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Lesley Lambert
 with



David McClymont
 at

EARTH WORKS
 (formerly Park on Wallace)

Fri 26 July
6pm \$10

ANY TAKERS FOR NEXT YEAR?



My gap year

Gemma Buxton started her career working for a magazine not unlike this one

TODAY'S MEDIA INDUSTRY is almost unrecognisable from what it was when I took a job as a reporter with my hometown's first monthly news publication, the *Barkly News Pictorial*.

I finished high school in 1997 intending to continue straight on to university. However, the opportunity to learn first hand from a professional writer, photographer and designer, led me to postpone my studies for a year.

It was the best career move I ever made.

My gap year was spent developing my confidence as a budding journalist, soaking up as much as I could about how to run a news publication, write articles, conduct interviews, and of course how to track down a really good yarn.

We were making recorded history for this sleepy old mining town, whose 12-page weekly newspaper had been the only source of local news for about 30 years — with the same people appearing in the same social pages and the odd short feature piece to fill the layout.

Our task was to create something new and exciting — a place where people could tell their stories, generate debate or educate us on what life used to be like in Central Australia.

We didn't have the luxury of the internet or digital recorders, and with digital cameras yet to properly make an appearance, I learned (woefully) how to use an SLR camera, waiting for two days at a time for the 'film shop' across the street to process the pics.

I was offered a Small Business Traineeship with the publisher of the *Barkly News Pictorial* (none other than the esteemed editor of the publication you are now reading), to boldly go where no writer in Tennant Creek had gone before!

What we found was a town full of characters, history and challenges. People with something to say and people who wanted to hear it.

I found great sources of information and stories in the friends I grew up with, their families, their friends, my neighbour, the newsagent ... even the butcher.

I began to develop my news sense and appreciate the often delicate task of storytelling.

I was encouraged to get out there and find the stories — to conduct a street Q&A about a current issue affecting the town, get feedback on how a Government initiative may be impacting on businesses, interview a long-term town resident or prepare a 'Did You Know' piece about something quirky.

I was practicing grass roots journalism.

One of my favourite articles from the *Barkly News Pictorial* was a feature we prepared on Australia Post's remote mail delivery service.

We travelled with the mail delivery plane to the remote communities of Brunette Downs and Ali Curung, photographing families receiving their weekly parcels — their bills, medical supplies, birthday packages and food. It was a heartwarming story that brought to life the reality of people living in the remote outback.

When I did begin my university studies, these skills helped me link the theoretical studies of journalism to the practice of the profession. In that regard, I had an edge over my fellow students.

Three years later when I joined ABC Radio Darwin as a news reporter, the interview skills I learnt in my gap year made the task of ringing a complete stranger to ask for a radio news grab not as daunting as it may have otherwise been.

My career path eventually led me into public relations when I started work as a Government Media Adviser, but my interest in and passion for journalism is still as strong.

Society needs the Fourth Estate to properly keep our governments, courts and law enforcers accountable. It's a profession that one should be proud to practice.

Taking time out after high school to gain some local work experience and develop new skills is something I believe every school leaver should consider.

University teaches you the skills you need to be a professional. But real life experience teaches you how to be good at it.

After launching the *Barkly News Pictorial* with Paul Cockram in 1998, Gemma studied a Bachelor of Mass Communications at the University of New England, NSW. She trained further as a news journalist at ABC Radio Darwin before working as a Government Media Adviser in the Northern Territory and Victoria. She spent two years living in London working in the Department of Health Press Office and for the Law Society of England and Wales. She is now a Senior Media Relations Officer with one of the world's fastest growing airlines, Qatar Airways. She lives in Doha, Qatar.