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HD **DOUBLE TAKE**
BY Drew Warne-Smith
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Writer **Bruce Pascoe**, 54, and his wife Lyn Harwood, 55, tell Drew Warne-Smith how love of the land, language and a gumleaf gift brought them together.

BRUCE: My life was a plane wreck when I got to know Lyn. It was 1982 and I'd just moved from Mallacoota to Melbourne to work as a drama resource teacher. My relationship was imploding, I had no money and I'd just started the Australian Short Stories magazine. And at the same time I was trying to track down my Koori heritage. It was like living in a jet turbine.

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Lyn was like no-one I'd met before. She liked bushwalking and bird watching and we had these long yarns about the land. One weekend she went hiking in the Wyperfeld National Park [northwest Victoria] and she brought me back a leaf. She told me she'd carried it in her bra, which was a stimulating piece of information. I thought it felt warm.

A bit later on, we went for a walk along the Yarra River to see a foal which was born in the wild. The foal left its mother and walked over to us, nudging us with its nose. I suppose you're a bit susceptible to emotions when you're in the first stages of a relationship, but it felt like such a blessing. I was just enchanted by Lyn.

We'd go for walks and she would be bum up underneath a berry bush examining bandicoot tracks. And I remember thinking, she's a different sort of a woman. She's elegant and sophisticated, she knows more about music than anyone, she reads widely and here she is scrabbling around in the dirt.

One morning I asked her, "If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?" She said: "I want to live in the country and have my own horse." Her total claim on the world's resources was about \$600 then, including her saddle. Well, a month later we bought a remote block down at Cape Otway. That was home for about 22 years.

She's the most generous person I know. And she has no desire for money. For all the time we had our publishing company, about 16 years, she never bought a piece of clothing. We didn't even have matching crockery. I regret it now, but she never complained, even living with a moody bastard like me.

I tend to bite off more than I can chew and under pressure I blame everyone else but myself. So I grab my swag and take myself off walking or camping somewhere. And the country does it for me; reminds me that I'm bugger all and I need to get home.

It might seem like a Koori instinct to go walkabout, but I suspect it's human instinct. Mine is only a remote Aboriginal heritage, going back to my mother's grandmother. But ever since I was a boy, Aborigines asked me who I was. I always said, "I'm Alf Pascoe's son." It wasn't until I was 18 that I realised that wasn't what they were asking.

Lyn really loved the Otways, but for me Mallacoota was always my place. I started building us a holiday house at nearby Gipsy Point a few years back, but one day I just realised I couldn't leave. It was a wrench for Lyn (and for our son Jack), but true to her good nature she came with me.

LYN: I wasn't flirting with him. It was a huge gum leaf and my bra was the only place I could carry it where it wouldn't get crushed!

It was during a horse-riding trip in the high country that I really fell in love with Bruce. He'd given me a short story he'd written about his daughter (Marnie, from a previous marriage). I read it by torchlight in a tent and it was such a passionate and yearning story, so sensitively written, so full of his love for his daughter and the land. And I just fell head over heels.

Bruce is such an inspiring person. He doesn't do anything half-heartedly and his passion is contagious. Moving to Cape Otway, I was pregnant and we were living in a caravan in the cold and the wet while we were building a house and running the magazine. It was tough but I loved every minute. And even coming to Mallacoota, I didn't want to move, but on reflection it was wise. Jack was leaving home for university and Bruce intuited that it was going to be hard for me without him there.

I might get caught flat-footed when he announces his latest enterprise, but I always end up his greatest supporter. He's such an enthusiast. And I have great respect for his integrity. The search for his Aboriginality has informed not just his writing [Pascoe's new book, Convincing Ground, examines Australia's indigenous heritage] but his whole life, and I've been swept up in it, too. It's humbling, being a part of his journey.

But what I've always struggled to understand is his fanaticism about sport, football in particular. Bruce was still playing in the Apollo Bay reserves two years ago. It only started making sense when Bruce explained that football was like dance; it's a fluid movement and the team is like a troupe of dancers all cued in. I'm a dancer and I used to run a dance school at Apollo Bay. Still, it's difficult to recognise the art on a cold, wet Saturday when you're watching from your car.

He often helped with our performances in those days. We did a dance on the beach one night, a lament for people who don't come back from the sea. Halfway through, an empty boat needed to appear near the shore, so Bruce got in the freezing water with his snorkel and guided it in. But as it turned out, some girls in a sailing boat had got stranded out in the bay, so after sliding our rowboat in, he stroked out to sea to save the girls.

We're extremely close, but we do fight like anyone else. Usually it's because Bruce has taken on too much and overdraws on his batteries. And he withdraws, emotionally and sometimes physically. He packs up and disappears into the bush, often with his dog. I do find that very painful. I don't know where he is or if he's safe or what's going on. But I could never chase after him. That would be a breach of faith. After almost 25 years together, I know he'll always come back.

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