

SIR SYDNEY DINKUM

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Illustrations by

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DEDICATION

The Australian koala is in danger of extinction because of the deforestation of eucalyptus trees. Koalas are not currently on the endangered list, but that does not mean they are not at risk. Koalas were nearly extinct in the early 1900's due to hunters killing them for their fur. Currently, the number of koalas is decreasing and could be as low as 40,000. Some scientists estimate that the species could be extinct within the next 30 years.

This book is dedicated to the volunteers who are committed to saving them . A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the **AUSTRALIAN KOALA FOUNDATION.**

At the end of the book is information on how you can do your part to help save the koala.







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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would truly like to thank Polina and Kenny, their talented illustrators for bringing the story of Sir Sydney Dinkum to life with incredible patience as the story evolved. And a special thanks to Polina's daughter, Lada who is such a joy and inspiration to her mother as she creates her spectacular art.

The first ideas for Sir Sydney were greatly encouraged by the late, great actress Deborah Walley.

We are in awe of the volunteers in Australia and those throughout the world that are fighting to save these beautiful creatures. The support and input of so many have really helped us in the creation of Sir Sydney.

And a special thanks to Peg who has undoubtedly put up with more Koala and Knight discussions than most could tolerate.







1

CHOK-A-BLOK

Sydney never thought of himself as all that special, but everyone who knew him certainly did.

To begin with, he had an amazing gift for languages. By the time he was three he could speak English as well as Aborigine. At age five he was fluent in Crocodile and Standard Wombat. He could even manage to have a decent conversation with bandicoots. As he got older he tackled the difficult grammar used by emus and could eventually pass the time of day with a dingo (which is no easy feat, given their famously bad tempers.)

He had always wanted to learn to chat with camels, but he'd not yet had the good fortune of meeting one.

Words were everything to Sydney, so it's no surprise he became more than a little peeved when someone called him a bear. "Pay attention, mate!" he would shout. "I'm a koala! Not a koala bear! Repeat after me, K-O-A-L-A! Which is, as everyone should know, a marsupial! And that has nothing to do with B-E-A-R! Got it?!" Once someone heard Sydney explain the difference they certainly did "get it" and never dared call him a bear again.

Sydney lived in a grove of gum trees located just outside a tiny, human village in the Outback of Australia, far from any big cities. In the highest branches of the tallest tree in the grove, he built a spectacular tree house and called it Chok-A-Blok. To the uneducated eye, Sydney's home seemed a terrifying place. Perched one hundred nineteen feet in the air and built out of branches and mud, it looked as if it might topple to the ground at any moment. When anyone said something along those lines, however, Sydney only chuckled; he had made the place with his own paws and that, he felt, should be enough assurance of its safety.

The best part about his home, however, was his closest neighbor and best friend, Sancho. They first met during the construction of Chok-A-Blok. Sydney knew he would need something terribly strong to keep all the sticks of his home stuck together. So, he began by mixing up his homemade mud-cement.

First he dug dirt from around the trees and threw it into a large bucket. Next, he added water from the nearby stream. Finally, he used a big branch to mix up the brown concoction. He needed several batches of the gooey stuff just to complete one level. Near the end of the first morning, he scooped a rather large shovelful of dirt from the ground and plopped it into the waiting bucket of water. At the time, he didn't realize he had accidentally scooped up part of a wombat's burrow.

He suddenly noticed the bucket of mud was beginning to bubble and churn. He didn't have time to be scared because a moment later, the head of a very irate wombat popped up. "What is it you think you're doing, mate?"

asked the wombat. "I don't suppose you thought about asking me first if I wanted a bath?"

Sydney tried to apologize, but the sight of this furious wombat covered in mud tickled his funny bone. He simply couldn't stop giggling and the little wombat became so angry he started throwing mud at Sydney's face. Soon the two were hurling mounds of brown goo into the air and laughing as it splattered down on top of them. And just like that, they became best friends. When the wombat told Sydney his true Wombatian name, however, Sydney decided he would have to give his friend a new one.



"Look here, pal," Sydney said, "that name of yours is so long I'm growing old just trying to get it out of my mouth. Now that we're to be best mates and neighbors, I suggest we come up with a nickname. I'll just call you Sancho."

At first, Sancho was not at all happy with the suggestion. "Sancho!" What kind of fool name is that?" he

asked. "It's only got six letters to it! That's not enough for a distinguished wombat such as I."

Sydney told him the name came from a book he'd read and he'd always admired it. "I can't quite recall the title of the book," Sydney explained. "But this bloke, Sancho, was true blue. His pal was this great knight, see, and no matter what trouble he got into, Sancho was always there to bail him out. You couldn't find a more loyal mate if you looked under every rock in the jungle."

Sancho wasn't sure what a great knight was and wondered if it was anything like a great day. Either way, he was still not convinced. "That's all very interesting," said Sancho. "But it still doesn't explain why I've got to drop a classic Wombatian name like Wumchatlakalaka-inshrushnot! I mean you're not planning on being a knight are you?"

"Of course not. Too much trouble. I like reading about them, but that's as far as it goes," Sydney answered. "But look at it like this. It's not as if your name has really changed. It's sort of like a code. Get it? So when I say Sancho, what I'm really saying is Wumchatlakalaka-inshrushnot. And only you and I know it. It'll be our top secret and everyone will be envious."

"Well, when you put it like that it does sound kind of special," said Sancho, always a fan of top secrets. "Alright then, I agree. Sancho it is."

That night, Sydney carried Sancho up to the lowest

branch of his gum tree where he was camping out until his house was built. Together, they sat under the moon and exchanged life stories.

Sancho had had a very dull life and was extremely proud of the fact. He was born in a burrow not more than twenty paces from the tree and was still living in the same hole. He reminded Sydney, however, his burrow was going to need some renovations after the mess he'd made of it with his shovel. Sydney quickly agreed to take care of any expense for necessary repairs.

When it was Sydney's turn he told Sancho he had been born in a place called Bullamakanka, which to the city dwellers of Australia was a mythical place. Sydney always rolled his eyes and ruffled the fur on his ears whenever he heard the tall tales of his birthplace. Granted, Bullamakanka was not an easy place to get to, in fact it was a rather difficult journey. But it was a wonderful place once you arrived and it certainly was no myth. "After all," Sydney would say, "if the place didn't exist, how would I be here?"

He explained to Sancho that he had been orphaned when he was very young. A wild fire had separated him from his mother and father and he was raised by a tribe of Aborigines. Sancho was most interested when Sydney told him of all the marvelous things the tribe had taught him. From the Woodcarver he learned how to make a boomerang out of soft wood and how to make it obey every command. The Medicine Man taught him about all the plants on the land: which plants would make you sick and which ones could cure your illness. From the Music Man he learned songs and how to play wonderful

instruments like the digaridoo. The Chief of the tribe showed him the power of dreams and how they cross paths with the waking life.

For many years, Sydney was happy living with the tribe, but one night the Chief came to him and said it was time he venture out and see more of the world. He told him it was important he experience different places and new people. Sydney, however, was quite content to stay where he was. He had absolutely no interest in adventure and couldn't see the benefits of it. The Chief, however, would not budge. So the next morning, Sydney packed a few essentials, including some of his favorite books. Then he said his tearful farewells and set off down a long path leading to the unknown.

By the time Sydney had finished, Sancho had a deep respect for his new neighbor and mate. "So you took off on your own?!" said Sancho. "No way I could've done it."

"Don't underestimate yourself, mate," Sydney replied. "You never know what you're capable of until someone holds your head under water."

"Well, how far did you have to walk?" asked Sancho.

"No idea, actually. I know I didn't see much more of the world than you'll find right here though."

"Do you wish you had?" Sancho asked.

"Nope," said Sydney. "I've got everything I need. And when I'm finished building Chok-A-Blok, I'm going to settle

down to a life of comfort and ease. After all, that's what a koala's meant for."

Now Sancho was sure he liked Sydney. Like all good wombats, he didn't do much of anything except sleep and dig in the dirt. In fact he wouldn't mind a day's schedule that included waking up, having a snack, playing in the dirt, taking a nap and repeating the same things over and over until it was night again and he could sleep hours on end without any interruptions. In his opinion, there was nothing more foolish than sticking one's neck out just for kicks and excitement. He predicted right then Sydney would be a lifelong companion who he could hang around with all day and do nothing.

"So tell me, what is this Chok-A-Blok you're building?" asked Sancho.

"It's my tree house!" exclaimed Sydney. "I've got all the plans right here." Then he showed Sancho an old book which he had cherished for many years. It was handed down through his koala family and had been rescued from the great fire. Its title was, *The Official Koala Guide to Building the Perfect Tree House*.

"You see," said Sydney, pointing out pages of the book. "It has all the instructions right here. There are lots of styles to choose from."

"So which one are you going to pick?" asked Sancho.

"All of them," said Sydney, carefully studying the pages of the book.

Sancho looked high up into the tree and tried to imagine a house up there.



Since he had almost no imagination whatsoever, he had trouble visualizing it. He had a feeling, however, his new friend was the sort who wouldn't let anything stop him once he determined to do something.

"When I'm finished," said Sydney, "I'm going to have the biggest and best tree house a koala has ever had!"

Starting the very next morning, that's exactly what he proceeded to do. It took one month to complete. Sancho did his best to help but because he wasn't fond of heights

he left the actual construction up to Sydney while he busied himself with making the mud.

Finally the day came for the Grand Opening of Chok-A-Blok. It consisted of nine floors connected by rope bridges and featured over a dozen rooms. There was the reading room, the music room, the shower room, the dining room, the billiard room, enough bedrooms for several house guests and a rooftop garden. There was even a manual elevator for those who couldn't make the difficult climb up. Sancho had actually been the one to request this feature.

The name he chose for his home ended up being a fitting one as it meant "overflowing" to Australians. And indeed it was. For a few years after the Grand Opening, Sydney went about finding things to fill his house. He was quite a collector of things and he would collect just about anything if he liked it. And since he liked just about everything, every inch of his house was jam-packed with stuff.

He had walking sticks, boomerangs of every make, hats stacked on hats, slap-dash furniture, toys, books, games, junk with no names, and an immense collection of electronic gadgets of every shape and size. Sydney had a peculiar weakness for anything that ran on electricity.

Naturally, Sydney never actually used the modern devices the way everyone else did. His electric toothbrush never entered his mouth, but it worked quite well as a paw massager after a long walk in the jungle. The washing machine was excellent for tumbling the rocks he found on his walks, and his steam iron was perfect for heating up

tasty eucalyptus leaves for late night snacks Though Sydney used these modern gadgets in his very own unique way, everyone had to agree they worked quite efficiently for him.



His most prized possession was his electric guitar and he did his best to use it the way it was supposed to be used. Whenever he had the blues or had something really difficult to think about he would play it for hours, sometimes days at a time. He had always dreamed of being a rock star and the fact he could not play even a single chord did not discourage him.

"Where would the great rock stars be today," he would say to himself, "if they worried about the fact they couldn't play all that well?" He knew the secret to becoming famous was having style, and he was sure he had plenty of that. The one and only time he had played in public for his friends, they had offered him a large amount of money to stop. He felt, however, those who did not appreciate his music were simply unenlightened. More importantly, he didn't play to please others, he played to please himself. And every time he would strum his paws over the battered old instrument he became very pleased indeed.

Once Sydney had Chok-A-Blok just the way he wanted it, he and Sancho settled into a life of comfort and ease just as they had planned. When it was sunny they would go to the nearby stream for a swim and when it was raining they would tuck themselves away in the tree house and talk about all the things they were glad they weren't doing. To earn spending money, Sydney hired himself out as a tour guide for the occasional tourist. When they needed a little entertainment, there was always Happy Larry's Pub and Grill just a short walk through the jungle.

Sancho's earlier prediction had come true. They were living the ideal life of two marsupials and both felt there could be no better way to live. Nothing could possibly make them change, or do anything else.

Life has a funny way of not turning out the way one thinks, however, and that was true for Sydney and Sancho. For very soon, things were about to change in a most dramatic and unexpected way. It all began when Sydney started to dream.