

Introduction

I have a confession to make – I’m hopelessly sentimental when it comes to land. I long to stand in a paddock under a gum tree, inhale the scent of eucalyptus and listen to the wind rustling through leaves. I want to tramp across the bush, watch eagles fly overhead and feel the energy of the earth vibrating through my boots. It’s a hopelessly romantic view, I know, a visceral desire, when the reality is that home for me is a densely populated suburb of Sydney’s inner west.

It’s a place of parks and trees – even odd glimpses of water – yet all I notice are tightly packed terraced houses crammed onto tiny plots, concrete patios, bitumen-covered pavement, traffic lights, shops, cars, cafes and only occasional glimpses of sky.

I carry a vague, ill-defined notion that I might one day find a small parcel of land where I can plant trees and grow food, a dream I suspect I might share with a not inconsiderable number of other people. It hasn’t happened yet. I live in the city and dream of open space.

From the outset I was an unlikely candidate to write a book about farming families; I have no background in farming and I’ve

never lived on the land. Leaving aside my lack of farming knowledge, I also have no children and I was born in England, not Australia. It's more normal for me to refer to a paddock as a field and to land as countryside. Lastly, I'm a lifelong vegetarian. And as if all that weren't enough, I'm hampered by my absurdly romantic view of farming.

Other than a few years living in Broken Hill, where I grew vegetables and kept chooks, I had little connection with Outback Australia when I embarked on this project. Writing a book about life on the land has challenged my stereotypical views and my ignorance about farmers, graziers and pastoralists (like the fact that there's a difference between them for a start).

I accepted the perceived view that 'bushies' were people whose pragmatic stoicism got them through the tough times they often faced, although what those tough times were was only vaguely articulated in my mind: something to do with fire, flood and drought. I've since added frost, hail, dust storms, pests, disease, debt, accidents and illness to that list.

Just as I was doing my best to try to bury my romanticism under a flurry of pragmatic, unemotional facts on farming, two parcels arrived from the Galls at Langawirra, friends who run a sheep station northeast of Broken Hill. Inside the first parcel were two small ziplock bags; one contained sandy earth and the other fine red dust. The second parcel contained a bouquet of everlasting daisies, neatly held together by a rubber ring normally used to castrate sheep.

Lynne Gall had collected the red earth from one of the paddocks at Langawirra, and she'd scooped up the dust from a truck stop on the outskirts of Broken Hill, where drivers stop to let the dust fall from their truck rims before they drive into town. Her grazier husband, John, picked the everlasting daisies from a paddock after a brief shower of rain.

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The contents of those two parcels astonished me. The Galls had always struck me as a classic bush couple – hard-working, pragmatic people with not a hint of sentiment or romance about them.

‘Hope you enjoy this little touch of the bush,’ Lynne wrote. ‘If you want, you can sprinkle it [the red earth] like fairy dust on your city garden.’

The unexpected gifts gave me a glimmer of hope that my sentimental attachment to land wasn’t so misplaced after all. Those everlasting daisies bloomed for weeks in my small studio as I worked on this book.

It takes a special kind of person to live happily away from the facilities most of us take for granted, someone like Cath Marriott, who lost her husband to cancer shortly after his fortieth birthday and who was left to run their Victorian sheep farm and raise their four young children alone, or Lyn French, who ran away from her strict father in Queensland when she was fourteen and by fifteen was working full time as a roustabout.

Then there’s Roma and Glenn Britnell, who were knocked back time and again when they tried to borrow enough money for a sheep property, so they proved the banks wrong by switching from sheep to cows and they built their own dairy by hand. Or what about Ian Jackson who was, on his own admission, the most feral kid ever to draw breath and the ‘dumbest bastard’ in school? He went on to meet the President of the United States of America. Michelle Reay arrived in Australia as an English backpacker fresh out of university and somehow ended up with four sons, living and working at Durham Downs, often referred to as the jewel in the crown of the Kidman cattle empire.

All of the interviewees I visited had fascinating stories to tell and they lived and worked in unique places, from the rugged high country of the goldfields of northern Queensland to the

grassy slopes of Tasmania; from the dusty red earth bordering Mutawintji National Park to the vast productive paddocks of Western Australia's central wheatbelt.

Most of us cluster near the coastline in this vast continent of ours. We turn our faces to the ocean and our backs to the land, rarely seeing what goes on beyond the coastal fringe. The Outback can seem a grim, forbidding place, thousands of kilometres of seemingly empty space with no mobile phone coverage and the nearest major hospital many hours drive away. Perhaps that's why the Royal Flying Doctor Service is such a well-respected and much-loved organisation – we all know how frightening it would be to have someone you love stranded 'out there', desperately ill and waiting for help to arrive.

Having worked for the Royal Flying Doctor Service for several years as a writer I had some idea of the challenges people faced in remote areas. I learnt a lot more writing this book. There were times during the research and interview process when I questioned my sanity, especially when I found myself driving alone on a dirt track hundreds of kilometres inland with nothing but wild pigs and kangaroos for company. More often than not, though, I felt blessed to have been granted the opportunity to find out more about the lives of people who live and work on the land.

Food is fundamental to our health and we can't survive without it, but in our neatly packaged, over-processed, technology-driven lives we're in danger of forgetting where it comes from. Food doesn't come from supermarkets; it comes from the land, and unless we're prepared to grow our own, the food we eat in every café, every restaurant and every home has been planted, nurtured and harvested or bred, fed and raised by people who live and work on the land.

The harsh reality of farming in the twenty-first century, according to much of what I read and many of the families I

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interviewed, is that a lot of people who live and work on the land today make less per hectare, per cow, per sheep or per pretty much anything they plant or raise than their parents, or sometimes even their grandparents, did.

But this book isn't about profitability or margins. I know more about farming now than I did before (and believe me, that wouldn't have been hard) but if you're reading this to learn something about farming techniques you're going to be disappointed. This book is about the stories that lie behind farming; about the people whose lives are intrinsically linked to the welfare of the animals they raise and bound up in the health of the land they farm.

What interested me most during the interview process were the human aspects of farming – the stories of success and failure, of life and love, of hardship and celebration – and the passion and gritty determination that characterised every family I talked to, from those who have lived on the land for generations to those who are relatively new to it.

The eight families featured in this book welcomed me into their lives with unconditional warmth and hospitality (even after I'd confessed to being a vegetarian) and although we had never met before, and in most cases only spoken once briefly on the phone, each family invited me to stay with them. It was a humbling experience and I'm not sure I would have found a similar welcome from strangers in a city.

I've done my best to keep a lid on any overtly sentimental musings in the writing of this book (and I suspect I haven't always succeeded).

Any mistakes are mine. Any credit for a story well told belongs to the families I interviewed.

Deb Hunt

Philip and Adele Hughes

'Dulacca Downs'

90 kilometres east of Roma, Queensland

The unlikely pairing of Adele and Philip intrigued me. Adele was born in Melbourne in the early 1950s, the daughter of a well-connected family whose grandmother travelled as a companion to Sir Robert Menzies' wife, Dame Pattie. She was sent to finishing school and she trained as a home economics teacher: hardly the sort of background you'd expect of someone who would go on to marry an uneducated stockman who'd left school at fifteen after he failed grade ten. Philip Hughes, though, was no ordinary stockman.

The fifth generation of an originally Welsh farming family – hence the surname – Philip's thirst for knowledge and his hunger to succeed saw him read every book he could get his hands on after he left school. It came as no surprise to learn that Philip had risen from humble jackaroo to head stockman then manager at some of the most successful properties in the Stanbroke Pastoral Company.

The stories they told me around their kitchen table at Dulacca Downs, when the paddocks outside were white with frosted grass and drought still gripped that part of inland Queensland,

had me weeping with laughter and sometimes just weeping. Tales of their early life together called to mind the stories of Henry Lawson or the bush ballads of Banjo Paterson, hinting at a bygone era peopled with drovers and swagmen, stockmen and cooks, jackaroos and itinerant gardeners – characters who craved the isolation of remote settings and who didn't 'fit' into the system. As someone who struggled to find his place in school, Philip knew how that felt. He struck me as a manager who would be slow to judge and quick to forgive.

The couple's eventual decision to set up in business for themselves at a stage in life when they were comfortably established towards the top of the corporate tree spoke volumes about their entrepreneurial spirit and their drive to succeed. Their undeniable grit and vision, coupled with a strong bond of love and a great sense of humour, have seen them through some of the darkest times imaginable. They're living proof that persistence pays.

Their paddock-to-plate beef production business – Rangeland Quality Meats – was only set up in 2011 but it's already been recognised for excellence within the industry. Their oldest son, Lachlan, joined the business a few years ago and moved to an adjoining property with his wife, Anna, and their son, William. Since I met them, Adele and Philip's second son, Alister, has also joined the family business.

They've gone through the usual ups and downs of any father/son working relationship, plus the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dynamic, and they've come through it stronger, wiser and more connected than ever.

Lachlan and Anna's commitment to living sustainably with as light a footprint as they can has driven Adele and Philip even further in the direction of organic farming, improving the soil that supplies the grass that feeds the cattle that, week after week, are

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sent to market to keep RQM at the top of its game. It's a game where the pieces have to fit together like a 3D puzzle to ensure a consistent supply.

Theirs is a family bond of love and laughter that has been strengthened through hardship and isolation, through success and failure, and through decades of sheer bloody hard work.

Philosophical Farmer

I met Philip Hughes at Roma airport, 470 kilometres inland from Brisbane. It occurred to me as I disembarked from a plane full of miners – including several women – that I hadn't told Philip what I looked like, nor had I thought to ask him the same question. I needn't have worried; Philip's blue shirt, dusty boots and battered Akubra instantly identified him, no doubt as instantly as my idea of city clothes suitable for the bush must have identified me.

It was generous of Philip to drive ninety kilometres to pick me up, even more generous of him and his wife Adele to invite me to stay for two days of interviews, but if he was anxious at the prospect of a writer delving into their lives he didn't show it. He seemed open and friendly, a loose-limbed, gently spoken giant of a man who found the prospect of being interviewed faintly amusing. I, on the other hand, was a bag of nerves. This was the first of eight visits I was planning to make to farming families across Australia and my cupboard was bare when it came to knowledge about cattle; even preparing basic questions had been beyond me. I had an empty tape recorder and two days of interviews ahead of me.

We were driving east, towards Dulacca Downs, an 8000-acre property where Philip and Adele had lived for the past ten years. I guessed Philip was probably in his late fifties, and it struck me as unusual that he and Adele had only lived at

Dulacca for such a relatively short time. This was my first wrong assumption: that people living on the land don't move around much.

Gentle drops of rain hit the windscreen as we drove out of Roma, past sprawling camps of flimsy dongas and white cabins that had been thrown up to accommodate the thousands of largely single men and women working in the coal seam gas industry; it was the modern equivalent of a gold rush.

'Roma was one of the first places they found oil originally, way back around the turn of the last century,' Philip said, resting his huge forearms on the steering wheel as he scanned the ranks of white dongas that marched across the landscape.

I assumed he must have been worried about the impact of mining on the grazing country we were driving through. But his concerns went deeper than that.

'When you have a big bucket of money and you fly in, do your thing then leave again, that has an impact on families. I think that's when we lose sight of what community means. In functioning communities it's not about everybody getting on, it's about accepting that there are differences and that you're all in it together.'

I learnt on the drive east that Philip had lived and worked in enough diverse communities to know what he was talking about. As we left the dongas and, sadly, the rain behind, he gave me a quick rundown. At fifteen he'd started work as a jackaroo and by eighteen he was head stockman at Dixie Station, west of Cooktown. He'd worked his way onto larger stations near Normanton, Winton and Windorah, and by the age of twenty-five he was managing 28,000 hectares at Banchory Station near Clermont, for the Stanbroke Pastoral Company. Two years later he was sent to Augustus Downs with the same company then to Bulloo Downs, a vast property of more than a million

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hectares carrying 20,000 head of cattle. I had no idea where any of these places were, and I hadn't given much thought to the possibility of people 'managing' stations rather than owning them either.

It sounded like Philip had been a rising star in one of the most iconic organisations in the Australian cattle industry (even I'd heard of Stanbroke) then he and Adele had left it all behind and struck out on their own.

As Philip described some of the setbacks, disasters and challenges they had faced since going it alone, I couldn't help thinking they might be regretting their decision. They weren't young, it sounded like they had struggled to make ends meet and their business was far from booming. My head spun with unfamiliar names and places. Then Philip was talking about hybrid vigour, pH levels, ticks and backgrounding, feedlots, grain-fed accreditation and I was forced to confess my ignorance of all things related to cattle.

'Well, it's like this . . .'

I let the conversation unfold about the various merits of different breeds of cattle – *bosincas? bostaurus?* – as the kilometres rolled past, trying desperately to remember if I'd told Adele I was a vegetarian. Then Philip let out a short bark of laughter.

'You'd have to say we've been on a long and rocky road with a few unexpected detours up some pretty dry gullies.'

His philosophical turn of phrase captured my attention.

'With the gadgetry we've got now I can pull up here on the side of the road, hop onto my iPhone and see how much meat they sold today. I can tell you exactly what's in my bank account, just from the side of the road. But is that a good thing? We live at quite a frenetic pace now so it's pretty important to keep in touch with nature to slow down a bit.'

I'm with you on that one.

‘But it’s all good. If you can put a family business together where each member can spread their wings, find things they like doing and build off the back of one another, you’ll be ahead of the game.’

The ‘game’ Philip and his family were in was beef cattle, a paddock-to-plate production business that to his obvious pleasure now involved the whole family, including Lachlan and Alister.

‘It hasn’t been easy and there’s no pot of gold in it,’ he said as we turned off the main road onto a dirt track. ‘As a parent you sometimes think it’s your children’s responsibility to come back and work, and your right to tell them what to do.’ He let out another explosive rumble of thunderous laughter as we pulled up outside a simple homestead, shaded by mature trees and surrounded by paddocks of what looked like dry, brittle grass.

‘I’ve sure had to pull my head in on that one!’

He was still smiling when Adele came out to meet us.

‘Welcome to our humpy,’ he said.

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The first thing that struck me about Adele was how immaculately well groomed she looked, from her shining white hair coiled into a neat bun on top of her head to the tips of her manicured fingernails; next was the difference in height between her and Philip (she barely reached his shoulder); and finally, how frequently she (and he) laughed.

From the little I knew about them they seemed an unlikely couple, and the more I found out the more unlikely their pairing seemed. Adele was born on the outskirts of Melbourne. Apart from having a grandmother (still alive at 103 at the time of writing) who travelled as a companion to Dame Pattie Menzies during Sir Robert’s tenure as Australia’s longest-serving prime

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minister, Adele was schooled at Presbyterian Ladies College in Melbourne and later trained as a home economics teacher.

‘And did she tell you she went to finishing school?’ Philip shouted from his office, across the hall from the kitchen. ‘She likes to keep that last bit quiet.’

Adele laughed.

‘It’s true, I did. And I always said I would send any children I had to a co-ed school because when I came out of school I had a strange attitude to boys, it was “Wa-hey! Boys! Where are they?”’

She was still laughing as she reached into the oven for a batch of white chocolate chip and macadamia nut biscuits.

‘Nice nails,’ I said, with genuine admiration. My own were splintered and grubby by comparison.

Adele smiled. ‘They’re fake, my only indulgence.’

A farmer’s wife with fake fingernails? *They’re not farmers, they’re graziers. Okay, a grazier’s wife with fake fingernails, still unusual surely?*

And how to reconcile Adele’s immaculate appearance with the cabinets in her cramped kitchen that would have been ripped out and refurbished by any style-conscious Melburnian long ago?

‘We’ll probably shift the whole house onto the ridge, there’s no point refurbishing it.’

It felt like Adele had read my mind and found it amusing; her breezy self-confidence suggested she wasn’t remotely concerned what I thought of her kitchen, and rightly so.

‘Did Adele tell you I was chosen as the first ever school captain at Charleville School of the Air?’ Philip asked, reaching for a cookie as he strode into the kitchen.

‘And did Philip tell you he was the only kid *in* grade seven?’ she countered.

They both roared with laughter and I began to relax. The next two days promised to be a lot of fun; Adele and Philip Hughes

may have been the most unlikely couple on paper but they were a natural pair in person.

‘I was at cross-purposes with the system,’ Philip explained, as we sat at the dining room table over morning coffee. ‘With animals, some of your best are the ones that are hardest to deal with. Same with humans. If you have a human with a brain who won’t be dominated, you can’t thrash him into shape and stick him in a box, you have to find another way to reach him.’

Philip had followed a long line of Welsh ancestors onto the land. Five generations back, HB Hughes set up on the Eyre Peninsula, one of four brothers who made the journey to Australia, and he made his fortune carting freight on paddle-steamers up the Darling, buying properties with the proceeds. Philip’s side of the family was descended from the youngest Hughes brother, who came out last and ended up in Queensland. Philip’s father, George Lucas (Bill) Hughes, and his grandfather, Henry Maddock Lucas Hughes, managed Nockatunga near Thargomindah for a total of fifty-seven years between them.

Finally, a name I recognised! Nockatunga was north of Tibooburra, a small town I once visited when I lived in Broken Hill. The long, largely dirt road north from Broken Hill to Tibooburra ended in a settlement of houses with not much more than a pub, a village hall and a small hospital. In 2014 Tibooburra was the hottest place in New South Wales.

Philip may not have had much formal education but he had a thirst for knowledge, and working on stock camps had given him all the time and opportunity he needed to slake that thirst. ‘We only went to town maybe twice a year and there was limited radio, so that left plenty of time for reading. Everything I learnt, I learnt through books. It was a wonderful way to get knowledge.’

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Philip grew up a bushman through and through. He learnt how to read the land and how to understand the rivers that criss-crossed the landscape like lines on the palm of his hand. Coloured pins stuck into a map of Queensland hanging on the wall behind him indicated the many stations where he and Adele had lived and worked. I soon realised that Philip could describe it all without any reference to the printed map; his mental map was far more detailed.

‘That’s my backyard,’ he said.

I wondered how on earth an educated young woman from Melbourne – who once dreamt of opening a gourmet bread and cheese shop – had ended up marrying a ‘bushie’?

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It was the late 1970s and Adele was in her mid-twenties, still living at home with her parents. She’d spent five years as a home economics teacher at a Baptist girls grammar school and all her spare time, including weekends and holidays, with friends on properties. She loved the bush, she loved horse riding and she was itching for a more exciting life. The answer was to offer her services as a governess in a remote area.

The first reply to her ad came from a place called Darkwood, inland from Coffs Harbour, near Bellingen in New South Wales. The handwriting was immature, as if the letter had been dictated to a child, so Adele’s strict father rang the local minister and discovered Darkwood was a hippy commune. He vetoed it.

The second letter was from a Lutheran school – out of the frying pan and into the fire – and the only other reply came from Terrick Terrick, an 80,000-hectare sheep station not far from Blackall in Queensland, almost 2000 kilometres north of Melbourne.

The station manager's wife, Mrs Ruth Harvey, wrote a long letter describing how all the young people on the station played tennis and went horse riding . . . 'and there are only nine children to teach', she added.

Adele didn't stop to consider the demands of teaching nine children in five different primary school grades (made all the more challenging given her inability at maths). She simply thanked her lucky stars that she wouldn't have to teach classes of thirty and she would be able to ride a horse. With the naïve enthusiasm of the young, she took the job.

Most inner-city parents would have been concerned about sending their child to a remote sheep station, even if that child was now an adult in her mid-twenties, and Adele's were no different. What worried them most was the threat of snakebite. Anti-venom at the time contained a high percentage of horse serum and Adele had developed an allergy to horse dander, so for Christmas that year her parents bought their daughter an unusual present: a twelve-gauge shotgun. Adele broke the shotgun into pieces and packed it into her suitcase, tucked under her neat little schoolteacher outfits.

Station manager Peter Harvey met Adele off the plane in Blackall, where the dry heat hit her forcibly.

'Man, that's hot!'

Peter smiled. Adele wasn't the first city girl to arrive and she wouldn't be the last. 'Is there anything you need while we're in town?'

'Maybe some chalk and pencils,' she said, suppressing a desire to ask for cigarettes. 'And I need to get to the police station.'

'Why?'

'I want to register my shotgun.'

Peter dutifully took the diminutive young governess to the local station and stood behind her as he addressed the sergeant over the top of her head.

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'This is our new governess,' he said gravely then paused, before adding in a deadpan voice, 'she wants to get her shotgun registered.'

By the time Adele was introduced to the jackaroos, the stockmen, the ringers and the overseer at dinner at Terrick Terrick that night – all of them gorgeous young men – the story had spread. One young stockman shook her hand and introduced himself.

'G'day, Annie.'

Adele assumed he had misheard and politely corrected him. 'It's Adele.'

'Ah, I thought it was Annie, as in *Annie Get Your Gun*.'

Before long everyone in town knew not to mess with the new governess who owned a shotgun, not that Adele ever fired it. The only time it came out of her suitcase was at weekends, when she threw dried cowpats into the air so trigger-happy boys could blast them out of the sky. When Adele tried it she almost blew her shoulder off.

Admitting she could type, if only with two fingers, landed Adele the job as secretary of Blackall's polocrosse club, with responsibility for organising the annual carnival dinner. Philip was a keen player and arrived at the dinner late, after spending the night in the pub with his team. Adele was no stranger to the pub herself but she was still put out that Philip and his players hadn't bothered to attend her carefully organised dinner.

'You have to pay full price to get in,' she insisted.

No amount of sweet-talking would sway her, and Philip and his team were rewarded for their lateness with cold spaghetti and a band that had finished playing.

Their next meeting was at a polocrosse carnival at Thylungra, a sheep station owned by the famous Durack family, and this time they managed a dance. Adele showed her hand without meaning to the next day when she sauntered past a young jackaroo.

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'Who was that tall dark handsome guy I danced with last night?'

'You could ask him yourself.'

To Adele's acute embarrassment, Philip was sitting quietly beside the jackaroo.

The carnivals and the dances kept coming until one night at the Sand Goanna Slide, at Yaraka, Adele watched Philip dance with someone else. His partner was a very pretty girl in a red dress ('much slimmer than me') and Adele couldn't help noticing he had his hand firmly planted on her bum.

She marched across, grabbed the youngest, greenest jackaroo who worked for Philip and slow danced with him in front of them.

It worked.

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'Have you seen that mole on Philip's back?'

It was just after Christmas, late December 1979, and Adele was standing in the kitchen at Fort Constantine near Cloncurry, the station Philip's parents had managed since they'd left Nockatunga. Apart from the occasional letter, Adele and Philip hadn't had any contact with each other since the end of the polocrosse season, several months earlier. Adele had mentioned in one of her letters that she was thinking of going back to Melbourne to open a gourmet bread and cheese shop and Philip's response was to invite her to spend Christmas at his parents' place.

'My mother's not what you would call a touchy-feely person,' he said by way of preparation.

Originally from Sydney, Phyllis Hughes had worked as an Australian Inland Mission nurse at Dunbar Station, a cattle property on the southern side of the Mitchell River in the remote

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cyclone-prone area of Far North Queensland, way up in the middle of Cape York Peninsula.

A practical woman, Phyllis realised when she took the posting that it would be some time before she might see a dentist, so she had all her teeth extracted before she left. She also spent a useful couple of hours learning how to perform extractions on other people, training that came in handy when her future husband, Bill, arrived at the clinic to have one of his own teeth extracted.

Now there she was, a dour, upright woman, not given to laughter, standing at the ironing board in the kitchen at Fort Constantine, asking Adele what seemed like a leading question. Had she seen the mole on Philip's back?

Adele's Christian upbringing kicked in. What had Philip said about her? What was his mother asking? Her mind raced through the possibilities. You don't have to get naked to see a mole on somebody's back, what if he'd simply had his shirt off? She'd worked with him, she could have seen it.

'Yes,' she said, eventually.

'And what did you think?'

'My mother always told me that a black mole wasn't good and you should have it removed.'

'Well maybe you can talk to him because I've tried and his sister has tried and he won't listen.'

Adele persuaded Philip to get the mole checked, and a biopsy at Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane revealed third-stage melanoma. Several days later the mole was successfully removed.

In between the two hospital appointments Adele took Philip down to Melbourne to meet her parents, a clear sign that the relationship was becoming serious.

'What are you planning to do next year?' Philip asked after their brief visit to Melbourne.

'I thought I'd open that cheese shop I told you about.'

'We won't see much of each other if you do that.'

'I could fly up for a few polocrosse carnivals.'

There was a pause, but if Adele was hoping for a romantic proposal she was disappointed. 'Maybe we should just get married.'

She thought about it for a while. 'Yeah, well I suppose so,' she conceded.

Adele's parents were quietly relieved that their 26-year-old daughter had finally met someone she wanted to settle down with, although the implication of living and working in a remote area didn't really sink in for any of them.

After a period of recuperation, Philip splashed out on a new car – a bright yellow Toyota SR5 with a double cab – and the pair set off to drive 1500 kilometres due west of Brisbane, heading for Tanbar Station near Lake Yamma Yamma, in the hot and desert-dry Channel Country. Tanbar Station was almost as far as you could go in southwest Queensland before hitting the border with South Australia. At twenty-five Philip was working as head stockman at Tanbar for the Stanbroke Pastoral Company and Adele had been appointed governess.

Philip made a rare diary entry in January 1980 that read:

Arrived back at Tanbar after a good holiday with a new car, 30 stitches and a fiancé [spelt finance].

Their wedding day, in July 1980, prompted another fulsome entry:

Got married.

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