

Fire and water

Playing with fire

Donny Look Jess, it's still raining hard, you'll get absolutely soaked. You're not seriously planning to walk home, are you?

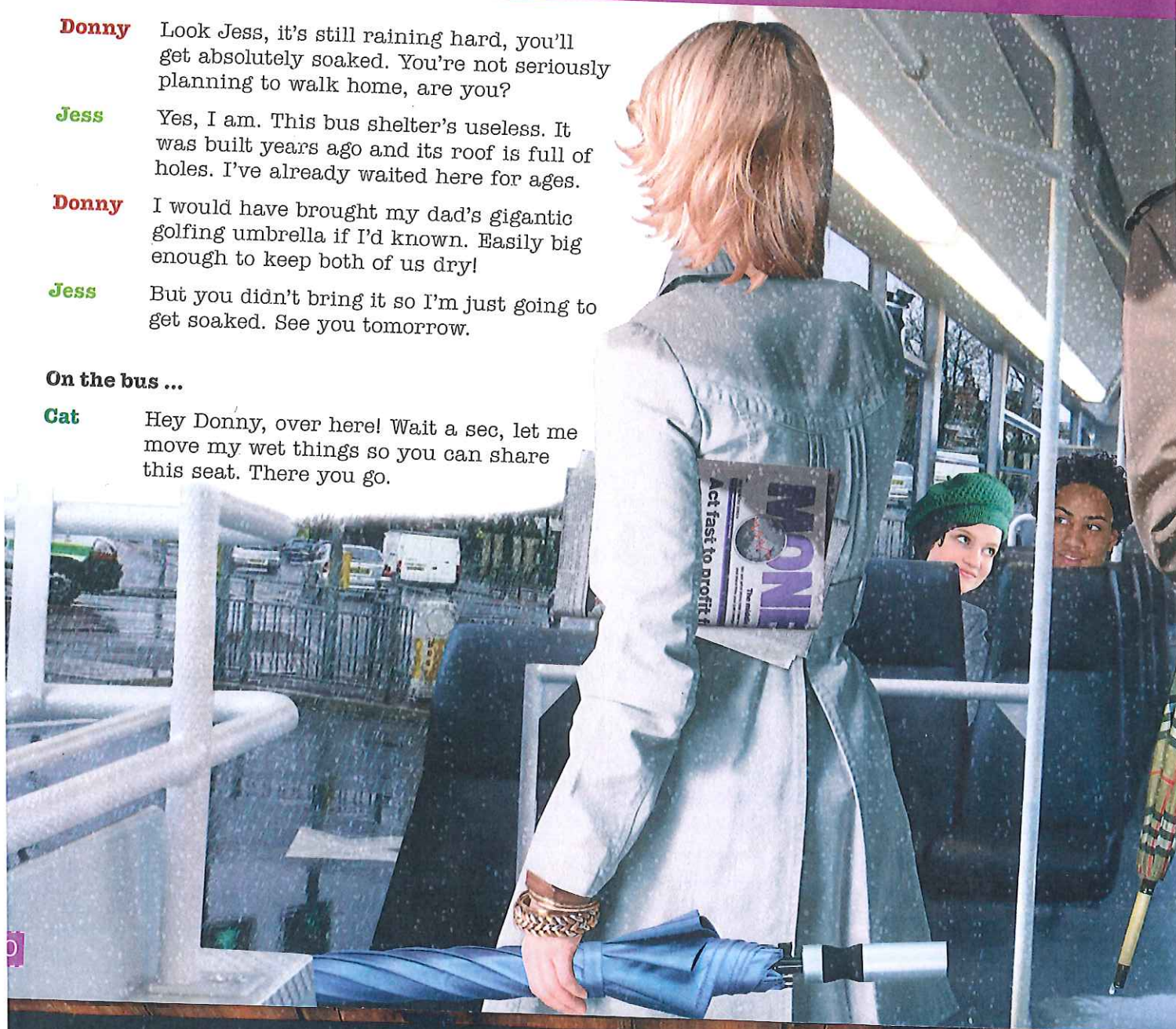
Jess Yes, I am. This bus shelter's useless. It was built years ago and its roof is full of holes. I've already waited here for ages.

Donny I would have brought my dad's gigantic golfing umbrella if I'd known. Easily big enough to keep both of us dry!

Jess But you didn't bring it so I'm just going to get soaked. See you tomorrow.

On the bus ...

Cat Hey Donny, over here! Wait a sec, let me move my wet things so you can share this seat. There you go.



Donny



I come from California, and the weather in Europe still gets to me. I miss the sunshine! No wonder the British talk about the weather so much – you just can't count on it. It never rains but it pours, or so they say!

How would you describe the weather in your country? How do you feel when it rains a lot? What do you know about climate change? Do you think it's a problem – why or why not?

Donny Thanks Cat. This weather is unreal! I've never experienced so much rain.

Cat Oh, I have. It always rained really heavily when I lived in Scotland.

Donny Well it hasn't stopped raining here since last Monday, which must be a record. We've had torrential rain for over a week.

Cat I know ... My cat's just had kittens. And they were born in our shoe cupboard, so I haven't been able to get my wellies out for three days!

Donny Wow, amazing. How many did she have? Do you need any help finding homes for them?

Cat Thanks for the offer, I'll let you know. She only had six this time. It would have been seven, but one of them died in my hands just after it was born.

Donny Oh, I'm so sorry. You have my sympathy, but there probably wasn't anything you could have done. Natural selection and all that.

Cat Oh yeah, I knew perfectly well that they wouldn't all survive. I was told that they never do. Here's our stop ... Why don't you come round now and see the kittens? They're really sweet.

Donny I'd love to but ... well, maybe I shouldn't come to your place today. Jess and I haven't been on very good terms for a while. I think she'd be very upset.

Cat I'm sorry about that but honestly, Donny, I simply don't understand. What is her problem? It's a totally innocent invitation to see Sugar's kittens. It's not like I've ever tried to steal you away from Jess.

Donny I know that, Cat, you know that. She wouldn't see it that way. She takes everything so seriously. All of life's disasters seem to affect her personally.

Cat Poor old Jess, how awful for her! Would you like me to speak to her? She should have learned by now that I'm not a threat.

Donny No, she'd misunderstand anything that was said right now, but OK. I'll come in with you for a bit.

Cat Great! Watch out for the puddle by the front door. You see why I'm missing my wellies ...

Donny Jess? You all right?

Jess No! I've just got home and seen the news! Those terrible bush fires in Australia! Isn't that where Sophie's gone?

Donny What? I mean, who? I don't know, I don't think so ... listen, I can see why you're upset but Jess, this is really insane.

Jess All those people were burnt to death. Children were killed, homes were ruined. Don't you care? Check it out on Reuters, it's a breaking news story. Where are you anyway?

Fanning the flames



REUTERS

Home

Finance

News

Britain drowns while South Australia burns

While Britain has witnessed the worst rain since records began, some regions of Australia have had no rain at all. Very high temperatures and strong winds created firestorms, and everything in their path was destroyed. Trees exploded from the heat, birds dropped from the sky and ash fell as fires burned across 115 miles of forests, farmlands and villages.

It was confirmed that at least 108 people have died in bush fires in Victoria, South Australia. Firefighters warned that this number was expected to climb higher as they continue looking for at least 100 people still missing in the ruins of houses.

Local people were warned relatively recently that Victoria badly needed rain. Bush fires are a natural event in Australia, but the drought, warm winds and recent extremely hot weather have created conditions that have made fires bigger than ever before.

At least 750 homes were destroyed as the fires burned through towns and farmland. Whole towns

were ruined, with photographs of the region showing the blackened earth and buildings whose fields and villages used to stand.

Locals described huge walls of flame that raced 'a train' across the countryside.

Marie Capaldi was staying at a friend's house in Kinglake when a man arrived with his baby daughter, saying his wife and other child were missing. 'He was so upset, and he just stood there and said "Look, I've lost my wife, I've lost my other I just need you to save my daughter"', she told website of *Melbourne Age*.

Chris Hanley, who has lived in Kinglake for 22 years, said: 'It's going to take a long time for the farm to recover. I've never seen so much fire damage all my life.'

Callers to national radio described how they were hiding in swimming pools as flames approached their homes, and how children were terrified by powerful winds, the incredible heat and a strange orange light in the sky.



Extremes of weather are more and more in the news. While some parts of the world have unusually heavy rainfalls, other parts have no rain at all. The cost, especially in human life, can be very high.

Have you noticed any extremes of weather in the Netherlands? What stories have you read recently about unusually high or low temperatures? Which countries have the most extreme weather?



authorities said that the whole country should be proud of the hard work thousands of firefighters have done over the past few days.

As main fires continue to burn, but forecasts for the next few weeks promise firefighters some hope, firefighter Bruce Esplin said on Wednesday. 'We see a very bright light at the end of the tunnel now,' Mr Esplin told reporters.

Victoria Police Superintendent Rod Collins said he would go on looking for missing people, a job that could continue for another three weeks.

He said roads into villages and towns would open as quickly as possible when all the fires were under control, but that came with a warning. 'Our advice is if people are going there just to have a look at what damage the fire has caused, they're not welcome,' he said.

Mr Esplin echoed the warning, but reminded people that tourists were needed by local businesses. 'If you're just being nosy, stay away. If you're going back as a tourist, you're more than welcome.'

Muddying the waters

Donny Hi Cat. How's it going?

Cat Donny, hi. Look, I'm really sorry, maybe I shouldn't have called you but ...

Donny Oh don't worry, Cat, it's cool. Jess was in such a panic about the bush fires, she didn't even realize I was with you.

Cat Well actually that's not what I meant ...

Donny As it turned out, Sophie was nowhere near the disaster area. I told you Jess gets anxious unnecessarily.

Cat I certainly don't want to cause trouble between you. I wouldn't have rung now but I don't know who else to ask for help.

Donny Why, what's the matter? What can I do for you?

Cat My house is flooding!

Donny Oh no! That's terrible!

Cat Yes, the stream at the bottom of the garden has just burst its banks, and the water is rushing in, all over the lawn. It's still pouring with rain. I don't know what to do!

Donny I'm on my way! Have you rung your mum?

Cat Yes, of course I have! I rang her first. I was told she's in meetings this afternoon and her mobile isn't on. I couldn't get hold of any of my brothers, either. I left a message on Mum's voicemail but I don't know how quickly she can get home. Lots of trains were cancelled earlier, because of water on the railway lines.

Donny You should have called the fire brigad immediately. Do it now. They have massive pumps. And why don't you st putting a few valuables into a bag? I'll there as soon as I can, OK?

Ten minutes later ...

Cat Oh Donny, there you are! Look, the riv water is coming in over the doorstep a my piano is in the front room. It'll be ruined! I should have moved it but ... I tried but it was too heavy for me.

Donny No, you couldn't have done it by yours. Maybe I should have called Spud and Darren? The staircase is very narrow and the stairs are too steep, but three us could probably have lifted it onto a table ...

Cat Donny, I think it's too late. There's mu water all over the floor already, look! I going to damage everything, the carpe the furniture, all our possessions ... Listen! Help has arrived ... thank goodness!

Donny Your cat!

Cat What? Oh no, the cat! And her kittens! Oh, the poor things! Donny, they'll dro

Donny Don't worry, I'll rescue them!

Fireman Right you are, young lady. The water's rising. Get out of here – no time to lose

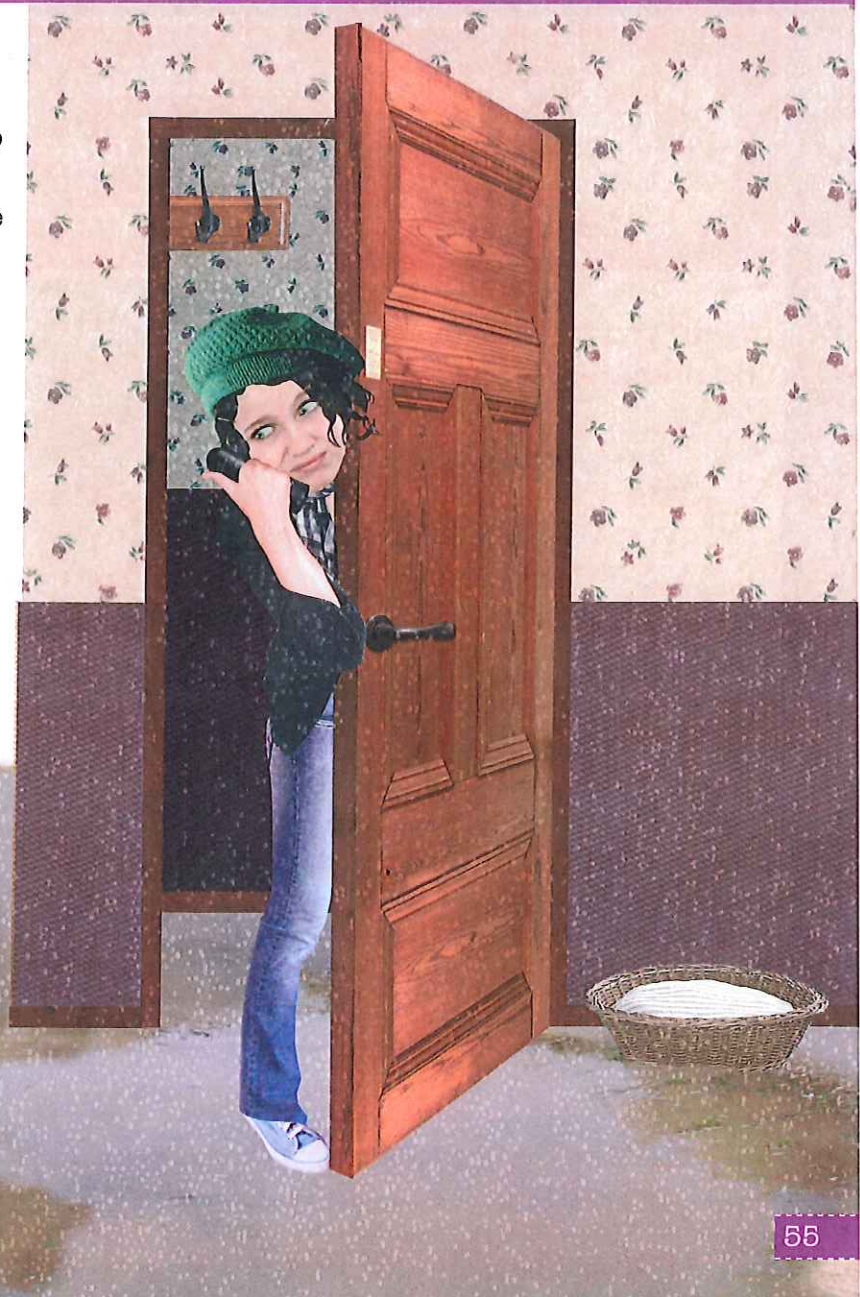
Cat



When we moved down from Glasgow, we were so pleased with our little English country cottage by the river. Now we've realized that it can be dangerous to live so near the water. Thank goodness Donny came to the rescue!

In what ways are water levels controlled in the Netherlands? Can you remember any times when dykes broke and canals flooded? Who comes to your rescue if that happens?

- at** But I can't! Donny ... the kittens ... if they ...
- reman** No ifs, no buts – out! We were trained to deal with this. You too, young man.
- onny** I've got them, Cat! They're all safe, take these two carefully, be gentle ...
- t** Donny, thank you, thank you ...
- reman** Come on you two! It's time to go!
- t** Donny, how can I ever thank you?



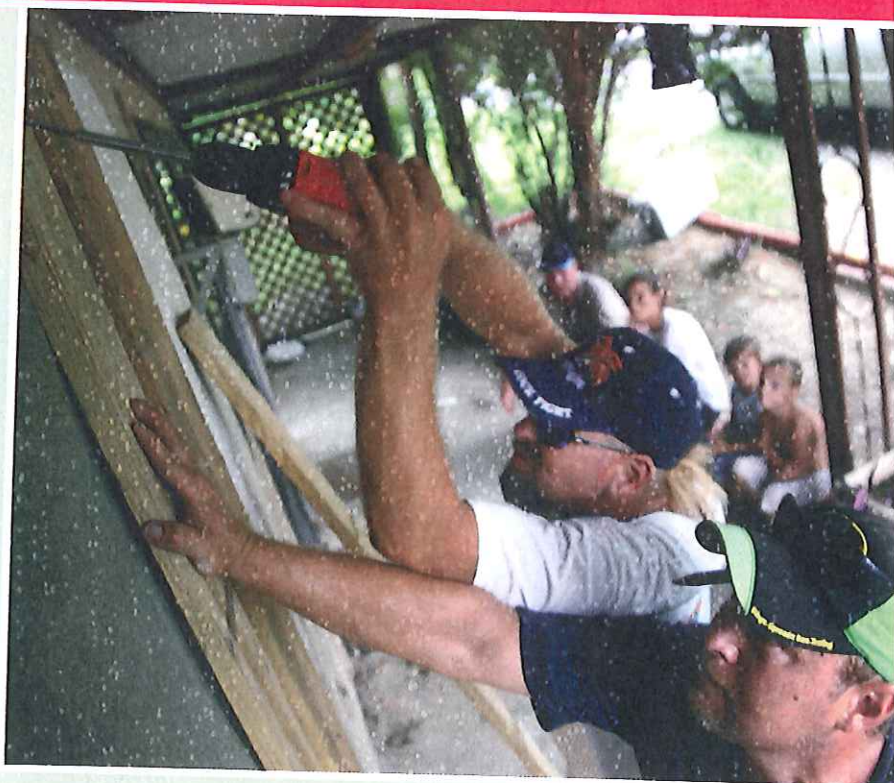
Cyclone!



Before Queensland's cyclone season in December, you should take some basic precautions that could save your family, your home and your business.

What you should do to be prepared:

- ☞ Check that your home is in a sound condition, especially the roof.
- ☞ Trim any tree branches hanging over your roof.
- ☞ Clear your property of any loose items that could blow about and possibly cause damage or injury during a cyclone.
- ☞ Know your nearest safe high ground and the safest way to get to it in case of a high tide warning or other flooding.
- ☞ Find out how and where to turn off power, gas and water supplies.
- ☞ Check that you have enough house and contents insurance.
- ☞ Store your important documents such as wills, passports, photos and birth certificates in a fire/water-proof container or safe deposit box.
- ☞ Know your community disaster plan.
- ☞ Keep a list of emergency phone numbers on display.
- ☞ Check neighbours, especially if they are recent arrivals, to make sure they are prepared.



What you should do if a cyclone is coming:

- ☞ Store all loose items inside. Put wooden or plastic outdoor furniture in your pool and fill garbage bins and small boats with water.
- ☞ Fuel your car and park it under solid cover.
- ☞ Close shutters, cover up or tape all glass and windows.
- ☞ Pack your emergency kit plus warm clothing, medications, valuables, papers, photos and keepsakes in waterproof bags.
- ☞ Disconnect all electrical appliances and turn off the gas.

What you should do when a cyclone hits:

- ☞ Stay inside with your pets. Shelter, well clear of windows, in the strongest part of the building (the cellar, internal hallway or bathroom).
- ☞ If the building starts to break up, protect yourself with mattresses, rugs or blankets or by sheltering under a strong table or bench. If necessary, hold on to a solid fixture such as a water pipe.
- ☞ Continue to listen to your portable radio for updates and advice.

- ☞ Beware of the calm 'eye' of the cyclone. If the wind suddenly drops, don't assume that the cyclone is over. Violent winds will soon start again from the opposite direction, so wait for the official all-clear.
- ☞ If you are driving, STOP. Stay well away from the sea and clear of trees and power lines. Stay in your vehicle.

What you should do after the cyclone:

- ☞ Don't go outside until officially advised that it is safe to do so. Check for gas leaks and don't use electrical appliances if wet.
- ☞ Continue to listen to your local radio for official warnings and advice.
- ☞ If you left your home, don't return until advised that it is safe to do so.
- ☞ When you do return, use a recommended route and don't rush.
- ☞ Beware of fallen power lines, damaged bridges, buildings and trees. Don't enter floodwaters.
- ☞ Pay attention to all warnings and don't go sightseeing.
- ☞ Don't make any unnecessary telephone calls.



Prepare an emergency kit containing:

- ☞ A portable radio, torch and spare batteries.
- ☞ Supplies of fresh water and canned food.
- ☞ Matches, lamp, portable stove, cooking gear, utensils, can opener and waterproof bags.
- ☞ A first aid kit, manual and tape for windows.