



Jame Mclean (right) pictured with the two loves of his life – DI and Baby Allison.

The beginning of a new chapter

BY SALLY MURFET

By his own admission, renowned Australian author Jame Mclean says that he was not very good academically but really knew how to tell a good yarn.

The thirty-four year old writer and farmer was born and raised in some of the toughest country in remote outback Queensland on a property called 'Lantana', about 200 kilometres south-west of Charleville, where the family ran sheep and cattle.

For the very tender aged of eight, Jame attended a boarding school in Brisbane—1 000 kilometres from home. He only returned four times a year during school holidays.

Through attending boarding school, Jame claims that he met many people

and experienced life in a way that he would not have been able to at a local high school.

He played football and cricket, participated in athletics and rowed in the school crews, as well as serving four years in the cadets.

After finishing school in 1992 he returned home to help his family on the property. He also got a job as a jackeroo on a neighbouring property that consisted of 54,000 acres. He then went out contract mustering, lamb marking and crutching on in south-west Queensland.

"I didn't have any degrees and I always knew I would return home," he says. It was during his contracting time that he met DI.

"Dianne came to work on a property right next door and we met when I was doing some contract work on the same property," Jame explains. "We met and then the two of us and one of my best mates who was the mustering pilot had to share a room and work together for six weeks straight with no days off ... and at the end of that I was hooked. The pilot's name was Darryl and he told me I'd found my girl; he was killed in a mustering accident a few years later, but not before he got to stand up as a groomsman at our wedding."

About 18 months after he met DI, Jame's father became ill and Jame had to put an end to his contracting business to take on more of the everyday responsibility and workload.

Jame says that through record-breaking rains and the worst drought in living memory, his passion for writing has often had to take a back seat to doing what needed to be done just to survive.

He wrote his first novel immediately after leaving school in 1992 and

two more before completing *The Greatest Life* in 2004. Along the way there have been several short stories, some poetry and a screenplay called *A Little Piece of Ireland*.

After years of close calls and near misses and a series of family health problems, Jame's family have decided that it's time to slow down and smell the roses, so to speak.

Jame Mclean and his wife Di will be downsizing to a smaller block in Chinchilla. The move will enable Jame to concentrate on his writing career, and Di will focus on her digital design business as well as building a good line of commercial Red Brahmans.

Jame's parents Roger and Lyn Kemshead (Mclean is Jame's pen name), who are in their sixties, will retire completely from life on the land and move to Toowoomba. Jame speaks with mixed emotions when he tells of the decision to go. "We are sad to go but are also excited because we chose to go."

When telling of his life on the land you realise how much the outback is in Jame's blood.

He is also quick to make you realise that no amount of cows, country or wool clips can replace the ones you love. The realisation came after he nearly lost Di through a nasty wipe-out

on a motorbike and through trying to manage a chronic cramping disease called Thompson's Disease. "I have a lot of trouble in the heat and the cold but I am able to manage it with medication."

Jame loves the idea of being a storyteller. He describes himself as a hard worker by day and an over imaginative fool by night.

"I never suffer from writer's block; I often describe myself as a professional bull-shitter. "It is often just a voice or a line of dialogue or simply a name that sparks me into starting a new book."

Fighting back in the outback is the motto that Jame and his family live by.

"We have always described ourselves as being good news from the bush." All the interviews that I have done, especially if they are not being done by country people, always end up focusing on the bad or negative. I did an interview with a guy in Sydney, and while ever I was talking about drought, stock dying or debt he just loved it but whenever I tried to talk about us doing our best and she'll be right—it wasn't as sensational [for him]."

It's the person that plays on with a broken arm rather than the person who scores the most points who inspires Jame. "I get great energy from other people's energy." ■

I SEE...

*I see you getting up early, I see you riding into the morning chill,
I see the wind has cut your face and your eyes are watering still,
I see the sun has burnt your skin,
I see you have cracks in both your hands,
I see how the years have mistreated you and how no one understands.*

*I know you with your old eyes and a strained but gentle smile,
I know you've put your life on hold, and for more than just a while,
I know you've worked so very hard and I know you've done your best,
I know you wish to settle back, stretch your legs and have time to rest.*

*I want for you these few simple things, as I want them for myself,
I want to think of these days past like pictures up on the shelf,
I want just like you do, to live my life out on the land,
I want to be able to take a walk, in the black soil or the sand.*

*I remember how it used to be, all the good times and the bad,
I remember how we used to be, sometimes happy and sometimes sad.*

*I remember all the green grass, the wool bales and the endless musters,
I remember chase'n wild scrubber cows and suffering endless busters.*

*I was there when the oldies heart's broke and when the young people stayed away,
I was there when the working dogs stood idle, and the stock began to stray,
I was there when the water ran out, and when we were all deeply in the pits,
I was there when all the gardens died and when the big house fell to bits.*

BY JAME MCLEAN

