

ME AND MY FERALS

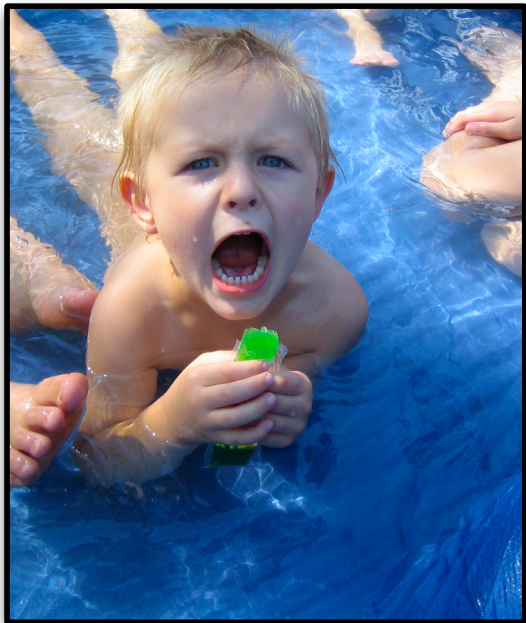
I NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS IMAGINED ID BE IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND LOOKING AFTER SIX KIDS. MY CAREER ADVISOR WOULD HAVE FALLEN OUT OF HER CHAIR IF ID SUGGESTED IT BEFORE BUT NOW HAVING DONE IT I COULDN'T THINK OF ANOTHER CAREER ID LOVE SO MUCH.

WHEN I LEFT SCHOOL I UNDERTOOK A GRAPHIC ARTS APRENTICESHIP AND WORKED IN A PRINTER FOR TWO YEARS. AT 19 I WAS HAVING MIGRAINES FROM STRESS, HATED BEING INSIDE ALL DAY AND GENERALLY DISLIKED WHERE I WORKED. WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE TO NORTH QUEENSLAND CAME UP I TOOK IT. THINKING THAT IN A CITY THE SIZE OF TOWNSVILLE ID RESUME MY APPRENTICESHIP EASILY. AFTER THREE MONTHS OF KNOCKING ON DOORS I REALISED ID HAVE TO CONSIDER SOMETHING ELSE. BEING YOUNG AND NOT REALLY QUALIFIED IN MUCH I LOOKED AT JOBS WHICH REQUIRED NO EXPERIENCE OR TRAINING AND STUMBLED ACROSS THE GOVERNESS AUSTRALIA WEBSITE AND POSTED A PROFILE. WITHIN A WEEK ID FOUND A JOB WITH THE MAHONEY FAMILY 270KS FORM TOWNSVILLE. ALL THEY WERE LOOKING FOR WAS SOMEONE WITH A LOVE OF KIDS TO BE A BIG SISTER TO ALL 6 KIDS.

I WAS A BIT APREHENSIVE AT FIRST BUT ALSO EXCITED AT SUCH A GREAT OPPORTUNITY. THE MAHONEYS AREN'T CATTLE STATION OWNERS BUT ARE MOSTLY SELF SUFFICIENT. THE KIDS ARE HOME SCHOOLED WHICH I HELP WITH AND SUPERVISE AND THEIR MUM AND DAD WORK IN TOWN, WHICH IS ABOUT 5KS AWAY, AND ALSO ON THEIR FARM. THE KIDS ARE AGED BETWEEN 12 AND 1. 3 ELDER GIRLS, SARAH, SAMMY AND ELLIE, TOMMO, 4, THEN BELLA, 2, AND NICK, 1. IM IN LOVE WITH ALL OF THEM AND EACH HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS AND DIFFERENCES. IVE BECOME A MUCH MORE PATIENT PERSON AND DEAL WITH SITUATIONS WITH EACH OF THEM DIFFERENT WHICH HAS REALLY HELPED MY NEGOTIATION SKILLS TOO. ALL ARE HORSE MAD AND LOVE BEING OUTSIDE BUT ANY EXCUSE TO TURN ON COUNTRY MUSIC CHANNEL AFTER SCHOOL WORKWILL HAVE THE GIRLS BOPPING AWAY ALL AFTERNOON.

MY DAY STARTS AT 7 WHEN I ARRIVE THEYRE PARNETS HAVE FED THEM AND USUALLY THEY ARE DOING CHORES OR STARTED SCHOOL. THE YOUNGER ONES TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY IN THE COOLER WEATHER WHILE WE GET ORGANISED FOR THE DAY. THEIR MUM SET OUT A MEAL PLAN FOR EVERY NIGHT AND USUALLY II GET IT SORTED FAIRLY EARLY ASWELL. SCHOOL GETS UNDERWAY BY 8 AT THE LATEST. THE GIRLS ARE GREAT THEY USUALLY DO IT WITHOUT TOO MUCH TROUBLE...AND THEYRE SMART TOO I USUALLY FIND THEM FINISHED, MARKED AND CORRECTED BY 10AM OR SO. SARAH IS FINDING IT HARDER NOW SHES IN YR 7 BUT IS STILL A CONSCIENCIOUS WORKER. TOMMO, BELLA, NICK AND I USUALLY PLAY OR WE DO SOME PRESCHOOL ACTIVITIES. BELLA IS A MEAN ARTIST, SHE HAS THEES COOKY FACES THAT GET DRAWN EVERYWHERE..THE WALLS, THE FLOOR,





WE ALSO READ ALOT OF BOOKS AND NICK AND BELLA WILL HAVE A SLEEP BETWEEN 10 AND 12. THE GIRLS QILL USUALLY FINISH BEFORE LUNCH. A LOAF OF BREAD, THREE PEANUT BUTTER, TWO JAM AND ONE PROMITE SANDWICH LATER I TRY AND GET THEM TO EAT IT SITTING STILL BUT THE MINUTE SCHOOLS OVER THEYRE HANKERING TO GET OUTSIDE OR DO WHAT THEY WANT. IF ITS HOT ITS INSIDE AND WE'RE DRAWING OR COOKING OR PLAYING CUBBIES. WE THEN DO SOME CLEANING AND TIDYING AND THE GIRLS WILL DO THEIR CHORES IF THEY WANT TO BE OUTSIDE IN THE POOL LATER IN THE AFTERNOON.

THEN WE START DINNER. SOMETIMES JUST ME WHILE THEYRE PLAYING OR A FEW DO IT TOGETHER. THEYRE FAIRLY SELF SUFFICIENT SO EVERYTHINGS MADE FROM SCRATCH AND IF U WANT SOMETHING PARTICULAR YOU HAVE TO MAKE IT OR THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE. MAKING DINNER IS SOMETIMES A WORK OUT BUT ITS GREAT EXPERINCE. THE FAMILY CIRCLE BASIC COOKBOOK IS MY BIBLE, ME AND THE KIDS GO OUT AND GET THE VEGES FROM THE GARDEN AND WASH AND PREPARE THEM. TOMMO WHOS FOUR TELLS ME ALL ABOUT THE VEGES AND WHEN THERE READY AND WHERE TO FIND THE GOOD ONES, HE KNOWS MORE THAN I DO!

THEYRE PARENTS ARE USUALLY HOME BY NOW OR AT LEAST BACK AT THE HOUSE. FROM THEN ON I HELP THEIR MUM BATH AND FEED THEM AND GET READY FOR BED. I USUALLY STAY FOR THE EVENING MEAL AND THEN FOR A UNWIND WITH THEIR MUM. WE TALK ABOUT THE KIDS, ABOUT HER DAY AND JUST GET SOME TIME OUT.

I STAY IN TOWN IN A HOUSE WHICH THE FAMILY HAS RENTED FOR ME. GETTING AWAY FROM THERE REALLY HELPS KEEP YOU SANE. YOU LEAVE WORK AT WORK AND GET YOUR OWN TIME TO DO WHATEVER.

I HAVE BECOME A BIG SISTER TO THE KIDS AND THEIR PARENTS HAVE BECOME CLOSE FRIENDS OF MINE. I DOUBT ID HAVE FOUND A MORE PERFECT SUIT.

I LOVE MY JOB AND HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH. I COME FROM A VERY DIFFERENT BACKGROUND TO THIS FAMILY BUT I HAVE HAD SUCH A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE. I HAVE LEARNT HOW TO DEAL WITH TRICKY SITUATIONS. HOW TO COOK FROM SCRATCH, IVE SEEN BABY PIGS BORN AND FEED A BABY KANGAROO..WHO STILL LIVES WITH THE FAMILY. I HAVE THE MOST AMAZING LITTLE PEOPLE TO WORK WITH AND ITS JUST LIKE BEING A BIG KID AGAIN. SOMETIMES ITS FRUSTRATING AND I THINK WHAT AM I DOING. ITS HARD BEING AWAY FROM TOWN AND SOCIAL INTERACTION BUT I GET BACK TO TOWNSVILLE WHEN I CAN, WHICH HELPS BECAUSE I USUALLY SHOP FOR THE FAMILY WHILE IM THERE. THERE IS SO MUCH IN MU JOB I DONT HAVE TO DO, LIKE MAKE THE FAMILY MEAL, CLEAN THE HOUSE BUT I FIGURE MY JOB IS TO HELP OUT THERE PARENTS, WHEN THEIR MUM WALKS IN ID LIKE TO HAVE MADE IT SO SHE CAN SPEND TIME WITH HER KIDS NOT END WORLD WAR THREE AND CLEAN THE MESS THAT SOMETIMES LOOKS LIKE A CYCLONES JUST BEEN THROUGH.

I COULD WRITE ALL DAY, THERE IS SO MUCH THAT GOES ON OUT HERE BUT YOU REALLY HAVE TO GET OUT THERE. ITS TOUGH BUT REWARDING. ONE AFTERNOON TOMMO CLOMBED ONTO MY LAP FOR A CUDDLE. I SAID TO HIM, "WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN YOUR TOO BIG TO SIT ON HERE ANYMORE?" HE REPLIED, "I'LL PROBABLY JUST BREAK YOUR HEART" WHICH IS PROBABLY TRUE BUT WORDS LIKE THAT MAKE EVERYTHING WORTHWHILE