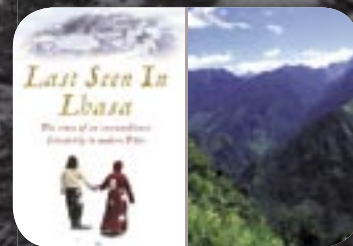




**claire**  
SCOBIE  
INTERVIEW BY TINA BROWN  
PROFILE PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY MICHAEL AMENDOLIA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLAIRE SCOBIE



youth typing out thoughts on a very old typewriter she was given at the age of five. Although Claire and her two older sisters grew up in Newbury just north of London, summer holidays were often spent traversing the globe with their intrepid parents, accompanying their father who travelled as CEO of a pharmaceutical company. Her childhood passport is battered and bruised from trips across Europe, Turkey, Cyprus, America and numerous journeys to Africa. Each stamp in her passport fuelled Claire's fire to explore. "I always remember loving that feeling of getting on a plane or a train and never knowing where you will end up," she smiles.

Studying History at Cambridge led Claire to become editor of the

university newspaper. Her dedication and passion was ignited, so much so, the moonlighting role became a rival to her studies. On completing her degree she applied for the job at the *Telegraph Magazine* to which she laughs, "It rather surprised me that I actually got the job! I really didn't think I'd get it." Pop star interviews aside, the young journalist found her calling following an in-depth story on Tibet and Buddhism. "That story was pretty pivotal," she says, "because I was reading about Tibet and my interest was sparked."

So inspired was she by her first fated trip to Tibet, Claire left her home of the UK for good, only returning on short visits. She has since lived in India, Nepal, Kathmandu, before

moving to Brisbane then Byron Bay and on to Sydney which she now calls home. She laughs heartedly when recalling her own pilgrimage, "I'm trying to curb my nomadic streak by travelling in my imagination. That's been the wonderful thing about this book, that last year when I was writing it, physically I was in Sydney but mentally I was soaring over the Himalaya."

She hopes to return to Tibet soon but with the book's release this month, she fears she will be in danger if she returns within the next year. Instead, a friend will ensure Ani is given a copy "even though she can't read English!" Inspired by the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela and of course, Ani, Claire's journey has granted her

the greatest gift anyone could ever ask for. "It's made me realise that we aren't just physical beings and life isn't just about earning money and acquiring more stuff. There's a lot more to us than a lot of people give us credit for. Ani's beliefs are based very much around compassion. Despite everything that's happened to her in her life she continues to forgive. She always says to me, 'You have to develop compassion in order to progress in your life.' That's been a huge learning curve for me. I try to live by that. It's hard, but I also believe that you must follow your bliss and always remain true to your heart." *Claire Scobie will appear at the Brisbane Writers Festival on September 15.*



Almost a decade ago, award-winning English journalist Claire Scobie had an enviable job working at the London's *Telegraph Magazine*. From the outside, everything in her life was progressing to plan but reflecting inwards, she was left empty and feeling unhappy. Her mind often wandered to faraway lands where a niggling thought of not living life to the full spurred her to accept a friend's offer - an adventure holiday to the other side of the world in search of a rare flower. It appeared a one-off journey. Instead, jumping on that plane set in motion a chain of Karmic events that led Claire to a place she could only dream of. A place which revealed the happiness she longed for. A place where she ultimately found herself.

The trip was to Tibet in search of a rare red lily. Packing her bags, the self-confessed nomad was not only seeking an adventure of a lifetime, she secretly hoped the whole romantic notion of trying to find a flower in the isolated Himalaya would translate into a stirring article to enchant readers. Not finding the flower on the first expedition led her back only a few months later to the wilderness region of Pemako, in south-eastern Tibet.

This very remote part of the world, untouched by Western hands, is considered a place where life-changing experiences flourish. Claire found the flower, yet it was here in this rugged jungle and mountainous region she encountered a much rarer species, a wandering and penniless Tibetan Nun named Ani. For Claire, discovering Ani was finding an extraordinary human time capsule to an almost lost time. Their spiritual connection and intuitive friendship challenged Claire's every perception and changed her life forever.

"It's one of those wonderful things in life where you take a risk, jump out into the unknown and you're almost being rewarded for taking the risk. I love that Goethe quote, 'What you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and

magic in it.' For something to happen, it happens when you leap out." In Pemako, Claire took a step from the known into Tibet's hidden land, an earthly paradise comparable to the myth of Shangri-La.

Tibetans very much believe everything in life is related. Karma is not a catchphrase but a way of life. What one person does will affect the next person down the street. An acute awareness amounts to a rich spiritual heritage and focus. It determines how a person lives, breathes and interacts with both humans and nature. For example, Tibetans believe with their mind, body and soul that each mountain, lake, river, plant, and animal carries the blessing power of Buddha. They believe that people are almost more spirit than matter. When Claire met Ani in Pemako, the connection lay deeper than words, a blessing considering neither could speak the other's language!

For Claire it did not matter as she recalls, "Over those days we walked together through Pemako, a spiritual connection did form. At the end of our trip, our whole group was arrested and there were a lot of Chinese soldiers with guns who herded us into this truck. That was a

very dangerous threatening situation and it really brought us together. It's beyond the normal day-to-day reality and our friendship was born out of that real rawness. Out of that has come something that's been enduring. I couldn't really understand it at the time...I didn't want to understand it. I just let it be." Until now.

Seven trips to Tibet, and several years later, Claire has drawn from her copious notes and vivid diaries to pen her debut novel *Last Seen in Lhasa*. This is fundamentally the remarkable and deeply moving story of Claire's extraordinary and respectful friendship with Ani, a role model for all women. It is a rare insight into the life of a woman who is perhaps the last of her generation. Along the way, through the wild terrain of the Himalaya evocatively and fluidly described by Claire, the reader encounters the struggles of a nation straining against oppression. It chronicles the complex and rapidly changing world of Tibet as the Westernisation juggernaut infiltrates. A place where monks talk on mobiles and Lhasa's sex industry thrives.

This inspiring novel is a childhood dream realised for Claire who recalls with some amusement spending her

looking for a home loan... have you tried the market?

**Julia Kabakoff**  
The Loan Market - Bulimba  
205-209 Oxford St Bulimba  
p. 1300 881 850  
e. julia.kabakoff@loanmarket.com  
w. www.loanmarket.com

**The Loan Market**  
Multibank lending centre

**Who's in charge?**  
The patches, the chewing gum or you?

You can **STOP SMOKING NOW!**  
Not the old way but the new way...

I offer the best chance you have to **STOP SMOKING FOREVER.**  
I guarantee it - saving you thousands.

**Janelle Manton 0407 263 023**  
janelle@mantontution.com  
Offices in Milton and Annerley.