



# Pauline Hanson

*November 1996*

**P**AULINE HANSON MAY BE BREACHING the *Racial Discrimination Act* when she speaks, but she's definitely breaking the law when she drives. There was no catching her at 115 kilometres per hour on the Cunningham Highway in Queensland one evening recently as we hurtled towards her farm at dusk, under a bank of clouds and a mob of black crows, past (no kidding) Goebels [sic] Road, and into the void of the bush.

Pauline Hanson thought it was a hoot, and her staffer-cum-domestic helper-cum-friend and fellow-traveller, Cheyenne MacLeod, said it was, for Hanson, a slow drive. 'You should see her when she's really travelling,' MacLeod said, laughing.

Pauline Hanson loves the rush of adrenaline. Her voice might quake in Federal Parliament, but in her heart there pumps the blood of a thrill-seeker. She lives close to the edge, in this case an hysterical environment which has spawned one of the most noisome racial debates this country has ever witnessed.

The stench has been all too well described. A politician refusing to represent her black constituents; adults and children of non-Caucasian background physically attacked, spat at, verbally abused or just simply made to feel like strangers in their own land; relations with our Asian-Pacific neighbours undermined; tourism and trade threatened; our reputation as an open, tolerant society defamed; and, perhaps most importantly, our sense of ourselves impoverished.

All blandishments and pleas to Hanson for commonsense or compassion have fallen on deaf ears. Her continual refrain has been that racism and bigotry are as old as the First Fleet; and that it is multiculturalism and generations of Aboriginal privilege which have created the divisions, not her.

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Far from being a racist, she says she is merely speaking for the silenced majority. Look at the polls and the flood of letters! What she ignores is that it is not just what she has said—although that, too, seems to have been based largely on fish-shop gossip and background briefings from her political Rasputin, John Pasquarelli—but the inflammatory way in which she has said it that has caused such a furore.

I have come, therefore, to Ipswich to try to understand the woman who has fired these muskets; a woman who has been both pilloried and lionised for her views, particularly on Aborigines and Asian immigration.

I have come to a working-class town that bears little resemblance to the cosmopolitan centres of Australia, a railway town of God and Rugby League worshippers that has been the butt of countless Brisbane jokes but which has thrown up over the years its local heroes such as Bill Hayden, Neville Bonner, Sir Llew Edwards, footballers Allan Langer and the Walters brothers and now, if you believe the same headlines, Pauline Hanson. A town where, unless you are talking about massive economic upheaval and unemployment, a lost generation of youth, fear of violence—yes, the fraying of an entire community—you are talking a foreign language.

To understand the formation of what has become a phenomenon is no easy task because while Pauline Hanson is a flamethrower on sensitive and complex issues of public policy, setting the country alight with her political credo, she is highly secretive about her private life. Broach it and you can virtually feel the daggers drawn.

‘My private life is my private life,’ she says indignantly as we sit at her dining table. It’s no-one else’s business but my own. I am not having a public discussion on my private life. And that’s it. End of story.’

There are a couple of risks in doing this story. First, there will be those who will argue that it further boosts the profile of a woman who should never have been given a forum in the first place; that, now when the dust is perhaps settling, we are continuing to turn, in the words of one commentator, a ‘misfit into a megastar’.

The second risk is that in trying to examine Pauline Hanson’s life, we end up on an excursion through the ugly, primal landscape of the Australian character where bigotry and racism have always played their part, but which a noble bipartisanship in recent decades has attempted to obviate. By revisiting such tribal prejudices we’re in danger of causing further offence at home and abroad.

And yet the dark phenomenology of ‘Hansonism’ is here. She has not vaporised politically as some forecasters hoped. Media-driven though much of it might have been, she has been discussed passionately on trams, buses, in cafes, pubs, around dining tables, in local and State governments

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and, of course, in the national Parliament. An examination of her character and the issues she has raised, as well as a chronicling of how she ever got to this point, therefore demand our attention.

For those who wish this sordid saga had never been aired, spare a thought for the people in Hanson's private life, particularly her four children.

Her 13-year-old daughter from her second marriage has been subjected to kidnap threats and is now escorted to and from school. She is monitored closely by security officials. Hanson's eldest son, from her first marriage, with whom she hasn't spoken in nearly six years, lives literally in fear of his life. He works in a dangerous industry alongside Aborigines and people from mixed ethnic backgrounds. He waits for someone to learn who his mother is. Her second son refuses to speak to his mother.

There's also her eldest son's grandmother, Hanson's former mother-in-law, who almost single-handedly raised this son. She is an elderly woman who survived Dachau concentration camp and arrived in Australia with her three-year-old child (Hanson's first husband) after the war. She is petrified that Hanson wants to have her deported. You can see it in her trembling hands. When asked about this, Hanson declines to comment.

Then there's Hanson's second husband, Mark. He has been served with a Supreme Court writ by his former wife for having spoken to Brisbane's *The Courier-Mail* about their marriage. Understandably, he has declined to talk to me.

Hanson, herself the subject of death threats, inspires fear (and adulation) not just in the wider community, but closer to home as well. The result is a grim sketch of domestic upheaval and unalloyed bitterness.

**I**PSWICH, ABOUT 45 KILOMETRES SOUTH-WEST of Brisbane and the heart of Pauline Hanson's electorate, is an easy town to malign if you find stereotypes comforting. It's easy to concentrate on the grime and the earth removers and the roaring lorries instead of the palms and flowering jacarandas and level homes that sit on a rim overlooking the Bremer River. It's easy to focus on the racism and bigotry instead of the goodwill and moral rectitude which permeates the churches and charities. It's easy to see this as a town that turned on Labor instead of one that has always displayed mercurial voting habits. It's easy to see this as a provincial hub that has nothing to do with the sprawling metropolises, rather than everything to do with them.

In another incarnation the city might have become the capital of Queensland. Today it is the dumping ground for Brisbane's prisons and

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mental institutions, but also where a nationally recognised, multi-million-dollar computerised library service called Global Info Links is situated and where a third Queensland University campus will soon go.

Still, the smart city concept is lost on many proud railway families who have watched with increasing dismay over the past decade and a half as the central pillars of economic life have toppled. Seventy per cent of the mines have closed, along with steel fabrication factories, wool scouring mills and railway workshops. Thousands of jobs have vanished.

In 1987 Reids, the biggest department store in town, burnt to the ground. Mark Hinchliffe, editor of Ipswich's local paper, *The Queensland Times*, describes it as a devastating blow to the city. 'It was 120 years old,' he said, 'and it was the heart of the city. They were desperate times.'

The 1980s were also times of significant social and demographic change with white Anglo-Saxon families being thrown into poverty and an increasing number of Aboriginal and migrant groups from countries like Vietnam, Taiwan and Tonga moving into the old housing commission areas that form part of Brisbane's western suburbs, the eastern extremity of Hanson's electorate.

**P**AULINE HANSON, 42, IS A THIRD-GENERATION Australian. Her father Jack Seccombe's parents were English migrants. Her mother Hannorah Webster's people came from Ireland. For 25 years Jack Seccombe was something of a local identity. He worked 106 hours a week running Jack's cafe, an all-purpose milk bar in Brisbane, which local legend would assert made the best hamburgers not just in Australia 'but in the whole world'. All seven children were raised with a strong work ethic—they were expected to iron their uniforms, peel the onions, haul the potatoes, hang the gherkins and pickled onions in the windows . . . Jack was the reserved, emotional one; Hannorah, the obdurate one who pulled her children into line.

Indeed, she is not a woman you'd want to cross. Hard-boiled and feisty, she displays the same angry defiance as her daughter, especially when it comes to defending her now-famous daughter or expounding on the virtues of old-fashioned discipline and child-rearing. 'Now, Pauline brought up national service [in her maiden speech],' she says. 'That came from me because Pauline was too young to know anything about national service.'

Pauline Seccombe left school in Brisbane at the age of 15. Two years later she was married—to a European migrant, Graham Powkowski. Powkowski is not his real name. Although recently identified in a

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newspaper article, he has asked that his name not be used so that his mother and, particularly, his son can remain anonymous. He says now that his life became a nightmare from the moment he met Hanson. He claims she became pregnant and that her family applied enormous pressure on him to marry her. 'I didn't want to marry her. She wasn't a person I was in love with. The only reason I got married was I thought it was the right thing to do, but I went through living hell because of that woman.'

Shortly after the birth of their son, Simon (not his real name), the couple separated, just when she had become pregnant again with her second son, Steven. Graham Powkowski has never accepted that Steven is his son. Hanson has always insisted the opposite and urged him to have a DNA test to prove paternity. Powkowski declined, saying it would have still been inconclusive. 'I believe I know who the father is,' he told me. 'When Steven was conceived she was seeing him. I have no doubts in the depth of my soul he is not my son.'

Hanson has not spoken with Simon for nearly six years. He was effectively raised by his paternal grandmother, Ruby Powkowski, and to this day feels devastated by his sense of abandonment by his mother. He refuses to discuss her. She and Steven are also not on speaking terms, although their estrangement is more recent.

In her electoral office in Ipswich, where we met for the first time, Hanson rebuffed all questions on her two marriages but was prepared to castigate both these sons for not showing her sufficient respect. 'Now, I've gone out of my way to look after the children . . . because they are my responsibility and nobody else's,' she said. 'And when your children turn around and give you a kick . . . you sort of think, what for? I've done nothing wrong.' Why did they give you a kick? 'Because they don't like what I have apparently told them [about not showing me enough respect]. I am not going to be used by anyone, even my own children, and expect to cop it.' Hanson sees similarities between these two sons and Graham Powkowski. 'Same sort of arrogant attitude,' she has explained. 'He's a very irresponsible person. And they're sort of. It's in the genes.'

Hanson has been outspoken in support of family values and has criticised those who exploit the welfare system. Asked whether it was true—as I have been told—that when she was receiving child endowments for all four children she declined to pass on the allocation for her first child, Hanson snaps: 'I'm not going to answer that.'

Hanson's second marriage in 1980 to Mark Hanson, a plumber on the Gold Coast, was no less acrimonious when it ended seven years after it began. He has told the *The Courier-Mail* that he, too, had felt pressured into marrying her because she was pregnant. 'I feel I was blackmailed into it,' he said.

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Hanson has rejected this. She believes he is motivated by a vendetta because of her decision to leave him over what she says was his drinking problem.

Early in their marriage, life was more joyous. The wedding was followed by a honeymoon swing through South-East Asia. She hated it. 'I have no intention of going there again,' she has said.

Mark Hanson can plead special insight into his former wife's views on race. They were once partners in his plumbing business and included among their clients an Aboriginal organisation. She always referred to Aborigines as 'black bastards', he has said. Hanson has denied this, saying: 'Surely the fact that we did business with them demonstrates I am not a racist.'

**I** FLEW TO BRISBANE IN LATE October to try to meet Pauline Hanson on a day of typical pandemonium. Her name was on every news bulletin in the country and she could barely move without colliding with the media. On one front, the major political parties had just declared war (temporarily) against her and a bipartisan resolution condemning intolerance and racism was in the air. Indignation and outrage had gathered at home and, within a week, was to spill out of Asia.

On another front, Hanson was considering a move to the Senate or forming a separate political party. The polls were buoying her. Ultra-right-wing groups such as the League of Rights were singing her praises and an avalanche of congratulatory faxes, letters and phone calls were continuing to pour in. Four thousand copies of her incendiary maiden speech were on order.

She was impossible to get to. I'd left three messages seeking an interview. No response. I'd tried her switchboard dozens of times. The three lines going in were jammed from morning till night. The only option seemed to be to get to Ipswich.

When I finally arrived, it was to the sound of music. A song written by a local crooner was blaring from a tape deck in Hanson's office. It sounded like Slim Dusty gone up-tempo: *Pauline, Pauline . . . Ipswich worker's hero; Pauline, Pauline, Oxley's number one . . . She's got little Johnny Howard and Beazley on the run, our fish and chip shop hero, to us she's number one . . .*

Hanson appeared cordial but wary. (She knows only too well now how journalists can twist things.) We shook hands. She was wearing a plum-coloured cotton suit and pink earrings. She looked composed but the quaver in her voice was a give-away. We began by talking about

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religion ('I'd call myself agnostic'); her parents and six siblings ('We're a close family. Do anything for each other but not in each other's pockets.');

and her childhood. ('It's a part of your life that's finished with, gone . . . but I sometimes feel I'd love to step back in time and go back to those days again.')

She seemed artless and vulnerable. She smiled rarely but said that was because when talking to the media she was terrified of being quoted out of context. She was astounded by the attention she'd received. 'How many have songs written for them and flowers dropped off?' she said.

I asked who her best friend was. Ten seconds later she replied, 'No, that's a hard one.' Another 20 seconds and she ventured Cheyenne MacLeod or Barbara Hazelton, an aide to former National Party Senator John Stone and now Hanson's personal assistant. 'I haven't had time to get a social life out there,' she said. 'For the past 10 years I've been too busy working 80 to 90 hours a week [in the fish shop]. And when I wasn't working it was like, look after the kids or clean the house or try and get some sleep.'

We then hit the Arctic Circle of her two marriages and two elder children, so we moved to the warmer currents of her shop. I asked her how much she borrowed to buy the business. 'I'm not telling you because it's private, too.'

Fair enough, although from what I can judge she is not living in Struggle Town. She has a property worth an estimated \$500,000 outside of Ipswich, an apartment in town and the shop, which is on the market. According to one newspaper report, she has assets valued at more than \$700,000.

We kept on moving, this time to Morrie Marsden, her former lover, campaign manager and nephew of the man who sold her the shop. 'Where did you get his name from?' she asked. 'Who've you been talking to?'

An ice-breaker was called for. I told her she seemed nervous and suggested continuing the interview over dinner or drinks. She said: 'What I will do is invite you out to my place [tonight] and cook dinner there. You can meet my [two younger] kids [Adam and Lee].'

**P**AULINE HANSON HAD NEVER REALLY shown much of an interest in—nor aptitude for—politics until the Labor mayor of Ipswich, Dave Underwood, was overthrown three years ago in a coup orchestrated by his fellow Labor aldermen. She had worked as a barmaid and, after her divorce, had bought what must now be the most famous fish and chip shop in the Southern Hemisphere. The shop was to become her political

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nursery. It was right in the middle of the fifth council division on Blackstone Road. Customers would come in, order their battered snapper, and gripe about the whole place going to the dogs. Hanson was all ears.

At the time she was going out with Rick Gluyas, an ex-policeman and close associate of Dave Underwood. Gluyas was appalled by what the ALP machine had done to his friend. He wanted to run for council and he encouraged Hanson to do the same. They became part of a mini-revolution. At the 1994 council elections Ipswich tossed out a council of 10 Labor aldermen and one Independent and replaced them with 10 Independents and one Labor. Pauline Hanson was one of the Independents.

She wasn't given much time to distinguish herself before the then State Labor government decided, without consultation, to merge Ipswich council with its neighbouring Moreton shire. This forced an election two years early. When Hanson lost by 130 primary votes she became, according to Labor councillor Paul Tully, the shortest-serving council member in Ipswich since 1860. In her brief time on council she gave clues to her eventual tub-thumping on race. She opposed an Aboriginal kindergarten on the grounds that there were already enough kindergartens in the area.

While journalists covering council meetings thought her timid during those first public appearances, she was also revealing a short fuse, the kind that was to become a hallmark of her political persona. Paul Tully recalls a weekend 'bonding' session with fellow councillors where they were asked to talk about themselves and their policies. All was going well until Hanson reportedly said: 'I am Pauline Hanson and if I want anyone to know about me I will speak to them privately.'

When everybody had recovered, the last councillor, Sue Wykes, declared she had taken over from Hanson as barmaid at the local Booval bowling club. 'Which proves old barmaids never die,' Wykes said. 'They go on to become city councillors.'

'With that, Pauline Hanson stood up and left in a rage and we didn't see her till the next day,' Tully says, 'She was absolutely livid and disgusted that someone had exposed her as a former barmaid.' Asked eventually about this in her parliamentary office, Hanson says, fuming: 'That's their opinion. I didn't storm out of any meeting.'

On August 2 last year, Hanson made her now historic decision to join the Liberal Party. Incredible as it may seem, three months after attending her first Liberal Party meeting she was preselected from a field of three to contest the seat of Oxley, the seat Bill Hayden had held for 27 years until his appointment as Governor-General in 1988. (The ALP's Les Scott was to hold it until this year.)



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Steve Wilson, local Liberal heavyweight, staunch church-goer, fierce advocate of corporal and capital punishment, as well as opponent of homosexuals 'and anyone else morally wanting', takes credit for choosing Hanson and cultivating her political ambitions. 'She was a good bit of gear at the beginning of the race,' he tells me. 'She was a small businesswoman who worked hard, had had her fair share of knocks and had a genuine concern for the people. A classic Liberal . . . she was pick of the bunch.' Her preselection speech was all about unemployment and the pain of working-class families.

Within a couple of months she was to become a dilemma for the party because of a bellicose letter she'd written to the local *Queensland Times* deriding Aborigines for their privileges. Phil Nickerson, the newspaper's chief of staff, tried to dissuade her from having it published. 'It was the first time we had ever heard about her preoccupation with Aborigines,' he told me.

The letter was published on January 6 but it was only five weeks later, on February 14, after an angry Paul Tully had written to the Queensland division of the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister himself demanding action over Hanson's views, that she was dis-endorsed. The day after her election victory she caused an uproar when, in claiming victory, she disavowed her black constituents. Denying she was a racist, she said it was unfair that indigenous Australians were getting preferential treatment. She said she was fighting for the 'white community, the immigrants, Italians, Greeks, whoever, it really doesn't matter—anyone apart from the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders'.

Hanson would have won the seat of Oxley whatever the Liberal Party had done, such was the disenchantment with Labor, even in its safest Queensland seat. But how she managed to garner the biggest swing against the government in the country—nearly 23 per cent on primary votes—takes a little more explaining.

According to David Hammill, State ALP member for Ipswich and a former minister in the Goss government, Hanson's stunning victory was aided and abetted by the publicity surrounding her dis-endorsement and the Liberal Party's failure to field another candidate. 'She was still listed as a Liberal on the ballot papers,' he told me, 'and local [National and Liberal party] activists were working for her on her campaign and in the polling booths handing out how-to-vote cards.'

Morrie Marsden, her campaign manager, dismisses out of hand any suggestion that voters might have been confused about which party Hanson belonged to. 'Look, with the amount of publicity she got everybody knew she wasn't standing as a Liberal candidate,' he said. 'The biggest thing she had going for her was her attitude. She has an attitude that you don't fail.'

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Hanson's attitude also allowed her to pass on her preferences to a neo-Nazi named Victor Robb. When asked about this Hanson says she merely marked the ballot paper according to the order in which the candidates were placed. She was number one, Robb was number three. This, of course, seems naïve at best, disingenuous at worst.

**T**HE MAIDEN SPEECH THAT ROCKED the nation has been picked over now probably more times than any other speech of its kind in Australian political history. So, too, have the explanations for how she ever managed to strike such resonant notes with her call for the abolition of multiculturalism and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, ATSIC; her denunciation of so-called Aboriginal privileges and her warning that Australia was in danger of being swamped by Asians.

Despite her and her family's claims that she has been grossly misrepresented by the media, it is quite clear from all that she says she has migrants, particularly Asians, and Aborigines clearly in her sights. So, too, has her political adviser, John Pasquarelli.

Her distortion of facts, her reliance on hearsay, her savage and emotional denunciations and over-simplification of complex issues have been glaring.

'I am fed up to the back teeth with the inequalities that are being promoted by the Government and paid for by the taxpayer under the assumption that Aboriginals are the most disadvantaged people in Australia,' she told the House of Representatives on September 10. '[I] challenge anyone to tell me how Aboriginals are disadvantaged when they can obtain three and five per cent housing loans denied to non-Aboriginals.'

She said nothing about the historical and social calamities that have befallen Aboriginal people—nothing about their higher infant mortality rate, shorter adult life expectancy, endemic unemployment, dramatically higher rates of incarceration, disease or poverty. She said nothing about the fact that there would be few Aborigines in Australia today whose parents, grandparents or great-grandparents were not murdered, imprisoned, starved, forcibly removed from traditional lands or wrenched from their mothers and fathers by Europeans.

'I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. Between 1984 and 1995, 40 per cent of all migrants coming into this country were of Asian origin. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate.'

'Totally without foundation,' retorts Dr Stephen FitzGerald, former Australian ambassador to China and chairman of the 1985 committee that

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advised the Federal Government on Australia's immigration policies. 'They don't form ghettos any more than people from Europe did or, in earlier stages of immigration, people from Ireland did. What happens is that in the first stage of immigration people concentrate in a particular area, but once they get established they start moving out.'

Sitting now in her living room of cypress pine and silky oak, the Gene Pitney song *Town Without Pity* (seriously) playing on the stereo, I ask her if she's ever known an Asian person or had an Asian friend. She replies: 'I employed an Asian person [a Laotian] last year in my shop. She worked for me for four months.'

And what about other Asian people you know? Thirteen seconds later, Hanson says through clenched teeth, 'Not a whole lot that I know.'

IT WOULD BE WRONG TO suggest that an evening with Pauline Hanson, her children and Cheyenne MacLeod is an entirely unpleasant experience. It is not, although when MacLeod unwrapped a stack of chops for dinner and I informed her I didn't eat meat, I thought momentarily that it was going to be a short-lived one. Hanson raised her eyebrows and shook her head slightly as if I'd just confessed to membership of the Communist Party. But she recovered. 'Spumante or Bundy?' she asked. I opted for Bundy. While the carrots and peas were defrosting I asked Hanson if she always drove so fast. She giggled like a schoolgirl and then poured us two very stiff drinks.

Her son, Adam, 15, walked into the kitchen and asked his mother to explain the last stanza of a Wilfred Owen poem: *And bugles calling for them from sad shires*. Hanson said it was about war, then shrugged her shoulders and suggested he ask me. Adam and I talked for a few minutes before he went off and watched *Braveheart* for what his sister, Lee, 13, claimed was the umpteenth time that month.

For a good part of our interview, Lee sat and listened to us talking. She told me that all her friends agreed with what her mother had been saying. (This squared with my conversation earlier that day with two Year 12 students. They loved Hanson, admitted being racist, claimed that Aborigines were just as racist as them, and said they could express their opinions more freely now because of Hanson's arrival on the political scene.)

Hanson's house is a hacienda of polished floorboards and wood panels on 65 hectares of grazing country boasting 25 head of cattle and a number of Arabian horses. A couple of years ago, when she and Ipswich councillor Rick Gluyas ended their relationship, she bought out his estimated

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\$250,000 share in the house. How she managed to raise the money for that she will not say.

The living room reveals a matching floral lounge and dining suite, a few ornaments over an unused fireplace and a small statue of a Filipino man riding a buffalo. It feels decidedly barren, perhaps because she and her children moved here 'permanently' only a few months ago from their apartment in Ipswich, or perhaps because Hanson is in Canberra all week when Parliament sits, during which time the children are normally looked after by the ever-faithful MacLeod or Barbara Hazelton.

Or perhaps it's because there is a frostiness about Hanson herself which even a Bundy-soaked evening will not penetrate. Her face seldom softens into a smile. When it does, she is transformed: less pinched and paranoid and unforgiving: more like a woman whose heart you might appeal to. But not now: not with me. Her political adviser, former crocodile shooter John Pasquarelli, has been on the phone twice, wanting to know which magazine I am from. *Good Weekend? Bad Weekend?* Hanson doesn't know.

The conversation turns to the Gold Coast where she worked as a cocktail waitress in the early 1970s at the Penthouse Nightclub, the same venue that introduced dwarf-throwing to an unimpressed world 12 years ago and where she was feted like a diva when she returned last month.

'It's just wonderful that it's a tourist destination,' she says, 'but the average Aussie out there is saying, "It's not the Surfers Paradise that we used to know." People are sort of feeling that they're losing something that was theirs. Like you're in your country but it's another world. By all means allow investment into the country, but I think we've got to be selective. If you're not an Australian citizen I don't believe you should be able to own property in this country. We're losing control of this country.'

Hanson talks of her patriotism, her anger at 'inequalities'; the reverse racism of Aborigines, the fear and struggle and pain in her community: the suffering of the Aussie bloke—'I think the most downtrodden person in this country is the white Anglo-Saxon male,' she says. 'I think they've hit the bottom of the barrel. It's got to the stage where I think the balance has swung too far [in favour of women] and men don't know what to do. "Gee, do I open up the door or don't I? Is she a feminist or is she not?"'

Are you a feminist? I ask. 'No,' she replies without hesitation.

I ask Hanson who she most admires. Fifteen seconds later she simply says, 'No.'

Nobody? 'The only person I truly admire is my father.'

No political figure? 'No.'

In history? 'No.'

No musician, actor, writer? 'Got to be alive, eh? That's a tough one . . .'

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Eventually, after Cheyenne MacLeod lauds Sir Joh-Bjelke Petersen, Hanson agrees the former Queensland premier would be as close to a political hero as she has ever had. Later on, with Lee by her side, I ask her to tell me the worst thing that's ever happened to her. 'Don't know,' she says.

What's the best thing? 'When I got divorced.'

From the first or second husband? She laughs. 'That's two good things ...' and an unmistakeable look of forlornness comes over the face of her daughter. Then Hanson says: 'I suppose winning the seat of Oxley, that's been a very high moment for me. I know I'm stirring the pot out there but I honestly believe it needs stirring. We need debate in this country.'

**T**O BE AUSTRALIAN TODAY IS, for many people, to be deeply insecure about the future. You can't see this trauma in the economic indicators so much as you can in the faces of those in dole queues, in companies being downsized, in workplaces of increasing stress and competition, in traffic snarls, in isolated country towns, behind the walls of disintegrating family homes.

It's no secret that the changes in Australian society over the past 15 years have been staggering. No aspect of life has remained unaltered. The catchwords have been globalisation and restructuring. The results have been declining wages, growing job insecurity, changing labour markets, soaring technological advancements, altering work practices and a re-definition of leisure. The Australian psyche has taken a pummelling. People are bewildered and apprehensive. They let fly at easy targets—welfare recipients, Aborigines, migrants. It's called the politics of downward envy. The politics of resentment.

Social researcher Hugh Mackay has written extensively on this subject. In an article in *The Australian* recently he tried to assess the Hanson phenomenon by re-visiting an interview conducted in 1939 with the psychoanalyst Carl Jung on the subject of the German people's response to Hitler. Jung said that Hitler was 'the loudspeaker which magnifies the inaudible whispers of the German soul'. Similarly, Mackay wrote, Hanson could be seen as a loudspeaker to the whisperings of the Australian soul. '[She] might fizzle out in another week or two, as some commentators are suggesting, but I doubt it. She has struck a responsive chord that will resonate for some time.'

In 1984, following historian Geoffrey Blainey's warning about large-scale Asian immigration, the mood turned ugly in a way similar to today.

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Asians were spat at and attacked in the street; the then Immigration Minister Stewart West received death threats; and Blainey's reputation, arguably, was never the same.

In 1989, it was headlines again when John Howard said that 'the pace of change of [Asian immigration] has probably been a little too great'. The following year he lost the Liberal leadership to Andrew Peacock, partly because of these comments. Now, seven years later, Pauline Hanson has arrived to remind him of his own mixed record on the subject of race, to haunt him with, perhaps, his own unconscious beliefs, his Jungian shadow.

John Howard has been widely condemned for his failure to directly repudiate her. Twelve days after Hanson's maiden speech, he told the Queensland division of the Liberal Party that one of the great changes that had come over Australia in the past six months was that 'people do feel able to speak a little more freely and a little more openly about what they feel. In a sense the pall of censorship on certain issues has been lifted . . . I welcome the fact that people can now talk about certain things without living in fear of being branded as a bigot or as a racist.' Howard had effectively allowed the Hanson genie to stay out of the bottle.

ON THE DAY AFTER FEDERAL Parliament has passed its historic joint resolution condemning racism, I visit Pauline Hanson in her parliamentary office. She is kneeling on the floor, shoes off, with the major dailies spread out before her on a long, low table. Each paper carries banner headlines deploring intolerance and noting her absence from the debate the previous day. She seems visibly distressed. This interview is not going to help.

The first thing she says to me is: 'Are you doing a beat-up on me?' I tell her that I'm not. She appears unconvinced. She's 'heard on the grapevine' that I am. I want to tell her—but I don't—that it's a journalist's job, particularly in a profile of this sort, to try to win over and extract information from a subject; and that only in rare circumstances does the subject not see betrayal in the result.

The interview goes from bad to worse. Each question is greeted with growing displeasure. What, for example, is her response to the Irish-Chinese National Party Senator Bill O'Chee's passionate speech in Parliament the previous day? He had spoken of the thousands of young Australian schoolchildren who 'know once they leave the safety of their classroom and enter the playground, they will become the whipping boys and girls of the fear and paranoia that Ms Hanson has whipped up. Twenty-five years ago I was one of those children.'

## Pauline Hanson

To which Hanson says, 'I think it's dramatising the whole lot.' She shows me her press release which defends her absence from the House the previous day—she had a prior appointment in Melbourne with 'real Australians'. She also says she is 'now being blamed for every misfortune that occurs in Australia. If a farmer's cow has a two-headed calf, it will be my fault.'

On a number of occasions Hanson begins shouting at me, particularly when explanations are sought for why she keeps targeting people on the basis of their race. 'I want a balance brought back into this country,' she yells, as Pasquarelli pokes his big, bald head through her door for what must be the fourth time during our interview.

With every new question I see her creeping realisation that it has all spun out of her control—this interview, the headlines, the national and international indignation. Yet the grim determination remains: to keep speaking out on what she insists have been until now 'taboo' subjects.

I ask her whether in giving her maiden speech she had planned this hullabaloo or whether it had caught her by surprise. Finally, the tears and mirth roll together as she says, with dripping sarcasm, 'Yeh, I just love all this controversy. I really do. I just love sitting on a knife's edge with my credibility and integrity and all the rest of it just about down the drain.'

For a brief moment I actually feel sorry for her. I look at Pauline Hanson and see a woman hopelessly out of her depth. I see a media circus and a political neophyte who has lost virtually all privacy. I see, in part, a scapegoat for all the ugly sentiments that gnaw away at the human heart, including those of our more slippery politicians.

But the moment passes and what I see again are the cold, sharp features of bigotry and racism and I am reminded of how far we still have to go to expunge this from our midst. I see the need, more pressing now than ever, for the true story to be told—of how Australia's bold multicultural experiment has actually worked.

Our conversation continues for a while, turning circles on the subject of skin and race. But then Pauline Hanson has had enough. She stands up and, in a white heat, walks me to the door.

## Postscript

*Pauline Hanson is no longer a member of Parliament, having failed to win the Queensland seat of Blair at the 1998 Federal election. At the time of writing she was still president of the One Nation Party.*