

Trail to equestrian studies

Sixteen-year-old Olivia Rasheed lives on a remote property roughly 40kms out of Katherine.

Every school holidays, she and her younger sister journey more than 3,000 kms home to Gum Creek from Brisbane, where they pair board at St Margaret's Anglican Girls School.

Their family operates a transport company specialising in the cartage of livestock, hay and lick, while Mum, Belinda, is also a fashion designer and entrepreneur, co-founding the lifestyle fashion label Longrass Style.

When they are home, Olivia and Isabella busy themselves helping their Dad wash the transport vehicles, tend to their stud horses and assist with mustering on their family friend's cattle station.

Horse mad Olivia also loves nothing more than to ride her own horses Simon and Diva.

The upcoming Katherine Show is an important event on the calendar for the Rasheed family.

Olivia and Isabella, together with mum, dad and their two older brothers, will be competing in the show's camp drafting competitions.

"My sister and I compete in the same age group and sometimes we compete against mum and dad. They aren't very competitive, but my sister and I are!" she said.

Olivia's sister, Isabella, says she has one goal in competing in the camp draft competition: "Beat Liv. That's my goal. She beat me last time, so I really want to beat her this time."

For Olivia, being away at boarding school has not meant giving up her passion for horses.

She has been able to continue to improve her riding skills as a member of the St Margaret's camp drafting team which she has competed in since Year 7.

Furthermore, the Year 11 student is being supported to pursue equestrian studies when she leaves St Margaret's.

"I am planning to study Equine Science at university, which will focus on everything from the nutrition, breeding, exercise, physiology, rehabilitation, behaviour, and health and wellbeing of horses to the interaction between horse and rider.

"My ultimate career goal is to work in the equine industry, possibly as a horse dentist or horse chiropractor," Olivia said.

For the sisters, it was a big change moving to boarding at St Margaret's.

"I studied via School of the Air before moving so it was a big adjustment transitioning from remote learning to classroom learning. It was also a big jump being with everyone 24/7. I found it difficult being with so many other people every day because I basically grew up with just my sister at home, hours away from anyone else," Olivia said.

"However, I had the support of the housemothers and our Head of Boarding who helped me to settle in. There's always someone to talk to and the boarding staff are so kind and amazing, always putting a conscious effort into making sure we feel at home.

"Our school dog Luna also helps to fill the void for those of us missing our own pets back home."

Isabella also found the transition hard.

"I was very homesick in the beginning. Liv's presence offered great stability during this time. It was comforting to know I had someone in my family here.

"It was hard to get used to wearing a uniform and shoes!

"The housemothers really supported me and the girls. I now have a special bond with my fellow boarders," Isabella said.

Now, five years into her boarding school journey, Olivia said she went from being overwhelmed initially to suddenly appreciating the sisterhood surrounding her in the boarding house.

"I've come to realise it is a truly unique experience being with your friends 24/7. We've all grown up together and it's like having lots of sisters really. I feel the same about my friends as I do my own sister," Olivia said.

While an education and career opportunities were what led her to St Margaret's, Olivia's heart is in the bush and she is looking forward to embarking on a career in the equine industry which she hopes might eventually lead her back home to the Top End.

St Margaret's Anglican Girls School is an independent day and boarding school for girls from Pre-Prep to Year 12 and boys from Prep-Prep and Prep. In 2019 and 2020, the school won boarding school of the year in the Australian Education Awards.

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