

From the heart of Texas to the heart of the Pilbara.

By Robin Pensini



*Wylloo Station
Carnarvon, WA
June 12, 1991*

Cheela Plains Homestead

Dear Mom & Dad,

I can't even explain the wide-open spaces I have seen in Western Australia. You can drive all day and never see a dwelling. I am truly in the "Outback". Wylloo Station is a cattle property 350 miles North of Carnarvon. Muresk has organized for me to spend four weeks here. The weather is getting hotter as we head north. Don't know if I brought the right attire. I am having difficulty understanding the accent. The bush flies are unbelievable and the Aussie salute is for real. The area here is very dry and in bad need of rain. The landscape is beautiful with a mixture of flat and hilly country. The annual average rainfall is 12 inches. The soil and rocks are a red earth colour, similar to the soil in Arizona. The homestead is amazingly self-sufficient, with supplies arriving every two weeks. The power is supplied by a diesel generator, which is only on for parts of the day and is always turned off at night. I am a little overwhelmed by the whole situation. Don't know what I've let myself in for. The crew is in the middle of mustering so I will ride shotgun with the boss in a mustering vehicle tomorrow. An airplane is used to spot cattle for the ground crew. There will also be horse riders.

June 13, 1991

The day out mustering was an experience. I was wearing some large loop earrings. The boss pointed out they might not be the best choice for the day ahead and I soon found out why. The mustering vehicle was more like a small bulldozer. My knuckles were white all day from holding on to the bar. My greatest concern was how on earth I was going to go to the toilet. We seemed to be always in a rush to do something and the plane flying overhead could see everything on the ground. My eyes were just about drowning when I finally had the guts to ask if we could make a pit stop.

June 16, 1991

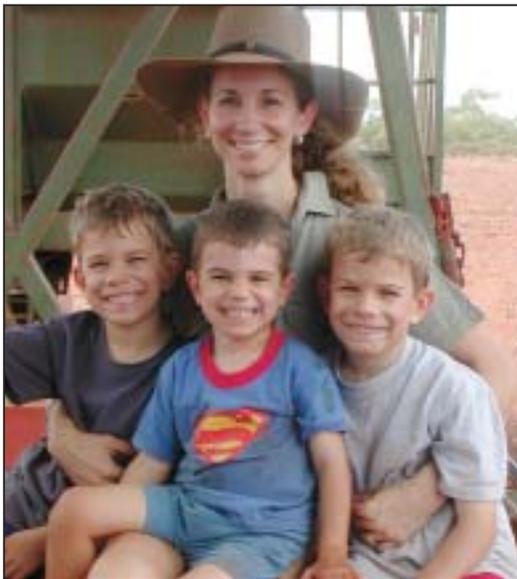
There has been some rain and the mustering has been called off. We had a "cut out" party last night. Don't know what will be on the agenda now.

*Love,
Robin*

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Maybe if it hadn't rained the romance might have never happened but it did and I fell for the boss, Evan. After leaving Wyloo, I spent another three months in WA on a graduate exchange through Muresk College of Agriculture before going back to Austin, Texas to begin my career with the Texas Beef Council, an organization similar to Meat and Livestock Australia.

Over the next three years Evan and I kept in touch through phone calls and letters. One day he rang and announced he was coming to Texas. Within a few weeks of his arrival in the States, we became engaged and decided I would move to Wyloo as soon as possible. The idea was for me to go through a summer and decide if I could manage the isolation and climate before making the final decision of marriage. Our plans changed and we married just three months after I moved to Wyloo.



Robin Pensini with her boys. From left, Fraser (6), Lawson (3) and Gavin (6)

Station life was a major adjustment for me. Many people say I must have been used to the wide-open spaces of the Pilbara having grown up on a Texas ranch. What people don't realize is that the part of Texas I came from is beautiful green rolling hills with an average annual rainfall of 950mm. The towns are fifteen to thirty kilometers apart. So the decision to begin a new life on a Pilbara station that was twice the size of the county in which I grew up, with only the people living on the station to socialize with on a daily basis, was a big decision. It was and still is incredibly difficult to lead a life without being near my family and friends in Texas. Thank goodness for the terrific friendships I have made here.

Adjusting to the climate proved to be the biggest challenge. I had been told that in the Pilbara there was winter and summer and not much in between. True it is! The first winter was fantastic but I could not believe the summer temperatures. I suppose anybody can put up with a 45-degree day now and then, but when you have weeks of them on end with a few 46's and 47's in between, one does begin to think twice. I soon discovered that sleeping with a wet sarong was the only way to sleep at night and having a "camp" in the afternoon was part of surviving the long summer days. Needless to say I am so adjusted now that I am looking for a jumper at 24 degrees. Moving to Wyloo also meant that I would be cooking for a staff of anywhere between four and fourteen people every day of the year. For someone who could only just boil water, I knew I had a lot to learn. Now nine years down the track, I really enjoy cooking.

Our first baby turned out to be TWIN boys; our third son was born three years later. What a rewarding challenge they have been. The twins are six now and in grade one with Port Hedland School of the Air. When they were all so little I did wonder how I would ever survive. However, as they all become more independent each day, I often wonder where the last six years have gone.

We take the family to Texas every two years. My parents generally visit once a year. My two sisters and brother have all visited twice in the last nine years. A few Texas girlfriends have been here as well. I have tremendous respect for my parents and siblings, so keeping in touch and sharing the boys with them is very important. We keep in touch by phone and e-mailing letters and photos.

In September 2001, we moved from the Wyloo Homestead to the eastern end of Wyloo Station to start our own station that we named Cheela Plains.

Our homestead is four sea containers under a roof with breezeways between. It's a bit like camping with all the "mod cons". We hope to be living in something more substantial by the end of the year.

Since Evan's family first came to Wyloo in 1978, station life and practices have really changed. Back then Wyloo had only one fenced paddock and mustering took up to six months or more. At Cheela Plains we rotationally graze through thirty paddocks and control mate a quality herd of Shorthorn cross cows. Our management intensifies and utilizes only the best country. It is more like a farm than what people think of as a station in terms of management practices. Cheela Plains is a progression of gaining stock control and implementing and developing infrastructure on Wyloo over the past 25 years.

I feel very privileged to be living in the "Outback" and am thrilled that our boys will have memories of living in the bush that will last forever.