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"deprived the poor bloody vulture of a good feed". It got a bit of a laugh but they weren't very impressed racing down the aisle with a torch.

I was living at La Perouse in Sydney when Karlene was born. Her father used to beat me but when she was born I thought, "Nup. I'm having no more of this, I'm out of here".

We came to live in Braidwood when Karlene was ten. Prior to coming here most of her friends had been Aboriginal. La Perouse was predominately Aboriginal and so before we came here Karlene was learning two cultures. One time at school here the teacher was looking to pass some time and Karlene said, "let's have a look at the Dreamtime book". Then some little girls turned around and said something quite racist, so Karlene turned around and dropped her, didn't she.

When I heard that she had been put on detention I went to the school and told them, "She's not going on detention for sticking up for mates because that is what Australians do".

Karlene and I, we get on pretty good although we can have our fights. Our star signs are too close, she's a Taurus and I'm a Gemini. We go a lot of places together like the Cosplay conventions [see last issue – ed]. I had David Hasselhoff sitting right in front of me. You know here's this guy, 'The Knight Rider' and he's really nice!

I'm easy going most times but I have a hot temper too. I can be quite volatile and that's probably from the races I'm descended from — Irish, French, English and Native American blood.

It could come from dad too because he was extremely hot tempered. He believed in the belt. When I misbehaved or talked back at him he took



off the belt and I copped a strapping. Dad believed in spare the rod, spoil the child, didn't he. Sometimes I think with modern-day kids a smack on the bum would do them some good, but not the strap, no — eww, that's wicked. Braidwood's not like it was — I think I've got more love for the farm where I grew up. Braidwood's very pretty but you don't know the people like you once did. You'd be walking down the street, run into someone you knew and be talking for an hour or more. Mary Musgrave used to have a bakery where Poppies is now; and her husband used to have a printing shop where he produced a newspaper.

My grandmother would take us into Mary's where she'd have a cup of tea and we'd get a bun, so we'd look forward to this. Oh, and the Royal Café — I miss that. In those days on a Friday everyone would come in from out on the farms.

We used to buy caps for our cap guns and we had the whole main street of Braidwood to play cowboys and Indians. And the rocks down here were great — many a cowboy or Indian met their maker down at the bloody rocks.

The rocks were a great place to play because it wasn't so dangerous. You didn't have all these Canberra cars flying through. My grandfather would come to town and see some car speeding through to the coast on, what was in those days, a dirty old mud road. Someone would say, "that cars being really silly". My grandfather would reply, "Yeah, that bastard'd be from Canberra." [Laughs] So nothing's changed in that respect.



Wannabe a Braidwoodian — a Canberran stretching the connection

Larissa Dann may seek asylum

ARE WE THERE YET? Are we there? How long to go?" my childhood voice would plead insistently, as we neared the township of Braidwood. We would be either on our way to the coast, or later, heading to my father's newly purchased slice of heaven — a small block of land near Braidwood. "Look for the Hairy Hill — then we only have about 5 minutes left before we get there", was my father's oft-repeated phrase. And indeed, to my childish delight, he was right!

Some decades later, I still look for that hill as a landmark to indicate that Braidwood is imminent. I reiterate the same mantra to my 11 year-old daughter as my father spoke to me — only this time, my husband renamed the hill "Paulie's Peak" — in honour of my father, Paul. For me, the controversial avenue of trees at the Kings Highway entrances to Braidwood, and the

colours of the seasons that the poplars reflect, are the markers that cause a little buzz of appreciation and familiarity as we enter the precincts of the Historic Town of Braidwood.

I wonder how many Canberrans have secret proprietorial thoughts about Braidwood? How many of us feel a comfortable familiarity when we stop to eat, stretch our legs and look around at this half-way point to our destination (somewhere along the southern coast line).

So — what has driven me to write this ode to Braidwood? Well, if I'm honest with you — and, to date, I have not shared this thought with anyone (let alone my husband!) — I have a vague, unspoken plan. I would, one day, some years into the future, like to move to this part of the world. Join a community of which I have been fortunate to observe as I float on its periph-

ery. I am so impressed by the people I have met here — the vitality, the passion, the diverse interests, expertise and political persuasions that seem to have funnelled into this town and its surrounds.

Ah ha, you might say. And what is my evidence that this is a cornucopia of humanity? Am I perhaps idealising this little corner of the world? Possibly. But through my father, I have met Braidwoodians that reflect the societal spectrum. There is the Wise People's Coffee Club, meeting on a Saturday morning. They have generously welcomed my brood and me as we take a break on our travels to the coast. Their musings on life and their experiences have broadened my own thoughts.

We have been fortunate to be welcomed to the local Toastmaster's club, where again I have been exposed to Deep Thought (rivaling the infamous computer of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) and Reflection. I have been fortunate to meet primary producers, and self-sufficiency advocates. I have met people from the left, and people from the right, and people dead centre. And people who don't really care about politics, but do care about people.

People are the heart of the district, and in the end, they are responsible for the unique attraction to outsiders. But for me, there is also the environment — the physicality of the area. My heart belongs to the 30-acre haven of my father's, some kilometres outside of Braidwood.

Here, when I crunch through the frost and inhale the crisp, stress-free air, I relax. Here, when I pause to watch the mist-laden creek sing its way to the sea, I am unburdened. Here, when I disturb the wallabies, or sit and listen to a myriad of birds vocalising their existence, I am present. Here, I renew. When I return to the cares and concerns contained in that city over the hill, I do so refreshed and revitalised.

I am attracted by the diversity of this district — pastoral lands so close to the gorgeous Monga National Park. Who could not appreciate the Penance Walk, and the evocative parasitic Plumwoods, and the ferns still surviving. And then, just half an hour or so away — a complete change of pace and climate, as you reach the sun, surf and sea.

Yes, Braidwood sounds idealised. I know an underbelly lurks — that not all is perfect. But this makes the town entire, and real. And one day, perhaps, I will experience for myself, all that it means to live in Braidwood.