



**William Verdon
Jeweller**

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everyone is going to want to go back. It's going to have to, because of fuel costs and everything like that, they're going to have to have a big think about it all. But then the factor is the skills shortage, and are we going to have the people to work the facilities and do what needs to be done.

Are you a foodie?

I love food. Too much. I cook. I love the whole idea and everything about it. Braidwood has been slow to embrace the idea of butcheries helping you come up with ideas for your food. But we've come round a long way and now we can have a cabinet with different sausages and things like that. Through cooking shows — television is a massive influence on peoples' buying — they've brought back a lot of different cuts. If people watch cooking programmes, they'll try to take on those specific cuts. Lamb shanks got a big revival, beef cheeks. When I first started out, that just wasn't used. Now, they're highly sought-after product. The cookery shows have brought a lot of things back.

Are you the cook in your family?

We share it. Because I work long hours, on weekends I normally do a lot of cooking. We both have our areas. Cheryl's great with pastries, desserts, things like that. She likes to cook. If we have parties or anything, I cook. It doesn't worry me to cook for fifty, sixty people. I enjoy it. I enjoy the challenge.

My favourite meat would be roast pork, with crackling. I am a bit meat-oriented, but I've been known to cook vegetarian meals. I'll cook anything. Any style of cuisine, I'll have a go at it.

So, tell us the truth — what's in a sausage?

Well, it depends on the style of sausage. Say a plain pork sausage; meat, rice flour, salt, white pepper, a little bit of nutmeg, sage, various things like that to give it some lift. The flour is to bind it, bring it together, give it some texture. If you go to the continental type sausages, say Toulouse or Italian or fresh chorizo, they have no flour. It's just salt that brings them together and the working of them. The meat is all just trimmings — if you're cutting steaks or whatever, just the end pieces and the cuts that people don't utilise.

If people come to you, are they getting a better class of sausage than they'd get at a big supermarket?

Definitely. In a big supermarket, they use things like fat stabilisers, powders and things that go in. And they use



collagen casings. We use intestines, sheep and hog. Sheep for the little ones and hog for the big ones.

Is your industry, in bigger towns and cities, at some risk from supermarkets taking market share?

Definitely. Because the world we live in now is at such a fast-moving pace. A lot of people don't think about what they eat. There are people like us, we prepare a meal and we think "This is from my garden, this is from here, this is from there" but a lot of other people, if they're working and struggling to pay for everything, they think "cost". And they just walk in and haven't got much time, and just go "this is going to be dinner." There are families like that. My idea is to have a meal that tastes good. Some people have this idea that if it's big and it's cheap, then it's good. I don't have that idea. For me, it wouldn't matter if it's a little piece of steak, as long as it's good. It doesn't have to be giant to be good.

Butchers, and others, in cities, have to cater to a different sort of market than the supermarket. It forces their prices up, but it also forces up their quality. You're going to get a higher-quality product. They're trying to attract a different clientele. That's where you've got to go in the city if you've got supermarket pressure. You've got have an angle. There's a big thing now with air-ageing, they're ageing beef a lot longer, and things like that. Years ago, that's how things were, it creates a better flavour and your top-line shops are going back down that road. You've got

to offer things that are different, your own signature products.

Does that obligation to be more specialist affect you as well?

Yeah, it does. Certain people come for certain things, they ring ahead and order specific things. We do have some of that specialist clientele, definitely. I think it's a good thing to provide a service for people that they haven't been able to get somewhere else. They come to me and I say, yep, we can do it.

And there are different skills. I learned to cut chops and break down lambs and things like that using a chopper. What I'm angling at, all the boys get shown some of the old-style techniques, but only briefly because we've got to make money! But I do show them different ways of doing stuff, so they're familiar, and if it did come to it, they can do it.

If they work for me, they work on every product. They work on chickens to cows, pigs, we've cut up alpacas, deer, goats, I'll show them how to cut up everything. I've done all the stuff, so if they work for me I'll show them how to tackle all the creatures.

I always have the theory that I have my ways, and I believe in my ways, but there are always improvements because you tend to go stale on ideas every now and again. If I go elsewhere I do tend to look to see what other people are doing, or I look in magazines that come out just to see what's going on.

Can you see yourself doing this for the rest of your life?

I thought about getting out. I was going to sell it. There are some days, like at Christmas time when you're coming down and taking hams out at midnight, and putting more on, and going back to bed for two hours, then coming back, or you unload trucks at two in the morning, go home, come back... I'll probably burn out. I'm enjoying what I'm doing. When I was going to get out, I was thinking about the teaching side of things. But I don't know if I'd really gel with some of the ideas.

Describe a typical day.

I get up at six every morning. We're in town at seven to open the shop. After my daughter's on the bus, then I do the general duties of a butcher shop, we cut the window, we cut the supermarket, then we start into orders for customers for the day, do the restaurants, cafes, cut all those. Once we do those we start onto bulk orders, cut up bodies of beef, lamb, do all those jobs,

make sausages, make hams and bacon, it depends which chores are on that day. We serve customers while we're doing all that. The boys have a lunch break but most of the time I stay in the shop. We work through, start cleaning up at five o'clock, and close the doors at six and head home.

You're quite a community person, and are often asked to help. How do you feel about that?

Every sporting organisation, every event that goes on, everyone who's trying to raise money for a cause, they all come and ask. I don't say no. What I try to do now is make sure that I give my part and they do their part, otherwise I can't be here next week to help them. I hope I get back too — that's why I do it. I do the best I can. I've been in Apex since I was eighteen so I've cooked barbecues and done charity things since then. I think if people don't do something for their community, there's no community. And people have to realise they can't just take, they need to give now and then.

If you look at any community, there are certain people, you can count them on two hands, who turn up at everything and if you didn't have those people nothing happens. And you don't really ask anything in return, you just go and do it so it gets done.

Does everyone come through the shop sooner or later? Well, maybe not vegetarians.

Probably everyone comes through at some stage. Yes, we do get vegetarians — they've got to feed their pets something! We have some clients who get everything from us, and some who come from time to time. I can tell you what some people are having tonight for dinner.

If you get requests for unusual things, what do you do?

If even one person comes in, I will get it for them. I tell them I can get it for them, and what it will cost and how long it will take.

There are certain products you wouldn't stock, you'd get them on demand. I haven't come across anything yet that's too ridiculous. If I can get it, I do. I've been asked for all the game meats, crocodile, emu, all of those things. I can get it. I just think, if I can get it, I'll get it for you. No worries. If people want to try something, I'm willing to let them do it.

Do you get an extra one to try yourself?

I've tried most of it already. If it can be chewed on, I've probably had a go at it!

Of course nowadays, you stand and they deliver.



Being one of the Clarkes — one of the old families in Braidwood, best known for their contribution to bushranging in the area more than for their other achievements — is that a bit of a thing?

I do get a lot of interest about it. Because I'm sort of the easiest one to contact if people come to town. I have a lot of people chasing family trees, they come and see me. I've had people that have talked about movies, people that have brought me in boxes of archives they've researched, people who've come and called me "relative" because they're related in some distant way.

Is it a subject that's of interest to you?

It's a very interesting thing to me, but, the big thing I find about it is that half the things you read about the Clarkes is made up, because if you knew half the things the bushrangers could have done, it's totally impossible they could have done half the things they were charged with. So they only did half the bad stuff. Mainly though, I don't really think about it.