

MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

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ANNETTE SHUN WAH: It's often a long trek from an outback town to a university campus but for George it's a journey well worth taking as he plans to give back to his local community.

GEORGE: My name is George and this is my story. Bourke's a little town in western NSW, about, I don't know, 800 something ks from Sydney. It's a town that it's pretty small, it's only about 1,500, 2,000 people. Everyone in Sydney always calls it the back of Bourke, it's never Bourke, it's always the back of Bourke but like, I guess, people in town see it as their home and there's nothing like home.

At the end of the day everyone mixes, everyone knows each other and it's a good place. People looking from the outside in and they come in and they might have a bad experience, they might run it down or give it a bad name or stuff like that but it is a good place and I will always call it home.

Life growing up in Bourke is very different to what I'm doing at the moment but it was always nice to finish school and come home, have a good time with your mates and you'd go fishing, go swimming, that sort of stuff. Mum works with like health and stuff like that, like indigenous health and running programs for that sort of stuff and dad's the boss out here with Essential Energy.

Yeah, I went to school here for seven years and from kindergarten to Year 6 and I guess the dream is to come back here and teach when I get older. Primary school in Bourke is - it was good, like I never experienced any other primary school so I can't compare it to any but I loved primary school in Bourke. It was small, you seen the same kids every day, it was just all your mates. I had a lot of good teachers at primary school that did - sorted me out when I was a young fellow. I was school captain in Year 6 so that was pretty big for me.

Family are my number one. I can't get away from them but I guess, I don't know, to better yourself you've got to move away and not that Bourke's not a good place, it's

just that it's hard to get what you want to get in Bourke.

There was a few families that had sent their kids away to Joey's and stuff like that and Bourke's a talking town, if one person knows everyone knows. So my mum sort of got on to the people, the kids that were already at Joey's and stuff when I was younger and family friends and stuff like that and we hooked it up through Joey's and Mum and Dad were never going to be able to afford it so the school worked out a scholarship program and it's still running now and gave me an opportunity to go away to Joey's.

Going away from Bourke to Sydney was - it was probably the hardest thing I've ever had to do. It was leaving Mum because I was always a mummy's boy but yeah, leaving Mum and Dad and your family behind is always hard and I was never one to be around big crowds. Yeah, the subjects at school that I was into was sort of your PE, your art, all your practical type subjects. This is my HSC work when I was at Joey's. It's sort of a bit of home. It was sort of my HSC work was based around home and the land and stuff like that. So it's sort of just a map of Bourke and whereabouts it is and my tribe down the bottom here. I started to get into more of legal studies and stuff when I got a bit older. I guess wraps in with every day life. Like you see people going through it every day, like.

Out home you're doing active stuff, you're going out fishing, you're going to play cricket, you're going to play footy with your mates and stuff like that where I guess in the city you just can't go out fishing, you can't just go out and do that sort of stuff. It's a lot harder, it's a lot more people and everyone's doing the same thing whereas out here there's a lot more space and you get, I don't know, you do your own thing sort of thing. All the city kids, they have questions like do you have electricity and that sort of stuff, do you go fishing a lot, shooting a lot, how hot it is and when you tell them it's 45 and they're like oh, they start to - they don't want to come near Bourke or anything like that. Yeah, but I took a few mates out and they experienced it and they loved it. It's something they don't get to do in Sydney. You can't go 2 minute walk down the road to go fishing sort of thing.

I loved Joey's because it was opportunities I could play sport every weekend, I could go in to town, go to the city, watch cricket games, watch footy games, meet famous people and stuff like that where if I was back here I don't get half them opportunities. You make mates that you never leave. Like you always got your mates, I've still got half my mates that go to uni with me now sort of thing. You make friends forever and you get an opportunity that not many kids back here get. I've always loved my cricket. I had a lot to do with in town and stuff like that and when I went away to school I was captain of Joey's and stuff like that when I was in Year 12 and cricket's always been my number one sport. I love footy and stuff like that but cricket's always it.

Dad thinks he's better than me but yeah, he doesn't really have it yet. Tries to tell me I hit him all the time but no, I've got him covered.

What I love about uni the most is that you're into acting with a lot of different people, you're making new connections, you work closely with lecturers and professors and stuff that people that know everything about what you want to be. So I guess that bit where you're learning about everything, they know more than you will ever know. Professors like that and people like that aren't just going to come to Bourke for no reason. If you go to Sydney and meet these sort of people you can bring them sort of experiences back and I guess take what they've learnt and given you into your work.

Yeah, I got through the lonely times with definitely family, ring my mum and dad all the time or, yeah, but I was sort of lucky, I didn't get very home sick. Like I did, you do have your lonely times and you do have your times where you just want to pack up and go home but then you think like I'm doing this for a reason, I'm doing it because I want to be a teacher and because I want to be able to say to my family like you put in a lot of hard work and want to be able to repay them sort of thing.

Game plan's definitely to come back rural, whether it's Bourke, whether it's Walgett, Brewarrina, anywhere, back this way to sort of just to help kids, like I just, I want to come back here and save kids having to go away to school, like so you don't have to leave your family because it is a hard thing to do. It's not like something that just happens overnight. Like you've really got to have a lot of self-motivation and you've

got to have good parents, which I did, like which I did have and you've got to have stuff to help you along your way. You've got to be very self-motivated to be able to go away to uni and to be able to stick it out for four years or five years or however long your course is to be able to get your degree.

Yeah, so my first day back when I finally get my teaching degree I'll definitely reminisce on my years at school and at university. I guess it's going to be a strange feeling because last time you sort of you're in that school you're a kid sitting at the desk instead of being a teacher at the front. Yeah, it will be a strange feeling but it will be one that I'll cherish, I think.

Indigenous kids in Bourke and even country towns like that definitely need inspiration and encouragement to be able to say that you're good enough to go away to school, you're good enough to go away to university, you're good enough to be a teacher or be whatever you want to be in that case.

I've done something I've always wanted to do and something that I've always inspired to be and I've done it and try to encourage kids to say that just because you're a boy from Bourke doesn't mean you can't go to uni and do what you want to do.

My name is George and this is my story. So I grew up in Bourke in outback NSW. I got a scholarship to go away to St Joseph's College. In Year 12 I captained the first XI cricket team at Joey's. I'm currently studying at university to become a teacher. I want to return to my home town as a role model to indigenous kids. University has helped me realise my dreams.

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: George is looking forward to returning to his country roots once he finishes his Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education degree. To learn more about these and other stories make sure you visit our website at modelsofachievement.com.au. See you next time.

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