

A RURAL SCENT

My rural journey begins in a small country town located in a valley with spectacular views of the Snowy Mountains. It was to prove rich in heritage of gold mining, timber and agriculture. My success was to be embraced by the community and earn the right to share in that heritage with visitors, friends and family and promote its wonderful lifestyle and attractions. You can decide if I earn the right to be called a local or not.

It all began when my family and I arrived in Tumberumba. Not much was known about the town, its people and infrastructure. The drive was pretty straightforward and the scenery on the way was impressive. Many times my family and I had travelled along the Hume Highway but never dared to venture off and explore the great places our country had to offer. A map did not capture the beauty and tranquillity of the region and there's a limit to what you can discover on the internet. It was time to explore this town.

On a gorgeous summer day nearly two-and-a-half years ago we parked in a quaint main street and surveyed the shops and surrounds with a rather sceptical eye. On one hand the 'hustle and bustle' was non-existent, but on the other our need for all that large societies have to offer, and sometimes bombard you with, was missing. Do we pursue this new phase in our life and reflect one day upon it as a worthwhile journey or do we play ignorant and retreat to what we know best? Well, as you can imagine many questions were being asked, but alas, we didn't have the answers. Experience gives you that.

We weren't to know of the rich history the town had or of its many wonderful inhabitants, heroes and villains. It was like we were stepping on foreign soil and, believe me, I know exactly what that's like having lived overseas for a short period. At least there were no language barriers. But what else did we need to know? The essential ingredients, I thought, to a smooth transition were the obvious support networks plus friends and family, yet we lacked all of these. Best to follow one of my

favourite mottos “you never know if you don’t have a go”!

At least this showed courage and living in a small rural community couldn’t be that bad, could it?

Little did we know that our doubts were soon to be dispelled and our life experience enriched, if not rewarded. Opportunity was knocking!

It was, for us, a journey into the unknown. However, as history shows, circumstances and experience shape you and your character. For that alone we can be very grateful. Many people do not experience the chance of a new life and may only ever exist in one environment their whole lives. We had met people in Ireland who had never left their village or even toured their own country let alone our ‘down under’. Having visited several different countries and actually lived overseas, I felt truly lucky and blessed to be given another passage. ‘Variety is the spice of life’, as they say, and I was ready to rack mine up.

So, it was not the outback but very rural in the whole sense of the word. Farms were all around, the familiar attire of boots and hats were noticed, smoke could be seen emitting from various chimneys over winter and yes, cockatoos and kookaburras could be heard. Of course there existed the modern influence of ATMs, retail businesses with eftpos and an internet café however the presence of historical buildings gave hint to early settlement due to the goldfields. History now gathered and compiled assured us we were indeed to reside in an amazing country town. Getting even closer to the rural experience would entail an isolated bush existence, but we weren’t quite ready for that although we had camped many times.

Apart from the various attractions that the town boasted (I was to discover these much later on) the people appeared friendly and inquisitive. You could never be ‘incognito’ here and given that most of the locals knew one another strangers were quickly noticed. It can be scary as a newcomer to a town where you know absolutely nobody. On reflection, when we began our rural life, we were quite brave. Not as brave as a soldier, or deserving of a medal, but nonetheless optimistic and excited about the journey that lay ahead.

People that are comfortable with city living could or would find it daunting. However, many people have commended us for our ability to transition from one lifestyle to another. Friends have even commented that, unlike others, we have indeed 'embraced our fears'. My family and I deeply respect and give kudos to those who have also ventured into the unknown. Much can be learned and passions can reveal themselves. Of our rural journey they are the love of nature, wildlife, organic fruit and vegetables and other beautiful local produce. I'm sure that on reflection so many other things will have contributed to how we would then perceive ourselves and our environment.

Today my family and I are still forging ahead strongly. The winters are very cold, but the spring, summer and autumn are full of promise and hope. Promised are sunny days, strawberries and blossom. We hope for many things and my list would be long, but I am also thankful for all life has to offer and has offered. I recommend getting out of that comfort zone and taking up a new challenge or existence. There are many self-help books but the greatest of them all is life itself.

My success lies in the fact that I have managed to sustain a quality lifestyle with my family in a rural region. In a town that has a big heart and where its residents are prepared to embrace you for one or all of your qualities and contributions. Personally, I feel that the word success is probably an inappropriate term. Ultimately you are trying to do the best you can and create rewarding relationships with the people that you love, know, work alongside or associate with in that community. By encouraging people to visit, as well as excitedly telling family and friends of your experiences and adventures, this itself could be measured as a success. There are no blue ribbons to prove the rural journey was as success. However, the wonderful knowledge and experience you have cultivated, and that of the enriched character you have become, could be.

May be we could bottle it? But what fragrance captures all this and what would we call it? I'm not sure, but I do know that I now wear a rural scent each and every day.