



**UPDATE
AUGUST 2019**

This week marked 20 years since I made my tree change and swapped life in inner city Sydney for life in a country town. Originally I was only going to be down here for a year or two helping some friends out but then then I brought a five acre paddock, started planting saplings (see before and after pics below) and created my little land of make believe known as A Poultry Place from little things big things grow.



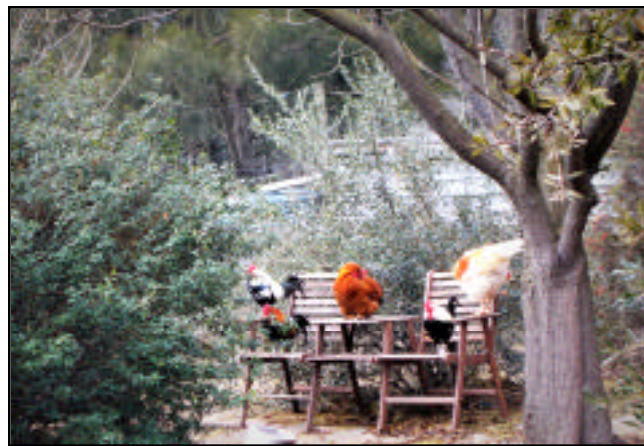
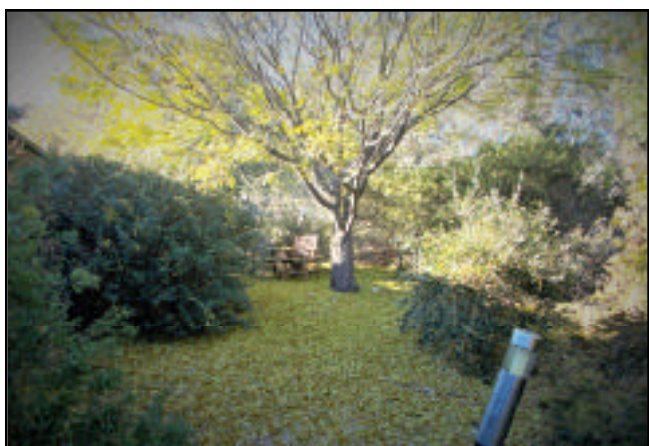
It's a decision I don't have any regrets about despite the challenges and hardships I've had to face. It's been amazing to reflect back on the experiences I've had over the past two decades. While I had previously spent three years living in a country town when I was studying journalism at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst I never thought I'd be living permanently in the country yet here I am. I'm not sure whether my tenure here qualifies me now as a local or not?

I can't help but think this country living gig has really got to me given my obsession with weather. Each morning one of the first things I do after making coffee is to check out the weather forecast. Sadly recent weeks haven't brought any joy and the long-term forecast is not inspiring.

We are now into year three of this drought. July was the driest July since records have been kept and also the warmest for this part of the country. Springs starts on Sunday and there is little forecast of rain

in the first month, which will mean there will be very little growth in the paddocks. The drought is still proving challenging to source reasonably price hay and getting supplies through when needed. A few weeks ago I had to wait 10 days to get my usual monthly delivery of feed for the ducks and geese because it hadn't arrived at the stockfeeds – luckily I always plan in advance and had enough to get through – just. Sourcing good edible hay for the sheep and goats is another ongoing challenge and when I can get my hands on some I grab it. It's going to be like this for at least another year I'm guessing.

I returned to work earlier this month after taking my annual leave, which I usually do in winter as it makes things easier given most winter mornings there are frozen pipes to deal with and fog etc. During my leave I took time out for myself and spent many hours reading, writing and sipping red wine in what is arguably my private space at the sanctuary (though often has rooster invaders). I loved creating this space some years back, using grevilleas and banksias to create the border with the centre attraction being a white cedar, one of a number I planted and grew here from cuttings made from a mature tree which existed in my parents' backyard in Ulladulla, which they had removed when they moved there in the early 2000s. I got the tree surgeon to make some cuttings of it for me so I could "save" the tree. The visiting cockatoos, galahs and rosellas love them and the fruit they produce.



Despite the challenges I continue to try and help out when I can and over the past two months have taken in a few new faces.

Three were ducks who had bonded together but could no longer stay where they were. Their story: *"Hello, I rescued a Muscovy cross that was brought into the vet where I work from a local pond where he'd obviously been dumped and was not doing well. The vet was just going to put him to sleep but he was so gorgeous I just couldn't let that happen. I've had him for about 3 months. About a week later I rescued a male Pekin and a female Khaki Campbell from the RSPCA so he had companions. They're all doing so well and I absolutely love them and try to provide them with everything they need but they're getting too much for our yard and my 7 rabbits haven't been quite themselves since they arrived. The ducks are getting more cocky with them, stealing their food, muddying their water supplies and pecking them. They're also destroying our yard and my mum is not happy. I need to rehome them but I can't bear to take them to the RSPCA where they might end up in a small yard without a pond because they love their swims and splashes. Is there any possibility they could come live in your sanctuary?"*

As usual there have been heaps of requests asking me to take in surrenders from across the country and the world – Colorado and Pennsylvania recently – because nowadays people are too lazy to even do basic research like sanctuary location before they ask for your help. And of course requests to take in roosters continue to flow in. At least I managed to take in two of these guys, which proved a touching experience and as usual it involved a stupid school hatching project.

“Hi there... my wife and I may have 2 roosters to rehome. I say ‘may’ because we’re still not sure whether they are indeed roosters. They’re both about 4 months old, and I think they’re Leghorns. We got them as part of a hatchery giveaway, because my little girl really wanted to bring home the chicks she’d been caring for at school. We love them both and desperately want to keep them, but this may not be possible due to council regs. And giving them away to be culled or eaten is unacceptable to us. As it is, we’ll try to keep them for as long as we can, but it may just be forestalling the inevitable. We’re not doing this because we don’t want roosters. On the contrary, we want so much to keep them.”



When this family brought the two boys named Henny Penny and Little Bird down here their young daughter was visibility upset at having to part with her friends and there were tears – it was heartbreaking but at the same time comforting to know that there are people out there taking responsibility for their actions and allowing their kids to experience the tough stuff. I’ve been keeping the family updated on how the guys are progressing to becoming part of the A Poultry Place family.

TO VISIT A POULTRY PLACE EMAIL freechook@bigpond.com

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