

# *My Friend, Magpie*

Book Two



*By William Loader*

# *Magpie*

I have a special friend and he is called, Magpie. He's a real magpie and we have known each other for hundreds of days – even more than that.

He sits on the fence which is just about as high as my head and we talk. Sometimes I feed him with a few seeds of grain.

If I'm sitting down at the table outside he drops down onto the table and once he even perched on my lap.



He is very beautiful with a sleek white back and sharply contrasting black feathers on his front and underneath. When he is close to me I can see how well his coat of feathers sits together and how clean he keeps himself.

He often talks – in a magpie kind of way – and I have come to understand what he is saying.

In fact he tells me lots of things about himself and his family and about magpies in general.

What he tells me is so interesting, that I thought I should tell you about our conversations. Often I need to start by asking a question and then off he goes and I listen.

Here are some more of his stories:



# ***11. Magpie and Wheatie***

Magpie was eating and when he had finished, he sat for a long time very still, thinking.

He was looking at a grain of wheat and began to imagine himself having a conversation. The grain of wheat, which he later called “Wheatie”, looked very frightened.



“Why are you so  
afraid?”  
asked magpie.

“I’m scared that one day I might get hurt. I’m so scared,” said Wheatie.

“You don’t need to worry,” said magpie. “If you get a cut, it will heal – especially if you keep it clean and don’t have an infection. It will just take time.”



“But what if I feel sad?  
It would be terrible to be sad,”  
cried Wheatie.

“Feeling sad is just like having  
a cut,” said magpie.

“It hurts for a while, but then  
it will heal.

It’s OK to feel sad sometimes.  
Give it time and it will go  
away.”

Wheatie still looked worried, very worried.

“What if I feel bad? What if I do something bad? I would feel awful. I’d feel just like rubbish,” moaned Wheatie.

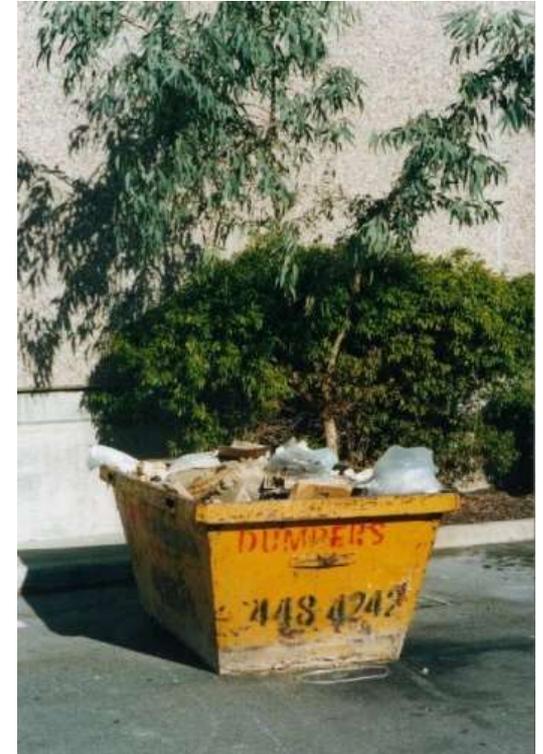
“It’s OK to feel bad sometimes when you’ve done something wrong.

When you own up to it, the bad feeling will gradually go away.

God forgives you.

You can forgive yourself.

Everyone makes mistakes and we can all start again.”



Wheatie wasn't finished.

In a very soft voice Wheatie said:  
"But what if I die?"

"Everyone dies," said magpie.  
"Then you go to be with God.  
There's nothing to be afraid of."



Just then magpie leaned down closer to Wheatie and in a moment picked Wheatie up in his beak and swallowed. Down went Wheatie, like down a slippery slide, all in the dark, down , down, until Wheatie landed in a warm soft bed, magpie's tummy, and went fast asleep.



After three days magpie was again sitting on his favourite perch when plop: down dropped Wheatie in magpie's plop onto the sandy soil.

Soon the rain came and washed the plop and Wheatie deep into the sandy soil.

After a week a tiny green shoot appeared, popping its head above the sand. Soon it was a blade of grass and then a full grown clump of wheat.

One day magpie looked down and saw the wheat that had sprouted already forming new ears of grain, so he hopped down right next to the plant. Smiling inside he then whispered to the plant: “I told you it would be alright!”

Magpie knew it was all in his imagination, but he also knew I would enjoy the story and that what he said was true.



## ***12. Magpie and Babies***

I had just got back from my morning walk, feeling very refreshed, sitting outside having breakfast, when my friend, magpie, dropped down onto the top of the chair on the other side of the table.



“Good morning to you, magpie!” I said.

“Good morning to you,” he replied. “I saw you on your morning walk, but, tell me, why did you keep stopping?”

“Well,” I said. “I noticed that every now and again there was a magpie on the path in front of me, picking up pieces of dry grass and small twigs. You magpies are very tidy people, aren’t you.”  
I also think their coats are very neat and tidy, too.

Magpie smiled – in the way that magpies do, by ruffling his feathers and making a loud gurgling sound.

“Don’t you know it’s time to build nests? They were gathering building materials. Late winter we build nests. In spring we lay eggs when it is starting to get warm. We sit on them to keep them even warmer. Then after a few days they hatch and out comes a little magpie with fluffy grey feathers. In just a few more days it is up and about, walking, ready to start its life as summer begins and not very long after can learn to fly.”

“That’s very well organised,” I said. “So it’s every year the same: prepare the nests in late winter or early spring, eggs in spring, babies in late spring and early summer. And that’s when some of you swoop down on us when we are walking.”

“Of course we do,” said magpie. “We have to protect our eggs and our baby birds against humans who are always trying to climb our trees and destroy our eggs and our nests. We know they do that because our parents told us, and their parents told them, and their parents told them – we know!”

“Strange,” I said. “I’ve never ever seen anyone trying to climb trees to destroy your little ones. I’m sure it doesn’t happen.” Then I remembered that we had had this conversation before. Magpies sometimes keep believing things even when they are no longer true. “Well, you certainly are well organised,” I continued.

“Yes, unlike you humans,” magpie replied. “To begin with, you don’t lay eggs. Then you have your babies at any time through the year – even in the middle of a cold winter or a hot summer! And then it takes months before they can get up and walk. Even the animals are better organised than that. They, too, follow the seasons like us.

And then I see your people walking the streets with their babies all wrapped up in oblong boxes on wheels. Very strange!”

“Prams,” I said. “Those are prams. We don’t build nests, but we do take a lot of care making sure we have safe and warm houses and that babies are safe and warm when we take them for a walk.”



For a moment I thought magpie was going to tell me that we should learn to be better organised and be like magpies. I was ready to explain that for animals it's easier. They can produce babies which can walk, some of them, from the very first day.



When our ancestors first started to walk on two legs instead of four, it all became much more difficult. Our mothers had to bring their babies into the world long before they were finished being made because when you walk upright the gap between your legs simply becomes too narrow to give birth to full grown babies.

Sometimes magpie seems to know what I am thinking. He looked down at me and said, "You know that we were walking on two legs long before you humans appeared on this earth and even before the animals?"



Of course, he was right, but then, when I thought he was about to say that magpies are better than humans, he twitched his head, looked me straight in the eye and said: “We are different. We are not the same. You do it your way and we do it our way. We both know building a safe place for our young is important. We both know that we need to care about them. You have to surround your babies for a long, long time with love and care before they can walk. That must be very good for them. We get them up and going straightaway. We are just different.”

Magpie had that very wise look in his eyes.

You can see a lot when you fly around over the trees.

I knew he was right.



“Yes,” I said. “We all belong. We all matter. And that’s why we don’t really climb up trees to try to destroy your babies.” I had to have the last word.

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” he insisted. “It’s not what my grandma told me.”

All the same, I sensed we agreed. Magpie gurgled a magpie’s gurgle and was soon off up into the trees. I was glad we were friends.

Deep down I also thanked God for making such a wonderful world in which so many different kinds of birds and animals have developed, including ourselves with our special needs and special advantages – even if we can’t fly, at least not like magpie.



# ***13. Magpie – a Murderer?***

Magpie surprised me one morning. Dropping down onto the table in front of me he declared:

“I killed them all! I pecked them all to death. They’re all dead. All lying under the tree covered in ants!”

and immediately flew off again.

I was shocked.

What was he saying?

That’s terrible.

I had to investigate, so I quickly got up and took a walk to the trees, and to his family tree in particular, to see.



But there were no dead magpies. No sign of them.  
His sister was sitting in the branches  
and the one I think is his mother was nearby pecking for  
worms in the grass.

I hurried back. Magpie had already  
returned. “That’s a relief,” I said.  
“Nobody’s dead at all!”



“It’s not a relief,” magpie answered.  
“I killed them all in my thoughts.”

“Did this just happen?” I asked, wondering  
what magpie was really talking about.

“No,” he said. “It happened some weeks ago and it was serious, very serious.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“I got angry and then very mad. I squawked at them. I pecked at some of them and my mind filled with hate. I hated them and told them so. I killed them in my thoughts. Three of them were my friends. I hurt them so much that they are no longer my friends. I still see them but they never come to my tree. We never fly together. I lost three good friends.”



This was serious. I could see. Magpie's feathers were all ruffled up. He was upset and sad. It you're nasty to people you can't expect them to be your friends.

"But what about the others?" I asked. "You hurt them, too? Are they still your friends?"

"Yes," he answered, " but only because I was really sorry and said so and they knew I wasn't just saying it but meant it. They're still my friends, but I'll never hate and hurt them like that again."

"But everyone gets angry at times. What do you do now when you get angry?" I asked.

"If they do something which hurts me or upsets me, I tell them how I feel, and we can usually work it out. I don't try to hurt them back. I don't peck at them. I don't hate them. I've stopped doing that. That's why I lost some of my friends," he added.

This all sounded very good, but I wondered. “Don’t you sometimes get really upset? Don’t you find that sometimes others don’t listen to you? What do you do then?” I asked.

“I fly off to the banksia tree,” he replied “and sit high up on the sky branch all on my own where no one can see me except the sky. That’s my special place. I sit there until I calm down. There I know that the sun shines on me and I wait till I feel nice and warm under my feathers. The sun shines on me even when there are clouds because I know it is shining behind them.



The banksia flowers are like candles that remind me of the sun. I call it my sun tree. When I let the sun shine on me I can stop feeling bad about people and stop feeling bad about myself. I don’t have to be afraid. I don’t have to pretend. I can tell the truth to myself. My feathers all fall back into place and I sit and sing to the wind.”

“Do you do that often?” I asked – because it sounded to me a bit like prayer.

“Yes,” he replied, “and not just when I’m mad. I like to be still and sing to the wind and sometimes Crow comes and sits beside me, because it’s her favourite branch, too.



Sometimes I can tell Crow about all the things that trouble me and then we sit in the sun and together we sing to the wind.”

I wanted to tell magpie that God is like the sun, that long ago Jesus taught us not to hate and hurt people, and how wonderful it is to live together in peace and love and not hate, but there was no time.

A gust of wind came and magpie was off into the trees. Soon I heard him singing to the wind, singing to the wind. And did I imagine it: I thought I could also hear the wind singing, too.

# ***14. Magpie and the Lost Girl***

Magpie dropped down onto the table, looked up at me,  
and asked: “Did I tell you about the little girl?”

“No,” I said, wondering what he meant.

“The girl lost in the bush?” he added.

“Oh yes,” I said, “I heard about it on the news. They found her. But how do you know about it?” I asked.

“I was there,” said magpie and so began to tell his story.



“I was flying over the bush, together with friends, when I noticed a little girl walking in the bush. At first I thought this was strange. Where were her parents? She just walked and walked. Soon I noticed that she was walking around the same tracks and going round in circles.

So I dropped down closer to see. She was crying. She was clearly lost and confused. I wondered what to do. So I sat on a high branch and watched her. After a while she sat down under a tree on some soft grass and before I knew it, she lay down and sobbed herself to sleep.

Poor little girl, I thought.



Then I had an idea. I flew down to where she was, saw that her pink handkerchief, wet with tears, was lying beside her and picked it up in my beak and flew back up into the tree. I don't think she saw me. She really did seem to be asleep.



Next I decided to fly off to the edge of the bush to see if I could see anyone looking for her. And, sure enough, there were her mum and dad, looking very worried. They were a long way away from her and were searching the bush and calling her name, Wendy! Wendy!'

There were so many paths in the bush; they might never find her. So I looked at the paths and which ones might lead to her and which one they were on.

I could see that they would soon come to a choice about which path to take where their path met others. So I identified the right path for them and dropped the pink handkerchief on that path some distance from where the paths crossed but close enough for them to notice.

Sure enough, when they came to where the paths crossed, I heard the mum say, 'Look, there's a hanky. That's Wendy's. She must have gone down here!'



Success, I thought. So I flew back to where the little girl was. Was there something else I could take. She had a pink ribbon in her hair. But how could I get that? I dropped down beside her and while she was fast asleep I carefully took hold of the ribbon in my beak and pulled. She squealed and she must have seen me, but I was off.

This time I could see that the parents were making progress, but they could easily take the wrong path at the next time the paths crossed, so I waited for them to come and when they stopped and wondered where to go, I quickly dropped the ribbon down the right track.

They saw me. 'Look at that, ' they said. 'That cheeky magpie has stolen Wendy's ribbon. How terrible! It must have swooped down on her. But this is probably the best way to go.'

I was relieved. It was the right way to go. It was a long windy path, but they were getting closer.

They started calling out her name again, 'Wendy! Wendy!'

I had woken Wendy up and she was crying. When she heard her name, she cried out loud, 'Mummy! Daddy!'



That was enough. As I sat on a branch nearby, I saw them find her and take her up into their arms. There were tears, now tears of joy.

The parents noticed me on the branch and I heard them say, ‘There’s that terrible magpie! Magpies are terrible.’

Then Wendy looked up at me – and through her tears of joy she smiled. I think she must have known what I had done, but I will never know.”



“Magpie, you’re a champion,” I said.

“But you would have done that, wouldn’t you?” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “But I can’t fly!”

# *15. Magpie and Christmas*



What was that in magpie's beak?

Magpie had dropped down onto the table in front of me, carrying something.

At first I thought it was an insect, but then it was shiny.

Looking more closely I saw that it was one of those very small bulbs which are used in strings of Christmas lights.

“What are you doing with that?” I asked.

It was certainly not something to be swallowed.

“I'm taking it home to my nest,” magpie explained.

“But it's a Christmas light,” I said. “What are you going to do with it?”

“Oh, I’ve got lots of them. I put them into the nest, all around the side of the nest and they shine,” he explained.

“But they won’t shine without electricity, magpie,” I said. “Where did you get them?”

“I know they won’t shine that way, but they shine in the sun. I got them from the Christmas lights which people hang on their trees and their houses.”

I had wondered why some strings of Christmas lights had gaps. This was very strange, but before I could ask, he went on:

“They have Christmas. I want to have Christmas, too.”





What could magpie possibly understand about Christmas, I thought. So I asked, “So what do you think Christmas is about?”

Magpie responded very confidently. “Of course I know what Christmas means. It’s all about baby Jesus and his father, Santa, and Mary his mother. He was born in a shelter where lots of magpies used to roost and they sang songs to him and swooped down on anyone who came near. He came to be friends with us magpies and teach us how to share.”

I was puzzled. How could I help magpie sort all this out? So I started with Santa Claus. “Santa Claus is short for St Nicholas who was a bishop a long time ago who used to visit children at Christmas time bringing them rewards if they were good or punishment if they were bad. And these days people talk about Santa as an old man dressed in red with a white beard who brings gifts and rides in a sleigh drawn by reindeer. But he’s not Jesus’ father.”

I waited for magpie to react. I think he understood, but then he continued, “And Jesus came to open supermarkets where people could buy presents and if you look, every supermarket has decorations at Christmas time, to remember that Jesus started people having supermarkets and that’s where I find these little light bulbs.”



I didn’t want to offend magpie, but I felt I needed to help him get it right. So I said: “Magpie, Jesus didn’t invent supermarkets. He came to teach people how to share.”

“That’s what I said,” chirped magpie, a little impatiently. “He came to be friends with us magpies and teach us how to share.”

“Well, not just magpies,” I said, “people, too.” I didn’t know anything about Jesus and magpies and I’m sure he was just making that up or perhaps it was an old magpie story. People make up stories about Christmas, so why shouldn’t magpies?

Magpie was silent for a long time and I wondered what he was thinking. Then he said: “When I sit in our nest with all those lights around me, I feel like I’m sitting in the centre of the universe.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. “We all belong together, you, humans, and we, magpies. We belong to the universe, to God’s creation, and in Jesus we know what God wants and what makes the universe work,” he continued.

He certainly got that right. I was amazed, even if he got some of the details wrong earlier.



“At Christmas time you will see us taking a walk in the bush and across lawns with our young ones, looking for worms. And as they squawk, we take the worms to them in our beaks and feed them. And sometimes we find birds that are weak or don’t have mothers and fathers, and we feed them, too. Have you seen us lately?”

Yes, I had, in fact. You see these big birds, the same size as their parents, still chirping like baby birds and running around wanting to be fed.

“We feed our children, too,” I answered. “And we also think about people who don’t have food and feed them, too, or help others feed them. Sometimes they are people in our communities.

Sometimes they live in countries a long way away and all we can do is send money to help others to feed them there where they live.”



Magpie look at me very intently. “Do you really care about people like that, like the way Jesus taught us? I mostly see you humans just keeping it all for yourselves and not doing much sharing at all. And you fight and you are mean and you try to kill magpies!”

I knew what was coming next. Magpie was going to tell me that humans climb into the trees to destroy their nests and that’s why they fly down and peck at them sometimes. I had heard that before. It wasn’t true.

“Yes,” I said, “we do care, just like you, and, yes, there are some people who at Christmas time think only of themselves and never share.”



Magpie shuffled his feathers back into place, made sure he had a good grip on the little light bulb, which he had placed on the table during our conversation, and smiling with a tilt of his head as only magpies can do, nodded goodbye to me and flew off up into the trees. I knew he understood.



He left me with a nice memory which I would carry into Christmas Day. He also left a little white blob on the table, which I knew I would need to clean off before we could eat there.

I sensed that he had also dropped some of his wrong ideas about Christmas and I wished more people I knew would do that, too.