



Above: Geoff and Analee Isbister.

The Two of Us

STORY HELEN ELLIS, CALVARY MATER NEWCASTLE IMAGES WIXPIX STUDIO.

Dr Geoff Isbister is a Clinical Toxicologist, a specialist in snake and spider bites, at Calvary Mater Newcastle, and Analee, his wife, is a self-confessed arachnophobiac with a successful cake business, Cakes To Dream On. Here I get a brief glimpse into their busy and diverse lives.

Carrington based, Geoff and Analee live in a delightful, converted, large warehouse that doubles as business premises come family home. It is just as well, as they need plenty of room for their seven children, who range from five to thirteen.

The couple met over four years ago, through their children attending the same school. With a love of walking, quality craft beer and good food, to name but a few, this couple are blissfully happy!

I'm intrigued to know how their combined brood of seven children interact with one another. Analee says, "The children get along just like siblings – they 'fight and play' as siblings do! It's good that they are all around similar ages, so they always have someone to play with or keep company, which is lovely to watch."

The newlyweds; they married at home in March this year, Analee creating her own wedding cake, of course, both have demanding jobs and yet they still manage to balance a large family whilst making time for each other, I'm somewhat in awe.

Analee says, "I used to work as a legal secretary, yet I hated typing. Once I had children, I really craved a job I was passionate

about and would afford me flexible hours, that's how I started Cakes to Dream On."

Analee always had a passion for baking and remembers sitting on her grandmother's kitchen bench at three. In fact, it was her grandmother who first taught her how to bake and you could say 'the rest is history!'

Analee has been creating unique cakes for weddings, christenings and celebrations and now has a 'stack' of awards proudly displayed, the most recent being 'Best in Show' at the prestigious Tamworth Trade Baking Show.

Geoff admits to being only too happy to sample Analee's creations, with her cherry ripe and chocolate frosting being his particular favourites. Analee comments, "In my family, it is not uncommon to have a piece of cake for breakfast; it is something of a tradition," Geoff adding, "It is just as well I run to work, being surrounded by all these cakes could really take its toll!"

With so many little fingers around, I'm curious if Analee ever gets nervous about the fate of any of her cakes (according to my mother I was the number-one suspect for fingerprints in a freshly iced cake!). She says, "Oh no, the children definitely know not to touch the cakes, my business kitchen is a no-go area."

With seven children in tow and being the creator of intricate cake masterpieces, Analee clearly has plenty of patience. She says, "I'm currently working on an eight-tier wedding cake and for that I need to make 300 handmade sugar roses. For some people that might be arduous but for me I find it therapeutic; one of the favourite elements of my job is making the flowers. It is a 'labour of love' and I enjoy putting in the hours to create a cake that people will be delighted with."

Whilst Analee is clearly the master of cakes, Toxicologist Geoff is without doubt the specialist of all things venomous. As a specialist doctor at Calvary Mater Newcastle, Geoff treats patients for everything from snake and spider bites, to drug overdoses and is particularly intrigued by researching the toxic effects of venom.

Nicknamed by his colleagues as 'Doctor Therapeutic Nihilist' or 'Spiderman', Geoff spends the majority of his time proving that something does or doesn't work through his award-winning research and he recently won the 'John Gilroy Potts' award for 'Best Publication in 2011 by an emergency physician'.

As part of his job, Geoff is on call 24/7 for the Australian Snake Bite Project. Luckily, Analee has developed the knack of sleeping through these calls! Geoff is part of a team of specialists collating calls nationally from every snake bite case admitted to hospital and provides detailed research and medical papers about venomous snake bites and how best to treat patients.

Unsocial hours and travel are clearly a major part of his job, with Geoff making frequent trips to Sri Lanka to help spearhead a major snake bite study in that country. This is a large international research and collaboration study involving top research groups and toxicologists' throughout the world. Incidentally, Sri Lanka is a country both he and Analee have great affection for, including choosing to have their 'child-free honeymoon' there, the couple giving the local cuisine high praise indeed.

Geoff has also recently visited London as part of his role on the Editorial Board of the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology, another area that he is becoming more involved in and devoting his time to!

It is clear that Geoff and Analee are passionate about their careers, with Geoff saying, "When it comes to results for a piece of research, I get a pang of excitement. I think when you don't start to feel that drive it's time to change careers."

When questioned whether they think any of their children will follow in their career paths, Geoff says, "Pippa, one of our youngest, is currently crazy about bugs, so you never know,"

whilst Analee adds, "Emerson, our eldest daughter, is currently experimenting with cake making and decorating and this is something I'm definitely encouraging."

Watching this couple sit hand in hand on the sofa, I feel uplifted, for despite their vastly different careers and views on spiders, they are undoubtedly perfectly suited and happy!

One question is on my mind, however; how did Analee, with a deep fear of spiders, end-up married to 'Spiderman' as he is sometimes affectionately known? Analee laughs in her infectious way. "I flip out when I see a spider. However, let's face it I'm with the best man to calm me down; it's all in a day's work for my 'knight in shining armour!'"

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