

The Country Web

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST

NUMBER 44 WINTER 2007 **FREE NEWSLETTER**



Bishops Lodge Historic House & Heritage Rose Garden

Bishop's Lodge (pictured above) is an 1888 iron house designed by architect John Sulman and the Bishop of the Riverina to combat

the region's extreme climate. The building is surrounded by a historic garden which contains a remarkable collection of heritage roses, some of which are unique to this garden.

This is just one of the great things you can see and do as part of the 2007 Women's Gathering to be held in Hay from 2-4 November. See pages 19-22 for program and registration information.

BISHOPS LODGE HISTORIC HOUSE & HERITAGE ROSE GARDEN AT HAY. PHOTO: EVOKE PHOTOGRAPHY



Let's make it happen – together

Rural Women's Network

INCLUDES THE 2007 HAY WOMEN'S GATHERING PROGRAM & REGISTRATION

THE COUNTRY WEB

The Country Web is produced by NSW Department of Primary Industries Rural Women's Network (RWN) and is distributed free, three times a year. For more about RWN see page 5.

EDITING/DESKTOP PUBLISHING

Allison Priest

CONTRIBUTIONS

Letters, stories, poems and photographs from rural women and their families are always welcome.

FREE MAILING LIST

If you live in New South Wales and would like to be on our free mailing list, contact the RWN.

ADVERTISING

14,000 Country Webs are produced each edition. We welcome advertisements and offer very competitive rates. Contact RWN for more information. Sponsorship and insert options are also available.

CONTACT DETAILS

Rural Women's Network
Locked Bag 21
Orange NSW 2800
Ph: 02 6391 3620
Fax: 02 6391 3650
TTY: 02 6391 3300
Email: allison.priest@dpi.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn

COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS

See pages 13 & 23 for competitions.

1. Information on how to enter and prize details form part of the Terms & Conditions. By entering the competition, entrants accept these Terms & Conditions.
2. To enter, you must provide your full name and postal details, and in 25 words or less answer the competition question.
3. Entries must be posted to the stated address by the stated date.
4. This competition is a game of skill. The best answer as judged by the RWN will win. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be transferred or redeemed for cash. The winner will be notified by mail within 14 days from the judging date.

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editorial

The past provides an enormous canvas on which to think and reflect. There are many books and television programs dedicated to examining many different 'pasts'.

We all have 'personal pasts' providing memories. For some it will be happy images of a wonderful loving and secure childhood. For others, suffering early grief, illness or abuse, such memories can be the opposite. There is also the 'historical past' uncovered and shared by historians and archaeologists.

One thing is certain, in all its manifestations, the past will fascinate us at some time in our lives. Many people become fascinated researching family trees and spend vast amounts of time and money sleuthing long-lost cousins, grandparents and great great aunts. We like to know where we come from and why we are as we are.

My own personal reflections on the past are for the most part happy. We all have times in our past that we would rather forget, but on the whole I have lived a blessed life and am grateful for it. It is easy for me to value the past, yet I feel many great values learned from the past have disappeared.

I most certainly wouldn't want to return to the good old days of no washing machines or refrigeration, no power and all things less technologically advanced. However, perhaps

we have lost some important principles which help to make life meaningful.

I often complain that no one takes responsibility for their actions any more. There is less honour among men. Remember when a handshake was as good as a written contract?

With the focus of most news stories on dreadful things happening around the world, it is easy to become overwhelmed and forget to reflect on good things we once valued – like helping people and contributing to the community. We need more stories of the many wonderful people everywhere who help others suffering or in trouble.

If I am truly honest I admit throughout history little has changed. There have always been and will always be honourable men and women alongside dishonest, unscrupulous and cruel people. It is well to look back and reflect on the past. We can learn a lot if we just take the time. I guess if it was an ideal world we would have nothing to strive for. My reflections on the past have made me wonder if we are imperfect for a reason and if this is why we all need to keep working towards a better world.

Denise Turnbull, former member of the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee.

COUNTRY WEB NO.43 COMPETITION WINNERS

Congratulations to the following *Country Web* readers for their winning entries in the No.43 *Country Web* reader give-away.

2007 Communities in Control

Conference: Due to the high standard of entries received, Our Community decided to give all six entrants a double-pass to the Conference: **Meredith Boyd**, Mt Hutton; **Helen Dalton**, Condobolin; **Mary Hollingworth**, Deepwater; **Lee McDonald**, Corowa; **Cathy Walsh**, Boorowa; and **Denise Willis**, Upper Lansdowne.

The Greatest Life Never to be Lived: **Jenny Magner**, Tenterfield

Beyond Burnout to Balance: Strategies & Solutions: **Mary Hollingworth**, Deepwater & **Jenny Symons**, Molong

Meditation – Mind, Body & Spirit CD: **Jennifer Duddle**, Milvale

Meditation for people with cancer and people in remission: **Norma Stewart**, Port Macquarie

CALENDAR OF EVENTS: LOCAL AND REGIONAL NSW EVENTS & ACTIVITIES GUIDE

AUGUST 2007

22–23, GUNDY

Shaping Our Futures Together

Contact Sonia Muir on 02 6391 3611 or sonia.muir@dpi.nsw.gov.au

22–23, KYOGLE

Farmers Mental Health

Gathering. Contact Julie Greig on 0429 126 656 or julie.greig@gwahs.health.nsw.gov.au

SEPTEMBER 2007

12-13, BROKEN HILL

Shaping Our Futures Together

Contact Sonia Muir on 02 6391 3611 or sonia.muir@dpi.nsw.gov.au

SEPTEMBER 2007

13-14, MANLY (SYDNEY)

2nd National Men's Shed

Conference. Call 02 9954 4400 or mensshed@dcconferences.com.au or go to: www.mensshed.org

15-23, NATIONAL

History Week. More than 200 diverse events across NSW are being planned to showcase history – exhibitions, talks, walks, workshops, open days, special events and much more. Contact the NSW History Council on 02 9252 8715 or go to: www.historycouncilnsw.org.au

OCTOBER 2007

15, STATEWIDE

Applications close for 2008

RIRDC Rural Women's Award.

See page 17 for information.

NOVEMBER 2007

2-4, HAY

2007 Women's Gathering.

A wonderful opportunity for women from all over NSW to come together to network or just have fun! This year's Gathering offers participant tours, dinners, networking, a wide range of workshops, keynote speakers, fun and lots of laughter! See pages 19-22 for more information.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The next edition of *The Country Web* will focus on 'Recovery & Resilience'.

If you have stories, poems, pictures or information of interest, we would love to hear from you.

Contributions required by 14 September for publication in December 2007.

Send your stories to: The Editor, RWN, Locked Bag 21, Orange 2800, Fax: 02 6391 3650; or Email: allison.priest@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Supporting women

I have written a few years ago in praise of the Rural Women's Network, however, I feel I must reiterate the important role you have in supporting women through this devastating drought. I do hope governments continue to recognise your important work in community matters.

The recent *Country Web* had excellent content and we can all gain some help and inspiration to survive the drought problems and hope for better times.

Frances Gavel, Condobolin

Communities in Control

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the 5th Communities in Control Conference 2007! The excellent presentation of authoritative, entertaining and empowering speakers was contained within the framework of a wonderfully hospitable, well-managed and accepting environment of hosts, good food, great program and friendly delegates!

The leadership of Rhonda Galbally, CEO of Our Community, and Joe Caddy, CEO of Centacare Catholic Family Services, was inspirational and community-creating in itself! The young members hosting the Conference reflected the authenticity and integrity of the vision – they were helpful, non-judgmental, obviously enthusiastic and helped to add to the overall camaraderie and warm ethos of the gathering. What an honour and a blessing to attend! I feel I have been given a privileged insight into the workings of people, organisations and processes that will not return void. The bringing together of such resources with a common vision, one of encouraging all in making a real difference in their own spheres of influence, must

make a profound impact! It is truly inspirational to know there are so many energised, highly able and enthusiastic people in our world.

May many others be encouraged to attend and, as a result, be lifted to a higher level of understanding and ability to make a difference.

Meredith Boyd, Mt Hutton

Ed: See ourcommunity.com.au for information on the Conference.

Women – leaders in families

The reference to *Women & Leadership in Rural Australia's Future* in the last *Country Web* prompted me to read Wendy McCarthy's Rick Farley Lecture.

A passing reference to women as leaders in their families caught my eye. A few years ago I completed my Masters honours thesis on organisational change using, as my research topic, the career development of organisational change agents.

Broadly speaking, the profile which emerged was not greatly different from that of corporate leaders in Australian organisations, with one major exception: the primary role models for both men and women in this group were their mothers.

Those were the days of very limited opportunity for women and all of these mothers were home-based for most of the time. Clearly they were also very intelligent and very frustrated. All were striving to find a better way in whatever they did and this inspired their children, not only with a passion for improvement but also for improvement within an ethical commitment to the growth of others.

With more than thirty years in senior executive roles in large organisations, I have observed that it is this drive to do things

better that most women bring to management and leadership roles.

Certainly rural women already have many of these skills and abilities and use them in their families and in agricultural businesses.

Since retiring nearly four years ago I have been conducting leadership programs for women, mostly in the public sector, and have come into contact with many successful women with a passion for their work and a desire to lead. In every group, however, the discussion of whether the price of leadership is too high is a major issue. Women look for a leadership style which allows them to be themselves and have a balanced work and family life.

As a result, we spent time in workshops developing self-awareness, reviewing our motivation and life needs and looking at skills to be self-managing in a leadership role. This affirms existing knowledge and enables the group to move on and apply their capabilities. The group interaction is a very powerful part of that experience.

Wendy McCarthy, in her lecture, pointed to the possible waste of resources in offering leadership training programs. Certainly educational research indicates that around 80 per cent of adult learning occurs at work. Nevertheless the kind of learning that occurs in the groups I have experienced can be an invaluable support for women as they develop as leaders in a broad sphere. It affirms existing capabilities, provides valuable feedback from others and introduces opportunities to compare the leadership cultures of various organisations and the impact on individuals. It helps women make choices about how they want to lead.

Kay Lord, Lyndhurst



The RWN team: Allison Priest (Assistant Coordinator) and Sonia Muir (Coordinator)

The Rural Women's Network (RWN) is a statewide government program within NSW Department of Primary Industries and is based at Orange. RWN works in partnership with individuals and agencies to share information and promote action on rural women's issues. The RWN:

- provides information and referrals;
- supports the development of local initiatives;
- works with rural women and families to identify and bring attention to priority issues;
- develops projects with other agencies to address needs;
- provides a medium for networking and information sharing;
- promotes the profile of rural women;
- provides a two-way link between government and rural women; and
- provides policy advice.

**Contact the RWN on
Ph: 02 6391 3620 or Email:
rural.women@dpi.nsw.gov.au**

'Nothing about us without us.'

QUOTE FROM THE 4TH WORLD CONGRESS OF RURAL WOMEN

'Rural women produce about 80 per cent of the food grown in Africa, 60 per cent in Asia and between 30–40 per cent in Latin America, yet own just two per cent of all agricultural land and receive only one per cent of agricultural credit. They are critically important to our society and yet are the most marginalised.' South African Minister for Finance.

I was fortunate to attend the 4th World Congress of Rural Women and a pre-congress study tour in South Africa during April. Over 2500 women from 60 countries (35 from Australia – three from NSW) gathered in Durban for the Congress. This short report gives a small glimpse into this experience.

Australian women are well respected for the key role they played in all past events and through initiating the first conference in 1994 in Melbourne. Since then, World Congresses have been held in Washington DC, USA (1998) Madrid, Spain (2002) and now South Africa.

The 2007 Congress explored issues shared by rural women worldwide and will perhaps sound familiar... the impact of globalisation and trade; concern for sustainable development (social, economic and environment); climate change; a guarantee of food security; access to land, water, finance, health services and new technologies; improved transport and roads; and

adequate housing. Having a high level event on their continent provided African women with an opportunity to also spotlight their region's highest priorities such as HIV/AIDS, land rights and poverty.

Despite a tight program just about everything ran late. African time means going with the flow. Music, singing and culture play a strong role in building community across Africa and the wonderfully colourful costumes and melodious voices created a fantastic and unique atmosphere. Meal times were 'feeding frenzies' as the hundreds of women scrambled to fill their bellies with protein – perhaps an uncommon item on their daily menu?

Personal safety was a constant concern and buses transported us from hotels to venues. Racial tensions in South Africa are complex and certainly NOT black and white. For anyone wanting alternative perspectives, an overnight stay at Mama Thope's Bed and Breakfast in the black township of Khayelitsha and a tour of Robben Island prison (think Nelson Mandela), both near Cape Town, are a must. The prison tour was led by an ex-inmate who, despite sharing distressing stories of prison life, had an inner forgiveness to host warders for a meal in his home when the prison closed.

Global rural women's congresses have become a platform for extensive networking and present

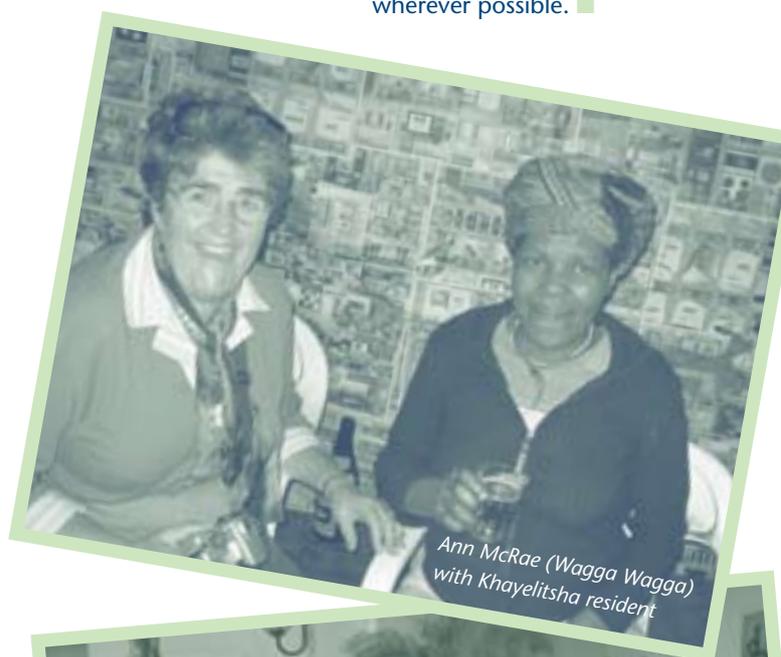
opportunities to explore issues regionally, nationally and internationally. It is hoped the Durban Declaration highlighting the 2007 Congress recommendations will provide a positive influence for action to improve the lives of rural women globally.

India has agreed to host the 5th World Congress of Rural Women in 2010-11. With one billion people and the largest population of rural women in the world, the scale of change there is daunting. However we can still learn from so-called 'developing countries'.

On the political level, one third of India's rural seats are reserved for women and this target is already exceeded with women holding 43 per cent of seats, and 20 per cent of government budgets must go towards capacity building for women's projects. I hope many of you can make it to India.

To find out more about the 2007 Congress go to: www.nda.agric.za

A full copy of my report is on the RWN website and I am happy to give visual presentations to groups wherever possible. ■



Ann McRae (Wagga Wagga) with Khayelitsha resident



A kaleidoscope of rural African women. PHOTO BY ANN McRAE

Come visit the past at Outback House

Article by Liz Tourle, Obley



My husband Scott and I own and operate a farming and grazing enterprise 40 kilometres south-west of Dubbo. In 2005 the ABC television series, *Outback House*, based on the Robinson Land Act of 1861, was filmed on our property.

Our children Kennedy, Tom and Sam are the sixth generation on this land. In 1837 my husband's great great grandparents, Arthur and Isabella Baird, came to Australia from Scotland.

The Bairds spent time in Bathurst before settling near Dubbo. In 1846 they bought 200 acres of freehold land. After buying more land in 1857 The Springs homestead was built.

The Springs was to be used for the filming, however the producers realised it would be

cheaper to build a 'set' rather than alter existing buildings and later return them to their 21st Century condition. Oxley Downs, built in 14 weeks, is a complete replica of an early rural Australian homestead. The producers went to great lengths to purchase or reproduce authentic props, so we now have a wonderful collection of early Australian memorabilia.

With more than a passing interest in history and a need to supplement our farming enterprise, at the completion of filming, we bought all the buildings and props and now open Oxley Downs to the public as often as we can.

Through Oxley Downs we can offer a tactile experience for school children as well as families. It is a lesson in history but also in early Australian life.

The first Europeans known to have seen this land were explorers, John Oxley and Allan Cunningham. In 1817, John Oxley wrote in his journal, 'The tops of the hills were generally stony (granite of different degrees and qualities), but the broom-grass grew strongly and abundantly in the interstices. We never descended a valley without finding it well watered, and although the soil and character of the country rendered it fit for all agricultural purposes...'

The homestead and outbuildings house the possessions of daily life in 1861 highlighting the simple but wholesome life of our ancestors.

With the hint of wood smoke on the breeze and fires burning in the parlour and kitchen, the atmosphere is very authentic. The homestead with its wide verandahs and strangers rooms, replicates an 1848 construction complete with hessian lined walls, calico ceilings and shingled roof.

The outbuildings are made of slabs covered with bark roofs and include a kitchen, laundry, meat house, long drop

(toilet), stables, milking shed, manager's quarters, bachelor's quarters and shearing shed. The vegetable garden and orchard created for Outback House is maintained, and one can still discover a strawberry or dig a potato when in season.

As in 1861, there is no electricity and we encourage children to play games that don't need electricity such as marbles, knuckles, hopscotch, quoits, kite flying and the girls' game of graces using a hoop.

On open days visitors can bring a picnic and wander at their leisure. At night events Oxley Downs comes to life with kerosene lights, candles and camp fires again keeping it as true to the period as we can.

Since opening we have made many new friends who share a common interest in history, tradition and rural life including the Outback House participants who return regularly. ■

If you would like more information, please call us on Ph: 02 6887 7264, Email: tourle@oxleydowns.com.au or go to: www.oxleydowns.com.au

BreastScreen
NEW SOUTH WALES

- Women 50-69 years are eligible for a FREE Breastscreen
- No Doctor referral required
- Breast cancer can affect 1 in every 8 women
- Breastscreen sites at Orange and Dubbo (2 mobile vans visit other towns)
- Simply telephone 13 20 50 for appointment

Wartime memories

Article by Helen Dempsey, Mudgee

By the end of 1941, advertisements were beginning to appear in newspapers reminding people of the need to help the war effort for Australia, and a call went out for volunteer telephonists to man emergency switchboards in the event of enemy attack.

Although fifteen years old at the time, I had left school hoping to join some kind of service. My brother was in the Army and in training in Queensland. My only sister was waiting for her 18th birthday and call-up into the Army Medical Service. She was working as a volunteer nurse.

I applied and was accepted to learn to operate the massive switchboard at the Metropolitan Water Board in Sydney. Within a week our group was considered ready to join other women in the then yet to be completed under-ground railway tunnels at Wynyard, near Circular Quay. We were placed under the auspices of the Women's Australian National Service (WANS). How I would have responded or reacted had I been on duty on the night that enemy submarines entered Sydney Harbour, I often wonder.

By 1942, yet another call went out by WANS for labour on farms as fruit and vegetables were rotting in the Gosford area. Women and girls were asked to volunteer to go to the farms to help with the harvest, releasing the men for the Armed Services. These women would soon be called The Australian Women's Land Army.

This was it for me! Still awaiting call-up, my sister volunteered with me. We were told to buy a uniform from David Jones, some overalls and boots, and report to the Sydney Central Railway Station where we would be given a rail ticket. So on a certain night we met with a group to travel to an unknown destination.

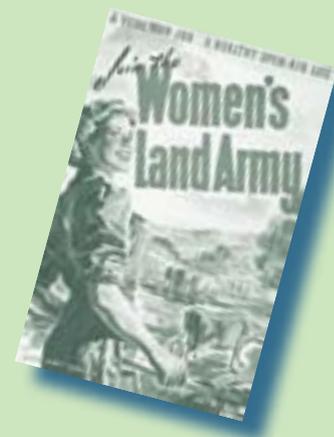
By noon the next morning, we disembarked at a railway station in the flattest country I had ever seen. We had no idea where we were. We had to ask the station master because all names had been removed from the stations so as to confuse the enemy should they have managed to get as far inland. So here we were, at Leeton, in the Riverina region of southern NSW.

At the barracks we found that an advance group of Land Army Girls had made everything clean and neat so that we were all ready to begin work the next day. We headed off in our clean overalls to various farms to be

greeted by row upon row of vegetables. Huge paddocks all laid out with precision as far as the eyes could see. Oceans of beetroots, onions and carrots. We spent day-after-day weeding, planting, picking or hoeing. At the end of each working day we were grateful for the irrigation canals where we would cool down with a splash and a bit of fun.

According to the seasons, large crops of oranges, lemons and the best quality grapefruit I had ever seen, were all carefully gathered. We often picked from the top of a twelve-foot high (3.5 m) 'A' frame ladder. A four-wheeled flat wagon pulled by the most patient horse was loaded high with boxes of the day's pick and taken to the packing shed. The fruit was packed with our love and prayers and sometimes a note with our best wishes for a safe return to all the service men and women.

When winter arrived and the days turned wet, being unable to work in the paddocks, the Land Army Girls were asked to help at the cannery. The huge Letona cannery supplied goods for civilians and the armed services. The factory worked non-stop every hour, every day. Peaches, plums, apricots and fruit salad were processed and vegetables, soups, stews and jams were canned by the thousands.



The noise from the can making area of the factory was incredible. The cans were stamped out of steel, formed and conveyed then dropped to the preparing benches below where women cut the vegetables to size and packed them into the cans. From there they travelled on to the huge cookers.

At the end of the hostilities, the Australian Women's Land Army was quickly disbanded when the men began returning to their farms. Enduring friendships were made and kept along with our memories.

One memorable event stands out for me. There were a number of Italian prisoners of war (POWs) working in a paddock quite near to the road. Each morning for a week we drove past on our way to a farm. On the second morning our driver slowed as the POWS began to sing. I have never forgotten the beautiful sound of those men's voices on that foggy morning. ■

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.

MARSHALL BERMAN

It's not like it was in the old days

Story on Daphne Kennedy, Walgett. From Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Walgett & Collarenebri, produced by the Department of Environment & Conservation NSW (now the Department of Environment & Climate Change NSW)



Things have changed in Walgett, its not like it was in the old days. The kids don't realise how good they have it now. They have opportunities in school, we didn't. They don't have to be sent out to work as soon as they are fourteen.

Born in Walgett

I was born in Walgett on the 30th April 1928. I was the second eldest out of seven children. My parents' names were William Kennedy and Sarah Gardiner. I do remember my grandparents but I'm not sure of their names on Dad's side. I know there was a Charlie Kennedy but I don't know my Grandmother's real name. She passed away before I was born so I never met her.

The family lived on Gingie Reserve

The family lived on Gingie Reserve when I was young. It was good there. We only had a little tin hut to live in and it only had a dirt floor. I remember we had to carry the water up from the river every day in those days. We had to get water for drinking and water for washing, things like that. It was hard work because we had to carry the water in buckets on a yoke. There was a little black school there at Gingie. I went there for a while and then I ended up going up to the convent school in town. After school the kids would go fishing and that was just about every afternoon

and they'd go on the weekends too. And we used to go out hunting rabbits. I can remember how we used to dig them out of their burrows. You know, we never set rabbit traps; we just worked out what burrows they were hiding in and how to get them out.

We lived out there on the reserve until I left school and got a job. Other than fish and rabbits, the family lived on rations in those days. I can still remember how we used to get our ration book and then walk into town to get what it was we needed. It was mostly things like flour, sugar, tea, some meat, dripping and butter.

Life as a child

We had our set chores to do when I was young. That was before and after school. We still had to go to school. But we had time for play; I think some of our games probably turned into collecting food for the family. Especially things like catching rabbits. But we still had time to play other games. I remember the kids were always having a game of rounders. Rounders was a game like baseball. I didn't have dolls or anything like that back then. We just spent most of our spare time going down to the river. We'd go swimming. The older ones would keep an eye on the younger ones so it was always pretty safe. It was a good community back then; people had to look out for one another. And there were lots of rules back then too. Like you couldn't go anywhere unless you had a grown up with you. And you couldn't be out in the night. You had to be home before it got dark.

They had stories that kept you safe

The adults and parents told us lots of stories back then when I was a kid and I guess the stories were probably told to keep us safe. I remember they had this one story about the Water Dogs¹. You see there were places along the river where we weren't allowed to swim because they told us these Water Dogs were there. Well we

thought the dogs would come up and grab us and take us under the water if we swam in these places. And they had these other stories about ghosts and spirits and how they would follow you home if we stayed out after dark. The stories were enough to scare me.

Work on a station

I had to leave school at age 14. We all had to go out to work at that age; there wasn't any choice. And it was only ever housekeeping work that was available to us in those days too; there were no other work opportunities. You see the station owners would hire the Aboriginal girls as soon as they finished their schooling. So I went out to one of the stations and I was there for about five years. I got paid but it wasn't very much. Eventually I came back into town and worked here. You see the boarding houses and the pubs would put us on as domestics.

The family got together for Christmas

Christmas was a time when the family tried to all get together, you see people always worked out on the properties so Christmas was the one time when they would try to get in to the one place and be together. The family at home would cook lots of things and invite everyone over. We had a big family ourselves and then there was an extended family too and sometimes it was really hard to bring everyone together. So that's how it was for Christmas and it was very good.

My husband and I lived over at Namoi

My husband Perry Dickson and I met here in Walgett. I was only 19 at the time. We got together and started a family. We lived over at Namoi back in those days. It was hard when the children started coming along because we had to go down to the riverbank to do the washing. That was

terrible. Percy used to work out on the stations around here; he did the shearing when the season was on and fencing during the other parts of the year. So I used to pack up the kids and go out and stay out there with him. That was when the kids were little. But it was a hard time when we were young and bringing up the kids. I mean now you just press a button and things work for you. But in my day we had to carry the water up to the house, we had to fetch and carry the wood, we had to wash things by hand and try to dry things when it was raining, and back then

FAMILIES

The dust blew in as thick as mud
You couldn't see a thing
And when it passed the work began
As we all commenced to clean

It wasn't nice, it wasn't fun
But dust and scrub we must
'Cause families pulled together
Be it rain or dust

The sheep they needed shearing
The men were working hard
They sure can be so difficult
To get into that yard

The girls were cooking up a storm
Cakes, biscuits and scones
The cow was milked the cream was beat
For shearing had begun

We all worked hard, we pulled our
weight
You didn't even think
The life was close the work was hard
It was a real good thing

We loved it all, we shared the life
The good the bad the sad
'Cause families pulled together
'Cause family was all you had

Dad came home heavy and sad
The fire had burned all day
I took his hand, it was so black
There was nothing that I could say

The troubles come and go
The work goes on forever
You didn't have to ask for help
'Cause families pulled together

JUDY WEST, MOLONG

it would rain for days on end. I don't think the young ones today could imagine the strain.

The hardest thing was carting water

I think washing was the biggest problem for me with all the children, especially when they were little. I had to wash in either a bucket or in a boiler. That's sheets and everything! All the white things had to be boiled! The real trouble was carrying the water up before you even started. And it was the same for our baths. We had to carry the water up, heat the water and bath in a tub. We only had dirt floors in our hut in those days but we had these bags on the floor to make it a little better. And believe me it was hard to dry things when it rained for days on end. And besides that you always needed dry wood for the fire! Percy had built our place himself. It had two big rooms and he put a verandah on it. Believe me, it was hard work raising a family way back then.

We went fishing

I can remember good times and one of them was when we went down to the river to do a bit of fishing. We'd walk along the river and find a good spot, but we never camped overnight. I'm very afraid of snakes you see. But we used to go for long walks out in the bush and for some reason we never ever got lost. You see when we were young, like as kids, we'd always have an old person with us when we went out in the scrub. So they must have shown us how to do it. They showed us how to know where we were and how to stay safe. I was able to do it myself as I got older because I used to walk around everywhere getting the wild fruit, the quandongs and bush food. I never used to eat wild meat. I wouldn't eat goannas or anything like that.

Bush food

I used to collect a lot of bush food. Sometimes I would eat it as I went along. Sometimes it can give you a stomach ache if you don't make sure it's ripe. I never ate goanna and I used to eat porcupine but I can't stand it now. I didn't want to eat kangaroo either. The only thing I didn't mind was rabbit. But now they buy rabbits

from the butcher shop. No one goes into the bush now. They don't get that sort of thing. They still go fishing and that's it.

I have my own family now

I have my own family now. I had 12 children over the years and I've lost four. I lost two girls just three years ago. They passed away nearly on the same day as each other. So now they are both together. One of them passed on the 3rd of July and the other passed on the 4th. There was even further tragedy when I lost my son. He was only 22 and he died on his birthday. He was asthmatic. It was very hard. So I have lost three girls and one boy. Now all the grandchildren have grown but I have one here with me. He is just a little fella. He is my youngest girl's boy.

Things have changed in Walgett

Things have changed in Walgett nowadays, it's not like it was in the old days. The kids don't realise how good they have it now. They have opportunities in school, we didn't. We didn't have choices at all. We couldn't say, no we like school; we want to be a teacher or something like that. No, that wasn't for us. We were sent out to work as soon as we were old enough to go and that was that. Sometimes we didn't even get paid. Nowadays they don't have to be sent out to work when they turn 14 and they can go on in school and be whatever it is they want to be. They just don't realise how hard it was for us growing up in our day. Life was so very different. And remember, back then, the roads were just dirt tracks; we didn't just jump in a car to get about. The houses didn't even have washing machines and clothes dryers in them, not like today. All those things weren't there for us, we had nothing. We even had to cart water; and that was an impossible task some days. It was all very hard. I hope the young people realise our struggle and decide to take advantage of what there is for them in their present day. ■

¹ A Water Dog is a spirit dog that lurks around near water after dark. The Water Dog is a common theme appearing in several previous books in the Women's Heritage series.

Ed: RWN received lots of feedback on the Men's Shed article, featured in the last edition of The Country Web from readers who would like to see a Men's Shed established in their local community. I also received a letter from Chris Simpson, outlining some additional information and support for communities interested in setting up a Men's Shed who have limited resources.

'...information and a wide scope of expertise can be gained free of charge from the Lane Cove Shed, operating since 1997. For more information or assistance contact Ruth van Herk or Ted Donnelly on Ph: 02 9418 8459, Fax: 02 9418 8434, Email: lanecovemenshed@usnads.com or go to: www.mensshed.org or www.mensshed.org.au

'Also, the Men's Shed movement, hosted by Lane Cove Shed, has a conference in Manly on 13–14th September 2007 that I would urge interested parties to attend. Details can be obtained by going to the national website noted above.

'Interestingly, Associate Professor Barry Golding, School of Education, University of Ballarat, has just completed research into Men's Sheds and can be contacted at: b.golding@ballarat.edu.au.

'And for those who doubt the value of a Men's Shed to the female population, I quote a local woman whose husband has several severe health problems and joined our local shed: *"He just enjoys the company and I know he is safe. From being a full-time carer I now have part-time employment and the chance to socialise with my female friends. The Shed means so much to both of us."*

**Chris Simpson, Secretary,
Grenfell Men's Shed &
Secretary/Treasurer,
Independent Men's Shed**

Knowing Geordie

By Jill Baggett, Mudjee

The promise of our new life in the country was exciting. With six young sons, leaving the city seemed like a good idea. The trials of leaving our brick veneer home, moving into the old fibro farmhouse, learning the art of lighting a fuel stove, using a chip heater and starting a water pump, were new experiences which hadn't yet lost their appeal and novelty on that special summer morning in 1982.

It was special because that was the morning we met Geordie. We were exploring, trying to find the boundaries of our hilly 100 hectare property when we heard the sound of a galloping horse and were startled to see a man dressed in a tasselled leather shirt and pants, red headband holding back a mane of long grey hair, riding a magnificent appaloosa stallion, appear over the horizon.

'Whoa Druid,' he shouted as he saw us, the horse rearing in protest and snorting his disapproval. 'Hey there,' he addressed us, the horse now turning in circles and my children taking shelter behind a large tree. 'You the neighbours? Have you seen 16 horses by any chance? I'm your neighbour from across the creek, Geordie they call me.'

'What a vision,' were my thoughts as I looked at his craggy lined face and blue eyes squinting against the sun. My husband John was introducing us and shaking his head to the query of the whereabouts of the missing horses.

'Come visit me laddies, first house over the creek', Geordie

said pointing over the hill. 'I'll teach you how to trap and skin a fox soon enough, good money in the pelts.' He waved as Druid broke into a full gallop and disappeared over the hill.

'When can we go Mum,' six young voices clamoured. 'When? When can we go? Today?' I knew there would be no peace until we did.

The next day we did battle with the fuel stove. 'Should be instinctive,' John said. 'People have been cooking on these darn things for centuries.' However, I felt it was going to take me a lot of practice and not just instinct to learn the intricacies of this blackened beast. A batch of scones of barely edible consistency resulted.

We set off to cross the three hills and swiftly running creek which separated us from Geordie. Hot and flustered, we eventually saw his mud brick house a few hundred metres downstream, smoke billowing from the chimney. It looked inviting and we welcomed the cooling wade across the creek until our three-year-old slipped on the rocks and was tumbled down the watercourse with alarming swiftness. I think his older brothers enjoyed the rescue and we arrived at Geordie's battered wrought iron gate with six laughing, dripping children.

Geordie was standing in a corner of the rambling overgrown garden looking at the ground, scratching his head. He beckoned us calling, 'Come see what I've found. I was going to move this elderberry tree – it hasn't been doing so well and I want to make some wine. Would you just look at what's here?'

I gasped in shock as I looked at the ground where he pointed. 'Wow, look at that,' my 13-year-

old said enthusiastically. 'Man,' echoed the 14-year-old, 'Man.'

There at Geordie's feet were the legs and feet of a human skeleton, the upper body hidden under a spade, fork and gold pan. 'Who,' I started. 'Must be old Mick, the old Chinaman who built this place. I've dug him up. My, would you believe it? Poor old Mick. Well, well. Come on laddies, help me cover him up. Guess I'll leave his elderberry tree after all.'

Willing hands helped restore Mick to his eternal rest and I wondered if future visits to Geordie's would be as surprising. They were.

In the weeks that followed he would lead us along the watercourse showing us the ruins of the mud brick and corrugated iron dwellings the Chinese gold prospectors had built when they opened our valley in the 1800s. The boys loved to eat the sweet juicy figs and crispy Asian pears from the trees flourishing in the summer sun, laden with fruit and planted long ago.

I always think of summer when I remember Geordie. I don't know why, because some of the happiest moments were spent sitting around his big open fire, the aroma of a spicy rabbit stew cooking in the big hanging cast iron pot and the kettle boiling merrily while a storm raged outside and the creeks rose, effectively cutting off our exit to the road home.

These were the times he'd bring out his penny whistle and transport us to his homeland with the tunes and songs of the English North Country. His gravely voice was none the less musical and we loved to listen to the rich brogue when he recited the poetry of Robbie Burns.