

THE *ride* OF THEIR *lives*

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DONNA AND GERRY MORRIS

THE LOVE AFFAIR BETWEEN GERRY AND DONNA MORRIS READS LIKE A SCREENPLAY. A BELFAST BOY FALLS IN LOVE WITH AN AUSSIE GIRL. THEY MARRY, START A BUSINESS AND HAVE TWO KIDS. THEN OUR LEADING MAN HAS A NEAR-FATAL CYCLING ACCIDENT BUT MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVES. THANKS TO HIS LEADING LADY, GERRY'S BACK ON HIS BIKE AND RIDING HIGH, AS TONIA ZEMEK DISCOVERS.

Who doesn't love a love story? Girl meets boy, they have their ups and downs and end up at the altar. Give me a rainy day and *Love Actually* and I'm happy. On second thoughts, throw in popcorn too!

When I meet Gerry and Donna Morris, I have no idea how long they've been together but they have that air of comfortable companionship that only comes with time. They're respectful of each other's space and thoughts. Leaning in but never interrupting. Smiling almost in unison.

This love story is actually 27 years young. He was born in Belfast and she was raised in Australia – the daughter of an Irish mother and a Scottish father. Fate stepped in to bring Gerry and Donna together in an Adelaide pub. "Our eyes met and it was kismet," Gerry says.

Donna also describes the attraction as being instant. "It was his Irish charm, that smile and the fact that he made me laugh." The pair married after only eight months. Although they started married life in Adelaide, they ended up on the Sunshine Coast, shortly after a five-day visit. "We fell in love with the Coast – it's like an Australian postcard."

Early in 2001 they packed up their son and daughter and made the

Sunshine Coast their permanent address. "We've been here for 12 years but we're still in the honeymoon period," Gerry laughs. "Our friends joke that we could get a job with the tourism board."

Their day job is in fact with ICMI, a speakers and entertainers bureau. Basically, they find emcees and keynote speakers for corporate events.

When they first started out, it was a very steep learning curve. Gerry had a background in car sales and Donna was previously involved in the travel industry.

Over the next decade, from humble beginnings, the business flourished. Along the way they booked a who's who of celebrities, including sporting greats Leigh Matthews and Wally Lewis.

Little did they know, Gerry himself would soon be making headlines. In June 2010 he was cycling along Alexandra Headland when the door of a parked car opened and sent him flying into oncoming traffic.

"I was dragged under a car for about 20 metres," Gerry says. When the car came to a halt, Gerry was pinned underneath. "Ten great guys appeared out of nowhere and lifted the car off me. All I could hear was someone saying 'we got ya big fella'."

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In addition to those 10 mighty men, Gerry also had Jessica Watson to thank for his survival. She was returning on that fateful day and paramedics had just driven past enroute to her homecoming celebrations.

“It wasn’t my time to go,” Gerry says of his brush with death. “We joke that there was no reservation made for me.” He sustained cuts to his head and arm, fractures to his ribs, a busted sternum and shoulder as well as crushed vertebrae.

Gerry’s list of injuries literally went from top to bottom. “Having been dragged along the road, I took a lot of skin off my left butt cheek. In hospital I felt like a cowboy and one great nurse called me rawhide,” he guffaws. That cheeky sense of humor was the hallmark of Gerry’s recovery.

“I was particularly impressed with how he accepted everything that had happened to him,” Donna says. That admiration is mutual. “Donna turned into superwoman,” Gerry tells me. “She ended up having to run the business, run the family and run back and forth to me in hospital.”

All up, Gerry’s rehabilitation lasted around six months at which point he decided to start a new business venture. “So many people had come out of the woodwork to offer me their support. It was very humbling and that’s how Hot Business Events started. We wanted to give something back.”

Hot Business Events is designed to give small businesses access to inspiring speakers, some of whom are household names. To date they’ve hosted the likes of George Negus, Wayne Bennett and Max Walker.

Gerry explains that while large national corporations regularly offer their staff corporate events with celebrity speakers, smaller businesses often don’t have the same opportunities.

As well as motivating and inspiring local companies, Donna says Hot Business Events opens other doors too. “There’s a lot of home-based businesses here on the Coast, so these events give people the opportunity to really get out and network and meet new people.”

The pair admit it’s one of life’s luxuries to be doing work they truly love. They show their gratitude by donating some of their ticket price to people in need. Rather than major charities, they focus on lesser-known, local battlers.

So far they’ve raised funds for a cancer sufferer who wanted to take a cruise and a retired couple who had their caravan stolen. Donna’s also recently started a drive to get more volunteers into local aged car facilities.

And yes, Gerry’s back cycling again. In fact, he covers about 250 kilometres each week. “I love cycling – it brings out the big kid in me,” he says with a smile. “You always have to get back on the bike.”

With his leading lady by his side and the success of Hot Business Events, I’d say Gerry’s well and truly back in the saddle. ■



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