

TOURISM



by Bill Nehmy

I am pleased to introduce Christie and Stephanie Rozaklis, the 'new generation' at Green Valley Strawberries, Hay Valley near Nairne.

BN: Welcome, Christie and Stephanie, please can we start with your early years, where you were born, went to school, your early plans and aspirations?

CSR: Thanks Bill. Both Stephanie and I were born at the Mt Barker Hospital. We finished our educational studies at Cornerstone College and just quietly we could not recommend the school enough.

My time at Cornerstone reignited my true love and passion for food and hospitality. It was my biggest ambition in life to become a nutritionist, personal trainer and health coach.

Two of which I achieved whilst still building the café from the age of 21. If I am working with food and positively impacting as many people as I can to be the best version of themselves for the rest of my life, I am winning.

As for me, Steph, I never had a clear path of what I wanted to achieve in my life. I didn't enjoy school and I was the complete opposite to my sister who was a very academically smart student.

All I knew was I could work hard and loved being on the farm, so I think I have found my place perfectly.

BN: Please can you elaborate on Green Valley Strawberries and the challenges of a mainly seasonal operation?

CSR: Whilst we are open seasonally to the public, strawberries are a high maintenance plant to grow.

Our off season is filled with planting, ripping up strawberries and general farm maintenance. Peak strawberry season comes with many challenges.

Finding staff, managing staff, expenses, wages and making sure everyone has the same values and ethics within the business.

We have strict quality control in our packing shed. We check almost every punnet of strawberries before they are shipped off to the supermarkets, so finding staff who have the same standards and care as we do is a hard one.

We are lucky that a lot of our staff return seasonally, some have even been around since Steph and I were born.

Weather is the biggest challenge out on field as it has so many variables on the quality of fruit being produced. Too much sun and too much rain are our biggest threats.

BN: If you have visiting friends or relatives and you want to give them a



Stephanie and Christie Rozaklis

memorable Adelaide Hills day, what do you recommend?

CSR: You can't miss the opportunity of staying in a cosy little Airbnb, with a bottle of locally produced Hills wine and a cheese platter.

We would recommend visiting our friends Glen and Judy at Artwine, Goldings winery or even sitting back and enjoying a gin at Unico Zelo in Gumeracha. Roadside produce stalls located throughout the hills are also a must.

BN: What do you think is the most significant tourism opportunity waiting to be realised in the Hills?

CSR: I think people love knowing where their food comes from, they love picking their own produce, meeting the growers and most of all enjoying knowing exactly how it was grown and the process involved from paddock to plate.

I would love to see more Hills farms opening their doors to the public and providing a real hands on experience.

A sustainable farm and cooking school showcasing locally grown produce would be ideal.

I would love to see young children getting back into nature and learning how to cook and prepare food, just like we were brought up.

BN: Please share any other key interests/activities that might surprise us including elaboration of your baking skills!

CSR: Stephanie is first and foremost a mum to little Leo. A keen show horse rider and avid gardener. As for

myself, Christie, I love getting outdoors and in nature.

I love reading, going to the gym, spending time with family and friends, trialling new recipes and visiting new and old eateries that showcase fresh and local produce and wine. Passion and creativity run fiercely through the Hills.

BN: What advice would you give a young person in respect to finding the right career and to have an enriching life?

CSR: Firstly, you need to find what YOU enjoy and what YOUR passions are in life and then go from there.

Loving what you do will lead you to success and living the most enriching life. If you are chasing money and status, it will only take you so far.

Our working life is a long life, so you need to enjoy it.

Secondly, don't think the road is going to be easy, whatever you choose to do in life takes hard work, time, patience, perserverance and a lot of failures.

Nothing comes easily and I cannot stress this enough. We were lucky our business grew very organically, and we learned a lot along the way, both the good and bad.

We are so happy with where we are in the business scheme of things, Green Valley is still our passion and we hope it will remain that way for many years to come.

Thanks for taking the time to learn a bit about us and we hope to meet you at the farm soon.