

A number of years ago, Des and Dee Cypel had been one of the first D'Different families to move into the new subdivision of Whittle Downs. Their daughter Wendy, had been a home birth, with Norma Lee as their midwife. They had very quickly met up with Stan Firmly and had joined with many others involved with the Heaven's Tableland project. A couple of years later another home birth provided Wendy with a brother, Brodie¹, and more recently Norma Lee had been present when Mandy was welcomed into the world by proud parents and wide-eyed brother and sister.

From the time of Wendy's birth, Des and Dee had decided to home educate their children, and like other families in the regions, they never regretted their choice. Heaven's Tableland being so close on their back boundary fence, became a paradise for implementing their total lifestyle-related curriculum of living beyond conformity. They found that those who visited and worked on Stan's property became a wonderfully rich supply of people resources, and "Uncle" Stan, as all children called him, often said that, "the small fry around me keeps me young". Now with little Danny Kerr on the property, and frequent visits from the Questerman's who were looking forward to home educating Faith, Stan knew that he had an important role to play for many years to come. In fact, everyone associated with Heaven's Tableland realized just how priceless the property had become.

Not only did it spur them all on to even greater efforts in the Whittle Down's community, but in a mysterious way, in the "light" that shone out, especially into the darkness, they began to see "light" – they saw things differently, and others responded to it too. This haven of peace and quiet was well used at every available opportunity.

¹ The name "Brodie" means "a goad". "400 Babies' Names and their meanings" – James Glennon, pub Robert Hale 1985 ISBN 0 7090 2451 7

The people of Whittle Downs, and beyond, were exposed to the combined forces of big business interests and all the pressures of the rat race on homes and families, that tend to drag down rather than uplift; where it is so often easier to “give in”, rather than “stand up”, because there is not enough time to think things through and make well-considered, informed choices. But across there in “the park” you could breathe fresh air; you could enjoy beauty instead of ugliness; you could walk for miles along bush tracks if you wanted to; you could listen to the birds; feed the ducks; be surrounded by harmony rather than disharmony; you could sing and praise, rather than curse and defile; you could feel “clean” rather than begrimed; you could appreciate simplicity rather than be confused by complexity; you could be yourself rather than wear the masks of pretence.

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One morning Stan was working on his house truck, quietly whistling to himself, when he heard the sound of young voices, and grinned. “Uncle Stan! Where are you?” but before he had time to answer they had found him. Wendy and Brodie Cypel raced up to him. “Guess what I’ve got!” panted Brodie.

Stan looked at brother and sister as he feigned surprise at their sudden arrival. “I don’t know young fella. Now, let me think,” said Stan as he scratched his head and stroked his beard, winking at Wendy. “Maybe it’s a”

Brodie was too excited to wait. “It’s a book. I got it from the library yesterday. It’s funny. I thought you might like to read it. Would you?” His eyes shone as he waved the book in front of Stan’s face.

“Now calm down me fine friend. I can’t even read the name. You tell me what it’s called and then we could find a comfy seat and you could read it to me.”

“It’s called “Yertle the Turtle,”² said Brodie pointing to the words on the cover, “but I’m not very good at reading all the words yet. Wendy will read it to you.”

By the time the children and their mother departed for home that day the story had been heard many times. Stan had been conscripted into taking his turn, and his rendering caused the children to sit spellbound. “You’re a good story teller Uncle Stan,” breathed Brodie in awe.

That evening Stan sat in his seat at the “lookout” overlooking Whittle Downs, deep in thought. He just about knew “Yertle the Turtle” off by heart and he couldn’t shake it from his mind. Darkness fell. The lights below him twinkled. The Complex

2 1950, Dr Seuss “Yertle the Turtle” Published Random House, Library of Congress Catalogue card number 58-9011

FROM ONE PRICK TO ANOTHER

was ablaze with its garishness. And still Stan sat. He thought of Yertle – the ruler of all he saw, but was never satisfied. He thought of how he used others to get what he wanted – to rule! He thought of the others in the stack that he used to get to the top. He thought of little Mack at the bottom of the stack. Mack was a nothing – he was used, and trampled on by all the others who were being used – and always at the top of that stack of pain and trembling and groaning, was Yertle, the marvellous me!

Then came the burp!!
Mack had had enough.

One little turtle who was prepared to do something – to gain the freedom for the stack; freedom from other worse stacks.

Even when he retired to rest that night, Stan's dreams had Yertle connections. And Mack was there too. Good old little Mack.

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The next day Wendy and Brodie, along with their mother Dee Cypel and little Mandy, were back at Stan's place for the morning. Although the book did not accompany them, Yertle was still a talking point. However, by morning tea time, the conversations had become spasmodic. Dee was minding Daniel while Ernie and Anne conducted some business in Fall City. Stan and the children were enjoying the view from the "lookout".

"Uncle Stan," said Wendy as she munched on an apple, "I love it up here – and all the way down to our place. There's so much to do and see. There's always something happening. Mum and Dad tell us little bits about all the things you've done to make the park so lovely; and you tell us about things too, and we can help you, and..."

"And I like the power house, and the light, and your house truck and playing in the barn, and listening to you tell stories. Yeah, I like it here too," interrupted Brodie, so as not to be left out of the conversation.

"I like Heaven's Tableland too," said Stan simply. "It's me home and I think it's become something of a home to lots of others as well. It's been hard work, but it's been wonderful seeing it all happen. It's like a schoolroom for kids like you, eh?"

Wendy looked very serious. "Uncle Stan, Dad said there are people who don't like you – people hate you. Especially the people who built Whittle Downs. Is that right?"

Stan didn't answer straight away. Memories came tumbling into his mind. Then he looked at the two children and his face creased into a contented grin. "I

suppose you could say that – there are times when people have disagreed with me. The problem is usually caused by being different. If people want to make lots of money, and they want to get to the top quickly and be important, then they're a bit like Yertle. They try to make other people obey them, or copy them. They don't tolerate people like me who stand firm against them. I guess I was a bit like Mack, only they didn't have a chance to build a stack on top of me. I guess you could say that I stuck me neck out and got on with the job. I've got a thick skin – or maybe I should say I've got a hard shell on me back, and I put on a hard hat to protect me head. We've just done things slowly, but surely, and while you two have been growing up, every day has been another step along the way to making it Heaven's Tableland. There'll be lots more stories to tell, and your Uncle Stan will tell' em, eh?! Anyway, I think I can hear Ernie and Anne coming up the drive. We'd better show them that we don't sit out here all day doing nothing!"

Stan winked. "How about a quick check on the power house before your Mum takes you off home."

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It was about a week later when Wendy and Brodie next visited Heaven's Tableland. They were excited, but secretive.

"Hi Uncle Stan. How are you today?" said Brodie.

Stan stopped cleaning the windows on his house truck and grinned at the children. "I am very well, thank you," he chuckled, "What can I do for you? I sure don't think you came all this way just to ask about me health!"

Wendy nudged her brother. "We've got a present for you Uncle Stan."

"Have you now! Well that's nice. What have I done to deserve..."

"Uncle Stan we've drawn you a picture 'coz you're special. Would you like to see it?"

"I sure would," said Stan. "Let's sit down at the table over there and I'll close me eyes, and then you tell me when to open them."

With Stan's eyes screwed up tight, there followed the sounds of paper being unwrapped and a few muffled whispers as the two children prepared for the unveiling ceremony!

"Now!" cried Brodie.

Stan opened his eyes, blinked a few times, and gazed at the picture in front of him in silence – for what seemed like a long time.

FROM ONE PRICK TO ANOTHER

"Do you like it?" asked Brodie.

Slowly Stan looked up. "I think it's real beaut. What say you tell me all about it. Me brain tells me there's a story behind it, eh."

The children needed no second bidding, and between them Stan was entertained with an enthusiastic, if somewhat disjointed, account of all that had happened to produce his present.

When Brodie had taken "Yertle the Turtle" out of the library the family had decided to centre their studies on turtles and tortoises, and it had proved to be extremely enjoyable and informative. However, it had been the talk with Stan at the lookout, about Heaven's Tableland, that had provided the spark for their art work. Both Wendy and Brodie had drawn a number of different pictures. Their parents had suggested that they might like to combine the good ideas into one. They did. This showed a turtle (or tortoise) with a beautifully patterned hard shell-shield, plodding along with his neck stretched out as if straining to achieve maximum effort. Brodie had drawn a neatly fitting army helmet to go on its head and a few puffs of dust being stirred up by its feet. Wendy had cleverly arranged some letters on the patterned shell – S_Y_N_O and underneath as a sort of caption, were the words:

SYNO & GO

Thank you Uncle Stan for all you've taught us.

Along the bottom edge, and a little way up each side, was a type of border design, showing some little turtles holding up placards on which were printed the words:

Dare to be

a Mac Turtle

"I like it, I like it, I like it," said Stan with great feeling. "I shall hang this on the wall in me house truck. But tell me, what does SYNO mean?"

Wendy and Brodie almost shouted the answer in unison.

"STICK YOUR NECK OUT!"

★ ★ ★ ★

Stan Firmly treasured that drawing. It was simple, yet sublime. A turtle, or a tortoise, got nowhere until it stuck its neck out, and started walking the talk.

D'Different Ones like the Cypel family, had provided a slogan which was easy to remember.

SYNO & GO

All because a little "goad" called Brodie had read a book called "Yertle the Turtle"! Stan was humbled as he realized the profound influence "oldies" like himself could have on children. The "taught us" could be so rewarding, and a thrill to involve children in the issues of life that so affected them. It was an awesome responsibility to know how to put the GO and the SYNO together.