

Challenging Charlie

A children's story about Fraser Island by John Sinclair

Grandpa was very fond of his youngest grandchild, Charlie. Charlie was very bright and active. He had personality and a lot of potential, but Charlie wasn't doing as well at school as everyone expected. At school sometimes Charlie got bored and distracted. Then he didn't pay attention to his teachers. In his boredom, Charlie got up to mischief and that often got him into trouble and not so good school results.

When Charlie brought his end-of-year School Report home everyone was disappointed — his parents, Grandpa and his family. Even his teachers were disappointed that such a bright boy didn't do as well as he should have. His parents decided that Charlie needed a challenge to catch up to his classmates.

They set him study assignments over the long summer school holidays so that he couldn't spend as much time having fun with his mates. When Grandpa heard of this he added another assignment for Charlie.

"I am working on a project to build a Nature Walk on Fraser Island and I want kids to be able to understand the complicated story about the relationship between the soil and how it changes from raw sand to have profiles," Grandpa told Charlie.

Grandpa added, *"Then there is the relationship between the soil profiles and the different types of vegetation. I want you to study the signs we are planning to put along the Nature Walk and let me know if you think that kids can understand them."*

Over the summer holidays Charlie studied the 32 signs that Grandpa had designed. He rang Grandpa before he went back to school what he thought about the signs and where they could be improved. They had a very long and interesting discussion. Grandpa was so impressed by Charlie's suggestions that he invited Charlie to join the team of volunteers who would be building the Nature Walk.

Charlie was happy to be on Fraser Island even if it was with a team of old men instead of his mates. It was heavy work building stairs to all people to get to the start of the walk without causing the fragile sand on the steep slope to erode. One of the volunteers had just retired from being a National Park Ranger in America who had plenty of experience and ideas. Charlie was the "gopher" because the men would ask him to go for this or that errands while they did the heavier work. Charlie was impressed with what he saw. He learnt a lot as he kept the men supplied with water during this hot sweaty work.

The team were missing some tools to finish the job so David, who lived nearby came to lend a hand and his tools. Mike and Greg installed the signs while Grandpa moved ahead with his trusty little chainsaw

removing any obstacles on the track and branched that were potential hazards.



Charlie watched the men building sand-ladders

Charlie kept following Grandpa. *"Look out Grandpa!"* Charlie shouted, *"You nearly stood on a small plant."*

Grandpa looked down and saw that there were many small plants that others might tramp on when they followed the Nature Walk.

"These are just the plants the women would like to use in their landscaping project at the resort," Grandpa said. *"Could you mark out any that can be moved and while you are at it, keep your eyes peeled for any weeds that should be removed."*

So Charlie got a bundle of small bamboo sticks to mark the small plants in the pathway. The women came with buckets and spades to save the plants. When the men had finished the Nature Walk project and the women their landscaping the Nature Walk was in a weed-free area.

Charlie might have been slack at school the previous year but by helping Grandpa with the Nature Walk project he had learnt so much and played a key part. Back at school though Charlie was determined to work harder so that he could be as wise and as helpful as the volunteers that he had worked with on the creating a Nature Walk that would be appreciated by many people in the years ahead.