

Ladies and gentlemen ...

Good morning and welcome to where it all began.

Bowenville.

I know I'm not alone in this ... but I love old country halls like this ... because of the ghosts that inhabit them.

A few months ago ... my eight-year-old son James and I got up early one Saturday morning ... and took a drive to the Bunya Mountains ... because I wanted to film a video postcard for an ABC Open project.

And I slowed down and stopped as we went through towns like Quinalow ... and Maclagan and got some footage of those halls ... and James asked my why?

And I explained to him that these halls once were ... and often still are ... the beating hearts of these communities.

In halls like these, first dances were had, maybe first kisses ..... gawky teenage farm boys and girls conquered shyness at Saturday night dances ... romances were forged from awkward dance steps ..some of them even blossomed into marriages and lasting unions ... and maybe even great dynasties.

These halls don't really have a city equivalent ... they are uniquely Qld bush ... they are wonderful evocative and they are beautiful.

As Jane said in an email to me yesterday:

"It's the Hall where we all learned to dance the Pride of Erin, the Barn Dance & the Gypsy Tap. It's where regular dances were held, with pops on the floor (that stuff that makes the floor slippery and adds to the fun, probably banned now for WHS reasons) and the boys outside drinking at their cars. But inside, cakes & cordial spread on trestle tables down the side area and wallflowers anxiously sitting on the bench seats waiting to be asked to dance. It's where Anzac Day ceremonies were held in my Grandfather's and Father's day."

I'd like to welcome some special guests to this morning's launch.

Jane's sister Nicola Potger, her mother's long-time carer Rick Ireland.

Cousins the Mynes who the Paull family grew up with – Tom, Patsy and Jim

Welcome ... to the launch of this wonderful book ... In Stockmen's Footsteps ... by our friend Jane Grieve.

And I think I may have forgotten to introduce myself ...

My name's David Iliffe ... I present the Breakfast program on ABC Southern Qld ...

And one thing I have noticed in my time working with the national broadcaster ... is that writers seem to be attracted to the ABC.

Like bees to honey.

It is one of those irreversible laws of physics and or biology that as soon as any man ... or woman ... or child ... has penned their Magnum Opus ... their grand project ... their novel that has been rattling around in their psyche since they first picked up a 2B pencil and learnt to write ... as soon as they've written the words "the end" in bold on the last page ..... and tied their 600 sheets of paper together with a ratty piece of twine ... they make a beeline for Aunty.

It's as if the mere act of putting pen to paper activates some sort of homing beacon deep within their brains ... and they follow it blindly. And if they live anywhere between Withcott and Winton ... Murgon and Mungindi ... it leads them to 297 Margaret St, Toowoomba.

I don't know why.

We are after all ... a broadcasting network ... not a publishing house. But I guess it taps into that unwritten rule that is drummed into all bushies from birth. If you don't know what to do ... go to the ABC ... THEY'LL KNOW !!! They know how much rain is in my rain guage before I've even got my slippers on ... surely they'll know what to do with this !

And they're right ofcourse. Nine times out of ten ... we know EXACTLY what to do with it.

We even have a well-honed system in place for when a local self published author, or self-recorded singer rings our doorbell.

First we draw straws to see who'll go ...

Then ... the author ... or singer ... or emu whisperer ... or whoever it might be ... is given five minutes.

Only they don't know it. But when that five minutes is up ... another staff member will interrupt and say "David ... there's a phone call for you ... they said it's urgent."

And that is the end of the encounter.

Having said that ... I must say that some of them are very good and one of the great joys of working for the ABC is meeting the locals with fantastic stories ... stories that make you laugh out loud.

And ofcourse we're here this morning to honour one of those writers .

My memory is a bit hazy ... but as far as I can recall ... I don't think Jane went through those primitive channels of self promotion with her first book ... the wonderful collection of columns called Slippin on the Lino.

I'm sure it was an email ... perhaps a phonecall ...

But the pitch was compelling ... and the stories were pure gold.

After reading even just a few ... I knew that the world in which Jane Grieve roamed would delight me.

Perhaps it was her writing which revealed a lifelong love and intimate relationship with the English language ... perhaps it was the dry wit ... which positively spilled out of the covers of Slippin on the Lino.

But perhaps it was the sense of what was only hinted at between the lines of the stories in that first book ..... that here was a woman who had lived a truly fascinating life.

Here was a born writer who was entering a chapter of her life that freed her to pursue that passion.

Yesterday afternoon ... as I was doing some last minute preparation for this event, I was listening over some of the pieces we'd recorded of Jane reading from her blog ... some of the few that are still GOOGLE-able ... and two things struck me. One was how much I enjoyed those opportunities to record because we would always have such a good yak. There are two people who, when we make an appointment for them to come in and record ... I always block out a full hour in my diary ... no matter how many or few pieces we've set aside to record ... one is Peter Cullen . and the other is Jane Grieve.

The other thing that struck me is that these blog posts provided some wonderful snapshots of Jane's childhood growing up on Oakey Creek ... and the floods ... and riding in Stan's glorified horsefloat that served as the school bus down Bowenville way ... back in the day.

Of course they were all just a mere hint of this cracking good yarn that she was really wanting to tell.

And I and I think everyone here thank whichever literary deity made the decision to commission and publish this fantastic tale.

Despite what you may read about the imminent demise of the publishing industry ... falling victim, they'll have us believe, to the world wide web ... there are still a lot of books being published.

And so many of them miss the mark ... so many are not worthy of your time. There are so many non-fiction books rushed into print to meet a perceived gap in the market place ... to cash in on the latest fad ... books as merchandise !

So many are either ripping good tales but shoddily written ... or beautifully written books about nothing.

Book shops are filled with non fiction that leaves the reader completely unmoved and unaffected.

So for me, it was such a pleasure to sit down each night to such a gripping read ... and written so so beautifully.

Just finally ... I was truly honoured to be asked to MC this launch this morning because I am very passionate not just about story telling ... but about story keeping.

The stories of so many wonderful lives brimming with adventure and achievement are all too often never recorded.

There's an old saying ... some call it an African Proverb ... but it goes something like: when an old person dies ... it's like a whole library burning to the ground.

So it is right and just that these wonderful recollections not just of the story of the creation of a vitally important building and entity ... the Stockman's Hall of Fame ... but of an era, a lifestyle, an upbringing ... it's so wonderful that they have been captured and preserved forever in the pictures and the pages of this book ... so that future generations ... not just of Jane's family ... but others ... can get a taste of an idyllic rural childhood circa 1950s regional Australia ... and be inspired by one woman's willingness to just see where tiny opportunities might lead.

When you read "In Stockmen's Footsteps" ... you very soon appreciate that Jane Grieve's life so far ... and her destiny ... has been not so much according to some GRAND PLAN ... but more a series of chance meetings and random circumstances that put her in the presence of the right people in the right place ... at the right time. Really ... the book is one long lesson in the power of fate.

Ofcourse ... integral to this story is Jane's meeting with the late RM Williams ... who saw in her ... another passenger on the same journey ... another person with the bush in her heart ... an understanding and empathy for its great traditions and deep rich history ... and an untapped desire to honour and preserve it to make future generations understand its importance.

This morning ... we are honoured to have RM's son Mike join us to officially launch "In Stockmen's Footsteps".

In his adult life ... Mike has well and truly made a name for himself in his own right ... while still playing an important role in keeping some of those bush traditions alive.

His iconic Toowoomba business has been selling superior quality bush clothing for about a quarter of a century ... including ... ofcourse ... the RM Williams brand.

It started with a staff of 2 ... and now has expanded to include customers online and by mail order overseas as well.

Ofcourse these days ... he balances his role in the business with public office as well ... as a second term councillor on the Toowoomba Regional Council and ... appropriately enough ... chair of the Finance and Business Strategy Committee.

This follows from his time of service as Deputy Mayor of the former Cambooya Shire Council.

He and his family also breed and train horses ... and compete in polocrosse and showjumping as well.

He's a busy man ... but we are thrilled that he has joined us this morning ... at this very important occasion.

Will you please welcome ... Cr Mike Williams.

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It is now my pleasure to introduce writer, author, sometime motelier, wife, mother, humourist, adventurer, and if not now, then before too long, highly successful and nationally and internationally revered author ..... will you please welcome ... Jane Grieve.

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Ladies and Gentlemen ... that brings this morning;s launch to a close ... I'd like to thank you all for being a part of this event ...

And may I just say finally that if you are yet to read In Stockmen's Footsteps ... you must read it. Buy a copy this morning ... it is one of the most beautifully written and most enjoyable books I've read in a long long time. And I'd be staggered if you didn't share that view after reading it yourself.

Please stay for a cup of tea and something to eat ...

The catering is being done by the Marlene Dunn and the Bowenville State School P&F.

Thankyou very much.