

## LUKE'S CUBBY HOUSE

I dedicate this story to the unsung heroes of the 2011 Queensland floods.  
I believe each and every child is a hero.

TEN-YEAR-OLD Luke never saw himself as a hero. In fact, he was quite the opposite. Shy, quiet, but had been blessed with an over active imagination and he always liked to be alone. It was on this fact his father helped him build a monster of a tree house. They woke early one Saturday morning and with a large shopping list, both Luke and his father drove to the timber yard to purchase all the materials.

The giant gum tree growing over the river was estimated to be at least one hundred and fifty-years old.

“This is the perfect place for a tree house,” said Luke’s father, staring up at the tree.

Twenty feet above the ground, the tree split into four massive snake-like branches. The massive branches grew outwards from the trunk at right angles. Three of the branches stretched out towards the river, the fourth grew out from the trunk towards the backyard of Luke’s house.

In two days the tree house was built. Perched high in the old tree, the house looked like a mansion compared to the weak cubby houses Luke’s classmates had. Not one of his friends ever came to visit. They took it upon themselves to shun Luke’s cubby house. They’d laugh at him for having a cubby house so big. Tom was the ring leader of the group. He was the biggest in the class and liked to throw his weight around. Whatever he said everyone else did; everyone except Luke. That was the problem. He was the outsider. He didn’t like the way Tom told everyone to exclude him, but in a small way Luke didn’t mind. He had lots to think about. He would shrug his shoulders at his class mates and plan the next sleep over in his tree house. He loved the peace and quiet. Lying in a small bed listening to the tree creak and groan in the wind seemed perfect for Luke. He could easily catch up on his homework or read a good book, or just enjoy the cool breeze which came from the river, flowing lazily past his house.

The next day Luke placed several cans of baked beans in a cane basket. Bottles of water were thrown in, fruit and a packet of biscuits. When the rain started to fall, he quickly attached a rope to the handles of the basket and climbed the tree. With the aid of a pulley his father nailed to the tree, he lifted the basket up off the ground and into the tree house. He carried the basket to his waist high wooden cupboard and placed the food items on the middle shelf.

Luke walked to the trap door and wound up the rope ladder. He trotted over to the wooden shutters that covered the plastic windows and settled himself on his chair at the table to watch the river. He loved being inside his tree house when it rained. He also loved watching the river. It seemed to come alive when the water picked up pace.

Luke was staring out across the river, lost in his imagination when a flock of noisy birds flew past the window. They rudely brought him out of his imagination. He threw his hands over his ears to block out their screeching.

Then he saw it.

The wall of water coming down the swelling river looked massive. The wave of fresh water swept everything towards the sea. Nothing was safe from the four-foot wall of water. He watched surfing movies before, the only thing missing was the surfboard. He stared at cars, tree branches, fridges, boats and whole houses starting to flow past his tree house. He stood at the window staring through disbelieving eyes at how quick the river rose. One minute there was grass between him and the river, the next, the grass was replaced by fast flowing brown water. The large old tree seemed to groan and tilted slightly. His tree house felt like it was on a slight lean. Even one of the cupboard doors opened. He watched an apple roll across the floor.

Luke returned his gaze to the river and onto a small red car floating towards him. One second it was on top of the water the next it was being sucked down only to surface again. He stared in disbelief at a person trying to climb out of the window of the car.

Without a second thought, Luke grabbed the thin nylon rope he used to lift his food supplies up from the ground. He jumped out of the window onto the small verandah encircling the tree house. In seconds Luke’s clothes were wet through. He didn’t care. He had a goal in mind and was determined to reach it.

Luke crawled along the thick tree branch on all fours and dropped the thin white line down to the river. He knew he didn't have long to rescue the person before he was washed away. He only had the one shot to save him.

The rope touched the water and was immediately forced down stream.

Luke brushed the rain from his face, yelling at the person.

"You down there, grab hold of the rope. I'll save you."

Luke wasn't sure if the person heard him or not. He called two more times. He started to yell for the third time when the rope pulled tight. It brushed against Luke's knee as it tightened, giving him a slight rope burn. The person grabbed hold of the rope and quickly jumped out of the car window and into the swirling fast flowing river.

Luke crawled back along the branch. He sprinted to the pulley and started to reel the person towards the tree house. The rope stretched, threatening to break. Luke bit his lip when doubtful thoughts entered his mind.

"Dad, I hope you're right about the rope can hold anything without breaking," mumbled Luke. "I have to believe what you said."

Luke wound the handle of the pulley faster. Slowly the angle of the rope changed to vertical. Luke ran to the trap door, lowering the rope ladder. He watched the person climb out of the water and up to the safety of the cubby house.

The boy staring at Luke. He was breathing hard and constantly coughed up water. Slowly the lad stood straight, giving his rescuer a feeble smile and a smack on the shoulder. "Thank you for rescuing me. You're a real hero Luke."

"Tom, what were you doing in the car alone?"

"Dad said he would only be in the shop for one minute. He needed to buy batteries for the torch just in case the power went out in our house. No sooner did he close the door the car was swept into the river. The only thing my father could do was run to try and save me. The river was too fast. If it wasn't for you I would've drowned."

Luke slapped his classmate on the shoulder. "Welcome to my cubby-house."

"I'm sorry for ever making fun of you. Wait until I tell the kids in our class about this place and how you saved me. They will want to see this cubby-house. It's amazing. I never thought this place would be so sturdy. My cubby house has been swept away by the river over an hour ago." Tom grinned at Luke. "Thanks again. Can we ever be best friends?"

"We sure can."

"I have a feeling you're going to have a lot of visitors from now on," said Tom.

"I love idea," replied Luke. "I think everyone needs friends; even me."

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thank you for reading my short story; Luke's cubby house. I do hope you enjoyed it. Any feedback is gratefully accepted. The information you, the reader give, helps me to become a more professional author.

My stories are based on the Australian culture. Some of the spelling is Australian. Thanks for your understanding.

Again, thank you for your support, for without you, the reader, I wouldn't have anyone to read my work.

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