



groovy grandfolk

Meet Sharlene and Ivan Cheetham, an adventurous couple who have been married for 33 years and whose family has grown to 13! They're only just getting started though and are excited to share their love, laughter and wisdom.

What was your childhood like?

I grew up in Toowoomba, Queensland, with my older brother. We had a pretty simple life. On the holidays my family went to the sleepy little town of Ballina where we swam every day and visited our relatives; I think those are my sweetest childhood memories.

Ivan grew up on a property near Cecil Plains which gave him plenty of opportunities to explore and help his family work on the farm. Growing up the oldest of five, Ivan always had someone to play with or, more likely, someone to annoy.

How did you meet?

We first met at a youth group event. I had never known anyone like Ivan before so from this encounter, I was curious to learn more about him. He was a fast mover too. We were married in less than a year!

The first few years of our marriage were spent on Ivan's farm. It was challenging but I gained new experiences and look back on that chapter with a smile. The farm was eventually sold and we moved back to Toowoomba.

We started our family and with our different skills, Ivan and I found ways to provide for our children. Ivan went back to his trade as a mechanic and as a stay-at-home mum I found ways to supplement our income. My last business was wedding styling, which I loved, but working weekends was a strain when trying to balance two teenagers and grandchildren as well. Family is a priority for me so when

I was offered a job, I quickly made the switch to being employed.

What adventures have you shared?

Everyday is an adventure! I believe the most adventurous thing we've done is have four children. Raising four unique kids wasn't an easy task; it was beautifully sweet and terrifying at the same time.

What do you love about being a grandparent?

It's an amazing privilege to be able to support our two oldest daughters in their journey of raising children. There is never a dull moment, which makes our lives busy, but it's worth it! I'm very aware of what we imprint on our grandchildren's lives, so having fun together is important. We read books, play, cook together, swim in the summer months and let them play in the dirt. Watching and interacting with them is so entertaining. So is listening to their perspective. We definitely have a wonderful dynamic now as a family of 13.

What fills your days now?

Ivan and I feel as if we're only getting started, we still have so much to give and teach. I'm a great believer that everyday counts towards something, so I often ask myself, "What did I build today?" Family is still our focus and we're intentional about developing strong relationships and living a healthy life. We learn so much from our kids, which I love. When we do get some alone time, Ivan and I go for a ride on his Harley and visit our favourite café and maybe go shopping.

What have been some big influences on your life?

Circumstances have played a big part in the direction of our lives, however other than my parents there aren't many people that come to mind. I'd say Ivan and I have been the biggest influence on each other as we have journeyed through life.

Communication is a huge part of our relationship and I think that's what has made our relationship so strong. Sometimes we're a bit like iron sharpening iron, drawing strength from each other and challenging each other too.

Ivan is an avid reader, so many authors have been an influence on his life, providing a lot of wisdom. Throughout our life people have encouraged us when we needed it most and we have tackled the challenges of life through seeking out the right information, which has been vital.

How would you encourage young people of today?

I would encourage young people to remember to be yourself. Don't fall for the comparison trap. Listening to those in your life who can guide and give good advice is also important. Seeking the advice of your peers isn't always beneficial, so look to those who are older and will listen to you. Lastly, don't be afraid and remember you give life to what you give energy to.