

BLOGG'S MOB

written and illustrated
by Gaye Dell

An initiative of
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Family Centre
Strengthening
Family Relationships
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BIDGE'S MOB

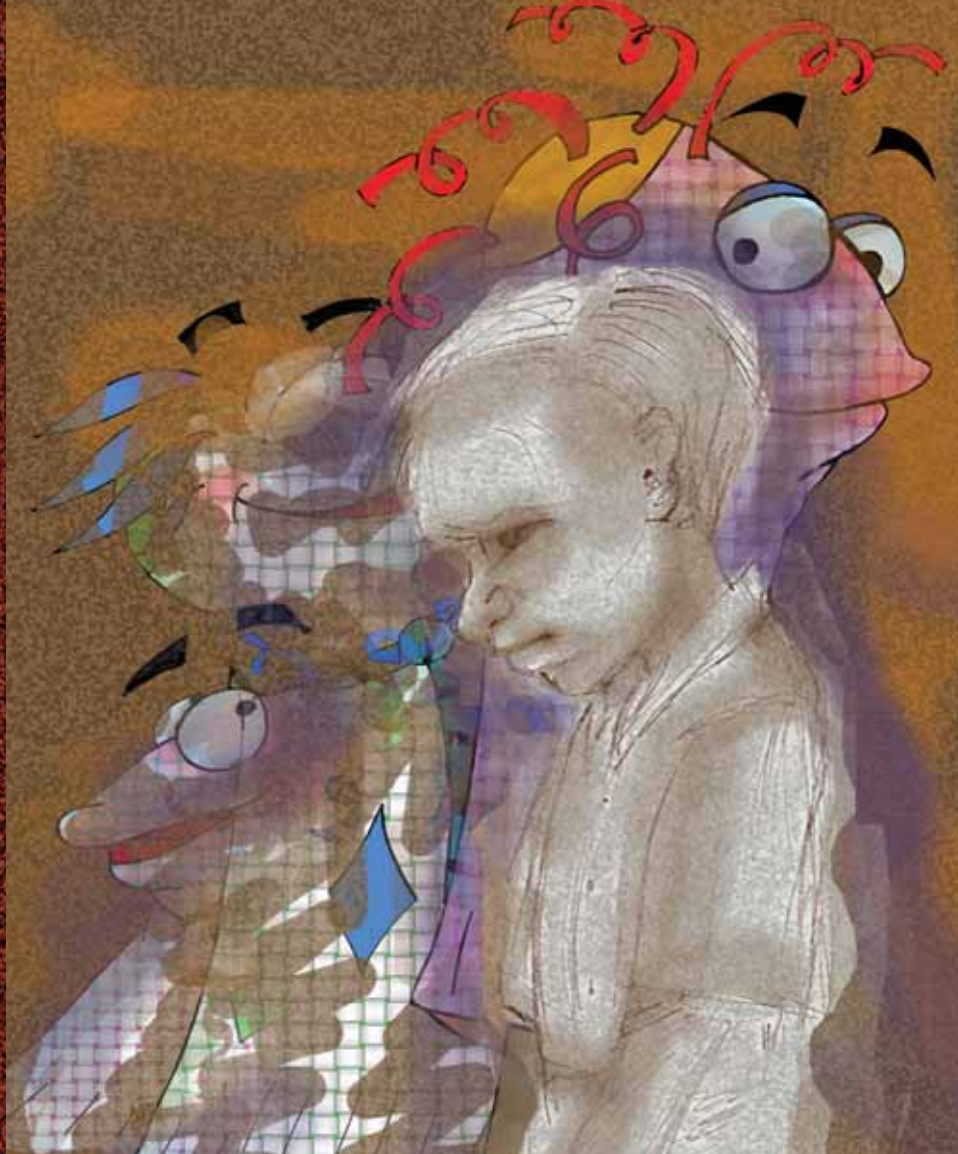
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Bidge followed his Mum through the tall glass doors of the Family Centre. He kept his gaze down toward the blue carpet, mainly because he did not want to look at anyone. His Mum walked quickly towards the smile of the receptionist. She talked in hushed tones, Bidge thought. He could hear their soft whisperings but couldn't make out what they were saying so he waited. There was a lot of talking so after a moment or two he had examined the blue, bobbily carpet enough and lifted his eyes just high enough to peek at the brightly painted characters on the walls in the large foyer.

"We call them 'The Listeners'" said the young lady behind the counter cheerfully to Bidge, "they're our sock puppet family, and if you head down to the little yellow fellow at the end of the hallway here, you'll see he's leaning up against a sign. That points the way to the Contact Centre."

So this was it, the moment he knew his Mum had been dreading. Since the family had broken and Dad had left, he knew she would not like letting him go anywhere without her. She had said so.

Dad had tried to visit him a few times but they turned into shouting matches. When Dad called about a visit with Grandad Drummley, they decided it was better to go to a Family Centre; he could be picked up without the usual blues.

Bidge bit on his lip because it began to tremble all by itself and he knew the time for the tremble to become a tear, was usually pretty quick.



The sign was a white-board and covered almost all of the wall facing the door. It had hand-written messages from other kids all over it. He read some of them:

"Lions rule," said one,

"Lions are pussy cats," said another.

"My family rocks," said another.

"That kid's mob probably isn't broken like mine," thought Bidge.

He looked around to see if Tim could tell what he was thinking, but he was already back in his office. He looked up and waved a broad 'hello' to Bidge through the window.

Bidge looked at the clock high on the wall. It was yellow and about the size of a dinner plate and was placed right above a little Listener who seemed to be interested in what the time was too. Bidge noted it was 3:15 and wondered how long he would have to wait before Grandad Drummley came for him. Tim popped his head around the door and said, *"He'll be here in about 15 minutes, Bidge."*

"Wow," thought Bidge. *"He really can see what I'm thinking."*

Bidge decided not to play or draw on the white sign even though Tim offered him special markers to write whatever he wanted. Instead, he snuggled into the comfy-soft couch tucked in the corner and decided to look at his new book. He flipped through looking at the pictures of the happy *Listeners*, and the not-so-happy ones and decided it was probably about 'changeovers'.

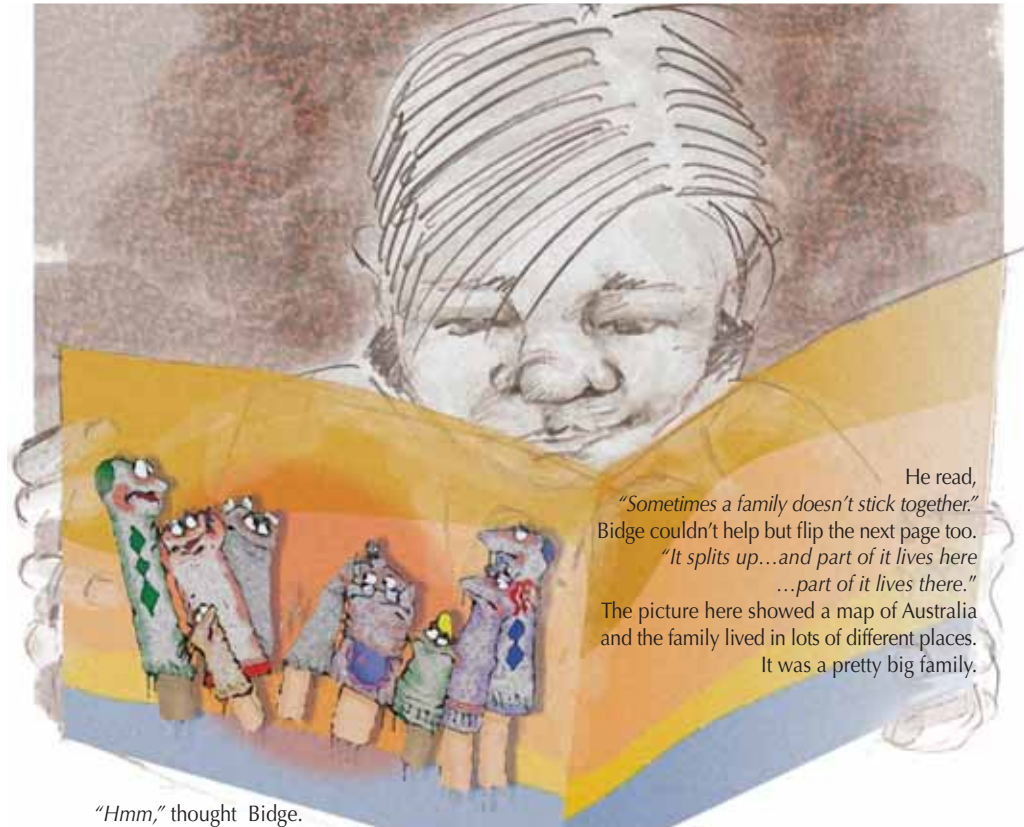
He read the cover:

The Listeners go to the Contact Centre.

He flipped over to the first page.

It had a family of *Listeners* that looked like they had all been caught in a massive willy-willy wind.

The drawing looked like the family was being pulled apart.



"Hmm," thought Bidge.

"Maybe there really are a few other kids like me if they write a book about this kind of stuff."

He looked around the room at the other kids and wondered about their families. His gaze settled on a little boy who looked like he might be Chinese or Vietnamese or maybe Japanese. Bidge was never quite sure about where kids came from when they looked so different from him.

This kid had come in after him and was playing with some cards with sock puppets on them. Bidge smiled at the little boy laughing at the funny drawings, when behind him, he caught sight of his Grandad Drummey's feet stamping the mud off his shoes. Tim had already unlocked the door and open it to the street outside. All of Drummey stepped inside.

"Drummey, Drummey," he cried as he threw his arms as far as they could possibly reach around the old man. A big smile crept onto the Grandfather's face flowing into the deep cracks in his skin that his life had put there.

"Hello young fella," is all he said as he tossed Bidge's hair. He signed a couple of pieces of paper Tim held out for him, then they headed for the door. In just a moment they were already out of town with the sound of the cranky old ute loudly humming them along the road.

The smell of Drummey's ute was so wonderful it almost made Bidge cry, and he might have, if Drummey hadn't looked across to ask him, "How are you goin', Witchetty?"

"H'ok," said Bidge.

"Don't look like it, fella."

After a long moment, Bidge threw back

"Be better if my family wasn't broken to pieces."

He shifted in the lumpy seat to glare outside while the grey-green slowly changed to yellow-red.

Drummey said nothing but they both felt the loud humming of the old ute underneath them. The humming and the creaking, squeaking and rocking made them both feel a little better.

It was a long drive, but Bidge relaxed and began to enjoy every squeak and creak and bump. The lumpy, bumpy seat smelled as though a thousand bums had sat there Bidge was thinking. He had missed the old ute and even missed the warm oil-smell mixed in with Drummey's hot old-man smell.

"You're awful quiet, fella," said Drummey, saving up for nattering at home, I reckon. Only a little while now, mate."

Bidge was yanked back from the comfy haze.

He hadn't given a thought to the others at Drummey's.

Of course they were going to want to know about his new life in the town. The new life without Dad.



Bidge's lazy gaze rolled over into an annoyed stare at the dance of the wheel-dust.

He wondered if it would be like at his Mum's rellies; all whispering voices and angry faces.

"Hey fella, your mob lives in different places now, but this part of it is pretty much how you left it, mate. We're even throwing some snags on the barbie to celebrate. Ol' Tikkee down the road promised to bring some of that barbie sauce you love so much. We're really glad you've come to see us, mate."

"I love that sauce!" sighed Bidge.

"Don't we all," laughed Drummey.

"I reckon I can smell it now...I can...we're here, mate!"

The anger leapt away from Bidge to make room for excitement as he jumped out of the ute to unhook the heavy iron hook of the gate. He had to take a little skip to push the gate open, then jumped on for the free ride as it opened all the way. He stood smiling as the ute crept noisily passed him and jumped back onto the gate again to push it off for another shuddering ride. This time it ended with the loud clunk as it came to its resting place up against the beaten post. Bidge relocked it carefully to keep the animals from wandering and bothering Tikkee again. He jumped up onto the back tray of the old ute for the ride to the house.

It was something he had always done with his Dad and Grandad for the 200 metres or so to the house. Drummey drove really, really slowly so he could stand in the tray of the ute with his belly pressed up tight against the cabin, his arms waved high in the air, the dry breeze tickling his face tasted as delicious as ever, as he yelled as loudly as he possibly could, "We're home

...everyone, we're HOME!"

"Families? Same and different, just like animal ones."

Bidge perked up.

He loved Drummey's stories about animals in the bush.

This somehow felt like the beginning of a Drummey story.

*"You take old man dingo. He finds himself a girlfriend, sticks with her for his whole life.
Just like Gramma Drum and me. Takes care of the kids too, like me."*

He sat silently for a moment or two.

"How about kooka-mate?"

*When he and the missus have a bunch of little kookaburras,
they look after 'em in the nest, then the aunts and uncles teach 'em
to hunt and fish when they get a bit bigger.
Sounds familiar. "*

He sat quietly for a long moment.



*"Lots of animals act like this mob you know:
brolgas do,
magpies,
pelicans,
parrots do.*

*There's as many different kinds of animal families
as there are people ones*

...like ones where the Mum leaves."

Bidge looked up from the fire at Drummey.

"I know," he said.

"Emu Dads take care of the chicks!"

*"Yes they do. Cassowaries and Mallee fowls do too,"
answered Drummey.*

*"I know some animals where they get their kids minded
in a kind of nursery," said Tikkee quite suddenly.*

*"The father penguins keep the egg warm till it hatches,
then he shoots through because he missed out
on all that tucker while he was waiting for the egg to hatch
...and he's really, really hungry.
He leaves the littlee in a penguin nursery."*

*"And dolphins do the same kind of thing, I heard,"
piped up Nancy.*

*"What about Mums or Dads that don't look after their kids?"
asked Drummey looking directly at Bidge this time.*

Bidge thought and then answered,

"I know, like tiger snakes.

And crocs

...and white sharks,"

he said, feeling pretty good that he knew
the answer to Drummey's question.



"And then there are families with one Dad who has lots of girlfriends and babies with all of them," he looked at Bidge again to see if he could remember any of the bower and lyre bird stories.

"The bowerbird bloke makes a cool home with lots of fancy blue things and hopes lots of chickies come a-knockin'" said Bidge laughing. With that, everyone laughed.

Drummey laughed too, then stood up. That was usually the signal that yarning was over and sleep was next.

He announced to the drowsy group, *"Tomorrow, Bidge and I will find some animal families in the bush where the Mum takes care of her kids by herself ...like the other part of this mob."*

"Can I come too?" asked a loud, deep voice from outside the ring of light.

Bidge whipped around, and slowly stood up.

Frozen.



"Dad?" asked Bidge in a voice that was barely a whisper.

"Yeah, mate. Can't have me Witchetty grub thinking we got a broke family now can I!" he said as he popped through the dark veil into the light circle.

The short stunned silence was shattered by laughing as everyone saw it was Bidge's Dad. Forget the sleep, Drummey, this is a night for yarning. And so they did.

The yarn continued to unravel until the little ones began to fall asleep one by one. The older ones tired too. It was only Drummey, Bidge and his Dad sitting close to where the fire had eaten its feast of twigs and branches and all that remained was the pink-grey of the warm embers.

Finally Drummey broke the comfortable silence. *"Time for sleep. We want to catch up with some bush families in next light."* He headed for the house, grabbed a blanket from the porch couch and threw it in their direction.

Drummey answered, "We're looking for an animal family like the one you have, when you're not with us. What do you reckon, Bidge?"

Bidge had anticipated the question and was quick to answer, "I reckon we're going to look for koalas, Drummey."

He spoke confidently, knowing that koala Mums care for their little ones all by themselves.

"Nah," said Drummey.

"They mostly want to be by themselves.

The Mums can't wait to shove off when the baby's big enough.

Doesn't sound like something your Mum would do, does it."

It wasn't really a question, so he didn't answer and thought some more,

"What about wombats, Drummey?"

Drummey answered, "Yeah, well the thing about wombat Mums is that they're like the koalas. They don't have the Dad around either. These little fellas carry their babies in a pouch for about half a year.

Never see the Dads at all."

Bidge continued,

"Yeah, I remember, they have the backwards pouch because they're good diggers and burrow really deep. The pouch is backwards because otherwise, it would fill up with dirt!"

His Dad smiled,

"When d'you get so brainy, Bidge?

Teach you that stuff in that fancy school your Mum made you go to, did they?"



Bidge glanced at his Dad trying to figure out whether he was having a dig at his Mum or whether it was just a question.

He decided he would act like it was a question instead of getting upset about something, just in case.



Today was way too special to worry about anything but being with his Dad and his Drummey!

"Learned it from Drummey, Dad. Also learned that the wombat Mums are really nervous about coming out of their burrows and have to wait until it's night to do it. They're real scaredy cats."

"Well," said his Dad. "Not like your Mum either, she's a tough one to live with, but has to be one of the bravest ladies I know."

"She is?" asked Bidge in his quietest voice hoping his question wouldn't harden the soft look on his Dad's face.

"Yeah, brave when it comes to spending all day with twenty-eight, sometimes more, 4th graders. Now that is brave, mate." He stopped for a moment, then continued, "Hey Bidge, can't live in the house together but haven't forgotten why I liked your Mum in the first place. Listen, when this bad air blows over, we might even end up friends sometime or other."

Then he added quietly, "Maybe. Maybe not, you never know about these things."

He looked away from Bidge not wanting to see the little boy's feelings written so clearly on his face.

He had to add, "Know it's hard on you, mate, but we just want different things now, that's all."

Bidge looked away too.



BIDGE'S MOB

This was written for all of those kids in Australia whose Mums and Dads are living in different homes from each other...like Bidge's mob.

Interrelate wishes to thank it's aboriginal friends throughout NSW for their willingness to support this endeavour by offering very much appreciated feedback about Bidge's Mob.



...for children, always

1300 736 966

**Bidge used to think
his family was broken
but he learned that now
it just lives in different places!**



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