

Australia Day

By

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Characters

Brian

Robert

Maree

Wally

Helen

Chester

The play is set in a fictional town – this version is set in NSW.
Geographical references may be altered to suit local productions.

Brian

45-plus, Mayor of Coriole Shire and preselection candidate for the Liberal Party. Chair of the Australia Day Organising Committee. Small business owner, Rotarian.

Robert

45-plus, Deputy Mayor of Coriole Shire and loyal Deputy Chair of the Committee.

Maree (pronounced Mah-ree)

60-plus, President of the local Country Womens Association. Long-serving committee member.

Wally

55-plus, local builder and small scale developer. Long-serving committee member.

Helen

35-plus, local Greens councillor, a relatively new arrival to the shire from the state capital. New to the committee.

Chester

25-plus, newly arrived Australian-born Vietnamese primary school teacher. Very new to the committee.

Act One

Scene One

The Coriole scout hall. Robert is setting up tables and chairs for the committee meeting, distributing papers etc. Brian enters.

Brian: Jesus wept. (Shivering)

Robert: Evening Brian.

Brian: Cold enough for you?

Robert: Lowest July maximum for eighteen years, apparently.

Brian: So much for climate change. I thought it was supposed to get hotter.

Robert: It is. But just because it's colder doesn't mean it's not getting hotter.

Brian: Makes sense.

Robert: You have to look at the trend.

Brian: Spare me the lecture - Weather Doesn't Equal Climate.

Robert: Eventually it does.

Brian: I think we've just got short memories. The weather changes but we forget it was exactly the same thirty years ago.

Robert: You mean they do make summers like they used to?

Brian: Don't you remember - school milk in the playground at boiling point? Turned me off the stuff for life. Still, it's bloody freezing tonight. What's the bet we get a few no-shows.

Robert: I've had an apology from Graham.

Brian: Again? Has he ever turned up for a meeting?

Robert: He made it to the council dinner to thank the committee for all our hard work.

Brian: I don't know why we just can't ditch him and get someone who's going to pull their weight.

Robert: He's the head of the Chamber of Commerce, Brian. He keeps the sponsors onside.

Brian: He doesn't give us a damn cent. Come on, he charges wholesale plus ten for the bread rolls, we've got to have that bloody O'Connor Bakery banner that's the size of a bus outside the sausage sizzle - and then he goes on about community spirit and the national day. Give me a break.

Robert: I'd let it go, Brian. It's a small town, it's not worth the grief.

Brian: What is these days? It's all in the too bloody hard basket.

Robert: What's eating you?

Brian: Oh, nothing. Just another meeting with the pre-selection panel today. A couple more hoops to jump through. Jesus, you'd think I was applying for a bloody sainthood.

Robert: It's a federal seat Brian.

Brian: Oh, don't worry, some bloke from Sydney was there, head office, just making sure that the "grass-roots, democratic process" was running exactly along the lines they had in mind - all hands off, of course. And I'm thinking, well, what else do you want me to do? I mean, what's gonna swing this - is it a group massage and happy endings all round?

Robert: They've got to get it right.

Brian: Never worried them in the past. That's why this place has always been run by the bloody National Party. Like that fuckin' idiot we've got now.

Robert: Well, if anyone can take it back for us, Brian, it's you.

Brian: Thank you, Robert. Very kind. I feel much better now.

Robert: You're welcome.

Brian: Oh - I've been meaning to ask you. You know your internet service provider - I mean, not yours specifically but any of them .. do they keep some sort of record of every site you've gone to?

Robert: Not yet, as far as I know.

Brian: Not that I've been doing anything under the counter but, you know, I don't know what the kids have been looking at and I don't want something suddenly blowing up in my face...

Robert: No. Your .. kids haven't been looking at anything on the council computers, have they?

Brian: *(pause)* Possibly. If they've been sick off school and I've had to take them in. That... might've happened.

Robert: I'll check for you.

Brian: How far back does council keep a record?

Robert: Five years.

Brian: Shit.

Wally enters

Wally: Fuck me sideways, it's cold.

Robert: And good evening to you Wally.

Brian: Coldest July day in sixteen years, I'm told.

Robert: Eighteen.

Wally: So much for global fuckin' warming, eh?

Robert: The urn's boiled. Have a cup of tea.

Wally: Got anything stronger?

Robert: We're in a scout hall, Wally.

Wally: I'm only talking about a nip. Half these kids are on smack.

Robert: Half the kids are cubs.

Wally: Your drug hooligan gets younger every day, Robert. How are you, Brian?

Brian: Can't complain. No-one'd listen.

Wally: Yeah, right. Are those taps in yet?

Brian: I checked with Stephen - next week, earliest.

Wally: Bloody hell, where are they coming from?

Brian: I think he said they were Italian.

Wally: That'd be right. Every bastard you do a bathroom for these days has got to have designer taps. Fuckin' architects. What's wrong with Caroma?

Brian: People've got more choice. They want a certain look.

Wally: And you seriously think they should buy a set of bath taps that's gonna cost more than a second-hand car?

Brian: I don't choose them, Wally, I just sell them.

Wally: I mean, just your bloody shower drain - your fuckin' grille thing - that can cost two hundred bucks! Those Italians have got it worked out, haven't they?

Robert: Must be the Mafia.

Wally: Oh shit yeah. They'd have a hand in it.

Robert: Yes, they'd split it up between the families. You can have prostitution; we'll have bath and shower sets.

Wally: You'd be surprised, Robert. Anything that turns a buck, your Mafia's in there. I saw this thing on the History Channel last night, just after "The Nazis in Colour". It was about garbage collection in Naples - that's all Mafia.

Robert: We could try that here Brian. Local mayor creatively outsourcing council services.

Brian: Can't see it getting past the Greens.

Robert: I don't know. How carbon neutral are the Mafia?

Wally: Speaking of greens, is that cold-arsed bitch coming tonight?

Brian: If you're referring to Councillor McInnes, Wally, yes she is.

Wally: Funny you knew who I was talking about.

Brian: It's a committee of eight. I don't have to be Sherlock Holmes.

Wally: What she want to barge in here for? We know how to organise Australia Day. What's the bet she'll want a smoking ceremony and everyone wearing sorry t-shirts.

Brian: Just pull it back a bit, Wally, can you? Between you and me - it's a little bit edgy in council at the moment, we don't want to rock the boat too much with our new green friends.

Wally: Friends? Brian, you're standing for pre-selection for the fuckin Liberal Party!

Brian: It's a new paradigm Wally.

Wally: A new what?

Brian: The goal posts are shifting.

Wally: It's the same fuckin' ball, isn't it? It's the same idea: you kick goals. Or is that out the window as well?

Brian: And the goal is two feet wide and it swaps ends every five minutes. If you want to score, you have to compromise.

Wally: Bullshit. You start letting the fuckin greens run the agenda and this town's down the shithole, mate. They had Canberra sewn up for years - they're fuckin' mad. Look at what happened with the sub-division out at Preston's Creek. Whole thing ground to a halt for six months because of some fuckin' endangered frog. And the frog - if you could find one - was the size of abloody five cent piece!

Robert: Biodiversity. It's actually quite important.

Wally: Then put the frogs in a tank with a bit of fuckin lettuce and send in the bulldozers.

Brian: You should have your own talkback show, Wally. You're a natural.

Maree arrives

Maree: Sorry I'm late. The traffic! That new roundabout they're building at Preston's Creek, absolute standstill.

Wally: Probably waiting for the frog to hop home.

Maree: I mean, really. Where have all these cars come from? I was in town last Thursday, I had to go round the block twice to get a park. In winter!

Brian: People don't just come here for the beach, Maree.

Robert: Growing town, growing problem, I'm afraid.

Wally: Don't give Brian any ideas, he'll put in bloody parking meters.

Robert: They've already got them in Duxborough Head. Two dollars an hour.

Maree: Two dollars an hour!

Wally: Shit! I've had hookers cheaper than that.

Maree: Wally!

Wally: Only joking, Maree. I've never paid for it in my life.

Maree: Well there's not much sense in paying yourself, is there?

Wally: Ooh! Right below the belt. Where I like it.

Brian: God, it's like watching re-runs of "Are You Being Served".

Robert: Maybe we should make a start. We've got a quorum.

Brian: No, I'd rather wait for Helen.

Maree: Helen?

Robert: Councillor McInnes.

Maree: Oh yes, I met her at the library during Seniors Week. New to the district, isn't she?

Brian: She's been here for nearly two years.

Maree: So new.

Robert: Moved up from Melbourne.

Wally: That'd be right.

Brian: She's replacing Clem on the committee.

Robert: Did you ever find out why he pulled out?

Brian: It's a bit delicate

Maree: Bladder's like a rusted bucket.

Robert: I'm assuming that's not the medical term.

Maree: She's not going to want to change everything, is she?

Brian: A bit of new blood wouldn't hurt.

Chester enters, uncertain.

Robert: Can we help you?

Chester: Hope so. I'm looking for the meeting about Australia Day?

Robert: You've found it.

Chester: Right. I'm the school liason .. person.

Brian: What's happened to Andrew?

Chester: He's got an in-service course. In Armidale. So I drew the short straw.

Wally: Short straw?

Chester: You know - volunteering is compulsory.

Brian: Sorry, I didn't get your name?

Chester: Chester.

Wally: Chester?

Chester: As in drawers. Chester drawers. That's not my real name. Well, Chester's real. But my surname's Lee.

Maree: You any relation to Darrell?

Chester: No.

Brian: Well, come and join us. I'm Brian Harrigan, chair of the committee ..

Chester: Good to meet you Brian.

Brian: This is Robert Wilson, he's my deputy, both here and on council.

Chester: G'day Bob.

Robert: Robert.

Chester: Bobert. Sorry - Robert.

Brian: Maree Bucknell, President of the local CWA.

Chester: CWA? Is that a supermarket?

Maree: Country Women's Association.

Chester: Right. Oh - I saw you guys on Masterchef! Outdoor challenge. They were making lamingtons and shit.

Wally: And you could only tell which was which from the coconut.

Brian: And this is Wally Stewart.

Chester: How you going?

Wally: Chester – funny name for one of you lot. Never met an Asian called Chester.

Chester: I've never met *anyone* called Chester. I've met one or two Wallies though.

Robert: Are you new to the district, Chester?

Chester: Yeah. Only been here a couple of months. Got a transfer from Newcastle. Year six teacher.

Wally: Bit young, aren't you?

Chester: We're like policemen. Get younger every year.

Maree: I think you teach my great-niece Sherridan.

Chester: Would that be the Sherridan with two 'r's?

Maire: Yes, dreadful name for a child but her sister's worse off. She's Bethakny with a silent 'k'. Sherridan was up at our place, for a "sleepover" – her mother's got relationship problems, not that it's my place to say anything on that particular score but blood will out – and she mentioned she had a new teacher. Said he was a Ch ..

(awkward pause)

Chester: Nice bloke, I trust.

Maree: I'm terribly sorry but .. we don't have many Chinese in Coriole – there's the restaurant at the RSL, of course, and the Thai place that's just opened, not that they're ..

Chester: Relax Maree, I'm not Chinese – I'm an ABV.

Maree: A what?

Chester: Australian Born Vietnamese. Son of a boat person.

Brian: Done a lot for this country. Hard workers.

Chester: Aren't they? My Dad was a doctor back home. Got here and worked in the casualty department at Canterbury hospital. As a cleaner. No, it's a joke. He worked as a doctor – Canterbury Hospital will take anyone.

Robert: Brian, I think we should get started.

Brian: Give her a few more minutes.

Helen arrives

Helen: Sorry, sorry everyone.

Robert: Speak of the devil.

Brian: Ah, Helen. Glad you could join us.

Helen: Couldn't start the car.

Wally: Shoulda bought a car with an engine in it.

Helen: It's a hybrid, Wally. It has two. But for some reason it still needs a battery to start the batt -look, I don't know, it's sorted out now and I'm sorry I'm late.

Chester: G'day - I'm Chester.

Maree: School liason.

Helen: Good to meet you, Chester.

Brian: I take it you know Wally?

Helen: We've crossed paths at the planning sub-committee meetings, yes.

Wally: Oh yeah, Helen and I are great mates.

Brian: And this is Maree.

Maree: We met at the library during Seniors Week. You opened the access ramp.

Helen: Gosh - you've got a good memory.

Maree: Well it's not every day you go to the opening of an access ramp. How are you settling in?

Helen: I'm starting to almost feel like a local.

Maree: Give it another thirty years.

Helen: So they tell me. Finally bought a place.

Maree: Yes, I heard. No offence but you paid too much for it. And you get the full afternoon sun on that side, I can't take that sort of heat.

Robert: Good for your solar hot water.

Wally: Which we're all subsidising.

Helen: I don't have solar, Wally. I have gas.

Chester: You can get pills for that.

Maree: Still, it's not a bad spot if you don't mind trees.

Helen: I like trees.

Maree: Can't stand the leaves and the mess myself.

Brian: Can we get started? Or is there some other aspect of Councillor McInnes' private life you'd like to explore?

Maree: I was only asking.

Helen: It's okay Brian. In Richmond I hardly knew my neighbours but I'm getting used to the attention.

Robert: It's community.

Helen: Exactly.

Brian: Alright. I declare this meeting open at 7.42.

Chester: Could I just ask a question before we start - Andrew didn't really say much about what I'm supposed to do.

Brian: Well, we're the committee that organises the Coriole Shire celebrations for Australia Day.

Chester: And that's January 25th, isn't it?

Robert: 26th. 25th is Anzac Day.

Chester: 25th of January?

Wally: Jesus, what do they teach in schools these days?

Chester: Wally, I'm kidding. I know Anzac Day's in October.

Maree: It's in March, isn't it?

Wally: It's in fuckin' April!

Chester: Joke, Wally.

Helen: Do we have a brief or some kind of mission statement?

Brian: Not as such, it's more of a, well, a traditional arrangement.

Maree: Pretty much the same every year.

Wally: Can't see any reason to change it.

Robert: We have it out on the sports oval. Citizenship ceremony, sausage sizzle, the SES volunteers.

Brian: Fire authority brings a truck down.

Robert: The scouts and guides do a march past.

Maree: We had a man in a Tiger Moth one year. What happened to him?

Brian: Insurance won't cover it.

Wally: What - they worried he's gonna fly into the marquee?

Robert: I think he lost a wheel doing a loop the loop down in Ballinderry. Could've hit someone.

Maree: What was he doing down there?

Robert: Oh, the Premier was opening a wetlands interactive experience or something.

Helen: Pity it didn't hit him.

Brian: Anyway, we have entertainment throughout the afternoon – police band, local dance academy, combined schools choir - which is where you'll come in of course, Chester ..

Robert: And then we finish at about four o'clock with a pop concert for the young people.

Chester: Bet that goes off. How do you get the choir to show up during school holidays?

Maree: It's not a very big choir.

Brian: We pay them.

Robert: No cash – it's McDonalds vouchers.

Helen: I know I'm the new kid on the block here but is that sending the right message?

Wally: Nothing wrong with giving kids a bit of pride in their country.

Helen: Sure - but bribing them with junk food ..

Waly: What - you think they're going to turn up for carrot sticks and sultanas?

Helen: Why not something like a book voucher?