

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4454

Dick, Muriel

(1921 - 2000)

Born	19210101, Victoria Australia
Died	20001211, Garfield Victoria Australia
Occupation	Farmer, social activist, Women's rights activist

Summary

In 1994 Muriel Dick was 73 years old and running a farm in Southern Victoria. Her husband had died some fourteen years earlier and she was managing things herself.

Details

Muriel Dick's mother was from the country (around Omeo in Victoria) but her father was from the city, working as a carpenter for the railways. He loved the countryside, though, and so retired to acres at Warburton, in Victoria. Her parents bought twenty acres, split them into blocks and built houses on them for sale. Muriel remembers the days of her childhood fondly. She liked the freedom and basking in her father's pride. 'He gave me strengths that are usually given in a male world.-, she said. 'I had two dancing classes – skipping around and riding racehorses. It was a wonderful teenage life.' Her father adored her. Her parents lost a son in a drowning accident and after that, the focus was her. Other children followed but she was the lucky one.

After marrying, she lived in east Melbourne for a while, before coming back to the land. Her husband came from farming stock and channelled everything into getting a property. They purchased one in the early 1960s. Despite living on acreage as a child, Muriel acknowledges that she had never really had much experience of farming prior to moving onto their farm.

Muriel's husband was nineteen and half years older than her, with very firm views on who was responsible for raising their two small children. 'Look, even a heifer can look after its calf', he told her when she was at the end of her tether one day. Whilst the children were small, she had very little to do with the everyday running of the farm. 'My place was in the house, really, and the garden, and with the children, but if he needed help, you know, you worked like a dog!'

Once the children were off to school, she started to get more involved . 'I got quite fond of cows. I could pat them and talk to them, and I had an affinity with them, and I was glad. It filled in some part of my life, actually'. But still her life really centred around her children, the house, the garden, in the community and following the children though school. Says Muriel, 'I was very keen, very ambitious, for my children too move on and I gave them all the support.'

When her husband died in 1980 she determined to stay on the farm and even though she didn't have a lot of knowledge about how to run it she had done the books and so she had a 'good functional idea of how things ran'. It wasn't however, 'without a lot of pain' that she became a sole operator. All the same, she says, 'it's been wonderful, because what I've really done is walk into myself; I've found myself as a person'.

She has an 'alternative' view of calving and running cows. She doesn't like dogs chasing them and has a bit of an 'open gate' policy when it comes to caring for them because thinks that 'a cow can look after its calf better than I can.' She can afford to adopt this method, however, because she is older and her property is freehold.

Muriel was very much into the women's groups in the area. And believes she has been into 'empowering women ... all my life.' She remains involved in a group which is the continuation of the 'Women on Farms' groups established in the mid 1980s. Over the years, she has 'Some of the women,' she says, 'were under the influence of their husbands but now they've moved out of the shadows into the sunshine a bit.'

Published resources

Book Section

Muriel Dick, Bowden, Ros, 1995

Site Exhibition

Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions: ABC Radio Australian Rural Women of the Year - 1994-1997, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2011,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/rwya/rwya-home.html>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Muriel Dick interviewed by Ros Bowden in the Women of the land oral history project \[sound recording\]](#)

[Women of the land oral history project](#)

Author Details

Nikki Henningham

Created 4 March 2010

Last modified 8 October 2020