

# TERRITORY SURVIVOR

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARK AND TIM  
WORDS BY NANNETTE HOLLIDAY

Life isn't always a bed of roses, but dealing with adversity that may be thrown our way from time to time can either make or break us. Nannette Holliday discovers how the following Territorians have overcome their darkest days and survived to tell us their stories.

## ROB TAIT THREE TIMES LUCKY

A specialist paediatrician at Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) since 2013, and a founding member of Darwin Paediatrics, he knew nothing of the ordeal until he woke up in the hospital. 'Even though it was a direct hit and I took a couple of weeks to recover I haven't stopped running along the beach. They say lightning doesn't strike twice,' Rob laughs. 'But it has made me assess my life and what's important. You can't take anything for granted.' Luckily, an Emergency doctor was on the beach behind Rob and was first on the scene. Other people had also witnessed the flash and Rob collapsing. The strike burnt his bottom lip and inside his mouth. 'There were no other signs or after effects,' said Rob. While in Emergency though, his heart stopped and CPR was administered. 'When I saw my attending physicians in ICU, I knew I was in good hands. I wasn't going to die,' he said. 'Thankfully, I'd just taken the dog off the lead a few minutes earlier otherwise he would have died.' Six weeks later Rob was holidaying in Kathmandu when the second devastating earthquake hit Nepal, this time near Everest base camp. 'We'd just taken off before the second quake hit. I was heading to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve with a private guide to see Bengal tigers. Because of the first earthquake in late April, there were no tourists

around and no communications,' he continues. 'My parents were frantic when they heard nothing from me, but I was unaware until we arrived back in the village and people came running up to me. Naturally, my parents still haven't forgiven me. But I never considered cancelling my planned holiday because of the first earthquake. As a South African, I know when there's a natural disaster, the next disaster is an economic one, so I believe in putting back wherever possible as this is their livelihood.' However, Rob's first brush with death was in July 1988, at age ten, when he was attending a rugby game with his father at Ellis Park, Johannesburg and a car bomb exploded killing two people and injuring 37 others. 'They say things come in threes, so I should be right now,' he smiles with good reason. While recovering from the lightning strike he contacted a former girlfriend via Facebook. After his return from Nepal in mid-June she came to Darwin. 'Kylie was a practice manager for a Sydney obstetrician, but after a week here she decided to quit her job and stay. We got engaged in January 2016 and married in Bali in June 2017. I'm a pretty lucky man,' he said. 'We both love the Territory. It's a great place to live and work. For me, it's the perfect hybrid between African and Australasian medicine too.' A South African trained doctor, Rob came to Australia in 2008. Aside from his work at RDH, he is the visiting paediatrician to Gove and Groote Eylandt communities.



At 7pm on 1 April 2015, it was no April Fools' Day prank when Dr Rob Tait was struck by lightning while running with his dog on Casuarina Beach in front of Dripstone cliffs.

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## JULIAN SMITH PLAYING WITH FIRE

When you throw accelerant on to a fire, the fire can follow the vapours back and up to the source. The simple rule is: don't use accelerants on any fire.

Something 56-year old Julian Smith knows only too well now, and how life can change so quickly. Twelve years ago, after cleaning up his property in Howard Springs after Cyclone Monica, he doused a pile of garden waste in fuel and returned the container to the shed before coming back to light the rubbish, thinking this was the correct action. But when he struck the match a flash exploded around him, his entire body was burnt, except for his ankles, feet and groin, where his boots and shorts had covered him. 'There were no flames, but my skin was burning, and my shorts were stuck to me,' he said. 'I ran to the tap and stood under the hose, while my partner Debra, who had been on the other side of the pile, called the ambulance.' A former nurse, Debra didn't panic. 'He actually didn't look that bad, more like a case of bad sunburn,' she said. Even with no flames, the chemicals in the accelerant continued cooking his skin. 'Because of the drugs administered, I remember very little about the ambulance or the hospital, except their concern I may have inhaled or swallowed the flame,' Julian said. 'They knocked me out to insert a tube down my throat until then I was talking and joking. I thought I'd wake up the next day and I'd be a bit sore, but everything would be fine. When I woke up it was six weeks later, I had no idea where I was, I didn't recognise anything, and I couldn't move.' Julian was at Royal Adelaide Hospital burns unit. The staff told Debra he was very sick and there was little oxygen in his blood. During the first three weeks Julian clinically died once, and the following three days he passed away a further two times. Doctors were also concerned about the time he was taking him to wake from the induced coma. 'Initially, I wouldn't believe Debra, all I wanted to do was go home. But to move only created agony.' Julian had 80 percent full circumference burns to his body, and 65 percent were second and third degree. 'The doctors did skin grafts to 25 percent of the burns. Where they took the skin from hurt more than the burns,' he said. He also had two superbugs in the burns that weren't responding to treatment and a fungus that they had no drugs for, but they thought it came from fruit trees. Julian and Debra's property has over 60 mango and other fruit trees. Every day he was having surgery and was surgically stretched to prevent the healing wounds thickening up and restricting movement. Between pure luck and good doctoring he never lost a limb either. 'Thankfully my fitness helped,' he said. 'But the doctors also said if this had happened five years earlier I wouldn't be here. They didn't have the same technology then.' Eventually released eight weeks after the incident, it was the same CareFlight team who flew him back to Darwin. When the pilot saw Julian he joked, 'Oh look the walking dead.' 'But I was glad I could experience the flight this time. They were amazing.' Covered in an all-over second-skin suit, Julian was meant to rest. 'That word isn't in his vocabulary. He even insisted on driving home,' said Debra. 'Then a week later returned to work at Channel Nine, where he'd been for 32 years, because he was bored.' The first skin suit was too hot and hard to put on in the tropical heat and was replaced with leg-ins, sleeves and gloves, which he wore for two years. 'Because of the scaring I no longer wear shorts in public. However, I still burn garden waste when necessary, but would never use any accelerant ever again. While the physical heat of fire affects my skin, I have no psychological effects. I'm extremely lucky.'

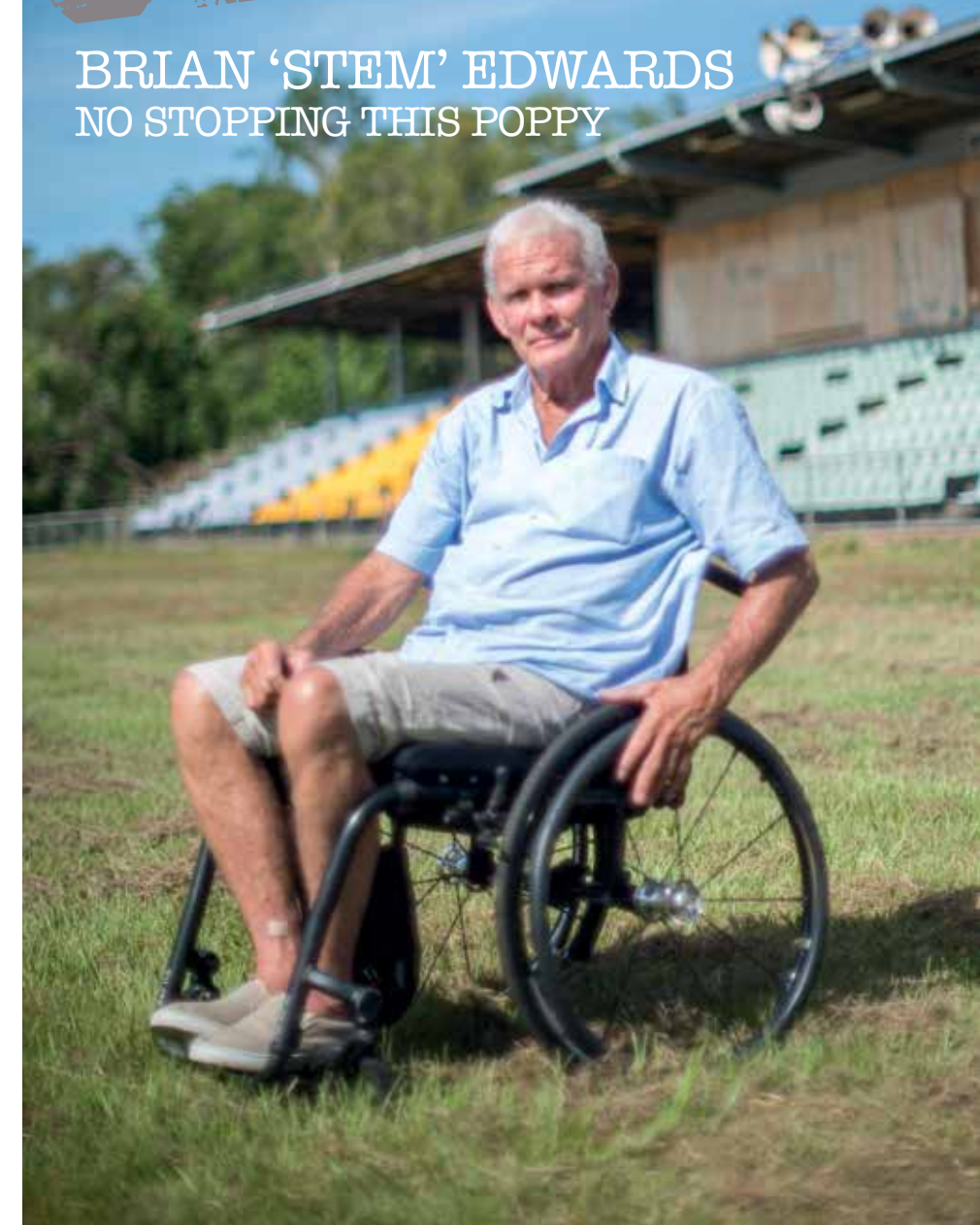
Brian 'Stem' Edwards fully understands the risks involved for football players and how a split second can change a life. Ever since his accident in 1980 at age 32, the Darwin Rugby League legend and Nightcliff Dragons President has been championing for tighter regulations for players.

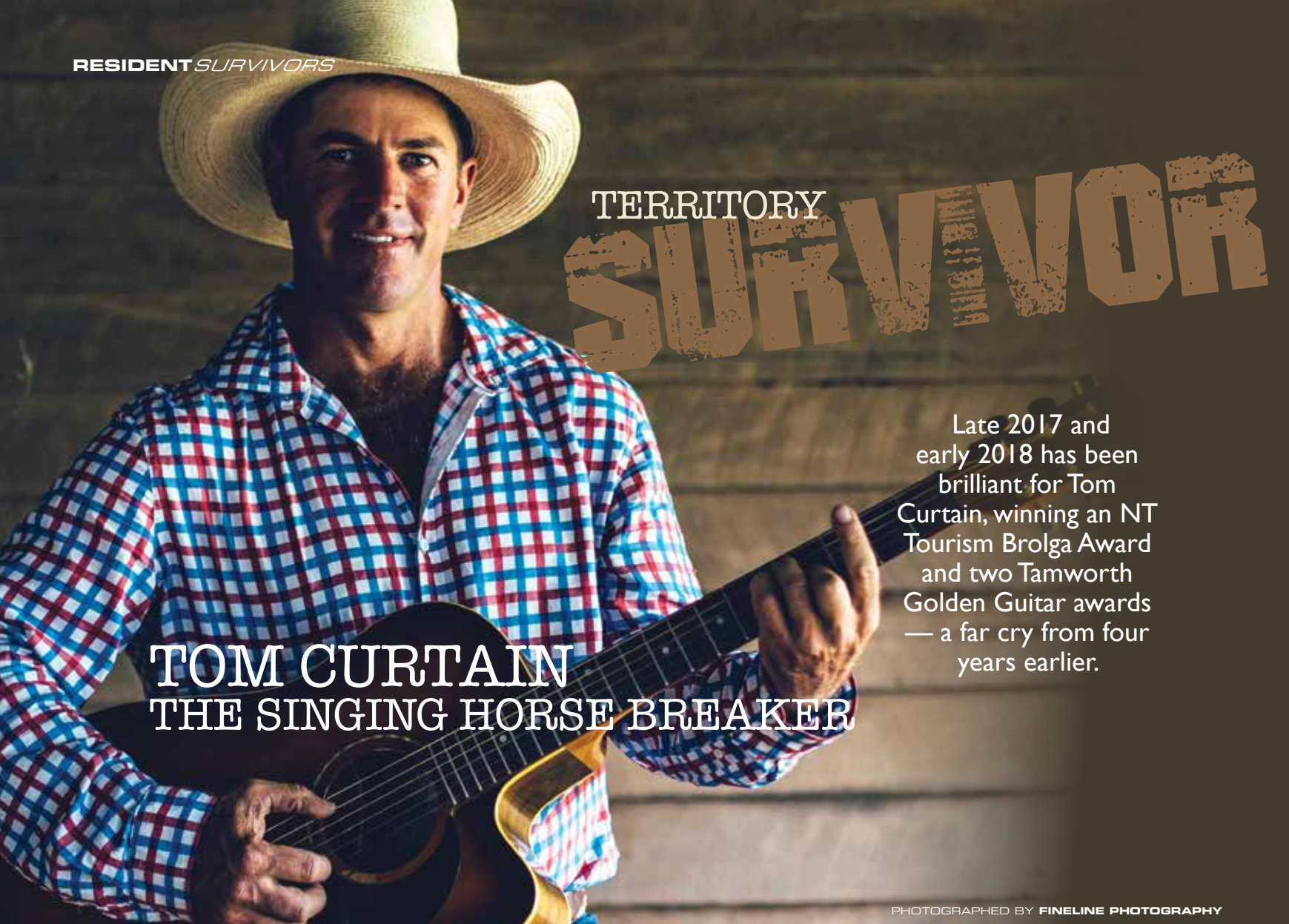
While I'm wheelchair-bound and haven't been able to play since that day, I've never retired from the game or life once,' Stem said. The youngest of six born and raised in Central Queensland, in 1964, at 15 he moved to Darwin, beginning a five-year mechanic apprenticeship with the Department of Works. Always good at football he initially played for Brothers, moving to Nightcliff apart from one year with Souths. 'I've always been a Dragon. In 66 I played in my first A Grade Grand Final against Brothers of all teams. Sadly we didn't win,' he said. 'I played in eight grand finals during my days, the last in 1977.' In 1980 while watching Nightcliff B grade play a competition match at Richardson Park, short a player Stem was asked to fill-in. Always ready to do anything at the drop of a hat, the skinny, 11 stone, six-foot-two prop (why he got the name Stem), didn't waiver. 'During a scrum, I moved to headbutt a bloke but ended taking the full weight of the scrum on my neck. Next, I was on the ground unable to move,' he said. 'At Darwin Hospital I had some movement in my arms, and next morning I could move my leg slightly. But as they lifted me an electric shock shot through me.' In that split second Stem was completely paralysed. Placing him in a medical coma, he was flown to Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital in a commercial airliner. 'Just shows you how terrific Darwin people were and still are — giving up their seats so I could be stretchered out. Nine were removed, and the Captain also asked people to refrain from smoking during the flight as there was a critically ill man on board.' When he awoke his wife, Jackie explained the details, but with three children in Darwin being looked after by friends she couldn't stay. 'I couldn't even scratch my nose — it was terrible. You go from thinking you are invincible to more helpless than a baby,' Stem said. When the doctors told him he'd be a quadriplegic for the rest of his life, he didn't want to believe it. 'After six weeks in traction a different physiotherapist came in and began testing my legs, wanting to know what I could feel. I couldn't feel anything but gave her heaps of cheek. Turns out she was the head physiotherapist, Miss Jean McPhail, a wonderful lady.' She eventually felt a slight flicker in his buttock muscle and said: 'If you have the grunt I think you have you may be able to do something about it.' His one-on-one physio Maggi was tough but precisely who he needed. 'I spent every moment I could in the gym. I'd never trained so hard in my life.' Six months later he returned to Darwin, and the real hard work began. Unable to walk and wheelchair-bound, he trained daily to be able to walk with a walking stick — in later years having to revert to the

wheelchair. George Milatos and the staff at his gym in Nightcliff were supportive and encouraging, giving him full membership to assist in the recovery. 'I could barely bench press a broom handle in the beginning. When I finally benched the bar with no weights attached everyone was standing around spurring me on. It was surreal.' Of course his wife of nearly 50 years, Jackie keeps him on his toes. 'He's never given up. He's a very determined man. It hasn't been easy for him all these years, but he hasn't complained,' she said. Stem smiles, 'I feel privileged to be part of the Darwin and Northern Territory community. I would like to thank everyone who has shaken my hand during my lifetime. Two years after I broke my neck my dad said to me: "It's a shame you broke your neck Stem, but you couldn't have done it in a better town — the people here are just wonderful." The people of Darwin keep me going to this day.' Stem's final words, 'Respect yourself and others, keep trying and never give up — and remember there's always someone doing it tougher.'

# TERRITORY SURVIVOR

## BRIAN 'STEM' EDWARDS NO STOPPING THIS POPPY





# TERRITORY SURVIVOR

## TOM CURTAIN THE SINGING HORSE BREAKER

Late 2017 and early 2018 has been brilliant for Tom Curtain, winning an NT Tourism Brolga Award and two Tamworth Golden Guitar awards — a far cry from four years earlier.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY FINELINE PHOTOGRAPHY

A professional horse trainer since 2001, in 2009 Tom purchased a property in Katherine, central to the cattle stations he worked with so his young family could be closer. 'Instead of me travelling between properties, stations sent me horses. I was breaking-in over 100 horses a year. Business was booming. The move had paid off. Then in 2011, the Live Beef Export Ban hit,' explains Tom. 'Overnight budgets were cut on stations. They couldn't afford to pay for horses to be trained. I was out of work.' To make ends meet Tom provided horse riding lessons, shod horses and sang at the Big 4 Katherine Caravan Park four nights a week. A retired couple intrigued by his stories of station-life asked if they could watch him train his horses. Their joy got him thinking of how he could share his passion for training animals and performing music. Mid 2013, Katherine Outback Experience (KOE) was launched. However, it wasn't an easy ride. It took persistence and resilience. 'In the early days, I'd perform for just one or two people. Sometimes no one turned up at all. It was heart-breaking. Deep down I wanted to inspire my kids and show them that hard work and determination pay off.' The sizeable mortgage and resulting financial stress contributed to the end of his marriage. His wife moved back to Perth with their two children.

'I spent many sleepless nights wondering if I'd done the right thing by staying. I missed my kids so much. I thought about moving to Perth and driving trucks but knew I wouldn't be happy and the kids would see that. 'I continued training horses and performing shows three days a week, but often found myself standing in the yard crying when no one was there. I was extremely depressed with no one to share my issues,' he pauses. 'But I wasn't the only one suffering around Katherine. Also as a guy I couldn't tell my mates what I was feeling. I just bottled it up and kept going because of my kids. Unfortunately, a stigma still surrounds mental health in Australia and men do suffer the most: mentally, physically and emotionally. And it's more so for isolated outback children and parents.' Having hit rock bottom, in early 2015, Tom was hitchhiking to a Campdraft south of Perth. A farmer noticed him looking out of place (he'd never hitchhiked before). 'The farmer was heading to the same event the following morning, so he took me back to his place,' says Tom. 'Later that night his daughter arrived home from Perth, dressed to the nines in corporate attire.' That girl was Annabel McLarty. After a year of commuting she put her Urban Planning career aside and relocated to Katherine, and in May 2016 together they formed KOE Pty Ltd. 'She was the rainbow, guiding and inspiring me. She understood my demons and put them to rest.'

Today, Tom is still the headline act singing from the saddle, breaking in wild horses and training his working dogs daily to full stands from April to the end of October. Mid-November to mid-March he and Annabel take the show on the road, showcasing a bit of the Territory to Australia. Recently they combined it with the launch of his third award-winning album 'Territory Time', down the west coast. 'We also performed at my kid's school in Perth. It was quite surreal how it all worked out,' he beams. 'I now know I did the right thing by sticking with my gut feelings. Ever since arriving in the Territory at Janet Holmes a Court's Mount Sanford Station in 2001 I've felt totally at home. I love the NT. It's brought out the singer-songwriter in me, and I've been able to have the open spaces and animals I love around me too. 'Now that I'm back on my feet, it's my turn to give back. A young Katherine girl recently committed suicide after being bullied. I've just recorded a song with Sara Storer called "Stand Up" with all proceeds going to Dolly's Dream Foundation. I've also donated \$2 from every sale of 'Territory Time' since the launch in November 2017 to the end of my WA tour in March 2018 to the Isolated Children's Parents Association.' 'My kids also understand why I had to stay and I hope I've inspired them to work hard, believe in themselves and never give up.'

It was my years of St John Ambulance work that initially saved me,' said Fay. 'Then months of hard work, adjustments and determination, along with the amazing support of my husband Mike, family and the Katherine community — I couldn't have done it without them and I am so grateful and humbled to this day.'

Heading home after a business meeting in Alice Springs in March 2006, as their vehicle mounted a ridge ten kilometres south of Aileron on the Stuart Highway Fay noticed what looked like water across the road and asked Mike for confirmation. Before he could answer the car was aquaplaning uncontrollably, spinning 180 degrees, and rolling six times coming to a standstill 15 metres away. 'While the car landed on its wheels, I was still firmly in place behind the steering wheel, but the roof had crushed so much I knew my neck broken,' recalls Fay. 'The searing pain was extraordinary. Fortunately, still conscious, my 14 years of St John Ambulance training and volunteer work helped me stay calm and assess my injuries.' Secured by her seat belt, her feet were uninjured on the floor amongst the muddy water and broken glass. Both her hands and fingers were fully extended on the steering wheel, with pain shooting through them due to the severed nerves in her neck. 'Mike didn't have a scratch on him as the ceiling above him had held, so I was able to tell him my diagnosis in case I lost consciousness. We couldn't get out, and I knew I couldn't be moved. The car was twisted and the doors jammed,' she said. The car, satellite phone and mobile were covered in water and red mud. It was 20 minutes later before a passing motorist stopped, and another couple of hours before the Emergency Response Team arrived from Alice Springs.

'My neck was swelling, making breathing difficult. When the ambulance crew arrived I knew Toni Marie Elferink who climbed through the back window to put a neck brace on and reassuringly staying with me,' continues Fay. 'The fire crews from Alice Springs and Ti Tree were fabulous cutting the entire side of the car to get us out.' With no medication for over six hours, Fay managed the pain through meditation, something she'd previously not been good at. Once freed they were transported back to Alice Springs hospital overnight before the Royal Flying Doctor took them to Adelaide Hospital's spinal unit.

Fay's C7 and T1 were fractured. Incredibly she wasn't paralysed. Five plates and ten screws later she had some strength back in her hands and arms. Within two weeks she was released from hospital but spent a further six weeks with her sister painfully regaining the use of her arms and hands.

'I wore a neck brace for five months and still have intermittent loss of sensation in my left arm through nerve damage and scar tissue problems due to the break down of my wound when a surgeon removed a plate and screw 12 months later. I still require regular remedial therapy. I now suffer from arthritis, and like the event, it will stay with me for life.

If nothing else, it taught me patience,' she laughs. 'When first released from hospital it used to take two hours to have a shower, but I'm ever so grateful to be alive.'

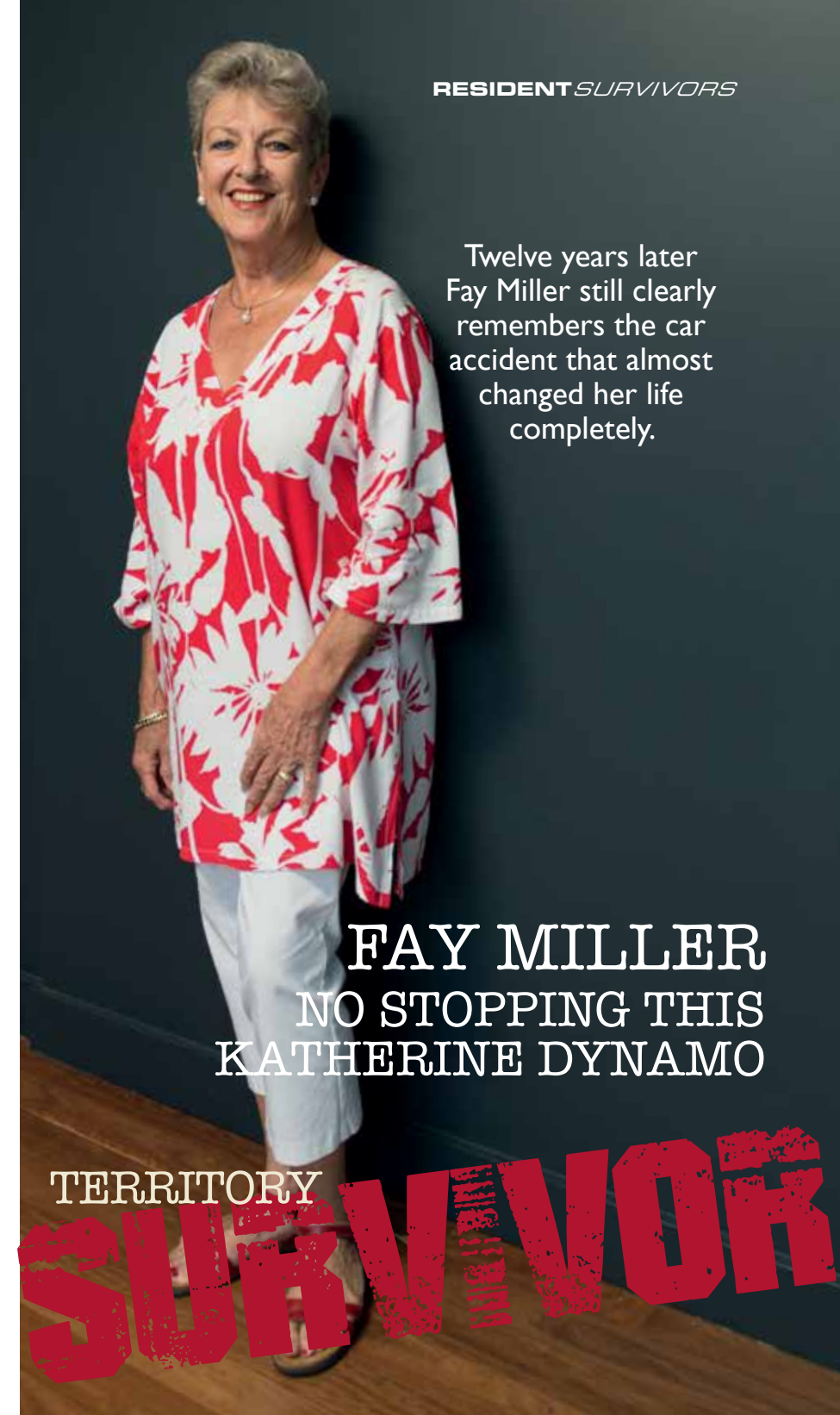
However, it didn't stop her returning to work as Member for Katherine and Deputy Leader of the CLP sooner than she should have.

'In hindsight returning to work at the end of May was too soon. I still wore the neck brace, and with no cruise control on the work vehicle, the drives between Katherine and Darwin were taxing. But I'm not used to sitting still.'

Two years later Fay retired and took up a seasonal position assisting tourists at the Katherine Visitor Information Centre.

'I'm passionate about tourism having also owned and operated Red Gum Caravan Park both before and re-establishing it after losing everything during the 1998 Katherine floods,' she said. 'I love interacting with people and sharing my joy of our region.'

But in April 2010 Mike was diagnosed with a very aggressive cancer. 'From then until October our time was spent together. The following year



## FAY MILLER NO STOPPING THIS KATHERINE DYNAMO

# TERRITORY SURVIVOR

Twelve years later Fay Miller still clearly remembers the car accident that almost changed her life completely.

I was approached by the previous mayor, asking if I would stand for Mayor in the coming election. Initially, my answer was no. I was still grieving. But it made me question — what was I going to do with my life?' In March 2012 Fay became the 4th Mayor of Katherine and was resoundingly re-elected in 2017. Her work within the tourism industry was recognised in 2011 with the Brolga Award for 'Outstanding Contribution to Tourism by an Individual'. She's also an accomplished Marriage Celebrant, officiating her first same-sex marriage in February 2018. 'I love working for my community. Since arriving with Mike in 1989, supposedly only for four years, I knew Katherine would always be my home. The beautiful people I work for and with humble me. 'There's been many ups, downs, losses, achievements and challenges. But so many more opportunities, I wouldn't swap a thing. I've thoroughly enjoyed the ride, and it's not over yet. The key is never giving up, roll with the punches and going with the flow. Life is a journey to be lived to the very end.'

TERRITORY  
SURVIVORDONA MAITLAND  
SHADOWS IN THE PAST

Photo supplied.

Although difficult at times, I hope my story offers hope and inspiration to others and helps turn their lives around, as it needs to be more acceptable to talk about these matters.' Dona's childhood was filled with hatred and distrust. She and the family were shunned within their community. 'We now have labels for dysfunction. My mother a beauty, was profoundly deaf, my father a petty criminal. Together they were functioning alcoholics,' she said. 'Mostly ignored, I found peace in books. I feared the nights — creaking floorboards, the familiar slow shuffle and the terror of my door being tried. I'd pound the wall to wake my mother. When old enough I escaped and joined the defence force.' Not long after arriving in Darwin she married and had two children, followed shortly after

Growing up in North Queensland in the 60s, Dona Maitland's childhood was far from normal as her family was socially isolated. 'But something inside gave me the strength to survive,' Dona said.

by divorce. 'I had a variety of jobs in Darwin, but nothing substantial. In 1986, as a single mother I had no option but to return to my parent's home for support,' recalls Dona. 'When my father attempted the unmentionable again I collapsed emotionally. To relive a childhood nightmare as an adult was catastrophic. I put the kids on a plane to Darwin, to my ex-husband, a decent man. Then my mother begged me not to leave her behind. The first time we'd ever really spoken about the abuse.' As they Thelma and Louise it in a Toyota ute from Cairns to Darwin Dona realises her mother's net worth is \$30 for glossy magazines. Settling in Katherine, Dona once again finds her peace at the local library. 'They had extraordinary books, a strong feminist theme of Jean Shinoda Bolen's Goddesses in Everywoman, Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women and a study of Gender Order in South Australia 1920-1970. Reading has always helped me heal and enabled me to move beyond the hurt child within, along with close strong female friends.' Meeting a handsome man in uniform, her mother remained in Katherine before succumbing to lung cancer. 'I ventured through the Territory — Katherine, Darwin, Alice — until falling in love,' she smiles. 'Packing the kids in the ute, we drove out of Alice to Sydney's North Shore, where I attempted to assimilate into a society I had never known. I was Territory wild.' Her lover hesitated, but a love child sealed the deal. Then life bit again. 'At 33 John was diagnosed with malignant thymoma. Our son was three. Undertaking chemo and radiation, he decided to be the househusband, while I pursued a career.' Five years of full-time work, part-time study and jockeying entry-level jobs with the opportunity to advance they managed to achieve financial security for the family with Dona an IT Manager with a national services firm. 'When John refused further treatment for his slow, but steadily progressing tumours, my employer understood, and we were able to relocate to the country.' A tree change to the Northern Rivers within a caring community, John and Dona finally married in 2008 after a 17-year engagement. John provided enormous emotional stability for Dona, but couldn't understand her childhood nightmares. 'A poignant turning point was when he watched Girl with a Dragon Tattoo,' she confesses. 'Thankfully he lived to see our son turn 21. Then last year I got a call asking if I'd come to Darwin for the birth of my first grandchild,' Dona beams. 'Working back in Darwin my life has turned a perfect circle. As a widow and new grandparent, Darwin has embraced me, especially the comedy circuit at Happy Yess, and the Cav. Life is for living. 'I'm very blessed to have two sons and two fabulous daughters-in-law who call Darwin home, and our love child, he will only visit in the dry. Life is good. My father is old and frail, and I choose not to hate him.' And Dona's advice: 'Let go of hate. If tied in knots emotionally, be brave to seek help, or counselling, and never give up hope or your good friends.'

A typical Aussie larrikin, Brendan Perry nearly died on the operating table two years ago, simply because he didn't seek medical assistance until it was almost too late.

Now he goes to his doctor for regular check-ups, and when given the all clear in December 2017 to not come back for two years, the 32-year-old spent \$40,000 on a Quintrex Renegade, from In & Outboard Marine, to celebrate life. 'It's worth every cent,' he laughs. 'Plus it reminds me not to be so stubborn and pigheaded ever again.' Brendan moved to Darwin from the Pilbara three years ago and today works for Inpex. He'd seen blood in his stools for more than four years. 'But I justified it in my mind because I'd had a massive weekend on the piss. There really wasn't anything wrong, I felt fine, and I certainly didn't need to see a doctor,' he said. 'It wasn't until Easter 2016 after coming back from Thailand and a week of non-stop partying at a mate's wedding that I became concerned. I was losing cupfuls of blood. I'd never had that before.'

At Royal Darwin Hospital Emergency he passed out and was admitted. On release four days later they told him it was an acute gastritis infection. 'They'd kept me in isolation, thinking I'd picked up something in Thailand,' Brendan continues. 'At home when I was still losing blood, I phoned my sister-in-law who is an Anaesthetist Nurse. She told me to go to a doctor and get a referral to see a Gastroenterologist immediately.' The doctor referred Brendan to Dr Guru Iyngkaran, a Gastroenterologist at NT Medical Specialist who performed a colonoscopy at Darwin Day Surgery. 'Brendan was extremely fortunate. He's one of the worst bleeding cases I've seen in Darwin. While there were many polyps, one was massive and at the highest level of turning cancerous,' said Dr Guru. 'If he'd left it another six months before seeking treatment he possibly wouldn't be here. By the time bowel cancer is detected it has usually spread to other areas of the body too.' Because of Brendan's tenuous position after the operation, he was taken to hospital for observation. 'That was the wake-up call,' he recalls. 'My only disappointment was I had to give away my Darwin Cup Marquee and Gala Ball tickets to a mate — over \$700 worth! But I was alive and grateful to Dr Guru and the fabulous nurses at Darwin Day Surgery. They're the nicest people and so friendly. They put me at ease. I take them chocolates at Christmas now.' Being diagnosed at such a young age also meant all Brendan's family required testing. 'Mum had a small polyp, but my middle brother still refuses to be tested. He's stubbornly stupid, like me,' he said. 'I'm just glad I had that bender of a week in Thailand, and this happened, otherwise I would've kept going on how I had been and not seen anyone and would've ended up in a box. 'Now I can continue my travels around Australia and the rest of the world. Every new place you go to is a new adventure — and I still have plenty to live. I hope that anyone reading my story takes note. If in doubt get checked out.'

TERRITORY  
SURVIVORBRENDAN PERRY  
BLOKES JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

Having moved to Darwin in January 1974 from Port Moresby where they'd worked for the Australian Government, like the majority of Territorians, Diane Davis, her husband and 16-month old daughter were enjoying Christmas party celebrations on 24 December 1974.



DIANE DAVIS  
LOSING ALL TO CYCLONE TRACY

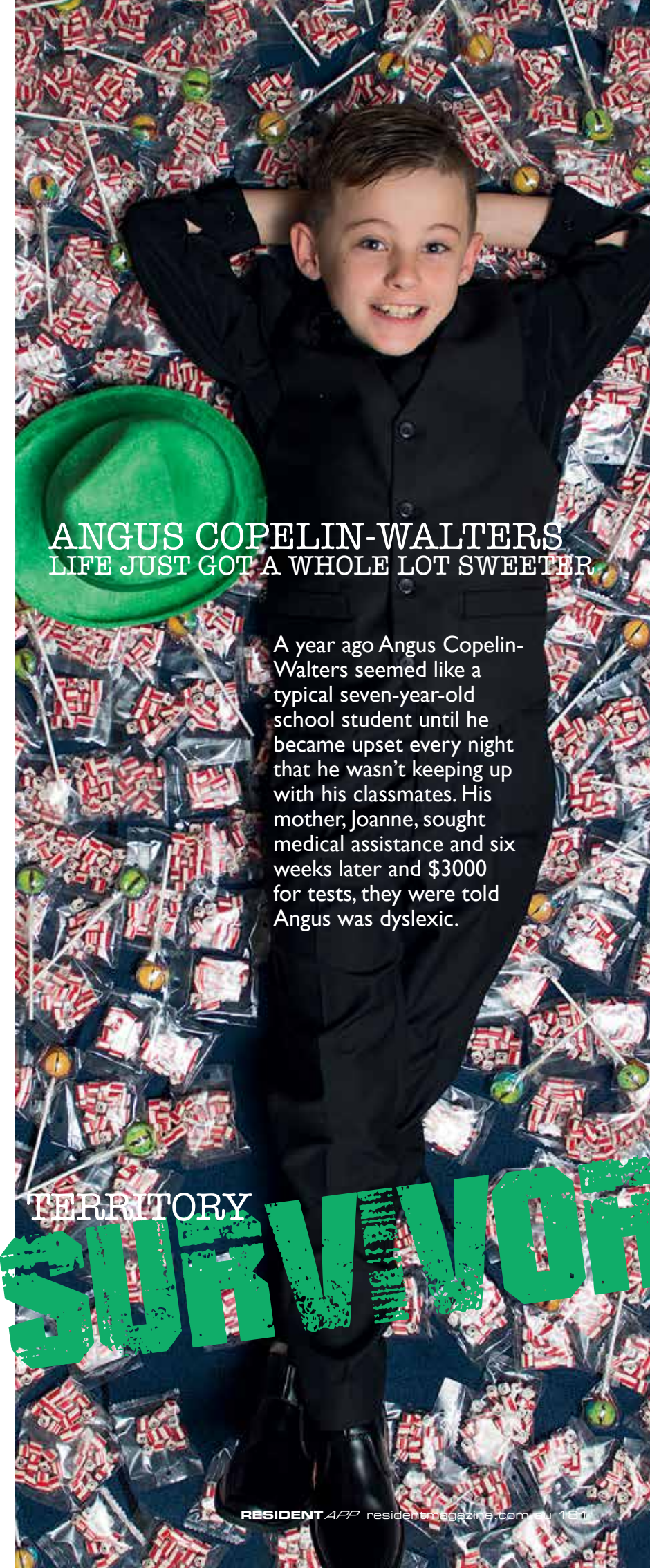
# TERRITORY SURVIVOR

## RESIDENT SURVIVORS

**W**e were at a friend's place in Nakara. We were all novices about cyclones, but at eleven-thirty we saw the power lines sparking and thought we better go home,' says Diane. However, they didn't get any sleep, within minutes the full force of Cyclone Tracy was upon their elevated home in Wanguri. 'A huge explosion took out our back two bedrooms. Picking up our daughter we huddled together in the bathtub,' she explains. 'The noise of the wind, the darkness, the roof lifting and continuous rain was frightening. We didn't have any relief from the eye as it didn't come over the northern suburbs.' The morning light exposed the devastation around them. 'Very little of the houses in our street remained. We discovered a flying caravan had destroyed the back of our house. We had no car; a brick wall had collapsed on it, and the people across the road were seriously injured. Nobody knew what was happening. We had no choice but to walk over to the Wanguri Primary School along with our neighbours for shelter.' Three days later they heard a plane was taking people out of Darwin. 'When I arrived they were only taking children. My parents lived in Cunnamulla, I wasn't prepared to risk my baby getting there just with a tag on her wrist,' continued Diane. 'Two days later it was a mass exodus. Friends from Perth had left us their car. As it wasn't damaged, like many others we drove out, stopping at Katherine Hospital to have our injuries attended to. Continuing on our way, we had New Year's Eve with other Darwinians in muddy surrounds outside Longreach.' Three months later Diane returned to Darwin with her daughter and went straight back to work. 'I never considered not coming back, like many of my friends. We'd bought our home in August 1974, and even though we never rebuilt, it was ours. Darwin was home and where my job was. The government provided us with demountable accommodation in the meantime. Eventually, we sold the block. Our marriage also broke down, just like many of my friends. Males who had stayed had changed. It had become a boys' town. They were living every day as if it was their last.' For the past 21 years, Diane has been the Branch Operations Manager at Elders Real Estate. Her daughter now has four children and lives down the road. 'While I lost my home, my marriage and most friends didn't return; I didn't lose my daughter or my passion for life. I love Darwin, the people, my friends and family, I'm not leaving,' Diane said. 'Cyclones are a part of our life here, and we just have to be prepared, like during our most recent Cyclone Marcus. Then afterwards we all pitch in to help clean up. Cyclones aren't ideal, but like most disasters, they do tend to bring all the community together. It was a real and quick learning curve back in 1974, but one that has stayed with me ever since.'

## RESIDENT SURVIVORS

**T**oday, he's a budding entrepreneur, where his business card title is Executive Head of Candy. He's also creating a storm in the Territory business space, presented a certificate as a Semi Finalist in the NT Government Small Business Achievement Award category at the NT Young Achiever Awards in April 2018 and the centre of attention at the event. 'Last year with July school holidays coming up I began looking at ways we could help Angus understand and manage his dyslexia,' said Joanne. 'We created a puppet game with market stalls to assist with his writing and mathematics and watched videos of people with dyslexia, such as Richard Branson and Jamie Oliver. He realised he could be successful in life.' Angus was progressing well through the puppet play and slowly improving at school. He was a happy little boy again. Then he asked his mother, 'Can we please do this for real?' 'KJS Entertainment were advertising for children to partake in a Kids Buy, Swap, Sell for five dollars a stand in late August. We weren't sure what to do, but it was the next and an inexpensive step for him.' Taking money from his moneybox they bought a few business tools — pencils, notebook and calculator and invested in some candy that they packaged together. The stall was an outstanding success, and Angus was delighted, he wanted to continue, but the next planned Kids Buy, Swap, Sell was cancelled. As a business adviser in her work-life role, Joanne assisted Angus in creating a basic business plan. With no superstar figures like Sir Richard Branson, Angus' idol, in Darwin, they approached Mick Burns for his business advice and mentorship. He also said if the candy was professional he would stock it at Crocosaurus Cove. Thus Croc Candy was born. The candy is handmade in Australia. 'Our candy is one hundred percent vegan, dairy, nut and gluten-free and can be personalised with logos or messages in edible food dye,' adds Joanne. 'This has been extremely successful with Tourism NT ordering 500 for their recent Routes Asia 2018 trade show in Brisbane. The candy was branded and aligned perfectly with their crocodile theme.' Not only is Angus now growing in confidence, he's also learning about business, overcoming challenges and balancing his budget has taught him about money. He's also inspiring others along the way. 'Even his older brother, 11-year-old Scott has started a budding business. Kids Can teaches youth how to make their business ideas into reality,' explains Joanne. During April 2018 Youth Week Angus, his brother and mother showcased their skills on young business entrepreneurial skills. 'It's astounding how many people are requesting information about how their children can learn business skills,' said Joanne. 'It's not something I'd originally thought of either. We didn't set out to create a business. I just wanted to help Angus deal with his issues. He's the one who's excited about growing the business. I'm only here to guide him, but we're delighted it's keeping him happy and focused. If he lost interest tomorrow, we would stop. We never thought it would be like this. It seems to have legs of its own.' 'But I love counting money,' Angus pipes in, grinning cheekily. 'So I want it to be bigger. I want to be like Richard Branson one day.' After watching a TV show that raised money to help and support people's illness, Angus decided that five percent of the profits from Croc Candy would go to Made By Dyslexia, a charity that raises awareness of children and adults who live with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. The organisation was founded by Kate Griggs and is supported by Sir Richard Branson. 'Eventually, I want to be able to offer fundraising packs to charitable organisations,' said Angus. 'I want to call it Candy for a Cause and everything can be customised.' Originally from Queensland the family moved to Katherine when Angus was four and then to Darwin in 2016. 'We're so grateful to the Territory people; I don't think this would have been as easy or as achievable for Angus had we been living in a huge capital city. Territorians are so helpful and wonderful towards him. It's amazing.'



ANGUS COPELIN-WALTERS  
LIFE JUST GOT A WHOLE LOT SWEETER

A year ago Angus Copelin-Walters seemed like a typical seven-year-old school student until he became upset every night that he wasn't keeping up with his classmates. His mother, Joanne, sought medical assistance and six weeks later and \$3000 for tests, they were told Angus was dyslexic.

# TERRITORY SURVIVOR



RDH FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Jenny Santosh, Ben Collins, Rhiannon Winter,  
Erica Bleakley, Amanda Paddon, Elissa Rowe  
and Joy Scott. The RDH Trauma Service helps  
manage more than 800 trauma cases annually.

BELOW NCCTRC TEAM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Peter Jones, Henry Janssen, Hollie Sekulich,  
Chris Hodge, Mel Morrow, Jasmine Dexter,  
Matthew Schobben and Juno Eadie.

The National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre (NCCTRC) is Australia's centre of excellence for disaster and emergency response capability located in Darwin.



RESIDENT DISASTER RELIEF

## SUPPORTING SURVIVORS AT HOME AND ABROAD

Established as a result of the 2002 Bali bombings by Professor Len Notaras AM and former Prime Minister Mr John Howard, the NCCTRC is based at Royal Darwin Hospital with a disaster warehouse at Woolner. 'The response following the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, showed Australia and the world, that some of the best doctors and nurses are here in Darwin,' Professor Notaras said. 'We work with the Royal Darwin Hospital to enhance surge capacity and capability in trauma and critical care services, ensuring preparedness and response capacity to a sudden health emergency onshore and offshore. There's also a sizeable investment in research, education and training to improve patient outcomes. The Centre's presence has enriched health services for all Territorians.' The NCCTRC is funded by the Australian Department of Health to maintain the Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) capability of multi-disciplinary health teams and building disaster resilience through education and training across the Asia-Pacific. More than \$7 million is provided from the NCCTRC's budget of \$15 million to ensure the Top End Health Services Network can maintain its surge capacity to ensure the Territory is prepared should we have a

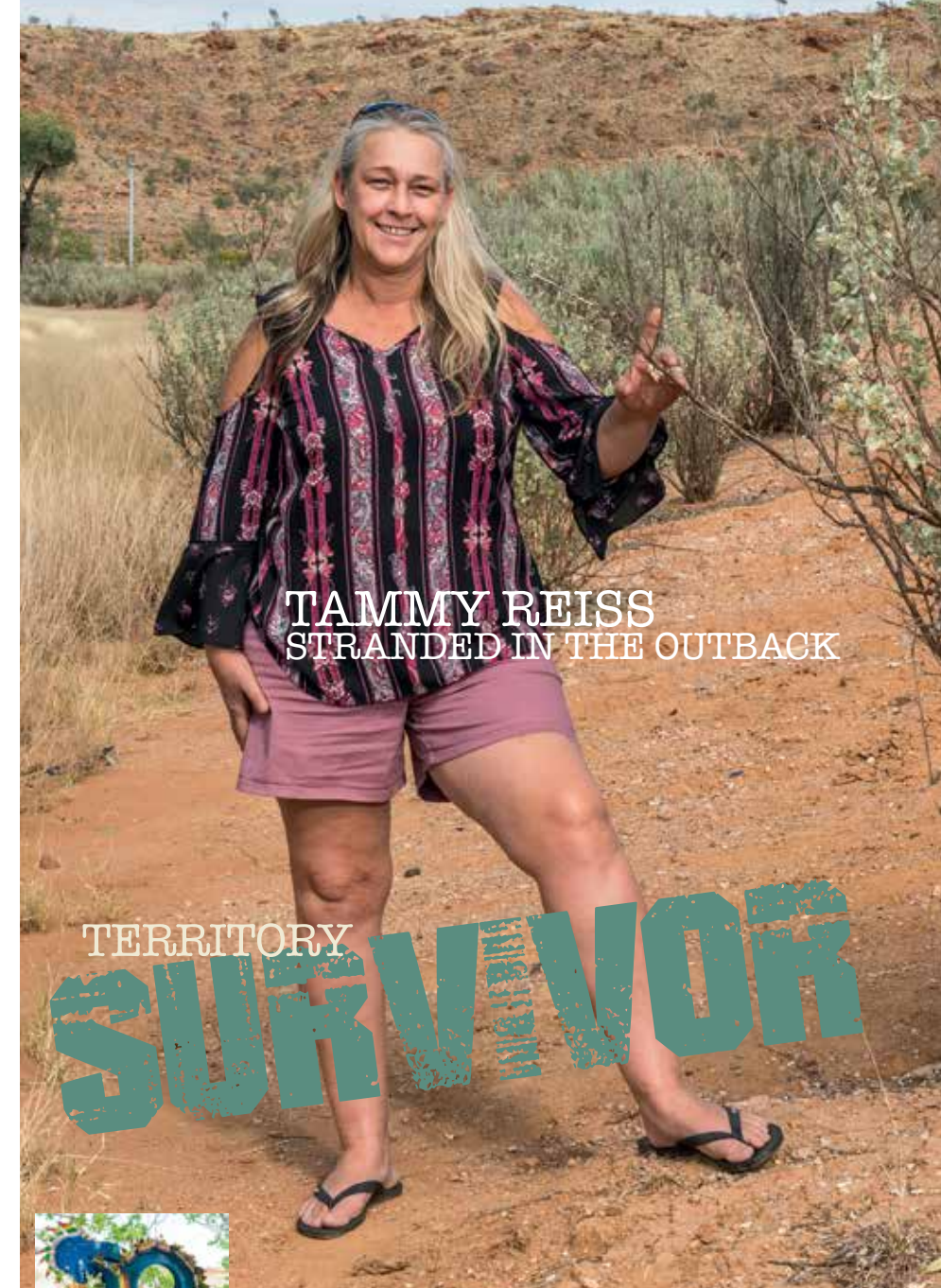
disaster or a mass casualty event. 'This includes the funding of the Trauma Service – a team of nurses, doctors and allied health professionals – who work within Royal Darwin Hospital to help manage more than 800 trauma cases each year,' adds Professor Notaras. 'Sixteen years on we are still demonstrating that the Northern Territory has capacity in the event of a disaster to bring together clinicians from across the nation to deploy and provide support to a disaster-affected country or here in Australia.' A large part of the day-to-day operational business of the NCCTRC does is focused on preparedness. Members of the team work closely with the Australian Health Protection Committee and the Health All-Hazards Working Group in addressing issues of national importance around disaster preparedness. 'Most recently following Tropical Cyclone Marcus, the NCCTRC provided staff to assist in recovery operations through logistic support in the Emergency Operations Centre. Previously we provided staff to support recovery efforts in the Emergency Operations Centre following Tropical Cyclone Lam,' Professor Notaras said. Every year in Darwin the NCCTRC provides medical support to the V8 Supercars at Hidden Valley. The event attracts large crowd numbers at both the Supercar day events and

the evening concert, and in the lead up the NCCTRC coordinates a multi-agency exercise to ensure the best possible outcomes for patients, the public and response agencies in the event of an incident. The NCCTRC collaborates with St John Ambulance, NT Major Events, NT Police, NCCTRC (Supercars Medical Team Provider) and with representation by Royal Darwin Hospital Emergency Department and Supercars event security. Over the last five years, the Centre has developed the mass casualty tracking device TrackMi, a software platform to assist organisations in the rapid collection and immediate transmission of critical information from significant incidents. 'In 2017 we provided support in implementing TrackMi for the Department of Chief Minister,' said Professor Notaras. 'It addresses three key areas of need: Evacuation Centres and Temporary Camps Management, Mass Transportation of Evacuees Tracking, Affected Area Management and Tracking.' The NCCTRC has become a local, national and international North Australia success story, and is a vital component of the Australian Government's disaster and emergency medical response capabilities, as well as an essential asset for the Northern Territory.

**T**listen to the old people now; we have a lot to learn from them. Luckily I remembered some bush survival skills otherwise the outcome would have been very different,' she said. 'My daughter Karlee agrees, but she refuses to drive in rain now, not even in Melbourne where she's studying nursing.' Originally from Stradbroke Island, in early January 2015 Tammy, then 41, and her sister Mandy managed the community store at Haasts Bluff, 250 kilometres west of Alice Springs. Karlee was to begin Year 11 at a Queensland school. 'The old people kept telling us to leave now for Alice as it was raining up country, but it wasn't raining at the community, and I had work to do,' Tammy begins. Eventually leaving late that night when they reached the crossing 40 kilometres away, the creek was in full flow. 'Using the car headlights, I walked out halfway to check the depth and road conditions. It seemed okay. But as we neared the other side my Toyota Prado slewed where the road had washed away, and we were quickly carried downstream. With water rushing in we grabbed as much as we could and scrambled to the bank,' she said. 'Thankfully the semi-submerged headlights gave some direction in the pitch-black surroundings as we're both petrified of the dark.' Soaking wet and with plummeting temperatures, their teeth chattered as they cuddled each other to stay warm during the night. 'Karlee was amazing. She was more concerned about me getting too cold as I was older and would take longer to get better,' she laughs. 'When day broke it was still raining. After retrieving a few more things from the car and the surrounding area we built a humpy using our wet clothes and tree branches and put on dry clothes from our bags. I made a fire by spraying a deodorant can and lighting it — no one should try this at home. But I'm an old Girl Guide and have worked on farms. Karlee was horrified. We protected the fire with a piece of iron from the side of the road.' With no food or water in the car, they survived for three long days and two freezing nights by licking water off gum leaves, drinking out of puddles and squeezing it from their clothes. 'That was disgusting – more like washing powder water. We mostly huddled under the humpy close to the fire and fought off ants, moths and frogs. A passing helicopter didn't hear my screams or see the flag we'd made with a red dress,' Tammy continues. 'By day three we hadn't seen a single vehicle and were now starving. The rain had eased, and not keen on eating insects, while we still had some strength I decided we should walk along the road towards Glen Helen.' Leaving everything else behind except a backpack and small suitcase on wheels with essentials they set off. After 30 kilometres, three of those being eyed-off by a massive bull, they met a passing motorist. 'They were heading to Mount Liebig. I explained our situation, but they didn't have time to take us back to the main road,' Tammy said. 'However, they returned, unable to cross the creek they'd not only picked up our belongings but also a community man who had been looking for us.' On reaching Glen Helen Resort they notified family and friends, showered, ate, drank and felt human again. 'My mum and dad at Papunya on the northwest side of Alice had phoned the police but were told it was too dangerous to search until the rain stopped. A medical helicopter out that way did look for us but couldn't see us through the low clouds. The police did scold us for leaving our site though.' A week later when the water around Glen Helen subsided Karlee and the other stranded tourists flew out of Alice Springs, and Tammy returned to her sister, older daughter and granddaughter at Haasts Bluff. Now living in Alice Springs, Tammy upcycles used vehicle tyres creating pieces of art. Through her business G & T Retyred Craft she also runs workshops in several communities. 'I love working alongside the indigenous people and each creation is useful. I'm sure that's what helped us get a second for Luritja Community at Mount Liebig, in the 2016 Australian Tidy Towns Awards,' she adds. 'I've stayed because I love the people, landscapes, colours and serenity of the outback. The incident didn't make me afraid of the Territory, but I am cautious of it – raining and flooding should be taken seriously and I'm never going to put myself in that situation again. We were very fortunate.'

### RESIDENT SURVIVORS

A year after arriving to work in Central Australia, Tammy Reiss didn't fully understand how distant weather conditions would alter the course of her drive back into Alice Springs for her daughter's flight to school interstate.



TAMMY REISS  
STRANDED IN THE OUTBACK

TERRITORY  
SURVIVOR



Dragon.

ORDER TAMMY'S BESPOKE TYRE ARTWORK ONLINE



Outdoor chairs.



Tyre clock.



Urns.

Tammy is a creative person as you realise in her story of survival, so we were amazed and captivated at the irony of seeing vibrant, strong tyre artworks adorning her home, made from the very things that contributed to her dire situation of life and death. Contorted, cut and fashioned, this utilitarian object is made-over for another purpose that saves landfill whilst being what it was never intended for. Of course we now have a stunning tyre urn that sits proudly in our foyer. See the work on Facebook: G & T Retyred Craft or reisstammy3@gmail.com