Beccy Cole is the real deal, a working single mother, a successful career woman, an explosive and very funny live performer and as honest in the lyrics of her songs as she is about her private life.

In double decades, the sassy Country Queen has shelved nine Golden Guitars, three Gold records, two Entertainer of the Year awards, seven song writing awards and has peaked at number one on the country music radio chart a whopping 14 times.

Beccy Cole has country music in her blood. Daughter of a country music star, Carole Sturtzel, she is one of the most popular country singer-songwriters in Australia today. This is the story of her life – in her own words.

At fourteen, Beccy was performing in her mother’s group, Wild Oats. By her late teens, Beccy had teamed up with the Dead Ringer Band – Kasey Chambers’ family band – and had attracted the attention of the country music world by winning the Star Maker quest: the same award that started the careers of Keith Urban, Lee Kernaghan, James Blundell and Gina Jeffreys. It was just the first of many awards and accolades for this multitalented woman with a big heart.

With refreshing candour, Beccy shares her story: leaving everything she knew to pursue her dream; making a name for herself with her own band; her marriage and motherhood; her subsequent divorce; becoming a single mother and maintaining the nurturing love of family; performing for the Australian troops in Afghanistan; coming out, and what it has meant for her and her fans; taking control of her own life – and finding love.

Heartfelt and honest, Poster Girl is the inspirational memoir of a strong woman who epitomises the authentic spirit of country music, and of Australia.
In one of my earliest memories I am looking up at a speaker as I awake from a nap during a gig. I remember the padded covers of the Cerwin Vega speakers and how inviting they had looked as a makeshift bed, right there under the blasting sounds of Mum’s band. There has always been music in my life.

My first steps were taken at a Country Women’s Association meeting. My dear Auntie Marj spotted me and yelled to my mum, ‘She’s doing it, Carole – she’s doing it!’

Madame President of the CWA exclaimed, ‘Do you mind? We’re trying to have a meeting here!’

And good ol’ Auntie Marj said, ‘Do you mind? History is being made here.’

I was controversial, even then.

I think I was about four when I first got onstage. Mum had sent me to jazz ballet and tap dancing. I was never able to dance –
I was too self-conscious to express myself with movement. I would do tiny versions of what the other kids did, hoping to go unnoticed. I danced with other four-year-olds, each with a teddy bear and teeny tap shoes on. For performances our hair would be put in rollers and our faces were covered in our mothers’ make-up – all very Toddlers & Tiaras. I wore a pink tutu under a sparkly dress adorned with sequins hand sewn by my mother and grandmother. There was one boy in that group; he got to wear white pants with glitter on them. I wanted to wear white pants too. I hated dresses.

This first time onstage I looked out and saw a whole row of parents, grandparents, godparents and friends. I stopped dancing to wave at them. When I saw my mum I realised how much I missed her and I cried – well, I suppose it had been a good few minutes since I left her side. My poor teddy bear dropped to the ground; perhaps he was trying to escape the humiliation … It’s safe to say that I blew the whole number for everyone and, on reflection, I’m terribly sorry for holding those other dancers back.

Despite this early experience, I continued with dance classes for many years although I didn’t enjoy them. There were little girls who moved gracefully, like gorgeous swans – and then there was me: an awkward little lump. I invented the flailing method of dance. All the girls would cartwheel constantly. At any given moment, there would be little girl wheels turning everywhere in the Uniting Church hall in Blackwood, in the Adelaide Hills. I envied those girls. I’d never done a cartwheel in my life. I still dream of achieving them, although I’m sure even an attempt would leave me with two black eyes.

From my earliest of years, I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my mother, Carole Sturtzel. My mum’s love of music began in the late 1950s as she became a teenager. She would listen to my grandmother’s 78s and learn all the words to songs by Teresa Brewer, Jane Froman, Rosemary Clooney and Petula Clark.

My grandmother played music in the house daily; this was Mum’s introduction to her passion. Mum learnt piano and songs became her refuge. Whenever she was sad, she would play piano or listen and sing along to Grandma’s records and that would bring her great cheer. I don’t think times were always happy for Mum when she was a child but she would never say otherwise – she is fiercely loyal and somewhat private.

I’ve often imagined Mum back then – I can see her closing her eyes and belting out songs with all the fervour of a bedroom star. Carole got her first taste of singing in public when she attended Bowley’s Community Singing, which was run and broadcast by a local radio station, 5KA. This was a ‘follow the bouncing ball’ affair, but occasionally someone was selected to sing solo. Mum’s friend Beverly Harvey was chosen and Mum found herself yearning for the same opportunity.

In 1959 Mum discovered Brenda Lee singing ‘Jambalaya’ and Connie Francis singing ‘Robot Man’ on the radio; she would go to bed and twist the dial until she found the songs. Then came Elvis. From all reports, Mum was mad for Elvis. She embroidered a shirt with his name on it to wear to the screening of Elvis’s movie Jailhouse Rock but was too shy to take her cardigan off and show anyone. I suppose she is where I get my deep-seated shyness from.

Mum’s older brother, Lance, would take her to concerts of visiting artists like her favourite Brenda Lee, the Everly Brothers, Crash Craddock and Fabian. Consequently, as a young teen she fell in love with the excitement of live performance and from that point she was hooked.
Mum had seen girls screaming at the movies of singers like Elvis and Bill Hayley and decided that she would try a scream at the Everly Brothers concert, even though ‘the scream’ hadn’t taken off in Adelaide as yet. Mum wondered if it just needed her to kick-start it. Picking her time carefully, and then plucking up the courage, little Carole let go of the loudest teenage rock ‘n’ roll scream she could manage – only to find everyone staring at her in shock. Nobody had joined in and Mum never screamed again. After the concert, Lance took Mum backstage, where he knew someone on the door, so at the age of fourteen she met the Everly Brothers and Bobby Rydell and they were lovely to her (probably because they didn’t know about the scream).

The first time my mother ever sang was at her end-of-year school concert in 1959, although she’d often been asked to sing by her school friends. A teacher had approached Mum and said, ‘I’ve seen you perform in the lunch hour – can you do an act?’ Mum had actually been doing impersonations of the teachers in the lunch hour but she was sure they didn’t want her to include that in the act.

She took along a guitar of her father’s (as a prop) and Lance played piano. She sang Elvis songs complete with his unique moves and trademark lip curl. At this time girls sang girls’ songs and boys sang boys’ – a girl singing Elvis was unheard of. And Mum does a wicked Elvis even today so I’ve always imagined that her school performance was impressive. The whole shebang increased Mum’s popularity at school and she was then often asked to sing.

Mum finished school in 1959 at fifteen and started working as a clerk for an insurance company soon after. In 1961 the mail boy invited Mum along to a band practice. He played bass in a band called The Tremors; he asked if she sang and she said yes, she supposed she did. So by the age of sixteen she joined the band and they frequented football clubs and coffee lounges playing pop music. Mum’s specialties, unsurprisingly enough, were Brenda Lee and Connie Francis.

When she was seventeen, Mum and her friend Marlene heard a fabulous sound coming from the Thebarton Town Hall as they walked by. A band was rehearsing inside and they stood at the door and watched. ‘Either of you girls sing?’ one of the band members asked.

Marlene said, ‘Yes, Carole does,’ and pushed Mum forward. Mum sang ‘Robot Man’ and ‘Jambalaya’ and realised that the band was the Penny Rockets, the regular backing band on Woody’s Teen Time, a show airing on Channel Nine at the time.

After the rehearsal, the Rockets announced that they would get Mum on television. Carole’s mother cautioned that musicians weren’t always to be trusted and that such offers usually came with a price that a good girl could ill afford. As much as Mum now doubted the validity of this offer, she soon received a telegram from Channel Nine and an invitation to appear on Woody’s Teen Time, hosted by Ian Fairweather and Glenys O’Brien. Mum sang her rehearsal songs on each of the two prerecorded TV shows and was immediately invited back to sing every month.

After the second appearance, a young local musician by the name of Trev Warner found out Mum’s address and knocked on her door. Trev said that Mum sounded like Wanda Jackson, who was his favourite singer, and he asked Mum to join his band, Trev and the Strangers. The saxophone player was Trev’s school friend Jeff Thompson; people would marvel at how Jeff could get the sax to ‘growl’ just like the American players did on the rock ‘n’ roll albums. The Strangers were certainly a step up from The Tremors and Carole felt very much a part of something musically special. Lance also played in the Strangers on piano.

Around this time the South Australian Film Corporation asked Mum to perform a small part in a short film. The scene consisted of Carole singing a song with the Penny Rockets. Mum pretended she
needed a partner and asked Jeff, the handsome saxophone player from the Strangers, to accompany her. She just loved his dimples. A few months later, they were engaged. Carole was eighteen.

Throughout her television career, as it became, Carole made regular appearances on Nine’s *Woody’s Teen Time* and *Seventeeners* on Channel Seven. Later in the 1960s, Channel Nine started *Country and Western Hour* with Roger Cardwell, who was later replaced by Reg Lindsay. Seven also started a regular country music show called *Country Style* and Carole Sturtzel was a favourite guest. Country music got pretty big in the mid ‘60s and Mum was asked to learn the songs of the likes of Patsy Cline and Kitty Wells. This really began Mum’s love affair with country music. She was joined by Trev Warner, who appeared on these country music television shows as a backing musician and artist in his own right; he adjusted his guitar style to suit the country format and soon introduced banjo and fiddle to his repertoire. Trev would later become my most significant mentor and teacher.

As a saxophone player my dad, Jeff, had spent the late 1950s playing Big Band swing music. That was until Elvis came on the radio singing ‘Hound Dog’ – when David first heard Elvis sing, he somersaulted across his mother’s bed to turn up the volume. He had discovered rock ‘n’ roll – this was the music he had been searching for! I always loved my father telling that story, and I still think about it when a new sound reaches out and grabs me musically. I imagine it’s nothing compared to Dad hearing Elvis for the first time; I can only imagine how exciting a time that would have been in music. All this means, of course, that I am a child of rock ‘n’ roll! I love the thought that my mum and dad fell in love playing music together. It’s easy to do (don’t I know it), but it’s such a beautiful thing to share with a partner.

Mum and Dad had a two-year engagement, during which they broke up for two weeks. They extended the engagement by six months after Dad’s mother accused Carole of ‘pushing Jeffrey’ and insisted that they wait a little longer to be sure. I highly doubt that Jeffrey needed pushing: my mother was a ‘60s hottie and a television star to boot. Musicians were always telling me that they were waiting in line for my mum; perhaps they had kept a copy of the edition of *Young Modern* magazine when she was ‘pin-up of the month’. Lucky Jeffrey.

Even though they were engaged, and just to prove that it wasn’t only Jeff’s parents who didn’t want their child to be pushed, Mum would be called inside when Jeff dropped her home and the front lights of the house would flash to ensure that no funny business was going on. Thank goodness – imagine having to write that your parents got up to funny business!

My parents were finally wed in 1964 in Saint Jude’s Anglican Church in Brighton. Carole unpacked the hope chest that she had been adding to for those two years and they began married
life in Mum's grandmother's house in Blackwood, which they rented for five years while saving money for their own house.

During the day Mum worked as a stenographer for an insurance company and at night she would play three live shows a week, as well as recording the television shows. One of Mum's regular shows was at the Palais on North Terrace in the city. The Palais was the rock 'n' roll venue of Adelaide and the place would be packed and pumping twice a week. The Bay Town Hall in the beach suburb of Glenelg was another popular venue and sometimes Mum would perform spots at both venues in one night. The Strangers had disbanded by now but everyone still played together in different formats. Mum soon joined Trev and Rick Adams for a country outfit called the Blue Streaks. Yes, Carole Sturtzel was a highly sought-after musical identity.

Jeff, too, worked for an insurance company during the week and at night played sax in several bands, including The Gasmen and Forum, which he formed with old school friend and former fellow Stranger, Chris Smith. Dad went from singing just one or two songs to being a main singer in Forum – he had a great voice, a little like David Gates from Bread, but he could do a mean Fats Domino too. I seem to recall Dad singing a rockin' version of 'Mean Woman Blues' which, I suppose, was made most famous by Elvis.

There was always a vinyl record spinning on the turntable in Carole and Jeff's house; music had brought them together, after all. Sometimes I listen to the love songs of that era and imagine my mum and dad holding hands to those sounds. Perhaps I am a romantic.

The couple eventually saved their deposit and in 1969 they bought a five-year-old cream brick home in Cumming Street, Blackwood for $13 300.

Carole had a clear plan to have children: they would first buy a house and then she would have a boy and, two years later, a girl. Everything turned out exactly as she planned and according to Mum it's because she has the scientific recipe for gender selection. I've never been game to ask what that recipe is – nor, to be truthful, had any interest in knowing the details.

My brother, Matthew, was born on the seventh of the seventh, 1970 (there was a big fuss about him turning 7 on 7/7/77 – I don't think I could see what all the fuss was about at the time!). Mum soon went back to singing but in 1972 she took more time away from the stage to have baby Rebecca on October the twenty-seventh – and I was bang on time for the last time in my life at 11.05 p.m. And, according to my mother, I was absolutely perfect. I did have thick black hair, which I can't imagine would have suited me, so you can probably guess how relieved I would have been that it turned blonde within a week.

That night Dad was playing a gig with Forum. He'd lost his driver's licence (for drink driving), so Chris Smith drove him to Glenelg Hospital to see me. The next day he arrived at the hospital on foot from Blackwood, a good 15 kilometres away. My brother was brought into the hospital to meet me by 'Auntie' Merrilyn (Chris's wife). In Auntie Merrilyn's arms was twelve-month-old Karen; my oldest, dearest and most trusted friend was there from the beginning. But Matthew took one look at me and ran out of the building and down the road. This was a clear sign of things to come. It would take reaching adulthood for us to find the first likeable traits about each other.

When I was eight weeks old, Mum went back to work at the Marion Hotel, where she was a part of the cabaret show six nights a week. With a toddler, a brand-new baby and a late-night singing gig most evenings, she was absolutely exhausted. I think there were high expectations on women in those days: it was the beautiful home,
immaculate children, happy husband era and these clear gender roles made it difficult for women who also had career aspirations, which Carole certainly did. But it took a toll.

One day Mum was driving home from Christmas shopping at the Marion Shopping Centre when she fell asleep at the wheel of her black Wolseley. The car crossed the busy Shepherd’s Hill Road and flattened a telegraph pole outside the Bellevue Heights Primary School.

When Mum came to, her two-year-old son was missing. She looked up to see that he was running towards the car with blood pouring from his face. Safe in a bassinette in the back seat, I was covered in Christmas parcels and had slept through the whole thing – I always did sleep like a baby. The ambulance drivers wanted to take me as I was covered in blood but that blood was my mother’s: she had broken her nose and a couple of ribs.

Mum was later allowed to leave the hospital with her swollen and bruised face and she went straight back to singing. Mum has an endless amount of energy when it comes to her duties as a singer – her ‘show must go on’ attitude is unfaltering. It’s probably safe to say that my mother would rise from her deathbed if she had a gig.

Mum says I uttered my first word at four months – I said, ‘Pretty.’ I suppose it’s possible as my mother spoke to me constantly and is well known for pointing out pretty things.

As a very young child, I thought everyone’s mum was a singer – wasn’t that just what mums do? To sit on Mum’s bed and watch her make her face look beautiful, to see her trying on outfits while she sang and practised lyrics, she was the queen of my world. I didn’t really know what a ‘star’ was but I saw no difference between Mum and the ladies who sang on TV. People would stop Mum on the street and compliment her on her singing. I assumed her fame stretched way beyond little old Adelaide. I guessed she was about as famous as Dolly Parton; I was already a big fan of Dolly.

I spent many of my weekends in the care of friends or my grandparents while Mum and Dad played separate gigs, but if I was lucky, I got to go along. Matthew hated going to gigs, but I lived for those shows. I would sit in the audience in absolute awe of Mum as she belted out her songs and made people laugh. And I knew that this was what I wanted to do, too; there was never any doubt.

My mother is the most generous, talented and funny woman I’ve ever known. Mum has a way of making people laugh without even trying. She has always had the unique ability to portray onstage exactly who she is offstage. She has never pretended to be anything other than herself and this is possibly the best gift she could have given me.

As I grew up, I realised that many of the women in my life who I had called ‘Auntie’ weren’t, in fact, my real aunties – many of them were singer friends of Mum’s. I suppose it stands to reason why most of my close friends now are singers. Looking back, this circle of Mum’s friends was also such a gift in terms of what it taught me. Carole was not a jealous person, nor was she ever full of her own importance. This gave her the capacity to be such close friends with other singers and to tell me tales of their talent and her admiration for them, rather than feeling a rivalry with them as some other people might have.

These women – Auntie Billie, Auntie Val, Auntie Heather, Auntie Jill – were all husky-voiced, spirited and hard-working singers, and I was fascinated by them. I loved to hear them tell stories of singing – stories of anything, really. From a very young age I was brilliant at listening to conversations that I wasn’t meant to hear. I suppose Mum thought that if I was colouring in or occupied with a toy,
I wasn’t listening. Not so: I was always intrigued by the way adults spoke to each other. I always laughed when the adults laughed. I might not have known what was funny yet, but I loved to laugh along with them.

I found a talent for mimicking at a very early age. I would put on shows and impersonate Mum and her friends having cups of tea and chatting about husbands and ‘how Rhonda gets the Cooper girls’ socks so white’. I actually remember using a line that I’d heard in an adults-only conversation while putting on a little play with my stuffed toys. ‘I just don’t WANT to have sex with you, Dino,’ said Pink, the teddy bear of the same colour, to the Flintstones character. I didn’t know what this sex business was, but it sure got a run in the conversations of ladies.

From the age of seven I began a lifetime of bad headaches. Mum took me to specialist after specialist, trying to find the cause. I’d always been told the story of Mum dropping me on my head at four months – apparently her A-line dress had been very slippery. I suppose the 1970s were a time when babies slipped off their mothers’ synthetic dresses constantly. At least this is what my mother had me believe – ‘Darling,’ she’d say, ‘babies would have slipped off their mothers’ silky nylon dresses all the time.’ My mother has a way of making everything sound hilarious, even when she’s not trying to be funny.

In the case of my headaches, I think Mum felt she was to blame due to the earlier nylon dress incident. But a doctor once told me, ‘Sometimes there is no cause and you have to learn to put up with a little pain.’ So I did. It was much better to learn pain management than waste time running from doctor to doctor. I inherited the art of worry from my grandma, although she is the Queen of Concern.

The pain in my head was often triggered during episodes of intense shyness. When I was very young I would hold onto Mum’s skirt and suck my thumb for comfort; I had this habit for a while and have the teeth to show for it! I had white blonde hair so long I could sit on it; when people I didn’t know tried to speak to me or comment about my hair or my dimples, I would instantly bury my face in my mother’s side to make the people disappear. When I was a little older, my face would twitch and turn red as I attempted to speak to people. I would struggle to get words out and I would often give up and run from the room.

In my very early years Lindy lived next door and we were friends from when we were babies. Lindy’s mother – another ‘auntie’, Carol, was Mum’s closest ‘cup of tea’ friend and we all spent time together even after they moved away. Poor Lindy – I would make her be my back-up singer as we donned costumes and sang into shampoo bottles and hairbrushes.

Lindy’s dad, ‘Uncle’ Ivan, had a horse farm in beautiful Kersbrook and when I was ten years old I would join Lindy there for school holidays sometimes. I’m sure I drove Lindy mad, as I couldn’t get on a horse without slipping into a southern American accent and declaring that I was ‘fixin’ to ride the range’. I had a certain fascination with Calamity Jane and I thought I was just like her, especially up on ‘Tizzy’ the horse. Lindy and I would write songs about all of the animals on the farm and the adults would have to buy tickets and watch the shows. I was never shy when I was pretending to be someone who could be onstage; I later referred to it as performing. It’s possible that the first song I ever wrote was about Ali, ‘Uncle’ Ivan’s kelpie:
Everything she does is good,
she is never bad
She sits and looks with those big eyes,
it makes you feel quite sad.

Oh Ali, little Ali, we love you
I hope you love us too
If you come and play with us
We will play with you.

This song, strangely, remains unrecorded.

I grew up in Blackwood, in the hills of Adelaide. Essentially I suppose I’m a city girl but we did live opposite a huge farm called Craigburn, and Blackwood looked pretty rural despite the city being only a twenty-minute drive away. Cumming Street, where we lived, led to Blackwood Oval, where I would ride my bike every Saturday and watch football games, buy 20 cents’ worth of mixed lollies, kick the footy with Gregg Hickey, then ride to the creek to throw rocks and sing songs to the flowers. My beautiful kelpie cross, Tammy, was always by my side. She was my best friend.

I have a memory of a yard that was full of neighbourhood kids until the sun went down. They were mostly boys but that didn’t bother me – I was happy to get up to the same mischief that my brother and his friends did. It was very rare for my brother to actually let me play with him; I was at the mercy of one or other of his more generous friends, who would convince Matthew that they needed another ‘man’ for Cowboys and Indians. Even then I’d often get shot first and have to lie dead for some time. I was pretty convincing – I’d often still be dead when the boys would get called home and forget to tell me the game was over. I didn’t mind – I was always grateful for my vivid imagination, which could keep me entertained for a while. I would sooner lie there dead for hours and know that the big boys let me play than take on an activity alone.

I fondly remember the kindness of our next-door neighbours, the Young family. They had a swimming pool and it was a very rare summer’s day when we weren’t splashing about next door. All I would have to do was catch Mrs Young’s eye when she was watering the front lawn and she would invite me in. I learnt to swim in that pool and I was quite the water baby, as I recall. I had my own little world under that water. Mum would call and call for me to come home and I would remain under water for as long as I could to save from hearing that it was my name she was calling.

With my mother being the first, the second most influential woman in my life was always my grandmother, Gloria Sturtzel. I have been so blessed to still have her into my forties. She has always been strong and hardworking. She is also generous, loving and very funny. Grandma had the beauty of a model and even now, well into her nineties, people comment on her complexion. She has always presented herself as an impeccably dressed lady, beautiful outside and in.

My grandma left school at fourteen and worked as a milliner in the city of Adelaide. She was extremely talented and eventually ran her own business, but she was never treated as an equal by her brothers – one of them even made her give him most of her pay. But she learnt to rise above the blatant sexism.

Through her hard work, tenacity and drive, Grandma soon became known by a few society ladies as the ‘go-to girl’ for hats. Grandma was once asked by a certain Lady Bonython to fix and spruce up a precious blue velour hat. Lady Bonython was a pillar of society: tall, elegant and always beautifully dressed. Perhaps she required the hat for one of her many public speaking engagements, for she
was a very important woman in Adelaide. Taking this job very seriously, Grandma placed the hat on the block and, to her absolute horror, the steamer burnt it beyond repair. In desperation, Grandma searched Adelaide for a hat just like it, but her search was in vain. Not to be beaten, Grandma took a piece of the blue velour and scoured the second-hand shops until she came across a hat which, although different from Lady Bonython’s, was at least the same colour. After an all-night remodel, Grandma had the hat looking identical to the original and handed it over to a delighted Lady Bonython the next morning.

The matter of Lady Bonython wearing a second-hand hat at a fancy function was no laughing matter until many years later, when it became a famous and funny story within our family. Our family picnics at Bonython Park were never complete without a version of the story.

As a young mother in the 1940s, Grandma also washed bottles in her family’s bottle yard to supplement the household’s income while still running her business.

To this day, Grandma lives in the house that my grandfather grew up in Thebarton, a suburb in Adelaide’s outskirts. ‘The one with all the beautiful roses,’ I have always said to the taxi driver as we turn into Filsell Street. That house is the closest thing I have to a childhood home, as Grandma still lives in it and I still spend time there.

Never afraid to speak her mind, Grandma has always been forthright in expressing her opinion, and has always done so with humour and good grace. I am yet to meet a woman who works harder than Grandma, or who has a bigger heart.

I spent many of my weekends with my grandparents as a young child while my mum was singing. I would accompany Grandma on her Avon missions – for she was, and still is, an Avon Lady – and I felt so proud of how loved she was. Ever busy, Grandma walked faster than my little legs could go but she always had time to spread such cheer. Every Christmas, I was amazed and delighted by the hundreds and hundreds of Christmas cards that Grandma would receive – to be loved by that many people was so fascinating to me. I would spend hours reading the cards, beaming with pride at the beautiful words people said about my grandma.

Of Grandma’s seven grandchildren, I was the only girl – and a tomboy at that. If anyone was going to have made me ‘behave like a young lady’, it would have been Grandma. I’m sure Mum and Grandma would have loved for me to be a doll-carrying little princess, but no such luck. The beautiful doll’s house that Mum lovingly gave to me (complete with teeny furniture) when I was six was turned on its side to make the fort that would be home to the little plastic army men and cowboys I stole from my brother. The antique dolls, Shirley and Joan, that were lovingly restored and passed on to me were not given the care and attention they deserved. I’m sure that was a disappointment to these beautiful and perfect tea-set and lace-loving ladies, but that was me!

In 1993, Grandma rang Channel Ten in Adelaide to tell them that her granddaughter had just won the Star Maker competition in Tamworth and they might like to know what flight I’d be returning on, so they could film me getting off the plane; Mum and my grandparents were there to meet me too. A year later, Grandma stopped the annual Avon meeting to announce that that same granddaughter had just won a Golden Guitar award during the Tamworth Country Music Festival. My grandmother has always been just about my biggest fan. I look back on having such strong, beautiful women in my family – all the way through my life – as a blessing. It is from Grandma and Mum that I get my work ethic and tenacity. The women in my family are strong and capable. I am extremely grateful to have come from such stock.
That said, I have an off button for wine time, and they know no such thing ...

My dear grandpa, Max, was with us until 1999. He was a steam train driver in his younger years, and I’ve always thought that sounded like a country song – ‘My grandaddy was a train-drivin’ man’ – but I haven’t yet written it! Before he was a train driver, though, he was a tap dancer in his teenage years. I have seen a framed black-and-white photograph of three very handsome young men in a dance pose, taken many years before my mother was born. My grandpa and his mates looked like a 1930s boy band.

After Grandpa died, Mum found a tape of him singing alone in his room. She was astonished to hear how beautiful his voice was – as smooth as Bing Crosby’s and with an amazingly rich tone. Grandpa was an undiscovered talent, you might say.

He also spoke on that tape and said the most beautiful and loving things about his wife – things he could never bring himself to say face to face. I have a vivid recollection of Grandpa attempting to read the telegram from the Queen that his mother received when she turned one hundred. He was so filled with emotion that he had trouble getting the words out. The backyard of Grandma and Grandpa’s house was filled with friends and family and my Grandpa’s emotional pride was reflected on the faces of everyone else there. I do come from true and loving hearts. I am blessed.