



CLAYDEN WILLIAMS, HOWARD CRISP, MICK CLARKE AND MATT PEARSON AT YOUR SERVICE.

# What is in a sausage?

Kylie Dominick asks some grisly questions of Mick Clarke

**I** WASN'T ACTUALLY GOING to be a butcher — I wanted to be a fitter and turner. I was a shit of a kid at school and my English was terrible, but mathematics, great. I was more oriented to sport at school. Sport and anything I could do with my hands, like woodwork and metalwork. But when I did work experience at the Braidwood butchery, they actually asked me back to work at Christmas time. I did that, then I was going back to school to do year 11 and 12, but the butchery asked me if I wanted to do an apprenticeship instead. And I went, yeah, awesome. I'll take this apprenticeship and do it, and I'll retrain later. But I never retrained. I don't really regret not retraining — I was interested in the whole meat thing. Even when I was growing up I was doing a lot of cooking and that sort of thing. I would cook the family meals quite a bit. My family lived in Reidsdale when I

was born. I lived there 'til I was eighteen, then my parents moved to Queensland and I came into Braidwood. I lived here with a mate of mine, down near the club for twelve months. I used to work at the butcher shop down the bottom there, which is now the Alpaca shop. I started my apprenticeship there — it would have been for about twelve months. He left, and then I worked for the other butcher; the bloke who started the shop where I am now. I worked for him then, for a while. Then I ended splitting up my apprenticeship between the Braidwood Butchery, Bungendore Butchery, and Queanbeyan Meats at the Plaza. I used to share myself around those three shops while I finished my trade. I finally ended up working at Bungendore. I worked there for six, seven years, but I left there when I got sick of driving. I ended up buying the shop here in town and I've had that now for, what, eleven years I think.

I come from a farming family. We had sheep and cattle and my father also ran a big property, so then we worked our land of an afternoon and weekends. I could shear a sheep and do all the things when I was growing up. Don't ask me to do it now though! I've got a few sheep on my block now, but I would never be a full-on farmer. Farming's a lifestyle, you've got to have too much acreage, in this area, to make a good living and it's too up and down. My goals are about security for my family. That's why I went into the butchery industry instead. Had I been a fitter and turner for the mining sector I probably wouldn't be here with the family I've got. You just never know. Same as if I'd went on with football, who knows, I would have moved away from Braidwood. I would have gone on with football if I could have, though. Definitely. How I got into that is basically that I was a sporting person at school — I played football. I had actually hoped

to make a career in rugby league. But, I was stopped from playing contact sport when I was nineteen because of head injuries — too many knockouts. At that stage I was playing under-nineteens for the Canberra Raiders. I was in New South Wales Schoolboys, in ACT Schoolboys, I did everything I could do until that point. I went and did all that stuff. But then, that season, I had concussions all through that period, but I suffered some very nasty head injuries, and the doctors basically said that I cannot play contact sport any more.

At fifteen I was a hundred kilos. When I finally quit football I was playing under nineteens, then I'd sit on the bench for reserve grade, then I'd sit on the bench for first grade, at my club in Queanbeyan, so I was trying to play three games of football every weekend. My opinion on contact sport is that it's good fun while you're doing it! I love to have a run around with the golden oldies. That's good fun. I never really think about it now, but back then, I just played it. After I had to quit, I couldn't watch it for a long time, because I just wanted to play.

I love sport. I was a terrible cricketer, but I like anything that doesn't involve too much water. I played cricket, squash, tennis. My family are horse people, but I'm the only Clarke who, when you say 'horse', my name doesn't come up.

For hobbies now, I play darts for the Royal Hotel team, and I'm a firearms person. I shoot sporting clay, with my daughter and my son when he's around. I also do a lot of hunting. Mostly I do rabbit shooting. I do shoot goats and pigs.

I'm a walking hunter — I like going walking in the mountains. I eat the rabbits, the goats — I love getting the goats. Pigs are terrible. I just love shooting pigs. They're just noxious vermin and should be eradicated.

## Are you competitive?

Very, very competitive. I'll accept a loss, but I only play to win. I don't believe you go on the sporting field for the sake of doing it. When I was playing rugby league, I had to win. Even though in my career, I played nine grand finals and lost every one. I tried my heart out. I never play just for the sake of playing, the fun's in winning. People say that's a bit selfish, but no. If I play a sport, a big part of sport is the mental game, even if it's just playing darts. Changing the pace of the game, change it round and it keeps them thinking. Try to change their mood.

## MEET THE MAN MICK

**You spend long hours at work and everyone knows you as 'Mick the butcher', so let's talk about that.**

**A big thing at the moment is awareness of food origins, local sourcing, food miles and that sort of thing. Where does your meat come from? Are localists getting what they want when they come to you?**

Yeah. Ever since I took on the shop here, all the cattle and lambs have been sourced from the saleyards here, the local area from here to Bungendore, Queanbeyan and Goulburn. That's the only place they come from.

I've always worked in with Paul Darmody from Bungendore Butchery. I've worked with him even after I left. I knew if I worked along with him — fair enough he's my competition from the next town — but we work together to bring a better product and higher turnover back into our region. We can work together to put the cows through, keep costs lower by filling up a truck, when it goes to the abattoir. We provide to the community out of the community. That was my theory on it all, that's why I took on the shop.

We have to use the abattoir at Cootamundra. There used to be one at Queanbeyan, but there's very few abattoirs, now, that process for small people. A couple on the coast, but they don't come up the hill. So there's a Canberra truck that goes to Cootamundra and he brings back the stuff for Bungendore and for us.

I've talked to people about starting a small abattoir, but the logistics and costs... We would need to get through a pile of paper about this big! It's too much, the environmental things, dealing with wastage, all these things to get rid of and deal with, it's just very hard. There have been people who've looked at it, but abattoirs are disap-

pearing. I reckon it will get down to just a few big ones before it gets better.

**Is the whole industry swamped in bureaucracy at the moment?**

We are. We're held back by a lot of regulation. A butcher shop like mine, if we were in Europe, would make a lot of smallgoods products; we would do a vast range of products. But I'm so handicapped by regulations, and testing, all the things I have to test for, it's not feasible for me to do it.

In Australia I have to pasteurise products and it's not worth my while. I'd like to see the European model taken on here. I can't see why in Australia we can't have small holding abattoirs that are run by the community, to process goods. A small abattoir in Braidwood could process everything, we could pretty much be self-sufficient, the butcher shop would make all your smallgoods, and it would be great. But it doesn't work like that.

We're losing so much knowledge, because everything's outsourced. There are a lot of shops now that outsource their sausages, they don't break down carcasses, I'd say that most butcher shops in New South Wales now wouldn't even break down a body of beef — they would buy it in boxes. I was doing some paperwork today and the new curriculum for apprentices has come through, and they've shortened the apprenticeship in butchery by twelve months. Now, breaking carcasses is an elective in the butchery trade, so you don't have to do it, it's an option. So you can still get a butchery ticket and not know how to take a beast to pieces.

**So, which way do you think the whole industry is going to go? Massive multinationals, or small and local?**

We're going to get to a point where

