

WE CHAT TO THE CAST OF *THE THORN BIRDS*, SOME 30 YEARS AFTER THE CLASSIC MINISERIES TOOK THE WORLD BY STORM

It's a sunny day in LA as *Thorn Birds* trio Richard Chamberlain, Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward sit down to reminisce about their very famous 1980s telemovie which acquainted a generation with the Australian Outback, and touched women then almost as much as *50 Shades of Grey* does today.

Despite the passing time, Chamberlain is still classically handsome in his 70s. Brown is still ruggedly handsome, and his real-life wife Ward is still slim, tanned and sexy.

What follows reads almost like a stream of consciousness as the actors give their very candid opinions on everything from the soap opera of *The Thorn Birds*, Hollywood and the very real romantic ending that the telemovie sparked.

Bryan, on the set, was there chemistry for you right away?

BRYAN BROWN: (Laughs) I can't do it, I've done it too many times ... no, there was with Rachel. I was shearing sheep in a scene when the director says, "Here comes Rachel now, you want to meet her." Rachel's a striking girl and I was not backward in recognising that.

RACHEL WARD: You took forever.

BROWN: I remember thinking that's a pretty shaky girl, and as an actor and a young man, I'd been in relationships where you get a relationship as a result of being in a movie and then it falls apart and then you've got to continue the movie and the tension and all that and I decided, "I'm not getting into trouble. This is the first job I've done outside the country and I don't want to be sacked and I don't want the leading lady to hate me, so I'm playing it cool," which to her (Rachel) excited the hell out of her. No one ever ignored her like this.

WARD: Let me speak for myself. Ever since I saw *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, I wanted a blue-eyed barbarian and Hollywood is the place to find them. So I found my blue-eyed barbarian and I left Hollywood, which was it.



THORNY SUBJECT
The Thorn Birds actors Richard Chamberlain (l-r), Rachel Ward and Bryan Brown reminisce about the classic miniseries.

The Thorn Birds

REVISITED

By the end of shoot, did you know you would spend the rest of your life with him?

WARD: The shoot went on forever, so we were practically divorced by then.

Do you remember how the ice was broken?

BROWN: Talking about these things now, I thought, I'm not going to get involved with this girl until after the first kiss we have in the show, so I knew that once we'd kissed on the screen, I'd be gone, but I was going to hang out and it did.

Where do the two of you live now?

BROWN: In Sydney.

What are some of your favourite places in Australia?

BROWN: One of our daughters has just moved to Bondi, which we are very proud of because we love Bondi and it will make us go there more often.

Richard, you're currently in a play at the Geffen Playhouse in Westwood,

California, and before that you were at the Pasadena Playhouse. Are you intentionally concentrating on theatre now?

RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN: Yes, two right in a row. I found learning the lines for the second one a trial. We only had two weeks.

So you had to learn the lines faster than for TV?

CHAMBERLAIN: Oh well, it's a whole different thing. In television, I used to learn my lines three days ahead for that particular day but unlike in theatre, you don't have to learn the whole thing at once and hold onto it.

So you will continue on this road, doing theatre?

CHAMBERLAIN: Yes. Well, I say I am very happy not working and, I am very happy working. So if the phone rings, that's fine. If it doesn't, that's fine.

Are you also still living in Hawaii?

CHAMBERLAIN: No, although I am hoping to go back from time to time. We [Chamberlain and partner Martin Rabbett] lived there for 32 years. It's a lot of palm trees and mai tais. It was time to come back.

WARD: Enough already!

Rachel, you have had some terrific co-stars but you chose Bryan and Australia instead of Hollywood?

WARD: Yeah. I did. I married an Australian and that's where I ended up. We did plan to spend a bit more time here [in Hollywood].

BROWN: We did. We bought a house in Malibu and in Sydney. We were young. I was older than Rachel but it was like, "Okay, what's this strange world going to be?" We were quite successful in people offering us jobs so we'll move between them when we have jobs and that sort of worked out all right until you start to have children. And then, it's they've got to go to a school. Where do you want them brought up and Rachel – what was happening in Hollywood wasn't satisfying to her. She was dealing with stuff and I've always loved doing stories in Australia. I loved telling our stories and I've been lucky enough to travel the world and tell other people's stories. Then that sort of led to Rachel deciding what she wanted to do, which was making film and directing film.

What projects are you currently working on?

BROWN: She's working with ABC in Australia.

WARD: I'm currently doing a telemovie, provisionally called *A Baker's War*, about a deserter in World War I who takes refuge in a French woman's farmhouse and she hides him throughout the war. So that's for ABC and it's a two-hour telemovie, which is in production at the moment.

What's the best part of life for all of you now?

CHAMBERLAIN: Friends. It used to be work and now it's friends. I also paint.

WARD: The kids have all just left home so for me it's my writing and directing career, for which I feel blessed because it sort of happened late and I am at that point in a career where it's all just happening for you and I'm like a pig in pork. I'm just loving the opportunities, really just having an adventure in a whole other career.

BROWN: Work for me has always been one of those things where I like it when I am doing it and when it's over, I am so glad I'm unemployed, where as I've had friends who go completely spare if they're like that. I've never been like that so, in a way I take it all terribly for granted and I shouldn't but I do. I expect that things will come up and they have come up and they take me to places. So what's central to me is being around my family. It's cliché but that's where I find my happiness, when I am knocking around with the kids, or when they are being demanding of me or they are giving me a hard time or my wife is, somehow, I like it.

CHAMBERLAIN: I like it. **TVS**



FLASHBACK
Ward and Chamberlain as their on-screen counterparts Ralph and Meggie.

Words by Diedre Johnson