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Guess who came to dinner in Toorak? Tacos, tequila, music and the Big O

Suzanne Carbone
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IN FULL: Oprah thrills Melbourne fans

Full speech: Oprah takes to the stage at Federation Square to thank Aussies for their warm hospitality.

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I NEVER thought I'd get to write a story called "The night I met Oprah Winfrey", but here it is.

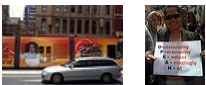
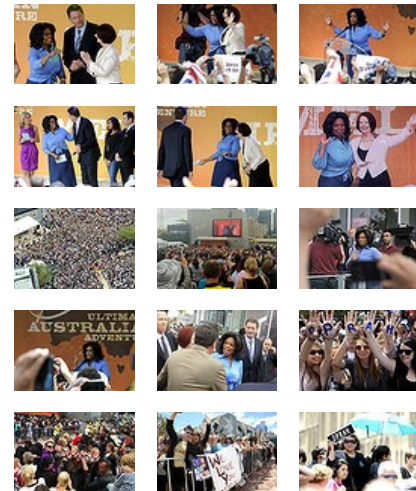
Ten thousand people crammed into Federation Square yesterday to see the TV star for 12 minutes but last night I ended up at a private dinner for 20 in Toorak with *her*.

My friend Megan Castran always dreamt about Oprah visiting her in Australia and if there's someone who can make dreams come true, it's the Big O.

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Oprah Winfrey in Melbourne
Oprah on stage with Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu. Photo: Wayne Taylor



Mrs Castran met Oprah in Hawaii in 2006 and sat in her Chicago audience the year later. After the show, she gave Oprah her business card and the TV star told her she would call if she was coming to Australia.

Oprah stuck to her word. She told me last night there was something special about Mrs Castran's

business card. "There was something about her energy. I kept it in the right-hand side of my desk."

Mrs Castran has held taco nights at her luxurious home for 20 years and when inviting me to last night's dinner, she said it was to celebrate her birthday, which was on Wednesday. Oprah was the icing on the cake.

Mrs Castran, surrounded by devoted husband Paul and children Max and Zoe, had invited 20 close friends including golfer Stuart Appleby and his wife, Ashley Saleet, Natasha Stipanov, Ronnie Atlas, Sarah Walker and Meghan McGann.

The doorbell rang at 6pm and Mrs Castran screamed when she saw Oprah. They hugged and Oprah handed over two bottles of tequila, Porfidio and Parfida. Well, it was taco night and tequila shots were in order.

A beaming Mrs Castran, declared: "This is one of life's great moments."

Dozens of cameramen, sound recordists, producers and PR people from Oprah's Harpo Productions buzzed around. Pearl restaurant staff took over the kitchen to prepare canapes and the tacos.

Oprah, wearing jeans and a shirt with her hair expertly blowdried, as usual, sat with us outside by the pool and picked up the taco shell with her hands - like the rest of us. We learnt that she sleeps five hours a night. She reiterated that we Aussies are so "darn friendly", saying: "There is a vibrance (sic) and confidence in Australia that I haven't seen in other places."

Then she made an announcement. "Everyone here is coming to Sydney!" There was applause and cheers.

Pastry chef Christopher Montebello from South Melbourne speciality cake shop Let Them Eat Cake made a flourless chocolate cake of Uluru with Oprah sitting on top. Singer Paris Zachariou serenaded Oprah with his own ditty, cheekily called *Billionaire*.

Mr Castran, who has done well for himself in real estate, joked: "Anyone who said money can't buy happiness doesn't know where to shop."

Commenting on being wealthy, Oprah said: "You should try it."

Oprah asked about Australian values, our lifestyle and even mentioned "sex", curious how parents educated their children about the birds and the bees.

Ross Wilson, who came with wife Tania, performed his classic song *Eagle Rock* and Oprah danced around the pool. Wilson said: "It can't get better than that."

At 7.30pm, Oprah departed with her Uluru cake, pausing on the tennis court to reflect: "I got to meet real people in a real family setting. That was as good as it can ever get."

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