



TWO

OF US

STORY BY Rosamund Burton | PHOTOGRAPH BY Gareth Gardner

In 2014 environmental officer Glen Turner was shot dead in northern NSW by farmer Ian Turnbull. Since then, the friendship between Glen's partner, Alison McKenzie (at left), 54, and his sister, Fran Pearce, 52, has become much deeper.

FRAN: When I first met Alison in 2000, I thought she was beautiful and very reserved, a contrast to my extroverted brother. I'm extroverted, too, but not as much as him. Alison and I always got on well, but Glen's death in July 2014, and all the subsequent hard moments, made us really close.

The night Glen died, I felt I needed to be with Alison and the kids at their property near Tamworth, but I had to break the news to my elderly parents first. Rob, my husband, drove up immediately from our Port Macquarie home; I came up a day later and stayed for two months. I work for Disability Advocacy and my employers were very supportive and understanding.

Alison was devastated, but she wasn't broken. She was still functioning and focused on the children, Alexandra, now 13, and Jack, 11. Before the funeral, I went into Tamworth every day with Alison to see solicitors, doctors and funeral directors. She drove and just cried all the way. She rarely cried in front of the kids, but she let herself go driving.

Trees are our symbol of Glen, of strength and family. The day of the memorial, Glen's co-workers planted a jacaranda in the garden.

Alison and I sit there whenever I visit. The day we brought his ashes home, we sat there with the kids and told them that was their dad in the box.

Alison and I were in Sydney for the trial for two months earlier this year, and that was a massive bonding experience for us. We sat next to each other every day in court. There were so many hard moments when we held each other's hand and both cried silently.

I thought the whole process was so unnecessarily painful. I'd verbalise my anger when I got out of court, and often talked to Gregory Miller, who was filming *Cultivating Murder*, about Glen's murder. Al was angry, too, but she's much more composed and reserved than me. She would go quiet, or need to be alone.

But we also laughed during that time. Al sees joy in everything. We would often come out of our rooms in the morning before court and be dressed almost identically, so one of us would have to change. That used to crack us up.

Until the trial was over in June, we were in "fight" mode and dealing with trauma and tragedy, and I don't think either of us has really grieved yet. Al copes by keeping herself busy. She's so strong. There is no thought of her

moving from the property. She loves it and just handles it. One minute she'll be in her gum boots at the creek, then she'll get all dressed up for town. She's an amazing, fearless human being. And she's a fantastic mother.

We have differing beliefs and different alcohol tastes at times. But now we have a favourite scotch. It's Glenlivet, but Al put an "h" on the end, and we call it Glen liveth.

ALISON: I really liked Fran from the moment I met her. Whenever Glen and I went down to Port Macquarie to visit his parents, we would always catch up with Fran and Rob.

When Glen died, Fran was the first person in his family I called, and she came and stayed with me for two months. Her being there was amazing, especially in those days before the funeral. There were so many decisions to make.

I didn't want to think about what to dress Glen in. The day came to take the clothes into the funeral home, and Fran said, "Have you decided what to take?" "No," I replied. So then I was rushing around and ended up going without any socks. Poor Glen. It was awful. But we can laugh about it now. Through everything, as well as crying we've laughed and joked. I couldn't cope any other way, and she gets that.

For nearly a week we thought that Glen had died instantly. Then the detective rang to say because there was a bail hearing, he wanted to tell us the details of the shooting before they came out in the media. When he said the first shot hit Glen in the chin and didn't kill him, both of us collapsed in shock. We had no idea he suffered such a tortuous ordeal before being killed. We sat holding each other and sobbing.

For the funeral we had a private service at the crematorium, and the next day had this huge celebration at the local hall. It was incredible. Hundreds of people were there and many people spoke, including Fran and me. Then we came back home and planted a jacaranda tree for Glen. We call it the Jack and Alexandra tree.

Some days during the court case, I felt it was all about land clearing [Glen had been investigating Ian Turnbull's illegal land-clearing activities]. I wanted to stand up and say, "Hey, this is about a murder." But I was always confident we were going to get the right outcome.

The day the sentence was handed down was so emotional [Turnbull was jailed for 35 years]. Fran and I were next to each other, and we'd squeeze each other's leg or nudge one another as we listened. The judgement was such a relief.

Fran is so kind and selfless. She put everything aside to come and support us in the early days - and still does. When Jack got into the final of the Premier's Spelling Bee last year, Fran came to Sydney with us. Fran is there for both children's events as much as she can be. For someone who has never been a parent, she's just amazing with the children, and they adore her.

We've seen each other every three or four weeks since the court case. My family adore her and she feels more like a sister to me than anything. She's my closest friend.

The upcoming film, *Cultivating Murder*, directed by Gregory Miller, is about Glen Turner's murder and its implications for Australia's environmental protections laws. ■

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