



TWO OF US

STORY BY Rosamund Burton | PHOTOGRAPH BY Edwina Pickles

Megan Jacobson (left) and Shari Sebbens, both 32, grew up together in Darwin and now live in Sydney. Megan is a novelist who also works in TV production. Shari is a Logie-winning actor who starred in *The Sapphires* and *Redfern Now*.

MEGAN: Shari and I have been friends since we were seven, when my oldest sister started dating Shari's big brother. They got engaged and had two children together. Shari and I were so excited because we were going to be sisters. We called each other "Sissi" until we were 12, when our siblings split up, having never married. We've been calling each other cousins ever since, because we share two nieces, so we are like family.

Her family used to take me with them on weekend trips. There was a gaggle of kids, and it was wild and chaotic, like most big Indigenous families. We'd eat traditional food like magpie geese that one of her uncles had hunted, and be told ghost stories.

I made up stories to tell Shari. I said pixies and fairies lived in the giant banyan tree near our home. She really wanted to meet them, so I told her they didn't come out because they didn't like her.

At 12 I moved to the Gold Coast, so we didn't see each other for two years. Then when we were 14, she came to Brisbane for surgery and stayed with me. From then until I finished

school I went and stayed with her in Darwin every year.

She's always been the funniest person I know. Even as a kid she could mimic anybody and would have me in stitches. We were both into what we do now. I was entering writing competitions from age seven.

I remember seeing Shari trying to get work for ages. She went to the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, then to NIDA, and kept auditioning until she got her big break: the role of singer Kay McCrae in [2012 musical comedy-drama film] *The Sapphires*. She really wanted the part and after numerous auditions finally got it. I was so excited for her.

Having done a journalism degree and worked in TV and film in Sydney and Darwin, I moved to New York when I was 29 to try to find TV writing work. Then, in 2013, Shari won a Logie [for Most Outstanding New Talent for her role in *Redfern Now*]. I thought really successful people were a different breed, but I knew Shari. Obviously she's got talent, but she also never gave up.

Watching Shari's journey inspired me. I'd always wanted to write a book and that's when

I started *Yellow* [Megan's debut novel was published by Penguin this year].

If I'm going through a tough time – say, I've broken up with a boyfriend – I'll message her. She'll say, "Come and stay at my house." I'll go and she'll make me laugh, so I can't be sad anymore. She doesn't ring me so much because she's got Dale – they've been together for 15 years and I know they'll be together forever. We don't see each other as often as we'd like to, but we're always going to be in each other's lives.

SHARI: My most vivid early memory is when we were seven and I stayed at Megan's house. She told stories about how her dolls came alive at night and moved around and watched us. I was terrified and couldn't sleep.

We were about nine when a poem she wrote about her grandfather dying was aired on the local ABC, and I remember the adults talking about it. We both had very active imaginations. I'd get her to eat flowers and leaves saying they were Aboriginal bush tucker. I'd never eat them, but she would, because she believed me.

My home was a madhouse filled with laughter, and Megan's was quiet. We both enjoyed the opposite of what we had. Megan wanted to be surrounded by all the rambunctious children, and I loved sitting and reading a book, or climbing a tree and talking about fairies.

When we were 15, in that gawky, awkward phase, she said, "You're so beautiful, you're like a clown." I'm like, "What?" "You've got this white skin and rosy cheeks and red lips." So I was, "Cool, I'm beautiful like a clown."

Megan is fiercely intelligent and totally humble. She's someone I can take anywhere and never have to worry about. She can hold her own because of her curiosity about people. I also admire that she's very rational and clear-headed, so the few times she's broken up with someone, she's not been an emotional train wreck.

Megan asked me to read from *Yellow* at the launch. She gave a speech about her being alone in New York and watching this YouTube video of me winning the Logie, and said that motivated her to write the book. She concluded, "This is for little Darwin girls who dream big." I was a sobbing wreck. I think she would have written the book regardless.

Her persistence has inspired me. It's like glancing into the left lane and seeing someone else is there with you, who is aiming for something as big and outrageous, and has come from the exact same place.

I'm the actor, so Megan will say I'm the extrovert. But I'm just saying other people's words, whereas she's giving people her thoughts and view of the world, which is so much braver.

We're very proud of our nieces and great nephews. We love talking about them and sending each other photos. In my Aboriginal culture my nieces are my daughters, so their sons are my grandsons, and they call me Nanna or Mimi. I'm not sure what they call Megan.

We have stayed friends because we share this love for Darwin, but also the desire to get out into the world and do bigger things. Whenever I see her I feel better about myself. She's saved in my phone as "Cuzzy Wuz". She's definitely family. ■

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