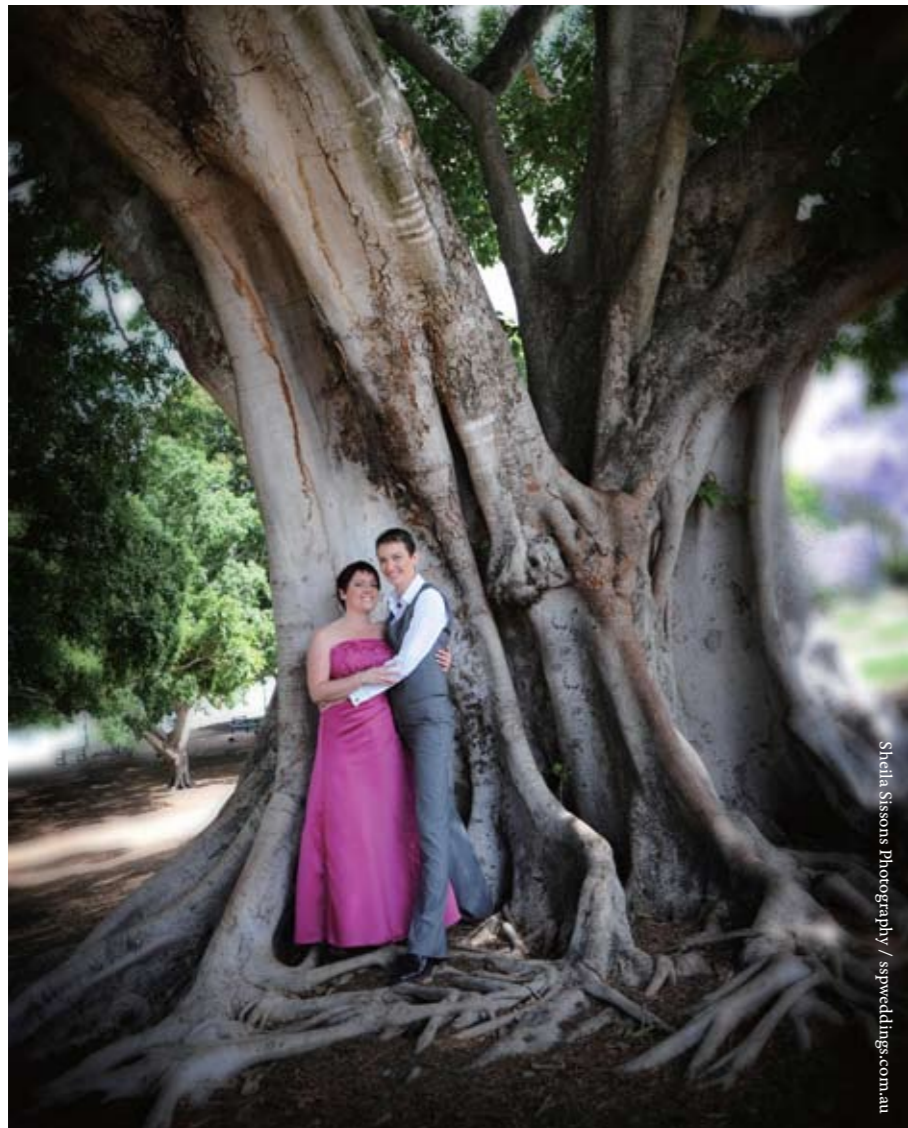


Paula & Michelle: An Aussie Union



PAULA AND MICHELLE MET WHILE working together in Brisbane. It was the year of the Sydney 2000 Olympics so they moved to Sydney to be a part of the excitement and lived together for a few years before moving back to Brisbane. In 2005 on a South Pacific cruise, Michelle proposed to Paula. While many Australian lesbians intend to spend the rest of their lives with their partners and plan elaborate 'wedding' ceremonies, gay

marriage is not legal in Australia. This is disappointing to many including Michelle and Paula who did not consider travelling to a country where same-sex marriage is legal since those unions are also not recognised in Australia. "Legal or not we wanted a declaration of our commitment to each other and a celebration with our family and friends," says Michelle. "They have always supported us unconditionally and their attendance and participation is what made the day special. In our eyes and theirs it is a real wedding. Why should we be deprived of such a wonderful day which is



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so important to us just because of the current laws? In fact, a lot of people who attended said it was better than any wedding they had ever been to because there were no rules or expectations and because we were doing it solely because it was important to us.”

Family and friends travelled from interstate and overseas to share the day with the couple at Clear Mountain Lodge (clearmtn.com.au), northwest of Brisbane. The ceremony was held in the garden overlooking the valley and its beautiful views. Celebrant Jennifer Cram helped the couple create their vows:

With all my heart and soul/ I give myself to you as your partner/ in life and in love./ All that I am I give to you/ All that I have I share with you/ All that I dream I will work with you to achieve./ Whatever the future holds./ Wherever life may lead us/ I will love you and stand by you/ As long as we both shall live.

Paula wore a full-length strapless fuchsia dress with beaded bodice. Michelle wore custom-made pinstripe grey pants and vest with a white French cuff shirt. Unique to the ceremony was a ‘jumping the broom’ ritual. “Later that night the broom became the highlight of the dance floor with people dancing with it, singing into it and playing the broom guitar!” laughs Michelle.

The ceremony was followed by a reception in the lodge’s function rooms. The cake was “a cupcake spectacular,” says Michelle. “Vanilla and chocolate cupcakes with pink



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love hearts on them.”

The couple enjoyed a honeymoon on Bedarra Island in North Queensland for a week. They reside in the house they built together five years ago and are not planning children although Michelle says “never say never!”

The gay marriage ban in Australia continues to concern the couple and others like them. Australian Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd remains opposed to gay marriage in spite of increasing pressure from gay rights activists. Michelle and Paula have their own message for the PM. “What are people so scared of? Everyone deserves the same rights and to discriminate against us because of our sexuality is just not on. It is 2010. We feel it is time for the government to get with the program!” ❖

