



20 QUESTIONS

Doug Humann

52, CEO, Bush Heritage Australia

Who has influenced you most professionally?

I grew up in the Melbourne suburb of Kew, and a guy who lived near us, Dr Alex Scholes, had more than a hectare of land in inner Melbourne, where he had horses, goats, a cow – which was pretty unusual in the '60s – and rural dairy properties in the upper Yarra Valley. He was interested in the way conservation could be interwoven into his commercial activities [and] he had an interest in indigenous engagement and was involved with the Aboriginal Advancement League. I followed his spirit.

Who has influenced you most personally?

My wife, Jill, whom I met at a party when we were very young. She was still at school and I was in my first year at Melbourne University [studying geography]. We married when we were in our early 20s. Jill is contemplative and creative and she has encouraged those elements in me, which introduces balance to how I am more naturally, she grounds me.

What is your motto?

If at first you don't succeed then try, try again.

Whom do you most admire?

A friend, a woman I will just call Florence, [who] was part of the Stolen Generation in the '50s, was raised in an orphanage in Ballarat, and when she was 15 she came and lived with my [maternal] grandparents for three years when she was going to secondary school and then working in Melbourne. She has stayed within the family envelope. I admire people who battle against adversity and she has certainly done that.

What has been your best experience?

In 1979 when I was 22, after I had finished my honours degree I spent seven months travelling around Australia in a four-wheel-drive with my mate Rob Drummond, going to some extraordinary and remote places. This trip opened me to the diversity of Australia and we had such freedom, the first time we had experienced that kind of freedom.

What has been your worst experience?

Unquestionably it was being diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2006, and, thinking I had secondaries, I thought I had a life sentence and my main concern was not being around to see my three children grow up, particularly my youngest daughter, then only 12. There was a lot of sadness there [and] I became pretty introverted and so with my wife and my friend Sally Polmear's guidance [as counsellors] I started working with some of Ian Gawler's meditation methodologies. I valued that awakening. As it turned out, I made a full recovery.

What has been your most formative experience?

Definitely having children and being a parent. When we had our first two children I was teaching, so I was around children every day, but having one's own children is another story, and I grew up having children and being fully responsible for them.

What has been your greatest achievement?

When I started at Bush Heritage in 1997, there were three other co-workers, part-timers, and we're now 70-strong, a closely



STORY BY:

JANNE RYAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY:

JESSICA SHAPIRO

knit staff with supporters and volunteers managing more than 1 million hectares of land on 30 properties. It is robust, it is effective and we – particularly through our president Phillip Toyne – have a growing engagement with indigenous people.

What is your favourite book?

West of Centre, by Ray Erickson.

What is your favourite viewing?

A landscape painting that artist Mandy Martin gave me for my 50th birthday. I am really fascinated by how landscape has been presented visually in Australia.

What is your favourite destination?

The tall, wet eucalypt forest and mountain streams at Toolangi Forest, just north-east of Melbourne. I have gone there literally all my life, with my parents, my children, my wife and my friends. The water in those streams baptised our children and in August last year [2009] I sprinkled my mother's [Rachel] ashes there.

How would you describe yourself?

Energetic, pragmatic, down to earth, I don't beat about the bush.

How do you present yourself to the world?

I am pretty forthright, so I present myself confidently and I always had a strong sense of injustice and that can make me a bit righteous sometimes. My grandparents, Charles and Jessie McLaren, were both medical missionaries in Korea and my mother often said I was quite like her father, I just followed a different mission, an environmental mission.

What is your favourite place and time?

Anywhere under the stars in the Australian desert.

What are you optimistic about?

My children's generation, with their ability to use all the technological resources we have and their growing awareness of the planet's needs. They are learning so much more than I did as a child and than I taught as a teacher. And the next generation will work better with indigenous Australians.

What do you like to eat and drink?

I love a French pastry ... and I am absolutely renowned for carrying around bags of carrots just to chew on.

What is success to you?

Achieving the best you can [and] living with integrity. Relationships with people are critical.

How do you stay up-to-date with ideas and trends?

I am a huge Fran Kelly fan [ABC Radio National]; I read the broadsheet newspapers and *The Monthly*, *The Atlantic* and the *Harvard Business Review*. My kids and their friends keep me in touch with popular culture.

Greatest professional and personal breakthrough?

Believing in my own abilities rather than trying to fit a mould. When I joined Bush Heritage, it was stepping into a leadership role in a much more defined sense than I had before. It was about communicating with the board and believing that I could run the organisation. Karen [Alexander, then president], introduced me to the concept of emotional intelligence. ■