

Rural retreat – to Russia!

By Pamela Wright, Reidsdale

City friends looked askance when 12 years ago I announced with great excitement that we were retiring to the country. ‘Why bury yourselves?’ ‘You’ll be bored to death.’ ‘You’ll die, culturally!’

However, a thousand trees, lots of hard work, plans high-jacked because of drought, then still more hard work, have realised our little piece of heaven on earth.

Tucked in the elbow of a grand National Park, our small property has become a haven for Sydney-siders who revel in rural quietude, birdsong and cosy fire-side suppers.

On a recent visit, eyebrows were raised when I mentioned my local poetry group, sponsored by the Regional Community College.

‘Do you just go and read your own ditties?’ enquired one sophisticate. ‘Well, no, actually we are studying Russian women poets of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.’ Jaws dropped perceptively.

Having Russian ancestry, nothing could keep me from my poetry group, run by a local published poet. Her love for Russian women poets immediately became contagious. I caught the bug and began collecting anthologies. My blood-link

intensified the poignancy of the poetry as I resonated with the emotions evoked – passion, love and sorrow.

Somewhere in all this, I became aware of an intense need to visit Russia, the homeland of my paternal great-grandmother. Quiet evenings now saw me studying the map of Russia, and the local library supplied me with a kit to teach myself some of the language.

The librarian, who doubled as a check-out chick, took up the challenge, exchanging Russian greetings and phrases with me, to the bemusement of fellow shoppers. When digging weeds from the vegetable garden I would count them in Russian! I would greet the chooks in Russian and confuse my poor husband with unintelligible words. Even the cows became wary of this woman who called them strange names.

Then the dream became a reality, and I was waving goodbye to my husband at the airport. Breaking through the thick, cotton-wool clouds and with the plane still some 15 minutes out of Moscow I had my first and unforgettable view of Mother Russia – miniature wooden farmhouses, maybe dachas, framed by birch woods, haphazardly dotted across the green fields. I felt instantly at home.

Filled with optimism and a good dose of idealism, I spent the next three wonderful weeks in the land of the steaming samovar, the icon and those gorgeous gilded onion-shaped domes. Ballet, opera in the Bolshoi Theatre, Russian choral concerts and art galleries gave me my fill

and more. But the highlight of my experiences was the pilgrimage made to the tiny museum devoted to poet Anna Akhmatova, who lived and wrote through the tumultuous Revolution years. Amongst the memorabilia, I discovered a tiny book made from the bark of a silver birch. Scratched upon its pages were lines from Anna’s poetry. This handiwork, wrought with love

by a dissident incarcerated in the Gulag, was a poignant reminder of Soviet shame.

Half a world away from my rural retreat, I found the essence of my Russian heritage, but without my rural experience, Russia, for me, may never have eventuated.

The countryside, a ‘cultural desert?’ I think NOT! ■

THE LAST, LONG NIGHT

I sit still on the verandah at the closing of day
While the mopoke breaks the silence in its melancholy way.
I see the skeletal outline of the gaunt trees by the creek
While the sight of dusty paddocks paints a picture harsh
and bleak.

I have known this sun-scorched landscape
for the best part of my life –
On the land there’s always heartache
and the constant toil and strife:
But you must learn to rise above it,
take the bad times with the good,
For it’s in your blood,
it’s more than just a meagre livelihood.
How we fought to tame this country,
wrestled bushfires, floods and drought
Had our triumphs with our woolclip,
knew what failure was about.
Raised a family in the thirties,
when depression held its sway.
Hung on grimly through the war years,
living only for each day.
Now I’ve grown too old and weary and I can no longer fight
Through another drought nor battle
as the bank exerts its right
To foreclose, so come tomorrow
I will shut the gate once more
On the memories of a lifetime
and the dreams that went before.

So I sit on the verandah, watch the darkness creeping in.
Count the stars and hear the night sounds –
soon a new day will begin –
Hear the mopoke break the silence in its melancholy way.
Feel the loneliness engulf me and wish that I could stay.

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Support for cancer patients and their carers



Can Assist (formerly known as The Cancer Patients Assistance Society of NSW) has been providing care and assistance to cancer patients and their families in NSW for 50 years. It has a network of volunteers and members in 27 branches across rural and regional NSW.

The formation of Can Assist, in 1955, was a dream of Mona Campbell Ham MBE. Her determination, charm and organising ability, together with the support of a small group of equally determined and able friends, ensured resolve through good times and bad to raise enough money for the purchase of Jean Colvin Hospital in 1961.

This was a huge effort by all, and showed what a wholly committed group of people Can Assist had working for them. The work that Mona and her fellow friends had done was truly inspiring by providing care and comfort to people who were ill and in need.

The network established the Jean Colvin Hospital for cancer

patients from the country who were forced by circumstances to come to Sydney for radiotherapy. Before this hospital was established, many people were unable to come to the city for treatment as they had nowhere to stay.

In 1978, Ecclesbourne was purchased to provide a home away from home for relatives and carers of country cancer patients. The hostel was conveniently located only a short walking distance from the Jean Colvin Hospital and cancer treatment centres at Sydney's teaching hospitals.

Since then, Can Assist has continued to grow thanks to the support and contribution by Presidents, Members of the Board of Directors, Country Branches and other committees and organisations who have given selfless time and effort to make this such a wonderful organisation.

It has long been acknowledged that the vitally needed community services of Can Assist, Jean Colvin Hospital, Lilier Lodge and Ecclesbourne bring comfort

and emotional support to cancer patients, their relatives and friends from all over NSW and beyond.

Today, Can Assist owns and operates three patient care facilities – Jean Colvin Hospital, which is a fully accredited hospital located in Darling Point, Sydney; Ecclesbourne, which is a bed and breakfast facility for patients and their carers; and Lilier Lodge, which also caters for cancer patients and their carers and is co-owned with the Cancer Council, located in Wagga Wagga.

SERVICES AND SUPPORT

The burden of cancer is not a small one. Patients, families and carers face enormous physical, emotional and financial burden. Can Assist tries to make things easier wherever they can. They provide a range of services, including information, travel, accommodation, hospital care, financial relief and much, much more. If a patient has a problem they do everything in their power to fix it.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Can Assist would not exist without its volunteers. As such, they are always on the look-out for anyone willing to join the network and become a volunteer. If you are interested in volunteering or becoming a member, contact your local Can Assist branch or the main office and they will help you become a part of this important organisation.

You can also help by making a donation to Can Assist and by supporting the various fundraising events coming up in your local area.

The most important thing though that you can do is to let people know about the service. Cancer affects us all in some way shape or form – the more people who know Can Assist exists, the more people they can help.

*For more information,
Ph: 02 9362 3429,
Fax: 02 9362 4371, Email:
admin@cancerpatients.com.au or
go to: www.cancerpatients.com.au*

AS DAY PROCEEDS

Whistle the wind at an early dawn
Send off remnants grey and forlorn
Chase away morning chill and cold
Bring on a sunrise bright and bold

Whistle the wind on an airless day
Bring flowers and leaves out to play
Sounds that carry across long hours
Echoes to linger through leafy boughs

Whistle the wind as daylight recedes
Welcome the sounds that night precedes
Cast your sight on the evening star
Count heaven-lit lanterns near and far.

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book reviews

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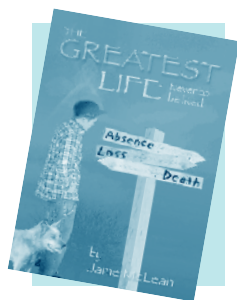
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The Greatest Life Never to be Lived

By Jame McLean

The Greatest Life Never to be Lived is a fast paced story set in outback Qld about a young man's battle to discover what's really important in life, not only to him but to all those he knows and loves.

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The main characters travel along on a razor's edge through what seems like a mine field of life's tests and turmoil in the hope of achieving an eventual dream and desire. One final great sacrifice, though heart wrenching, puts pay to any doubts about what is 'the greatest life'.

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The Creative Edge

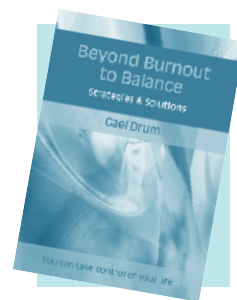
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Beyond Burnout to Balance: Strategies & Solutions

By Gael Drum

We all assume that life is easy, but when you feel like abandoning it, what do you do?

- ☐ Are you sick of feeling tired and exhausted?
- ☐ Are you frustrated with your relationship or your job?
- ☐ Do you have little or no time for yourself?
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In *Beyond Burnout to Balance*, Gael shares the strategies and solutions that she used to regain control of the areas of her life that were not working.

Published by Gael Drum
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Daring to Dream



JOSEPHINE NATHAN DENILIQUIN, NSW

Josephine Nathan was born and raised on a dairy farm in Cobram, Northern Victoria. After spending time in Melbourne she moved back to the land with her partner on a large family property near Deniliquin where she has established her 'Woolliwoolli' fashion label. Josephine's successful designer knitwear business uses 100% Australian merino wool. To test the waters, she initially sold products through markets. The response was so positive she decided to ramp up production and her garments are now sold in selected boutiques in Australia and Paris. Josephine continues to showcase her wares at fashion shows and wants to continue exploring export opportunities. Josephine has participated in 'fashion weeks' in Australia, Hong Kong and Paris. At 33, she has achieved so much and is already scoping her next creative endeavour.

WHAT GAVE YOU THE MOTIVATION/ INSPIRATION TO FOLLOW YOUR DREAM?

The motivation to start my own fashion label emerged from the frustration I felt as a young designer working in industry. I was employed by a major Australian knit label, but found I was unable to get my own ideas out in the way I had hoped. Looking back I can see that I was quite idealistic, but I was passionate with lots of dreams and ideas, and I wanted to see them become reality.

I also felt a strong need to work for myself rather than being employed in a traditional sense. I was once given a tip that 'rather than trying to find a dream job, you should create it for yourself', and that has always stuck with me. I was very fortunate at that point in my life to know many innovative people who were seeking this type of life choice by running their own business. They encouraged and mentored me to believe I could get my ideas to work.

The concept for Woolliwoolli began as a simple kernel and developed into a business. I studied textile design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology but I am a self-taught garment maker. After university I worked as a designer in industry, which gave me a good grounding in marketing and promotions. I also lectured on knit at RMIT in the fashion and textile design department. Teaching a new generation of future designers I was made aware of the growing interest in knit and natural fibres. This strengthened my fashion business vision and gave me a clear direction of how it could develop.

In my twenties I also spent time travelling through third world countries in Central America and Asia. These experiences showed me that there are many different ways of living a life and that financial security and material possessions don't

necessarily guarantee happiness. I saw many craftspeople continuing with traditions that would not make them a lot of money but gave them huge satisfaction and purpose in life. That was really inspirational for me and encouraged me to pursue my own craft of fabric creation.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU REALISE THAT YOUR DREAM WAS ACTUALLY POSSIBLE AND WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE YOU THINK YOU COULD REALLY DO IT?

When I left Melbourne to move to my partner's family property I started playing around with ideas and experimenting with possible woollen products. My first marketing foray was selling goods at local markets, and I knew I was onto something when I would sell out of product. People gave me great feedback and seemed excited with what I was doing, so I gained the confidence to explore business ideas further. I was also lucky to meet a few different boutique owners at these markets who wanted to stock Woolliwoolli. I began approaching other retailers, experienced success, and knew that Woolliwoolli was a business that had the potential to grow.

WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD, WHAT DID YOU WANT TO 'BE' WHEN YOU GREW UP?

I wanted to produce children's books. I've always loved writing, drawing and doing creative things. I remember exploring Mum's fabric box and I loved playing with her fabrics. I would pin material together and come up with garment ideas. This continued through childhood and as a teenager as I made a lot of my own clothes. Back then, being a fashion designer seemed like a bit of a fantasy career, something I would never really be good enough to do. Actually I still have to pinch myself occasionally to realise that I have become one.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD INFLUENCE YOU

IN LATER LIFE?

Perhaps growing up on a farm meant I had to use my imagination and entertain myself a lot more than city kids. We were always looking for things to do and this often involved making things out of what was lying around and easily available.

Being constantly surrounded by nature as a child also had a big impact. When designing I am always looking to nature for inspiration and I don't feel too happy if I can't see the trees and the sky, or touch the earth and animals every day. That is probably why city life didn't really work for me. I love visiting the city to soak up all it has to offer, but it is only when I get back to the farm that I feel I can really breathe.

WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS?

All the women in my family have had a major influence throughout my life as very strong role models. My Mum was a library teacher and taught me to explore the world through books and reading. She was very creative and would make amazing displays for the library. It wasn't unusual to spend a weekend helping her make a giant papier-mâché beanstalk for book week, or perhaps paint all the flags of the world when the Olympics were on. She really showed me that there was no limit to what could be achieved if you used your imagination.

Both my grandmothers were incredibly positive and I hope that I have the energy they both had throughout their entire lives. One of my grandmothers was a hand knitter and spinner and I loved to watch her turn fleece into yarn. She also made her own dyes and I have many happy memories of bushwalks where we would gather leaves, lichen and berries to create the dyes. I think that is where my passion for wool and fascination with colour began. My other grandmother was a great traveller; she visited China with a

girlfriend in her late seventies, just because she wanted to see what it was all about.

My husband Matt is also a great source of inspiration and role model. He is incredibly resilient and has a great love of life. He constantly tells me to 'not worry so much' and 'just enjoy the ride'. Although that is not always easy, I think that aspiring to follow this advice makes life a lot more enjoyable.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

I think success isn't about finances or how much you earn. It's about being happy and being independent. I get most satisfaction from being able to continue doing the things I am passionate about in the way I choose. When a collection turns out the way I envisaged it, I feel a real sense of success. I have to be happy with the results myself and of course getting positive reactions from the marketplace and clients is very rewarding and important too. When a customer puts on a Woolliwoolli garment and I see them feeling great, more confident, more beautiful, I know I have done a good job. For me that is success and it feels fantastic!

WHAT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE BIGGEST BARRIERS YOU HAVE HAD TO FACE, WHAT HAPPENED, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME IT?

Being a competitive fashion designer based in the country is a huge challenge. Selling to city boutiques continues to be a large hurdle. I continue to work on changing city people's perceptions about what happens in the country and showing that I can produce innovative products despite living on a farm. Also changing people's preconceived ideas about wool itself has been an important aspect of my business plan. I continually have to educate people about wool. Since I started my label, attitudes have really changed but originally I was faced

with the idea that wool knits meant clothing for the 60-plus age group, not something for a young modern customer. The best way I have been able to tackle this hurdle is to actually create products that say something different. I aim to get Woolliwoolli on the catwalk and in trendy boutiques, so that fashion-conscious consumers can feel, see and experience the wonder of wool for themselves.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 10 YEARS TIME? WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE?

I hope that the Woolliwoolli business is still going strong. I am sure I'll be creating in some shape or form. I've recently taken up painting and I would still love to get back to my first dream of writing a children's book. As long as I am tapping into my creative side and meeting that need, I'll be happy.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO OTHER WOMEN WHO MAY BE JUST STARTING OUT ON A DARING TO DREAM JOURNEY?

If you have a real gut feeling you need to follow it through. You need to surround yourself with positive people who can support and encourage you. Steer clear of anyone who is negative. You also need to be prepared to steer through the times when things don't work out exactly as you want them to. Be persistent and keep trying. One of my grandmother's favourite sayings was: 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again'. I have now taken on that saying myself, because sometimes it really does take more than one go to get to where you want to be. ■

We are always looking for more rural women to be featured in Daring to Dream. So if you or someone you know has a great story to tell, we would love to hear from you. Visit our website to read more great stories. Go to: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn