

DISASTER CHRISTMAS



by Lisa Thompson
illustrated by Greg Turra

THE CHARACTERS



Mandy

Davey



Uncle Lou



Mum and Dad



CONTENTS



Chapter 1

Countdown 2

Chapter 2

Warning Signs 12

Chapter 3

She's Here 26

Chapter 4

A Safer Place to Hide 34

Chapter 5

Christmas Day 42

Chapter 6

Heading South 50



Chapter 1

Countdown

Davey roared into the kitchen making loud motorbike noises. "Only two more sleeps," he announced excitedly, "and it's Christmas!"

He shut down his imaginary motorbike, bombed his cereal with milk and began gobbling breakfast. In-between mouthfuls he made motorbike noises and played with his Evel Knievel action figure. Evel Knievel jumped the cereal box and landed with a rattle on the table.

"Davey! Do you have to be so annoying?" growled his older sister. Mandy was sitting quietly at the table flicking through a cookbook.

Evel Knievel was a real-life motorbike riding daredevil and Davey's hero. Davey had asked Santa for a motorbike to go with his Evel Knievel action figure. He had been counting down the days until Christmas for weeks.





"Where's Mum?" asked Davey, realising it was just the two of them at home.

"Down at the shops. Tomorrow we're making the Christmas trifle."

Mandy held up the cookbook and showed Davey the brightly layered trifle their mum made every Christmas. Davey's eyes widened at the thought of it. He loved biting into the layers of red and green jelly, sponge cake, cream and custard.

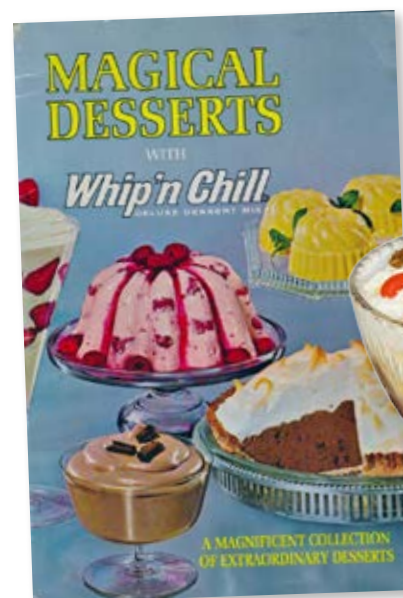
"Mum wants you to take Baxter for a walk before she gets back," Mandy fibbed. Baxter was the family dog and Mandy knew he didn't need walking. Their dad walked him before he left for work, but the house would be much quieter without Davey.

Davey shook his head. He rarely did anything his sister asked.

"Wash up your bowl then."

Davey shook his head again. "Don't tell me what to do, Mandy-Do-This-Do-That."

"If you're going to call me names, you'd better hope Santa's elves aren't listening."



Davey got up from the table with Evel Knievel.

“Suit yourself, but Mum won’t be happy,” said Mandy, “and neither will the Christmas elves.”

Davey began to walk away but stopped. He really wanted that motorbike. He couldn’t risk not getting it over a dirty cereal bowl.

Mandy hid her smile behind the book while Davey quickly rinsed his bowl. When he was done, he started his imaginary bike up again—extra loud just for Mandy. As Davey raced outside he tripped on the mat by the door and lunged through the swinging back door. He disappeared outside with his arms waving like windmills.

Mandy jumped up expecting to see Davey crumpled on the back deck. Instead she saw him racing up the side of the house on his pushbike, Evel Knievel poking out of his backpack. Mandy winced as she watched Davey wobble and almost crash as he jumped the curb. He made it to the corner. Mandy was relieved she wouldn’t have to see Davey stack it. Davey almost always stacked it.



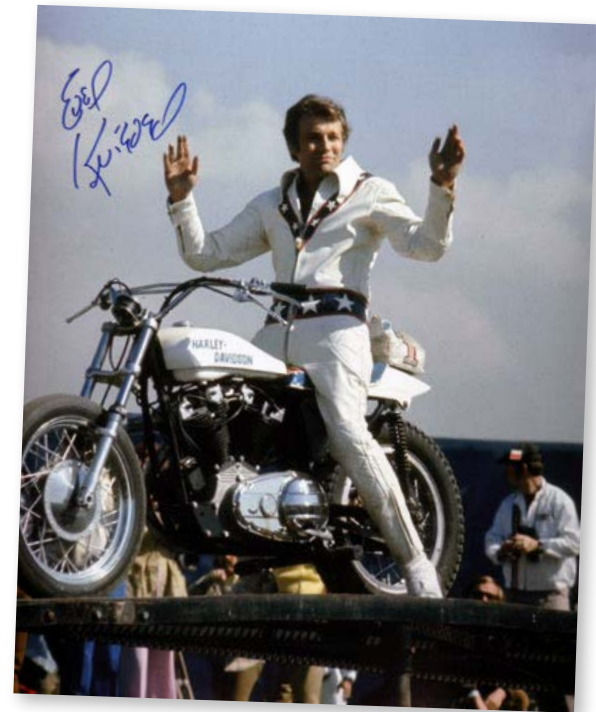
Later, Mandy helped Mum get the Christmas groceries out of the car. Davey limped in with his friend, Sam Chu, pushing his bike. Blood oozed down Davey's knee.

"Daredevil Davey had an accident," announced Sam, a little too proudly. "So we've come back to race cars."

Mandy and her mum knew Sam meant toy cars. Davey had a huge collection.

"What did you do this time?" asked Mandy. "Stack it off a gutter or get your shoelace caught in the wheel?"

"Hey, that happened once," said Davey. Davey's mum frowned as she waited for the details. "I *almost* jumped four bins," explained Davey. "But I stacked it on the landing."



"Davey! How many times do I have to tell you? You're not Evel Knievel," cried Mum. "You could really hurt yourself. Hop upstairs and I'll tape your knee. Honestly, you should have asked for bandaids for Christmas with the amount I use on you."

"I'm alright, Mum," said Davey, hopping to the stairs. "It's an easy patch-up."

Davey only took a few steps before he tripped, bumped his good knee on a banana chair and crumpled to the ground.

"Oh Davey!" said Mum.



After dinner, Davey and Mandy were putting up the last of the Christmas decorations while their parents watched the news. The weather bulletin showed a cyclone named Tracy at sea, north of Darwin.

“There’s always a cyclone at this time of year,” said Mum casually. “It’s going to be a wet and windy Christmas. We’ll have to put some tarps up outside.”

“Wet outside, sunny and dry inside,” added Dad. “We’ll still make it a good day.”

“They should name a cyclone after Davey,” giggled Mandy pointing to her brother, who was trying to untangle tinsel. Davey swung the tinsel around and around and was soon caught in a tinsel twirl. He fell into the box of Christmas decorations, sending baubles and bits everywhere. A bauble bounced off Baxter’s

head and landed in Dad’s drink. Mandy and Mum dissolved into laughter.

“Disaster Davey strikes again,” said Dad shaking his head. “Make sure you don’t hurt yourself with that tinsel, son.”

Davey didn’t like being called Disaster Davey. He was Daredevil Davey. He wriggled free from his tinsel knot.

“I’m going to bed,” he grumbled as he wandered up the hall.

That night Davey dreamed he jumped twenty double-decker buses. As the crowd roared, Evel Knievel appeared and said, “I knew you could do it Davey.”



Chapter 2

Warning Signs

The next morning the whole family—except for Davey who was already watching cartoons—woke to the sound of a car horn.

“Who’s making that racket?” Dad yawned, wandering out to check.

“I’ll see,” said Davey, bounding from the lounge room. “Uncle Lou!” he yelled excitedly.

Uncle Lou worked as a fisherman in the Arafura Sea, north of Darwin. He was a big man with shoulders as wide and strong as a bluefin tuna. His wild hair and wiry beard made Davey say he looked like King Neptune.

“Mornin’ all,” said Uncle Lou, “Merry Christmas!”

“Uncle Lou, you’re just in time. Mum’s making her Christmas trifle today,” said Davey excitedly. “We can be the tasters.”

“Sounds like my kind of job,” smiled Uncle Lou.



He tapped the esky in the back of his ute. "I've brought prawns and lobsters. We might have to eat them today before Cyclone Tracy shows up. Tomorrow's not looking good."

"Oh Lou, that cyclone won't cause trouble," said Mum. "It'll just mean a wet Christmas. That's nothing new around here."

"Come on in, Lou," said Dad. "I'll put the jug on for a cuppa."

Uncle Lou made himself at home at the kitchen bench. "I think we're looking at more than a wet Christmas. Tracy's already pounded Bathurst and Melville Islands, north of here. My skipper says it's a big one. We spent yesterday putting



the boat in the mangroves and making sure it's secure until the cyclone passes. Haven't you been listening to the weather reports? The warning was upgraded early this morning."

"Upgraded? What do you mean?" asked Dad.

"The cyclone's stronger now and it's heading this way, right towards Darwin. I'm telling you, if the skipper isn't taking any chances, I'd be listening. He reckons it's going to hit tomorrow morning. I thought I'd check on you lot and make sure you knew."





“Are you sure this won’t just blow off and change direction out to sea?” asked Mum.
“Honestly Lou, if I stopped every time there was a cyclone warning I’d get nothing done. We had a cyclone warning two weeks ago. The reports said it was coming and then nothing happened.”

“I wouldn’t be taking my chances with this one,” said Uncle Lou.

Davey and Mandy watched their mum and dad exchange concerned looks. They were used to cyclone warnings. It was a hassle—tying things up, putting things away and preparing for the worst that never happened.

“I guess it’s better to be safe than sorry,” said Dad finally. “We’ll get everything outside tied down or put away this morning.”

“What about the trifle?” asked Davey.

“We’ll get to that later,” said Dad. “Let me make a few quick calls and then you can help your Uncle Lou and me outside.”

Dad got on the phone and called a few friends, just in case they hadn’t heard about the cyclone upgrade. Some people said they were getting prepared, while others were convinced it was nothing to worry about.

Mandy helped her mum fill containers with fresh water. They stored them with boxes of towels, sheets, and blankets. Davey hunted around the house for spare batteries for the radio and torches.



“Now for emergency food,” said Mum. She showed Mandy which tins she wanted her to pack. “Don’t forget a tin-opener. No point having all that food if we can’t get to it.”



“This is such a waste of time, Mum,” moaned Mandy. “We’re not going to be eating baked beans for Christmas. We have a fridge full of food.”

“I certainly hope we won’t be eating baked beans,” said Mum, as she packed spare clothes for everyone. She put family photos and important papers in a box. Everything went into the laundry.

After they packed, Mum got Mandy to help her with the trifle. Usually they made the trifle while singing along to Christmas songs, but this year they listened to the radio for updates on Cyclone Tracy.

Davey and Uncle Lou missed being taste testers as they busily packed things away outside. They took down the hanging plants and hammock. They roped the plants in big pots to the house piers. Dad moved his car into the garage and the boat under the house. They taped and boarded up the windows.

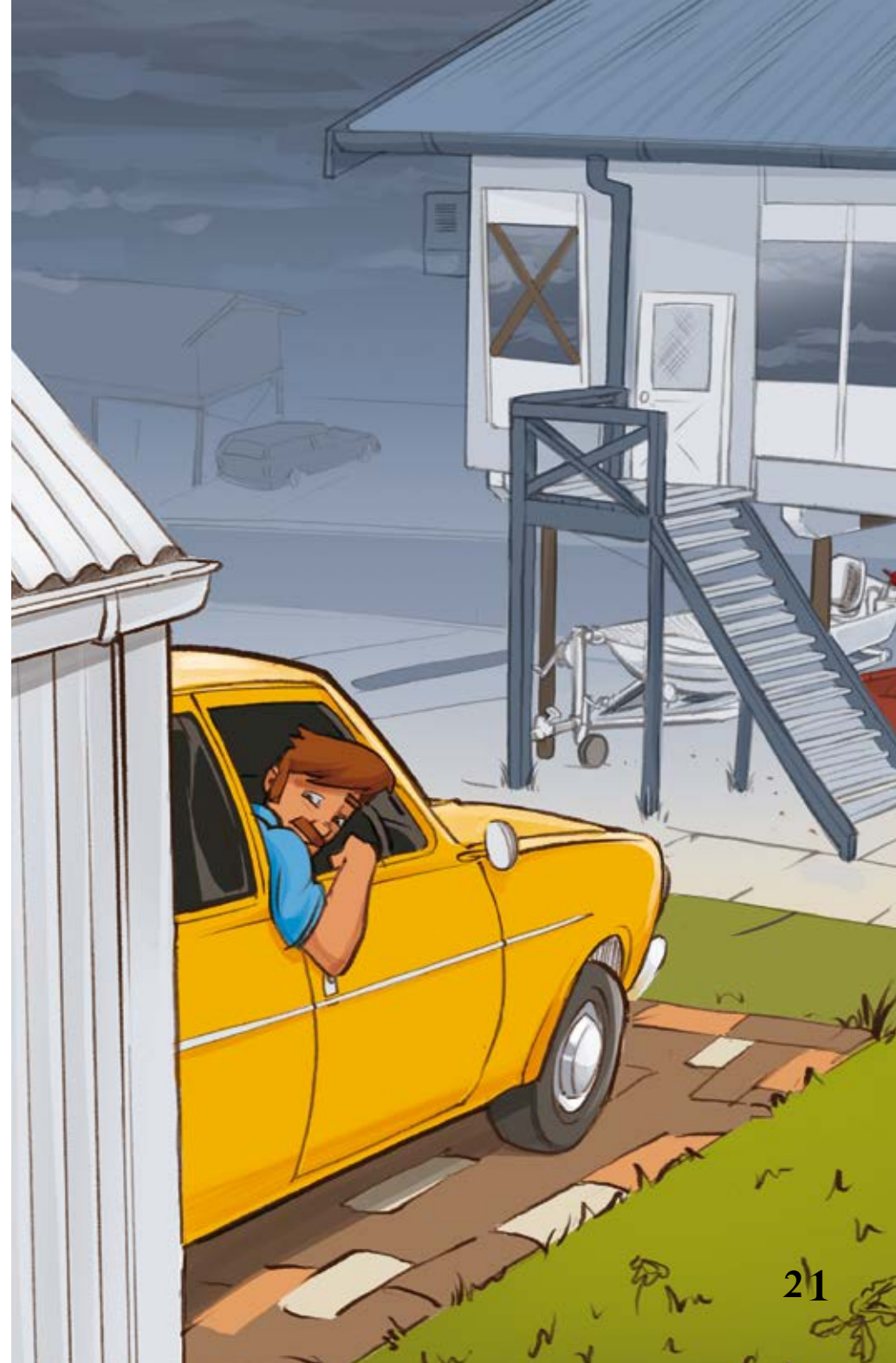
Davey didn't manage to stay injury-free. He stubbed his toe when he moved a chair, scraped a knuckle when he moved some pots and banged his sore knee twice when he moved the bins. He was glad Dad and Uncle Lou were too busy to notice.

It was hard to imagine a cyclone was on the way, as the weather wasn't too bad. But by mid-afternoon the sky was dark.

"Hear that?" said Uncle Lou.

"What?" asked Davey. "I can't hear anything."

"Exactly. Not a bird, not a dog, nothing. That's not a good sign."





In the early evening, despite the heavy rain, the neighbours came over for a visit. Everyone got wet but didn't seem to mind. It was hard to ignore the wind getting stronger and the rain falling harder.



Most of the talk was about the cyclone. Uncle Lou couldn't believe Sam's dad, Mr Chu, didn't think the cyclone was anything to worry about.

Then the rain started falling in big heavy drops and the wind picked up. Mum turned up the radio as it was hard to hear over the pelting rain on the tin roof.

Once everything was put away and tied down, Mum, Dad and Uncle Lou did their best to make it feel like Christmas Eve. Dad fired up the barbecue under the house and put on some prawns.





“Wake up tomorrow and it will all be over,” said Mr Chu. “Nothing to worry about.”

“You’ll have *nothing* and *plenty* to worry about,” warned Uncle Lou. “Come on, I’ll give you a hand.”

A little later, Mr Chu, Sam and Uncle Lou left in the rain with crates full of ropes.



“Davey, I’ve put a mattress for you in Mandy’s room,” said Mum, when it was time for bed. “Uncle Lou will sleep in your room.”

Davey and Mandy were secretly glad they would not be alone. Not on a night when they could feel this cyclone creeping closer and closer.

Chapter 3

She's Here

"Be quiet, Davey," mumbled Mandy still half-asleep. She checked her watch; it was just after 2am. It was Christmas. Mandy soon realised the noises were not coming from Davey. They were coming from outside.

It was an angry, roaring, wild wind. Mandy looked out her bedroom window and watched what she thought were great sheets of silver tissue fly across the yard and down the street. Only it wasn't silver tissue. They were sheets of roof tin that had peeled off homes like ripe banana skins. A tree fell and smacked the side of the house so hard the house shook.

Mandy screamed. Davey startled awake. Branches from the tree scraped across the window glass. The bedroom door swung open. Uncle Lou shone a torch into the room.

"Cyclone Tracy's here. She's a monster alright and it doesn't sound like she's mucking about.



Mandy, get away from the window and onto the floor with Davey.”

Dad rushed in shining another torch.

“Power’s gone,” said Dad.

With a loud bang, one of the windows in the kitchen smashed. Mum screamed as wind and rain rushed in. Cyclone Tracy was in the house.

“Get to the bathroom!” yelled Uncle Lou.



Mandy ran to her mum and together they scurried down the hall. Davey scrambled out of bed and grabbed his torch.

“Hurry Davey,” ordered his dad.

As Davey ran he spotted two frightened eyes under the lounge.

“Baxter!” he yelled, rushing across the room. “I have to get him.”

“Davey, no!” cried Mum.

The house was alive with the cyclone. Davey felt the wind pushing and pulling at him.

“Davey, stop!” Dad’s plea was swallowed by the roaring wind.

Davey crawled along the floor. He reached Baxter as part of the awning out the front tore away with a loud ripping noise.

Davey pulled the terrified Baxter from under the lounge. He struggled to stand with the dog in his arms. The force of the wind was so strong he was pushed back until the mighty grip of



Uncle Lou latched onto his shirt and pulled him into the bathroom.

“Oh Davey,” cried Mum, scooping him into her arms.

Baxter crawled over to Mandy. Both of them were shaking. Davey’s dad put his arm around them all.

The house shook again.

Uncle Lou shone the torch at the ceiling. The roof was groaning. In the torchlight Davey saw his mum, dad and Uncle Lou exchange worried looks.

“Why are we all in here when it’s so small?” Davey yelled over the wind.

“Being small the walls are less likely to collapse on us,” Uncle Lou yelled back.

“Collapse?!” wailed Mandy. “Dad, is the house going to collapse? Is it?” Mandy started sobbing.

Dad pulled them all closer. “We’ll be alright. We just have to ride it out.”

Uncle Lou turned off his torch. They huddled in the tiny room in the dark.

No-one spoke as they listened to the chaos thrashing about outside. Each bang and shudder made Mandy jump. The storm came at them from all sides.

On and on it went.

In the most frightening moment of all, an angry gust of wind lifted off the roof. It cracked and peeled, grinding and screeching as the wind carried it away. Rain pelted in. Everyone scrambled under the shower curtain and towels.

Finally, the rain eased, the wind died away. The monster cyclone was tiring. An eerie silence descended.



Chapter 4

A Safer Place to Hide

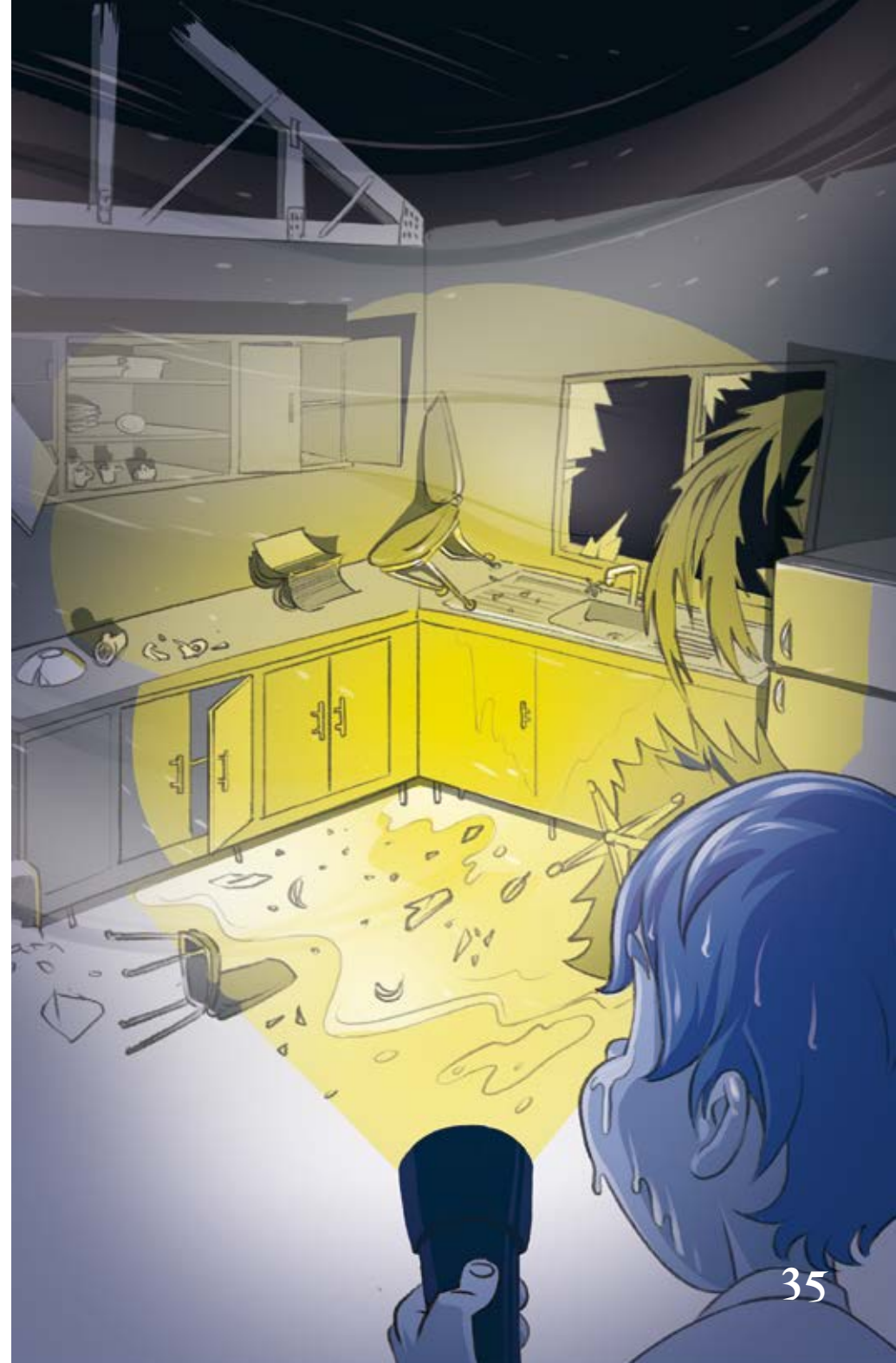
“The eye of the storm is passing over us,” said Uncle Lou. “We don’t have a lot of time. We need to get downstairs to the laundry.”

“Uncle Lou’s right,” said Dad. “We can’t stay here. If the rest of the house goes, the laundry’s our best chance.”

With his torch, Dad led the way out of the bathroom. The inside of the house was a mess. The Christmas tree had blown across the room, and now the tip of it was wedged under the fridge. Broken furniture and glass lay everywhere. All the windows were broken. Everything was wet.

Davey quickly scanned the lounge room and kitchen with his torch.

“Come on, Davey!” Dad yelled from the back door.





Uncle Lou was already outside. "Be careful of the stairs, they're not holding on by much."

Mum carried Baxter and cautiously made her way down. Dad followed and then turned to guide Davey and Mandy.

"Slowly now," he said. "Just one step at a time."

Mandy put her foot on what was left of the wobbly staircase. She held onto the doorframe as she took another step. In that moment, the whole stairway gave way and fell sideways to the ground. Davey just managed to grab her and pull her back into the house.

"Mandy! Davey!" yelled Dad. He had just managed to run out of the way of the falling stairs.

"We're okay," said Mandy shaking, "I think." She started to cry. "Dad, how are we going to get down?"

"I'll get the ladder."

"You could if the shed was still here," said Uncle Lou, pointing to the spot where the shed had been. All that remained was the cement slab it once sat on.

"You're going to have to jump," said Uncle Lou.



"They can't," cried Mum. "There has to be another way."

Baxter started barking as the wind picked up.

"I'll climb up and get you," said Dad. "Just wait a minute."

"There's no time!" yelled Uncle Lou. He spotted a mattress that had blown onto the front lawn. He dragged it to a spot next to the crumbled staircase. "This is the drop zone. Now, jump!" ordered Uncle Lou. "Jump onto this mattress. Come on, you two."

"I can't," cried Mandy. "I won't make it. It's too far."

"Yes, we can," said Davey. "I jump all the time."

"No, you crash and hurt yourself all the time!" wailed Mandy. "Dad, find another way, please!"

Davey saw his dad looking around the yard frantically. The rain was getting heavier.

"Mandy, we have to jump now," said Davey. "We'll jump together."





“Come on,” yelled Uncle Lou. “Hurry!”

Davey got Mandy to her feet and to the edge of the doorway. He wasn’t sure they could reach the mattress but he knew they had to jump.

While Mandy was making up her mind, Davey pulled her out of the doorway and threw them both as far as he could towards the drop zone.

Mandy landed safe and sound. Davey managed to bounce off the mattress and, with a safety roll, he stopped at the feet of Uncle Lou.

“Way to go, kiddo,” laughed Uncle Lou as he picked him up. “Now that’s a jump to be proud of, and not a scratch on either of you.”

“Well done, son,” smiled Dad, running to him. Cyclone Tracy began to roar again. “Inside the laundry, now,” he ordered.

The laundry under the house was brick and bigger than the bathroom. It’s only window was

boarded up. All the boxes Mandy and her mum packed earlier were stored to one side.

Everyone helped to make a comfortable space on the floor out of towels and blankets. Davey and Mandy felt safer down in the laundry, especially when the banging and wild noises started again.

After a while Davey couldn’t help but snuggle into his dad and rest his eyes. As he lay there he heard Mum say, “To think we weren’t going to do anything. Oh Lou, thank goodness you showed up and convinced us to get prepared. I can’t imagine what the people who weren’t ready are going through.”

Davey thought of Sam Chu and his family.



Chapter 5

Christmas Day

When Davey woke, Dad, Uncle Lou and Baxter were already outside. Light rain was falling. The wind had gone. Davey got up quietly as his mum and Mandy were still sleeping. He crept outside. Nothing looked familiar. All the plants in the yard were torn up or destroyed. There wasn't a tree left standing. Whole homes in the street were missing. Other buildings stood broken. Rubble and furniture covered every yard.

Clothes lay on the road, next to broken wood. On the road a car had flipped on its roof. Uncle Lou's car was fine, but the garage had caved in on Dad's car.

Davey looked up at the second storey of his house. It was a wreck. One of the side walls was missing and he could see into the bathroom they had huddled in.



Up the street he saw Sam Chu with his mum and dad. Sam's dad had his arm in a sling.

In the front yard Davey looked up to his bedroom. The window was blown out as had part of a wall. The wardrobe doors were missing and so was his bed. Davey's toy car collection was scattered across the yard. As he sifted through more rubbish he saw a plastic hand that looked familiar. It was Evel Knievel. He was wet and scratched and missing a boot, but it was him.

Davey felt an arm on his shoulder. He looked up and saw his sister.

"Everything's broken, Mandy. Look at this place. Look at our house. If it's not trashed it's gone."

"Not everything. We're all okay and that's the main thing."

Mandy was right but Davey still felt miserable. Tears spilled down his face. He was glad they were all okay but it was such a mess.

"Thanks for making me jump." Mandy hugged her brother and whispered, "I think you're better than Evel Knievel, in a cyclone anyway."





There were no Christmas presents—Cyclone Tracy had taken them. There was no Christmas lunch. The family spent most of the day sorting through mess for things they could keep.

Uncle Lou drove Mr Chu, his wife and Sam to the hospital to get Mr Chu's arm checked. A cabinet had fallen on it and Uncle Lou was sure it was broken.

When Uncle Lou came back he said entire parts of Darwin were completely destroyed. Many families were left with nothing. People had lost their lives.



Dad tried to get the radio to work but there was no signal. Mum put up tarps and made the laundry a living space. Dad dug a hole and buried all the food from the fridge, including the Christmas trifle.

In the late afternoon, a car came around announcing that there was an evacuation centre at the local school. Mum, Dad and Uncle Lou decided to stay put until their

fresh water and food ran out. The evacuation centres were overflowing with people who had been left with nothing.

Boxing Day was a blur. Davey spent most of it driving around with Uncle Lou, helping others clean up.

The next day, the radio was up and working. The news said Darwin was in a state of emergency. An army general from Canberra was now in charge. Women and children would be evacuated to other capital cities. The men staying behind would help clean up and put Darwin back together.

“Where will we go?” asked Mandy.

“I guess we could go to Brisbane and live with Grandma,” said Mum.

“How long for?” asked Davey, not liking the news. He never liked being away from Darwin.

“No-one knows,” said Dad. “However long it takes to get this place back up and running.”

“Everyone will be working their hardest,” said Uncle Lou. “Don’t doubt that.”



Chapter 6

Heading South

Three days after Christmas, Uncle Lou drove Mum, Mandy and Davey into the evacuation centre. They each carried a small bag to take to Brisbane. Baxter was not happy about being in a travel cage. They drove along streets where every building was gone and only rubble remained.

The evacuation centre was overflowing. Long queues of tired families waited to give their names and details about where they wanted to fly, and who they would be staying with. People with no place to go were told which city could take them.

Davey saw Sam and his family in the queue. He had not seen them since Uncle Lou drove them to the hospital.

“How’s your dad’s arm?” asked Davey.

“It’s okay, but he has to have an operation when we get to Adelaide.”



"You're going to Adelaide?"

"My aunty is there. Mum says if she likes it we may not come back. She doesn't want to be in a cyclone ever again. Where are you headed?"

"Brisbane. We're going to stay with my gran."

"Davey," called Dad, "it's time to go."

A voice called people to board the bus taking them to the airport. Davey ran to join his family.

"Look after your mum, Mandy and Baxter for me," said Dad. "I'm proud of you. You're a brave lad."

"You sure I can't stay? I could help. I don't want to go to Brisbane. I don't want to leave you and Darwin."

"It's been a while since I've been to a big city," said Uncle Lou, "but I'm pretty sure you'll like it. You may not love it like home, but you'll be okay."

Davey heard the final call for everyone to board the buses.



“Keep an eye on this one,” said Dad to the official. “He’s our Darwin Daredevil. We want him back in one piece.”

The whole family hugged each other tightly. Mum and Mandy got on the bus but Davey lingered.

“Will I be back for my birthday, Dad?”

“I hope so,” replied Dad. “When we’re all back together we’ll have a big celebration, bigger than any Christmas or birthday. Now, off you go. When the phone lines come back on I’ll call you every night.”



As the plane took off, Davey saw the full extent of the damage caused by Cyclone Tracy. It was going to take a long time to rebuild Darwin. Some people might never return. Davey hoped Sam and his family would. He knew his family would. No cyclone, not even one like Tracy could keep them from coming back to the place they called home.

GLOSSARY



awning

a roof-like cover over a doorway or window to keep out the sun and rain



cyclone

a storm with big wind gusts and large rainfalls, also known as hurricanes and typhoons



daredevil

a person who acts recklessly and likes doing dangerous stunts



destructive

to destroy or ruin

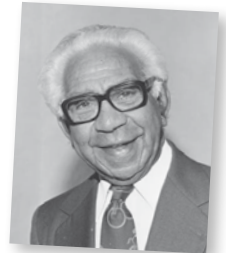


pelting

to come down heavily and quickly

AUSTRALIA IN THE 1970S

- **1970:** Western Australia gives 18 year-olds the right to vote. So does South Australia and New South Wales in 1971, then Queensland and Victoria in 1973.
- **1 January 1972:** seatbelts are made compulsory for all Australian cars.
- **1972:** Sir Douglas Nicholl becomes the first Aboriginal Australian to be knighted.
- **20 October 1973:** the Sydney Opera House officially opens.
- **1 January 1974:** Whitlam government cuts university fees. University courses are free for everyone.
- **1974:** *Countdown* airs for the first time with host Ian "Molly" Meldrum.
- **1 March 1975:** first colour broadcast on television.
- **1977:** Australians vote nationally for *Advance Australia Fair* as the national song.



- **1977:** The first *Star Wars* is released.
- **1978:** the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is set up and broadcasts radio and television services in many languages.
- **1978:** Sri Venkateswara Temple, the first Hindu temple in Australia opens at Helensburgh, NSW.
- **1978:** Dr Rod Saunders successfully implants the first bionic ear in a patient at Melbourne's Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.
- **Throughout the 1970s:** ABBA is one of the most popular singing groups, releasing in Australia a number of hits including *Mamma Mia*, *Dancing Queen*, and *Fernando*.

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

49 DEAD IN DARWIN CYCLONE

At least 49 people are dead and a number injured in a fierce cyclone which swept down on Darwin yesterday as the town slept through the early hours of Christmas Day.

At least 70 per cent of houses in the city had been seriously damaged or completely destroyed, according to reports reaching the National Disaster Organisation in Canberra.

Winds of up to 200 kilometres an hour cut a swathe of damage across Australia's northern coastline, destroying all communications.

The Acting Prime Minister, Dr Cairns, is flying to the scene of devastation this morning. He described it as a national disaster.

The Darwin Hospital is reported to be seriously damaged, but is still operating.

As sketchy reports of the extent of the disaster began to trickle into Canberra, medical and relief organisations started pre-paring airlifts of urgently needed supplies.

The Minister for Defence, Mr Barnard, promised the full co-operation of all forces to carry out relief work.

Eyewitnesses said that as the cyclone passed across Darwin, vehicles were over-turned, trees ripped from the ground and hundreds of homes wrecked.

People walked around dazed, many weeping openly in the streets as the shock of the disaster struck home.

By the time the cyclone had departed at dawn, the city with a population of 40,000 was described as a major disaster area.

DEATH TOLL RISING

Scanty reports from the devastated city of Darwin early this morning indicated a death toll of about 50, with hundreds more injured and half the 40,000 population homeless.

The death toll is expected to rise even higher as rescue teams move in.

The Acting Prime Minister, Dr Cairns said in a statement: "It's a national disaster. The Government is pulling out every stop it can to provide relief".

Dr Cairns was leaving Melbourne by air force jet before dawn today for a personal inspection of the havoc.

The Minister for the Northern Territory and for Northern Development, Dr Patterson, had already been flown in from Queensland.

Cyclone Tracy ripped in from the Timor Sea in the early hours of Christmas Day with winds of up to 200 kilometres an hour.

CONTACT CUT

Communications between the tropical city and the outside world were

completely cut for several hours. Last night, mess-ages were being received by navy radio at the National Disaster headquarters in Darwin.

Royal Australian Air Force planes prepared to take medical, food and clothing supplies to Darwin, although the airport there last night was still unusable.

The RAN cancelled all leave for seamen in Sydney and prepared a task force, led by the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne, of men and supplies. Three ships will sail today and another four on Friday.

The few meagre reports received in the more populated southern States last night said the city looked as it had been bombed—as it was by Japanese bombers early in 1942. People were walking the streets so shocked they were stupefied. Many wept.

The city's hospital was deroofed, the post office and police station severely damaged and five vessels sunk or run aground in Darwin Harbour.

Every building in Darwin suffered some damage.

Marine operations centre in Canberra said the motor vessel, Kendal, was capsized while attempting to shelter and several of the crew had been lost.

Two survivors were picked up by the patrol boat, HMAS Attack, before the patrol boat itself was driven aground.

The Navy said the patrol boat HMAS Arrow sank in the harbour. One crew member was known dead and two were missing. Sixteen survived.

Ashore, survivors picked through the rubble of homes and other buildings that had been gaily decorated for Christmas Day, seeking further victims of what

officials described as the worst natural disaster to hit Australia.

The National Disaster Organisation, the Red Cross, radio and television stations and newspapers in the southern States have been inundated with inquiries from people with relatives in and around Darwin. But with communications down, there was little that they could be told.

In Melbourne, the Federal Leader of the Opposition, Mr Snedden, said Australians would be appalled by the tragedy.

"Words are little consolation at times like these", he said. "But on behalf of my family and the Opposition parties, I express sympathy to the victims".

TONS OF BLANKETS

The Minister for Repatriation and Compensation, Senator Wheeldon, said that natural disaster compensation would be paid to victims of the cyclone damage as quickly as possible.

He said they should keep records of what they had lost.

The Australian Red Cross began moving tons of blankets, food and clothing to RAAF bases to be flown to Darwin soon after first reports were received.

A Red Cross spokesman in Melbourne said four tons of baby food had been flown out of Melbourne and was due to reach Darwin last night.

Truckloads of blankets and clothing were also on the way from all capital cities.

Canberra organisations began collecting material to aid cyclone victims yesterday. The St Vincent de Paul Society and the Salvation Army opened depots.

'49 DEAD IN DARWIN CYCLONE', *The Canberra Times* (Canberra: 1926-2016), Thursday 26 December 1974, p.1.

FASCINATING FACTS!

Cyclone Tracy (21–25 December 1974)

- Cyclone Tracy was a tropical cyclone that destroyed 70% of houses in the Northern Territory on Christmas Day 1974.
- It was rated a Category 4 storm. Cyclone Tracy was so strong it bent a railway signal tower in half.
- The radius of gale force winds was 50 km and the wind reached 217 km/h before breaking the official recording equipment at Darwin Airport.
- 71 people were killed, 650 injured and 5000 homes were lost.
- The damage was estimated at \$4.5 billion.

Evel Knievel (1938–2007)

- Robert Craig “Evel” Knievel was an American daredevil who attempted more than 75 ramp-to-ramp motorcycle jumps.
- During his career he suffered more than 433 bone fractures.
- When he retired in 1980 he told reporters that he was, “nothing but scar tissue and surgical steel”.
- His most famous jump was in 1974, when he attempted to jump 488 m across the Snake River Canyon in the United States.



Rebuilding Darwin

- Major-General Alan Stretton was put in charge of the rescue effort.
- The government promised that Darwin would be rebuilt in 5 years but it was completed much faster in just over 3 years.
- In the week after the storm, 35 362 Darwin residents were evacuated and approximately 12 000 residents stayed behind to help with re-building the city.
- The city of Darwin learned many valuable lessons from Tracy. There are now more rules about building and special processes to keep people informed about storms.



Tropical Cyclones

- Tropical cyclones form over warm oceans around the equator. The warm water needs to be at least 26°C.
- As the moist air rises from the ocean it turns cool and forms clouds. These clouds rotate and spin, picking up speed.
- Tropical cyclones bring big, destructive winds and very heavy rainfall, which can cause flooding.
- Tropical cyclones usually slow down once they reach land, as without warm water underneath them, they cannot keep building.
- In Australia, cyclone season is between November and April.

REFLECTING ON ... DISASTER CHRISTMAS

ENGLISH

Comprehension



- Choose three symbols that represent Christmas for Mandy and Davey.
- How did the cyclone change the relationship between Mandy and Davey? Give an example.
- Summarise the story to a partner. Were you able to include all of the key ideas?
- Predict the following chapter for Davey. Where is it set? What is he doing?

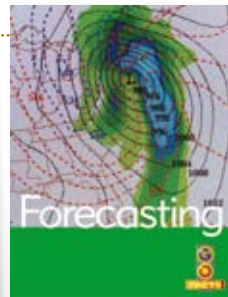
Structure and Textual Features

- Find three details that help you visualise the storm.
- Look at the introduction. Find words describing Davey. How do words like “roared”, “bombed” and “lunged” help you understand his character?
- How do headings and sub-headings help you read newspaper articles?



HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY

Find these *Go Facts* to help you understand more about natural disasters in Australia.



How do natural disasters affect places and people?

Look at *Disaster Christmas*



- Environment: What do the images tell you about the environment? (pp. 42–49, 54–55)
- Empathy: What do Davey’s actions tell you about how people felt? (pp. 42–46)
- Perspectives: What do Davey and Sam tell you about returning to Darwin? (pp. 50–52)

What were the short- and long-term effects of Cyclone Tracy?



- Spaces: What places would need to be rebuilt? What spaces were vital for communities?
- Social: How did people help one another? What does this tell you about the community?
- Economic: What were the costs of re-building? Who pays?

How has research helped communities face natural disasters?

- History: Who studies the weather? How was the weather explained in ancient times?
- Technology: What tools are used to study the weather today? How are warnings issued?
- Place: How do people consider weather in structuring new places? Why is this important?

