

**In 1980, Lyudmila and Roman Fishman arrived in Australia from the Ukraine with two children and a sewing machine. There was much that was unfamiliar and strange, but the one thing that really captured their imagination was the sheepskin ugg boot! Roman was immediately determined to make them.**

So Luda washed dishes to save the \$60 they needed to buy three marino skins from the local tannery. Roman fashioned them into three pairs of handsome ugg boots and his wife took them to the Victoria Market to see if she could sell them. She did. And has continued to do so for the last 35 years to make Ugg Australia the leading brand in the country.

Like any business, there were plenty of challenges along the way. Sixteen years ago Melbourne's last sheepskin tannery ground to a halt, leaving the Fishmans up the proverbial creek. But these are practical people. Starting their own dedicated tannery, Roman Tannery, Ugg Australia was able to keep control of their primary resource, and around 150,000 skins a year are now being processed using ecologically friendly techniques complying with the highest Global EPA standards.

The other thing that stands out like an Aussie flag in the breeze is that these enterprising immigrants are more passionate and proud to be making 100% Australian products than any other ugg boot brand. While their so-called Australian competitors flock to low cost overseas factories, Ugg Australia is the only product fully owned and fully produced in Australia, all the way from the sheep to the shop.

"I am passionate about providing skilled jobs and training for Australians," says Luda. "We are constantly pushing the development envelope to create a great quality sheepskin product to sell to the world."



**Lyudmila Fishman - Ugg Australia**

Three generations are now involved in Ugg Australia as the business continues to grow, with a new factory soon to be built. 400 stockists around the country generate the bulk of their sales, including a glamorous new concept store in central Melbourne, but Luda sees great potential in online which has grown a massive 2000% just in the last 12 months.

Overseas markets are expanding too. You only have to stroll through the streets of Manhattan to see how New Yorkers have embraced the product as everyday footwear, adding colour, glitter and pizzazz to the once humble sheepskin slipper. New Zealand, China, Japan, France, Scandinavia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and several other markets also enjoy the warmth and comfort of Luda's products, though trademark issues have prevented her from marketing them under the Ugg Australia brand. In China they're Roman & Lyudmila ugg boots, in New Zealand, R&L. In fact trademark issues have been a burr in Luda's side for much of their business journey.

So how have a Chemical Industrial Engineering graduate and her furrier husband made such giant sheepskin strides?

Luda is reticent about her own talents which undoubtedly include resourcefulness, innovation and unbounded determination. She does not even mention being shortlisted in Telstra's 2015 Victorian Business Women's Awards.

But Luda is quick to recount the ready help they have received from others, from the accommodating tanner with the foresight to know that 'small fish can become big fish one day', right through to the present day. It is very clear that the Fishmans have a thirst for learning that makes others only too willing to share their knowledge, a facility that continues with Luda's enthusiastic involvement in Syndicate 19 of The CEO Institute.

"I treasure every meeting," says Luda. "They are like friends. We talk about our problems. Everyone tries to help each other. It's so good I don't want the session to end."

Although Luda is the only manufacturer in her group, Chairman David Cartney and her Syndicate colleagues have been able to share a whole range of skills and experience including government support, management skills, import / export and invaluable business contacts. And when Luda organised a function to celebrate Ugg Australia's 35th year, all her Syndicate friends were there.

It's been an inspiring journey; a classic case of a small family business having a go and doing whatever has to be done to succeed. This hard-working couple from the other side of the world have themselves become a proud 'Product of Australia'.