

KOALA TOWN

Once upon a time there lived a close knit community of Koalas. They shared a peaceful existence in pristine Australian bushland. They called this bushland their home and named it Koala Town. It was a wonderful place where everyone was welcome and everyone was treated with respect. Koala Town evolved over many years, under the watchful eye and mentoring of an old Koala named Nestor. Nestor was a wise and friendly old fella, who was regularly called upon for advice. He was very well respected, always ready to listen and he had a great deal of pride in this close knit community. Koala Town was a very special place, because Koalas are usually solitary animals, who live peaceful lives amongst themselves.

There was a large number of Koalas living in Koala Town and as with any community, there were some characters among them. One of which was Bugbear, who was happy enough if everyone just left him alone. He had to be right all of the time and he had an opinion on just about everything and nothing was ever good enough. Bugbear seemed to have what people would call “red wire plugged into the green socket”, so the other Koalas usually kept him at a safe distance. Then there was Willy. The Koalas would say, “Will he or won’t he be getting up to mischief today?” He was a happy-go-lucky little fellow who was always fooling around, getting into trouble and generally

not taking himself too seriously. He was well liked but challenging at times. Then there was Mirabel, she had a heart of gold and somehow she was always able to see the good in other animals and in the things which happened around Koala Town. Mirabel loved helping out and most of the time she was happy just to be with her friends and family. Mirabel was loved and held in high esteem by the entire community; even Bugbear had a soft spot for her compassion and understanding. There was another furry fellow named Theodore. His parents had named him Theodore because they had expected him to become the future leader of the colony. As he grew older, he felt pressured and at times appeared distant and anxious. He was often shy and he was reluctant to play with the other Koalas. Theodore had become more of a follower than a leader and he would get into trouble sometimes when he played with Willy. His parents were a little disappointed with his lack of commitment and drive and this only seemed to make things worse.

Life went along as normal, with the Koalas sleeping most of the time, only to wake for a feed of gum leaves and a good old chat with family and friends. There was always plenty of food and good conversation to be shared.

That was until a new housing estate threatened to eat up bushland not too far from Koala Town. All of a sudden there was talk of

uncertainty, anger and fear in the Koala community. Nobody seemed to know what to do. Could houses one day swallow up their little community? Would the development come out this far?



“What are we going to do?”

“Where would we live?”

These were the questions on everyone’s lips.

“Will we end up like other Koalas living separate lives?”

“This could tear our colony apart!”

The Koalas became more and more restless, argumentative, snapping at each other, which created even more uncertainty and hostility.

Nestor did everything he could to reassure the Koalas and manage the conflict, which had now become an epidemic. It was eating away at the very fabric of this beautiful and once peaceful sanctuary. And Nestor's task became increasingly difficult as time went on.

“What is going to happen to us?”

“You don't know what you're talking about!”

“You make me so angry Bill.”

“It's all your fault Sam.”

“We're doomed!”

The Koalas were becoming anxious about the situation, catastrophizing, thinking of the worst case scenario. They simply couldn't focus on anything else.

Nestor did what all good leaders do; he stayed calm and focused on the issues and not the Koalas' behaviour. He called a meeting to discuss everyone's concerns, in order to come up with some ideas on how to stop the infighting and bring the community back together. Nestor knew if the Koalas couldn't get along then they wouldn't work together effectively to plan for their future.



“How can we fix this?”

“I’m sick of all the arguments!”

“Let’s stay and fight.”

“No, we need to run away.”

Nestor started the meeting with this question:

“How much can a Koala bear? We are all at breaking point as a result of our arguing and bickering with one another.”

Nestor continued by saying, “Conflict can be real or it can be imagined, it can be good or it can be bad.”

“At present we are worrying about something which may or may not

ever happen. Having said that, we need to be proactive and we need to work together now more than ever, so if our community is ever taken over by houses, we will have a plan.”

“I believe if we have a plan, the future will not only look brighter, it will be brighter. After all, knowledge can conquer fear.”

“The problem as I see it is, we are fighting amongst ourselves, so we can’t agree on anything. We need to relearn how to get along with each other, to respect one another again, to listen and acknowledge each other’s concerns and ideas. I have tried my best to bring us back together but alas I have failed. We are arguing more than ever however I have an idea, if you would just hear me out.”

“I would like to send a team of Koalas through the Valley of Trials to Mount Tribulation, in search of Yogi.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” asked one Koala.

“What good would that do?” asked another.

“They’re both reasonable questions,” replied Nestor.

“Firstly, yes it could be dangerous and that’s why we need to send a well selected team. And, I believe we will all benefit from the wise words of a very old friend of mine, Yogi, who lives at the top of Mount Tribulation. Yogi left our community many years ago, in his

search for knowledge and inner peace. Some of you will remember him.”

“He left a map and told me that should we ever need his help, just follow the route on the map and it will take us to him. I believe he can help us to get along again and in turn we can collectively plan for any issues we may face, now and in the future.”

Well, much discussion was had about Nestor’s idea. The community was divided. There was so much disagreement, it seemed that a decision would never be made.

Just when it all seemed hopeless, Mirabel spoke up, asking everyone to think of a time when they had all worked together to solve a common problem. After some confusion and argument over this question, Koala Bill piped up.

“I remember when Willy got stuck in the mud in the billabong and we all decided to join paws and link up, forming a Koala chain to pull him out.”

On recalling this event the Koalas started to laugh.

“Remember when we eventually got him out? He looked a sorrowful sight!”

“Yeah and then he had that cheeky expression on his face, when he knew he was safe.”



Then Sally recalled a time when they thought a wild dingo was stalking the community and everyone was terrified. They all put their heads together to work out a way to catch the predator, before any of them got hurt, only to trap old Percy who had begun walking in his sleep and making funny growling noises. Once again they all laughed, not at Percy, just at the circumstances. Now a flood of conversation



arose about the good times they had shared over the years and about all the times they worked together to overcome concerns and issues they faced, and how supportive they were of each other during those trying times.

“What a wonderful community we all share, how lucky are we?” said a smiling faced Koala.

A different communal attitude and mindset had now taken over and the Koalas were more positive. However, this would prove to be short lived.

“Remember when?”

“We did a good job then!”

“Those were the days”

“I think we should go ahead with Nestors’ plan,” said Stewy,

“So do I, “said Ivan.

Then there was agreement, “let’s go for it!”

“The question is, who do we send?” said Mallory, the unofficial mother of the colony.

“Ahh,” said Nestor, “I have chosen what I believe is a wonderful team.

I would love to hear your thoughts on each Koala I have chosen. I think Mirabel, Theodore, Willy & Bugbear would make an admirable team.”

Discussion was now being generated around the suitability or unsuitability of Nestor’s choices.

“I can see why he selected Mirabel, she would be an asset to any team,” said one Koala.

“Willy may be a bit mischievous but he is adventurous and he thinks outside the square,” said another Koala.

“Theodore lacks confidence,” said another Koala “And he is a bit of a follower. Having said that, I have seen flashes of greatness in him, from time to time. Like the time he calmed us all down when we were trying to capture what we believed was a wild dingo.”

“If it wasn’t for Theodore, I don’t know what we would have done.”

“Yes, yes, he is a good choice,” said Mallory.

“But what about Bugbear, what good will he be? Being as argumentative and opinionated as he is,” said a rather angry Koala.

Bugbear immediately replied, “What do you mean argumentative? It’s hard not to be argumentative when I’m surrounded by incompetence

and when I'm right most of the time. I'm as capable as anyone else in this team."

Bugbear huffed "And if you don't like it, you can all go and ..."

With that Nestor interrupted "Yes, yes, we get your point Bugbear and thanks for agreeing to go along. It's greatly appreciated." Having just inadvertently volunteered to take part in the journey, Bugbear was thinking to himself, "What the heck did I just get myself into?"

Nestor said he had chosen Bugbear for a very special reason, which would become evident upon the safe return of the team.

The Koalas were again arguing with each other and their high spirits were now waning. But they all eventually agreed that the team Nestor had selected should go and find Yogi and learn all they can about communication, conflict management & how to maintain and enhance relationships within their community.

Willy, Mirabel, Theodore and Bugbear all said their goodbyes to their families and friends. They also had a last minute discussion with Nestor, who wished them well and handed them the map which would lead them to the top of Mount Tribulation. He told them how proud he was to have them as friends. He also told them that Yogi had insisted that if anyone was to come and see him, they must follow the map precisely, without deviation.