



Kim Pacheco

Susie Edmonds talks to Kim about becoming an Australian citizen

What was the prime reason for becoming a citizen?

There are many; for the most part though, I really like Australia. I like the culture, I like the people. The land is beautiful and coming from a big city and then moving to a nice small country town was like finding serenity, so I didn't want to leave. And how marvellous it is to have an opportunity to choose where it is you can be. So when I had the opportunity, I took it.

Why take the plunge into full citizenship though? You could have continued living here couldn't you?

Yes. As a permanent resident I had a lot of the same rights as a citizen but not in its entirety. You can't get a passport, you cannot vote, you can't have a say.

That's important for me, to have a say. If I'm going to be politically minded or make any political statement but yet

not immerse myself in it, then I feel hypocritical. I also find it remarkable that I can be a citizen of both the United States and Australia. I think that's a privilege and an honour and if I have an intention to spend my life here, well the remainder of my life here then I should be a part of it.

What brought you to Braidwood?

Initially I came here with my partner. It was an opportunity to have a life somewhere else and it was just fortuitous that my partner had come from another country. So coming here again and not only falling in love with that individual but falling in love with Australia as well, why not take the adventure? Why not try something new and different?

I wasn't very happy with the political climate in the United States at the time. It was still dealing with the bust to the economy and I didn't like the

politics so that was an incentive and being in love was just the icing on the cake. I didn't see any reason to not do it.

What are some of the differences between Australia and the US for you?

You mean, other than you call your flip flops, thongs that you wear on your feet not as undergarments? That still makes me laugh. Interpersonal relationships are quite different here than they are in the United States. The relationships that men and women have in the States seem so much more about the ways to form romantic connections where as there are genuine friendships that are accepted and expected to occur between men and women here which is always interesting and nice.

I find women in this culture, at least heterosexual women, to be far more aggressive than in the United States. I find them far more independent on average. There are always exceptions to the rule, but my observation is that they are less inclined to immediately run into relationships, they're more career oriented and not to say that heterosexuals are not attracted to the opposite sex but it does not seem to be their main objective which is kind of interesting. Australians are racist in a different way.

Expand your thoughts on that...

In the United States if you are not white, you are less than. You can be educated, you can even be of means and yet you are still considered less than. Whereas in Australia, with the exception of Indigenous Australians, which is still disgusting nonetheless, if you are well spoken and educated you get treated with more respect. This was a really, really big shock for me. It was probably one of the main reasons why I felt so comfortable staying in Australia even without family and my partner.

I never was treated with so much respect. Respect for people of colour in America, if ever gotten from strangers, is hard-earned. You have to have a daily interaction with these people over time in order to earn respect.

The other way racism affects a person in the United States is that it is understood that you don't matter, it is understood that you are not as attractive, it is understood you are never going to go past a certain level in society and everyone knows it. Even the lowest of the low, even the most uneducated, unsophisticated, uncultured white American will still feel them-

selves superior to people of colour and that's where the idea of privilege comes in to it.

And I am sure that is how it is towards Aboriginals, which again as I said is disgusting, but fortunately for me I am not treated that way. That doesn't mean that I don't acknowledge that it doesn't exist here. That doesn't mean that I haven't heard racial slurs towards Asians, Jews and Muslims. Just today day I heard someone saying there is a suburb that has the largest population of Muslims in Australia and if we only bomb them ... then we'll be okay! Well for a nation that has had so little by way of terrorism that seems such a visceral attitude.

Anyway for me here, no one ever crosses to the other side of the street when they see me, no one sneers, no one assumes that I am less than, no one assumes I am uneducated.

What do people assume about you here?

The one assumption is 'Oh my God you're from Brooklyn, you must have been in a gang', or something like that. Cliché assumptions yes but again not the assumption of less than...! But again that's different than racism.

Racism for me is the ability to pass legislation based on someone being superior over another. You can have biases or be bigoted and have prejudices, which I think is a human thing and I think we are all going to do it but when you can apply that legally ... then we have a problem.

In the States it is applied legally. So to really understand all the isms, there are laws that restrict woman, laws that restrict homosexuals, laws that restrict people of colour, all of these things. When we talk about racism we talk about our America perception of racism for a person of colour, caused by the power and ability to effect legislation, which as yet we don't have the power to effect. So when someone says to me that someone's been bigoted to them I say that doesn't make them a racist that makes them a bigot. They don't have the power to talk to their Congressman to get laws passed so that people of colour can't come to their store, you know, those sorts of things.

How is being gay different in Australia or indeed is it?

It's hard to say because the majority of my time has only been in Braidwood and no one has been rude or outlandish. I've had more people be abusive to me in the United States. I don't think I can make an honest



assessment on this because I've been in a small town in which everyone knows everybody. It is really hard to have those kind of prejudices because you have to see them every day and I think that's how we get over racism or sexism or homophobia. If you've got to see me every day and you see that I do struggle with the same issues as you, it becomes very difficult to keep that division.

Any problems being gay in Braidwood?

I have had no issues being gay here. You know, there are always going to be people who will derive a larger sense of ego by pushing someone else down or again by looking at other people's issue as opposed to their own. Have I heard other people speak of gay people in this town negatively? Absolutely! But I think it is not necessarily because the person is gay but because they had a negative inter-

action. It wasn't about their sexuality but then again it is also trying to understand sexuality in general. The statement may be made that a woman is acting too manly — I mean, what the hell is that? If a woman was standing there and she adjusted her testicles, then I'd say that was a manly act but ... Look I am openly gay and some people have felt comfortable to have that conversation with me so I don't think it was homophobia because I think if it were then they wouldn't introduce me into the conversation.

I think that people confuse gender and sexuality. I think that people make this assumption that if a person is a lesbian she doesn't have any sexual desires for men. You can still find men sexual attractive — you just don't want to have sex with them. And you can still have sex with men and still consider yourself a lesbian. It takes a lot to offend me and I would prefer someone say something unfiltered and feel comfortable enough to be unfiltered so that we can have that dialogue as opposed to being on guard and not say it. Don't tippee toe around me; we're never going to get along that way.

So what do you hope the future will bring now that you're a citizen?

I didn't become a citizen because I expected something extra although I can now apply for government positions if I choose. I never really thought of anything other than being able to participate fully. Being able to put my shoulders back and my chin up and say I am also part of your citizenry. I don't have any expectations. I'll go with what happens and try my best and try to enjoy it.

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