

11 September 2018

RECOGNITION FOR REGIONAL AND RURAL WOMEN

Her Place Women's Museum Australia Exhibition

Morwell Library 1–20 October

[#onedayourplinthwillcome](#), the campaign launched in August by Kathy Lette and Annabel Crabb for more statues to commemorate history's 'badass women', should look first to Australia's regions, says **Mary Stuart**, who chairs Her Place Women's Museum Australia.

"Country women are the hidden backbone of Australia – all too often unknown and unheralded. Only twenty-four years ago there were – officially – no women farmers. In 1994 Australian farm women were still classified in the Australian census as 'domestics', 'helpmates', or 'farmers' wives'," she said.

"It's about time that women in rural and regional Australia got the recognition they so richly deserve. That's why Her Place is hosting an exhibition in Morwell Library, from 1 – 20 October, with others to follow at Pakenham and Ballarat."

Harriet Shing, Member for Eastern Victoria Region will open the exhibition on Thursday 4 October 4pm.

Ten women are featured: **Sallie Jones**, co-founder of milk brand Gippsland Jersey; **Aunty Bess Yarram** and **Alma Thorpe**, Aboriginal leaders with long connections to Morwell; **Pat Bigham AFSM**, pioneering CFA volunteer and poultry farmer from Gruyere in the Yarra Valley; the late **Joan Kirner AC**, Victoria's first female premier; **Susan Alberti AC**, businesswoman and football trailblazer; **Peta Searle**, Head Coach of the Southern Saints, St Kilda's first women's football team; **Halima Mohamed**, Somali community leader; **Alice Pung**, author; and **Deborah Lawrie** FRAeS MAP, Australia's first commercial pilot.

Seven of the women featured in the exhibition have been inducted onto the Victorian Honour Roll of Women. <http://www.vic.gov.au/women/women-s-leadership/victorian-honour-roll-of-women.html>

For each of the profiled women, there is a short biography, video portrait and artefacts.

Sallie Jones, 38, is one of the new breed of Gippsland farmers. She is also a businesswoman, entrepreneur, PR maven, mother of three and a daughter. She grew up "free range" on an organic dairy farm at Lakes Entrance, the eldest of four.

Her father and grandfather were often away for two weeks at a time working on the oil rigs, leaving her mother and grandmother with the job of milking the cows and Sallie with much of the responsibility of running the household and helping to look after her brother who has autism. To make ends meet, her Dad also built an ice-cream brand called Riviera Ice Cream, made from their own milk and cream.

Sallie, who was home-schooled until grade six, eventually ended up in public relations in Melbourne. A chance meeting led her to quit her job, go back home and use the farm's milk for Aphrodite Bath Milk, which was sold as a cosmetic product because raw milk can't be sold for human consumption.

Sallie has always loved everything about farming but doesn't fancy the lifestyle of 4am starts and the smell of cow poo in her hair. Her father's suicide just as the dairy crisis erupted two years ago – and brought many farmers to their knees – reignited her passion and love for the dairy industry with a purpose to honour her father's life.

"The turning point was a chance encounter with dairy farmer Steve Ronalds where we shared our personal desire for wanting to bring some positivity to the dairy industry in a time when we were both coming to

terms with our own personal crises. This conversation led us to launching our own brand, Gippsland Jersey, at the Warragul Farmers' Market in September 2016 and we were blown away with the public support. I kept thinking how proud my Dad would be," Sallie said.

"Our mission is simple –farmers must be paid a fair price, the stigma around mental illness must be smashed, and old-fashioned kindness must be our guiding principle. One cent a litre goes to the Random Act of Kindness Fund.

"We joke that we're taking on the industry one bottle at a time. I have to admit that I'm also a sucker for Jersey cows – such gentle natures and eyelashes women would kill for."

Sallie has become a strong advocate for the mental health organisation, The Ripple Effect, and launched a 2018–2019 calendar about rural mental health on her Dad's birthday in April – at the Warragul Farmers' Market which she (co-incidentally) co-founded in 2013. It features 12 Gippsland farmers who, in turn, are having many conversations about the issue of mental health with people in their communities.

Gippsland Jersey has found an appreciative and growing market. The milk won two silvers and a gold at the recent Dairy Industry Association of Australia Awards. Gippsland, one of Australia's food bowls, has also gotten behind the initiative.

"I've figured out how to connect the dots and bring consumers and farmers together. The taste of our milk is sensational – everyone says it reminds them of the milk from their childhood. We've even got Woolies on board and they're paying what everyone is paying. I tell them to stop making milk their loss leader," Sallie said.

"We're now gearing up for the second chapter – moving the processing back to my family's farm in Lakes Entrance by Christmas."

The industry still poses challenges for women.

"I go to meetings, look around the room and don't see women. It's nearly always all men over 60," Sallie said.

"I know that a lot of women are watching my journey. My motto is to be positively disruptive. I want to inspire women to take more of a role. It doesn't necessarily have to involve overalls and gumboots," she said.

"However, you do have to have a lot of energy and be prepared to put in the hours. It can be very tough when you have small children. Make sure you choose your partner wisely – and that you have a network of women backing you up.

"I couldn't do what I do if I didn't have women picking up the kids, making the occasional meal, pumping up my tyres and cheering me on from the sidelines."

Being in the Women of the Land exhibition at Melbourne Museum last year has given her a tremendous platform, Sallie said.

"So many women in Gippsland should have their stories told. My mother and grandmother never called themselves farmers but they were," she said.

***Her Place* exhibition, Morwell Library, 63–65 Elgin Street, Morwell**

1–20 October. Monday–Friday 10–6; Saturday 9–12

Forthcoming exhibitions (with different line-ups):

Her Place exhibition, Pakenham Library, cnr John & Henry streets, Pakenham

24 October – 8 November. Monday–Wednesday 9–8; Thursday 9–9; Friday 9–8; Saturday 10–4; Sunday 1–4

Her Place exhibition, Eureka Centre, 102 Stawell Street, Ballarat Central

14 November – 10 December. Monday–Sunday 10–5

More info on Sallie Jones: <https://www.gippslandjersey.com.au/our-story/>;
<https://invisiblefarmer.net.au/blog/2017/4/28/sallie-jones-of-gippsland-jersey-west-gippsland>

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