

My Friend, Magpie

Book Two

By William Loader



Magpie

I have a special friend and he is called, Magpie. He's a real magpie and we have known each other for hundreds of days – even more than that.

He sits on the fence which is just about as high as my head and we talk. Sometimes I feed him with a few seeds of grain.

If I'm sitting down at the table outside he drops down onto the table and once he even perched on my lap.

He is very beautiful with a sleek white back and sharply contrasting black feathers on his front and underneath. When he is close to me I can see how well his coat of feathers sits together and how clean he keeps himself.



He often talks – in a magpie kind of way – and I have come to understand what he is saying.

In fact he tells me lots of things about himself and his family and about magpies in general.

What he tells me is so interesting, that I thought I should tell you about our conversations. Often I need to start by asking a question and then off he goes and I listen.

Here are some more of his stories:



11. Magpie and Wheatie

Magpie was eating and when he had finished, he sat for along time very still, thinking.

He was looking at a grain of wheat and began to imagine himself having a conversation. The grain of wheat, which he later called “Wheatie”, looked very frightened.



“Why are you so
afraid?”
asked magpie.

“I’m scared that one day I might get hurt. I’m so scared,” said Wheatie.

“You don’t need to worry,” said magpie. “If you get a cut, it will heal – especially if you keep it clean and don’t have an infection. It will just take time.”



“But what if I feel sad?
It would be terrible to be sad,”
cried Wheatie.

“Feeling sad is just like having
a cut,” said magpie.

“It hurts for a while, but then
it will heal.

It’s OK to feel sad sometimes.
Give it time and it will go
away.”

Wheatie still looked worried, very worried.

“What if I feel bad? What if I do something bad? I would feel awful. I’d feel just like rubbish,” moaned Wheatie.

“It’s OK to feel bad sometimes when you’ve done something wrong. When you own up to it, the bad feeling will gradually go away.

God forgives you.

You can forgive yourself.

Everyone makes mistakes and we can all start again.”



Wheatie wasn't finished.

In a very soft voice Wheatie said:
"But what if I die?"

"Everyone dies," said magpie.
"Then you go to be with God.
There's nothing to be afraid of."



Just then magpie leaned down closer to Wheatie and in a moment picked Wheatie up in his beak and swallowed. Down went Wheatie, like down a slippery slide, all in the dark, down , down, until Wheatie landed in a warm soft bed, magpie's tummy, and went fast asleep.



After three days magpie was again sitting on his favourite perch when plop: down dropped Wheatie in magpie's plop onto the sandy soil.

Soon the rain came and washed the plop and Wheatie deep into the sandy soil.

After a week a tiny green shoot appeared, popping its head above the sand. Soon it was a blade of grass and then a full grown clump of wheat.

One day magpie looked down and saw the wheat that had sprouted already forming new ears of grain, so he hopped down right next to the plant. Smiling inside he then whispered to the plant: “I told you it would be alright!”

Magpie knew it was all in his imagination, but he also knew I would enjoy the story and that what he said was true.



12. Magpie and Babies

I had just got back from my morning walk, feeling very refreshed, sitting outside having breakfast, when my friend, magpie, dropped down onto the top of the chair on the other side of the table.



“Good morning to you, magpie!” I said.

“Good morning to you,” he replied. “I saw you on your morning walk, but, tell me, why did you keep stopping?”

“Well,” I said. “I noticed that every now and again there was a magpie on the path in front of me, picking up pieces of dry grass and small twigs. You magpies are very tidy people, aren’t you.”
I also think their coats are very neat and tidy, too.

Magpie smiled – in the way that magpies do, by ruffling his feathers and making a loud gurgling sound.

“Don’t you know it’s time to build nests? They were gathering building materials. Late winter we build nests. In spring we lay eggs when it is starting to get warm. We sit on them to keep them even warmer. Then after a few days they hatch and out comes a little magpie with fluffy grey feathers. In just a few more days it is up and about, walking, ready to start its life as summer begins and not very long after can learn to fly.”

“That’s very well organised,” I said. “So it’s every year the same: prepare the nests in late winter or early spring, eggs in spring, babies in late spring and early summer. And that’s when some of you swoop down on us when we are walking.”

“Of course we do,” said magpie. “We have to protect our eggs and our baby birds against humans who are always trying to climb our trees and destroy our eggs and our nests. We know they do that because our parents told us, and their parents told them, and their parents told them – we know!”

“Strange,” I said. “I’ve never ever seen anyone trying to climb trees to destroy your little ones. I’m sure it doesn’t happen.” Then I remembered that we had had this conversation before. Magpies sometimes keep believing things even when they are no longer true. “Well, you certainly are well organised,” I continued.

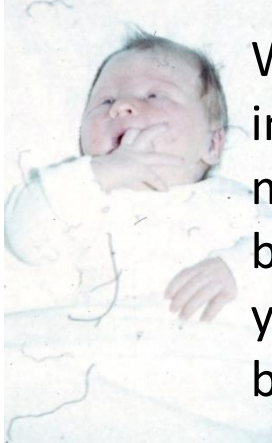
“Yes, unlike you humans,” magpie replied. “To begin with, you don’t lay eggs. Then you have your babies at any time through the year – even in the middle of a cold winter or a hot summer! And then it takes months before they can get up and walk. Even the animals are better organised than that. They, too, follow the seasons like us.

And then I see your people walking the streets with their babies all wrapped up in oblong boxes on wheels. Very strange!”

“Prams,” I said. “Those are prams. We don’t build nests, but we do take a lot of care making sure we have safe and warm houses and that babies are safe and warm when we take them for a walk.”



For a moment I thought magpie was going to tell me that we should learn to be better organised and be like magpies. I was ready to explain that for animals it's easier. They can produce babies which can walk. some of them, from the very first day.



When our ancestors first started to walk on two legs instead of four, it all became much more difficult. Our mothers had to bring their babies into the world long before they were finished being made because when you walk upright the gap between your legs simply becomes too narrow to give birth to full grown babies.

Sometimes magpie seems to know what I am thinking. He looked down at me and said, "You know that we were walking on two legs long before you humans appeared on this earth and even before the animals?"



Of course, he was right, but then, when I thought he was about to say that magpies are better than humans, he twitched his head, looked me straight in the eye and said: “We are different. We are not the same. You do it your way and we do it our way. We both know building a safe place for our young is important. We both know that we need to care about them. You have to surround your babies for a long, long time with love and care before they can walk. That must be very good for them. We get them up and going straightaway. We are just different.”

Magpie had that very wise look in his eyes.

You can see a lot when you fly around over the trees.

I knew he was right.



“Yes,” I said. “We all belong. We all matter. And that’s why we don’t really climb up trees to try to destroy your babies.” I had to have the last word.

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” he insisted. “It’s not what my grandma told me.”

All the same, I sensed we agreed. Magpie gurgled a magpie’s gurgle and was soon off up into the trees. I was glad we were friends.

Deep down I also thanked God for making such a wonderful world in which so many different kinds of birds and animals have developed, including ourselves with our special needs and special advantages – even if we can’t fly, at least not like magpie.



13. Magpie – a Murderer?

Magpie surprised me one morning. Dropping down onto the table in front of me he declared:

“I killed them all! I pecked them all to death. They’re all dead. All lying under the tree covered in ants!”

and immediately flew off again.

I was shocked.

What was he saying?

That’s terrible.

I had to investigate, so I quickly got up and took a walk to the trees, and to his family tree in particular, to see.



But there were no dead magpies. No sign of them.
His sister was sitting in the branches
and the one I think is his mother was nearby pecking for
worms in the grass.

I hurried back. Magpie had already
returned. “That’s a relief,” I said.
“Nobody’s dead at all!”



“It’s not a relief,” magpie answered.
“I killed them all in my thoughts.”

“Did this just happen?” I asked, wondering
what magpie was really talking about.

“No,” he said. “It happened some weeks ago and it was serious, very serious.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“I got angry and then very mad. I squawked at them. I pecked at some of them and my mind filled with hate. I hated them and told them so. I killed them in my thoughts. Three of them were my friends. I hurt them so much that they are no longer my friends. I still see them but they never come to my tree. We never fly together. I lost three good friends.”



This was serious. I could see. Magpie's feathers were all ruffled up. He was upset and sad. It you're nasty to people you can't expect them to be your friends.

"But what about the others?" I asked. "You hurt them, too? Are they still your friends?"

"Yes," he answered, " but only because I was really sorry and said so and they knew I wasn't just saying it but meant it. They're still my friends, but I'll never hate and hurt them like that again."

"But everyone gets angry at times. What do you do now when you get angry?" I asked.

"If they do something which hurts me or upsets me, I tell them how I feel, and we can usually work it out. I don't try to hurt them back. I don't peck at them. I don't hate them. I've stopped doing that. That's why I lost some of my friends," he added.

This all sounded very good, but I wondered. “Don’t you sometimes get really upset? Don’t you find that sometimes others don’t listen to you? What do you do then?” I asked.

“I fly off to the banksia tree,” he replied “and sit high up on the sky branch all on my own where no one can see me except the sky. That’s my special place. I sit there until I calm down. There I know that the sun shines on me and I wait till I feel nice and warm under my feathers. The sun shines on me even when there are clouds because I know it is shining behind them.



The banksia flowers are like candles that remind me of the sun. I call it my sun tree. When I let the sun shine on me I can stop feeling bad about people and stop feeling bad about myself. I don’t have to be afraid. I don’t have to pretend. I can tell the truth to myself. My feathers all fall back into place and I sit and sing to the wind.”

“Do you do that often?” I asked – because it sounded to me a bit like prayer.

“Yes,” he replied, “and not just when I’m mad. I like to be still and sing to the wind and sometimes Crow comes and sits beside me, because it’s her favourite branch, too.



Sometimes I can tell Crow about all the things that trouble me and then we sit in the sun and together we sing to the wind.”

I wanted to tell magpie that God is like the sun, that long ago Jesus taught us not to hate and hurt people, and how wonderful it is to live together in peace and love and not hate, but there was no time.

A gust of wind came and magpie was off into the trees. Soon I heard him singing to the wind, singing to the wind. And did I imagine it: I thought I could also hear the wind singing, too.

14. Magpie and the Lost Girl

Magpie dropped down onto the table, looked up at me,
and asked: “Did I tell you about the little girl?”

“No,” I said, wondering what he meant.

“The girl lost in the bush?” he added.

“Oh yes,” I said, “I heard about it on the news. They found her. But how do you know about it?” I asked.

“I was there,” said magpie and so began to tell his story.



“I was flying over the bush, together with friends, when I noticed a little girl walking in the bush. At first I thought this was strange. Where were her parents? She just walked and walked. Soon I noticed that she was walking around the same tracks and going round in circles.

So I dropped down closer to see. She was crying. She was clearly lost and confused. I wondered what to do. So I sat on a high branch and watched her. After a while she sat down under a tree on some soft grass and before I knew it, she lay down and sobbed herself to sleep.

Poor little girl, I thought.



Then I had an idea. I flew down to where she was, saw that her pink handkerchief, wet with tears, was lying beside her and picked it up in my beak and flew back up into the tree. I don't think she saw me. She really did seem to be asleep.



Next I decided to fly off to the edge of the bush to see if I could see anyone looking for her. And, sure enough, there were her mum and dad, looking very worried. They were a long way away from her and were searching the bush and calling her name, Wendy! Wendy!'

There were so many paths in the bush; they might never find her. So I looked at the paths and which ones might lead to her and which one they were on.

I could see that they would soon come to a choice about which path to take where their path met others. So I identified the right path for them and dropped the pink handkerchief on that path some distance from where the paths crossed but close enough for them to notice.

Sure enough, when they came to where the paths crossed, I heard the mum say, 'Look, there's a hanky. That's Wendy's. She must have gone down here!'



Success, I thought. So I flew back to where the little girl was. Was there something else I could take. She had a pink ribbon in her hair. But how could I get that? I dropped down beside her and while she was fast asleep I carefully took hold of the ribbon in my beak and pulled. She squealed and she must have seen me, but I was off.

This time I could see that the parents were making progress, but they could easily take the wrong path at the next time the paths crossed, so I waited for them to come and when they stopped and wondered where to go, I quickly dropped the ribbon down the right track.

They saw me. ‘Look at that, ‘ they said. ‘That cheeky magpie has stolen Wendy’s ribbon. How terrible! It must have swooped down on her. But this is probably the best way to go.’

I was relieved. It was the right way to go. It was a long windy path, but they were getting closer.

They started calling out her name again, ‘Wendy! Wendy!’

I had woken Wendy up and she was crying. When she heard her name, she cried out loud, ‘Mummy! Daddy!’



That was enough. As I sat on a branch nearby, I saw them find her and take her up into their arms. There were tears, now tears of joy.

The parents noticed me on the branch and I heard them say, ‘There’s that terrible magpie! Magpies are terrible.’

Then Wendy looked up at me – and through her tears of joy she smiled. I think she must have known what I had done, but I will never know.”



“Magpie, you’re a champion,” I said.

“But you would have done that, wouldn’t you?” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “But I can’t fly!”

15. Magpie and Christmas



What was that in magpie's beak?

Magpie had dropped down onto the table in front of me, carrying something.

At first I thought it was an insect, but then it was shiny.

Looking more closely I saw that it was one of those very small bulbs which are used in strings of Christmas lights.

“What are you doing with that?” I asked.

It was certainly not something to be swallowed.

“I'm taking it home to my nest,” magpie explained.

“But it's a Christmas light,” I said. “What are you going to do with it?”

“Oh, I’ve got lots of them. I put them into the nest, all around the side of the nest and they shine,” he explained.

“But they won’t shine without electricity, magpie,” I said. “Where did you get them?”

“I know they won’t shine that way, but they shine in the sun. I got them from the Christmas lights which people hang on their trees and their houses.”

I had wondered why some strings of Christmas lights had gaps. This was very strange, but before I could ask, he went on:

“They have Christmas. I want to have Christmas, too.”





What could magpie possibly understand about Christmas, I thought. So I asked, “So what do you think Christmas is about?”

Magpie responded very confidently. “Of course I know what Christmas means. It’s all about baby Jesus and his father, Santa, and Mary his mother. He was born in a shelter where lots of magpies used to roost and they sang songs to him and swooped down on anyone who came near. He came to be friends with us magpies and teach us how to share.”

I was puzzled. How could I help magpie sort all this out? So I started with Santa Claus. “Santa Claus is short for St Nicholas who was a bishop a long time ago who used to visit children at Christmas time bringing them rewards if they were good or punishment if they were bad. And these days people talk about Santa as an old man dressed in red with a white beard who brings gifts and rides in a sleigh drawn by reindeer. But he’s not Jesus’ father.”

I waited for magpie to react. I think he understood, but then he continued, “And Jesus came to open supermarkets where people could buy presents and if you look, every supermarket has decorations at Christmas time, to remember that Jesus started people having supermarkets and that’s where I find these little light bulbs.”



I didn’t want to offend magpie, but I felt I needed to help him get it right. So I said: “Magpie, Jesus didn’t invent supermarkets. He came to teach people how to share.”

“That’s what I said,” chirped magpie, a little impatiently. “He came to be friends with us magpies and teach us how to share.”

“Well, not just magpies,” I said, “people, too.” I didn’t know anything about Jesus and magpies and I’m sure he was just making that up or perhaps it was an old magpie story. People make up stories about Christmas, so why shouldn’t magpies?

Magpie was silent for a long time and I wondered what he was thinking. Then he said: “When I sit in our nest with all those lights around me, I feel like I’m sitting in the centre of the universe.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. “We all belong together, you, humans, and we, magpies. We belong to the universe, to God’s creation, and in Jesus we know what God wants and what makes the universe work,” he continued.

He certainly got that right. I was amazed, even if he got some of the details wrong earlier.



“At Christmas time you will see us taking a walk in the bush and across lawns with our young ones, looking for worms. And as they squawk, we take the worms to them in our beaks and feed them. And sometimes we find birds that are weak or don’t have mothers and fathers, and we feed them, too. Have you seen us lately?”

Yes, I had, in fact. You see these big birds, the same size as their parents, still chirping like baby birds and running around wanting to be fed.

“We feed our children, too,” I answered. “And we also think about people who don’t have food and feed them, too, or help others feed them. Sometimes they are people in our communities.

Sometimes they live in countries a long way away and all we can do is send money to help others to feed them there where they live.”



Magpie look at me very intently. “Do you really care about people like that, like the way Jesus taught us? I mostly see you humans just keeping it all for yourselves and not doing much sharing at all. And you fight and you are mean and you try to kill magpies!”

I knew what was coming next. Magpie was going to tell me that humans climb into the trees to destroy their nests and that’s why they fly down and peck at them sometimes. I had heard that before. It wasn’t true.

“Yes,” I said, “we do care, just like you, and, yes, there are some people who at Christmas time think only of themselves and never share.”



Magpie shuffled his feathers back into place, made sure he had a good grip on the little light bulb, which he had placed on the table during our conversation, and smiling with a tilt of his head as only magpies can do, nodded goodbye to me and flew off up into the trees. I knew he understood.



He left me with a nice memory which I would carry into Christmas Day. He also left a little white blob on the table, which I knew I would need to clean off before we could eat there.

I sensed that he had also dropped some of his wrong ideas about Christmas and I wished more people I knew would do that, too.

16. Magpie and Easter

Magpie looked very worried as he dropped down onto the table one Easter Sunday. “What was wrong?” I thought.

As usual Magpie knew what I was thinking.

“Eggs,” he said. “Eggs!”

“What about eggs?” I asked.



“They are hunting eggs. Haven’t you seen them? The children are hunting eggs. Soon they’ll be climbing trees and taking our eggs, too!” Magpie’s feathers were all ruffled. I could see he was very upset.

“But you don’t have eggs in your nest at this time of year,” I said. “The children are hunting Easter eggs, chocolate eggs, which their parents have hidden,” I explained. “Haven’t you heard of the Easter bunny?” I asked.



“You, humans, do very strange things,” Magpie replied. “You make eggs that don’t hatch into anything. You pretend rabbits hide the eggs. And then you let your children eat them. Why do you do such strange things?”

“Where should I begin?” I thought. So I started: “You know sometimes you see crosses on the top of churches?”



“Yes, of course,” replied Magpie. “We magpies like to perch on the cross bar. I think it’s very kind of church people to put them there for us.”

I began again. “Magpie, the cross is something terrible. You know about Jesus. Remember how he came to change people, to teach them to share? Some people didn’t want to share and killed him by nailing him onto a cross. That’s how they sometimes killed people a long time ago.”

Magpie sat very still, like he was thinking.
“Why do you humans do things like that? Why do you hate people? Why do you kill people? Why do some of you want to kill us magpies?”

Magpie was clearly upset again. He was right, but only half right. “We’re not all like that,” I said. “And especially people who follow the way of Jesus don’t do that – or they shouldn’t.” I had to be careful because magpie must have seen people who said they followed Jesus and still did cruel things.



Magpie bent his head down, looking at the table and for a long time said nothing. “It’s hopeless,” he said. “Jesus’ friends must have felt hopeless. Why didn’t they just give up? Sometimes I feel like giving up.” Then he moved to the edge of the table and did one great big plop, right into the garden.

“That’s what I feel like,” said Magpie when I hear that story.

He looked at me very intently and looked again at the garden. “Did you see that?” he asked, pointing with his beak to one of the many other plops he had done into that garden. “See what’s happened?” he asked.



I could see. There was a bright green plant growing right out of the middle of the plop. “That’s how it is,” Magpie explained. “My plop had some seed in it and the seeds then sprout and life begins again.”

“Yes, Magpie,” I said. “That’s exactly what happened with Jesus. He was like a seed. Everyone thought he was dead and buried, but then his friends began to say: ‘No, he’s not dead. He’s alive. We’ve seen him!’ We don’t really know for sure what they saw, but it convinced them that it wasn’t all hopeless. God had taken Jesus to be with himself. He is alive and wherever people share and show love he’s right there with them, even though you can’t see him.”

“That’s what I meant,” said Magpie. “Life begins again, like with my plops. But why are those kids hunting eggs?” he asked.

“Eggs are like seeds,” I explained.
“They are a sign of new life.”



I think I convinced Magpie, but then he answered: “I’m sure your children couldn’t possibly understand all that. They don’t think it’s about Jesus and about his way of love coming back to life. They’re just interested in chocolate.” Sometimes magpie sees things very clearly.

“Yes,” I admitted. “That’s all it is for some people and nothing changes. They can even use the Easter egg hunt just to be greedy and keep it all for themselves. Jesus must get very disappointed.”

“Don’t complain about the children,” answered Magpie. “Watch me with my baby magpies. I just do what all good magpies do and they follow.”

His mood had now changed considerably. He proudly lifted up his head and did one more very big plop. “See,” he said. “That’s Easter.”

And off he flew.



17. Magpie and the Easter Bunny

Magpie had something in his mouth. It was colourful. “You can’t eat that,” I said. “It’s the wrapping of an Easter egg!”

“I know,” said Magpie, “but when I saw it on the ground it reminded me of Elaine.”

I remembered Elaine, too.

Here is the story about Elaine

....

“Really cross! I’m really cross!” shouted Elaine.

“Cross, cross, cross!” and she threw her book at Stephen her brother and just missed him.

Galah hopped down onto the window sill and talked to Elaine very seriously: “Don’t be cross, Elaine. You nearly hit your brother. That would have hurt him. You mustn’t be cross!”



Elaine had a lot of respect for Galah and decided to try not to be cross.

She swallowed her cross feeling and inside it grew like a balloon. It grew and grew and the next time Stephen accidentally stood on her drawing she exploded.

“Ahhh! You stupid ...”

Lots of words came out which we cannot say, but Elaine was mighty cross, cross, CROSS, CROSS!

This time she picked up a chair and threw it across the room, just missing Stephen, but one of its legs smashed into the bookcase and broke her favourite toy.





Galah was there again, shaking its head, and saying, “Elaine, you mustn’t get cross like that. That’s really bad!”

Elaine felt a bit ashamed, but she was still cross.

She swallowed her cross feeling again and this time she said to herself, “I’m never going to be cross like that, again.”

“Good,” said Galah.

But Elaine still had the balloon inside and again it grew, a big balloon inside full of cross feeling, but this time it was heavy. It got so heavy that Elaine felt heavy and lifeless. “What’s the matter?” asked her mum. “What’s got into you? You used to be full of life.”

Elaine just wanted to stay in her room and lie on her bed. “I don’t know,” she answered her mum. “I just don’t feel very OK.” She even forgot about her feeling inside. But really she still had it but she had forgotten why.

Now Magpie has very good eyes and is also very wise and one day when Elaine was lying on her bed, Magpie hopped down onto her window ledge and because the window was open, hopped right over to Elaine's bedside table.



“Elaine,” Magpie said, “you’re not happy. What’s wrong?” Elaine said, “Nothing. Nothing.” And then a bit louder “Nothing!” Magpie didn’t fly away. He didn’t even frown – if magpies can frown. Elaine was a little surprised. She was used to being told off.

She looked at Magpie and began to say, “Magpie, ...” but then stopped. Inside her balloon was welling up and now it seemed filled with water. Elaine began to cry.

Magpie just sat there with her. Elaine was again surprised. “Magpie isn’t telling me I should stop crying,” Elaine thought. “Perhaps, I should say ‘sorry I’m crying’”, she thought. So she did.

Magpie heard her and simply said, “That’s OK. It’s always OK to be sad.” That was like letting Elaine burst her balloon and she cried. She cried quite a lot and Magpie just listened. Elaine’s feelings of being cross had now become feelings of being sad.



“It’s OK to be sad,” repeated Magpie. “It’s also OK to be cross, as long as you don’t hurt anyone, because when you get cross, you will always feel sad. Anger is always a second feeling. The first feeling is sadness or hurt or disappointment. You get cross because something has hurt you or made you sad.”

Elaine thought about that for a long time. “So if I get cross and angry, I need to find where it all began. First you feel hurt and sad and then you feel angry.” She said all this out loud because she often talked to herself when she was alone.

Magpie nodded. “Yes,” he said. “when you find yourself being angry, it’s OK to be angry. Feel your anger and then try to feel the hurt or sadness which lies behind it.”

“But it sometimes makes me scared,” said Elaine. “I’m scared of being sad and I’m scared of being angry.”

Magpie looked at Elaine and repeated very softly: “Everyone gets angry. Everyone gets sad. If you don’t let yourself feel your feelings, it’s like you have a bad cut and you don’t wash it clean. Your tears are what helps to wash your hurt clean.”



Elaine understood that because once she did have a nasty cut and she didn't wash the dirt out of it and it festered and became really sore and she had to go to the doctor.

“If you don't let yourself feel your hurt and your sadness, it will fester, and you will find yourself getting very angry or sad and eventually not even knowing why,” added Magpie.

“This is what Easter is about,” Magpie continued. “Death and resurrection. Seeds get buried like they're dead and then come to life.

It's like autumn, winter and spring. In autumn and winter things die and in spring they spring to life.”



Magpie chuckled in a magpie kind of way because he knew that Easter isn't spring time in Australia but autumn, but it was still true and perhaps Elaine wouldn't know.

Next time Stephen came trampling into her room Elaine got mad again, but this time she did two things differently.

She was angry and very angrily told Stephen:

“When you walk all over my drawings, you crumple them up. I can’t always straighten them out.”

Stephen was taken a little by surprise.

Did he know why? He wasn’t just being shouted at.

Elaine was telling him about how what he did messed things up for her, how she was feeling.

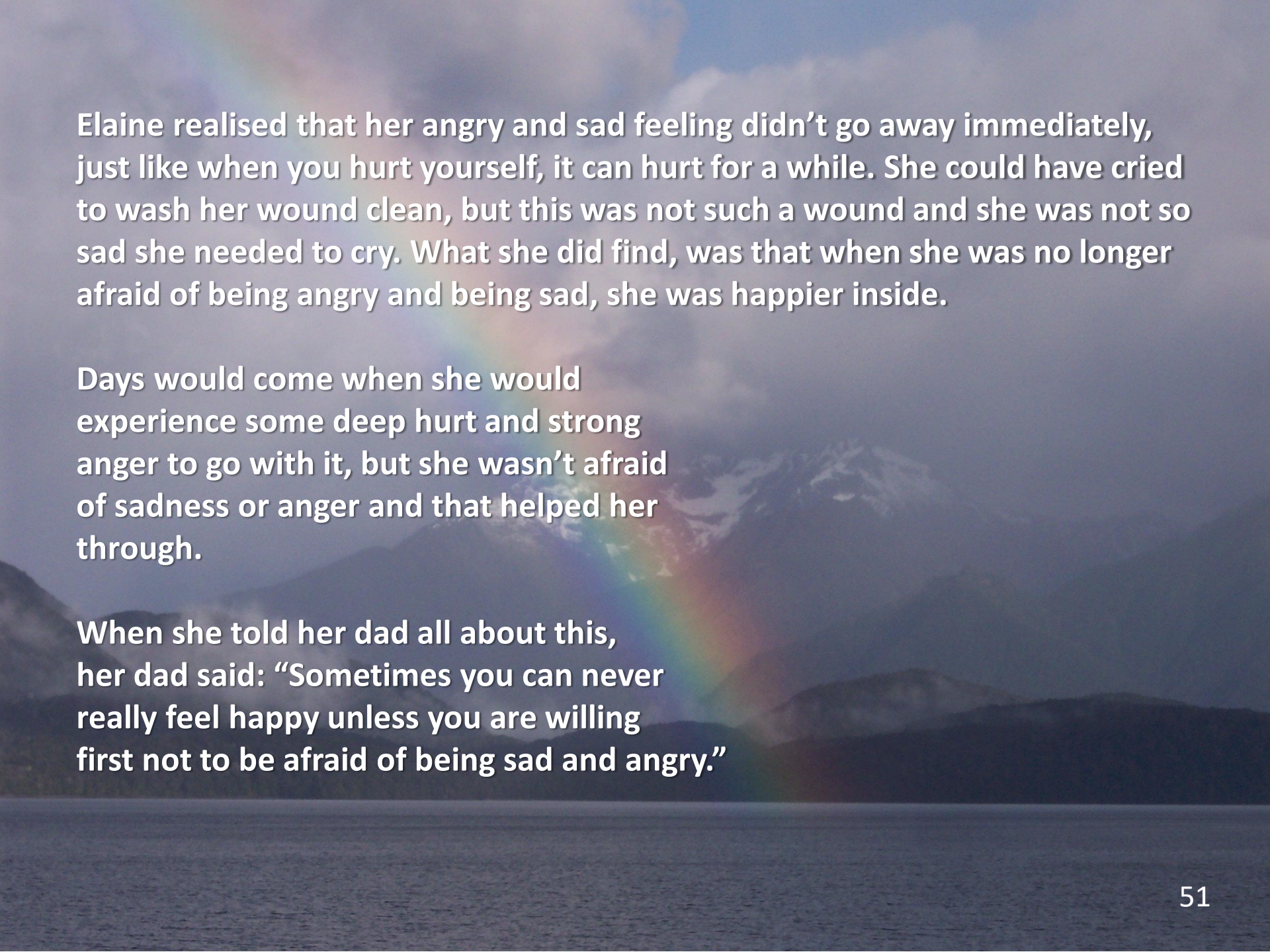
Perhaps Stephen didn’t know why, but he found himself saying, “Oh, sorry, sis.”

She didn’t throw anything at him. She wasn’t just angry.

She knew why and she knew what made her sad.

There was nothing left over to fill her inside anger balloon or her sadness balloon.



A scenic background image of a lake with mountains and a rainbow. The sky is overcast with grey clouds, and a vibrant rainbow arches across the center of the frame. In the background, there are dark, silhouetted mountains, some with patches of snow. The foreground shows the calm surface of a lake.

Elaine realised that her angry and sad feeling didn't go away immediately, just like when you hurt yourself, it can hurt for a while. She could have cried to wash her wound clean, but this was not such a wound and she was not so sad she needed to cry. What she did find, was that when she was no longer afraid of being angry and being sad, she was happier inside.

Days would come when she would experience some deep hurt and strong anger to go with it, but she wasn't afraid of sadness or anger and that helped her through.

When she told her dad all about this, her dad said: "Sometimes you can never really feel happy unless you are willing first not to be afraid of being sad and angry."

Elaine didn't need her mum or dad to tell her to handle her anger in ways that did not hurt other people, her brother or anyone else, because Elaine discovered that with her new way of being angry and sad she didn't feel the need to hurt people.

It was from this time that Elaine found that she had many more friends. She was much more pleasant to be with. The best friends are those who you can agree with and disagree with but stay friends.

"I'm an Easter bunny!" said Elaine.

"Don't be silly," said Stephen. But inside Elaine said to herself. "I am really, because I'm not afraid to be sad and I know how to be glad."

With that she reached over to her bedside table, picked up the big chocolate Easter egg, broke it in half, gave one half to her brother and kept the other half for herself.

"Yes, I really am an Easter bunny!" she said.

Stephen had to smile – and the Easter egg was delicious.



Magpie smiled, too. “So where do you think I got this coloured paper?”

“Of course,” I said. I should have thought of that.” Magpie is really very wise.

I gave Magpie part of my Easter egg and he thanked me as usual and off he flew.



17. Magpie Shines

Magpie looked very fresh, all shiny.

“You’re looking good, today,” I said.

“I’m ok now,” answered magpie.

“I wasn’t ok yesterday.”

“Why, what happened?” I asked.

“Do you really want to know?”

I nodded. Of course I did.



“I was very sad,” began Magpie. “I’m getting older and I’m not as good as I was at picking up worms. I was so embarrassed. My children and grandchildren jumped about, finding lots of them. I found only one.”

“So what did you do?” I asked.

“I flew off on my own, up onto a high branch and felt very sad. They won’t care about me anymore, I thought. I’m just going to sit here till I die. That’s how I felt.”

“Goodness, that’s terrible,” I said. It almost made me cry and I wondered: how does a magpie cry?



“I was so sad,” continued Magpie, “that I fell asleep. But then I had a dream. There in front of me was a frowning magpie. ‘You’re no use now. Why don’t you try harder?’ It made me feel worse.



“Then he began to say all the things he thought I should do. It was a long list. After the first ten things, he said: ‘If you do these we might start to like you.’

“Then he tweeted off another ten things and said, ‘Do these and you’ll be useful.’ The list went on and on and I dreamt that each time he mentioned what I should do, one of my feathers fell off.



“Very soon I had lost all my feathers! I’m no good, I thought. I shall die – even in my dream.

“Then, just as I dreamt I had fallen to the ground to be eaten by a cat, I opened my eyes in my dream and there in front of me were my mum and my dad. My mum put her wings around me and whispered:

‘I love you, my special one.’ My dad did the same.

Each time they said it I grew a feather.

All my feathers started coming back.



“Then I remembered: what about all those things I need to do if I want to be loved? Each time I thought of that I lost a feather again.

“Fortunately, my mum and dad noticed what was happening and said. ‘Stop! We don’t love you because you have done lots of things or could do lots of things. We love you because you are you!’

That made my skin feel warm and I felt even warmer as I felt all my feathers coming back.

“My mum and dad died last year, but they were very much alive in my dream. I woke up with a jolt. Others from our family had landed on the same branch, so it shook. One of them held a worm out in front of my nose. Another gently stroke my feathers with its beak. They seemed to love me, too.

“That night I went off to sleep remembering my dream, but also remembering something else. They want me to love myself and I think I learned that that was a very good idea.”

With that, Magpie began to warble a warble I’d never heard before. When he was finished, he looked down at me and said: “Like my new feathers? Like my new song?”

I don’t always understand magpie language, but when I heard the warble, I knew what it was saying. It was what he had learned.

He’s an old magpie now, but I could see that inside he was new.

And his feather shone in the sun as he flew off.

It set me thinking. Does Magpie know that God loves him just like his mum and dad and that Jesus came to show us how to love ourselves and love others. Was Magpie kind to others?

If only I could go and see. If only I could fly!

