

La Perouse Summer Camp

SOME CANDID COMMENT

by Little Chief Eagle-Eye

Just a day or two before the children of the great out-back were due to arrive in Sydney to pitch their camps at La Perouse, and prepare to explore the wonders of a mighty city and to bathe and bake on its glorious beaches, Great Chief Bald Eagle, who presides over all the lesser birds at Head Office, came to my eyrie and fixed a twinkling eye upon me.

"Eagle-Eye", he said, completely ignoring my full title, "I want you to keep your eyes and ears open for any funny little happenings at the Summer Camp and write them down for *Dawn*, so all the children who did not get to the camp this year can read about them and have a good laugh and be happy even though they had to stay at home.

"Oh, Great Bald One", I replied, not using his full title because he had not used mine, "suppose nothing funny happens at the Summer Camp. What then?"

"Senseless One", he roared, using a more applicable title this time, "you will write funny stories about the Camp, whether they happen or not. I, Great Chief Bald Eagle have spoken."

I felt that I should say something more about that, but I couldn't think of what I wanted to say until he had disappeared round the corner, followed by Sir Secretary, who turned to grin a smirky grin in my direction before he too disappeared round the corner into his hollow tree. Just then a roaring blast from the direction of the new Quay Railway Station shook the building and reminded me of what I wanted to say. I looked over at Mr. Green Parrakeet to make sure that he was still absorbed in nursing the arrow wound he received from Cupid's bow at last year's summer camp, and I looked to see whether little Mrs. Rene Wren, who flits from branch to branch and hops from shoulder to shoulder, was out of sight and hearing. Then I said it . . . as softly as I could. After that I felt better and the job didn't seem so hard as it sounded at first.

On Saturday, the 5th January, the first batch of children from out back of Bourke arrived, bringing to Sydney the rural fragrance of gum leaves and sheep to be mingled with and absorbed by the odours which only a big city can produce.

They were met by Mr. Jeffrey, Supervisor of La Perouse Reserve, who guided his car with his elbow stumps, because he had forgotten to stop gnawing when his finger nails had all been eaten while he tried to remember all that he had to remember during the preparations for the Camp.

Naturally, the youngsters were almost stunned by the bigness of the city and everything in it.

"Look at all the cars" said the first boy to recover from shock. "Look at all the people" said another. "Would ya take a look at that great big shop," said yet another, as the car came to a halt at a red light.

Just then a workman started operating a jack-hammer startlingly close to the car. As the great hammer chattered its way through solid cement, an eight-year-old in the front seat dived under Mr. Jeffrey's coat tail and yelled: "Hurry up, and get us away from that great big woodpecker."

At last came the time for the first swim in the surf. "Killer" Cain, a big, barrel-chested boy from Moree, dived fearlessly in and struck bravely out to sea. At thirty yards a big wave struck him head on and turned him over backwards. Hastily he made for the beach and flopped on his stomach on the sand. His colour was not good and all the "Killer" urge had left him.

"What happened?" I asked, quite unnecessarily. "I met a big wave" he sickly replied. "What happened then?" I asked, still quite unnecessarily. "I think I swallowed the most of it, sir" he gasped, and promptly set about showing me just how much he had swallowed.

Apparently they are accustomed to having salt with the beef, but never with their bath water, at Moree.

Really, you know, these kiddies didn't do and say the funny things I had hoped they would do and say to make my job easy and to keep me out of trouble with Great Chief Bald Eagle. Mostly they were just normal kids who knew how to behave and have a good time anywhere, without making other people miserable. Their parents and teachers can well be proud of them.

A lot of people, from the Superintendent down to me, have given a lot of thought, a lot of time and a lot of labour to make this year's Camp a happy one for the youngsters of out-back. Now that it is all over, I am sure that every one of them is looking forward to doing the same again for next year's batch.

Many happy memories have gone to the west with these boys and girls, and many a tale of the city will be told round the camp fires of Dubbo, Walgett and Bourke.

When asked what was tops in their two weeks' stay at the Camp, it seemed that they all shouted, "Luna Park". It was shouted so loudly by the boys and by most of the girls that I couldn't have heard if some shy maiden had softly said "Harry" or "Georgie" or "Danny". But I wonder and I wonder. You see, I am Little Chief Eagle-Eye.