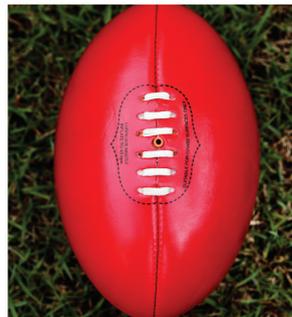


more than a
KICK
 TAYLA HARRIS
 footy, the photo and me



First published by Allen & Unwin in 2020

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN 978 1 76052 580 4

For teaching resources, explore www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers

Cover and text design by Sandra Nobes

Set in 12 pt Mont Book by Sandra Nobes

Photo opposite and on p79 and silhouette on cover and pi by Michael Willson/AFL Photos

Printed in January 2020 by C&C Offset Printing Co. Ltd, China

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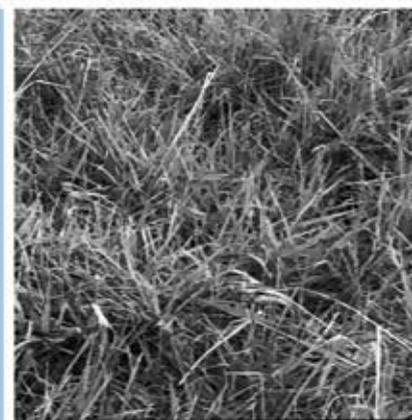
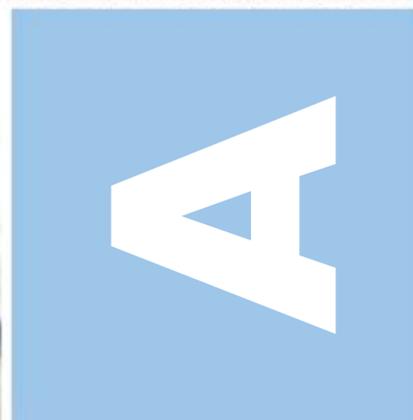
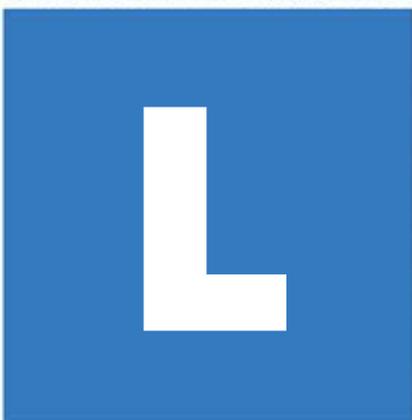
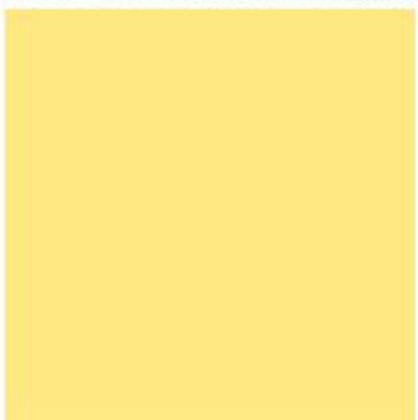
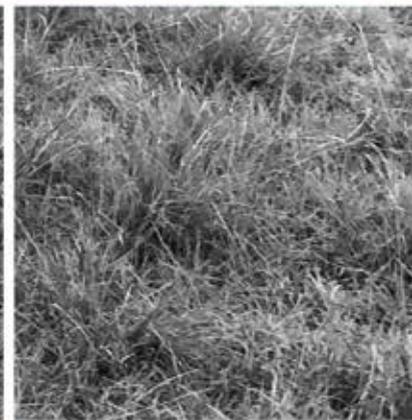
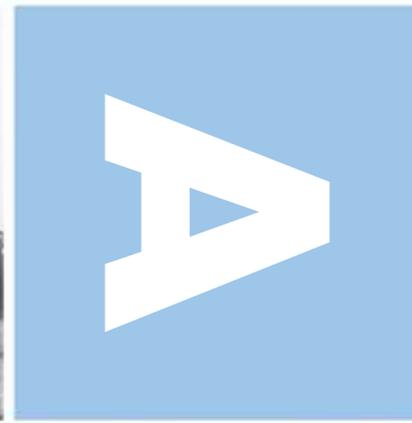
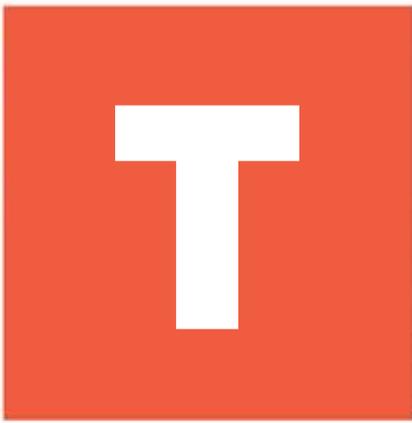
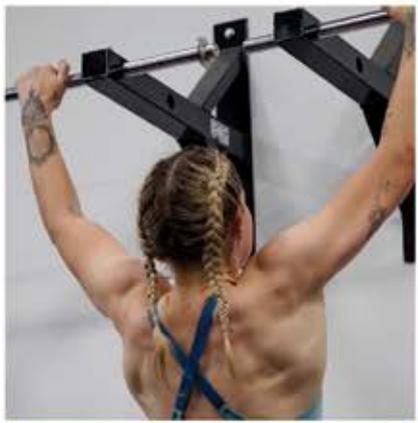
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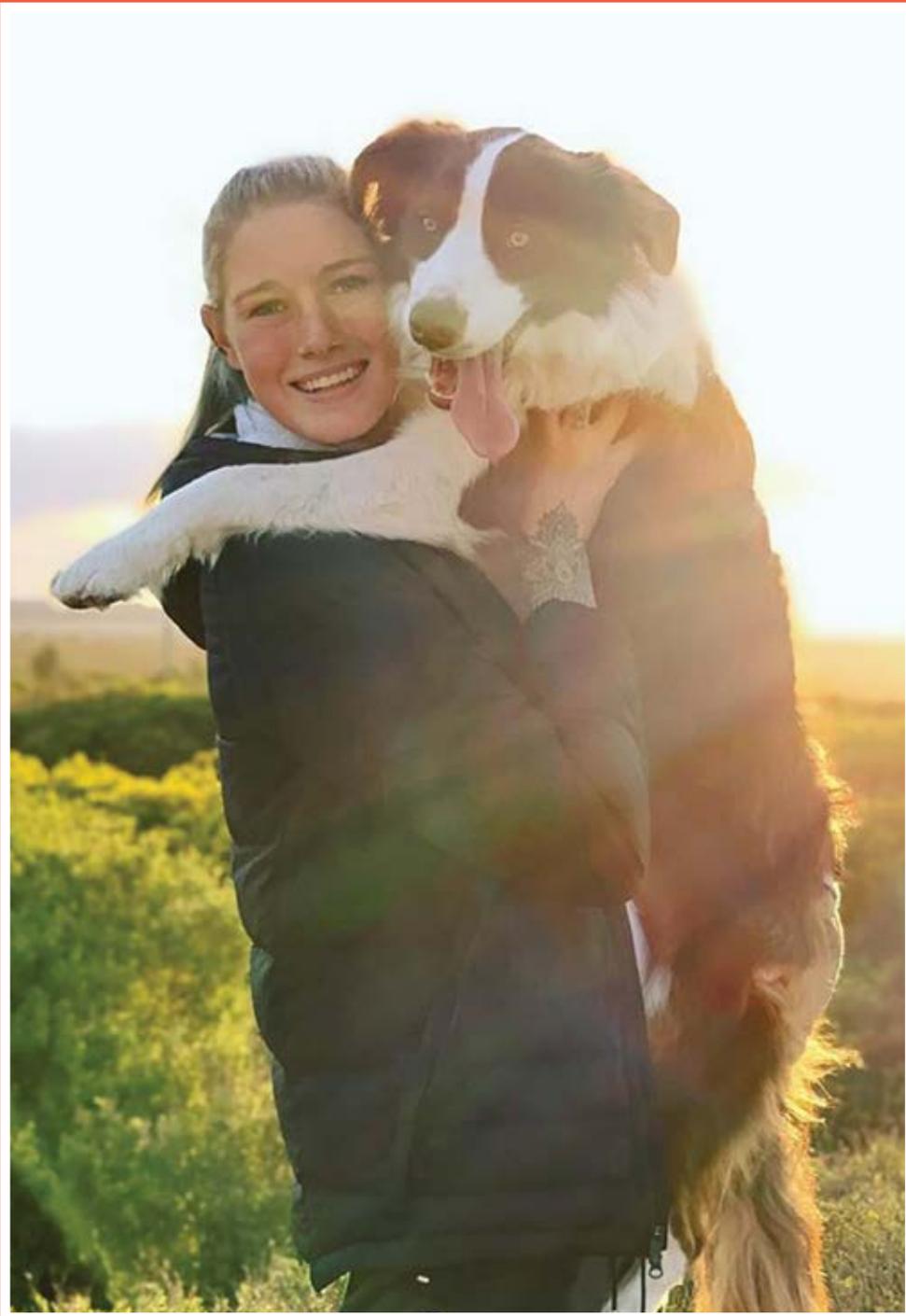
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Me and Beans

Before the photo, not many people knew who I was.

Even now, if someone says my name the response will usually be, 'Tayla who?'

Then they'll say something like, 'Women's footy...kick... photo...trolls...'

And the penny drops. 'Oh yeah, right – *her*.'

That photo turned my life upside-down.

Some of what came after was scary and distressing and confronting and I wouldn't wish it on anyone. But most of what came after was inspiring and uplifting and amazingly cool.

That photo...

- exposed an ugly side of human beings I'd never experienced before
- forced me to dig deep and bring out strengths I didn't know I had
- gave me opportunities I never dreamed of
- showed people around the world that AFLW has arrived
- gave me a taste of the fear some women feel every day of their lives

AND IT TAUGHT ME SO MUCH.

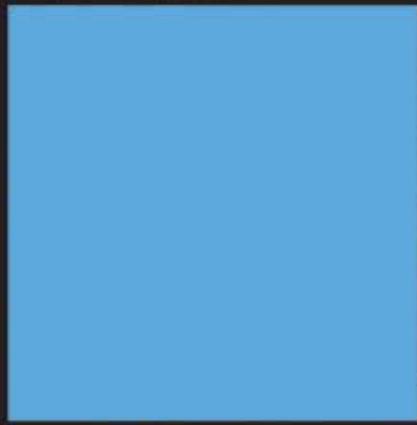
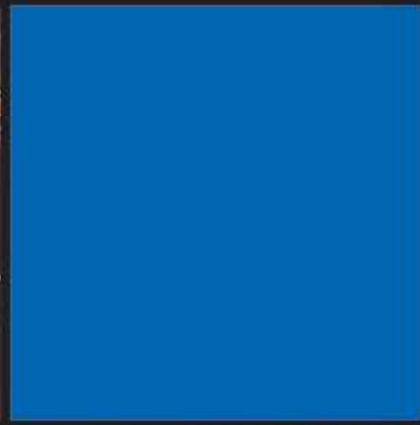
Writing a book has never been on my to-do list and, to be honest, a year ago it was the last thing on my mind. But after it all blew up I was continually being asked about the kick, the photo and the trolling. There was a ton of media surrounding the story and I needed to set the record straight.

I also wanted to share what I'd learned from the experience. I figure if I can help just one young person feel better about navigating social media, then this is a good way to do it.

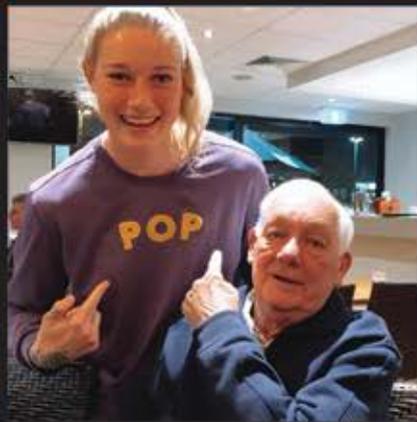
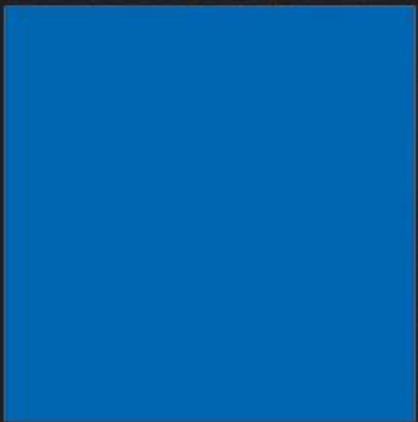
I've put in some background about the influences that shaped me and a few of the people who are important to me so you can see where I'm coming from.

And there's lots of stuff about the socials – the good, the bad and the ugly – with bits of advice that I've picked up along the way.

Also photos. Lots of photos.



So here's the story of what happened from my point of view.



1. TAYLA WHO?

I grew up in the northern suburbs of Brisbane with my dad, Warren, my mum, Lisa, and my brother, Jack, who is two years older than me.

Mum and Jack are business-minded brainiacs while me and Dad are sports-mad fitness freaks.

My parents have always been incredibly hands-on and supportive of whatever we kids choose to do.



LOVE YOU
ALWAYS, MUM
ALWAYS HERE
FOR YOU,
LOVE DAD



ONE OF THE BOYS

THERE ARE GIRLS WHO LIKE
BALLET AND THERE ARE GIRLS
WHO LIKE FOOTBALL. EVERY
ONE OF THEM HAS TO FIND
THEIR PLACE AND EVERY ONE
OF THEM HAS THE RIGHT
TO TAKE THAT PLACE.
WARREN HARRIS (DAD)

When I was five I would tag along when Mum and Dad took Jack to the under-7s footy practice. The team was called the Aspley Hornets. I had my own ball and I'd kick it around on the sidelines. I was desperate to play.

One day the Hornets were a team member short so they roped me in. They put a guernsey on me and I threw myself into the game. I kicked about six goals and ran over about six boys. That's how I started. I've literally never stopped.

The boys we played against were scared of me to begin with. It was totally unexpected for them. I wouldn't back off for anyone. On the sidelines their parents were saying, 'Get her off. What are our boys supposed to do with a girl? They can't touch her. It's not fair.'



That changed once they could see that I was just as willing to scrap as the boys were. They soon figured out that I wasn't easy to mess with and that they should treat me the same. Besides, I played in the ruck so there was no avoiding me!

I was the only girl who played, but I can't recall a moment when I ever felt out of place. That was my thing growing up: I often felt out of place, but not when I played footy.

I had to play with boys because that's all that was available for me. Now girls can choose to play in a mixed team or in an all-girls team. The choice is there.

My teammates always looked out for me. I'd tackle hard and some of our opponents didn't like it – they'd have a go at me, and the other Hornets would come to my defence.

I won my first ever trophy with the Hornets, the 'Hotdog Award'. It was named after the coach. I don't even know what it was for. Probably something like 'Number One Ratbag'.

A great highlight was being awarded the Division One Best and Fairest in the boys competition. I think I'm still the only girl who's ever won it.

I played against Ben Keays, who now plays for the Lions. The award ceremony was a special night with a proper countdown to the winners, just like the Brownlow Medal. I came first and Ben came second – it was all very friendly and good-natured.

BOATS, BOARDS & BMX

Dad is a marine engineer by trade and he's got an awesome toolshed. I love building things too and I had my own little toolbox for my projects. With Dad's help I built chookhouses and bee enclosures, skateboards and jump ramps. He even helped me do up my own speedboat when I was twelve.

I named it *Thunderbird*. We had our names painted on the side: 'Driver: Tayla Harris, No. 22' and 'Observer: Warren Harris, No. 22' (that was the number on Dad's guernsey when he played footy for Queensland). We'd take it out on the Brisbane River – so much fun! Then I got busy with sport and it was taking up too much space in the shed so we sold it.

A few years later I was at the servo and a car drove in pulling *Thunderbird* on a trailer at the back. I nearly burst into tears. I wanted to go up to the new owners and beg them to sell it back to us. I loved that boat.



I went everywhere on my BMX bike. I used it to get around, but also did heaps of tricks and took lots of risks. There was this incredibly steep hill on the way to my Nan and Pop's house and I'd fly down it fast as I could go. No way I'd do that now.

I hated it when I busted something on my bike and I had to leave it at the shop. That meant I was stranded.

Dad knew a guy who owned a bike shop, so Dad asked him if he could show me how to fix my bike. That's how I learned the basics and got my very first job working in the shop doing minor repairs.

I still know how to change a tyre but most bikes are way too fancy and high-tech for me now!

Our house wasn't far from my grandparents' place and I used to go on long bike rides with Pop. They were good times to catch up and hear his stories. Pop's got some trouble with memory now but every time he sees me he talks about those rides we used to have together. They meant as much to him as they did to me.

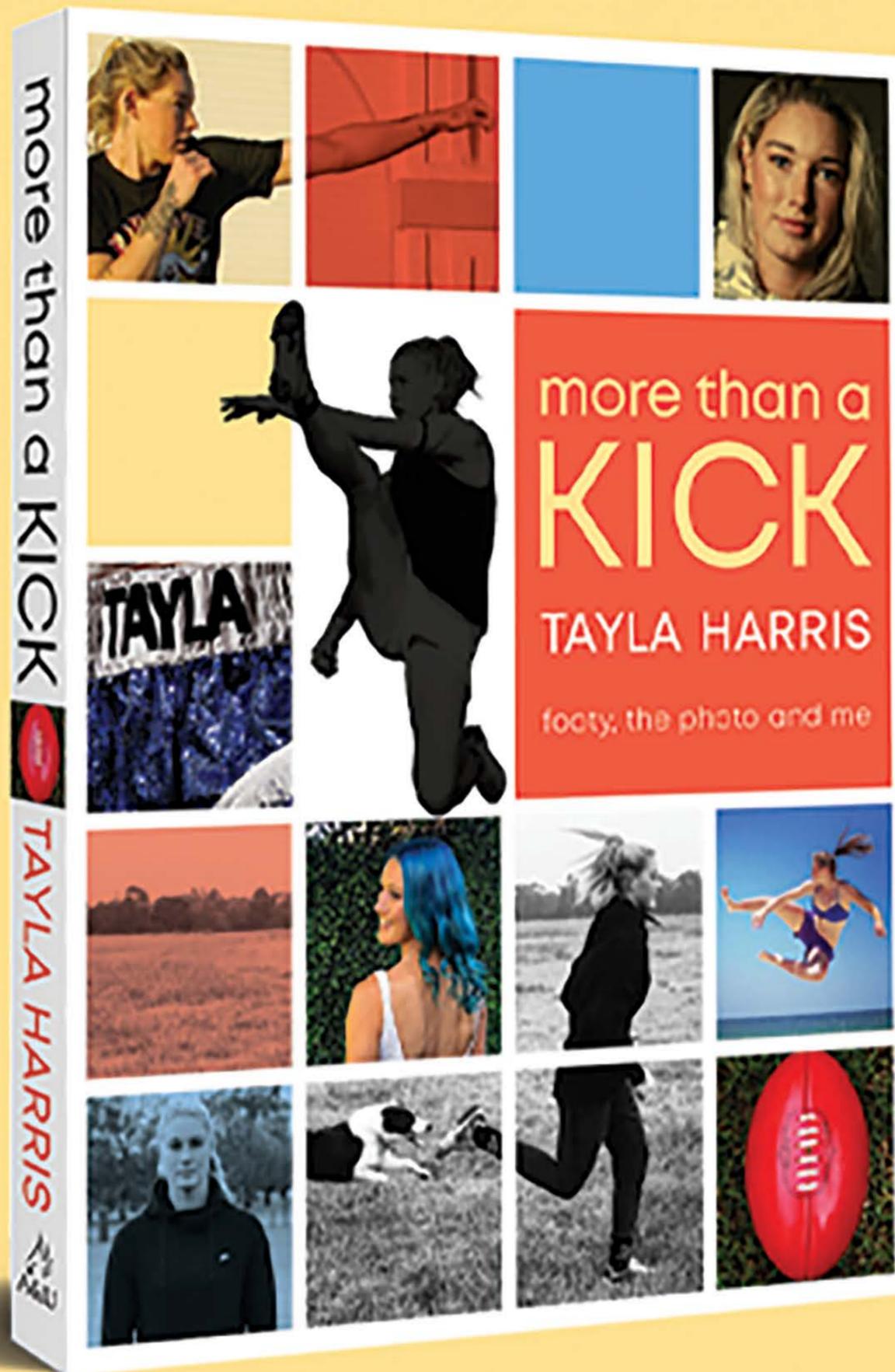




I grew up with skateboards and I feel very safe riding them. These days my favourite thing is my electric skateboard. I zip around the streets of Melbourne on it, even walk the dog with it. I recently had a photo shoot in the city and I knew the parking was going to be horrendous. So I caught the train in and did the last bit on my board and they ended up using it in the shoot!



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