

RESOURCE 1—A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PENELOPE PRIMROSE

By Joann McAlister

I stir out of a strange dream about choosing different coloured jackets for my puppy, Perry, and sit up with a start. I blink, stretch my mouth wide in a yawn, and raise my arms high in a stretch.

“Wait, what?” I’m gazing up and I poke my long coloured nails. Then I pull back my covers and give my enormous feet an incredulous look. “These aren’t my feet! Why do I have red nails? And WHERE IS ALL MY HAIR?” I lumber to my mirror and my jaw falls open.

Because this isn’t my body. This isn’t my face. And this is ABSOLUTELY not my hair. This is the body of my mum, Pamela Primrose, Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory. My name is Penelope Primrose and I’m a primary school student in Canberra. I have short nails, am on the A-grade soccer team and certainly should not have these obscenely huge feet. How am I supposed to play soccer with these enormous ski-feet?

“Muum!!! What’s going on?”

My mum bolts into my room, knocking my mirror to the floor with an obnoxiously loud smash. I can’t believe my eyes – my mum looks just like me.

“Ow! Penny – there you are! Oh my goodness – I can’t believe this is happening! You look like me and I look like you! Remember how I bumped into our postman, Mr War Lock, yesterday? And then I tried to explain to the policeman who saw the whole thing it was an accident. And after I accidentally knocked Mr Lock over again, Mr Lock *did* say something about a curse. I really thought he was just kidding about that,” Mum sighs.

“I don’t have time to be cursed today! I have a committee meeting this afternoon, the election is soon and I can’t get us into the Curse Reversal doctor until next week. This is a disaster! What are we going to do?” She attempts to pace but she trips over her normal-sized feet and she scrapes three of my favourite posters from my walls so paper rains down all over my bedroom floor.

“Er, Mum. Hey – Mum! MUM!” I finally manage to poke my mum in the ribs hard enough with my claw-like nail on the end of these super annoying long arms to get her attention and she says, “What? What is it?”

“Well, maybe, just this once, I could go to work in your place,” I say. “You’re always saying I should learn more about the Legislative Assembly. This could be my chance!”

And mum could take my spelling test and finish my geography assignment.

“Oooh, OK. You’re right.” The fear is fading from her very pretty green eyes. “Yes. Thank you. Now remember while you’re at work today – we’re all responsible for democracy.”

“Yes, yes,” I interrupt her, “I know, you’ve told me before. Democracy is a two part word - ‘demos’ is the whole citizen living within a particular city-state and ‘kratos’ means power or rule. The Australian Capital Territory and Australia are both representative democracies.”

“OK, OK, you’ve convinced me. I’m sure you’ll find it interesting. Good luck!” She thwacks a briefcase and her daily diary into my hands, gives me a gentle tap on my back, and I trudge out of the house, ready to see what the day will bring.

I have a lot of questions about today, including; what does my mum do? How does she do it?

I'm excited to find out!

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First, we are preparing for the upcoming election. I meet up with Mum's good friend, Mr Sam Spencer, who is also a Member of the Legislative Assembly. We're campaigning – going door to door to discuss people's issues and what our party, the Play Party, will be doing to help them when we get elected (or re-elected). I wonder how many of the 25 Members of the ACT Assembly are doing the same today.

"How BUSY are we?" Sam grins at me as we jog along. "Lucky **one of the functions of democracy is to have free and frequent elections**, so we only have elections every four years, right?"

"Yeah, lucky," I pant, as I struggle to keep up. My mum's body is not used to jogging, that's for sure.

Mum and I have talked about how the ACT is cut up into five areas, called **electorates** and each area has a similar number of voters in them. Sam and I are campaigning in Brindabella, which is the southern electorate that covers most of Tuggeranong.

We knock on a door and when it opens, Sam smiles a toothy grin at the voter and says, "Good morning. My name is Sam Spencer and I am a candidate for Brindabella. I am part of the Play Party and **we as a party believe in justice and fairness for all and we also have a strong belief in people engaging in play, in certain areas and at certain times, if they wish.**"

"Mmm." The voter is a tall woman with suspicious eyes and she screws up her face. "I like the sound of justice and fairness but I'm an arachnophobic, so **I'm more interested to hear what the Play party thinks about the squashing of all spiders on sight.**"

Oh, I totally know the answer to this question so I say, "The Play Party has a policy that if the spider remains outside a person's premises, it should be left alone," I say.

Now the woman is glaring at us as her voice grows louder and louder. "Unacceptable! I am the head of the 'No Spiders Group for the ACT' and next year **we're going to create our own political party**. Until then, I'm going to be **campaigning against anyone who doesn't agree with our position** on immediate spider squashing. Good bye!" She slams the door in my face.

"Excellent!" says Sam. "Bit of differing views, but all citizens should be treated equally and accorded dignity and respect - a great feature of a healthy democracy."

I nod and I keep this advice in mind as we campaign for the next three hours.

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Sam is also the Minister for Education, so after a quick cup of hot chocolate, he has to leave to open a new school. I wave at him and continue plodding along the street just outside the Legislative Assembly when I see a group of young students from my class all milling together outside the Assembly. One of them is my good friend, Tamara Taffy, and she breaks away from the pack and bounds over to me.

"Ms Primrose! Ms Primrose!"

That's when I notice that Tamara holding a poster that says:

FIX ALL FOOTPATHS NOW!

A number of my classmates are yelling, "Fix all footpaths NOW!" One of my classmates, Ben Bratt is holding a picture of a glum-looking five-year old flopped beside a chipped and broken footpath. The five-year old is missing her two front teeth, has a skinned knee and her right arm in a sling. Just looking at the sad five-year old and her sore knee makes my stomach roll over.

Oh yeah. I remember now.

My mum said that last year a little kid called Laurel Lee was skipping along the footpath. This footpath had a tree next to it and some roots had grown up underneath the footpath, making the footpath lumpy instead of smooth and flat. Laurel tripped over the footpath and fell flat on her face, knocking out two teeth, grazing her knee and breaking her arm.

An ambulance came to the accident and **whisked Laurel to the hospital to see a doctor and get a cast on her arm.** That's what I'm looking at in Ben's picture.

After that, **the Assembly created an inquiry into footpath safety for a committee to investigate in further detail.** Along with two other MLAs, my mum is part of that committee which will hold a public hearing to listen to community opinions on footpath safety. One of the submissions made to the committee is that there should be **an amendment to our safety laws and that all footpath issues must be fixed within three months.** This law would make sure Canberrans could be safer from footpath accidents. **My classmates and other Canberrans like the idea of this law. They are protesting to ensure that changes will be made to the law.**

I focus back on Ben and ask him, "What can I do to help?"

Ben hands me a clipboard and then says, "**This is a petition** about footpath safety. It has over 600 signatures. Can you please present it in the Assembly for us, please?"

I look at the petition. It's a piece of paper and on it are the following words:

PETITION

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that damaged footpaths in the ACT are not being fixed in a timely manner.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly change the Footpath Safety Laws to ensure footpaths are fixed within three months.

Underneath that is a long list of names, addresses and signatures.

"Yes. Of course I'll present it."

Ben's mum leans her head over and stares at me – straight into my eyes. "This issue is very important to us. So important that I've watched all of the parties: the Play party, the Frisbee party and the Study party in the Assembly and what they've said about footpaths and that will affect how I vote in the election. I like that your

Play party has a policy that footpaths should be fixed within three months. I hope you'll also consider the idea of one week. I'm looking forward to the committee report on footpath safety."

"Thank you. Yes, my mu-, er, my party has a strong belief that footpaths must be fixed as soon as possible. We are hopeful that the committee's report will convince all Legislative Assembly members to agree to change the laws."

Then I tuck the paper into my briefcase and make my way into the Assembly.

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I'm on the Ground Floor of the Assembly in a meeting room, squirming in my chair. I'm excited to have a meeting for the Footpath Safety Committee over our lunch break. The Legislative Assembly is a **unicameral parliament** which means it only has one lower house and doesn't have an upper house or house of review. Instead, the Assembly has a committee system that investigates certain issues and then prepares a report for the Assembly on the issue.

"Hi, Pam! Hi Pam!"

Mike Marrone from the Frisbee Party enters the room, followed by Gail Greenwich from the Study Party and Imogene Ivory, the committee secretary. Imogene's job is to organise committees and their meetings and hearings and they all sit down.

"Hi," I respond.

"OK," says Gail, who is the Chair of this Committee. She gazes over at the three of us. "Thanks for coming this afternoon."

The rules of the Assembly, or Standing Orders, as they're called say that there must be one member from the Play Party, one from the Frisbee party and one member from the Study party to make up a committee. So that's why there are four people in our Footpath Safety Committee meeting today (including Imogene who begins to take notes).

"Looks like we're all here." Gail looks over the papers in front of her. "So, today we're discussing the upcoming Public Hearing for this committee. We have received 53 submissions from people in the ACT about footpaths and safety and we've read through all of them. Our job is to choose witnesses from all sections of the community."

Mike Marrone from the Frisbee Party speaks up. "Yes, so firstly I think it's important to have the Minister for City Services and her staff appear before our committee."

The Minister is the person responsible for footpaths in the ACT and has people who work with her and who supervise new work and repairs to footpaths.

"Yes. And we had 28 submissions from people directly or indirectly affected by injury as a result of footpaths, so we'll include all of them," says Gail.

I nod, as I've already checked through all of the submissions. "There were six submissions from cyclists, five of whom are members of Pedal People, the ACT's cycling advocacy group so we will invite a few of the members to appear."

Mike taps his finger on the piece of paper in front of him. "We had a submission from the Risk Management Co-ordinator from City Services discussing the process involved in fixing footpaths, including staffing, materials and awareness of damaged paths. Do we agree that he and his team should be on the list of people to appear before our Committee?"

"Yes." Gail checks over her paperwork. "I have two submissions here from a community organisation called the ACT Public Safety Association. They work with the community to help make Canberra safer and they talk to many groups and individuals in Canberra about footpaths and safety, so we'll include them on our list. Anyone else?"

Mike speaks up again. "I have a submission from ACT Restorations and Driveway Engineers. This is a privately owned company that has worked with the ACT Government on installation and repair of footpaths in the ACT for over 23 years, so they will contribute to the good cross section of views from the other witnesses."

"Thank you, everyone," says Gail. "We will hold our public hearing in one week. Imogene, could you invite all of the witnesses just mentioned to the hearing and publicise the hearing in the newspaper and on social media?"

"Yes," says Imogene. "I'll organise that."

"OK." Gail nods at all of us. "Thank you for your time today. We'll meet with Imogene in two days to discuss the list of witnesses and prepare for the Public Hearing. Thank you."

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It is the end of the day. I still need to **lodge the petition with the Clerk**. First I need to count the number of signatures. There are a LOT, so this could take a while!! There are 602.

Before I go, I visit the Clerk and give him the petition. I'll go home for a quick dinner and then I'm off to the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards. What a day!

Hopefully tomorrow I'll be back to my usual soccer playing, normal-sized feet wearing self!