



# From Jabiru to UQ: a conversation with Storm Barrett

By DARBY JONES

**Storm Barrett** is a proud Aboriginal woman born in the Northern Territory whose love for the natural world inspired her to pursue a Bachelor of Veterinary Science (Honours) at The University of Queensland (UQ).

## A long way from home

Storm Barrett was raised in Jabiru, the main township in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. It was here that her love for animals began.

Due to its National Park status, Jabiru has strict policies regarding pets, and no local veterinarian. However, Storm has fond memories of keeping pet snakes, due to her father being the local snake catcher. She also recalls times spent with local Elders, acknowledging that this is what fuelled her passion for the natural world around her.

"[The Elders] would talk to me about how everything was connected, like how seeing a particular kind of dragonfly means that the season is changing," she says.

While Storm admits that she always dreamt of becoming a veterinarian, she experienced immense self-doubt, and didn't believe that it was something she could achieve. Instead, she initially opted to study ecology at Charles Darwin University, admitting that this aligned with everything her Elders had taught her about interconnectedness.

As it turns out, Storm excelled in her ecology degree, passing with flying colours, and this is what motivated her to pursue her dream of becoming a veterinarian.

"Once I finished my ecology degree, I realised, 'I just got a degree—I could actually give it a go and go into vet!'"

## The pathway to UQ

It was at this point that Storm faced her first hurdle. In spite of successfully completing a degree in ecology, she faced rejection from the schools she had applied to due to the fact that she finished school in Year 11 and therefore lacked the required ATAR equivalent.

However, Storm was determined—she was not going to let this stop her. In response to this rejection, Storm applied to Murdoch University in Western Australia, where she completed additional academic units that contributed towards a Bachelor of Animal Science, paving the way towards her entry to UQ.

"I got a phone call to say I'd gotten in, but I didn't believe it until I actually got it in writing," she says.

In the lead up to her studies at UQ, Storm was fortunate to receive a Destination Australia scholarship,

a prestigious past scholarship that empowered students to pursue higher education in regional and remote areas of Australia.

Access to these types of scholarships fosters a diverse, well-educated workforce made up of students from various backgrounds. They contribute significantly to the growth and development of regional and remote areas.

## Support at UQ

In 2021, accompanied by her beloved horse Casino, Storm commenced the long drive to Gatton where she would live in a share house throughout the duration of her degree. She recalls getting stranded somewhere outside of Cloncurry, where she had to wait for raging floodwaters to recede.

Reflecting on the early days of her degree, Storm admits how difficult it was to be so far away from her home and her support network, acknowledging that she didn't realise how much she relied upon them until she had to leave. Thankfully, she has now found a home away from home at UQ's Gatton campus.

"It feels like a little clubhouse," she says. "You get to know everyone pretty quickly."

Storm is thankful for the overwhelming support from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (ATSIS) Unit at UQ. In addition to a monthly social lunch hosted at the Gatton campus, Storm has also taken advantage of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance and Retention (ITAR) program.

The ITAR program, offered through UQ's ATSIS Unit, provides students with supplementary academic tutoring in subject-specific areas from qualified tutors. Storm is incredibly grateful for the support she has received from this program, and believes it is a great opportunity to build your community at UQ.

"My tutor is great—she answers all my questions and reaffirms that I can do it," says Storm.

"You can also sign up to be a tutor yourself, which helps with income, reaffirms your knowledge, helps the other students, and builds your community."

## Representation matters

Storm's resilience and determination is contagious and inspires those around her (this writer included). She admits that completing her first degree inspired her own mother to go to university to pursue a career in nursing.

"When I finished my ecology degree, my mum went back to university and got her degree in her 50s, and she's now working as a nurse.

"I think when she saw that I was doing it she realised she could as well."

Storm hopes that her and her mother's pursuits will inspire her nieces and nephews and show them that they can achieve anything they set their mind to.

Storm has a strong desire to help those around her, sharing tales of her time with the not-for-profit organisation Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC). During a visit to the Tiwi Islands, she found herself talking to a local whose daughter dreamt of becoming a vet. Without hesitation, Storm offered to show her how to start the process.

"To go from living in a small town into vet is a huge thing—it seems so far and unobtainable," she says.

"Making people aware of all the support available can be a huge help."

## Looking towards the future

As for what's next, Storm expresses dreams of becoming a mixed practice veterinarian before returning North, where she could work in regional and remote areas.

In anticipation of the fifth year of her Bachelor of Veterinary Science (Honours) in 2026, she spoke to the importance of finding a placement in order to make her dream a reality.

"I'm trying to find my mentor for my fifth year," says Storm.

"I want to find the person who will support me and have my back—the person who will help me grow.

"That's the most important thing for me at the moment."

She is certainly far too humble to realise it, but Storm Barrett is an inspiration. Her achievements are a testament to what is possible when you pursue your passion and refuse to give up in the face of obstacles. Following her Bachelor of Veterinary Science (Honours) at UQ, her story will undoubtedly continue to inspire all those who imagine chasing dreams of their own.

**Darby Jones** is a freelance writer and editor with matrilineal ties to the Kamilaroi mob in Southwest Queensland. He has written for several national publications, such as Griffith Review Literary Journal, Island Magazine, and IndigenousX. For more information, visit [www.darbyjones.au](http://www.darbyjones.au).



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