

Paul Jennings

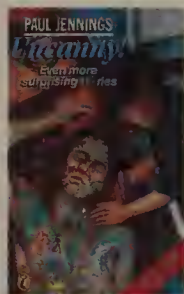
the cabbage patch



Illustrated by Craig Smith

MORE GREAT BOOKS FROM

Paul Jennings



WHICH ONES HAVEN'T
YOU READ YET?

Puffin Books
The Cabbage Patch Fib

When Dad tells Chris that babies grow out of cabbages, Chris sets off to search in the vegie patch.

Where he finds a baby.

Chris becomes an instant father. He has to feed and change the baby, and he even has to sleep with it! The kids at school think this is very funny. For Chris the novelty soon wears off, and he decides that being a parent is the pits. But what can he do with a baby that won't let him out of its sight?

This difficult problem is solved in a most unexpected way, and with hilarious results. "

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The Paw Thing

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Round the Twist

Unmentionable!

Paul Jennings

The Cabbage Patch Fib

Illustrated by Craig Smith

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this Book
Thank
you.



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For Gemma
from Paul

For Mary
from Craig

My brother Chris is only eight years old, which is rather young to have a baby. Well, 'have a baby' is probably not quite the right way to put it, but there was a baby and it sure thought Chris was its father. He was in charge of it, that's for certain. Anyway, I had better start at the beginning so you know the whole story. If you don't believe it I don't blame you - but it's true.

It all started at tea time. The whole eight of us - six kids and Mum and Dad - were eating spaghetti. We kids were all killing ourselves laughing because Chris (who can be a real pain at times) had put a piece of spaghetti up his nose and left one end hanging out over his lip so that it looked like something I would rather not talk about. It was a grotty thing to do but it really did look funny and we couldn't help cracking up.



Dad hadn't noticed because he was too busy pretending not to be watching *Doctor Who* on the TV. It is a rule in our family that the TV is not on at tea time but somehow or other Dad never notices it is on until *Doctor Who* is over.

Suddenly Dad saw the piece of spaghetti and he began to throw a wobbly. 'Take that disgusting thing out of your nose,' he roared at Chris. 'You are a hopeless child.'



Dad started to go purple. Then he began banging his head up and down on the table next to his plate. 'What did I do to deserve this?' he moaned. 'First the boy puts a length of spaghetti up his nose and then when I ask him to remove it he sucks it in his mouth and swallows it. Doesn't anyone in this family have any table manners at all?'

We all tried hard not to laugh but giggles kept breaking out.

On the TV I saw that Doctor Who was just about to be eaten by a green, two-headed monster. The funny music came on which meant you had to wait until tomorrow to find out what happens. I knew Doctor Who would not be eaten alive. He never is because he has to be around for the next episode. Anyway, now that the show was over Dad got up and switched it off. 'That's it,' he yelled. 'From now on there is no TV at tea time. We are having good manners and proper conversation for a change.'

He says this about once a week but it never lasts more than one or two days, so we were not too worried.

'I want a proper discussion,' Dad went on. 'Intelligent conversation about important things you do at school. Like who made the moon or where flies go in winter. Who has a topic for discussion?'

There was a long silence and then Chris said, 'Where do babies come from, Dad?'

Dad started to go red. He was not expecting this one. 'Well,' he said. 'Um, er, well, it's like this, er, you see, Chris, well, er . . . they come from, from, er . . . the cabbage patch. Yes, they come from the cabbage patch.'

Mum was looking at Dad in a funny way.



She didn't like it because Dad was not telling Chris the truth. Everyone knew that it was a fib except Chris. He looked interested.

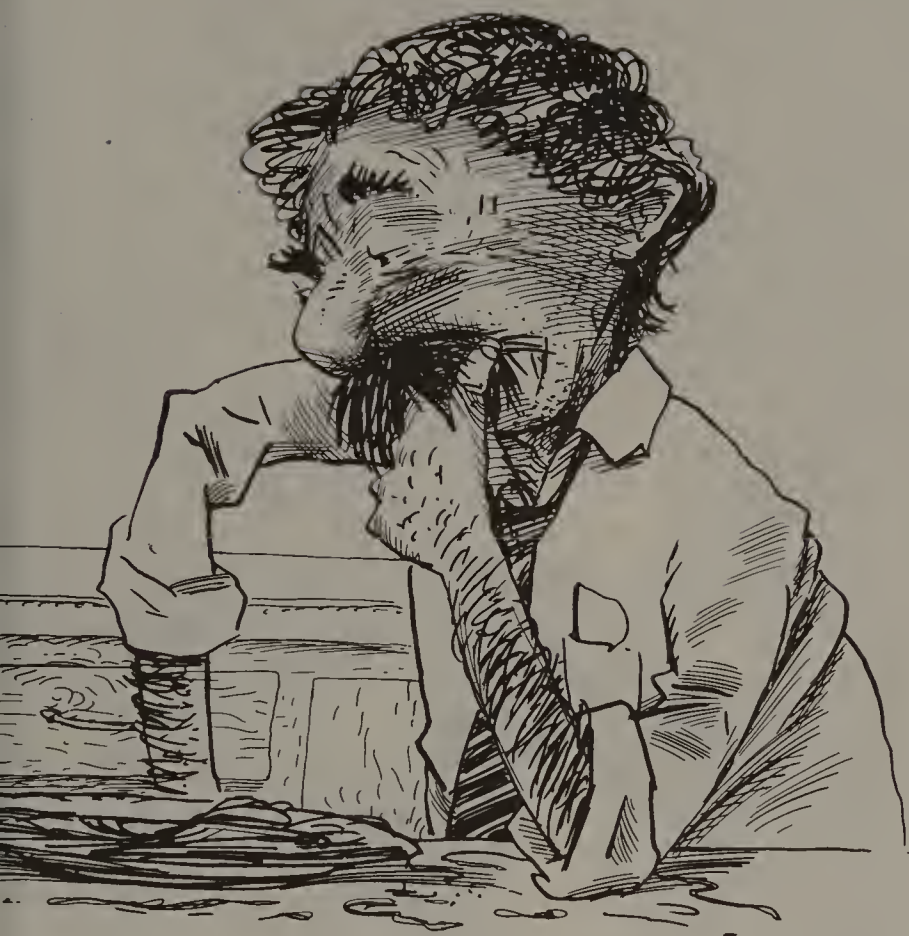
'How do they get there?' he asked.

'They grow out of the cabbages. Yes, they grow out of the cabbages at night,' Dad said weakly.



‘Wow,’ responded Chris. ‘There could be a new kid arrive tonight, couldn’t there?’

Everyone was looking daggers at Dad but he just said, ‘You never know – we could just be that unlucky.’ Then he got up and switched on the news, which meant we had



to do the washing up. It's not fair how par-
ents make their kids do all the work while
they watch the news but that is the way
it always is – even on days when they are
not trying to get out of answering a difficult
question.



Well, the rest of the evening passed as normal and no more was said about babies. Finally I went to bed and was just starting to fall off to sleep when I heard Chris get up. We share a room and he sleeps on the bunk above me.

He climbed out of bed and got dressed. Then he took his torch out of the top drawer of the dressing table.

I heard him leave the bedroom and then I heard a 'click' as the back door closed. He had gone outside. I quickly put on my track suit and followed him out into the back yard.

Everything outside was dark and at first I couldn't see where Chris had gone. Then I noticed the torch flashing right at the bottom of the garden in the vegetable patch.

I made my way down to Chris as quietly as I could, but he heard me coming and looked up from where he was rummaging about among the cabbages.

I called out to him through the darkness, 'What do you think you are doing?'

'Looking for babies,' he said. 'Dad reckons



that one could be sprouting tonight. We can't just leave it out here until morning. It might catch a cold and die.'

'Oh, no,' I said. 'You don't believe that load of codswallop, do you? Babies don't come out of cabbage patches, they grow inside their mother.'



A look of disbelief came over his face. 'Where?' he asked. 'Whereabouts in their mother?'

'Here,' I said, rubbing my stomach. 'Somewhere in here.'

'Don't give me that,' he said. 'Pull the other one. That's where all the potato and sausage and gravy and custard go. You couldn't have a baby mixed up with that lot. Ugh. The poor thing. You don't have to hide it from me. I'm old enough to know the truth about babies growing in the cabbage patch.'

He wouldn't listen to me any more. He just kept on searching under the cabbages. 'Help me look,' he said. 'One might have crawled over there into the potatoes.'

I decided to humour him and pretended to be searching for a baby amongst the vegetables. After a while I heard him say, 'Got one.'

'Got what?' I asked.

'A baby, of course,' he replied.

'Great,' I said, making out I believed him. He certainly had a good imagination.

'Keep looking,' he ordered. 'There might be another one. It might be twins.'

I started to laugh quietly to myself but

quickly stopped. I heard something that made my hair stand on end. It was a baby crying.





I rushed over to where Chris was pointing his torch at something on the ground between two cabbages. I couldn't believe it. Chris was right. There was a baby but it was the funniest looking one I had ever seen. It was green and had a long, pointed chin. It was naked and it was crying. It didn't even have a blanket but just lay there on the cold, hard dirt.

'Poor little thing,' said Chris and he picked it up. It stopped crying right away and started smiling and gooing.

'It likes me,' exclaimed Chris.

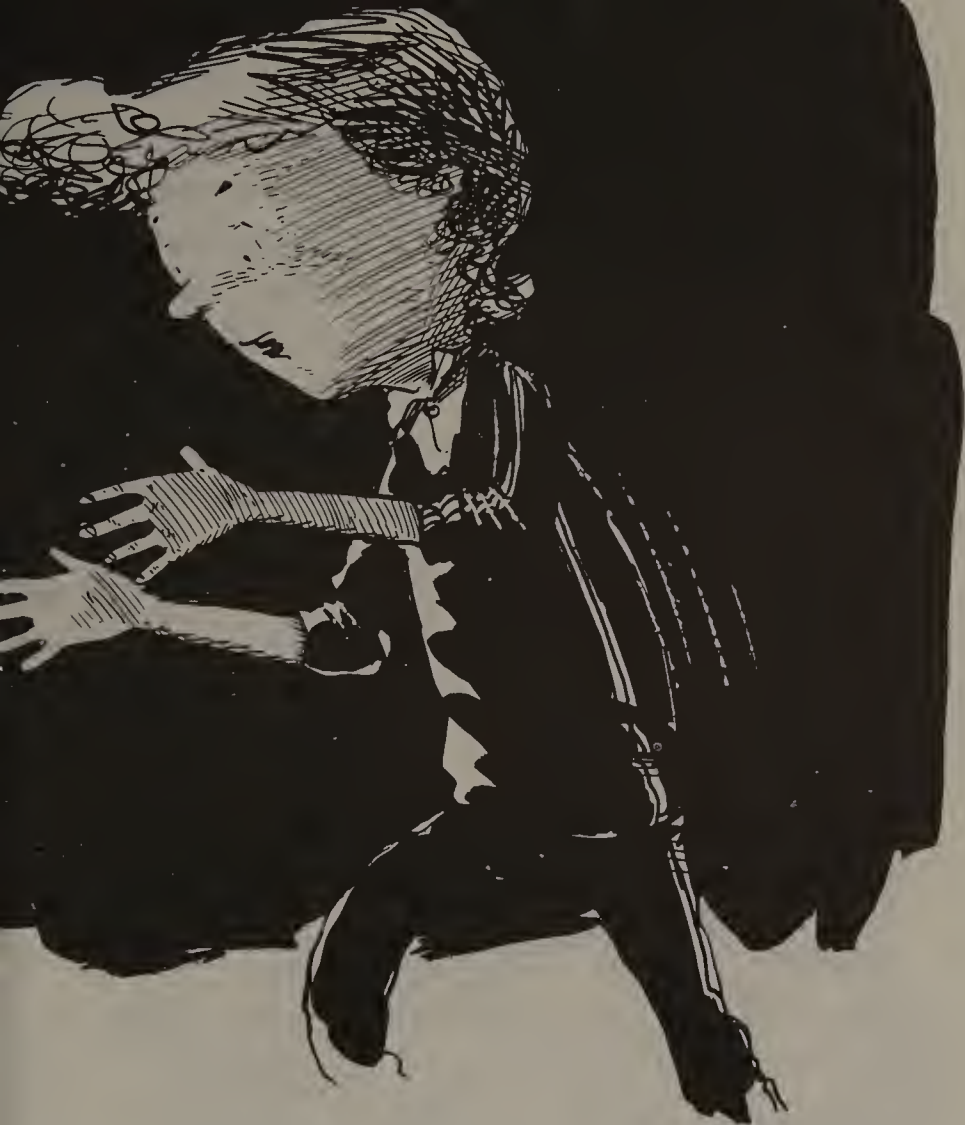
'But it's green,' I said. 'Babies aren't supposed to be green. It must be sick. It might be dying. Here, give me a look at it.' I took the baby from his arms. Straight away it took one great breath and then screwed up its nose and closed its eyes.



‘It’s stopped breathing,’ yelled Chris. ‘Quick, do something.’

I tried to remember my first-aid but my mind was a blank. ‘Oh, no,’ I groaned. ‘It’s holding its breath. And look. It’s turning purple.’

It was too. The baby had stopped breath-



ing and instead of being green it was turning purple. I started to jump from one foot to the other. I panicked. I couldn't think of one thing to do to get that baby breathing again. 'Give it to me,' yelled Chris as he grabbed the still, purple infant from my arms.

As soon as Chris had the baby in his arms it let out a huge breath and commenced breathing. Slowly its colour turned from bright purple back to bright green.

‘It thinks you are its mother,’ I said to Chris. ‘You are the first one to pick it up and so it thinks you are its mother. I have heard about this sort of thing before. I once read of a duck that thought it was a rabbit because the first thing it saw after it hatched out was a rabbit. This is the same thing. This baby thinks you are its mother. But green. I have never heard of a green baby before. We had better get Mum and Dad.’

We hurried inside and woke up Mum and Dad. They were amazed. Their eyes nearly popped out of their heads when they came out and saw the green baby. ‘Get the doctor,’ screamed Dad. ‘The poor thing is green. It needs a doctor immediately.’ He ran off to the phone and called for the doctor.

‘Give it to me,’ said Mum and took the baby away from Chris. At once the baby screwed up its nose, closed its eyes and stopped breathing. It started turning purple again.

Chris grabbed the baby out of her arms

and once again it began breathing and went back to its normal colour.

‘It won’t let anyone hold it except Chris,’ I told Mum. ‘It thinks he is its mother.’

‘Father,’ corrected Chris. ‘It thinks I am its father.’



The doctor arrived and the same thing happened. The baby wouldn't let anyone get near it except Chris. The doctor couldn't even put his stethoscope on its chest without the baby turning purple. He called for an ambulance which arrived with sirens blaring.

'Chris will have to come to hospital with the baby,' said the doctor. 'It needs special help. It stops breathing when Chris is not there so he will have to come too.'

'No,' said Mum slowly. 'Chris is not going. I am not going to have him spend the rest of his life in hospital with this baby, he has to go to school. If you want to examine the baby you will have to come here.'

The green baby started to suck Chris's arm. 'It's hungry,' said Mum. 'You had better give it its bottle, Chris.'

Chris was grinning his head off. He liked being a father.

For a little while anyway.





The baby soon took over Chris's life. He had to do everything for it because it would stop breathing as soon as anyone else came near it. It would even hold its breath if Chris went off and left it.

Chris changed its nappies, gave it bottles, bathed it, and even had to take it to bed with him. Everywhere that Chris went the baby had to go too.

We were famous. The TV people came and did a lot of shows about Chris and the baby. Everyone wanted to see the little green baby from the cabbage patch.

Doctors and scientists and people from the hospital came to see it. They all wanted to take it away but none of them did any good. The baby just held its breath whenever anyone came close.



Chris didn't care at first. He had two weeks off school and he loved his new child. In the end though, the terrible day came.

'You will have to go back to school, Chris,' said Mum. 'You can't stay home here for the rest of your life.'



‘But what about the baby?’ he protested. ‘I can’t leave the baby. It will die without me.’

‘The baby can go too,’ said Mum. ‘I have already made the arrangements at the school. You can put its bassinet next to your desk.’

The next day Chris fronted up to Shepparton Primary School. Every kid in the school was there to meet him and see his new baby. Chris's teacher, Mrs Manley, was there too. 'Make way,' she said. 'Give Chris and his baby room to breathe.'

'Isn't he a lovely mother?' said someone in an unkind voice.





The bell went and everyone trooped into school. One of Chris's mates told me what happened next. It was terrible.

Chris put the baby and its bassinet down next to his desk and started his Maths. After a while the baby started to cry.

'It wants a feed,' said Mrs Manley. 'Go and get its bottle, Chris.'

Chris groaned. He didn't want to stop his work. He liked Maths. It was his best subject.

The baby sucked away at the bottle. It was a quick drinker. As soon as it was finished it started to cry again.

'It's got wind,' said Mrs Manley. 'You will have to burp it, Chris.'

Chris put the baby up on his shoulder and patted its back. Suddenly the baby gave an enormous burp which echoed around the room. The class started to laugh like mad. Everyone rolled around with tears running down their faces. They thought it was a great joke. Everyone except Chris. He was embarrassed and he looked down at his shoes.

At lunch time things were even worse. Everyone was playing British Bulldog.

'I'm sorry, Chris,' said Mrs Manley. 'But you just can't play. It's too dangerous. If you fall over with the baby in your hands it might get hurt.'

Chris tried to give his baby to a friend to mind but it just started to hold its breath and turn purple so he had to come back.

He sat sadly on a seat watching the other



kids play. The baby slept on his lap. Soon about ten kids came and sat with him. They all had Cabbage Patch dolls in their hands. Every one of them. Every time Chris did



something with his baby the others would copy him. If he gave the baby a dummy, they gave their dolls a dummy. Chris tried to escape but they followed him everywhere.





During the afternoon there was more trouble. While the class were doing Spelling someone said, 'Pooh, who fluffed?'

'What a stink,' said someone else.

The kids all held their noses and grinned and pointed at each other. Mrs Manley was cross with them. 'It's the baby,' she said. 'It needs its nappy changing.'

Poor old Chris. He had to change the baby's nappy while the whole class watched. He held up its legs and wiped the yellow gunk away from the baby's bottom. 'Ugh,' said someone. 'It's horrible.'

Chris had tears in his eyes. He grabbed up the baby and rushed home without stopping.





That night at tea, Chris started shouting at everyone. 'I don't want a baby any more. I like it but I don't want to look after it. I don't like being a father. I just want to be a kid. I want to go fishing and climb trees and play British Bulldog. I don't want a whole lot of people following me around with Cabbage Patch dolls.'

Mum looked sad. 'I don't know what we can do, Chris. It won't let anyone else touch it except you. You don't want it to die, do you?'

Chris didn't answer. He picked up the baby and stomped off.

That night when everyone else was asleep I once again heard Chris creep out of the house. He had the baby with him. Once again I followed him down to the cabbage patch.



I watched as Chris put the baby on the ground and started to creep off. 'What are you doing?' I shouted. 'You can't go off and leave it.'

'It's not mine,' he yelled back. 'I don't want it. This is where it came from and I'm putting it back.' Without another word he turned around and rushed off. His footsteps faded off into the night.

I looked at the baby. It was already turning purple and had stopped breathing. I

didn't know what to do. I picked it up and tried to give it mouth-to-mouth resuscitation but I couldn't get its mouth open. It had it closed like a vise. I turned it upside-down and gave it a whack on the bottom but that didn't work either. The baby grew still. I had never seen it so purple before. I thought it must be dead.

A tear ran down my face and plopped onto its little purple ear. 'Don't die, baby,' I whispered. 'Please don't die.'



Suddenly two hands reached down and took the baby from my arms. It was Chris. 'I couldn't do it,' he said. 'I couldn't let it die.'

The baby started to breathe again and soon was its normal green colour.

We sat down on the ground and talked. We talked for hours but we couldn't think of any way to get Chris out of his problem. It looked like the poor kid was stuck with the baby until it grew up.

Then, just as we were about to go back inside I noticed something. 'Hey,' I said. 'That's a big cabbage.'

We both looked. One of the cabbages was huge. I had never seen such a big one before.

'It's growing,' yelled Chris. 'Wow. Look at that. It's growing in front of our eyes.'

I started to get nervous. Something funny was going on. This cabbage was growing so quickly that you could actually see it expanding. It grew and grew until it was as big as a car. Then it stopped growing and just sat there.

'I'm getting Dad,' I said. But before I could move, an enormous leaf fell down to the ground like a door opening up on the side of the cabbage. It was hollow inside.





Without any warning a small green woman with a pointed chin ran out and grabbed the baby from Chris. The baby grew even greener and started to smile.

The green woman began chit-chattering



W

away in some foreign language in a high squeaky voice. We couldn't understand a word but we knew one thing. Boy, she was mad. She was shaking her finger at us and screaming away like nothing.

'It's not our fault,' I said. 'We didn't take your baby. It was left here. We don't want it. You can have it back.' Chris was nodding away like mad. He had a big smile on his face.





Without another word the little green woman turned around and rushed back into her cabbage with the baby.

The leaf flapped back up and the cabbage was closed. Straight away it started to shrink. The cabbage shrivelled up in front of our eyes until it was just a few, shrunken, rotten leaves on the ground.



The baby and its mother had gone. I don't know where they went but I do know one thing. Chris was real pleased that the baby had found its own people.

Well, that's just about the end of the story. Dad pulled out all the cabbages and planted onions instead. He said that it was better to be on the safe side as the family was already big enough with six children.

Mum looked him square in the eye. 'There is one more thing,' she said. 'You take that boy off into the bedroom this minute and you tell him where babies really come from.'

Dad went red but he led Chris off and they had a good long talk. When they came out Dad looked embarrassed but Chris didn't. He looked quite chirpy.

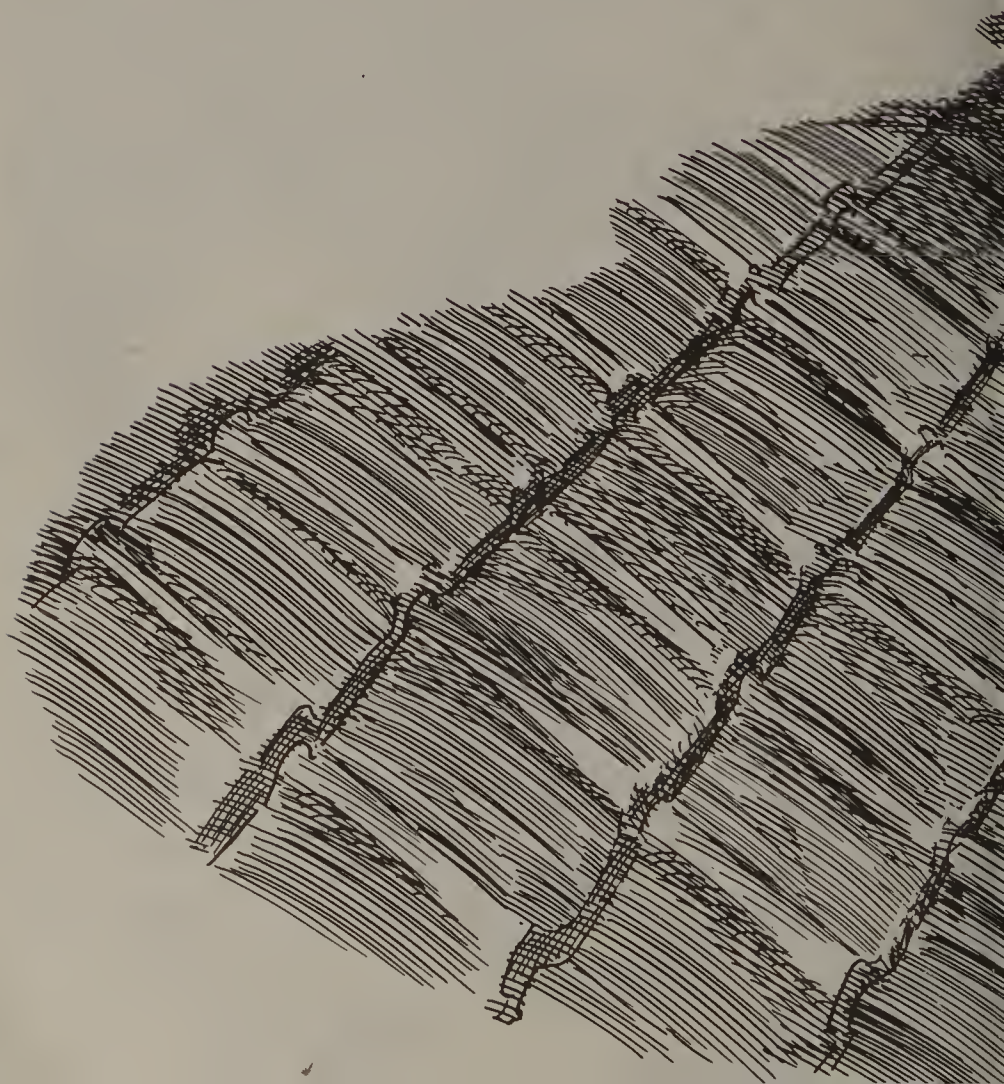
'Well,' said Mum. 'Do you know the truth about babies now?'

Chris nodded happily.



The next night I was once again awakened by Chris leaving the house. This time he didn't go down to the vegetable garden. He fetched a ladder and went up onto the roof.

After a while I followed and found him shining his torch down the chimney. 'What on earth do you think you are doing?' I yelled. 'Do you think you are Father Christmas or something?'





'Sh,' he said, putting a finger up to his lips,
'Or you'll scare them off.'

'Scare what off?' I asked.

'The storks. Dad told me how they bring
the babies and drop them down the
chimney.'



I took Chris back inside and sat him down. Then I told him honestly where babies really come from. This time he believed me. 'Wow,' was all he said. Then he jumped up and ran out of the room.

'Where are you going this time?' I yelled.

'To have a little talk with poor old Dad,' he said. 'It's about time somebody told him the truth.'



– ABOUT THE AUTHOR –

Paul Jennings is a full-time writer of children's books. Many of the incidents in the stories come from his own life.

The picture on page two depicts a true incident in the life of the Jennings family. Paul is not willing to reveal the name of the child who put the spaghetti up his nose but is happy to confess that he was the father who banged his head up and down on the table when he saw the dreadful sight.

Paul's main aim in writing is to entertain. He believes that there are few things better than a chuckle or two. He hopes that this book will leave you laughing.

– ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR –

Craig Smith lives in Adelaide, and has been illustrating books for children since 1979. He has worked with lots of different authors, and his illustrations appear in many books, including *I Hate Fridays* (by Rachel Flynn), *Sister Madge's Book of Nuns* (by Doug MacLeod), *Putrid* and *Petrifying Poems*, and *Vile Verse*. *The Cabbage Patch Fib* is the first book Craig and Paul have worked on together.

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Unmentionable! Paul Jennings

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Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left Robin Klein

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Doug MacLeod/Illustrated by Michael Atchison

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Eleven-year-old Trevor arrives in another new town, but this time things go wrong as he tries to muscle in on the school football team.

Runner-up for the 1982 Guardian Award and the 1982 Australian Children's Book of the Year Award.

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For Arkie, this is a year of change, the year before she starts high school, a time to re-examine herself and the people around her.

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Lexie and Merrina are friends, until Lexie is sent to boarding school and half forgets her Aboriginal companion. But dramatic events force them back into contact . . .

Nan Chauncy won the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award three times and was awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Diploma of Merit in 1962.

They Found a Cave Nan Chauncy

A group of English children make their home in a cave in the remote Tasmanian wilderness. They learn to fend for themselves, encounter many adventures and make some fascinating discoveries.

Seashores and Shadows Colin Thiele

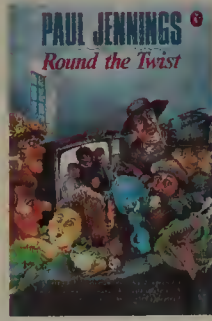
Terrible events carve the names of Wayward Island and Scarface, a huge white pointer shark, on the memories of Joe and Meg – seashores and shadows they will never forget.

Shortlisted in the 1987 Australian Children's Book of the Year Awards.

Magpie Island Colin Thiele/Illustrated by Roger Haldane

A small boy passing a windswept island spots a lonely magpie and resolves to ease its plight.

Paul Jennings



WHICH ONES HAVEN'T YOU READ YET?

'I watched as Chris put the baby on the ground and started to creep off. "What are you doing?" I shouted. "You can't go off and leave it."

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I looked at the baby. It was already turning purple and had stopped breathing. I didn't know what to do ...'

Another wacky story from the author of best-selling Puffins Unreal! and Unbelievable!

Cover illustration by Craig Smith
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