

The Ballad of the Drover's Dog

As told by to Paul Hemphill in Bondi in 1984, and illustrated by Gabrielle Tindall of Boggy Boggy Creek, near Bellingen in 1986



The Ballad of the Drover's Dog



On the slopes of Warrumbungle
Near Coonabarabran,
Where the cattle dog's the truest friend
Of the lonely cattleman,
Wherever dogs may gather
To do what dogs must do,
They never tire of listening to
The stirring tale of Blue.
One day, old Mick, the drover
Felt the bush had got him down.
He turned his battered Kingswood
To the lights of Sydney town.
He took with him old Bluey
As reward for a job well done;
The drover and the drover's dog
Drove east in search of fun.

Now Bluey'd been a drover's dog
Since he was but a pup,
And the biggest pond he had seen
Was the dam at Wagarrup;
But when he got to Bondi,
Quite unexpectedly,
This drover's dog went overboard
When first he saw the sea.

But all that shining water
And all that golden sand
Were straight away denied to him
For all dogs there were banned.
And the Beach Inspector chased him
To the streets of Waverley,
Where the Canine Control Units fought
To keep the town dog-free.

The reasons for his banishment
He could not understand.
The beaches were well-littered
With the junk of urban man.
And the surf was oft-times flavoured
With human calling cards.
It seemed to hypocritical
To hound poor dogs so hard!

Then he met a wise old-timer
Who said He'd show the way
To savour the delights of surf
While its keepers were away:
"They never go down early
And they never stay 'til dark,
And in wet and windy weather,
It's a doggie Luna Park".

The storm clouds came a 'rolling,
The wind howled for encores.
The waves dashed hard against the rocks
And surfies stayed indoors.
So Bluey went a 'rambling,
His spirit wild and free'
He saw a swimmer floundering
Out in the boiling sea.

He didn't stop to question.
Fear was unknown to Blue.
The instincts of a cattle dog
Told him what he should do.
He swam out 'til he reached the hand
That grasped at empty air.
He grabbed it, and struck back for land
To tow the swimmer there.

He dragged the drowning man to shore,
And as he gasped for breath,
The Bondi Beach Inspector
Came a 'running through the wet.
And with his strength depleted,
Bluey jumped into the waves,
But caught up in a rip-tide,
He went to a sailor's grave.

The Beach Inspector reached the man
Who Bluey'd brought to land,
For this had been the reason
That He'd run onto the sand.
He had not seen the cattle dog,
Nor seen his daring deed;
And when the swimmer told his tale,
His manly heart did bleed.

The story hit The Evening News
In letters big and bold.
In all the towns of New South Wales
The story was soon told
Of how the gallant cattle dog
Did brave the raging storm.
From Blue's supreme sacrifice,
A legend was soon born.

And out there in the dry lands
Near Coonabarabran,
Where the cattle dog's the truest friend
Of the lonely cattleman,
The hearts of beasts beat faster
And the eyes of dogs are dewey,
As mothers tell their pups the tale
Of Mick the Drover's Bluey.

The Story of Swansea Jack

Swansea Jack was a black retriever born in 1930. He lived in the North Dock- River Tawe district of Swansea with his master, William Thomas. Jack would always respond to cries for help from the water, diving into the water and pulling whoever was in difficulty to safety at the dockside. He made his first rescue in June 1931, when he saved a 12 year old boy. This went unreported, but a few weeks later, this time in front of a crowd, Jack rescued a swimmer from the docks. His photograph appeared in the local paper and the local council awarded him a silver collar. In 1936, he was awarded the prestigious 'Bravest Dog of the Year' award by the 'Star' newspaper. He received a silver cup from the Lord Mayor of London, and he is still the only dog to have been awarded two bronze medals ('the canine V.C.') by the National Canine Defence League. Legend has it that in his lifetime, he saved 27 people from the Docks and River Tawe. Sadly, in October 1937, Swansea Jack died after eating rat poison. His burial monument, paid for by public subscription, is located on the Promenade in Swansea near St.Helen's Rugby Ground. In 2000, Swansea Jack was named 'Dog of the Century' by NewFound Friends of Bristol who train domestic dogs in aquatic rescue techniques.

Up there with in the canine roll of honour with Greyfriars Bobby, the faithful Edinburgh pooch, and Laika the doomed Soviet astrodog, and the dog who sat on the tucker box nine miles from Gundagai. The latter was memorialized by a famous statue beside the deadly Hume, and long since stranded by a bypass. As I write, in 2011, the top Australian Movie awards went to Red Dog, a lightweight, feel good film about a red kelpie who won the hearts of an outback mining town.



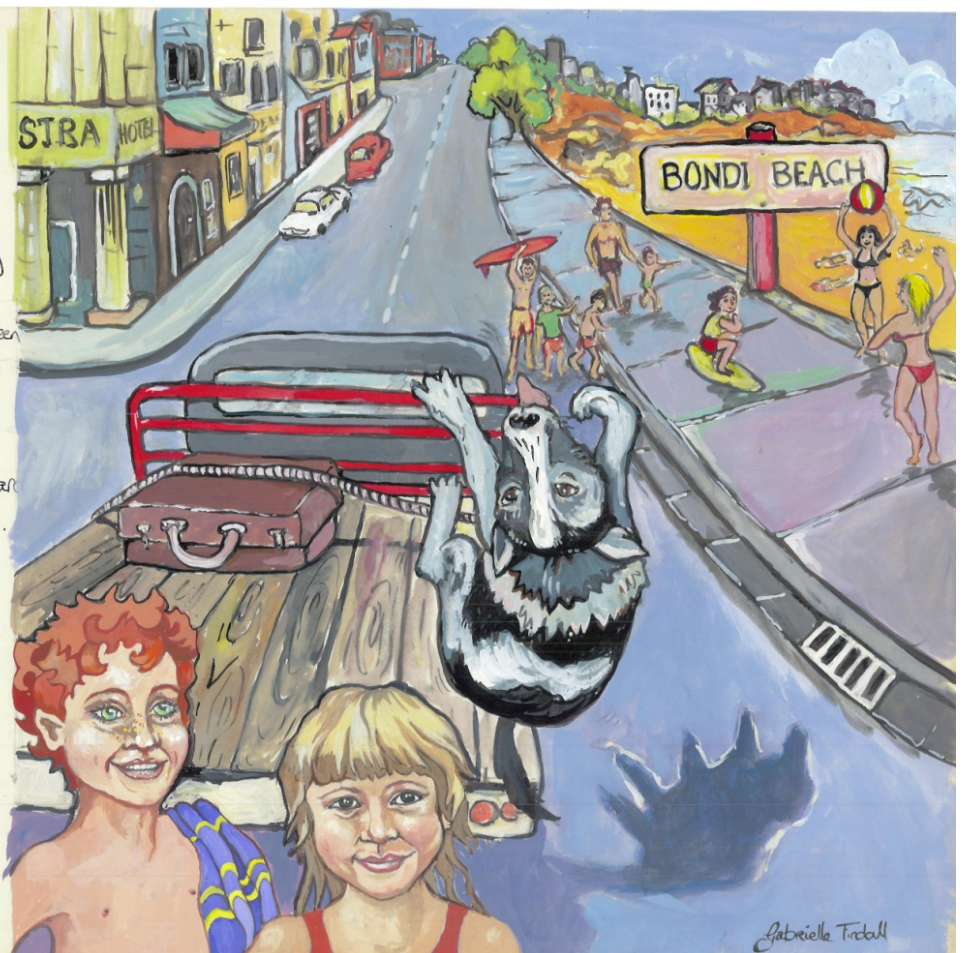
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Gabrieli Tinkall

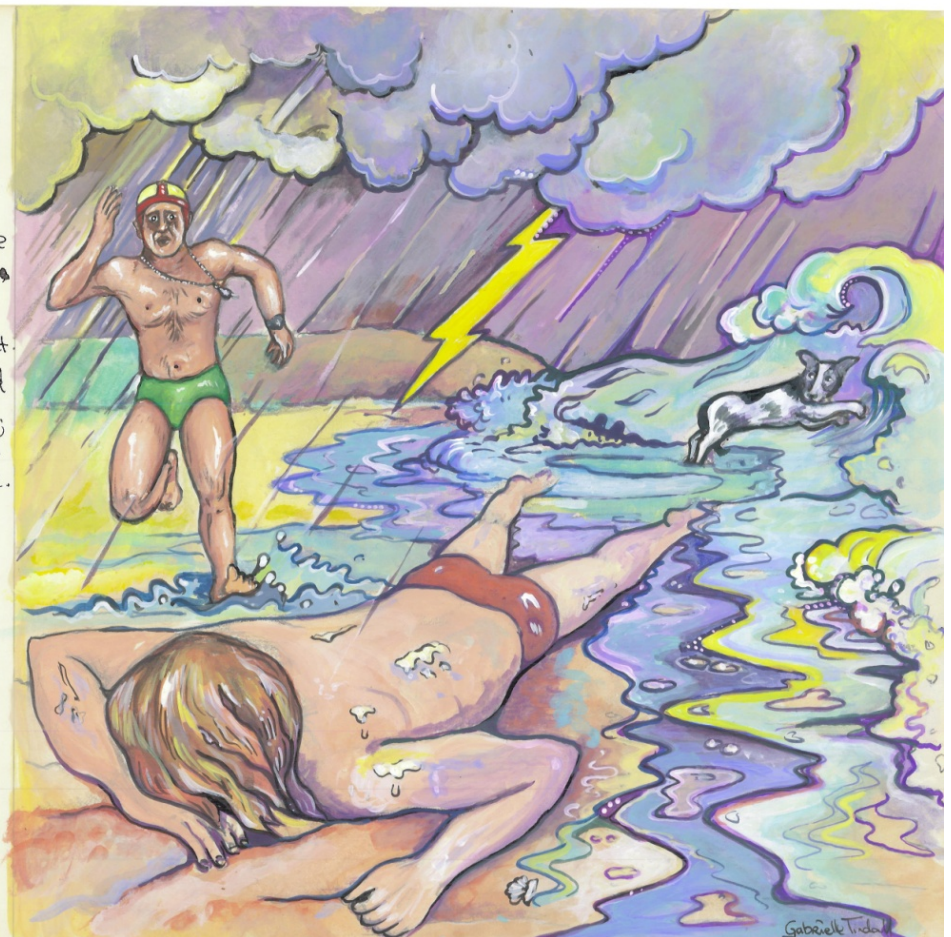
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About The Writer

Multi-award winning songwriter Paul Hemphill has performed throughout Australasia and the UK, as a solo artist and as a member of the shadowy HuldreFolk, combining poetry and music, horror and humour. Vikings, Romans, Mongols, and the Spanish Inquisition have all faced the music!

Something old, something new, something that may take us disappearing down the foggy ruins of time – pushing poetic licence to its hazy limits, reacquainting us with his particular take on history, imparting an altogether different perspective on pain and pandemonium, and sharing with us dubious anthems to power, pride, and prejudice.

You can find out more and listen to some of Paul's songs on SoundCloud and YouTube. Search under Paul Hemphill or HuldreFolk (but ignore the Dutch death metal band of the same name)

