

## Samantha, Samantha's teddy bears, Sophie, Melissa and Frederick go to Canberra

“Ouch,” said Samantha, as Sophie, her sister, poked her to wake her up. It was still dark outside and Thumper the dog and Smudge the horse were fast asleep. The children's house was in the country and all about there was no noise.

“Up you get—it's Canberra day!” exclaimed Sophie. And indeed it was. It was the day that Year Three and Year Five at Holcombe Public School—the best school in the high country—were going on a bus excursion for three days to Canberra.

The two girls had their bags all packed the night before. Actually they had been packing their bags for a whole week because they could not decide what to take and what to leave out. But this morning they were ready.

After a quick breakfast of muesli, toast and milk, Mum and Dad and the two girls jumped into the car and down the dirt road they went. The weather had been very dry and as usual a dust cloud followed them. The cattle were surprised to see a car so early.

This time Dad was driving and he drove all the way to school because the children had to be there by 7.00 am ready for the bus to leave at 7.30. And of course Mum and Dad had also come to see the two girls leave. All the other mums and dads were there too and there was hardly anywhere to park. It was like market day in the town.

The first job was to get the girls' bags out and give them to the bus driver, ready to load. Samantha was amazed at how the bus opened up and how the bags fitted in. Samantha's bag didn't fit in that well because it was so huge. It was the most gigantic bag the bus driver had ever seen.

“What on earth have you got in there?” the bus driver asked as he, *and* Samantha's Dad, lifted the bag into the special place at the bottom of the bus. Well, Samantha knew, and Sophie knew, and Dad and Mum knew.

It all started when Samantha couldn't decide which teddy bear to take. She had three, and they were all super jumbo size, and very much needed because each teddy bear had his own special job to do. So Samantha decided to take *all* the teddy bears! And of course the teddy bears were pleased because they were very used to being together. In this story we will be hearing more about the teddy bears.

The teachers were marking children off as they got onto the bus and parents were hugging children and saying goodbyes. It was hard to see who was getting on the bus, and who wasn't, as there were so many people. But the teachers knew what was happening and amazingly all the right people got on, finally. The principal of Holcombe Public School, Mr Bean, was there, and he spent a lot of time talking to the parents.

At first the children were told to quickly sit just anywhere but the idea was that the smaller Year Three children would have the window seats, some of the time at least, and the larger Year Five children could see over the top of them. Actually Year Three and Five children were quite young to be going on a long overnight excursion but Mr Bean thought that it would be possible because the children at the school were so sensible and grown-up. And the parents agreed.

The coach went through the school gate and some of the children couldn't believe it was happening. They kept looking out of the windows as the trees and houses slid past—but this

time the view was vast because they were so high up. The coach was extremely quiet and comfortable. It didn't drive down Denning Road, it floated down. Samantha and Sophie forgot to look at their front gate as the coach went past and by the time they remembered they were already well on the way. Sophie made up her mind that coaches were better than cars in some ways.

Frederick was sitting next to Sophie, and these two students were the best in maths in Year Five. Sophie had been working very hard on her maths and since she learned all her number facts, fractions, decimals and percentages she had really skyrocketed.

“I've been thinking,” said Frederick, looking out the window, “about all those trees”.

“There's plenty of trees to think about,” replied Sophie, who really wanted to watch the Mr Bean movie that was playing in the coach. What a dumbo that man is, thought all the children, not realising that Mr Bean was an actor named Rowan Atkinson, who in real life is a very smart man. Sophie wanted Melissa to come back so she could get rid of Frederick. However the teachers were getting tired of children always wanting to change seats.

“If you look at just the trees at the side of the road there's about one tree every ten metres,” explained Frederick, putting on his ‘scientist’ voice. “Now since we know how far it is to Canberra—about 300 km—we can work out how many trees there are!” Frederick's voice was getting louder and louder, and Sophie was looking for Melissa, who seemed to have disappeared. Sophie had now decided that if she didn't interrupt Frederick he would shut-up sooner.

“If you times 300 kilometres by 1000 metres, that's how many metres in a kilometre—‘hmm’ said Sophie—you get 300,000 metres to Canberra. And do you know what comes next?” Sophie didn't answer as she knew she was about to find out.

“You divide the 300,000 metres by 10 metres and you get 30,000 trees from here to Canberra because remember—Sophie had forgotten—there is one tree every 10 metres,” exclaimed Frederick, who by this time was almost standing up and shouting.

“No, you're wrong, Frederick,” grinned Sophie, with an evil look spreading over her face.

“Errrr?”

“You forgot to count the other side of the road! So there are 60,000 trees! Ha, ha, I'm better at maths than you!” screeched Sophie, much louder than she intended because by now half the coach was listening.

“Oh, well, yes, of course,” admitted Frederick, who had noticed an empty seat next to his friend. “I'll see you soon.”

“Hope not,” thought Sophie, just as Melissa slid into the seat beside her. She had been at the back of the coach all the time and Sophie had not looked there. She was glad to see her best friend but Melissa didn't seem pleased to see her.

“A bit mean to Frederick, Sophie,” she commented. Sophie knew her friend was right, and she thought she should be nicer to other children, especially since they were on an excursion. On the other hand maybe Melissa was being too kind. Perhaps Melissa was secretly very naughty at home. Sometimes children are like that. Sophie wondered how she could find out.

But now the Mr Bean movie had finished—and Sophie had missed the very part she had most wanted to see—so she didn't feel like being nice. Sophie did not know it then but that night she would be very very mean to Brian, a small boy, who unlike Frederick never seemed hungry.

The bus glided on, eating up the miles and sending most of the Year Three students to sleep. Frederick, who had started counting trees and reached 37, was fast asleep, quite worn out by mathematics, and even the teachers had lost their energy. There were only a few clouds in the far distant sky and they weren't moving either. The whole landscape seemed to stretch out forever like a huge green blanket.

"There it is. I can see it!" shouted Samantha, who never slept during the day. "Look...!" And look the children did, and saw the most interesting thing so far on the trip. A set of bright yellow arches about half way up the next hill. Yes, they had come to McDonald's, finally, and Samantha had found it first. The children would stop there for an early lunch.

The coach driver went around the side into a special large area reserved for coaches. In no time at all the children were out and lined up, ready to go into Maccas. There was the start of a cold wind blowing across the car park but these were Holcombe children, and they were used to cold winds. In fact, none of them noticed—they were thinking about what they would buy. The teachers had said only two items per child, and no buying for others, and many other instructions as well. Of course, the children were used to the teachers spoiling things.

So in they went. Inside this country style McDonald's it was monstrous, and some of the children wondered if they would ever find their way out. There were four lines but it was still a wait.

Then Sophie noticed something. Something quite unthinkable. The teachers were pushing in. Actually, even worse, for they just stood over to one side at the counter, and a McDonald's girl came up, asked what they wanted, and they were given it almost immediately. And believe it or not the teachers didn't pay. And the coach driver was in on this selfish scheme too! And even Mrs Lawson, one of the helping mothers, got free food. Aaaagh, thought Sophie to herself—and then started telling the other children. One thing was certain—nobody would be listening the next time those terrible teachers talked about waiting your turn, and things like that.

After lining up for what seemed like half an hour Brian, the Year Five boy, reached the counter. As he was only small he should have bought, well, hardly anything. But Brian was really excited by the size, colours and movement of McDonald's—and the delicious smells—so he ordered a large beef burger and a large chips. He then sat down at the table, nearly completely hidden by the size of the meal this brave but silly boy was about to eat.

Now all children know that when they put their socks on the socks start out small and then get bigger when they put their feet into them. The same thing happens with your stomach. It starts out small and then stretches. In Brian's case it started out very small and then got very very big. Amazingly Brian ate the food, stretching his stomach farther than it had ever gone. While getting on the bus Brian had the faintest idea that just maybe he had overdone it.

Sophie, Samantha and Melissa had lunch together, and Sophie forgot about those teachers. The children very sensibly

shared their chips, and it was nice of the older girls to include Samantha in their conversation. But getting back on the bus Sophie found some more unthinkable selfishness.

Now on the excursion there were two teachers and two parents. Mrs Lawson was one helping mother and Melissa's mother was the second one. She came because she was a nurse which meant the children, or the teachers, or anyone, could have proper medical care. That's four grown-ups altogether.

Sophie expected that these four grown-ups would have four seats, or perhaps six, allowing a little extra. But no. Each teacher had a double seat, and a seat to put a small bag on. Mrs Lawson had two seats, and Melissa's mum had three. How many seats was that? Sophie had the answer in a flash—11 seats for just four grown-ups! Unbelievable!

Now Sophie knew, and knew for certain, that the grown-ups at Holcombe Public School were the most selfish grown-ups in Australia, and probably in the whole world. But, she decided, she wasn't going to let this spoil her excursion. And besides, as the grown-ups sat at the front of the bus—more selfishness!—she didn't really notice that much.

It was twenty minutes before Brian's stomach decided it was absolutely too full. Stomachs are not really like socks—they're like, well, stomachs. Brian sort of suspected something was wrong. Suddenly his whole body gave a violent lurch and he vomited up the hamburger, all of it, and the chips, all of them. The sound, the smell and the sight were truly unmistakable. The child next to Brian called out, "Brian's been sick," but of course nobody needed to be told.

Suddenly at least six hands descended on Brian, and onto the bus seats and floor, and in less than a minute everything was spotlessly clean, including Brian. The smell had completely disappeared, replaced by the scent of gum leaves. Brian was moved to the front of the bus, where he sat next to Melissa's mother. Wow, thought the children, that was fast. Sophie was very impressed too and the thought that maybe grown-ups were not that terrible crossed her mind. Perhaps they really do need those extra seats.

The first stop in Canberra was at the National Capital Exhibition, right on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin. The children walked about in the park and admired the Captain Cook Memorial Jet which sent a huge stream of water straight up into the air. The spray seemed to hang in the air, and the children were hoping it would fall on them, but it didn't.

Inside the National Capital Exhibition the children learned about the history of Canberra and were shown an enormous 3D model of the city. Then they were allowed to go to the shop. Samantha chose a small jar of green stuff for her mother and Sophie chose a Canberra pencil for her father. However it was not a good shop for children. Both children decided the items were too expensive, and so they bought nothing in the end.

From here the coach travelled past the National War Memorial and then turned left, taking the steep road to the Mount Ainslee Lookout. The teachers liked the children to see things so everyone played a game called 'spot-the-animal'. Samantha, with her eagle eyes, and used to living on the land, won many of the prizes as she was the first to see the bunny rabbits, the kangas, and even a foxy-woxy. Frederick was of course counting the animals and trying to work out how many there were which the children didn't see. He really wanted to beat Sophie in the next maths test.

The view from the top was breathtaking. The air was crisp, cool and clear, and the children could see for miles, right out to the Brindabella Ranges at the back of Canberra. The teachers pointed out the National War Memorial below, and then up Anzac Parade, and across the lake to Parliament House. It was all so magical, and the children kept on looking and looking, and taking photographs. There was also the town centre, the bridges and Telstra Tower at the end of the lake. The children would visit most of these things later.

Frederick had been studying a map of Canberra before the excursion and he knew about the airport and where it was—off to the left, where most of the children were not looking. And right on the very top of Mount Ainslee, next to where the coach parked, was an aircraft guiding beacon. Frederick recognised what it was and understood what it was for, and he just had to tell someone.

Right at that moment Samantha and her friends were walking by so they all climbed the short flight of steps leading to the base of the aircraft beacon. They then looked over to the left of the lookout area to see the airport. And guess what—a plane was just taking off. The children watched it travel to the end of the runway and steadily gain in height. Although it seemed slow it was out of sight very quickly. Samantha saw it for the longest time. Frederick wanted to come back to the lookout at night to see the lights of Canberra, and of course the light of the beacon. That would be an adventure but the teachers had not put this into the program.

From the lookout the children travelled down to the other side of Canberra for a quick tour of the embassies before going to their motel for dinner and the first overnight stay. As Canberra is a small city this didn't take very long which was just as well for most of the children were getting very tired of everything by now. They were pleased to get off the coach and into their bedrooms for a rest before dinner.

As soon as Samantha got into her bedroom she unpacked her three gigantic teddy bears. The first bear was Bedtime-Bear. He was coloured a light pink all over with darker paws and ears. His eyes were fairly large but his ears were small. He was just the right shape and softness for going off to sleep with which is why Samantha would often use him as a pillow.

The second bear was called Middle-of-the-Night-Bear. He was quite different, and Sophie sometimes called him a squashed octopus because of his unusual shape. Although he was just as big as the other bears his arms and legs were very long and flat. Coloured blue, his body was covered with sticky pads on one side and small spikes on the other. This bear's job was very simple—not to fall off the bed during the night no matter what. So if Samantha wakes up during the night she can always find him. Middle-of-the-Night-Bear begins the night right in the centre of the bed and that's where he stays.

Morning-Bear was the last bear, and he doesn't live in or on the bed at all. No, he sits on the dressing table and in the morning welcomes Samantha with a very big smile and huge bright eyes. In the middle of his light green fur is a lovely picture of a sun, with gold and red rays coming out of it. He helps Samantha find things, by pointing to what she is looking for when he is asked. This is why he must sit on the dressing table so he can see where everything gets put, but of course sometimes he misses things.

Samantha and her friends then hurried to the dining room where everybody was sitting down waiting to be told to go and

choose their food. Sophie was sitting with her friends at another table. Unexpectedly Brian, the small boy who was sick on the bus, appeared and headed towards Sophie's table, a decision that he would soon be very sorry about.

Well poor Brian had been sick more than once on the bus and during the afternoon also, and Melissa's mother kept a sharp eye on him. When the coach arrived at the motel Brian said he felt worse and that he had to lie down. Melissa's mother arranged for him to be put into a special room for sick people, and then she went into the motel manager's office and telephoned the hospital to speak to one of the doctors there. Then she collected her large first aid bag and went to see Brian.

Brian wasn't allowed to eat anything but he could drink a little water. He was tired of being by himself, and needed cheering up, and that's why he went to the dining room. He sat next to Sophie and Melissa and tried to join the conversation, but somehow he couldn't get comfortable on the chair.

"Sit still," Sophie told Brian. "Have you got ants in your pants?"

"Well, sort of," mumbled Brian quietly, "you see Melissa's mother gave me an injection in my...." Brian never got to finish his sentence because Sophie, quick as a flash, worked out what had happened and burst out laughing.

"Ssssh," said Melissa, and Sophie managed to stop herself from laughing. But Sophie did think it was funny—so funny that she just had to tell some of the other children during the dinner. And they thought it was funny too, and they just had to tell some of their friends as well and before long nearly all the children knew what had happened to Brian. As you would expect the children started sneaking looks at him and that made Brian feel worse than ever.

Finally, one of the teachers—they always find things out—had to interrupt the dinner to talk to all the children. The teacher explained how the children at Holcombe are like a family, and when one member of the family is sick the family treats that person with special kindness and care. Although the teacher didn't mention Sophie's name everyone knew who had started it. The teacher thanked the two parents for coming to help on the excursion, and told the children they were fortunate to have one of the parents a registered nurse.

It would be hard to imagine that Sophie would cause any more trouble that night. But, surprisingly, she did. Now when children are away from home on an excursion it's very exciting. Part of the fun is to be with their friends and enjoy different types of food, and be able to have, for example, a chocolate lamington, and then go back for a vanilla slice, with ice-cream. But some of the children thought they shouldn't go back for that vanilla slice, and that was quite disappointing. You see, Brian had well and truly demonstrated what happens to children who overeat and get sick. Well done, Sophie!

After dinner that children wasted no time in going back to their rooms. They were excited because this was their first night, with one more night to go. In their cabin Samantha and her friends got themselves ready for bed, and also ready to play. There would be some talking but not too much because they were really tired.

Samantha had already unpacked the three teddy bears. She jumped into bed with all bears in the correct position—Bedtime-Bear, next to the pillow, Middle-of-the-Night-Bear in the middle of the bed, and Morning-Bear on the dressing table. After saying

good night to each bear Samantha went to sleep—and so did everyone else.

The next morning the children were up, dressed, packed, and off to breakfast. Brian was having something to eat and *this* time Sophie was trying very hard to be nice to him. After breakfast it was back to the rooms for a quick check and then the bags had to go on the bus because the children would be going to a different motel for that night.

“Aaaagh!” screamed Samantha. “Where’s my teddy bear? Bedtime-Bear has gone!” Yes, he had, and very strangely Samantha hadn’t noticed this when she was packing. Perhaps she had been talking too much.

All the girls started to search everywhere for Bedtime-Bear, on the bed, in the bed, under the bed, next to the bed.... But it was Samantha who thought to search *behind* the bed. She couldn’t quite reach so she pulled the mattress off the bed a little bit. There he was, her beloved bear. But that’s not all there was. Samantha found a large wallet stuffed with more money than she had ever seen before. Two amazing finds in one place!

The manager of the motel was able to find the owner of the wallet, a Mr Mawcroft who lived in a town close by to Holcombe Public School. When the manager telephoned Mr Mawcroft he was so overjoyed he could hardly speak. Indeed he was so thankful that when the children got home from the excursion the school principal told the children that the owner of the wallet would be buying a new reading corner rug for Year Three, and a special reading book for Samantha. These were presented at a school assembly by Mr Mawcroft which was attended by many of the Year Three parents, and by Samantha’s Mum and Dad, of course. The whole story was written up in the newspaper and so Samantha became quite famous.

All the shopkeepers in the high country were grateful to Samantha because the girls at Holcombe Public School wanted to buy even more teddy bears than they already had. In fact there were so many teddy bears in Year Three the teacher said the children and their bears could have a ‘Teddy Bears’ Picnic’. But there was only ever one Bedtime-Bear. Samantha renamed him Clever-Bedtime-Bear and he always had a special place in her bedroom.

But we must get back to the excursion in Canberra. Well the children visited many more places and learned many more things. And the good news is that Sophie now behaved sensibly, and had fun being with all her friends, and with her sister, Samantha. Brian, under the care of Melissa’s mum, recovered completely, and Frederick went on counting things. And Samantha found she couldn’t stop thinking about her teddy bears. So, we will leave them all there in Canberra, to enjoy the time they have left of this excursion—an excursion which Samantha and Sophie would remember for a long time.