

the U.S. company that we had a pregnancy. We are also obliged to disclose that Indigo has arrived. We can also register on their website if we would like to get in touch with the donor now — if he then chose to register his interest on that website, we could exchange details and she might get to meet him before she is eighteen. But it's up to him — we'd definitely be interested to meet him. For now, legally, Indigo is my child — not even Kristy's.

**[K]** Because I became Jo's donor too.

**[J]** Both of them are donors to me under the law, and that is where it stands until Indigo's birth has been registered with the government. On the birth certificate I will go down as parent one: mother, and Kristy will go down as parent two, and that's when she gets rights as a parent.

**[K]** I'd better behave, basically — I want to stay in the good books!

**[J&K]** We've been together nine and a half years. We got married two years ago, on the 30th of September. We have just had our second anniversary of marriage. We had to go to New Zealand to get legally married. Same-sex marriage became legal in New Zealand on 19 August 2013. They sang the most beautiful customary song about family when they introduced it — it was a really special moment.

On our last night in New Zealand after getting married, we were having drinks outside the hotel and we met this amazingly wonderful man who was one of the men responsible for introducing the bill and gaining the support to pass the same-sex marriage equality.

**[J]** He was a happily married heterosexual man, a beautiful man.

**[K]** We had the most wonderful time



with him. Just understanding the warmth and the wonderful nature of the people behind that process made us really sad to leave New Zealand because we felt that we were really valued and our relationship considered sacred there.

I'm a pretty staunch feminist, and I didn't entirely even buy into the concept of marriage at the time. Jo took me to New Zealand and wooed me, in order to convince me. And after it happened, I started thinking more intently upon it as a social and political message as much as anything else. I then started thinking about how the movement towards equality for people of colour in the U.S. was partly precipitated by the legalisation of interracial marriage. The role of marriage has often served as an important political and social vehicle to combat inequality.

**[J]** I am a bit old fashioned in that way. I really value the idea of being connected and supported by marriage. I wanted us to be married when we had a baby.

**[K]** I have begun to understand that this is an important thing for us to prove to people; to reinforce to the world that we are every bit as deserving and every bit as capable of having a wonderful, loving, fulfilling life together. That deserves to be respected just the same as for everybody else — regardless of our genitals! It's a bit offensive really when people want to reduce it to something as simple as that.

**[J&K]** One of the main reasons that we are still, occasionally, found to be making reference to being lesbians is because the rate of youth suicide is substantially higher among kids who identify same-sex attracted.

It's so incredibly important that young people recognise there are people who are absolutely joyously and bountifully living a wonderful existence.

And that they can be contacted and are visible in little communities like this. So whilst we don't go out of our way to always be on about gayness, we are proud and open about our relationship and our 'gayness' so that those young people have a role model — it is just so important that we make

them feel loved, accepted and perfectly normal!

**[K]** Braidwood is an amazingly supportive community. But we are very much active in the community too, so I think you get out of something what you put in as well. The wonderful thing about Braidwood is that everybody here has been really open to our enthusiasm to be a part of this community. I don't feel that they see us very much as different because of sexuality. They probably do from time to time, but I feel like I interact with people as a human being who cares about this place.

**[J]** And with our beautiful Indigo, there's been so much love. So much excitement about this little person; so many people just doing the most remarkable things for us — people that we don't even know that well. One beautiful local woman knitted us the most beautiful little vest and gumnut baby hat. You know, just the most beautiful gestures of kindness and love from a community.

I have never felt more at home than we do here, or safer, to be who I am. It is a very safe place to be who you are.

We now have the most amazing and magnificent little human being, born on 4th of September; very calmly brought into the world in a water birth at Queanbeyan hospital. We received wonderful service at Queanbeyan, a wonderful midwife and a great doctor. Indigo was 50 centimetres, 3.3 kilos, cute as a button and wonderfully healthy.

**[K]** ... and entirely beautiful. What is really lovely is that we have people commenting on how she actually looks a lot like Jo, and also like me. We wouldn't be remotely surprised if that was true because she has the life blood of Jo as her Mumma, plus a bit of genetic input from me, her other Mummy.

We are a family. We don't think that it is necessary to have complementary pairs of genitalia in order to successfully raise a family and we feel as though the rest of the village of Braidwood is very much with us and very supportive. We are so excited that Indigo will be raised within, and often by, the most wonderful village in which either of us have ever had the privilege to live.

## MERRILYN SIMMONS

Musician and enthusiastic exponent of social singing



## Joybelles

Merrilyn strums her stuff

I thought it would be just nice to have a women's singing-for-fun group, because there are a couple of other options in town for people singing, but I wanted to just do something a little bit different. I do enjoy women's singing groups, so it started off at the beginning of the year, and we limped through winter a little bit because the numbers were small. It's tricky over winter, it's hard to get out — I find it hard myself — but often, after you do and have a sing, you feel great and you feel glad that you did. As the weather's picked up we have had more people come, and it is all about singing for fun, so all the songs are taught from ear and memory. Occasionally when there is a few more words I'll do a sheet, but it is not like looking at the sheet while we are doing it because it is more about singing in

the moment. I did some training around that way of leading, but it also suited me really well because I am not a classically trained musician.

I read music a bit, but I approached it much more experientially by doing it — and it seems to really work — particularly when you choose a repertoire that is not too wordy and has a tune that will stick in your mind. That approach has a sort of instant success built into it.

So people who like the idea of singing but are a bit nervous, as lots of people are, can come along, and because of the repertoire they can get that instant success and their confidence grows. I really like that about it and, being in a group, less confident people can just sort of blend into the background for as long as they feel they need to as they find their voice.

*[BWD] What is it about singing, especially harmonic singing, that makes the spirit soar?*

That is really interesting. I have always loved harmonies, I know in my own songwriting there has always been at least one, maybe a couple of harmonies, so it is something that really resonates, I think, with harmonies; they can sometimes make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, it is really interesting, so I guess it is something to do with sound and soundwaves and all that kind of stuff. But the other thing is that when you are singing, you are using your body, mind, and spirit. So it is an amazing emotional activity. When you get a group of people together, creating something which is always more than the sum of the parts, it's fantastic.

The soundwaves wash over you, it feels really good. You feel like you have achieved something.

You can arrive quite tired, but by the end of an hour of singing together, and it tends to be pretty well song after song after song, there is not much mucking around or over-analysing. It doesn't work for me to teach that way. It works for me better if I know the songs in my head, and then it is like that call and response — more a traditional way of teaching.

When you think about the tradition of music making as a family activity, people sat around the fire or pianola or whatever and just sang and made up harmonies. I like the idea that music is not something that only certain people do, it is something that human beings can do.

If you can talk, you can vocalise on some sort of level, and so it is almost like returning something to people that's been taken away by the, "I can't sing, I did try and sing but they told me to stand up the back ...". Whereas when you have a group and you are doing a repertoire that is relatively simple but sounds nice, success is built in. People can start to see themselves differently, as singers. They can see, "actually I can".

There are people who are on the edge sometimes, and I have a call out like, "come on girls". I guess this whole approach is to try and make it as accessible as possible, and that's what it is about. I love that, I love it when people sing out with confidence and develop, yeah.