

ers at Albeni

they are just absolutely lovely people.” That determination has clearly been with the family from the beginning, with Graeme and Susan self-made people, slowly building up their businesses over the years.

Graeme grew up in Banana and was one of eight children. After he finished school, he spent four years working for several industry identities including Charles and Grace Lund, the Hicks family, and Ron and Pat Elliott. He then spent eight years working in the mines but always had a view of returning to the land, and purchased his first property, at Banana, in 1977. In 1984 they sold this and bought Albeni.

He and Sue have expanded as they have needed to, now with a collection of three properties, including one aggregation, all in Central and Western Queensland districts.

That sense of determination is also obvious when you consider the two of them raised five children with an age gap of 10 years between the eldest and the youngest.

Added to that mammoth effort, the children were taught via distance education by Susan, who immigrated to Australia from England in 1971.

The qualified teacher taught all five of her children over a period of 16 years, and attributes their success not to her teaching abilities, but to the environment they grew up in and the opportunities that come with learning in one of the world's best classrooms – the bush.

She said they are a perfect example that distance-educated children can turn out to be successful and well-adjusted adults.

The oldest son Alex (31) is first officer in charge of the base for Cobham, a subsidiary of Qantas in



Susan and Graeme McDonald near the airstrip on their Springsure property, Albeni.

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Darwin, while Ben (28), the next in line, has a sheep property at Wyandra, which he signed up for around his 21st birthday. Susan said their third son Nick (25) was in the military and more recently Nick has been out of the army flying his Super Pumas.

The final son Sam (21) is a tradesman mechanic who became one

in record time of about two-and-a-half years, and is now working on the machinery for the Singapore army.

Finally, the baby and the only girl of the children Elise (20), who according to her mum could put her hand to anything, is back at home on the family property. “She doesn't like to fly though,” Susan said.

Now the book is almost complete, Susan said it feels like forever that she's been working on it and will be pleased to have it on book stands.

“I have this dream of sending the book to Baz Luhrmann who made *Australia* – I think that would be fun to do the film on location at Albeni,” Susan laughed. “You've got to dream,

don't you? You won't know what's going to happen.

“The biggest thing to come out of this is how blessed we are to have such great family and wonderful friends.

“That's what life's about – it doesn't really matter about anything else, as long as you have your kids and your family and your friends.”



Two of the four pilots in the McDonald family, Graeme and Sue McDonald, pictured with their Cessna 182T. Graeme claims he is the better pilot of the two, while Susan would like to think otherwise. Two of their five children are also passionate about flying, turning it into their day jobs. Alex flies a Boeing 717 for Cobham Australia, while Nick flies Super Pumas, flying both offshore and in search and rescue operations.

Two generations of McDonald family flying high

FOUR pilots out of a family of seven and two 'wannabe' pilots clearly paints a picture that the McDonald family loves to fly.

With both Sue and Graeme having had their licences for over 15 years and two of their four boys flying for a living, it seems they all have the bug.

Well, they almost all have the bug, bar the baby Elise, who would typically have her eyes closed during a flight and would rather her feet firmly on the ground.

Owning scattered properties, living 135km from the nearest town Springsure, and over 500km away from the Yeppoon and Brisbane – boarding schools all five children attended – being able to fly is a handy skill to have.

Graeme had always wanted to fly, and owning several isolated properties

was the perfect excuse to get hold of a plane, a Cessna 182T in this case, and make any excuse to fly.

“Living out here is a very good reason to fly. A lot of people would say the reason they don't fly is because they don't enjoy it,” Graeme said.

Enjoying flying isn't a problem for either of them, giving 'back-seat driving' a whole other meaning.

Susan said because they both love to fly, it's first in best dressed with who has the flying honours, and a bit of a competition as to who is the better pilot on their family trips.

Susan had never considered getting a pilot licence when she was younger, but jumped at the opportunity when it came up.

“It wasn't really anything I'd ever thought about, but the writing was on the wall that one day we were going to

have a plane, and I thought I wasn't going to have a plane sitting in the shed and not be able to fly it,” Susan said.

“There are times where you need someone else to fly.

“It was never a 'got to do' but when the opportunity came up, I thought 'why not' – I do enjoy it.”

However, for sons Alex and Nick, flying was a 'got to do' and something they have both made successful careers out of.

“The eldest fella was going to be Superman when he was three, then he was going to be an astronaut, so he always knew that he wanted to fly.”

Alex flies a Boeing 717 for Cobham Australia, while Nick flies Super Pumas, flying both offshore and in search and rescue operations.



It has been a challenging few years for the McDonald family following cattle theft allegations in 2006 which were later dropped. Susan has spent a whole year penning a book about the experience, which is in its final stages. Pictured are Graeme, Susan and Elise McDonald – not even half of the big family – with sons Alex, Nick, Ben and Sam absent.