. *Not a bad weapon – just in case.*

A skimpy moon left the back yard in complete darkness. But Rose didn't need a flashlight. Her feet had long ago memorized every pebble, dip, and curve that lead to the back fence. The voices now grew more distinct.

"Cripes mate, I killed somethin'!"

"Dumb git! You offed a roo. The old biddy's heard us for sure. Let's scarper."

The voices faded, lost in the far reaches of the wild bush area that backed onto Rose's property.

Grim-faced, Rose reached the fence line. Soft scrabbling noises came from the bush side of the fence. Leaning the garden fork against a fence post, she hiked up her nightie and dressing gown. Climbing over the broken section of the fence wasn't easy. Rose struggled. Then a tearing sound. ***Blast! My favorite nightie, too!***

Finally, she made it over the fence and into the bush, hoping to find whatever was making those distressed rustling sounds. Aha... She peered down at the ground around her – dim and blurry. ***Stupid woman - forgot my glasses!*** Her toe hit something furry. Kneeling in the darkness Rose searched the ground with outstretched hands. She felt something warm and soft. ***Oh Lord, NO!***

In front of her lay a still warm but very dead female kangaroo. Snuggled beside his dead mum, yet very much alive, was her joey. "There, there," murmured Rose. "Not to worry little mate. You come with me."

It took a few more rips and tears to her nightie, but she finally got the joey over the fence and safely back to the house. Tucking him into a spare pillowcase, Rose hung the makeshift pouch on the back of a kitchen chair. The joey's small head peeked out, all big ears and long snout, a wistful look on its face. The pillowcase, loosely knotted at the open end, was the best she could do to provide a pouch.

***Oh-ho, he's shivering. Mustn't let the little bloke go into shock.*** Rose quickly filled a hot water bottle and slipped it into the pillowcase. A swift look through her winter woolies, and joey wore a blue beanie scrunched down over his ears. She had knitted the beanie last winter.

"That'll have to do for now. First thing in the morning I'll find out what to feed you. Then I'll phone the police. I just hope they catch the hooligans that killed your poor mum."

Rose, chilled to her toes, made herself a steaming cup of tea. The creature, blue beanie askew over one eye, ducked inside his makeshift pouch every time she ventured near.

"You just hold on 'till I get you the right food, matey." Rose yawned. "Whoever said older people needed less sleep were nuts. Still, I'm a bit long-in-the tooth to be hopping fences. . . and in the middle of the night too!" She looked at the bulge at the bottom of the pillowcase. If she moved the chair into her bedroom, she might disturb him. What to do?

Dawn woke Rose to a raft of new aches and pains. These were mostly due to napping away the remainder of the night in an armchair close to her young guest.

A hot shower helped, plus two aspirin. Several phone calls later, she had operation "save joey" well under way. The police promised to investigate, and the Lone Pine Wildlife Sanctuary had been most helpful. They gave her great information about joey care and joey food. However, it seemed they wanted her to look after the little bloke until one of their staff could come and take him off her hands.

"No problem," Rose assured the nice lady from Lone Pine. "He'll be jake with me."

Bright and early, on advice from the Lone Pine lady, she took joey to visit her Veterinarian. The Vet checked him out thoroughly and pronounced him fit-as-a frogmouth. He handed her a bottle and teat, plus a package of Kangaroo Milk Replacer.

"Just the ticket for a beaut young joey," he said. "It's a completely balanced diet; easy to use, too." He patted the young roo's head and added, "Kangaroo milk comes in four strengths, for



different stages of growth. Oh, and don't forget to let him hop about a bit after you feed him, because he'll need to poop and pee."

As she left, with the joey safely tucked into his pillowcase, the Vet called, "Don't worry, Rose, I've plenty more "joey juice" if you need it."

On the way home, the tiny 'roo slept on the front seat. Rose smiled as she drove. *Hmmm. . . Car trips seem to sooth animal babies as well as human babies.*

Once home she put some of the kangaroo milk into a bottle, warmed it, and then took joey out into the garden. No more shivers, so she removed the hot water bottle. The beanie had disappeared, lost in the depths of the pillowcase.

Joey snuggled on Rose's lap, still mostly inside the pillowcase, with only his head and two tiny front paws out in the open. He sucked like a trooper, both front paws clutching the bottle. After he finished drinking, Rose rubbed his tummy like the Vet said. He looked at Rose, twitched his nose, and then slid down into his pillow case pouch. A soft burp followed.

"Oh, no you don't," cried Rose. She grabbed the pillowcase full of soon to be pooping-and-peeing joey, and hurried to the laundry.

"I'm too old to chase you around the yard," she told him. Closing the door, she gently pulled the baby 'roo out of hiding and put him on the cement floor. "Pillowcase pouches don't have bathroom facilities, mate – understand? Cement floors can be hosed down."

He took a few tentative hops, and then looked up at her, head cocked to one side.

"You want me to turn my back?" asked Rose. Chuckling, she said, "I imagine my grandson Andy would be bug-eyed over a little bloke like you."

A few hops later, and joey attended to business. Rose dealt with the cleanup while the perpetrator hopped around the laundry.

"Right-o little mate, time for a nap." Two sleepy eyes blinked up at her as she smoothed the fur on his head. Scooping him up, she slid him into his makeshift pouch. Joey folded himself into a ball at the bottom of the pillowcase, and slept.

Rose carried him outside. She hung his pouch on the back of her garden chair, and hurried to see if the mail man had brought anything worth reading.

"A-hah, what have we here?" she peered at the sender's label. "Well, blow me down, a letter from my grandson, Andy." Pleased and happy, she went to her chair, ripped open the envelope, and read his letter.

*55-A Pine Meadows Way  
Portland, OR USA*

*Dear Grandma,*

*Mom said I should write you a letter, so here it is. I'm twelve years old. I'm in sixth grade. I have a friend called Kelly. She's in sixth grade too. I'm real good at math and computers. But I don't much like reading, and English is boring.*

*My friend Kelly has twice as many Xbox games as me. I asked Dad for another music download or a game, but he said no. He said I had enough e-junk and music downloads already. Dad's way cheap since he got downsized.*

*That's about all.*

*Your grandson,*

*Andy.*

All of a sudden Oregon didn't seem quite so far away to Rose Larkin. "Hmmm. . . That grandson of mine seems a bit too keen on computers," she told the sleeping joey. "He needs to discover some outside fun."

Lady sat by her feet, swishing her tail back and forth. She glared at the bundle on the back of her mistress's chair.

"You behave yourself, missy." Rose shook her finger at Lady. "This joey has lost his mum. I'd better not find any claw mark on him – understood?"

Lady slunk under a nearby hibiscus bush and sulked.

She put Andy's letter on the garden table. Tossing her gardening hat aside, Rose pulled the pen and writing paper on the table closer. She thought about her reply to Andy, as the yellow wattle flowers wafted their rich scent through the garden. "Hmmm. . . I'll tell Andy about the joey, but what about the brutal way his mum was killed? What do you think, Lady?"

Lady treated her to a dose of feline disapproval. The cat's attention was now centered on a greedy praying mantis eating a lunch of caterpillar.

Rose smiled to herself. "I wonder what my daughter had to threaten him with to get Andy to write this letter?" Then, pen in hand, she set about replying to her grandson in Oregon.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Andy

Over on the Oregon side of the Pacific Ocean, grandson Andy Frazer was having a problem with girls – well, one particular girl.

The moment Kelly arrived that morning, flash drive in hand, her red hair and green eyes wiped out Andy's brain functions. Yesterday, Kelly had been a neat buddy to hang with. Yet today, looking at her made him sweat. His feet immediately grew larger, and he was certain the small zit on his chin tripled in size. Kelly had been his friend ever since his family had rented the small condo near her luxurious home - and until today, without any noticeable change in the size of his occasional zits.

He slouched against the line of rusty mailboxes, trying to string a few brilliant words into a clever sentence. What popped out was, "Wow, a music download Kelly? Is it your birthday?" He stared at the flash drive she swung from one finger.

"Where's your brain, Andy? My birthday was three months ago. You came to the party, remember?" One red sneaker tapped an impatient tattoo on the ground.

"Oh. . . Yeah." *Geez, I've got brain-freeze!*

"Good. For a moment there I thought you'd lost it! One of my grans is visiting for the week. She gave me the download money. Want to try it out?"

"Sure." Andy frowned. "Does your gran always bring you gifts?"



The superior smile Andy knew so well flashed across her face. “They all do. I’ve got four Grandmothers and four Grandfathers. It’s a sweet deal when they come to visit, even if it’s just for the day.”

“How come you have so many grandparents? I only have one.”

“Don’t you know anything? It’s because of divorce, silly. My mom and dad divorced and remarried. So I have my original grandparents plus extras. You know: the ones that come with a step-dad or step-mom.” Kelly stopped, muttering as she counted on her fingers. “No, wait. Dad’s new wife lost her father before he married her. So, I’m short one Grandfather.”

Andy, his brain miraculously out of hormonal freefall, did some fast mental calculations. “Wo-hooo! The pile of Christmas gifts at your house must be awesome!”

Kelly’s smirk said it all. “Gotta go.” She waggled the flash drive. “Do the download later. Gran promised me money for mall shopping. See ya.”

Kelly ran down the street. Everything about her, from her red sneakers to her bobbing red hair was superior to all other girls. She disappeared through her front door.

As far as he knew Andy had only one grandma. She lived in Australia. Yeah, I’m definitely grandparent deprived!

Kelly lived in an excellent house, a bit like the one Andy’s family used to own. Now they lived in a row of five condos. These two story boxes shared walls with those on either side of them. The communal area was miniscule - patchy bark dust, tired groundcover, and brown grass. Anything green and flowering had been flattened long ago. Andy stared at their faded blue front door. Resentment raged inside him. Why did Dad have to be downsized?

“Andy, lunch is ready.” His mom stuck her head out the front window and added, “Hurry now, I have an appointment with the Parker Temp Agency.”

Andy ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at the kitchen table. “Mom,” he mumbled through a mouthful, “I keep wondering why they sacked Dad? He’d worked there for years. We’d be back in our real home if they’d kept him on.” He shot her a quick look. Was she ticked at him for asking?

“Andy, we’ve told you this before.” His mom sighed. “Big corporations don’t have personal feelings. Their only rule is *Bottom Line Economics*.” Her voice carried an edge of impatience. “Because of the poor economy the company your dad worked for wanted to reduce their workforce. Your dad was downsized – he lost his job. It’s as simple as that. When you can’t change something, you need to find a way to alter your situation. Dad and I are looking at ways to do that.”

Yeah, she’s ticked! He swallowed another bite and watched Mom tidy the kitchen. Kelly’s surplus of grandparents came to mind.

“Mom, do you realize I only have one grandparent – your mom?” Might as well go for broke! “Yeah, and how come you and dad stuck together and didn’t divorce?”

His mom gave him a sharp look.

“Downsizing, grandparents, divorce: odd lunchtime subjects, Andy. Let’s see.” She put the last cup in the dishwasher. “Your dad’s father and mother died in a car crash before you were born – very sad. My mother, Grandma Rose Larkin, was an Aussie when she married my dad. He met her when he was stationed at the US Consul’s office in Brisbane. Mom was only eighteen when they married - 1952 I think she said. Dad was a lot older than Mom, and he’s gone now.” Her eyes held a sad look. “But you know Andy, I still miss him.”

She stood behind him and patted his shoulder. “Why the sudden interest in divorce?”



Sandwich finished, Andy drank his milk before answering. "My friend Kelly has lots of grandparents, old ones and new ones. She said it's because her parents divorced and remarried. So, what kept you and Dad together?"

She smiled. "Love, understanding, and hard work."

"That's it?" Andy's eyes narrowed. "Well, I try to understand him, but it's darn hard. Dad's such a cheapskate. I've heard you two arguing about money. And he told me he won't buy me any more music or Xbox games."

"Oh Andy, your dad was out of work for a long time. That makes him extra careful about money. And even though he has another job now, he worries about what we owe on our credit card. . . and elsewhere." A gloomy tone crept into her voice. "We lost our lovely home, remember?"

*Yeah, Toby too. This dumb condo won't allow dogs!*

"As soon as we pay off some of the bills your dad will be his old self again, you'll see." She ruffled his hair in passing. Her tone grew serious. "Sure we argue. But arguing isn't the end of the world, or the end of our marriage. It's the things we have in common, plus our love for each other that keeps us together. Marriage is like a balance sheet: a set of pluses and minuses, like in your math class."

He stared at her, intrigued. Math was Andy's best subject. "Who-da-thunk marriage and math could be related. Okay Mom, I get it - I think." He grinned. "But what's with the appointment?"

"I'm looking for a part-time job. The sooner we dig ourselves out of this financial hole, the sooner we can save up for another home, one that really belongs to us."

While she talked, mom took a mirror from her handbag and did the usual stuff to her face. 'Making myself gorgeous,' she often said with a laugh. She dropped the mirror and lipstick into her purse. "Your dad and I don't agree on everything, but our plus column has a way higher total than our minus column." She laughed. "So here we all are, an *original* family, but a tad short on cash and grandparents."

Staring at his down-in-the-dumps expression, she asked, "There's something else, isn't there."

Andy sighed. "I guess. . . Kelly's grandparents give her gifts, lots of them. I know Grandma Rose sends birthday and Christmas money, but it's not the same."

"Aha! And it's not multiplied by divorce and remarriage either, is it?" She sent him a sharp look. "How do you think Kelly feels about her parents being apart?"

Andy, eyes on the table, herded crumbs into a pile with his finger. "She cried a lot in class last year. I guess having multiple grandparents and heaps of gifts isn't all good."

"You're a smart kid, Andy. Remember that. Oh, and I almost forgot. There's a letter for you on the hall table. I think it's a reply from Grandma Rose."

*So soon. . .* Andy remembered how Mom had twisted his arm about why he should write a letter to her mother. She'd barged into his room while he'd been playing his favorite Xbox game and said, "It's summer vacation. *You* need a serious project young man – something besides computer downloads."

The gleam in her eye had made him cringe. "I think you should write to my mother, your Grandma Rose. It's time you got to know her better, and letters back-and-forth are a great way to begin."

"Awww Mom, I don't remember her. Anyway, why can't I just email her?"

"Your grandma doesn't have a computer, that's why."

"Oh NO! Is she THAT old? What can I write to an old lady I don't know?" His sullen



expression and feeble excuses had not changed Mom's mind. So he'd written the darn thing, posted it off, and then forgotten about it.

"I have an appointment, Andy. I don't have the time to argue. Go read Grandma Rose's reply. You'll get to like her. She's been asking about you in her letters to me."

She grabbed her handbag from the table and hurried to the door. "Letters are a great way to get to know someone, one page at a time." The closing of the front door chopped off all further words of wisdom.

Andy went to his room and stared at his computer screen. Geez, how did he get trapped into letter writing? *Guess I'd better read what she has to say - there might be a pop quiz.*

### Part of a letter from Grandma Rose:

*Board games were the rage. Everyone played - parents and their kids. Cards games were popular too. Strip-Jack Naked and Grab were fun and my favorites. My grandma, Mum's mother, lived with us. Tiny and plump, she had white hair and this, "I'm the nicest old lady," expression. She was really a mean old woman.*

*Grandma never liked me one bit. "Rose called me a rude name, Thelma," she'd say to Mum. Or, "That daughter of yours picked all the flowers in the side garden!"*

*"Nasty old liar!" I would mutter.*

*But her favorite thing was to trap me in our narrow hallway. THUMP, right between my shoulder blades. "That's for being a cheeky young snippet!" How could she look so nice-old-ladyish, and yet act so mean?*

*Grandma loved playing card games, and she always pushed to join my friends and me when we played. They soon woke up to what I already knew. "Grandma, my score was higher than that. You forgot to add the last numbers for Joan and me."*

*Soon I was hearing, "Sorry Rose, we're not going to come over and play games if your Grandmother plays."*

*This from friend #2: "Yeah. You know she cheats!"*

*Gran saw no problem in changing the score to suit herself, and then swearing black-and-blue she was right. "No dear, my addition is correct. See. . . I'm winning."*

*Groans from around the table.*

*"Now, now, girls. We can't have any sore losers." Grandma's smile would melt stone.*

*"Cheeky young brats! #@S%&. . . No respect for age. She would mutter under her breath when she didn't get her way. Some of the words she used would have made Mum faint.*

*All my friends agreed. "We'll only play cards with you if your grandma isn't there." Oh, Andy, I died of shame many times. And I never did discover why Grandma was the way she was - mean as a Tasmanian Devil.*

*For a long time I thought all grandmas were like mine. Mum did so much for Grandma: permed her hair, cooked her special meals, made her dresses. Mum was always kind and thoughtful to everyone, and I often caught the love in her eyes when she looked at Grandma. Mum cried when she died. She was quiet, and so unlike her happy self for months afterwards. I never cried one tear.*

*Later, Mum said, "You know, Rose, I loved your grandmother." A soft sigh followed. "But I was never sure she loved me. All those years together, and never once did she put her arms around me*

*and tell me she loved me.” A tear ran down Mum’s cheek. I hugged her so tight my arms hurt.*

*“Even when I was a little girl she never told me, not once, that she loved me.”*

*Mum deserved better. And I guess it was only after friends introduced me to their grandmas that I realized mine was a lemon! “I’m sorry Mum. Gran was mean to everyone. I’ve often wished I had a nice and loving grandma like my friends. She never hugged me either!”*

*Mum wiped her eyes and offered a watery smile. “Well, love, it’s too late to worry about it now. Your Grandmother was a strange woman and that’s a fact.”*

[BACK](#)

\*\*\*\*\*

**COMING SOON**

**2x NEW STORY books.**

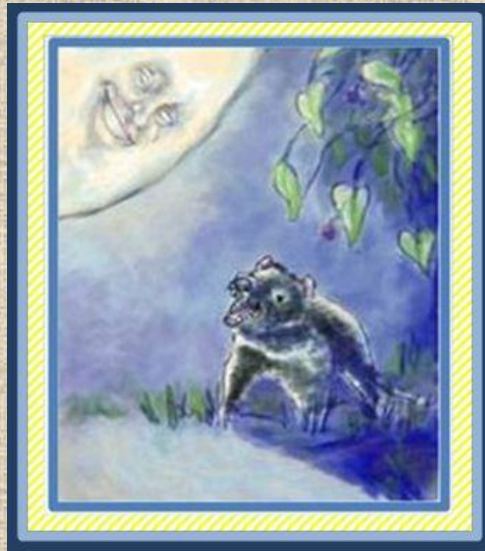
**With the “WOW” factor kids love!**

**Soft Cover or Kindle**

## **Oscar Needs a Friend**

**Oscar is a friendly Tasmanian Devil, kind and helpful. Everything his family is NOT. Bush critters are afraid of him. He is ugly too, and that doesn’t help one bit. One look at Oscar and the bushies are sure he will eat them. The Kingfisher tells him he must prove he is trustworthy. And with a bucket of courage and a little luck, he proves that you can’t judge by how someone looks – only by how he acts.**





**No cover yet. This illo is for the first page. Agy Wilson, is illustrating both these new story books.**

*Young Oscar threw back his head and howled at the moon. Moon looked back, a fat butter-yellow smile on his face.*

*“You’re no help,” grumbled Oscar. He ate a mulberry from an overhanging branch. “Why are the bush creatures frightened of me? I’m not mean to them. I’d like to be mates.”*

*Oscar was a Tasmanian Devil with a difference. He slept inside a snug hollow log at the edge of the bush, and he had an ample supply of tasty fruits and berries to eat. When Oscar curled up inside his log and slept, he dreamed about berry bushes and trees loaded with good mates. They dangled from every branch, ripe for the picking. Yet unlike berries and fruit, good mates did NOT grow on trees.*

*When he woke the next morning, Oscar ran across the grassy clearing to the billabong and took a long drink. High on a wattle branch overlooking the water, a blue Kingfisher watched for his breakfast.*

*“Why didn’t you fly away when you saw me?” asked Oscar. “All the other bushies run from me.”*

*Kingfisher cocked his head. “Because I’m smart. I KNOW Tasmanian Devils can’t climb trees.”*

[BACK](#)

## Kobi Borrows a Pouch



Illustrations will be by *Agy Wilson*

**Kobi is a young koala who thinks he knows all about surviving on his own in the bush. He soon learns what it feel like to be alone, lost and hungry. A surprise offer changes everything, and Kobi discovers he is not as smart as he thought.**

### **The Beginning. . .**

*Kobi Koala and his mum slept snuggled in the fork of a tall gum tree. And every morning without fail, the whoo-hoo-hah-ha laugh of the Kookaburra woke them.*

*Kobi often asked, "Mum, when can I live in my own gum tree?"*

*His mum always answered, "Soon Kobi, when you're more self-reliant, and know the dangers in the bush."*

*Kobi thought soon would never come. So one morning while his mum dozed, he climbed down to the ground. Through the trees he heard the splash-splash, gurgle-gurgle song of the billabong. Kobi rather fancied living in a gum tree beside the billabong.*

*"You're not safe on the ground, young Koala," warned Karangi, the Frill-neck Lizard.*

*"I can look after myself," said Kobi, heading toward the sound of the billabong water.*

*"G'day there," said Jabbo the Bandicoot. "Are you lost?"*

*"Of course not. I'm running away. I want to be self-reliant and find a tree of my own," said Kobi.*

*"Be careful. The bush is plenty dangerous for runaways."*

*Ignoring the warnings from Jabbo and Karangi, Kobi marched through the gums and wattle trees. He walked until his short stubby legs ached. Yet the splishetty-splash of the billabong still seemed far away.*

**[BACK](#)**



for  
**Parents and Teachers**

I write because it is my passion. To not write is unthinkable. When I was a teacher's aide, I saw how often boys were reluctant readers. Other children had dyslexia, or problems that made reading a chore, instead of a *Magic Carpet Ride* to fun and adventure.

I have tried to include a WOW factor in all of my books.  
A WOW factor is a good thing, because it **HOOKS KIDS on READING!**

**\*\* TEACHERS, contact me about a  
FREE Skype Author Visit  
to your classroom**

*Margot Finke*  
[mfinke@frontier.com](mailto:mfinke@frontier.com)  
<http://www.margotfine.com>

\*\*\*\*\*

**BUY**

*Autographed*  
copies of my books

**ALSO**

**Publisher:** <http://www.guardianangelpublishing.com/authors&books.htm>

**Amazon:** <http://tinyurl.com/bg9dtxt>

Soft Cover, Kindle, Nook etc

**Powell's Books:** <http://www.powells.com/s?kw=Margot+Finke&class=>

and MORE. . .

**BACK**

## Happy Reading, Mates.

them  
with  
BOOKS

MARGOT  
FINKE

A MAGIC CARPET

**\*Picture books—soft cover.**  
**\*Young teen books—soft cover + Kindle.**  
**\*Autographed + FREE Aussie Recipe Book:**  
<http://www.margotfinke.com>

Hop on my  
**Magic Carpet. . .**

**Take a Ride to Fun and Adventure!**

[BACK](#)