

This Is Your Bug Life!

play by Marian McGuinness | illustrated by Tohby Riddle

Characters

TV HOST

DOUGLAS DUNG BEETLE

PATTY (*childhood sweetheart*)

DIGBY and MEADOW MUFFIN (*Doug's children*)

POOEY THE FLY and FRIENDS (*blowflies*)

DR PETER (*CSIRO research technician*)

CAMERA PERSON

This is a TV show being recorded in front of an audience. The CAMERA PERSON spends the time filming different angles of the guests and host.

TV HOST

(*holding a book with the cover: "Douglas Dung Beetle, This Is Your Bug Life"*) Good evening and welcome to THIS IS YOUR BUG LIFE. And just a little warning to our audience: tonight's show might get a bit stinky because our special guest has a super smelly occupation. He's not only the world's strongest insect for his size, but he's the world's strongest animal! Please give a warm welcome to ... the Eco Hero .. Douglas Dung Beetle!

(*Audience claps. DOUGLAS DUNG BEETLE enters with his sweetheart, PATTY. They sit on chairs.*)

TV HOST

(*with authority*) Douglas Dung Beetle ...

DOUG DUNG BEETLE

(*dryly*) Call me Doug ...

TV HOST

Doug, you were born in the spring of 2021. You started life as a squirming, white larva in a wet cow patty in a dung beetle nursery called 'Dung Down Under' in country New South Wales. Smelly, was it?

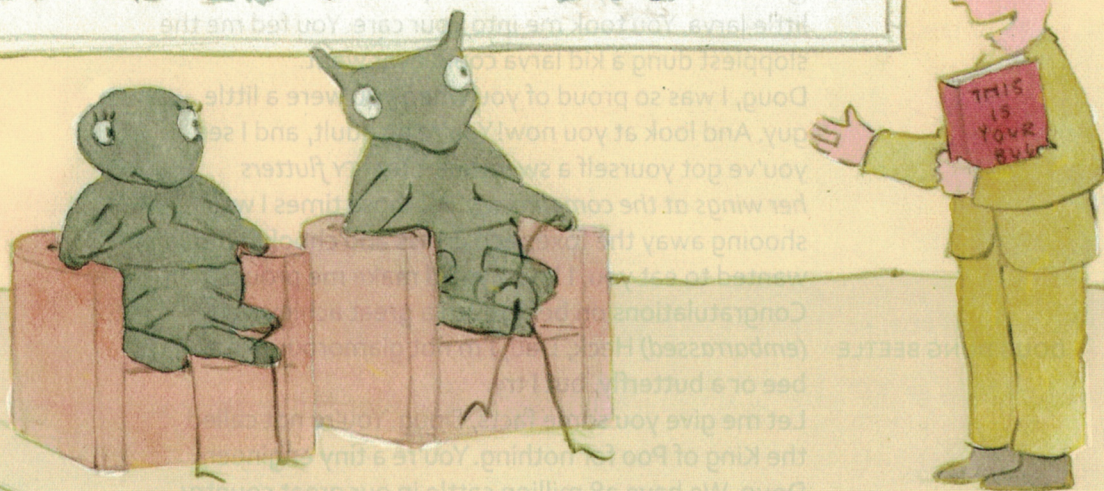
DOUG DUNG BEETLE

I actually have no recollection of this early stage of my life. But my adopted dad said I was a good larva and munched my way through the dung he collected. I was very healthy. He only gave me the best poo.

TV HOST

So, Doug, your ancestors go back a long way. While you dine on cow poo today, your ancestors dined on dinosaur poo. We know this because palaeontologists have found fossilised dung the size of tennis balls.

THIS IS YOUR BUG LIFE



DOUG DUNG BEETLE Yes, my ancestors tidied up after woolly mammoths too. Now that's some job! They must have been whopper dung balls back then. Like watermelons!

TV HOST Doug, you have another claim to fame. Tell us about your connection to ancient Egypt.

DOUG DUNG BEETLE Well, I don't like to boast, but my image was worn in jewellery by the great Queen Cleopatra, herself. The Egyptians thought that the sun was rolled across the sky by a dung beetle. They're called Scarab Beetles in that part of the world. A bit of a hoity-toity name for a dung beetle, if you ask me.

TV HOST Let me introduce your sweetheart to our audience. Patty Dung Beetle, is Doug being a tad humble here? Let's face it, you're all so important to the ecosystem. Our world would be much smellier without you.

PATTY DUNG BEETLE Doug and I fell in love on top of a pile of horse manure. He's a hard worker and a great provider. He'll often wait under the bottoms of the animals so he can hop on the dung as it leaves its owner. His motto is *Fresh is Best*. So he's first in, first served, if you know what I mean. We made a great nursery together in our underground house for our children when they were little larvae.

TV HOST And now to explain a bit more about Doug's beginnings, we've flown in someone special from his past. It's Dr Peter, all the way from the CSIRO nursery farm Dung Down Under!

(DR PETER comes onstage dressed in a lab coat.)

DOUG DUNG BEETLE

(gets a little teary) Dad! You adopted me when I was a little larva. You took me into your care. You fed me the sloppiest dung a kid larva could ever want.

DR PETER

Doug, I was so proud of you when you were a little guy. And look at you now! You're an adult, and I see you've got yourself a sweetheart *(PATTY flutters her wings at the compliment)*. All those times I was shooing away the foxes and crows and chooks who wanted to eat you, I knew you'd make me proud. Congratulations on being such a great achiever.

DOUG DUNG BEETLE

(embarrassed) Heck, Dad, I'm not glamorous like a bee or a butterfly, but I try.

DR PETER

Let me give you some facts, Doug. You're not called the King of Poo for nothing. You're a tiny engineer, Doug. We have 28 million cattle in our great country, that produce 300 million cowpats a day. That's 500 000 tonnes of dung each day of the year! For your size, Doug, you're the world's strongest animal!

Let me give our audience another fact. Doug can pull a whopping one thousand times his own body weight. That's like me dragging six semitrailers full of potatoes along a road! You're a gift to humans, Doug. And that brings me to our next two guests. Joining us tonight. Having flown in from their own dung patties, are your children, Digby and Meadow Muffin.

TV HOST

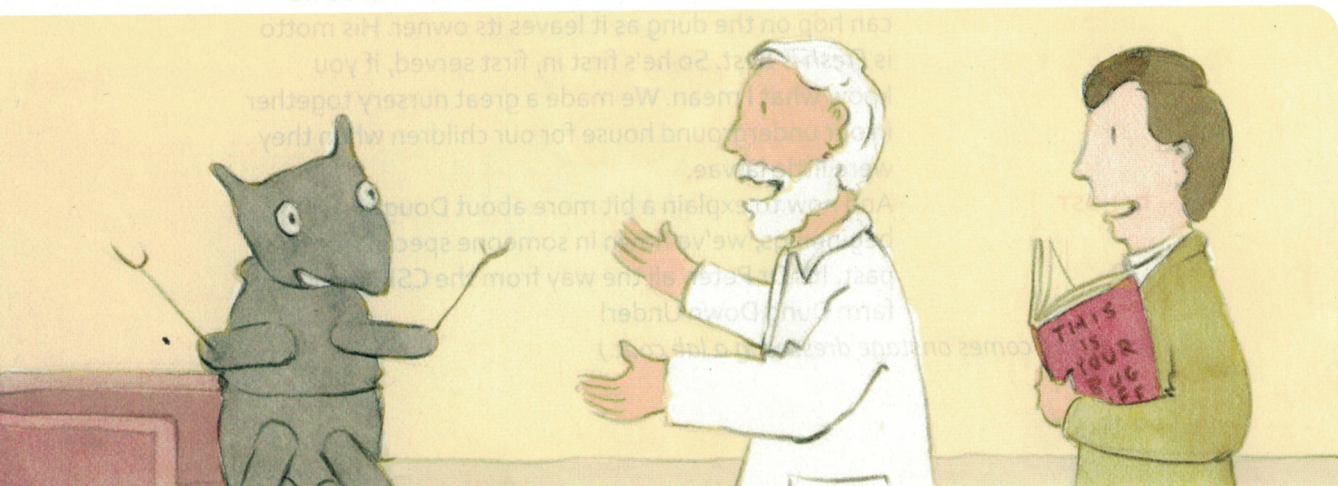
(DIGBY and MEADOW MUFFIN enter.)

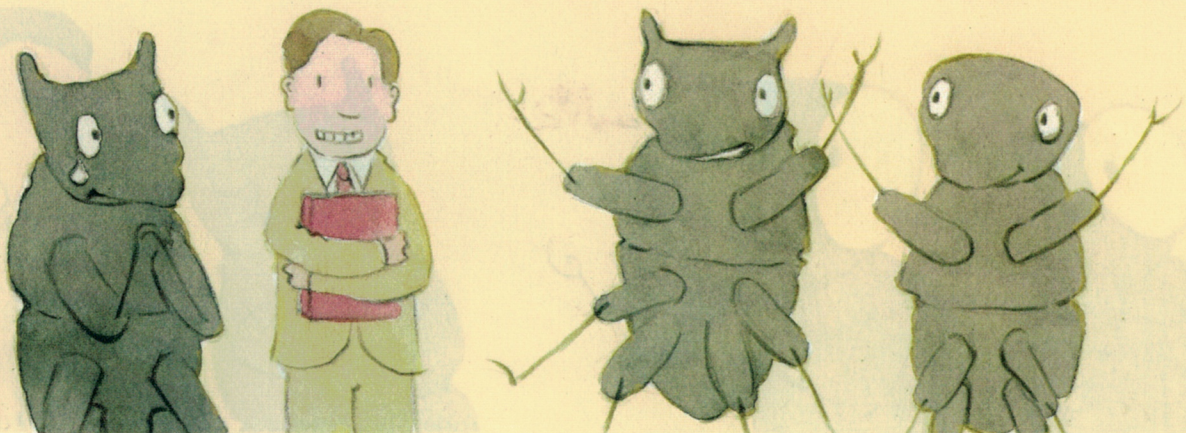
DOUG DUNG BEETLE

(getting teary again) Digby! Muffin! I haven't seen you for ages! Look how you've grown! You were toddlers when you left home and look at you now. What good-looking beetles!

DIGBY

Yeah, Dad, we've grown our wings *(flaps his two sets of wings)* and we found our own cow patties to hang out in. You and Mum were great parents.





MEADOW MUFFIN Dad, you taught us the difference between omnivore and herbivore dung. We're both gourmet dung beetles now and appreciate the pong difference.

(They sit next to PATTY.)

DOUG DUNG BEETLE *(sighs happily)* They were the good old days, kids! I remember scuffling over grassy hillocks with you as toddlers, looking for wombat droppings, fox scats and rabbit pellets. We'd sit on those cow pats sniffing the grass and playing Guess the Stomach Gases.

TV HOST That's such vivid detail, Doug.

(A squadron of FLIES buzzes onto the stage. They rub their legs on things they land on.)

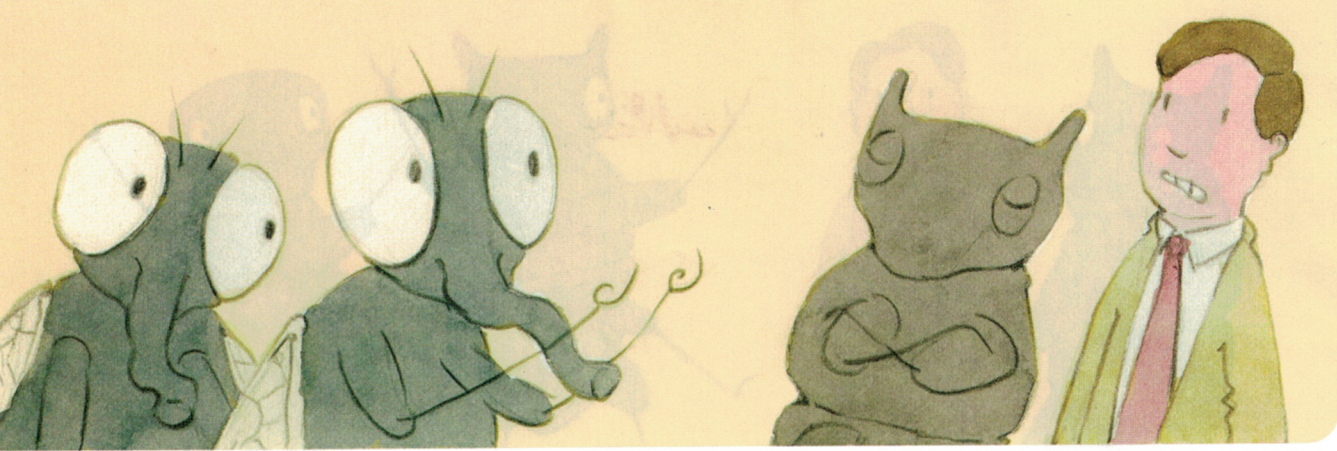
TV HOST It seems we have a few blow-ins, Doug.

POOEY THE FLY Too right! I'm Pooey the Fly and I've brought the gang from the horse stables next to Rose Farm Primary School. Remember us, Doug? We're old friends, if you get my drift.

TV HOST So, Pooey, now that you're here, you may as well give us your side of the story. When did you first meet Doug?

POOEY THE FLY I remember it well. Me and the gang were getting hungry. The school lunch bell rang and we made a beeline for the playground. When the kids opened their lunch boxes we swarmed in. It was *bea-u-tiful*. You couldn't tell the bananas from the sandwiches. We covered 'em all. The kids went crazy, but we had a feast. It was a buffet in a lunchbox! Then, Doug, you flew your team in and cleaned up all the patties in the horse paddock next door. You wiped out the homes of a gazillion flies! The next day when we swarmed the kids' lunch boxes, there were only a few of us left! It was a war zone out there, Doug.

DOUG DUNG BEETLE *(nodding his head)* We went where we were needed. That's our job.



POOEY THE FLY

There you go again. Think you're so smart. Think you're a bug superstar! You can't even roll dung balls like a normal bug. You're a show-off, Doug. You have to walk doing handstands while your four back legs roll the ball. Left, right, left, right. Should have gone into the circus, Doug, if you wanted to be an acrobat!

TV HOST

Thank you, Pooey. You and your friends can buzz off now.

(The FLIES buzz off the stage.)

TV HOST

I think we'll leave our last comments to Doug's adopted dad. Dr Peter, is there one last achievement to sum up Doug's amazing life?

DR PETER

I bet no-one knows that Doug's an expert navigator. How do you think he finds his way home to Patty while rolling a ball of dung, backwards? Well, I'll tell you! At night, he climbs on top of his dung ball and it looks like he's doing a little dance, but he's really taking a mental photo of the sky. Then he compares his memory to where the stars are now and rolls that dung ball in a straight line all the way home. That's pretty impressive! I'm a scientist and I couldn't do that.

(TV HOST gestures to DOUG and PATTY to stand up.)

TV HOST

Well, Douglas Dung Beetle, you've flourished from a tiny larva into a magnificent beetle. By processing dung, you're a recycler. Not only that, cow patties release climate-destroying methane into the atmosphere, but you bury it! You control pesky flies and aerate the soil while putting nutrients back into it. You're an Eco Hero! Douglas Dung Beetle ... **THIS IS YOUR BUG LIFE!**

(TV HOST presents DOUG with the book. Audience claps.)

THE END