

Story for performance #960
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Writer/s: Kristin Hannaford

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My father is a collector. Or rather, he is a recycler. Cans, bottles, newspapers. He compresses his weekly 'non recyclable' garbage into a bundle the size of a teacup.

Dad is so committed to recycling and reusing that he refuses to buy new clothes. He is proud of the fact that all his clothes come from St Vincent de Paul. Visitors to his house will often find themselves inspecting his latest clothing 'discovery'—Armani pants, a good-as-new leather jacket, or the American made fly-fishing coat complete with flies. He deduced that it was American because he couldn't identify many of the 'flies'. There was also a small U.S. flag on the lapel which might have given the game away. Dad spent hours with his head inside an insect identification book and researching on the internet.

'Mayflies!' came the triumphant shout from the bedroom.

'This one here, it's an *Iron Blue Quill* and this, *this* is a *Giant Michigan Mayfly*.

'I knew they weren't Australian bugs' he said to himself. Later, there was the self pleased 'hmmppff' as he stored this new bit of trivia away for later. He was like that, always thrilled with discovering simple facts and knowledge, as if the world always had something delicious to show him.

My sons, his grandsons, thought he went a bit far sometimes. They caught themselves occasionally thinking like he did—noticing bits of rubbish by the side of the road, tins, buckets, perhaps a lost shoe, and suggesting 'We could do something with that Mum. Maybe we could make a mobile or something?'

I observed with pleasure that it was something they tried to keep in check.

The older boy would state simply 'Yeah right. It's rubbish. Mum doesn't want any more rubbish at home. Do you mum?'

The truth was I didn't. I was having a hard enough time keeping my father in line. Though he only lived around the corner, it appeared that lately more and more of his junk was living at our house. As was he. Last week it was a good-as-new birdcage, the week before an inflated inner tube. 'Perfect for the rapids,' he'd stated as he hung it in the shed. We had second-hand bikes, Styrofoam boxes packed with seedlings, old fishing rods and rags. 'I hope you're not going to throw that out' he'd said to me the other day as I went to put some holed pantyhose in the bin. 'I'll use those for the tomatoes.'

Our greatest problem was that we could never quite argue against his recycling policy. It all made sense for a planet that was gradually simmering up to boiling point. How could we buy new in full knowledge of the Earth's limited resources. Even the local school seemed to have a militant recycling agenda; my younger son came home with old newspapers, cellophane and a stack of egg cartons. I glared at him and his pile of rubbish, which was now ours. He shrugged his shoulders. 'The teacher didn't want it. I thought I could make a mask out of it. Don't worry about it mum.'

The real trouble began when my father arrived after

dinner one evening with a large pillowcase that appeared to be seeping blood onto the back verandah floor boards.

'What's in the bag Dad?' I asked, chewing a last mouthful of sausage.

He looked around guiltily and said 'A perfectly good kangaroo.'

I dug out the last piece of sausage skin with my tongue.

'What do you mean, a "perfectly good kangaroo?" Good for what?'

He explained that he had recently been thinking about the numbers of small animals he had been passing on the road. Wallabies with their legs splayed wide open, kangaroos laid flat by trucks and cars. Animals in their prime felled heavily back to the earth. He grew more agitated. 'I mean what a waste.'

'So what are you doing with the corpse in the bag, Dad?' I was certainly not going to commence serving roadkill for dinner. He shuffled the bundle of bloody fur onto the grass and began slicing it up into edible portions. The smell was foetid, but not too rank.

'I could see it had just been killed. It's fresh,' he went on, 'I won't be slicing up *old* roadkill. The crows have got to have something.' I was livid. I explained to Dad that there were butchers in town and plenty of kangaroo meat at the pet shop for dogs.

He laughed. 'But that's \$4.50 a kilo, this is free!'

After that, we frequently found him on the grassy verge, assessing the state of the latest Brown's Road victim. 'I'm like that guy from South Australia, who wears a cat fur on his head. You know the one who's getting rid of all the feral animals? Think of all the ferals I'm depriving of food!' I gave him my best raised eyebrow.

'Do you know that Australia is the only country in the world that eats the animals on our national coat of arms?' son number one piped up. I was beginning to worry about his appetite for trivia. I shot Dad a black look. 'Did you put him up to this?'

He was smug and ruffled my son's hair. 'That's right my boy. We do. Bloody good eating too. Just ask the dogs.'

Dad was amused, 'Haven't found any emus yet though.'

One night as we drove home from the beach, a voice spoke from the back seat, 'Hang on Mum! There's a dead kookaburra on the road. Stop!'

I gripped the wheel tightly, cursing my father and his recycling.

'Dogs don't eat kookaburras stupid,' the older boy informed. 'There won't be enough meat.'

'I know that,' said boy number one, indignant. 'I thought I could use the feathers for a mobile.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kristin Hannaford.