

Warning message: [\(00:00\)](#)

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Brendan: [\(00:19\)](#)

That took all my strength, I always talk about taking the first step. That's probably the hardest thing you can do is accept that you actually got something wrong with you or acknowledging the fact that you need an out. You need a spell

Beverley: [\(00:33\)](#)

Father of three Brendan Cullan managers a 50,000 acres sheep station, 120 kilometers out of Broken Hill. Raised on his family property. It was always his dream to return and take over from his dad. He did get back for seven years but then the loss of his dreams together with the stresses of rural isolation and farming in the drought took it's toll. We all know about the depression caused by rural isolation. Here Brendan, his wife Jacinta and farming buddy Lance drill down to explain the factors that, cause it

Brendan: [\(01:06\)](#)

Jacinta, my wife and myself, we went managed a few properties before we went home. So I didn't just leave school and then go home. There was a window of opportunity, move back to a home and I thought, well this is the best thing ever. So we jumped at it straightaway and we, we moved into the shearers quarters, which is only about 50, 60 meters from my parents place. And the problem is one of the, one of the biggest issues is, is that with your working in an environment like that, whether it be in a family environment or a, uh, a managerial environment, you don't have the opportunity to walk out the door and leave your work environment. That's quite tough. So, your work environment not only is outside, but it's actually inside the house that you live in, uh, you don't have the chance to go home and sit down and, and just, just spend some time with your, with your wife and your kids. It can be a dangerous environment living like that because you know, you've always got someone looking over your shoulder and not intentionally, it's just you're living in each other's pockets and then unless you can find happy ground all the time, it can be quite difficult at times.

Brendan: [\(02:28\)](#)

So, and it did become difficult. But, through that process, I suppose I was home for the best part of let's say seven years,

Announcer: [\(02:39\)](#)

Succession

Brendan: ([02:41](#))

Yeah. Succession is quite difficult. There's so many, things attached to succession. When you've got family's on properties or say for example, parents, grandparents, even great grandparents, still involved in the farming, uh, enterprise. You have, it can be quite difficult because the younger generation or the last generation that is on that property, there's an expectation on those people. there's an expectation to succeed and I don't believe it's self imposed. It is spelled out to you sometimes. So, you're in a position where you think, gee, you know, this is a solid outcome, but at the same time you don't have an opportunity in making decisions because you don't hold the checkbook. So you can be working for nothing for a very long period of time hoping at the end of the day that you get the opportunity and you might be 60 before you get it.

Brendan: ([03:43](#))

And that is tough. I mean that is really tough. I, I admire anyone that goes through that situation. I couldn't, or I think I could envisage what was happening as opposed to my parents envisaging what was happening. So from that, from, from about three years on, basically I had to find the courage to say, well, you know, we've got to move on because I don't envisage that we have a future here anymore. And, that was bloody tough. It was really tough. So, we went through a, through a process there and to cut a long story short, we parted company which is probably the best thing that could've ever happened. It gave us the freedom to move on, but it probably also gave my parents the opportunity to move on as well.

Announcer: ([04:30](#))

Drought,

Brendan: ([04:34](#))

Droughts are evil bloody things.

Brendan: ([04:36](#))

And, so when you uh, fall into a drought and I say fall into, well not so much fall into a drought but you ease into a drought, always refer it to as a, as a disease. It, it starts from a long way out so you don't wake up in the morning and see it dusty outside and what not and your sheep are poor or your stock are poor, it starts from a long way. Sometimes you can have the best plans in place and if droughts lasts long enough, they'll take you down paths you've never been before. They find themselves working harder than they've ever worked before and you start in a strong position, you end up in a very ordinary position. Now, if you're in this position, you are today, two years ago,

and I asked you to say, now would you like to feed for the next two years.

Brendan: ([05:35](#))

Would you like to run your waters for the next two years, would you like to pull your sheep out of the bog for the next two years? Will you sign up for that? The first thing they go and do is think I'm crazy. There's no way in hell are we going to do that? The problem is at the end of the two year period after being in a full blown drought, is you find yourself in that situation and it has different levels because, uh, let's say for example, Broken Hill for instance there are some areas which had been in a drought a lot longer than other areas. So people's perception or even your own perception of how they're traveling might be completely different about how your traveling. So you constantly looking over the fence at each other saying, Oh who's doing it worse, who's doing it better?

Brendan: ([06:26](#))

you know, what's their management strategies, uh, are they doing it right? you know, should, I follow them so, but what ends up happening in a big drought is you're all end up in the same situation. And the, the unfortunate thing is, is they, most, most people end up having to deal with a lot of death.

Announcer: ([06:47](#))

Death.

Brendan: ([06:48](#))

Death is part of farming unfortunately. And and it always will be. Whether that be your own stock or whether it be you know, your native animals, whatever it may be. And in a lot of cases, a lot of people have to euthanize stock, a lot of stock and some people have the ability to be able to cope with that. And some dont. If you have a pet in the house and that pet's been part of your life for 10 years and you see that it's passing away for whatever reason, it has an enormous effect on not only you, but the house, you know, whoever's living in that house, well, you know, our, our domain, these farms, these stations out here, we have, we take great care in looking after our stock and after our pets.

Brendan: ([07:45](#))

And when that's compromised, that is quite difficult. So if you increase that single unit, say one dog, as your house pet into 10,000 head, you've got a whole lot of worry on your hands. You just need to take the emotion out of the game the best way you possibly can, but it'll come back and bite you every now and again. I mean, you, you're just inhuman if it doesn't affect you in some way or form. Some people have the ability to be able to deal with it and some don't. And the ones that don't, are the worry. And the ones that do it

does affect them but they just have the ability to be able to work with it. But, you know, people get affected by it.

Announcer: [\(08:25\)](#)
Self doubt,

Brendan: [\(08:27\)](#)
there's also a two fold effect that that has on people where they, they start drinking, they start, yeah, self-medicating, instead of having one beer a week. All of a sudden they're having six a night, all that, that type of stuff. So they lose the clarity of thought. And in doing that, their, their ability to be out of make, good sound decision starts to waver even though they think they are making good decisions. So you start doubting yourself. Your thinking of just you know, I'm going to lose the property my family are gonna think I'm a failure. Uh, where do I send my stock? It might be too late to send my stock, as they're too poor. I can't afford to feed anymore. Then all the, you know, internal stuff, you know self doubting starts to happen. Uh, and unfortunately people's coping mechanisms change. Their ability to be able to think clearly changes

Announcer: [\(09:38\)](#)
Isolation.

Brendan: [\(09:45\)](#)
You can have a lot of time on your hands. We get to spend a lot of time by ourself and a, we do a lot of miles in the car and we get a lot of time to think. And, you could probably say that you get into a situation where you can overthink things sometimes and I, I actually got into a situation there, I probably did it for best part of nearly 10 years where, if someone was sitting next to me, if you could look over my shoulder when I was driving around doing the waters, you would think that I was talking to someone next to me. But I used to have conversations, conversations with no one sitting next to me and basically have an argument sometimes. Which was, you know, always come out OK, but I mean you fill your head full of rubbish and, you exhaust, a lot of energy on nothing. But because it went on for so long, I just thought, you know, I've had this issue for a very long time. I've just had so much stuff going on in my brain for a very long time and I'm thinking I'm walking around being normal, but truly that wasn't the case. I was internally combusting

Jacinta: [\(11:04\)](#)
It was a fairly significant dry time so I assumed it was the drought but it turned out that it was, yeah, it was other things as well that were bothering him.

Brendan: ([11:19](#))

So if you put the drought, family pressure, succession all that sort of stuff tied into one, all of a sudden it becomes a pretty tricky situation. Therefore, a lot of people will fall into a depressed state. They won't even know they're in it. They won't even know they're in it. One of the issues is with growing up in the bush is you're constantly trying to prove yourself. What you do out there is basically your signature. Uh, your, you are completely in control of your actions and your actions basically tell who you are and how you are as a person. You know, in my case, I was well aware of that. I felt like I was coming off the long yard for half my life, uh, off the long run for half my life. And constantly felt as if I had to prove to either my parents, which I had no pressure there by the way, to prove but it was self imposed.

Brendan: ([12:24](#))

And for the people I worked for constantly prove that I was capable and then if something went wrong, you used to knock, I used to knock myself around about it. And if you're out in one of these places and you can't pull yourself out of bed in the morning to go to work yeah, you, you probably should be looking to do something else. So you put yourself under an enormous amount of pressure, undue pressure. A lot of times, a lot of times. What I used to do is I used to put, when I started working in the morning or I envisage what I need to do for the week, I'd write down a list and on that list I'd try and achieve everything on that list no matter what. And a lot of times, uh, I wouldn't achieve what I wanted to achieve.

Brendan: ([13:20](#))

So I created this massive workload for myself and, um, I wasn't happy until it was done. We went through a fairly significant drought in 2009, and what I was finding is, um, I was basically walking through the front door and walking out the back door and, you know, my kids were quite young. And actually a bloke tapped me on the shoulder and he said, you know, you better slow down otherwise you're not going to see these kids grow up. And what he meant by that is slow down. And I'm thinking, well how can I slow down when if I slow down or stop this place, it's going to fall down around my ears. And it would have, absolutely, it would have. So, you know, um, there was outside pressures, unbeknowns to them, but there was also more internal pressures as well. So with the, with what was going on with that drought, uh, probably I foresee it as a bit of micro management as well.

Brendan: ([14:21](#))

Um, and just, I actually started drinking more too. I probably was hitting the bottle more often than what I probably should have been and self medicating. I just felt tired. Not actually knowing where an out was, not actually knowing what, what can help me. I think that was my lowest point. Um, I couldn't find

solace in anything. I couldn't find it from my wife. I couldn't find it from, uh, from my family. I couldn't find solace. I couldn't find anything that was going to get me out of the situation I was in, which tells me like, now I can see that. Um, yeah, I was in a dangerous, dangerous space because I mean surely surely I can talk to someone about something and then I'll be right the next day. But it was a big slow turning cog.

Jacinta: ([15:27](#))

I think when I started to think in the drought, particularly when he was going out all the time and you know, every day there, you know, having to, to destroy animals. And I started to, you know, just little things. So I started getting nervous about him going out and things like that. And I just thought, Whoa, why am I even, why am I even thinking stuff like that, you know? And once you start thinking and worrying about things like that, you know, somethings, your gut, you know, your gut tells you that something's, something's not right.

Lifeline: ([15:59](#))

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Jacinta: ([16:18](#))

through his depression. I actually started to get my own a little bit. So, and that's probably from being worn out because you are trying to look out for them. And then because you know, um, he's a little bit on edge. You try and keep the children, um, you know, happy and you just try to, um, I guess over, sort of overly over compensate for what they may be missing out from dad. You make sure they're getting it from someone in that process, you are actually becoming exhausted yourself.

Brendan: ([16:53](#))

And yeah, I was emotionally exhausted and I was physically exhausted. And I remember standing in the doorway of the kitchen and I was looking at my wife and I was just standing there and my heart just went berserk. It just went. I thought I was having a heart attack and, um, oh, this is a worry. I said, Gee, my heart's bloody trying to jump out my chest. And then I knew, well, that's never happened to me. That's um, that's quite strange. And that was probably a trigger point to actually thinking that something wasn't quite right. Um, and then, you know bloody, I was crying a lot and you know, over stuff which probably wasn't relevant and this is what I was talking about earlier, that um, it creeps up on you. You don't actually know it's happening.

Beverley: ([17:47](#))

Things started to change for Bendon after he went to a royal flying doctors service life skills course. It was aimed at young farmers struggling with rural issues. And Brendan was asked to fill out a form. He ticked a lot of boxes and for the first time, realised he was suffering from depression.

Brendan: ([18:05](#))

The RFDS did a clinic, with a life coach Jill Rigney and, went to that. And we did a few things and I was thinking at the time, I'm thinking, Gee, it sounds like me, you know, this sounds, sounds horribly, like me, you know, you know, in a bit of a pickle here. So I decided that it might be time to, um, catch up with someone, you know, um, talk to someone about it. And that, that took all my strength. I always talk about taking the first step. That's probably the hardest thing you can do is accept that you've actually got something wrong with you or acknowledging the fact that you need an out, you need a spell. And, so I walked into the Broken Hill base hospital and, I met up with a couple of people and we sat down and had a conversation.

Doctor: ([19:02](#))

Yes Brendan if you have a look we've gone through a number of different things and you can see from the way that you've reacted that you....

Brendan: ([19:06](#))

And, they basically told me that I, had a, form of depression and I thought, right. That was a massive relief for me. I actually thought at the time, I just felt this enormous weight off my shoulders because I thought right, now and I know what's going on. Now I'm going to fix this.

Beverley: ([19:29](#))

When Brendan told friend and fellow farmer Lance about his depression, Lance was shocked, but as he considered his own increasing isolation. He realized his mate was not alone.

Lance: ([19:41](#))

Yes. It was a bit of a shock really. We didn't really expect it, we all thought he was on top of his game and everyone looked at him to, you know, thought he had everything organized and sorted, yeah. Well, sorta hit home a bit, sort of made me think about what I was doing and um, what was going on there really. And um, and once you sort of heard about it, you sort of noticed different people that you thought could, could have been covering up as well. And you just might conversation about it. Like when I first started, when I was 13, 14, I was at the end of the pack horse and at the start of this new age aerial mustering and all that sort of stuff. And then I go to learn a lot more. When you're riding back then you rode around on horses and you got a little bit more time to talk and take things in. It was obviously there, but they were a

lot bigger camps so you had a lot more blockes to talk too. Like I remember being in a mustering camp when I was about 15. I think there's 23 people in, in that mustering camp alone. So you had more, more of an opportunity to um, get things off your chest.

Brendan: ([20:46](#))

People look at people who have depression. And say, well, you know, it's a commonly used word. Um, you know, it's, over rated and whatnot or you know. You may be just in a, in a state where you're overworked, you're tired and you may not be depressed, but it's the prerequisite to fall into that state. So you're very close, it's a borderline and it's not actually up to you to make that call, allow someone else to make that call. And even if you are, if you, if there is a massive workload and your feeling under enormous pressure there's so many good options out there that can take that away from you, where it gives you some, extraordinary clarity in what you do. I was out of hospital and they put me on some medication, um, which was quite thankful for and during the period was on that medication, I, I harnessed some tools which are used, um, to get myself into a situation where I was thinking clearly and, but also kit those tools with me and I've got them with me right now.

Brendan: ([21:59](#))

So if I find, I find myself slipping into a situation where, aah, I'm going down this road again, I just pull them straight out of the toolbox and um, you know, put them into gear. I need to actually acknowledge where my thoughts were or what I was doing to create my own toolbox. And I knew damn well what they were. I just didn't want to act on any of it. Um, or if I thought I was, I wasn't really. So you need to accept where you faults are. What's actually making things tough for you. And um, for example, alcohol, you need to accept you're drinking too much. Um, so don't drink too much. But only you can tell yourself that. And if you've got the ability to tell yourself that and listen to yourself, well then you're on the right path. So one of the reasons for me to actually come out and express why I've gone through this, is to allow people to be able to come up to me and say, well, mate can you help me out. Because it's easier to come to someone like me or this is my perception as opposed to having to walk through those doors at hospital and with this, um, this lifeline ambassadorship that I fell into, it was a role that didn't even exist.

Brendan: ([23:27](#))

And, I was asked whether I'd take on the role and I just put my hand up straight away. And I said, well, Yep, I'd love to do it. Um, it gives them the opportunity to come up and have a chat and a discussion.

Lance: ([23:41](#))

I just thought it was good because, you know, at that stage on knew I had a

problem. I just thought it was good that he'd sorta told us all what was going on and it made it a bit easier to talk to him, as well. Yeah, just sort of give you that sort of bit of relief that you can actually talk in confidence with him about the same issues really. Oh, it's good to catch up and just get a few things off your chest and you know, you can vent a bit, just sorta you know you're around the right company. That, that's the main thing. Get it off your chest and, and that way you now you're not alone and you're not fighting a big battle on your own, which most times is in your own head. I struggled. I didn't like leaving the place, could you just felt as though it was going to fall apart if, if I did leave. For 12 months there, I went to town for three days and that wasn't three days in a row, it was one day here, one day there sort of in and out for the year. Um, and that got to be hard and that's when I sort of, I suppose that was probably the year everyone was telling me I did have a problem and I didn't believe them. Yeah it wasn't long after that I realized I did have a problem. It is a lot easier to do it with a mate. Sorta, you can, you can let them vent a little bit more. Oh it made a big difference. It was, it was a load off my mind. Like I said, you think you're the only one going through it and you don't want to put it out there coz you just don't want to deal with everyone else's problems coz you got your own to deal with, is the big thing.

Brendan: [\(25:18\)](#)

Look if there was someone in the district that knew out there that one of his mates or one of her mates, that was in strife. I'd be quite proactive in actually take it, making an advance and just asking me if they are okay. It's really important. They probably not going to get the answer that they think they should be getting though. They'll ask if they're okay, but they'll, they'll generally just say, yeah no, I'm doing alright. Knowing full well they're not. That's the tricky part I think when it gets to that point. Especially when the alarm bells are really ringing. Um, yeah, just ask how they are going and make the phone call. Yep.

Jacinta: [\(26:04\)](#)

It was almost instant really. He really, um, once he'd unloaded all that. He could see the, the light at the end of the tunnel. And he could see what he had to do. And now I can see when he, if he starts to possibly have feelings like that again, you can see him sort of stepping back and assessing it and then making the right choices.

Brendan: [\(26:27\)](#)

I learnt quite a few tools. And one of the biggest thing for me is exercise. Uh, it's a known fact that it helps with depression. And I've, sports always played an enormous role in my life. So, you know, I'd travel 140 k's to Broken Hill and go and play AFL. I didn't just do that because I enjoy it. I did it because it helped me. And you know, it was not uncommon for people to drive down the

ride and see me, with my joggers on running up the road. And they'd look at me and say why in the hell are you doing that? Well, I was doing it cause it made me feel good and you're punishing yourself, but you, the return you're getting is a, it's good. And so, I'm in a, I'm now swimming with a club in Broken Hill called Broken Hill aquatic, and, that's been enormous from me. It's a good out for me. So it gets me off the, off the station and I love my position here, but it's just a good out. Because you're doing something completely different. Um, and being different is not bad. Being different is good because it allows you just to do whatever you want and um, and that's empowering, as opposed to trying to, you know, follow the next person in front of you and try and be like the next person. Be Like, who you want to be. And that's taken me down in the road of, you know, doing ocean swimming and whatnot. So between ocean swimming, running, um, and working, life's pretty good at the moment. I'm trying to make up for lost time the best I can. And there'll be nothing that ever gets in the road of myself and my kids ever, ever again. Very proud of them all. Look, if I had to give someone a message, I would just say acknowledged the fact that you may need help. Even if you perceive that you don't, uh, if you're doing something that's not quite within your character or if you find yourself that you're under pressure, the best thing you can do is just acknowledge it first because that's the hardest thing. And then seek help, seek help. And once you seek help, it becomes very simplistic. After all, your in charge your own wellbeing, people out there that know there in a, in a situation that's not nice. Um, for them to be able to get on track, they need to search and look for help. It's quite difficult. There's no disguising that. Um, but once you take that first step, things get a hell of a lot easier.

Brendan: ([29:29](#))

The closest beach that, I've swam at is in Adelaide. Yeah. So that's about 500 odd km's from here. Yeah that's the only downside. Yeah. I wish I could get up in the morning, swim in the ocean every morning, but you know, I drive to town and do a couple of sessions there a week. And you got a couple of champion little kids there that, uh, a little bit out of place at times, but um, oh their robots, their absolute robots.

Beverley: ([30:04](#))

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