



## School Dog's Big Mistake

story by Gaz Simpson , illustrated by Kim Gamble

NO-ONE KNEW where he came from. He just turned up one day at our little bush school. We only have one teacher, and she was as surprised as we kids were. After all, it's not often you have a dog run into your classroom. Anyway, from that day forward, the dog decided to make his home under the verandah.

He was a funny-looking dog. It was hard to say what sort of breed he was. We thought he might be a labra-kelpie-collie with just a dash of dingo. But we knew he was definitely big, brown, hairy and friendly.

We decided to call him School Dog and we all loved him. When the teacher wasn't looking, we would share our lunches with him, especially banana sandwiches. He liked them best of all.

It wasn't long before School Dog decided to take on some responsibilities around the place.

For example, he became Snake Monitor. Every morning before the kids arrived, he would investigate every spot where snakes might be likely to hide: under the classroom, around the shed, in the bushes and near the rocks down by the creek.

During the night, when all the kids were home in bed, he took on the job of Rabbit Monitor. School Dog knew that rabbits like carrots, not to mention lettuce and cabbages, all of which the school tried to grow and sell. (So we could make money to buy library books.) So, his night-time job was scaring the bunnies away.

But his most important job was Round-Up Monitor. When the teacher rang the bell, School Dog had to get the kids ready for their lessons. That meant he needed to run around the playground, barking a lot and rounding-up the kids (all sixteen of us). Then he would make us stand in line, ready to march into the classroom. This was definitely School Dog's favourite job.

Whenever visitors came to the school, he became the Greetings Monitor. In this role he would give a kindly bark and then rush out to give the visitors a friendly greeting. This often meant bringing them one of the special toys someone had given him or a stick he had picked up or, on special occasions, one of his old, well-chewed bones.

This Greetings Monitor job sounds easy but, in fact, it was the job that got School Dog into serious trouble one day. That was the day all the children remembered as 'School Dog's big mistake'.

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Everyone later agreed that the trouble was that the visitor arrived at the school gate carrying a strange black case. For some reason, School Dog seemed to think that the black case looked suspicious. Forgetting his usual practice, he jumped on the visitor and knocked him to the ground. Then he put his front paws on the man's chest, looked him in the eye and growled. In fact, School Dog growled a lot.

Unfortunately, this visitor was not an ordinary visitor at all. The visitor that School Dog had pinned down was the District School Inspector! Worse still, the Inspector was well known as a kindly man. Whenever he visited schools he always brought along his violin (in a strange black case) because he loved playing music for the children.

But on this occasion, the kindly District Inspector was *not* feeling particularly kindly at all. In fact, he was very angry indeed!

'Get this big, hairy beast off me!' he shouted. 'This dog is a maniac! HELP!'

People said his cries could be heard two farmhouses away.

Everybody came running—the teacher, the kids, nearby farmers and even two stray cows that happened to be grazing along the roadside. Eventually they managed to persuade School Dog to get off his captive. They then took the Inspector inside, brushed him down, smiled a lot and gave him a cup of tea with homemade scones.

But the Inspector was having none of it (except, of course, the tea and scones).

‘How dare you have this wild beast on school property!’ he exclaimed. ‘He is a public menace. He is a threat to life and limb. I shall report this to head office. Call the pound right now and have him taken away!’

Well, the teacher cried, the farmers buttered some scones, the cows mooed and the children sobbed. In all the commotion nobody noticed that School Dog had quietly trotted away and gone outside.

Then, in the middle of yet another rave from the Inspector, School Dog returned. He had found the violin case and was holding it carefully by the handle in his mouth. He placed it at the Inspector’s feet and looked up at him with sad, begging eyes. Then School Dog barked softly as if to say, ‘Won’t you play us a tune please? Your music might make us all happy again.’

You can tell from this event that he was no ordinary dog. He was a very clever dog indeed. And if it can be said that a dog can be wise, then School Dog was a very wise one because before long the District Inspector had forgotten all about what had happened. He took his violin out, played some happy, foot-tapping tunes, ate more scones and declared that every school in the district should have a dog like School Dog.

Meanwhile, School Dog began to carry out his other job. You see, he was also School Clean-Up Monitor, which meant he needed to eat up any food scraps that happened to be lying around the place. And on that particular day, there were quite a few crumbs that required his attention.