

# BOYS AND GIRLS

RUTH THOMPSON

**B**Y 3 PM ON SATURDAY 1 January the temperature in Melbourne had reached 39° Celsius, the hottest recorded for nearly three years. At Reservoir, an outer northern suburb, the Darebin creek near the Couplands' six-room weather-board cottage swarmed with boys and girls trying to escape the heat. Doreen Coupland, aged six, enjoyed 'roaming around the creek' with her two elder sisters. Their summer holidays were spent swimming and fossicking there, making bridges, fishing or picking wildflowers. They fished with 'a stick and a piece of string and a bent pin with a worm at the end', and sometimes caught tiny minnows to take home triumphantly. They went for walks along the creek banks with the family dog, picnicked on sandwiches and scones, and gathered huge bunches of pincushions, 'all different colours, red, pink and white, mauve with little stamens at the top ... and "chocolate" flowers which had a gorgeous scent'.

The girls' father, Henry Coupland, a railway worker, was struggling to keep up the 10s a week repayment on the house. There was no question of a holiday at Lorne or Portsea, only an occasional train trip to Brighton to visit relatives. So on Saturday 15 January, Doreen was in a fever of excitement at the prospect of a trip to the docks to see the ships. The Couplands walked the three kilometres to the station because 'there wasn't anywhere to leave the horse and jinker', and caught the train to Port Melbourne where the P & O liner *Strathnaver* had berthed earlier that morning at Station Pier. Visitors were allowed aboard to look around. It 'was always an exciting thing', Doreen remembers, 'to go and see these huge boats'.

Other children were storing different memories of childhood. Eda Thompson grew up far from the sea, as an only child on Trida, a pastoral station 740 kilometres west of Sydney. Her memories are of becoming

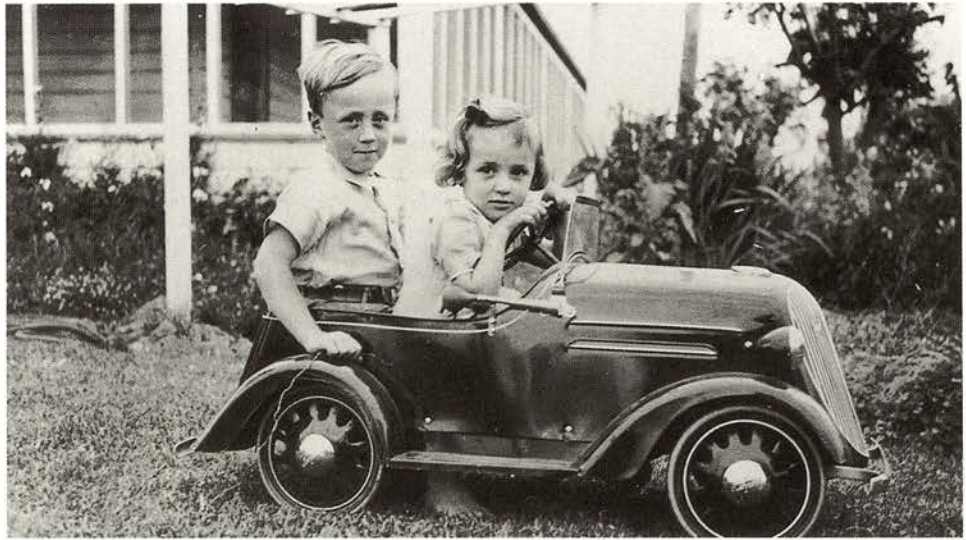
adept at playing games by myself. There was a patterned carpet in my room ... I played 'sheep' using marbles as sheep and I mustered them out of one pattern into another—endlessly. I also had an imaginary country.

Nine-year-old Peter Porter was also an only child. Every summer he and his mother left Brisbane to visit family in Sydney. They caught the morning sleeper



*A Christmas wish come true.  
Advertisement for Ever Ready  
torches. Man, Dec 1938.*

*Michael Bidencope, six, and his sister Cynthia, four, in a Cyclops pedal car on their front lawn at Coonamble, some 600 kilometres northwest of Sydney.*



*Michael and Cynthia with their ten-year-old brother Peter, holding a toy yacht, at South Steyne beach. The Bidencopes stayed in a flat at Manly for their annual holidays. Peter liked the 'beautiful Norfolk pines' and the 'large ferry steamers'.*

P. BIDENCOPE, 1938 COLLECTION

from South Brisbane station, having a compartment to themselves, reached Central station about eight the next morning and took a taxi to Circular Quay and a ferry to Hunters Hill, where Peter's grandmother lived at Iona, 59 The Point Road. Her backyard sloped down to the harbour in a series of rock terraces that ended with an old boatshed and a swimming area formed by staking out part of the harbour with netting. Peter spent most of the summer there. He liked to watch ferries, especially the *Lady Chelmsford*: 'She had a nice tall funnel and was the oldest of these double ended particular branch of ferries'. He rushed out whenever he saw the huge white showboat cruising up the Lane Cove River. This year the highlight of Peter's visit was a trip into town to watch the sesquicentennial procession. On Thursday 26 January, he and his mother caught an early ferry and hurried up to the building overlooking Martin Place where Peter's Aunt Edna worked in a circulating library. 'We stationed ourselves at my aunt's front window', he remembers, 'and then simply waited for the events':

For several hours at least there was a steady procession passing through Sydney. There were scenes from Government House, goldrush scenes and of course copious scenes about Australia's virility, particularly in the war ... The whole thing was mixture of floats and people marching—it was enormously long.

A week later Peter returned to Brisbane to begin the new school year.

Gavin Souter, aged nine, had mixed feelings about going back to school, for in February the National Bank transferred his father from Sydney to Kempsey, a country town 500 kilometres north with a population of six thousand. Gavin entered fifth grade at East Kempsey Public School. He was sorry to leave Sydney, where he had enjoyed racing his scooter down the steep hill outside his home in Ontario Avenue, Roseville, and hurling clods of earth in the nearby paddock with his best friend Lyall Waddy. But the boys parted 'without apparent sorrow' when Gavin joined his younger brother and sister in the family car, an Erskine, for the trip north. Their new home was 22 Innes Street, East Kempsey, a weatherboard bungalow with an unpainted corrugated iron roof—ideal for flying model gliders from—and the biggest wisteria Gavin had ever seen, capable of supporting a dozen children.

Discipline at East Kempsey Public School was tougher than Gavin was used to in Sydney. The enormity of some crimes and the severity of their punishment (six

cuts on each hand delivered by the headmaster with all the force he could muster) astounded him. He was caned only once, shortly after his arrival, for reading a comic under his desk, and was in a quandary about

Whether to exhibit contrition or bravado; whether or not to look at Mr. Ibbett, with whom I had hitherto enjoyed good relations, and if I were to look at him during my imminent ordeal, whether to register fear (which might mitigate the sentence, of whose mildness or otherwise I had not been apprised in advance) or outrage (which might well compound the felony). There was no time for conscious decision, but I suspect that I did not look at Mr. Ibbett, and that the expression on my face was closer to fear than outrage.

Gavin spent most of his time with neighbours, Don Milligan and Alan Rosten. They spun tops, made catapults out of the inner tubing of bicycle tyres and the tongues of old shoes, threw nib darts fledged with folded paper, played the newly imported game of Monopoly, hunted for birds' eggs, dug up walnuts for ammunition, and hid in the huge wisteria tree, much as boys and girls in Queensland escaped to the cool, adult-proof space under their stilt homes. They



Roma Souter with her children Rod and Mary, twins aged six, and Gavin, aged nine, taken by a street photographer in George Street, Sydney, on a shopping expedition. Gavin was 'striving for a Budge persona' from an early age.

G. SOUTER, 1938 COLLECTION



Front cover of *Budge and Betty in America*, London, in the possession of G. Souter.

*Feeling Hot and Uncomfortable in the heavy clothes which convention dictates they must wear even in sub-tropical Sydney, many men will envy the lot of these care-free youngsters . . . For years now, little nudists have been swimming in this lake, on the fringe of Centennial Park, Sydney, opposite the Randwick racecourse. As a result of recent protests, however, by passengers riding on trams which pass every few minutes along the rising in the background the Park Trust is now making efforts to stop the practice. PLX cameraman was on the spot to record the following drama . . . It's a Good Race, but the ringer is handicapped by his big boots or maybe he slows down purposely because he doesn't forget he was a boy himself once. The little nudists escape by wading across the lake. From the water's edge the ringer roars horrible threats—then quietly grins to himself.' Pix, 23 Nov 1938.*

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS

each had a big cloth bag to hold their marbles. Success at popular marbles games like bull in the ring, poison, eyedrop, big ring and little ring brought prestige and a bulging collection of taws (marbles flicked with the fingers), bullseyes, bots, aggies, alleys, bottlers and connies.

Keith McCance, aged nine, never had much success with marbles. He and his friends at East Kew Central School in Melbourne preferred to play five yonnies. They put five little chips of bluestone or road metal in a pattern near the playground wall, then aimed with a tennis ball at the stones, hoping to be the first to move them. Cigarette cards was another popular game. Each boy, playing in groups of three or four, tried to flip his card closest to the wall, and the one who finished nearest won all the other cards. 'We used to have our own special cards', Keith recalls. 'we thought they had some magic power of staying nearer to the wall than the other fellow's.'

Opposite Keith's school was the local Catholic school, 'which made it fairly hand because you could generally have a bit of a bluey on the way to school or on the way back or preferably both'. The 'bit of bluey' included chanting rhymes, hurling insults and name calling. The 'proddos' or 'pubbos' (Protestants attending the public school), were usually in the majority, but either side was capable of laying an ambush or whacking a schoolcase flat. After school Keith also played football or cricket with other boys in his street, flew a home-made kite, found a suitable house for nick-knock, a game which offered the exquisite pleasure of irritating adults by fleeing after knocking on their doors, or teased girls, pulling their hair if the chance arose. Occasionally, he and his friends managed to sneak down to the Yarra.

We'd go for a swim, hang on those ropes that used to be suspended across the river, probably duck a few kids if you got a chance, generally skylark and make pests of ourselves. We'd have a bit of a rubber tyre tied on the bottom of the rope we used to swing across the river on, just to see who'd get out furthest.



Keith got poliomyelitis during the epidemic and spent the early part of the year recuperating in a convalescent home. He went back to school after term had started, relieved to be able to wield a bat, kick a football made out of a cigarette packet with paper stuffed into it, and play brandings, which involved throwing a ball at someone and making red marks on him.

Most primary school children knew anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant rhymes.

Catholic dogs  
Sitting on logs,  
Eating maggots out of frogs.

Keith McCance avoided reciting dirty rhymes in front of his parents but he thought this one 'was pretty clean because we could generally get away with it':

Ask your mother for a sixpence,  
To see the new giraffe,  
With pimples on its whiskers,  
And whiskers on his  
Ask your mother . . .

When his mother queried his language he replied 'Well I was only saying "ask"'.  
One girl Keith knew used to say:

Red, white and blue,  
A dirty cockatoo,  
Sitting on a lamp-post doing Number Two.

'We really thought she was pretty grotty because nice girls didn't say those things'.

K. McCANCE, 1938 COLLECTION

Clowns in Wirth's circus exhibit at the Royal Easter Show, Sydney. Photograph by L. Pimblett, 1938.



Similar adventuring caused young Ernest Moroney, of the Sydney suburb of Haberfield, to join the small minority of children who were sent to boarding schools. He was 'a bit of a wild boy':

All the underground drains, I knew them, because I'd crawl down the gutters into the drains. What with getting down drains and walking through people's properties and the local residents complaining for trespassing on their premises through these canals . . . The outcome was me being sent to boarding school. I thought my throat was cut when I went there with the strong discipline and if anyone felt like fighting, boxing gloves were very promptly produced.

By early April cafes and milk bars all over Australia were bulging with Easter eggs. Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse novelty eggs were popular. In Sydney, Easter meant the show. The special Anniversary Show opened on Saturday 9 April and extended for thirteen days and eleven nights. For the first time attendances passed a million. Promoters knew the show's enormous appeal to children and sent out a plan and directory of the showground to 50 000 schoolchildren a few days before the opening. Children were also granted a concession fare of 6d return from anywhere within 55 kilometres of the city, to let them watch the procession of 106 floats in the 'March of Commerce and Industry' which left Broadway at 9.30 on the opening Saturday and stretched for almost three kilometres.

For almost all children the most exciting things about the show were collecting sample bags and exploring Sideshow Alley, where spruikers urged customers into the tents to see freaks, magicians, boxers and death-defying artists. But ten-year-old



Boxing troupes like this one at Sydney's Royal Easter Show appeared at shows around Australia tempting young men and boys to compete. Photograph by L. Pimblett, 1938.

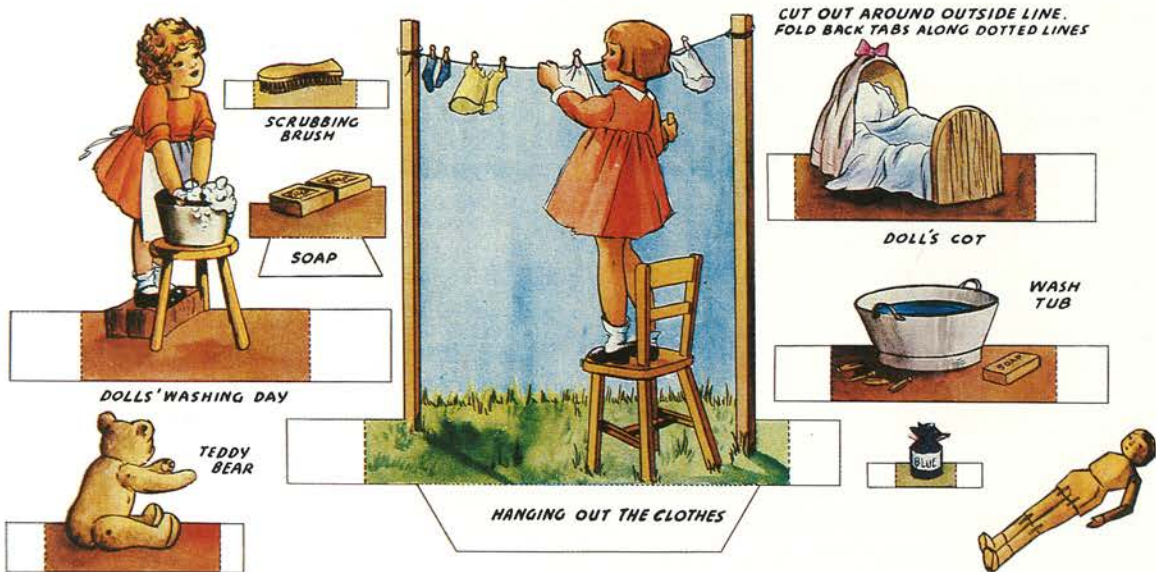
Betty Beauchamp and her sister Valerie, aged eight, daughters of the herdmaster of Bundure stud in western New South Wales, saw a different aspect of the show. They stayed with their parents in a flat close to the showground and spent most of their days in the cattle pavilion helping to look after the stud's prize Red Poll bull, Windfall. It was unusual for two young girls to be playmates with a bull, but, their father told reporters, these girls had practically grown up with the animals. 'They know all the names and pedigrees of the whole eighty on the property', he said, adding, 'Betty is quite a good judge too'.

Two days after the show ended, most schools held services on the eve of Anzac Day. Neatly dressed children saluted the flag and listened in respectful silence as the Last Post sounded. A month later Empire Day was celebrated with a round of stirring speeches and songs, prizes and processions to honour Queen Victoria's birthday and the growth of the empire, the lands coloured red on maps of the world. In Hobart Empire Day coincided with the first day of second term for primary school children. Boys and girls at Elizabeth Street Practising School saluted the Union Jack and solemnly pledged to love their country, honour the flag and cheerfully obey the laws. They then listened with varying degrees of interest and some nudging and winking while the Reverend C.F. McRae described two ways towards peace between nations. 'One is by trying to make the English language world wide', he said. 'The other is through the King who is looked up to as the one common head.' His call for fair play and truthfulness was echoed by a fellow clergyman at Trubridge State School, where boys and girls, buoyed by anticipation of an afternoon half holiday and the sweets, fruit and fireworks to be distributed after the proceedings, sat through an address on 'Service'.

In Sydney the real thrill of Empire Day was not the 21-gun salute fired at noon, or the elaborate decorations in shop windows for Empire Shopping Week, or even the program of flying formations and aerobatics on Empire Air Day—it was Cracker Night. Soon after dusk thousands of bonfires blazed against a night sky punctured by rockets, bangs and showers of sparks and coloured stars. Boys scouted in the shadows, their pockets full of bangers. Frank Toby, whose father was a fitter and turner with the Tramways department, disliked crackers, but with his three older brothers and younger sister enjoyed a huge bonfire on the headland at Coogee:

*'Lot-of-fun' cut out, Offset Printing Co, Sydney, c1938. Although printed in Sydney this cut-out book, like many other children's books at the time, was derived from British examples.*

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS



We'd fossick around for weeks before for the material for the bonfire. My eldest brother used to purchase the crackers wholesale. He got them from some Chinese merchant down at the markets. We'd be supervised by the elder people, the elder children.

From the headland they could see a chain of bonfires lighting the coastline north and south.

That night residents of Surry Hills, Paddington, Glebe and other inner Sydney areas called fire brigade officers to put out fires burning in streets and vacant lots close to their homes. No damage was done, the *Daily Telegraph* reported next day, but 'swarms' of children hampered firemen, 'hooting' at them, standing on their hoses and even pelting them with live crackers. Donald McManus, aged fourteen, was taken by Manly ambulance to hospital after fireworks exploded in his pocket. Police suspected that a spark had fallen in his trousers, but Donald laid the blame on one of his mates for dropping a lighted match in his pocket.

With the coming of winter, in colder states swimming costumes and fishing rods made way for books and comics, stamps, card games such as patience and grab, jigsaw puzzles, ludo and snakes and ladders, train sets, Meccano sets for those whose parents could afford them, knitting, drawing and football. On Saturday afternoons Frank Toby went to the Boomerang Picture Show at Coogee Beach for *Captains courageous* or *King Solomon's mines*, the latest Shirley Temple, or the next thrilling episode of a serial in which Hopalong Cassidy or Buck Rogers fought for justice in the west and in space. When the 6d admission price was increased to 9d it was 'a catastrophe' because 'we just didn't have the ninepence. We could cater for sixpence. We used to get the money by picking up empty bottles on the beach—beer bottles, soft drink bottles, and selling them'.

The 'flicks' and the organ that rose out of the floor during interval were only part of the entertainment. Roy Holt, aged sixteen, a post office messenger, always walked into the Excelsis Picture Theatre at Campsie, Sydney, armed with ice blocks from the White Rose café over the road. 'Nobody ever ate their ice blocks. They used to come back and break them up and pelt them around the theatre at random. You know, you'd be sure to hit somebody.' The boys also formed a syndicate to

West Australian,  
21 May 1938.

**BOYS & GIRLS**  
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'Crying room' at Ozone cinema, Glenelg, opened in November 1937. 'An air-conditioned, sound-proofed room, with special sound equipment and commanding a perfect view of the screen. Here mothers may bring their fractious children, and view (and hear) the programme in comfort, knowing that other patrons are undisturbed. The walls are beautifully decorated with murals depicting Popeye the Sailor, Mickey Mouse and his pal, Donald Duck.' Photograph by D. Darien Smith (courtesy John A. Atkins, Adelaide).

Chums, from England, brought adventure to many Australian boys. Chums, London 1938.



buy peanuts in the shell and a bottle of soft drink. Nothing was wasted. When the peanuts had been eaten the shells were thrown into the aisle so that anyone walking down it went ‘crunch, crunch, crunch’; and the empty soft drink bottle was set rolling ‘bonk, bonk, bonk’, down the stepped slope of the aisle or under the tiered seats. The management at the Excelsis turned a blind eye to such youthful high spirits, but at the Regal Theatre in the Perth suburb of Subiaco the manager, Phil Appleby, was not so tolerant. Marcia Leavesley, whose parents owned a shop in Subiaco, has memories of ‘Old Phil’, as she called him, coming down the aisle with the torch. ‘If anyone caused a disturbance, boom—you knew you were outside and weren’t allowed to come in again for a couple of weeks.’

Sundays began with a scramble for the comics. In Sydney, Aldyth Beale, an eight-year-old girl from Abbotsleigh private school, had a special affection for Ginger Meggs. Her father, who managed the Sydney piano making firm Beale and Co, employed Mrs Hogan to do the washing in their north shore home once a week, and Mrs Hogan’s sister, Miss Molly Nolan, helped Aldyth’s grandmother. The two told Aldyth and her three brothers stories about how they had grown up with Ginger’s creator, Jim Bancks, and how ‘Nolan’s Corner’ and ‘Hogan’s Goat’, landmarks in the Ginger Meggs stories, were named after them.

When she was not out riding her horse Aldyth was an avid reader of adventure books. ‘Friends of mother’s who’d been at school with her had a marvellous collection of children’s books’, Aldyth remembers—‘lots of Mary Grant Bruce—and they used to bring me two of those per week to church and I would devour them and take them back and then they’d bring me another two’.



John Mystery’s famous romance, Sydney 1938.



Adelaide News, 2 Apr 1938.





In western New South Wales Eda Thompson got her reading material in an apple case. It came every few months from her Uncle Tom at Marulan who negotiated a flat rate of 3d a copy with a second-hand bookseller in Goulburn. 'I would read my way steadily through all the children's books and then ... get on to the adult stuff while I was waiting for the next box to arrive.' Through novels in the apple case and articles in magazines Eda discovered sex. 'I found the whole idea rather horrific when I first encountered it but the articles helped me to come to terms with it.'

Keith McCance's reading came from England, and was limited to the occasional Captain Marryat adventure story or a dog-eared copy of *Champion* or *Tip top* comics. In cold weather he preferred to mess around with his crystal radio set or write to penfriends overseas. James Bryant, aged twelve, from Marian in Queensland, shared Keith's hobby. He wrote to the Pen-Friends Club run by the weekly paper the *Queenslander* and asked for a Queensland or interstate penfriend who liked riding, cricket, birds and canoeing. In Melbourne the *Argus* encouraged young readers to become a 'Link of the Empire' by sending their name, age, address and list of hobbies, together with a 2d stamp, to the 'First Mate'. The information was sent to London and about three months later a letter arrived from a penfriend overseas.

Most newspapers ran boys' and girls' clubs. 'Sally Hamer' ran the *Brisbane Courier Mail's* Children's Corner and 'Ralph Rover' wrote the children's column in the *Melbourne Age*. It featured Chatterbox Corner News in association with 3AW's radio program for children, a stamp collecting corner under the auspices of 'Phil Ately', topical and educational articles, craft ideas, riddles, 'spot the difference' pictures, birthday wishes and colouring-in competitions.

Peter Porter's mother died in June of a ruptured gall bladder, within months of their trip to Sydney in the summer to stay with Peter's grandmother at Hunters Hill. He later associated her death with stamp collecting, for instead of going to the

*The boys of Radio 2GB's Youth Club pose with their leader, Rev C.L. Oliver, in the hall at St Andrew's Church, Summer Hill, Sydney. Founded in August, the club boasted a membership of 300 in less than two months. Under the slogan 'National Fitness' it aimed to produce from the youth of the community 'leaders of national importance in the various fields of physical and mental endeavour, men who will compare to advantage with the great leaders of the world ... The club has a badge, a war cry, a theme song, a system of signs, tokens and regalia which are symbolic of the underlying ideal'. Wireless weekly, 23 Sept 1938.*



*Roland Wakelin, Judy and Diana: lunch on the grass, oil on canvas, Sydney 1938. 'Diana was my best friend', recalls Judith Murray (nee Wakelin). 'We were eleven years old and played together nearly every day. We are sitting on the lawn in front of our house at Berry's Bay, on the north side of Sydney Harbour. On this day we pretended we were going on a picnic so we took our lunch outside with some barley water to drink. My father worked as a commercial artist during the week and painted on the weekend. He had a big room in the front of the house where he worked and he observed our picnic from his window. He first made some quick sketches in pencil and then painted in the scheme of the picture quite quickly.'*

MURRAY COLLECTION

funeral he stayed at his paternal grandfather's house in East Brisbane, looked after by a woman friend of the family. He remembers doing 'a sort of stamp collection with her while the funeral ceremony and the cremation of my mother was proceeding', and afterwards spending hours wandering alone in the East Brisbane cemetery, vaguely aware that people were buried there but very conscious of 'the smell of the flowers that people ... put on the graves and the constant buzzing around of the bees who would come into the graveyard to get the nectar from the flowers'.

By late spring flowers seemed to be blooming everywhere. By summer children were culling fruit trees, sometimes selling the fruit on makeshift street stalls, or catching yabbies and tadpoles to put in jars. Doreen Coupland and her sisters sold 'stray' golf balls for 3d each. 'As the golfer hit the ball down the course we'd run out—they were out of sight ... and pick up the ball and go down the creek and walk along up to some other golfers and say "would you like to buy a golf ball?"' Doreen also played cherry bobs—a game using cherry pips boiled and dried. The idea was to win an opponent's cherry bobs by being first to lob your own bob into a small hole. Doreen found this game more exciting than saddle my nag, kiss in the ring, tip cat, hopscotch, or up and down the yard. But it could not compete with her prized collection of jacks, made from real sheep knuckles and painted different colours. The colour faded, and Doreen hoped that when Christmas came she would be given another tin of water paints so that she could colour them again. 'We didn't get very much at all for Christmas', she recalls. 'Mum always tried to make the best of it she could, but toys were very, very expensive.' The paints were there on Christmas morning, together with a kewpie doll from a neighbour across the road.

The doll was cheap, 'but it was a doll, and I loved it. It had a large green bow around the neck and a pointy head'.

After Christmas boy scouts from all over the empire gathered in Sydney for a jamboree. Early on 29 December the first of six special trains expected that day steamed into Central station with a contingent of scouts from the country. Khaki-clad boys humping haversacks jangling with billies and eating utensils poured from the maroon and cream carriages, and changed trains for the thirteen-kilometre trip to Bradfield, north of Sydney. Soon 10 000 boy scouts were gathered in jamboree on 120 hectares of bushland.

The Chief Scout of Australia, the Governor-General Lord Gowrie, officially opened the jamboree on the afternoon of Saturday 31 December. 'The brotherhood of man would be more than a mere ideal', he remarked, 'if we could find expression for the Boy Scout spirit in our international relationships'. Lord Hampton, representing the world's Chief Scout, Lord Baden Powell, said much the same thing in his New Year's Eve broadcast on 2FC, and added: 'We greatly regret that Scouting at present has no place under the banner of National Socialism. We sympathise deeply with the 10 000 keen Austrian Scouts who were swept away by the Anschluss'. But most scouts had thoughts nearer home. At the stroke of midnight the camp erupted as hundreds of boys blasted whistles, banged on pots and pans, shouted, blew mouth organs and flung mud pies at each other. Through the pandemonium a loose procession wove, headed by a dragon's head and an illuminated ram's head on a stick. Catching Lord Hampton near his tent, the cheering boys hoisted their chief shoulder high, jostled him to the other end of the camp, and dumped him on his feet before facing about for the return march.

It was 2 am before the din subsided. Order descended. 1938 was over.

## SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

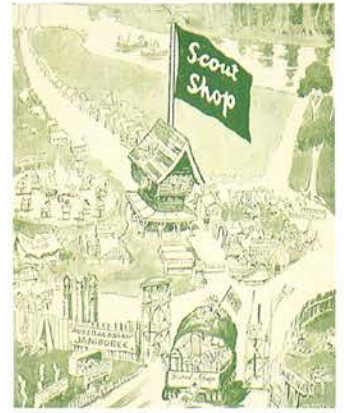
BRIAN DICKEY

Most Australian children grew up in families, with their parents looking after them. But between July 1937 and June 1938, South Australian courts declared 12 500 children neglected, destitute or delinquent. Some were discharged on parole to their parents; others, including orphans, some juvenile lawbreakers, and children with parents deemed by the courts unfit to remain responsible for them, became the responsibility of the Children's Welfare and Public Relief department. Under the Maintenance Act of 1926 the department had total control over these children, and placed them either in an institution run by the department or with foster families who were paid a weekly allowance and who had to accept inspection and advice from the department's visiting officers.

The fortunes of the children varied considerably. A fifteen-year-old girl, confined in the Girls Probationary School at Barton Vale after running away from foster-parents and marrying without sanction from the department, wrote poignantly to her foster-mother:

Just a short note to let you know that I am quite well and I sincerely hope that you are the same. I am very pleased to be able to say that I am on a trusted job now. I am on kitchen . . . Well Mummy dear, I hope you are not too angry with me about my marriage. I realise now what a fool I am for not listening to you and Daddy, but never mind dear, the years that are coming will tell whether I mean that or not . . . please write to me dear, because you and Daddy are the only ones in the world I have got to look for help now.

Please Mummy come out and see me on visiting day, because it is a long time



*Advertisement in  
Australasian jamboree  
official program, 1938.  
BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS*

since I saw you isn't it. Please give my love to Daddy, will you Mummy and tell him that I often think of him and what he said to me when I came home. I'll never hurt you or Daddy again as long as I live Mummy and I mean that too. I don't care if I stay here for ten years I'll never, never run away.

Sometimes fostering broke down because the foster-parents could no longer support the children. 'I am sorry, but I find I will have to return John', one foster-mother wrote to the department. 'I find I really cannot manage. Should you find a place that wants both the children I would not mind Helen going so she could be with her brother, although I would be very sorry to lose her, she is a very nice little girl, and she seems to have settled down with us very nicely ...' Inadequate housing was the main problem, she explained: 'I told the Inspector that we would like a home with a room more, but houses are like gold, very hard to obtain. There is no prospect of our shifting, because we could not get another if we wanted it, they are very scarce'.

A mother whose boy had been placed under the department's control in the middle of 1937 learned bitterly that her parental rights had been extinguished. She wrote to the department:

I wish to enquire about my son Mick, who is, or was in the Industrial School, I have lately received a letter from him which I understand was written in hospital I would like to know what has been the matter and if he is quite all right now. There was a note enclosed with his letter saying that the boys in the Probationary School can only write once a month. What is the Probationary School, and where is it. Also can you tell me if Mick was among the boys who escaped from the Industrial School, and if so did he get into any trouble as a result of it for you can understand that I feel rather anxious so I hope you can let me know all the particulars.

*Children at Scarba House, Bondi, a home for children run by the Benevolent Society of NSW, a voluntary organisation established in 1813 to give relief to the poor and distressed. It was the first charitable organisation to be founded in Australia.*

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS



She was told:

Since he has been placed in the care of this Department he has continuously absconded from the Institution in which he was placed, and on the 21st January this year, he was transferred to the Boys Probationary School at Mount Barker, where it is hoped the stricter discipline will do him good. At no time has he been in hospital.

Her son had escaped seven times since he was first placed in the department's care, and was already in the middle of the hierarchy of institutions which the department ran for boys: industrial school, probationary school and reformatory.

Children from institutions were childhood's second class citizens. State wards who attended a local school sometimes experienced persistent discrimination. A departmental inspector wrote:

According to Mr Smith (school teacher) the parents of the other children are up in arms not so much because of the low mentality of these children but because of their filthy habits, filthy clothing and filthy heads. The children at the school will not play with them unless the Teacher is in the yard playing with them or watching them . . .

The department was humane when it could be. 'I am writing to See if you would kindly write and Let me know if I could bye a bike', a boy wrote;

I have saved very hard indeed I do not Spend my pocket money in Sweets. I am a few Months off Sixteen why I have wrote to ask you I am working a long way from home and have to be back at milking time on Sundays so I have no time to spend with my Foster Parents which I would like to have . . . Would you write as soon as Possible I have an offer of a good Secon hand bike and he wants to know as soon as he can. I will be very very Pleased indeed.

He got his bike.

When they reached eighteen, children were released by the department, sent a letter wishing them well, and asked whether the department held any money or property on their behalf. One girl replied,

I am enclosing form as instruktud. Thankyou for my release. I will try and abide by the Department's good wishes and example. Thank you once more for the care and protection I found in the Department. I have not anything in the Department I wish to claim.

A former foster-parent wrote in warm, personal terms to an officer of the department:

You will be pleased to know that Elizabeth, the little girl that was handed to me by the Children's Welfare Department nearly 15 years ago, was happily married last Saturday. It was a lovely day and her friends decorated the church beautifully. She received some lovely gifts, one of which was a nice teaset from the Sunday School that she has attended. I am very proud of her. She is a fine industrious young woman, and has, I believe, a good husband in a good position. Her brother came to the wedding. We had a nice reception after the ceremony. I know you will be pleased to hear how well she has grown up.



*Herbert Badham, Interior 1937, oil on cardboard. Born in Sydney in 1899, Badham became well known as a teacher, writer and painter, with a particular interest in painting figure studies and beach scenes.*

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*Fixed desks, often with wrought-iron legs, were used in most well-established primary schools and high schools. They suggested uniformity and discipline, notions accepted by the more conservative teachers and by most parents who wanted schools, whether state or private, to instil sound values in their children. Australian Catholic directory, Sydney 1938.*