

# a LEGEND IN HIS OWN LUNCHBOX

BY MARGARET CLARK



It had been a rotten day. Two lots of detention, no hot pies left at the tuck-shop, busted bike brakes, and the beginnings of the first pimple in my entire life span.

Worse was to come. As I wheeled my bike up the hill towards home a terrible sight met my eyes. On the footpath, in humungous writing for all the world to see, was written, 'Peter Unwin George Wall SUCKS!!'

Right! I knew who'd done it. Only a handful of humans on this planet are aware that Pugwall stands for Peter Unwin George Wall. My parents, grandparents and best friends wouldn't have scrawled this graffiti right outside the Wall mansion. It had to be Marmaloid!

Marmaloid is my creepy, pea-brained, thirteen-year-old sister, the ultimate in nerd technology. I never call her Marion, which is her proper name, because she is such a pain. Marmaloid suits her better, believe me. Her main aim in life is to drive me bananas, which she is not far from doing. Trust me.

I burst into the kitchen, having first dumped my bike against the garage wall. It would be a great joke if someone pinched it with busted brakes—it would serve them right! It was my mum's rostered day off, so she was doing her usual frantic routine, vacuuming with one hand and making cakes with the other. I should train her to hold a feather duster in her teeth! She's always moving at the speed of light—that's why I call her 'Supes', short for Superwoman.

'Where's Marmaloid?' I snapped, 'I'm going to really mangalate her this time. She'll be dead meat.'

'What?'

I switched off the vacuum cleaner.

'Marmaloid. Where is she?'

'I wish you wouldn't call your sister that dreadful name,' said Supes, flicking the switch on again. 'She's not here. She's at Cindy's house.'

Oh, yeah? Good move. But I'd get her, no worries. My immediate problem was to get that graffiti off the path. Otherwise I would be wearing heaps for ever. Soapy water should do it.

'Where's the plastic bucket?' I yelled above the roar of the vacuum. Supes looked irritated as she turned off the machine. She hates her schedule being interrupted. Well, so do I. It's snack time when I come home from school, not washing footpath time. I rummaged around the biscuit barrel. Nothing decent—typical. I opened the fridge.

'There's nothing to eat,' I complained, as Supes fished out a plastic bucket from an overhead cupboard. 'Absolutely nothing to eat in this place.'

Supes raised an eyebrow as a packet of cheese, a tub of yoghurt and four tomatoes came tumbling down from the stacked shelves to land on the floor.

'Nothing decent,' I explained, grabbing a chunk of stras and two apples.

'Like what?'

'Like ... mini pizzas, chips, snack packs, coffee scrolls, donuts—decent stuff.'

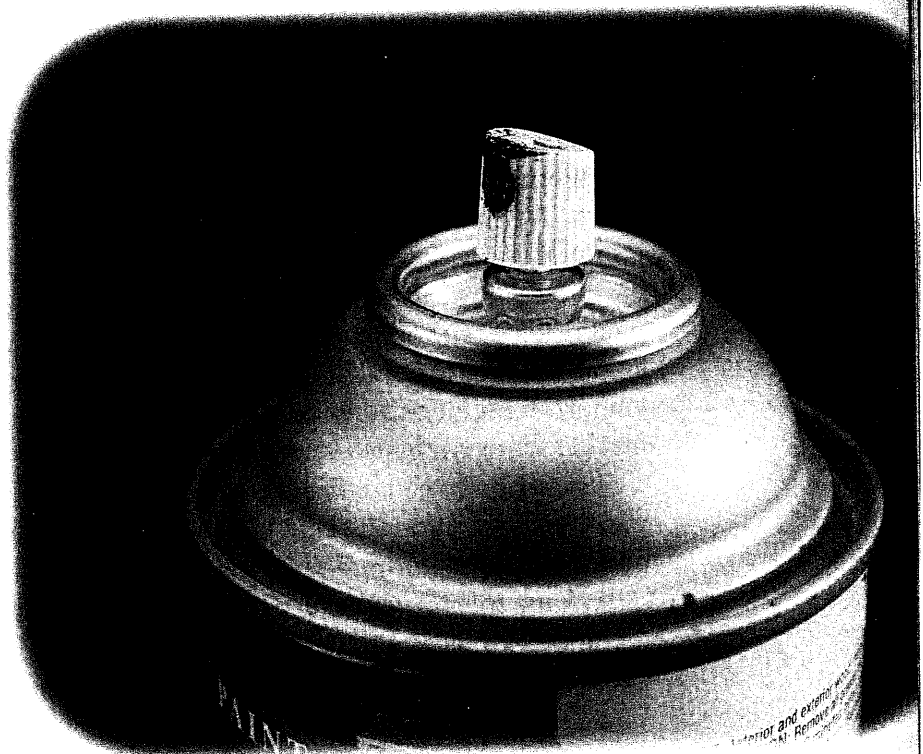
'When you are a millionaire you can buy whatever you like,' said Supes, handing me the bucket. 'Until then, you'll have to put up with this inferior food.'

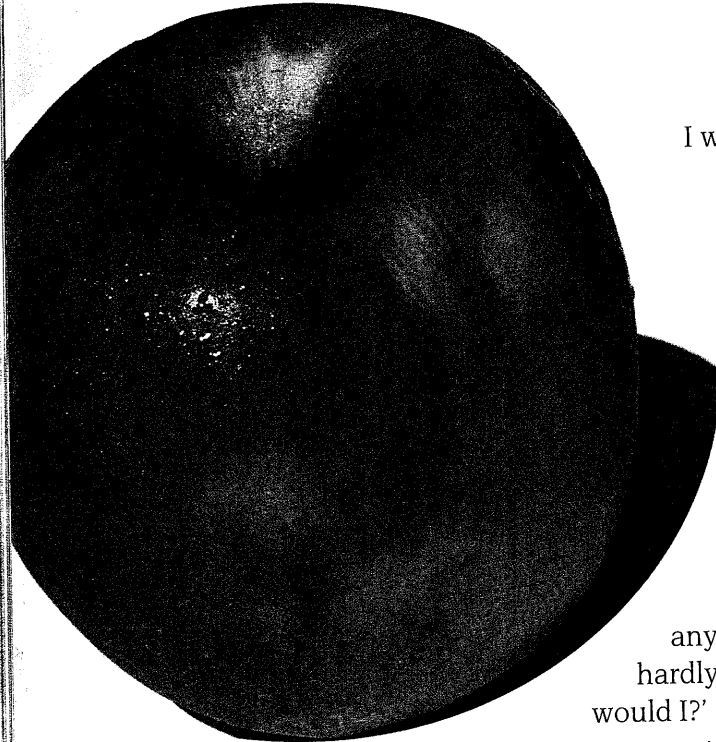
Yeah, yeah. Sarcasm will get you anywhere but nowhere. I began to fill the bucket with water, which splashed all over the windows and down the cupboards. Supes looked suspicious. 'What on earth are you doing?' she asked.

Seeing as I very seldom have a mania for cleaning anything I guess she had a right to be puzzled. I explained about the graffiti.

'Your sister wouldn't do a thing like that,' she said, shocked. As far as Marmaloid is concerned my mother's brain cells operate in reverse mode. That kid can do no wrong. I shrugged and grabbed the bucket. What was the use of arguing?

Munching on the stras, I wandered out onto the footpath. I plonked the bucket down with such a thud that half the water slopped over onto the lawn. There was *more* graffiti! It went right down the street! 'Pugwall is up himself', 'Moron of the month', 'Pugwall, go home' (that was hard to do 'cos I was), 'Pugwall has a fat head', 'Pugwall has nits', 'Pugwall is the biggest dork in the world', 'Pugwall is a loser' ...





I would need a hundred buckets of water.

I was standing there, contemplatively chewing on the first of the two apples and wondering if I should leave town, when this cop car pulled up alongside. This ginormous cop clambered out and strolled on up to me. Now what? 'Don't you know it's against the law to deface public property?' he said, taking out his notepad.

Oh, no! He thought I'd written all the stuff!

'Listen,' I said desperately, 'I didn't write any of this. I'm Peter Unwin George Wall. I'd hardly write all those rotten things about myself, would I?'

'Peter Unwin George Wall,' wrote the cop carefully. 'And where do you live?'

We'd learned in legal studies that you didn't have to give your name and address by law, but privately I thought that was a dumb idea if you had nothing to hide. Which I didn't. I was innocent. Why not cooperate with the cop?

'Here', I said, pointing to our house, 'so you can see that I wouldn't write stupid stuff about myself outside my own house unless I was crazy. Which I'm not,' I added hurriedly.

The cop looked me over slowly. He was upholding the law. Any minute I'd be charged with vandalism and carted off to the cop shop. Where's the social justice? I was holding out my arms ready to be handcuffed when Supes came charging out the door like an angry cow protecting her calf.

'What going on here, Officer?' she said, wide eyes, brandishing her wooden spoon like she was conducting a symphony. Well, she was. The Death March in P minor!

'I'm being arrested,' I said with as much dignity as I could. I wished that I'd paid more attention in legal studies. There was something about remaining silent. I looked around. This crowd was beginning to gather. How totally embarrassing! It's bad enough to be seen by the general public with your mother, but getting arrested as well ... my life was ruined!

'Someone's been defacing public property,' said the cop, staring hard at me. 'Hey, aren't you the kid I had words with a few years ago about noise pollution?'

What a memory! I knew that cops were trained to be alert and have brilliant memories for faces, but this was ridiculous. When I was ten I had bought two milk crates from this kid I'd never seen before in my life. I'd saved up and

bought the biggest ball bearings in the store. Presto! The noisiest, fastest billy cart in our street. So noisy that it drove the neighbours nuts. One even called the police. I looked more closely. Yeah, it was the same cop. I remembered that he'd wanted to charge me for the milk crates, 'cos they were stolen! And I couldn't produce the kid! A record already, and I was only fourteen. If this kept up I'd be a living legend! Or a dead legend if Herohead found out! Herohead is my dad. He has this very low sense of humour, and an even lower tolerance level to trouble where I'm concerned. I nodded. Why lie?

'Hey,' yelled a voice from the crowd, 'get off the kid's case.'

'Yeah,' said somebody else. 'I saw the girl with red hair and freckles writing on the footpath about half an hour ago.'

'See?' I said to Supes, 'I told you it was ...'

I stopped. The cop was watching me like a hawk. 'I told you it wasn't me,' I finished lamely.

The cop shut his notepad with a snap. He looked at the crowd. 'I don't want to see any more vandalism of this nature around here. Right?'

Kids shuffled their feet, looked down at their toes, up in the air, looked casually innocent. I knew darned well what would happen now. The biggest outbreak of street graffiti in every other street but this one! Well, it wouldn't be me wielding the chalk. The cop took off at a hundred Ks an hour and the crowd disbanded. Supes stalked back inside, calling over her shoulder, 'And don't you wash off that mess, Peter. Your sister will be doing that job.'

Boy, was she mad as a snake. Her voice sounded like a cross-cut saw with rusty blades. Marmaloid was going to get pulverised somethin' horrid. They'd probably chop off her hands and she'd have to learn to write graffiti with her feet. What a shame! Good one. Justice at last.

I had a sudden idea when I noticed a forgotten stub of chalk lying in the gutter. No one was looking. I dipped it in the water for extra strength, nibbling happily on my second apple. At the bottom of the list I wrote, in big letters, 'PUGWALL—A LEGEND IN HIS OWN LIFETIME'.

Looking good! I didn't have to worry about getting even with Marmaloid. Supes and Herohead would do it for me.

After tea, I stood, munching on some corn chips, watching Marmaloid on her hands and knees scrubbing away at the footpath. How sweet it was! I'd just bet that would be the last time that Marmaloid would slander the Pugwall persona! I got tired of watching the action. I went kitchenwards to make myself a triple decker peanut butter, jam and chocolate sprinkle sandwich. Well, if they'd buy some decent food ...

The next day at school I opened my lunch box for a morning munch. Written inside the lid in black texta were the words 'Peter Unwin George Wall Sucks'.

Just you wait, Marmaloid, just you wait!!

## ➔ Responding to the story

- 1 How does the narrator feel about the day so far, in the first paragraph of the story?
- 2 What are the two main settings for the story?
- 3 Why does Peter believe that his sister is responsible for the graffiti?
- 4 Peter uses a lot of unusual expressions during the course of the story. Give the meanings of the following:
  - a humungous
  - b drive me bananas
  - c 'I'm going to mangalate her this time.'
  - d 'But I'd get her, no worries.'
  - e This ginormous cop clambered out.
  - f The cop took off at a hundred Ks an hour.
- 5 'Marmaloid. Where is she?' How does Peter's mother react?
- 6 What reasons does Peter give to the policeman to prove he couldn't have written the graffiti?
- 7 How does the crowd react to the policeman's questioning of Peter?
- 8 'I don't want to see any more vandalism of this nature around here. Right?' How does Peter believe the kids will react to this?
- 9 'Her voice sounded *like a cross-cut saw with rusty blades*.' What does the simile emphasise about the mother's voice and feelings?
- 10 What are Peter's feelings as he watches Marmaloid removing the graffiti?
- 11 How does Marmaloid take revenge against Peter at the end of the story?
- 12 Do you think the title is suitable? Why or why not?

### The narrator

The narrator of *A legend in his own lunchbox* is Peter Unwin George Wall, also known as Pugwall. Peter is fourteen years old and has a high opinion of himself. He is the observer and narrator of the events in this story. His observations, judgments and comments concerning the other characters and the happenings are decidedly one-sided. This can be seen early in the story when he complains about there being 'absolutely nothing to eat in this place' and yet as he rummages around 'a packet of cheese, a tub of yoghurt and four tomatoes came tumbling down from the stacked shelves to land on the floor'. As he relates the story, we learn about his personality and the personality of his sister, mother, father, and the policeman who appears on the scene.

# From the narrator's point of view

Using the comments and observations of the narrator, write what you have learned about the actions and personalities of the characters of *A legend in his own lunchbox*.

**Peter, the narrator:**

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**Marmaloid, Peter's sister:**

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**Supes, Peter's mother:**

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