

## Junior Short Story Category – 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize 2021

# WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?

By Fletcher Davies

Like most people, I've lost count of how many stories I've read that in the end, just turn out to be the main character's dream - how boring is that? Well, you'll be pleased to know that this real-life story, only starts with a dream, my dream in fact, and ends with an adventure where all characters are at least awake and conscious!

My dreams often feel real, even scary, this time though, it was different. I was reminiscing about my awesome holiday with Pa. For my birthday last September, Pa gave me a metal detector which turned out to be the perfect excuse for us to go on a gold prospecting trip to Western Australia. To be honest, I was extremely surprised when Dad let Pa and I go alone, as he seems to think we shouldn't spend so much time together. "Hang out with kids your own age" he often says, which always manages to infuriate me. Why would I give up the opportunity to spend time with family, especially after what happened last year? I thought Dad would know better.

I'll never forget our first day exploring, which is probably why I was dreaming about

it again. We were up and out of our swags early, ready to organise the equipment and examine Pa's hand-drawn map, just as the sun was appearing over the horizon. We were in the middle of nowhere, just as Pa had planned. I could see the joy in his eyes when he was showing me how to tune the frequency on my metal detector, not to mention the shock on his face when we heard the first loud BEEP! Pa had unearthed a nugget, and not one of those delicious crunchy things from a fast-food place, I mean an actual gold nugget! Our luck only continued when we were astonished to hear the metal detector alert us to a second lump of precious metal. There was Pa, wearing his old red shirt, ripped work pants and a smile from ear to ear. I loved that day. Pa and I are more than just family, we're great mates too. He's really looked after me since Mum died last year, he even takes me to his bowls games sometimes. The food for afternoon tea there is always amazing, and the other old people seem to like talking to me. Well, except for grumpy old Albert, I don't really like him. I can't work out why he even goes to bowls, he's rubbish at it and never seems to enjoy talking to people either. Pa loved telling his friends about us striking gold in Western Australia and they were all impressed too, surprisingly none more so than Albert though, he was actually interested in a conversation for once. Which brings me back to the moment I was unceremoniously ripped from my dream recounting our exciting eureka moment, by a loud, yet familiar crash from the kitchen downstairs.

Living in the country means we often have nocturnal visitors, so to begin with I wasn't worried, I just assumed another possum had found its way through the cat flap. Dad usually takes ages to notice, his chainsaw like snoring prevents him from being aware of his surroundings! With one eye barely open, I decided to creep down the stairs and attempt to usher a marsupial intruder outside with a broom. The light from the full moon shone brightly through the kitchen window and to my surprise, through the open backdoor too! I guess this should have been the first sign that it wasn't a possum but in my sleepy haze I didn't give it a second thought. I slammed the kitchen door shut again and retreated briefly to my room, carefully avoiding the creaky bottom step. However, within seconds the sound of Pa's old ute bursting into life from the garage had woken Dad from his slumber, who was now racing down the stairs. "Call the police mate!", Dad shouted as he kicked his motorbike into action.

My heart was racing, watching Dad chase the daring thief down the dirt track, although I knew the ute was no match for his powerful motorbike! To be honest, I'm still not sure what I found more alarming though, my dad in pursuit of an intruder or the sight of Pa appearing from the hall without his false teeth! "What'shh going on? Who'shh drivin' my ute?" he muttered, inserting his dentures, and clearing his throat. I couldn't answer him though, I was trying to explain to the very patient phone operator that we needed help immediately. Although, of course, Pa had a plan of his own and before he could even tie up his dressing gown, we were in the Land Rover speeding towards town. Pa was quite rightly furious, "Young people these days", he exclaimed. "Always looking for trouble. In my day we were brought up to respect other peoples' belongings, not like this generation!"

The dust had almost completely settled when we came across Dad's motorbike laying beside Pa's old abandoned ute. We could see that the front door had been left wide open with the keys still in the ignition. The moon was now partially obstructed by thick clouds, which made it impossible to see more than a few metres in front of us. Despite the lack of light, it was still obvious to Pa that I was worried about Dad, I wouldn't cope if I lost him too. He quickly assured me that Dad was tough enough to deal with petty, young criminals and joked that he was more concerned about what Dad would do if he got hold of them first. To my relief, in the distance I could hear the faint sound of a police siren, "Can you hear that, Pa? Sirens?" I questioned. He chuckled and shook his head.

"I'm lucky to have my teeth in mate, I certainly didn't have time to grab my hearing aids too!"

The red and blue lights of the police cars helped illuminate the area and before long a search party had been established. Pa muttered something about getting a torch and unsurprisingly decided to ignore the instructions from the policeman, directing us to stay in the car. Pa knew there were old farm sheds down by the creek and discreetly grabbed my arm. We successfully departed without being noticed by the young constable who was inspecting the footprints near the motorbike. The first shed was empty, besides a few hay bales, as was the second. The third however, was different. Only moments before I wanted to give up, the light from Pa's torch revealed a shocking discovery. Crouching beside a large, unused fuel tank, was an old man, gripping something tightly in his hands. It was

hard to see clearly, however it quickly became apparent that his face was familiar. “Is that.....Albert?!”, Pa questioned in complete astonishment.

“He’s got our gold nuggets”, I shouted. “Wait here, Pa, I’ll run back to the others and get help!”

The whole night feels like a blur now, however I will never forget the sorry sight of Albert, handcuffed and staring blankly from the back seat of the police car. Constable White informed Dad, Pa, and I of Albert’s criminal history, and it turns out he’s been on their

‘wanted list’ for over two years! I guess his strange behaviour at bowls makes sense now, he was only there to scope out his next easy target! The worst part is, I had to admit to Dad that he was actually right when he told me I should be spending time with people my own age.

Who would have thought that even some old people can’t be trusted!