

# Leaves & branches

## The view from a tree changer

By Rosemary Adams

### A typical day *before*:

**Wake to the sounds of Parramatta Road and passing planes overhead. In the car and head to work. Many cars, houses, apartment blocks crowding the view. It's six kilometres door to door and takes 40 minutes. Park in the multi-storey car park and pick up breakfast—'large, strong, skim, flat white and Turkish bread toast with vegemite please'. Enter the office up to the 25th floor with views over Sydney Tower.**

Another flat white at about 10.30am. Lunch could be a session at Fitness First, or a stroll down Pitt St Mall, a visit to David Jones Food Hall, or fantastic laksa sitting in the lunchroom with city skyline views.

Back in the car about 6pm and join the traffic heading back to suburbia. An overwhelming reception from the dogs upon arrival. Throw on the 'dog clothes' and drive the dogs down to the off-leash park. Mingle with dogs and owners. Head home. Dinner in or out? Walk up Norton Street, collect dinner and eat at home. Some TV. The 10.40pm departing plane signals time to consider going to bed. Doors secured and lights out.

### A typical day *after*:

Wake to the sounds of birds and sheep, and look out on the frosted lawn. Missing Angela Catterns. Make breakfast—stove top coffee and regular toast. In the car and head to work. Many sheep, cows, alpacas—orchards on

rolling hills. It's 62 kilometres door to door and takes 45 minutes. Park right outside the building. Enter the office—views over the vet practice next door and some retirement villas in the distance.

10.30am—take coffee bag to kitchen and make cup of coffee. Lunch time does not offer many options. Stroll down the main street, buy the paper and pick up something from the local bakery. Dig into briefcase to see if there is an apple or other edibles rolling around.

It's 5pm and the building empties—better head home. Let dogs out of their Sydney-house-block-sized pen. Check water troughs and feed steers and alpacas. Light the fires as required. Prepare dinner. Some TV but storm has taken out ABC reception on Mt Canobolas. Stoke up the fires. Turn to sudoku, magazines. Set the fires for the night and head for bed.

Rosemary Adams was Executive Director of the ALRC from 2000 to 2004. Prior to her position with the ALRC, Rosemary Adams spent 10 years at the University of Sydney holding senior positions, including Faculty Manager of the Law Faculty.

She relocated with her partner to a seven acre property near Millthorpe, central west NSW, in September 2004. The immediate family has since expanded to include eight alpacas, three dogs and two steers.

Her list of academic qualifications includes an MBA from the University of Technology, Sydney and more interestingly, a Graduate Diploma in Wine Business from the University of Adelaide. The latter is now being put to good use while she works on a casual basis at the cellar door of a local Orange winery.



## There's more

A typical day is part of the story. The other part is what drives someone from the city? A city, for example, where schooling was completed, where family and good friends reside, where things feel familiar, and where you have a secure and comfortable lifestyle.

For me, it was a consideration of the future. What was I looking forward to? A bigger house in Sydney with a more prestigious address and a larger garden? A house with a water view? A job that paid more so I could afford a second house in the country to get away to on weekends? All of these options, and others, were contemplated, but it was escaping the city and eventually retiring to the country that appealed most to me.

Given I was in my early 40's, it seemed I would have a few years penance before realising this desire. And then it occurred to me—I need not wait if I was willing to take a chance, risking the sense of security I had developed in the known and familiar.

And 18 months down the track what can I report?

It's hard work—physically, and also in adjusting to a new perspective. And it also brings a lot of pleasure.

Finding suitable work has not been easy as there are not as many opportunities. I've now stepped outside my usual sphere of work to include the wine and food industry in the work repertoire. The salaries on offer are not as great as what you can attain in the city, but the cost of living is cheaper here—especially housing. Speaking of which...

Maintaining seven acres of garden, lawn and paddocks takes time and energy. Mowing the lawn, a concept not known to me in Sydney, now takes about 4 hours on a ride-on. (And the ride-on cost as much as a second hand car.)

The constant requirements of the animals—keeping up the food and water—takes time in planning and execution. The two steers drink the entire contents of a large water trough in two to three days. We are not on town water (or town sewerage, garbage collection or broadband!) and, hence, pumping water from the bore to the trough is not as simple as fixing a tap with a self-timer!

Then there is managing the uninvited wildlife—we've had mice, possums, bats, frogs, a variety of spiders, lizards and snakes—many of these in the house!

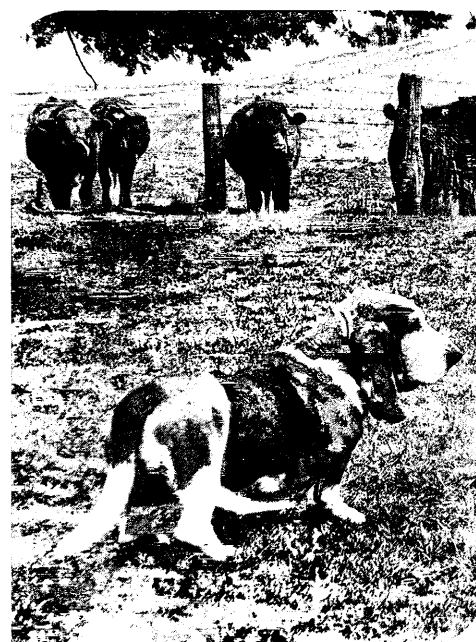
And, of course, we have no corner shop to get the milk or bread. There is no local pasta, pizza or Thai take-away to satisfy dinner needs.

As for the pleasures? You can't put a price on the quiet, peace, privacy and sense of space and freedom. It is luxurious. It is glorious looking out across the fields, farmed lands, and big skies—it gives a sense of perspective and a fulfilment that is hard to put into words. The accessibility to fresh produce—meeting the orchardist, the winemaker or the grazier who makes the product you buy—makes it all seem more meaningful and enjoyable. It is the simple pleasure of checking the rain gauge, chopping the wood, and observing the change of seasons that takes you by surprise.

## A community beckons

We were overwhelmed with Sydney weekend guests in the first year. This was lovely, but also inhibited our progress in making friends in our new location. With the ebb of Sydney visitors so our local contacts have grown. And we are forever surprised by the number of people we meet who have also left Sydney in recent years looking for a more sustainable lifestyle.

A recent report (October 2005) by the Australian Centre on Quality of Life at Deakin University,



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presented the results of a four year study which measured the wellbeing of the Australian population. Fourteen surveys sampling in every Federal Electoral Division (FED) sought to measure people's satisfaction with their life. The results are interesting. With the exception of one, all of the highest scoring (being most satisfied) FEDs were outside capital cities, in areas of relatively low population density. The personal wellbeing domain that most consistently separated the lowest from the highest scoring FEDs was community connectedness. The study showed there was no obvious connection between income and personal wellbeing.

In my experience, community connectedness does not necessarily mean joining the local social or sporting group. It is a sense of belonging to a place. There is a feeling of inclusiveness. You have good relationships with your neighbours, and the local storeowner and postie know you by name and are genuinely interested in you. There is a diverse range of community issues to be considered—from bushfires, to residential developments, to supporting the local historical society. You can become, and are welcomed to be, a participant in your community.

### Back to the smoke

We recently spent a weekend in an inner city hotel and enjoyed recently released movies, coffee, shopping, more coffee, restaurants, and the buzz of the city. It was fun. It was expensive. And we'll buy it again sometime soon. But it was a relief to have the sounds of the sirens and the unrest of the traffic jams replaced by the sounds of rain on the tin roof, parrots contesting to eat the seeds from the tree, and the wind through the pine trees. This seems more real, more sustaining.

We've left the city and branched out in many ways—professionally and personally—but the core of our lives has changed through the increased emphasis on enjoying everyday living now as opposed to waiting for, or planning for, an ideal future.

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