

Strength comes with numb

GRAEME and SUSAN McDonald Albeni, Springsure



FAMILY PORTRAIT: Graeme and Susan McDonald run Albeni, an aggregation of three cattle properties, near Springsure. The family is in the process of converting Albeni into a certified organic property.

UNSOLVED MYSTERY: The McDonald family has had a challenging few years fighting a two-year battle against cattle theft allegations that were subsequently dropped, but the crime remains unsolved. Susan has written a book about the cattle theft allegations and their battle with the legal system.

HIGH FLIERS: Of the seven members of the McDonald family, four – Graeme, Sue, Alex and Nick – are pilots.



Steve Elliott, Macquarie Private Wealth, and daughter Sylvie, who at the time of the picture was eight months old, with Graeme and Sue McDonald at Albeni, Springsure. Mr Elliott said since he had been working with the McDonalds their families had developed a great friendship.

By SUZANNAH BAKER

TO say it's been a challenging time for the McDonald family would be an understatement to say the least – the past three years would be classed as trying times in anyone's books.

For Graeme and Susan McDonald and their five children, life was going ahead as usual on their five properties until 119 head of their neighbour's cattle were found on Albeni in February 2006.

That was the catalyst for criminal charges against Graeme, and a two-year legal battle which was both financially and emotionally costly for

the family of seven.

While the charges were withdrawn in August last year, there is still one burning question on their lips – who did it?

The cattle theft allegations received much coverage in media and the old 'bush telegraph', and now Susan has been working on a book about the events that unfolded around that day three years ago.

The book *Pinched or Planted – The Cungelella Cattle Mystery* is in its final stages, and both Graeme and Susan agree it will give people a chance to look at the facts in a different light and make up their own minds.

"We think we know what did

happen and there are plenty of people around who would like to know and they are entitled to ask," Graeme said.

"There are so many segments to it that you can't physically sit down and tell everybody the whole thing.

"By writing down the facts, people can take their time to study and check all the evidence and make their own conclusion. The book is the only way they can look at it and make up their own mind, because obviously the legal system isn't going to prove things one way or another."

While Susan was busy writing and involved in various community groups, Graeme was forging ahead with his organic farming plans at Albeni. They could almost see the light at the end of the tunnel, until early this year tragedy struck.

A fatal farm accident at Albeni took the life of close family friend, 20-year-old Cody Cole, who in a short time had become very involved in the running of Albeni.

Queensland Country Life columnist Steve Elliott from Macquarie has witnessed their highs and lows – highs of three new grandchildren and lows of recent events.

Graeme first contacted Steve in

Graeme and Sue will keep going when everyone else has given up.

2001 about buying shares, and since then they have developed both a close business relationship and a family friendship.

While Steve said the past few years have taken their toll, it is clear that the family is a testament to the saying 'life goes on'.

"Some things about Graeme and Sue that stands out to me are their absolute resilience and determination – I guess it's their dogged determination," Steve said. "I really admire that because they will keep going when everyone else has given up – altogether



LEFT: Susan McDonald getting ready to land at Albeni, Springsure.

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