



A child's life on the station

JENNIE BUCKNELL
creative director



When I came out to the bush, I realised there's this sort of mysterious veil over it for city people. We see the outback in glossy magazines and we hold it as a special place but we don't really know anything about it. It's not easy to understand, even though we want to. I grew up in the city and came to live on the station after I was married. We're in south-west Queensland and we're fairly isolated. The nearest town is Mitchell, two hours away. Mitchell's about seven hours west of Brisbane.

I watch all the kids growing up in this amazing lifestyle. They're very good at so many things and they're grounded and needed. They have a purpose in life. My own kids are so practical and brave, not like me. I still have the city side in me. Like I can't ride a horse... well, I can, tentatively. (But I get sore pretty quick!)

But sometimes it seems like rural life as we know it is slipping further and further away so I wanted to invite people in. I wanted to share it. And I thought how can I do that? Then I thought, children! Children are universal and everyone immediately understands and connects with

children. And that's how it started. It's a photographic exhibition about what life is like on a station for kids.

It took a long time to evolve. You think you have a great idea and you're so enthusiastic about it but then you realise you have absolutely no idea about how to do it. I started off asking a photographer and I organised some friends of mine to donate their children but it all fell in a big heap. It was disappointing but it also taught me a lot. It was a blessing in disguise. I eventually re-grouped, thought for a long time about what I needed, learned how to apply for grants and came up with the idea of a competition.

Epic Energy provided the prize money and I just advertised in the local region for community people who were willing to put their pictures in. In this land and with this beautiful subject matter we have some wonderful bush photographers. I had two other people help me choose which ones to include in an exhibition and that was actually very difficult. There were a lot of really wonderful entries and I would've liked it to be twice the size. Next I found someone in Brisbane who enlarged the photos and a wonderful framer. So we just went on like that and step-by-step it progressed. For the multimedia aspect, I recorded all the sounds myself, on one of those big, fluffy microphones to get high quality (what are they called again?) and I found someone to put it onto a CD and mix it with the photos.

I started in the January and the first exhibition was in an art gallery in Mitchell in September, so it took nine

months from whoa to go. The original exhibition included 30 photographs, a series of kids' drawings and a DVD. Part of my RADF grant was that I had to donate that exhibition to Booringa Shire Council which I was happy to do. They have been wonderful and supportive and we have got the exhibition into Queensland Arts Council's *Ontour byrequest* and now it's been touring for two years around the state. We were originally only going to tour for a year but they extended it and that's been really satisfying. In 2007, it went to the Brisbane Exhibition (Ekka) where it was apparently seen by nearly 200,000 people.

An idea for the future could be to have an exhibition about women on stations because there's a lot that isn't understood about that too. And there's a lot to come to grips with. I remember before I had children all the women told me that from the time you have your baby, you feel this thing hanging over you that one day they're going to have to go to boarding school and you have to let them go. My first one goes next year, so I'm not quite there... yet!

For people growing up with the land, it doesn't take long before it's running through their veins. It's such a big part of them. That's what I wanted people to see and feel. The way the bush is etched into our hearts.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:

Washing off the dust by Petra Mason – Mack (7) and Jake (3) had just spent a scorching hot Australia Day helping to take weaners off drought affected cows and washing off

The Overseers by Sandra Godfrey – Lance (3) and Jye (2) sitting on the fence as their Dad herds the cattle

Instructions from the Shed by Noela Ward – Nicholas (6) listens intently to his dad, who is in the shearing shed, advising on penning up the sheep

Jake and Grandad by Petra Mason – Jake and Grandad wait on the top rail for the calves to be run up the race in preparation for an impromptu paddy riding competition at Jake's third birthday party

