

A Tale of Two Farmers



Isla Burns, Jewel Carlo, Daneeka Fejsa-Sexton, Darcy Toscan,
Braydon Fejsa-Sexton, Edward Tuohey and Josh Harvison

Darlington Point Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive, cooperative activities that encourage students to learn about and respond to, natural resource management and the importance of agricultural production.

wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/

Petaurus Education Group

Petaurus Education Group identifies, develops and delivers a range of learning and curriculum experiences, resources and initiatives for schools and community groups to connect with land, water, productive farming, sustainability and cultural issues at the local level. The group was established by Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre in late-2014 to support its operations and education activities.

wirraminna.org.au/petaurus

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by Peekdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

envirostories.com.au

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School: Darlington Point Public School

Teacher Support: Mrs. Helen Wood

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In 2018, students from Darlington Point Public School were involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program. The program was generously funded by Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated.

Creative Catchment Kids is partnered with Enviro-Stories, a Peekdesigns education program.



Farming on 'Cavaso'

Our story begins on the 27th of March when we went on a farm tour of the Toscan's farms. They hosted the Monsanto Cotton Grower of the Year Field Day. The farm tour included stops at Ringwood, Coleambally Demonstration Farm, Rosewood, Farm 4002 and 'Cavaso'.

Cavaso Farming Pty. Ltd. is owned by the Toscan Family. The company was established in 1969 at 'Cavaso,' the original 240 hectare property, which has expanded considerably to 4200 hectares. They have a long association with irrigated agriculture and currently produce cotton, wheat, maize, prunes and beef cattle.

After completing the tour, Darcy took our group around all the farm equipment that was on display around the yard. He explained the use of various pieces of equipment including a cotton picker, mulcher, rootcutter, a roller and a planter.

The day was capped off with a delicious barbeque lunch.



Tony Toscan was born in Griffith on the 16th of May 1951 to Anne and John Toscan. Tony attended Hanwood Public School until year 5 and then went to Yoogali Catholic School. His high school years were at the Marist Brothers in Griffith, which is now Marion College. After high school, Tony went to Murrumbidgee Ag and completed a one-year intensive course.

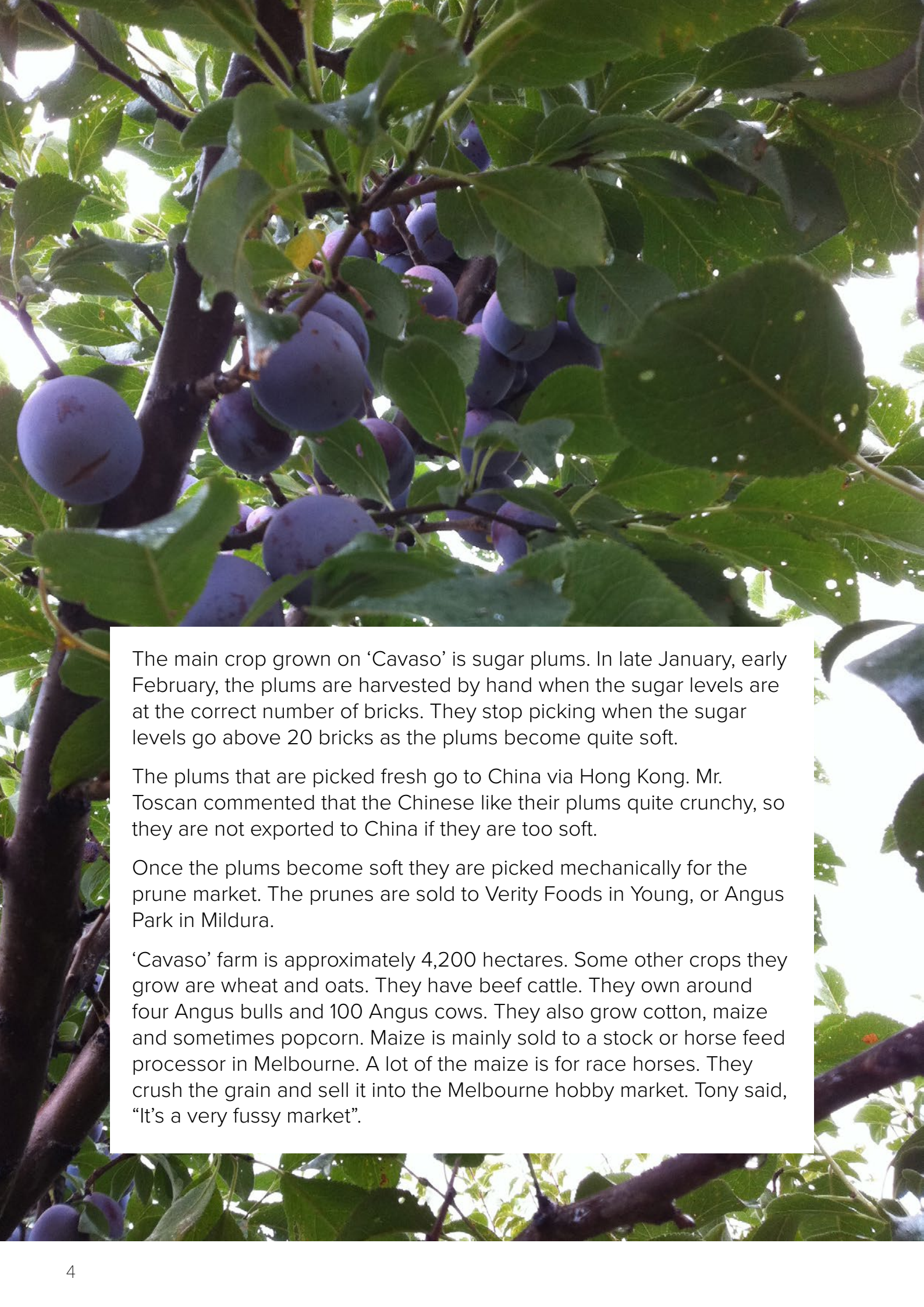
Tony married Joyce Minato (right) on the 6th of May 1972. Joyce is the second eldest in her family of nine children and Tony is the second eldest in his family of six children. Tony and Joyce had two children, Matthew and Ben. Sadly, Ben was accidentally killed in 2001.

Tony told us that Joyce's father was a builder and had worked on the building of Darlington Point Public School.

Tony's first job was working for his father on his farm. The family had a fruit farm and grew peaches and wine grapes in Hanwood. Darcy's great grandfather bought 'Ringwood' (below) in 1978.

Tony's dad came to Australia, from Italy, in 1930 at the age of seven. Tony purchased 'Cavaso' in 1969. He named 'Cavaso' after the town in Italy where his family came from.





The main crop grown on 'Cavaso' is sugar plums. In late January, early February, the plums are harvested by hand when the sugar levels are at the correct number of bricks. They stop picking when the sugar levels go above 20 bricks as the plums become quite soft.

The plums that are picked fresh go to China via Hong Kong. Mr. Toscan commented that the Chinese like their plums quite crunchy, so they are not exported to China if they are too soft.

Once the plums become soft they are picked mechanically for the prune market. The prunes are sold to Verity Foods in Young, or Angus Park in Mildura.

'Cavaso' farm is approximately 4,200 hectares. Some other crops they grow are wheat and oats. They have beef cattle. They own around four Angus bulls and 100 Angus cows. They also grow cotton, maize and sometimes popcorn. Maize is mainly sold to a stock or horse feed processor in Melbourne. A lot of the maize is for race horses. They crush the grain and sell it into the Melbourne hobby market. Tony said, "It's a very fussy market".

They have 10 full-time workers and up to 20 to 22 casuals depending on what they are doing. They have different forms of irrigation. Most of the irrigation is drip irrigation. Some of the fields are syphon irrigated. They have to have someone start each syphon.

They have some bankless channels on 'Cavaso'. Bankless irrigation (right) can be automated, however, the technology is only in the early stages. The water for irrigation comes from either the river system or the bore.

All the workers on 'Cavaso' use Toyota vehicles to drive around. Tony said, "We don't use four-wheelers anymore because they are too dangerous."





During the winter months on the farm, the jobs include maintenance work, renovating cotton beds in preparation for planting in September, planting new trees and recalibrating spray equipment. This is a job that has to be done every year.

Tony has some new prune trees that were only 1 month old when we saw them. They put replacement prune trees in approximately every 20 years. Just recently Tony attended a Prune Conference in Europe and saw some trees in France that were over 100 years old!





Within a short walk on the farm, we saw ten year old trees, three year old trees and the most recent one month old trees. The old trees were from root stock obtained from America. The new trees are from Russian root stock. The root stock is a hybrid plum and peach.

Tony is hoping these trees will have more vigorous growth. They are more sturdy and do not require staking and tying, which in the long run will save money.

Tony has had some farming problems, one being the rising cost of energy. 'Cavaso' has also been affected over the years by droughts, floods and pests. The farm is in a floodplain area. In 2012, 'Ringwood' sustained serious flood damage.

During winter, frosts can be quite damaging to prune trees, however hot winds in the summer are worse.

Kangaroos also cause a lot of damage. Tony said, "We don't like shooting the kangaroos". They have built a fence to keep them away from the crops. Rabbits can also be quite harmful to the crops.

Tony has a Smithfield Red Healer named Sam. He purchased Sam from a breeder in Whitton as a pup. He has taught Sam to work with cattle and given him four commandments to help with this work. These commandments consist of sit, stay, come and speak up. Although Sam does do a little bit of cattle work, Tony said “he is a little too excitable!”

When things get a little stressful on the farm, Tony likes to drive his 1986 Porsche 911 with the Griffith Classic Car Club. Tony takes enormous pride in owning this vehicle. The Porsche was manufactured in Germany, before being sold in England and later Hong Kong. Tony is the third owner of the Porsche 911.

Tony also enjoys fishing on the Murrumbidgee River in his spare time.



Tony likes what he does, he thinks that some jobs are more rewarding than others. He hopes that family farming will continue on 'Cavaso'.

Tony thinks that Australia's irrigation ways are very sustainable, because of the fact that most of the rivers are controlled by lochs, dams and weirs.

Most of Australia's irrigation farmers use recycled lift pumps on their properties.



Farming at 'Daisy Lodge'

Peter Tuohey was born in Bendigo, Victoria to Kevin and Jill Tuohey. He is the eldest of four children, having two younger sisters and one younger brother. His parents had a dry area farm 40 kilometres out of Bendigo.

Peter attended Toollen Primary School where he had the same teacher for seven years! That teacher was Mrs. Noeline McCumber. It was a two-teacher school of approximately 28 children.



Peter's high school years were at Marist Brothers in Bendigo. In his final year the school went co-ed with St. Mary's. In Peter's words, "It was the best year of high school!"

Peter went straight to College after high school. He attended VCAE in Bendigo where he did a double degree in accounting and data processing, with a minor in law and economics. He said, "I would have had a gap year, because after 13 years of school you are just about over it!"

Peter always had a passion for farming, however he believed that he needed something to fall back on if farming didn't turn out to be what he wanted.

Peter told us, "If I had my time over again I probably would have gone into the Air Force. I love flying! If I didn't have that attachment to the land I probably would have gone down that path, maybe flying jets as a commercial pilot."





Peter married Caroline Webb on August 19th 2000 and they honeymooned in Canada. They have two children, Edward who is twelve and Stella who is ten. Both attend Darlington Point Public School.

Peter's youngest child, Stella, is not interested in farming yet but she enjoys helping sometimes. However, his oldest child, Edward, is a very keen farmer. Some of the jobs that Edward does on 'Daisy Lodge' include starting syphons, tractor driving and picking up tools.

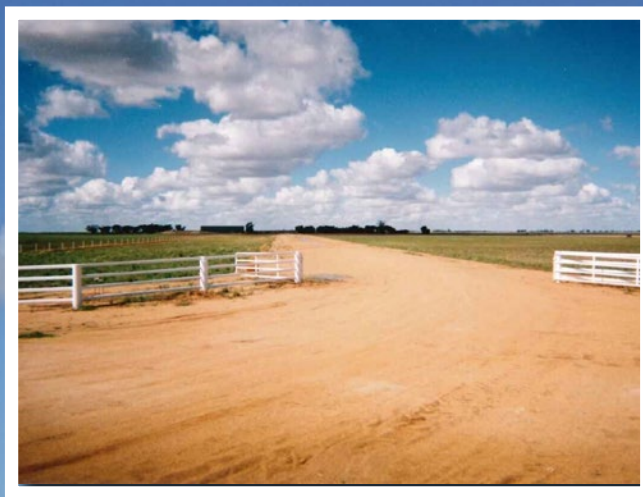
Just before Peter and Caroline got married they moved into a house at 'Daisy Lodge'. When the option of leasing 'Kulki' arose, they relocated to the homestead on that farm. After leasing 'Kulki' for twelve months, they purchased it. Since 2007 they have mainly lived at 'Kulki', with a few periods of time spent living in Darlington Point, then Armidale.



Peter's farming enterprise consists of three properties – 'Daisy Lodge', 'Kulki' and 'Carlisle'.

'Daisy Lodge' is the base for administration, machinery, repairs and maintenance, while 'Kulki' is where the family live.

Cotton, wheat and corn are the main crops grown, with some barley, rice and canola being grown in previous years.



On the 10th May we went to 'Daisy Lodge' to look at the farm. When we arrived we were greeted by Caroline, as Peter was busy dealing with a major problem. In the early hours of the morning one of the cotton pickers had caught on fire! Peter had been up since 2 am and when he arrived he was very exhausted. However, after a quick wash he was still happy to continue with the day. He also informed us that the damage to the picker was repairable, so that was a great relief to him.

We had a short talk about the management side of the farming enterprise. The Agronomists, Heath and Chris come out every Tuesday to plan with Peter.

Peter is MyBMP (best management practice) accredited as a cotton grower. This happened in 2015 and leads to BCI (better cotton initiative) accreditation. "The better the cotton bale you produce, the more credits you get," Peter said. "You get one credit for every kilo of cotton. Those credits are then sold to the cotton merchant and they pay up to \$3 for each bale."

To sell cotton in Australia you don't have to be an accredited BMP holder yet.



We headed off around the farm. Our first stop was at the bore, which has a 300 horse power motor and pumps water from 230 metres below the surface.

We then proceeded to the top of the dam. The dam has a capacity of 1800 mega litres.

From the dam we went to the dispersal tank and pump site that is run by two Mercedes Benz engines. Peter joked, "Caroline's always wanted a Mercedes Benz!"

The purpose of a dispersal tank is to regulate the water in the dam and channels.





We left 'Daisy Lodge' and travelled to a farm where Peter was contracted to pick cotton. We were able to watch the picker in action and the big yellow modules of cotton coming out, before heading to the cotton gin to continue the cotton process.



Before heading back to school we stopped at RivCott. Peter is a shareholder in this company. We saw the cotton modules coming along the conveyor belt, where they removed the yellow plastic. The plastic is put into a press and recycled. The cotton continued along and was mulched and shot up through tubes. It then came down and went through the ginning process of drying and cleaning, then all the seed was separated from the cotton lint.

The next process we saw was the cotton being made into bales, where a sample is taken and the bales are marked identifying the owner. The bales were then stacked out on a concrete slab, before being transported to cotton merchants.

The best part about visiting the Gin was climbing the seed pile which at the time was quite small considering the size of the shed. Peter told us that a lot of the seed gets sold to the Chinese and they make use of every part of that seed.





Peter believes you should always have one or two other interests if you are on the land. It is important to have an outlet in those stressful times, like when dust storms occur and drought affects crops.

He also believes in using the facilities that are available locally such as football ovals, swimming pools and walking tracks.

Peter and his son, Edward, like to get away fishing and go on short road trips together. Peter would also love to do more flying!





2018 Years 5 and 6 Opportunity Class with Tony Toscan (left) and Peter Tuohey (right)

Darlington Point Public School



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