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Opening extract from

tales from outer suburbia

Written by

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the water buffalo

when I was a kid, there was a big water buffalo living in the vacant lot at the end of our street, the one with the grass no one ever mowed. He slept most of the time, and ignored everybody who walked past, unless we happened to stop and ask him for advice. Then he would come up to us slowly, raise his left hoof and literally point us in the right direction. But he never said what he was pointing at, or how far we had to go, or what we were supposed to do once we got there. In fact, he never said anything because water buffalos are like that; they hate talking.

This was too frustrating for most of us. By the time anyone thought to 'consult the buffalo', our problem was usually urgent and required a straightforward and immediate solution. Eventually we stopped visiting him altogether, and I think he went away some time after that: all we could see was long grass.

It's a shame, really, because whenever we had followed his pointy hoof we'd always been surprised, relieved and delighted at what we found. And every time we'd said exactly the same thing – 'How did he know?'



eric



some years ago we had a foreign exchange student come to live with us. We found it very difficult to pronounce his name correctly, but he didn't mind. He told us to just call him 'Eric'.

We had repainted the spare room, bought new rugs and furniture and generally made sure everything would be comfortable for him. So I can't say why it was that Eric chose to sleep and study most of the time in our kitchen pantry.



'It must be a cultural thing,' said Mum. 'As long as he is happy.' We started storing food and kitchen things in other cupboards so we wouldn't disturb him.