

‘We’re COMPLETELY off the grid’

Sophie and Ged jacked it all in to live off the land and have never looked back

Sophie Love calls out to the pigs and brumbies using very different tones, her southern English accent echoing off the hills that surround her slice of paradise.

One brumby races down the hillside towards a half-eaten bale of hay as a couple of dozen alpacas quicken their strides towards her. The clucks of the chickens laying eggs increase with all the commotion and Sophie’s dogs, Tucker and Goldie, start chasing their tails.

It’s a scene that repeats itself daily on Sophie’s 162 hectares. It’s a way of life like that led by Tom and Barbara Good in the iconic 1970s English comedy *The Good Life* in which Tom (Richard Briers) and Barbara (Felicity Kendal) ditch the rat race for self-sufficient, off-grid living in suburban London, much to the dismay of their orthodox neighbours Jerry and Margo (Paul Eddington and Penelope Keith).

Sophie, 52, and her Australian husband Ged McCarthy, 49, have the Aussie equivalent on the mid-north coast of NSW. “Really, truly, Ged and I have watched *The Good Life* in the last few years ▶



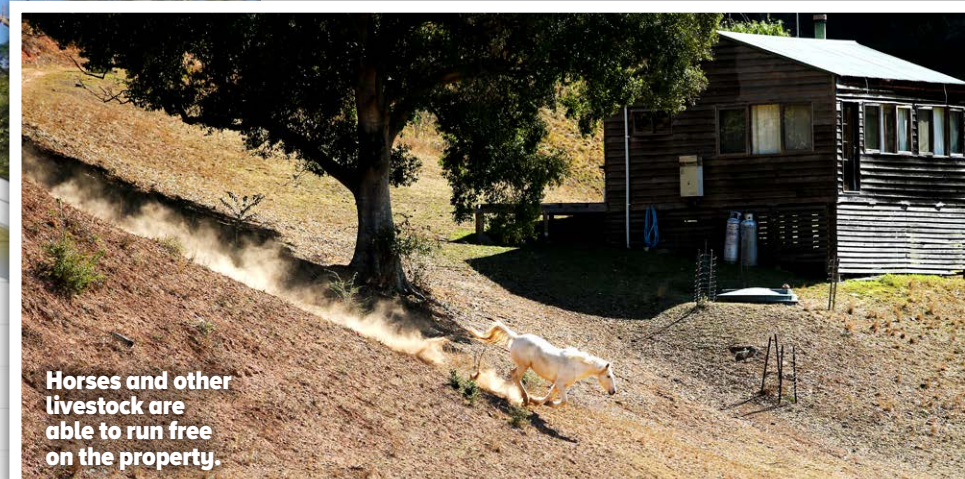
Richard Briers and Felicity Kendal living *The Good Life*.

‘We want to be as close to nature as possible’



Sophie and Ged are living the *Good Life*, too on the NSW Mid North Coast.

Sophie loves life on the land and being self-sufficient.



Horses and other livestock are able to run free on the property.



Sophie collects freshly laid chook eggs on a daily basis.

► and have both said that we loved the show so much when we were kids, so I think it has inspired our lifestyle,” Sophie admits.

But for Sophie and Ged, the self-sufficient lifestyle almost occurred by accident. Sophie, a marketing expert, was looking for somewhere to run and ride with her horses and dog. She fell in love with the riverbound oasis in a valley west of Wauchope, NSW, in 2007. Back then Ged was the local electrician who turned up at Sophie’s property to give a quote to upgrade the small solar power system.

And the rest is history, as they say! They hit it off instantly, got married, and then Sophie gave birth at home to their gorgeous son Ben, who’s now 10.

“That was at the beginning of 2007. I had just turned 40 and I was grieving my single status and childless life,” Sophie reveals. “A series of miracles basically allowed it to happen. I came up, saw the plot and fell in love with it. I came up a second time for a weekend to get a whole heap of tradies to give me some quotes to see whether I could actually afford it and as luck would have it, Ged was the solar guy who came!

“He had 400 acres up the road and he was happy to listen to all my silly questions. Plus I had to continually chase him to get the quote because he was so busy.

“I’d ring him and ask about this and that and we’d end up chatting on the phone for an hour-and-a-half,

so we started to develop a firm friendship.

“When I got here, the builder I had hired for his cute bum and his low quotes hadn’t done what he was supposed to have done.

“So I fired him and Ged took over. He was always solving all my problems, so you have to marry someone like that!” she adds laughing.

Life-affirming choices

As their romance blossomed, Sophie’s love for the good life did, too. So when she arrived on her Tom’s Creek property and discovered there wasn’t enough solar power to run a vacuum and the lights at the same time – let alone a hairdryer or any other “luxury items” – Sophie enthusiastically embraced the lack of modern resources. The situation inspired her to go back to basics even more.

So she set to work “self-sufficient-proofing” the place. First on the to-do list was more solar power, followed by a veggie patch, just like Tom and Barbara from *The Good Life* – although the crop Sophie harvested varied a bit from her fictional green-fingered inspirations! Sophie had the added bonus

‘With no one around, you are free to embrace the outdoors’



Being at one with nature and baring bums is the norm on the farm!

of an expanse of land rather than a backyard, so a huge step for the self-described “city vegan” was introducing livestock! The decision to re-introduce meat into her diet came when Ben was nine months old.

“I was still a vegetarian – almost vegan but eating eggs because my naturopath had said I had to have some sort of protein,” Sophie explains. “And when I had Ben, my diet stayed the same but I thought, how will I know if he needs to eat meat and if he wants to eat meat, will I feed it to him?!”

“So one day I went and bought some organic chicken at the supermarket and he gobbled it up! I knew then he needed and wanted meat in his diet but I was resolute that if we were going to eat meat, it was to be chemical-free and grown here from our own free-range livestock. I wasn’t going to buy crap.”

Sophie already had Daisy, her dairy cow (a Christmas present from Ged), which would follow her around on her runs. But then came the pigs, sheep and cattle for consumption, as well as the 30 alpacas for fleece.

Back-to-basics business

The happy family-of-three can now proudly say they are completely “off the grid.” And, helped by bartering for produce with neighbours, they’re fully self-sufficient.

And with their thriving veggie patch, livestock and bee colonies, they’re running The Naked Farmers, their

natural business enterprise selling their produce and products from honey to candles, alpaca yarn and eggs!

“The inspiration came from a ‘bare bums’ photo of me and Ben when he was very little,” Sophie explains. “It’s got a bit of double meaning and echoes our thoughts on food and life in that we want to be as close to nature as possible.

“Also, there is quite a lot of gratuitous nudity when you are on a farm, especially when you have a small child. With no one around, you’re completely free to embrace the outdoors and quite often you’re hanging out in the nud, or in the river in the nud. So it was just one of those days. when we were looking for a new business name, I loved the nudie idea and being at one with nature – and that is our theme.”

Now, Sophie, Ged and Ben – who loves his rural life – are developing their business of natural, homemade products. It’s proving very fruitful indeed and gaining nationwide recognition, winning awards across Australia.

“It was never a conscious decision to become self-sufficient and have it develop into a business, too. It just happened,” Sophie says. “Friends who tried our dressings and ice-cream and other goodies encouraged us to sell it. It was a germ of an idea that spread! It was great to go to farmers markets and see such great reactions to our foods – everyone loved it.”

But for this unassuming family, they like to go with the flow and are allowing the business to grow at its own pace – just like in nature.

Ultimately, they have a lot to be happy about. Taking that leap of faith has led to them living the “real” Good Life!