

at The University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba and Duncan, 17, is a boarder at St Peter's Lutheran College in Brisbane.

Chris says she couldn't do all the things she manages to do if she was working full-time in town and had to drive the 180 kilometre round trip each day. 'If I had to dress up, put on makeup and drive to town, it would be two and a half hours out of everyday. I'd be exhausted trying to balance everything else I do as well. And then there's the rain factor: it doesn't take much for our road to become inaccessible.'

While Evesham has had some late wet season rain last year, the Capels have endured five years of unreliable and deficient rainfall. 'Drought has been the order of the day for much of this time. It has just been one more reason for teleworking. Not only do you have a paid working role and reduced commuting, it allows you to lead a fuller life and to focus on something else. My manager is now in Longreach at the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and I drive into the office there once a week to meet with him and various work teams and occasionally I travel within the region and to Brisbane for work.'

Chris says having the opportunity to meet with other work colleagues is a great benefit. 'Having the mix of home office work and meeting face-to-face with others is crucial to the relationship building, and if possible, should occur regularly. I have enjoyed great management support in the four different jobs I have held since I first started teleworking and have found this to be critical.'

Today, Chris continues to work as though she is in a central office. She says the impulse to work overtime is not easily quelled. 'I am expected to work to standard public service hours and make sure I'm available during those times. But I also often start early in the morning and work at night and some weekends. You do that as a teleworker to prove your worth; because you love your job and you don't take having a job like mine lightly.'

David Arnold, who heads the Remote Area Planning and Development Board based in Longreach, employs two teleworkers – both are women who live on remote properties. He says he is completely at ease with teleworking and while, as a niche role, it isn't for everyone, it should be taken up by more employers.

'Teleworking allows me to access the people with the skills I am looking for. As project based positions, their work doesn't require any oversight, it's all outcome based while working to time-frames. The trust you put in your teleworkers is two-way. The job they are doing, with flexible hours, suits them and their lifestyle, so they deliver. It also frees up space in my office.'

Chris says the idea of working from home is gaining momentum. 'While teleworking in Australia has been around for more than 30 years, it hasn't progressed as much as it could have. Now with the advances in technology, the benefits and possibilities are increasingly available. I am positive that, in the future, we will see many more examples of rural people working from home than we do now.' ■

WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

RUTH FAGAN, COWRA

Ruth is the Regional Manager-Western for the NSW Cancer Council, a Board Member of Tourism NSW and Deputy Mayor of Cowra Shire Council.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO BECOME INVOLVED?

Blayney, a small town in Central West NSW, was the home for three generations to my family, and my parents were involved with just about everything that happened in the town. As one of seven children we were very active in community life. I remember the hundreds of times my parents catered for functions to raise money for different projects and took part in the broad social life of the town. It just seemed natural to take on decision making for a community and to do something important.

WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF BEING INVOLVED IN THIS?

Every day I am learning something new and meeting wonderful people. It is very satisfying helping people to work together to access better accommodation and transport services for cancer patients and their carers in the region.

Local Government has always interested me and I was actively involved on a large number of projects within the community before being elected to Cowra Shire Council in 2004. This has been really amazing as we have had so many challenges in our community. Although not everyone agrees with each other on lots of matters it is interesting to put forward an argument and try and resolve it through debate. Council

is a lot of work and most of the general public don't see how much is done outside the Council meetings but it is rewarding, although you are not always appreciated.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY OBSTACLES?

Of course there are obstacles in any position but I find it challenging to work around them and come up with new strategies and ideas to overcome them.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR SUPPORT?

Family, friends and colleagues, in all areas of my work, are important to me and allow me to do the things I do. Many people from my 30 year working career help me when I need support or a favour. I have found most people very generous and supportive if you ask them to help. Over the past 10 years I have also done a number of courses and workshops to enhance my skills which has been great value in giving me confidence.

WHAT IS YOUR FINAL MESSAGE TO OTHER WOMEN WANTING TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING?

Women have amazing strengths and skills which they themselves do not often recognise. I encourage all of you to get involved and make a small step toward a goal each year. It is amazing how if you write down what you would like to do it actually can start to take shape. There are many paths toward success but you have to take the first step down one of them.

Dreaming of my retirement

The following selection of letters were received by *The Country Web* in response to Roslyn Lambert's 'Daring to Dream: Of My Retirement' letter in the No. 42 edition. Thank you to all those who took the time to put pen to paper and share your thoughts and ideas with us.



Maybe the best is yet to be?

By Pam Reynolds, Goulburn

Looking back, it all began about a year before I actually left work. It became almost like a grieving process. I was going to be leaving a job which I loved. I work from the heart so had put most of my time and energy into something very rewarding. I think I focused on all the things I would be leaving behind and I was nervous about how I would meaningfully fill my days and, importantly, how we would manage financially. I worried about losing the friends I had made at work. Our jobs bound us together, but would those friendships be sustained outside the workplace environment? Probably not.

I asked many retired people what they did all day but I never got a very satisfactory answer. Most were 'so busy' and life was 'pretty good' but they never actually told me how. It was all very vague and unsettling. I wondered if other people about to leave work felt like this.

My husband Ronnie had been retired for a few years. We had always been good friends and I wondered if 24-hours a day, seven days a week would stretch

the friendship just a little. He seemed to have a nice routine going and I didn't want to spoil things for him although he was keen for me to leave work and we had discussed a few plans.

However, when the time came I did start to get excited. I was overwhelmed with farewell functions and good wishes and moved by the kind words and appreciation from colleagues and clients for my work. But it was a casual remark from a friend that changed everything. 'Knowing you, you'll make a career out of retirement.' It was one of those moments when you know, 'This will be OK – I can do this!' and so I became determined to make the next years of my life the best years.

I decided to approach this retirement 'thing' as a project and set out some strategies. First of all, I would brainstorm all the things I would like to do, given the opportunity of not working. Number two, I would research what other retired people do. None of this vague 'this and that'. I wanted to know day-by-day exactly what they were doing. Finally I would keep a monthly journal just to stay on track and check my progress.

So on 1 February 2003 I started off with all sorts of ideas. A patchwork quilt, the material long ago pushed to the back of the wardrobe in a cane basket;

joining a meditation group; starting the garden again after the drought; sorting out boxes of old photos; reading all of my Howard Spring books again; watching a daytime serial I could usually only catch once a month; spending more time with family; updating my computer skills and exploring the Internet; travel; studying 'A Course in Miracles'; writing a Stress Management Program; doing a Reiki course; tracing our family tree and finally catching up with old nursing friends. That seemed pretty good for a start.

My research into other retirees led to some interesting ideas and I was able to add to my 'things to do' list. The University of the Third Age (U3A) sounded like a wonderful way to share expertise and learn from others of different backgrounds. Further study was a real possibility with local Community and TAFE Colleges. Some people were taking arts and crafts courses, there was travel for all budgets, and many were involved in organisations such as CWA and Red Cross. What especially appealed to me was the range of voluntary work available. 'Find two things to do together and two things to do on your own,' one person told me, and 'always have something to do and something to look forward to.' Good advice!

An entry in my Journal for March reads: *Learning to relax and enjoying each day. Doing lots of spring-cleaning and maintenance jobs I have been putting off for years. Have finished a crocheted rug for a new baby, written to the editor of the Sunday Telegraph re the format of the ABC News, taught myself to play Poker Patience. Not missing work. So great not to feel tired all the time!*

It seems to me that a good title for a document about retirement would be 'No Expectations'. Society doesn't seem to have any rules about this stage of life. Whether you travel, throw yourself into some voluntary cause, or do absolutely nothing – it all seems to meet with some kind of approval or perhaps total disinterest from younger members of society. This feeling that there is no structure to retirement is probably why we approach it with apprehension, but I now actually feel it is rather a comfortable place to be!

Journal entry for July: *I am wondering what all the fuss was about! I have enrolled in U3A, started as a volunteer in a Literacy Program at a local school, trying to teach myself Italian and attended a Writer's Workshop. Ronnie and I are getting on really well, perhaps closer than ever before and planning a trip to Tasmania.*

So gradually, over the next few months, my life changed. I went from being this sometimes frazzled person who lay awake at night worrying about possible scenarios at work, who regularly darted down another aisle of the supermarket to avoid someone because she only had five minutes left in her lunch hour, who fell asleep watching the news at 7 pm, too tired to try a new recipe and too busy to spend a few hours browsing in a bookshop, to someone who enjoys just having time **to be**, to sit in the sun with the dogs, watching tiny wrens building a nest, who spends ALL day in town, and lies in bed with an early morning cuppa, watching the sunrise through the window. Inevitably, there are disappointments. Our plans for restoring the garden have not come to fruition because of the continuing drought and we lost one of our beautiful dogs from snakebite. I've realised, too, that going to work is a great distraction. It forces us, in many ways, not to dwell on personal issues. When life becomes a bit complicated, we can always throw ourselves into the job, thus putting lots of things 'on hold'. When retirement comes these issues must be faced and this process may be uncomfortable. I have attempted

most things on my 'things to do' list but I couldn't stand the TV soapie for more than a few months and the material for the patchwork quilt is still in the back of the wardrobe in the cane basket – now with those boxes of old photos keeping it company. But new interests have emerged too – things I would never have anticipated.

Retired people have the opportunity to contribute in so many ways to society. The wealth of their experience is so valuable. They have the luxury of **time** and quite probably have more patience. Listening to fellow retirees discuss the new skills they are acquiring, I have been amazed by their energy and their capacity to try something different. Bravo!

Journal entry for September 2004: *Heading for two years since those last days at work and started what feels like a journey. Wonder where it will take me! Looking forward to what might be around the corner – living in the present, taking each day as a gift and finding an unsuspected treasure – peace of mind.*

Robert Browning's words say it all:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be.

The last of life for which the first was made. ■

Dear Roslyn

I am involved with Older Men: New Ideas. I believe that women have a different 'vision' to men – but we can still dream.

'You don't retire (or get old), you look for a new challenge' – a quote from a doctor aged 82. I am looking forward to celebrating my 80 years (OBE) this year. I have discovered that I have had 63 years in community service since becoming employed – been involved in 16 different activities and still involved in five.

I do not see myself as retired and am looking for a new challenge – putting my dreams into practice. I was following 11 occupations at the one time in 1964. I believe the word is **involvement**, not retirement.

Jim Finucane, Tamworth

Dear Roslyn

Like you, Roslyn, I read *The Country Web* and thoroughly enjoy all its articles, suggestions and stories.

Also like you, I am asking the same questions about retirement and succession planning, which is one of the saddest and most difficult things I have done with my family.

I too feel the fear of not being needed, of being in the way or not pulling my weight in society.

I have been looking after two of my grandchildren for the last two months and have been thinking that I would like to go into one of the preschools or childcare centres as a part-time helper/worker.

I was a teacher – infants and primary but mainly infants; taught my own children for 10 years, and grandchildren for 3-4 years. Yet, to get the correct qualification to go in to childcare I need 3-4 certificates from full-time TAFE (my nearest TAFE is 70 km away), and this is only the pre-qualification for early childhood degrees.

I have a lot to offer in this field as I believe I'm good with small children. Any suggestions?

Julian Campbell, Warren

Dear Roslyn

Thank you for your inspiring letter in the summer edition of the *The Country Web*.

I retired, after much planning, from the family business and left the job I called 'home' for the best part of 15 years. For the first two months I was basically filled with fear, emptiness and anxiety. I wondered what was going on? I had it all planned. I missed associating with our clientele, as over the years we shared happiness, sadness, birthdates, recipes, etc.

My family and friends were a great help to me. I picked myself up and found the courage to step out of my comfort zone and pursued other interests, including some community work. Six months later I feel the transition has been worthwhile, in fact I feel happy and useful.

Life has many forks in the road as we journey through and somehow we need to advance towards change. Planning for retirement is just so important. You need to have other interesting choices on hand. Community work is very fulfilling and there is TAFE or even a new business venture. Most of us have much to offer. We need to strive for happiness which will result in good health and a clear mind. We all experience feelings of insecurity during our lives – that's human nature. I find reading a great book or just listening to music provides great enjoyment.

Hilda Newstead, Gilgandra

Take time to pray

By Elaine Armstrong, Co-Chair
Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee

The first Friday in March is called in the Christian calendar the 'World Day of Prayer', with churches throughout the world holding services to unite the thoughts and prayers of the world's communities. Each year, women from a different country organise the program, with this year's program prepared by the World Day of Prayer Committee of Paraguay.

To read and hear of the stories from the women (both young and old) in this country makes one realise just how very fortunate we are to live here in Australia, where our communities value the contributions and worth of women as people. In this free country we do not fully comprehend when we hear that: Demetria grew up believing that she must serve men: first father and brothers, then husband and sons. She lives each day in silence, subject to serving their needs. Susana is an Enxet woman who would dearly love to be educated. Angelica, 11 years old, lives in a house made of cardboard and plastic. Her afternoons are spent washing windscreens to earn money to simply survive (or to survive simply?). Mercedes, a Nanduti lace-weaver, works long hours at her lace-

making to earn enough to feed her family three meals a day.

Injustice, violence and deceit are rife in some of the world's countries, and women are deprived of the honour and respect that we in Australia have grown to expect and enjoy. Those of us who have such a privileged life should take time to pray for our friends in Paraguay, and in other similar countries. We must prayerfully ask that they will be sustained in their continued struggles against the oppression of women and children. We must ask for governments to have wisdom to act with justice: to have governments that will seek justice and harmony for all, and not have communities that are destroyed through greed and exploitation. Pray that children throughout the world may increasingly have the opportunity to play, to study, and to enjoy the beauty of our world, not suffering because of hunger or violence.

Within our own communities, may we not be in such a hurry that we neglect the elderly, the disabled, the homeless. May we have the courage to stand up and defend the rights of those who are not so able to do so. May we not remain silent when we are confronted with power struggles, exploitation and corruption. If we find it hard to do this in our own safe communities, imagine how much harder it is for the women in Paraguay.

Have you got a minute? Take time to pray!

TIME OUT

In silence
The golden moonball drifts above
dark timber.
The world, waiting for night,
Holds still.
The rustle of an animal,
A whisper,
A warm breath lightly sighs through
leaves.
I stand and smell this place,
Lost amongst the trees
In the moon's glow.
The gentle light blankets the harsh
realities of day.
No flies buzz here
No gnarled and jagged trunks jut out
No sun-bleached carcass screams of
passing time,
Not here, not now.
I stand becalmed, so still, in time,
In that subdued and dulcet light of
after day,
Letting peace seep slowly through
my tired soul.
A spirit moves me.
All things are one, all burdens gone,
No single part is greater than the
whole.
I am happy here.

© HELEN WILLIAMS, COWRA

2007 Hay Women's Gathering

CONTRIBUTE • CREATE • COLLECT • CURATE

2-4 November 2007

Situated on the picturesque Murrumbidgee River and surrounded by the vast, open grasslands of the One Tree Plain, Hay's history is rich with characters and tales of boom and bust – of isolation and innovation. During November this year, Hay will play host to hundreds of women as they come together for the 2007 'Flat Out in Hay' Women's Gathering, organised by Women About Hay.

For more information call 1300 307 090 or go to: www.visithay.com.au



**Rural
Women's
Network**

The State Advisory Committee (SAC) is the RWN's advisory team. It is made up of women from rural, regional, or remote communities, who come from diverse backgrounds and represent the many interests of rural women.

The primary purpose of the SAC is to provide independent advice and strategic direction to the RWN by:

- developing strategies to address priority issues specific to women living in rural, regional and remote communities within NSW;
- promoting and advocating RWN initiatives;
- providing feedback on the effectiveness of the RWN programs;
- being a consultative body for DPI providing feedback on the effectiveness of relevant programs and initiatives; and
- identifying hot and emerging issues for rural, regional and remote communities within NSW.

The SAC is currently Co-chaired by

- **Barry Buffier**
Director-General, NSW Department of Primary Industries; and
- **Elaine Armstrong**
Country Women's Association of NSW

The RWN and SAC invite you to contact them with your views, ideas and questions.

Current members are:

- **Bourke:** Patricia Bates-Canty
Aboriginal women's interests
Ph: 02 6872 3021, Fax: 02 6870 8892
Email: pcanty@gwahs.nsw.gov.au
- **Bourke:** Denise Turnbull
Far Western representative
Ph: 02 6874 7330, Fax: 02 6874 7330
Email: will10@bigpond.com
- **Coonamble:** Susan Ainge McLeish
NSW Farmers' Association
Ph: 02 6824 2091, Fax: 02 6824 2408
Email: mcleishs@nswfarmers.org.au
- **Gleniffer:** Julie Woodroffe
Natural Resource Management
Ph: 02 6655 1420, Fax: 02 6655 0864
- **Mandurama:** Sally Green
Minister for Primary Industries' representative
Ph: 02 6366 7209, Fax: 02 6366 7256
- **Sydney:** Dr Frances Parker
Academia/Research Interests
Ph: 02 4736 0049
- **Wagga Wagga:** Elaine Armstrong
Country Women's Association of NSW
Ph: 02 6931 7639, Fax: 02 6391 7639
Email: ear86878@bigpond.net.au

rwn sac update

There have been a number of changes to the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee (SAC) in the past few months with several members retiring from their position on the Committee and the election of a new Co-Chair.

FAREWELL

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Margaret Francis, Rural Lands Protection Board representative, for her commitment to the SAC and her role as Co-Chair, and to Linda Duffy, NSW Association of Rural Financial Counselling Groups representative.

Margaret and Linda have been instrumental in maintaining the profile of the RWN and have generously given their time and expertise, providing advice to the RWN and helping with our many projects and activities. Their skills and knowledge in agriculture, the environment, business and community issues have been highly valued by the RWN and the SAC, with both playing an important role in helping to set the agenda for rural women.

While Margaret and Linda may be 'gone' from the Committee, they are definitely not forgotten. I look forward to continuing to work with them on rural issues and wish them much success in their future endeavours.

NEW CO-CHAIR

I would like to warmly welcome Elaine Armstrong and congratulate her on her new role as the Community Co-Chair. Elaine takes over from Margaret Francis and will serve a two-year co-chair term from June 2007.

Elaine joined the RWN SAC in February 2004 as a representative of The Country Women's Association (CWA) of NSW. Since joining the SAC Elaine has brought many issues to the table and has been active in RWN activities including writing and sourcing many articles for *The Country Web* newsletter.

Elaine joined the CWA in 1992 and helped to reform the Oura branch (near Wagga Wagga). This led to her taking on many roles within the organisation

including her current role as a member of the State Executive Council. She has represented the CWA on the Energy Australia Customer Consumer Council and was the Association's delegate at two Associated Country Women of the World Conferences.

'CWA is an excellent forum for rural women to have their voices heard and provide input into the decision makers, as we represent over 12,000 members.

'There are many synergies between our organisation and the RWN from which to achieve better outcomes for women and their families.

'I aim to ensure that my involvement with the State Advisory Committee continues to build on the work of those who went before me.'

Allison Priest, Rural Women's Network Assistant Coordinator

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

RWN are calling for expressions of interest (EOIs) from rural women living in far western NSW for a three-year term on the RWN SAC. The successful applicant will take over from Denise Turnbull who is due to retire from the SAC in June 2007.

EOIs should be no longer than two pages, include two recent referees and demonstrate you have: 1. Broad networks; 2. A commitment to rural women and their families; and 3. An understanding of key issues facing the far western region.

EOIs must be received by 15 June 2007. Send to: RWN, Locked Bag 21, Orange NSW 2800, Fax to: 02 6391 3650 or Email: allison.priest@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Applications will be assessed by the SAC who will then make a recommendation to the Minister for Primary Industries for approval.

For more information contact RWN.