

Quigley the Quokka (Kwaòka)
Goes To the Big Island

Nora Panossian © July 2005



small wallaby: a small short-tailed wallaby that lives in large colonies. It is now found mainly on islands off the coast of Western Australia. Latin name *Setonix brachyurus*.

(From Australian Aboriginal Nyungar *kwaka*.)

Quigley the Quokka lived on Rottneest Island with his two brothers, Boomer and Willie, his sister, Sally and their parents, Momma and Pappa Quokka.

One evening, at the watering hole, Quigley was complaining about his lot in life.

“It’s the same old routine day in and day out; sleep all day, go to the watering hole at dusk, then forage in the leaves and branches all night. Then we repeat the whole thing over again. I’m stuck in a rut on this island,” moaned Quigley.

“What are you complaining about, Quigley? We have a nice and satisfying life,” said Boomer.

“Yeah,” chimed in Willie. “We live on this beautiful island, have all the food and water we need, we forage for food at night, rest during the day, so that we can enjoy it all over again the next night.”

“There just has to be more to life than this...” said Quigley, the dreamer. “I often dream of going to the big island across the waterway.”

“Drink up, kids. We’re leaving for home in a minute,” called Momma Quokka to her little ones.

“Coming, Momma,” Sally called back.

“Hey, Quentin!” called Boomer as he hopped off to chat to his friend.

“Don’t lag behind, Boomer!” ordered Poppa Quokka, “It’s getting dark and I don’t want you to lose your way.”

“Okay, Poppa. See you tomorrow, Quentin,” said the ever-cheerful Boomer.

As he hopped home with his brothers and sister, Quigley was busily making his plans.

The next morning, Quigley woke up extra early and snuck down to the ferry wharf. He hid behind a pole until all the people were loaded onto the ferry and it was just about to launch. Quigley got a running start and took a big leap off the pier and landed safely on the deck of the ferry.

The ferry soon arrived at the big island and Quigley scurried off, hiding between the legs of the other passengers.

He hopped down the busy streets, taking in the sights and sounds while trying to dodge the many pairs of feet rushing around him. High heels clicked on the pavement, cars with their loud engines went thundering past, the wind roared through the tunnels created by the tall buildings and the rain came pelting down.

One dark-suited man accidentally kicked Quigley who tripped on his tail and went rolling head over heels all the way to the end of the street.

“Whooooooaaaa,” yelled Quigley loudly but no one seemed to hear him.

They were too busy to notice, rushing here and there. The streets were full of stern-faced people who hurried along, looking miserable and staring at the ground in front of them. These were not like the easy-going tourists he was used to.

Quigley kept rolling and skidding and sliding down the street until he came to a sudden halt, slamming into a glass door. He had accidentally made his way into a store. The store-keeper screamed, grabbing the nearest broom and ran towards Quigley with it raised over her head, yelling at the top of her voice,

“Ahhhhh! It’s a rat! There’s a rat in my shop.”

Quigley squealed and hopped away as fast as his little legs could take him.

“Oh my,” moaned Quigley as he dusted off his coat and peeled an old ice-cream wrapper from his tail with his trembling little paw, “this is nothing like I imagined. I don’t think I like this very much at all.”

A car drove through a puddle nearby and soaked Quigley to the bone with dirty water from the street.

“Deary me, I had better leave big island before anything else awful happens to me,” sighed Quigley.

Now Quigley was very accustomed to the wind and rain. In fact, he rather liked rain as it gave life to his little island home and made everything lush and green. But Quigley the quokka from Rottnest Island was **not** used to the hustle and bustle of the crowds, the noise and the smelly air of the big city.

Enough was enough!

“I’m going home! This place stinks,” declared Quigley.

But as Quigley looked around him, he noticed that all the pushing, shoving and trampling had taken him a long way from the ferry wharf. He was standing at a kerbside and he was completely lost.

Quigley started to step off the kerb in an attempt to cross the road. Just as he did so, a gigantic truck tore down the street past him creating a big ‘WOOOSH’ that knocked Quigley over backwards with great force.

When he was able to get himself up off the ground, he knew he had to think of another way. Just then, Quigley saw a young boy riding towards him on a pushbike. With one big leap, Quigley landed on the rack at the back of the bike and the boy didn’t even notice.

They rode along for a while until they came to a huge set of gates that led to a beautiful big park.

‘Now, we’re talking,’ thought Quigley as he jumped off the bike, silently thanking his kind chauffer.

He saw a rather large tree trunk lying horizontally on the ground, probably as a result of the recent storms. He gingerly peered into the big hole that was in the middle of the trunk and saw two balls of fur that looked liked baby quokkas.

“Hello, fellow quokkas, I’m Quigley,” he said.

“We’re not quokkas,” the cuddly balls of fur replied, “we’re possums. And here come our Momma and Poppa Possum now.”

In the background, Quigley heard a very loud and nasty growl. Two very large possums were running towards him and they looked very angry indeed.

“What are you doing near our babies?” the two angry possums shrieked as they ran towards Quigley, cornering the frightened quokka.

The two adult possums had been foraging for food for their little ones. They were returning with the food when they saw Quigley poking his little nose into the nest. They thought he was posing a threat to their babies.

Quigley leapt over the old, broken down tree and, once more, hopped away as fast as he could. The father possum hurled a large rock that went whizzing past his right ear and missed Quigley.

‘Goodness me,’ thought Quigley, ‘even the wildlife are unfriendly here!’

The quivering quokka hopped over to the fence that surrounded the park. From the fence, he could see a familiar sight – a ferry wharf.

“At last things are going my way,” said Quigley out loud.

He leapt over the fence and hopped down the hill through familiar bushland, barely in time to scramble onto an outgoing ferry.

“Phew, that was close,” said the very relieved little quokka, “Finally, I’m on my way back home.”

Later that evening, while drinking at the watering hole, Quigley found himself next to Quentin who was complaining about the lack of excitement on the island lately.

“Now that it’s winter we can’t even look forward to the tourists to visit us. It’s so boring! Day in, day out, it’s the same old routine. I want to check out the big island. I bet it’s more fun over there...” Quentin whined.

Quigley rolled his eyes. He knew better than that. After his experience, he loved the old, familiar, comfortable routine.

“Believe me, Quentin, it’s not all that it is cracked up to be. Nup, not at all,” replied Quigley, shaking his head, “not at all!”