

2012 Writing Contest Winner

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2012 FICTION — SECOND PLACE

WEKA GOES BUSH

by

Kinsa Hayes

Speakwell Club, New Zealand Region, Division IV

"I'm sick of this place," Wallie Weka complained to himself. No one else would listen. "The blackberries have finished, there are too many tourists, and the lake level is going down."

Wollie Weka lived by Lake Brunner in Westland. It was true it had been a long hot summer. The lake water was lower than usual. Each day Wallie would patrol the edges of the lake for tidbits among the lake weed on the sandy shore.

"I think I'll go and visit my rellies In Christchurch," said Wallie. "I wonder how they got on with the earthquakes." Word had flown across the Southern Alps to the West Coast about the damage the earthquakes had done. "I've got no responsibilities here. My kids have grown up and left the nest. Yep, I'm going!" he declared to the world.

Spotting a late blackberry, he scoffed it down, and then set about tidying his taonga, the treasures that he'd stored in his hidey hole in the scrub where he lived. "I need me boots," he said. "Where are me gumboots?" He searched high and low for them, but no boots were there. "Bet those kids have taken them. Botheration! Now what'll I do? You gotta have boots to go bush and over the Alps, otherwise my feet might freeze up there."

Feeling annoyed and grumpy, he went down to the lakeside to think. Pecking at the water weed on the shoreline, he spied a person further down, sitting on a chair with a table, right on the edge of the lake. "They're Invading my territory," he grumbled. "Who do these tourists think they are? The lake edge is my patch!"

As he got closer he could see a woman painting. An easel had been set up and beside it, a small table laden with paints and brushes and jars and things.

Peck, peck, peck, closer and closer he came and stopped dead in his tracks. "Look at that," he whispered, his little red eyes lighting up. "See, under the table, purple crocs!" An Idea was forming in his mind. Cautiously he pecked his way towards her. She had her back to him, painting the lake scene. Those crocs would be the perfect shoes for him to go bush, light and sturdy for travelling.

He'd have to steal them from under her nose, but he was good at that. He'd got all his taonga, his treasures that way. Silently he crept closer. She hadn't seen him yet. Grab one and go! Got it! Don't drop it! Run into the thickest part of the scrub with it. She'd never be able to follow you there!

He paused, checked behind. No, she hadn't noticed, still safe, Quietly he worked his way through the scrub to his hidey hole and dropped the croc. "Purple!" he said. "My favorite colour! How lucky can you get!" He tried it on. "A bit big," he muttered, "but I'll stuff it with straw to make it fit. My long toes need protection. Now I need to stay lucky to get the other one."

Back at the lake edge, he pretended to be looking for food, but he was really looking for a chance to steal the next croc. The woman was still painting. Now! Slowly, slowly, don't move quickly or it might attract her attention. Ok! Got it! Run!

But just then his luck ran out. The woman turned round to wash her brush and saw him. "Hey, you sneaky thief! What do you think you're doing?" she yelled. "Come back with my croc!" Grimly hanging onto his prize, Wollie dived into the scrub and melted away from her sight, something wekas do very well.

"Ow, ow," cried the woman as she tried to run after him in bare feet. "You've stolen my brand new crocs! Just wait till I catch you!"

But Wollie didn't wait. While she was removing a thorn from her foot, Wollie scarpered to his hidey hole, puffing a bit, but triumphant. Now he could go bush in style! No pre-loved boots for him; no, brand new boots to show off to the rellies in Christchurch.

"I'll wait until dusk before leaving," he thought. I don't want to be caught red-handed, or should that be purple-footed?" he chuckled. "I'll just get some dried grass and get them fitting well so I don't get blisters."

The sun was almost setting when Wallie started out, heading up the valley towards the hills. He stayed on the path, getting his balance and into his stride for the big journey. Suddenly, round a bend, he met the painter woman who was taking photos.

"Gotchal" she cried. "You've been nabbed!" as she clicked the camera.

"Oh, no you don't," muttered Wallie. "Emergency time! Run for it!"

He dived off the track into the rain forest, hanging grimly onto the crocs with his toenails as he ran to safety, hidden by the canopy of trees.

"Christchurch, here I came!" He got into his stride taking huge steps at a time until it was almost too dark to see his way.

"At least I've got photographic evidence," the woman chuckled as she went back to her tent. "That's worth a pair of crocs any day!"