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Bush Telegraph

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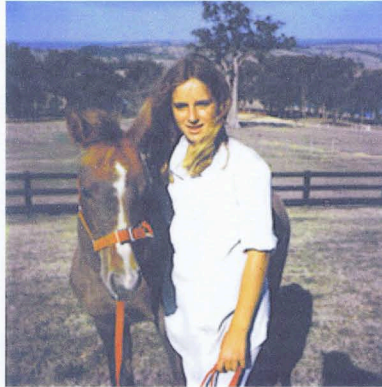
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Melissa Bruce from Sydney, NSW

The most rural sound I recall before "living on the land" was the clinking glass and bitumen plodding of the 6am milk delivery horse. I was seven the day this Clydesdale bolted into our street. The sharp turn caused the bottles to jump the care and – like some religious prophecy – a River of White ran past our house into Toorak Rd. The horse was okay, but I guess he got retrenched.



Melissa Bruce

I didn't see him or any horse for another seven years, until we moved to Wandong, which to me, sounds more like a Chinese rice-paddy than a one-shop country town north of Melbourne. Wandong is wedged between the Hume Highway and the train tracks to Sydney. Not much went on there except the annual Wandong Wingding ("the second largest country music festival in the Southern Hemisphere") – and the stopping of some of the northbound trains.

The Hume was the boundary of the eastern side of our property, where we bred Hereford cattle and Anglo-Arabian horses. I learnt to ride the latter ... and all sorts of things: motor bikes (crashed one), industrial lawn-mowers (rolled one) and tractors (it's still in the dam). Too young for a road license, I took (impressed) local boys for rides in the (horn honking) Ute and did 360 degrees wheelie-spins around the back paddocks.

At the Wandong Winding, while some cowboy was winning time on the electronic bronco, joking blokes were rocking the onsite caravan I found myself in. It was "Me and Bobby McGee" playing on the main stage while the best-looking guy from school and I were supposed to be having "the ride of our lives". Hmmm.

But the most loyal thing I learnt to ride was The Horse. I'd only been on a Merry-Go-Round. I'd had ten years of dance training but our riding instructor, Arnold, had trained the Royal family and he was certain he could get my horse to do ballet. And yep, soon I was doing "figure eights" in dressage competitions.

Dad made a cart with old Holden wheels and a car seat, which he'd attach to his retired Clydesdale (yes, could be, could be!). Sometimes a crowd of us would ride alongside (for a day or two) with dad riding high in his top hat and tails.

Some days I'd just take my horse White Sails for a long, solitary ride around the property. As soon as our house disappeared, I'd feel entirely and divinely independent.

Now I live back in the city (the Merry-Go-Round) beyond where the Hume and those train tracks ended. I haven't talked to a horse for a very long time. I once rode around Centennial Park, but it just wasn't the same. Every kid – every human – should have the chance to ride something; to gallop a wild steed, with the wind in their hair, alone across human-less fields.