There are some things I took for granted growing up out of town
Everyone knew me business and my brother was the local clown
I grew up in the house my Dad's parents built,
by the time I came along, the youngest of five,
It had a loving lean, but the wood stove still heated
the water and the dunny was still outside
I had acres as a backyard, me dad drove the roller for council
and me mum was the local teacher
We would listen to Macca on the way to church every Sunday
and I think I thought he was the preacher
Slim Dusty was our soundtrack on the well used turntable
These stories settled inside me like the most sacred fable
I always thought I knew a lot about life in the bush –
I mean I could milk a cow before school
But for some reason, as soon as I could,
when I was 17, I decided that was far from cool
I headed off and became a journo from the plains of Deniliquin
to Kalgoorlie in the west of wild
I came back east and our babies saw the city
where kindergarten places were delivered with the child
It wasn't long before we were back rural,
in Victoria in a little town in the Shire of Buloke
It was a Council CEO who answered my call
of asking for childcare for my two little folk
He called me into the chambers and explained they needed a community lead
Next I was meeting the mayor, who was affectionately called weed.
As a bored but motivated mum at home I built on many, many giants before me,
We got a childcare centre funded and little did I know my kids absorbed civic responsibility
I realise now this was deep entrenched, this sense of getting in and solving,
not waiting for the cavalry, just working with familiar faces
maybe it was all those years sitting under the meeting tables of my mum
or cutting four points of sandwiches at the races
Knowing my kids wouldn’t see the benefit of this centre,
but like we have heard so much this week
it's about looking beyond, taking in the big picture
and always looking to the future for a peek
What followed was an amazing role as the local human interest writer
on an independent newspaper
as well as a role with an ag machinery dealership
making big ads and getting involved in that caper

But it was the stories, turning up the extraordinary in the ordinary
Writing my living obituaries while the oldies could still read the story
I saw the community discover what was always in front of them
and the lonely bloke on the bench now had fans of his lifetime of glory
We then ran the general store and learnt a new side of our communities through dim sims, burgers and coffee, sometimes the hard way, I found some brave
so perhaps it was no surprise I ended up director of community services to be part of the solution from cradle to grave
Why am I telling you this? I promise it has a point
because at the end of 2021, we all took off from that joint
I live in the Gold Coast now but I'm so lucky to work through Australia, growing and supporting aged care workforces in the bush
I learnt that rural is sometimes a bit bigger than my old Buloke patch, 8000 square km with 6201 people at a push
We took our kids from a tiny town population of 600 to the city lights where just their grade had 900
They learnt to use trains and trams, hold their own on the streets of Surfers Paradise
They loved the lights, the fancy cars and seeing the big wide sea
but unbeknownst to me
they missed something, a piece was gone and they and told me
it was community
the thing I'd taken for granted and hadn't seen in the invisible golden threads
the ones that wrap around in grief, celebration, encouragement and might be better than meds
Peter asked me to tell you about a story I wrote for my old small town publication the other week
A tragedy occurred that tore hearts apart and the community asked for me words, for me to speak
My words had been dormant for ten years or more, I had closed the country chapter and sealed it
I was done with writing, robots were doing it now and click bait was not my fit
but I got the pen out and started to write and what came out was far from new news or a headline bite
I just wrote about the community that held my family through, that knew me well and let me write
The community that encouraged me and knew it was a village to raise a child and wrap around the mother
The community that was hurting now with broken hearts but knew how to hold each other
I can't tell you what followed with phone calls from town leaders, even a message from Weed

I realised the universe was delivering a lesson I needed to heed
Then I saw this conference, representing many of the communities I now stand in service with my current vocation
I had to come to Longreach, Aramac, lay on the green grass in the middle of the outback and hear so much about collaboration
I needed to hear about Blackall, Tambo, communities full of positive outlook and motivation
I needed to know about Cocky's fish and have a boogie on the banks of the Thomson
I needed to soak up all you people, your stories and where you are from
I have been reminded that there are so many common themes, despite our staunch defence of our own patch
I needed a coffee from Tracey's famous hatch
I've seen people back out of the spotlight, it's not just me, they've said, it’s these people over here
“This is our story, come and see what we have done to bring people far and near.”
from Muttaburra to Ilfracombe to Isisford and beyond, one thing is clear the passion runs deep it bursts out of their words and they light up
With tears in their eyes they tell us about their things, but most importantly their people, from babies to elders, talk about fill the cup!
We've had a tiny taste of places like Barcaldine and Winton, mixed in with stories from across the west, down south and in between and a couple from overseas
It's left us all wanting more, sad that every one had to end, on these ancient lands we have shared our stories and now we feel we have the keys
We will all be back, making connections beyond and to hear yesterday in the lanolin how these conversations become reality
We have laughed so hard, found ourselves among friends and dare I say created our very own community
I now realise this is no accident on behalf of the great Mr Kenyon, the man of the hour
We have eaten food prepared with love and a fair whack of volunteer power
Those common themes seem clear to me and I wish I could go back and tell young Rose keep telling those stories, promote your patch soak up every moment of volunteering with the shows
because one day you'll be in a role where you get to meet so many more people like you who grew up thinking they had nothing, battled through with a that's just 'how it is' view but they turned that into a fire in the belly that has meant that our towns thrive
it will be a feeling on a bus, in the dust and eating a scone that you just can't describe but it will sit so deep you can't ignore it and like they say on The Castle, maybe it's just the vibe
but when the vibe comes together on a bus or in a hall it will level up and remind you of something so real

something you were born with, that passion you sometimes try to reel in but you really should reveal
It’s about the people, in a world of artificial creation, robots, disconnection and perhaps even some distrust,
that maybe now we all are craving genuine, no bs and that experience, the way it makes you feel, with just the right amount of bull dust
that's us, we are here, and there is something I now see so very clear
if there is one thing the world needs it is what we have and we should share it without fear
what I've seen this week is no one fights to take the credit, glory is shared and they built on what the last person started
it's about relationships, showing up, change starts with people who care, maybe a little bit at a time, but it is all big hearted
it's about raising our voice but also using those two ears of ours to listen
listen to absorb and learn, not just to reply, but to soak it in and imagine the big vision
what do I care most about? well it's telling the great stories on a loop
I've heard so many and I sit here in wonder, who else knows about this scoop?
if only I knew a rural girl with Wimmera sunsets in her soul, and a love a dance to any band
dusted with dust from so many plains across this wide brown land
a girl who must have been born to use story to create her dream of forever towns
a girl who sent her daughter a selfie of her on a Longreach train of old, and her daughter said mum, you look ‘old happy’, there are no Gold Coast frowns
That daughter who left the Gold Coast this year to return to rural life, with second hand ute her key to freedom, the Chicks’ ‘Wide Open Spaces’ as her soundtrack
to study agriculture and excitedly rings me to tell me she has found the missing piece, people who know her, she belongs, mum, they've all got my back
towns that are a village to raise a child but not just the child, the young person, the young adults, professionals and our elders full of wisdom
if heaven has a dirt road, and Sam is out bus driver and Peter the captain, raise me up right now to that there damn Kingdom
thanks for the awakening, and I stand here as a disciple, but there is no last supper here there is so much growing and emerging and so much to revere
I pledge to use my skills and never try and move on from my country childhood that built me
I found the rural girl who will now forever wear her boots so proudly
it's the grass roots that matters, and anything ‘big time’, manufactured or fake will rust
because the other thing I've been reminded of is the holy grail of trust
I'll tell all the stories like I preached to people years ago
because I've been reminded that these stories are what we have to show

they are ours alone (even if we share across our district), if it's a dinosaur, where the plane was born, the cattle stealing bushranger or first labour chinwag
there's no excuse, population doesn't measure potential, it's high time to wave our flag