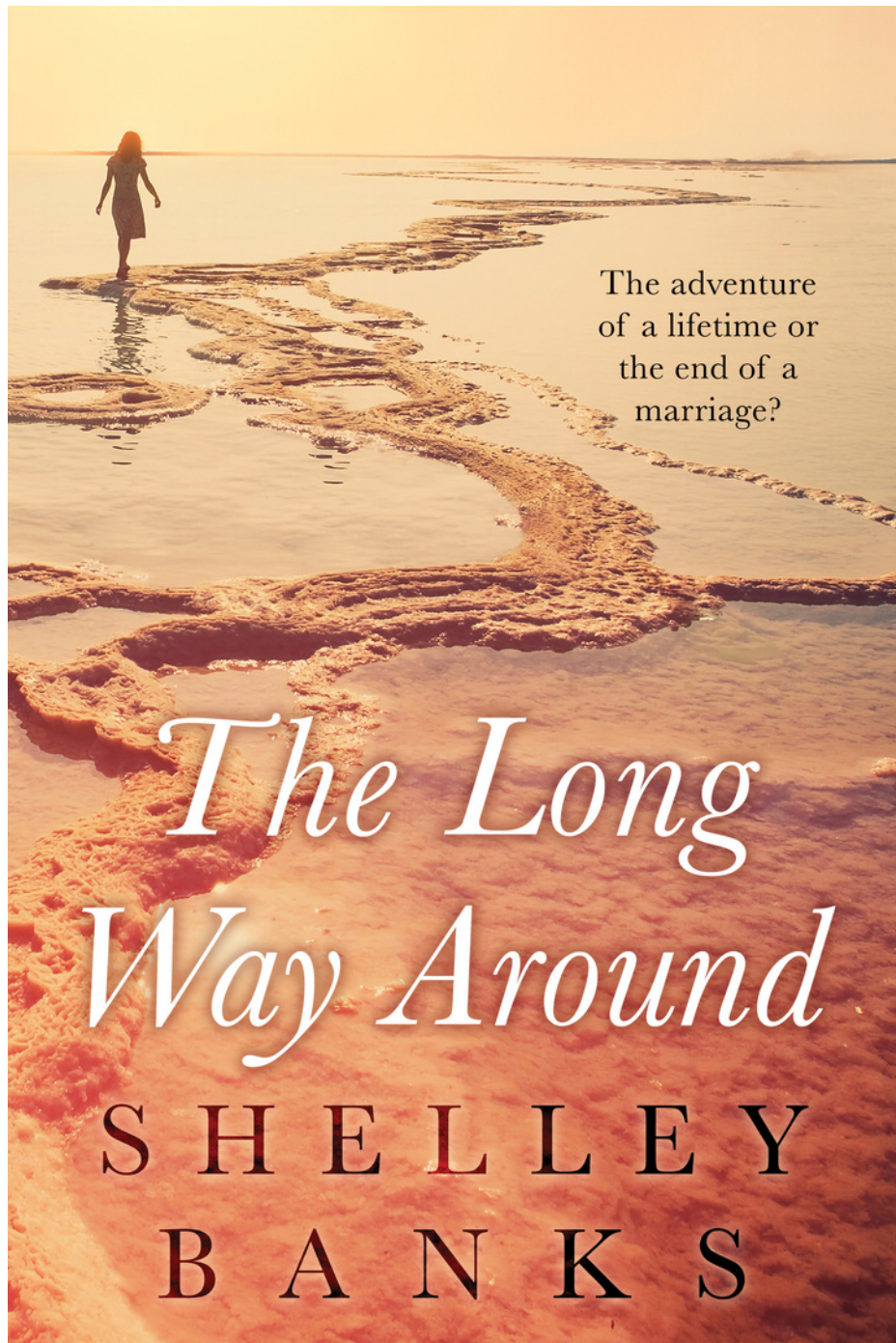




**The Long Way Around  
Shelley Banks**

**Reading Guide**

## About the Book

The Long Way Around is a contemporary Australian women's fiction novel about friendship, marriage, identity, reinvention, and the complicated realities of long-term relationships.

When two couples set off on a twelve-month caravan trip around Australia, they hope the journey will offer adventure, freedom, and a break from the pressures of everyday life.

But life on the road brings more than scenic destinations and shared experiences. Confined spaces, changing routines, unresolved tensions, financial differences, and emotional distance begin surfacing in ways none of them expected.

At its heart, The Long Way Around explores the idea that sometimes the journeys people take externally mirror the emotional journeys happening internally.

## About the Author

Shelley Banks is a Brisbane-based author of contemporary women's fiction. With a background in communications and a passion for storytelling, she writes emotionally resonant novels that explore relationships, identity, and personal growth.

Her other works include:

- Finding Home
- The Diary and the Green Dress
- One Weekend

She is also the creator of September Sprouts, a blog featuring both fiction and non-fiction pieces designed to inspire readers to explore new perspectives.



# About the Setting

## Australia as Emotional Landscape

The Australian road trip setting is central to the novel's emotional atmosphere. Beaches, small towns, islands, roadside attractions, caravan parks, bushland, and endless highways create both freedom and emotional exposure.

The physical journey reflects the emotional journeys of the characters:

- movement versus emotional stagnation
- escape versus confrontation
- adventure versus routine
- and closeness versus isolation.

The constant travel also removes many of the distractions of normal life, forcing the characters to spend extended time together in close quarters.

## **Key Themes and Analysis**

### **Marriage & Long-Term Relationships**

The novel explores the quiet shifts that happen in long-term relationships over time.

Both marriages contain affection and history, but also:

- emotional distance
- frustration
- routine
- communication issues
- and unspoken disappointments.

Throughout the trip, the characters begin noticing things they have ignored for years.

### **Reinvention & Midlife Reflection**

The trip represents more than a holiday — it represents possibility.

Each character is quietly reassessing:

- who they are
- what they want
- what they've sacrificed
- whether the lives they've built still fit them.

## **Key Themes and Analysis**

### **Female Friendship**

The friendship between Andie and Jen provides emotional grounding throughout the novel.

Their relationship contains:

- history
- trust
- emotional understanding
- humour
- and unspoken support.

In many ways, they understand each other more deeply than their husbands do.

### **Emotional Labour & Invisible Responsibilities**

The novel repeatedly highlights the invisible emotional and practical work carried out by women.

Examples include planning, cleaning, emotional management, compromise, caregiving, and maintaining harmony.

Often, the men remain unaware of the emotional burden being carried around them.

## **Key Themes and Analysis**

### **Nature, Freedom & Perspective**

The landscapes throughout the novel often create moments of clarity, calm, or emotional reflection.

Nature becomes:

- restorative
- grounding
- confronting
- and symbolic of possibility.

Andie in particular experiences moments of emotional awakening through travel and natural beauty.

# Character Focus

## Andie

Thoughtful, observant, practical, and emotionally reflective, Andie often suppresses her own needs to maintain peace.

Throughout the trip, she quietly begins to question her marriage, her happiness, and what she truly wants from life.

### Key Internal Conflicts

- Feeling emotionally unseen
- Financial pressure
- Relationship dissatisfaction
- Fear of confrontation
- Desire for meaning and connection

## Jen

Jen is warm, adventurous, emotionally intelligent, and increasingly aware of the emotional distance growing within her marriage.

She often masks disappointment with humour or patience.

### Key Internal Conflicts

- Feeling dismissed
- Exhaustion from compromise
- Missing the “old” Rob
- Balancing love with frustration
- Fear of emotional disconnection

## Character Focus

### **Craig**

Craig enjoys comfort, routine, food, competition, and familiar habits. While not intentionally cruel, he is often emotionally inattentive.

#### Key Internal Conflicts

- Resistance to emotional reflection
- Comfort versus growth
- Financial stress
- Competitive masculinity
- Avoidance

### **Robert**

Successful, driven, organised, and increasingly image-conscious, Robert has changed significantly since his career advancement.

Jen struggles with the version of him he has become.

#### Key Internal Conflicts

- Identity tied to success
- Need for control
- Emotional disconnection
- Fear of vulnerability
- Escapism through alcohol and routine

# Symbolism & Motifs

## **The Caravan**

The caravans symbolise:

- closeness
- confinement
- routine
- partnership,
- emotional exposure.

The lack of physical space mirrors the emotional pressure building within the relationships.

## **The Road Trip**

The journey symbolises:

- reinvention
- uncertainty
- freedom
- emotional transition.

The characters are moving physically while emotionally trying to determine where they belong.

## **Food & Drinking**

Meals, drinks, BBQs, and roadside stops repeatedly reveal:

- relationship dynamics
- coping mechanisms
- comfort
- routine
- emotional tension.

Alcohol especially becomes associated with avoidance and disconnection.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does the title *The Long Way Around* mean emotionally as well as physically?
2. Which character changed the most during the story?
3. Which marriage felt most realistic?
4. Are the characters escaping something by travelling?
5. How does travel reveal truths people usually avoid?
6. What role does nostalgia play in the novel?
7. Which character felt loneliest?
8. How important is feeling “seen” in relationships?
9. Did the trip strengthen or weaken the couples?
10. What emotional truth stayed with you after finishing the novel?
11. Why do you think the author chose a caravan trip around Australia as the setting?
12. How does travel affect the relationships between the characters?
13. Does being away from home make emotional truths harder or easier to ignore?

## **Discussion Question**

14. Which relationship felt strongest at the beginning of the novel?
15. How does routine affect intimacy in long-term relationships?
16. Why are the characters drawn to such a major lifestyle change?
17. What does the trip symbolise for each person?
18. Which character seems most ready for change?
19. Is reinvention exciting or frightening in the novel?

## **AUTHOR Q&A**

### **What inspired the idea for the caravan trip?**

Many years ago, I travelled around Australia in a caravan and I remember the sense of freedom that comes with life on the road. But I was equally interested in what happens emotionally when people leave behind routine and spend long periods together in close quarters. A caravan trip seemed like the perfect setting to explore relationships, friendship, identity, and the quiet tensions that can build over time.

### **Which character came to you first?**

Andie came to me first. I could clearly picture someone standing in a beautiful place while quietly questioning parts of her life she'd stopped paying attention to. From there, the other characters and relationships gradually developed around her.

## **AUTHOR Q&A**

### **Which relationship was hardest to write?**

Probably Jen and Robert's relationship. There's still love between them, but also disappointment, frustration, and emotional distance that has built slowly over many years. Writing those quieter relationship dynamics — where nothing is dramatically wrong but things no longer feel quite right — was emotionally complex and important to get right.

### **Why did you choose Australia as such a major focus of the novel?**

Australia felt essential to the story. The vastness of the country, the changing landscapes, the small towns, beaches, bushland, and roadside attractions all contribute to the emotional atmosphere of the novel. I wanted readers to feel like they were travelling alongside the characters while also celebrating the beauty and uniqueness of Australia itself.

## **AUTHOR Q&A**

### **What themes did you most want readers to connect with?**

The biggest themes for me were emotional connection, friendship, feeling unseen within relationships, reinvention, and the idea that people can quietly lose parts of themselves over time. I also wanted to explore the invisible emotional labour many women carry and how important it is to feel understood and valued.

### **What do you hope readers take away from the story?**

More than anything, I hope readers feel seen. I hope the story encourages people to reflect on their relationships, their friendships, and the lives they've built for themselves. I also hope it reminds readers that it's never too late to reconnect with yourself, ask difficult questions, or make changes that lead to a more fulfilling life.

## **Themes to Explore Further**

### **Marriage & Emotional Distance**

The novel explores how relationships can slowly shift over time through routine, pressure, and lack of communication.

### **Friendship as Emotional Support**

Andie and Jen's friendship provides understanding and connection often missing elsewhere in their lives.

### **Travel & Reinvention**

The road trip becomes not only a physical journey around Australia, but an emotional journey toward self-awareness and change.

## **Final Reflection**

The Long Way Around is ultimately a story about the emotional distance that can quietly grow between people, the longing to feel understood, and the ways travel can force people to confront themselves as much as each other.

It reminds readers that sometimes the most important journeys are not the ones measured in kilometres, but the ones that slowly unfold within us.

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**Two couples. One unforgettable road trip. And the  
questions they can't outrun.**

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