Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4471

Kearney, Christine

(1943 -)

Born	19430101, South Australia Australia
Occupation	Farmer, Religious Sister, Research officer

Summary

Christine Kearney was a Regional winner (Gippsland, Victoria) of the Rural Woman of the Year Award in 1994. She and her husband were dairy farmers in Dollar, Victoria. Christine was important to the establishment of rural counselling networks in her area.

Details

Christine Kearney did not come from a farming family; she was a city girl brought up about six miles out of Adelaide. She only came to a farm after marrying in 1980. Michael, her husband, bought it from his mother and then added to it.

Upon leaving school in 1961, seventeen-year-old Christine joined a religious order. She left when she was about thirty-five and returned to Adelaide where she met Michael who had also been in a religious order. After a relatively quick courtship, she and were married. Michael had taken over a small part of the family property – a small venture but big debt. It was not an ideal time to be borrowing for farming land (1982). They survived day by day through a period of drought and rising interest rates. As Christine reflects, ‘We didn’t have any comforts here; we didn’t have any money to spend on entertainment, but, because we hadn’t ever had that in our lives, we didn’t look for it’

Christine was one of the first farming women in Victoria to get unemployment benefits. A social worker suggested she should apply. Her husband couldn’t because he was a self employed person. But wives, given that their status on farms at the time was that of ‘a silent sleeping partner’ and that they weren’t recognised as wage earners, satisfied the criteria, although most didn’t know it. Christine managed to successfully apply for the dole, after proving that the farm would run without her.

After about two months on unemployment benefits she got a job off farm on a research program designed to investigate the possibilities for tourism in the local shire. She began work in May 1985. As well as bringing in a salary that helped to save the farm, Christine going off the farm created possibilities for her to meet new people. It meant that she had new things to bring back to the farm and talk about. It brought life back to their farm.

Christine was very interested in establishing a Women on Farms group in her region. She also tried to get the rural counsellor program up and running in her district. Federal funding was available, matching funds raised locally were also required, and they proved to be difficult to raise. It was very difficult to convince the conservative rural sector that a counsellor was needed; as Christine later observed, ‘It was unheard of that rural people had welfare problems’. In 1987 they employed their first rural counsellor.

Events

1994 - 1994
Regional Winner for Gippsland

Published resources

Resource Section
1994 ABC Rural Woman of the Year Regional Winners, ABC Radio, 1997,
http://www.abc.net.au/rural/rwoty/previous94.htm#reg

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
Christine Kearney interviewed by Ros Bowden in the Women of the land oral history project [sound recording]

Women of the land oral history project

Author Details
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