

My experience of the 2009 Junee NSW Women's Gathering

By Joy Beames, Dunedoo, Member of the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee

This was my first gathering and what a wonderful weekend it proved to be. The Junee Women's Gathering Committee lead by Gail Commens and her pink-shirted team did an absolutely fabulous job and are to be congratulated.

The whole town became involved in one way or another – catering, setting up or just generally assisting wherever needed.

Friday night was an excellent start to the weekend. A BBQ and wine tasting provided by two of the local wineries were held in a marquee at the local high school.

Mayor Lola Cummins, hobbling on crutches, welcomed over 400 of us who had 'made tracks' to Junee and provided some background to the town's history and challenges. She also reminded us that it is OK to sometimes put ourselves first and not be the one to always eat the burnt chop after serving everyone else first!

We then heard from Toni Nugent – a young woman who grew up near Junee – she began our journey of inspiration as she shared stories of being a crew member on the Young Endeavour ship and establishing the Desperate Farmwives group in Tarcutta to organise social get togethers for farming families.

A regional women's choir later lead a sing-along of *We are Australian* so the positive mood for the entire weekend was well established early on.

Saturday morning saw about 100 gatherers attend a Poet's Breakfast hosted at the historic Broadway Museum. I was most impressed with their array of talent and in particular 'The Limping Poet' Neil Smith who also emceed the Saturday night gathering dinner.

Jo Wilson-Ridley from Coleambally, attending the Gathering for the first time, also bravely took to the podium to recite a poem she had written especially for the Junee Women's Gathering.



Gail Commens, Chair of the Junee Gathering Committee (far right) and some of her team.



Women enjoying the speakers in the marquee.



Jo Wilson-Ridley of Coleambally at Poet's breakfast.



Back in the marquee, Aboriginal Elder Isobel Reid warmly welcomed us to Wiradjuri Country before the official opening by Nerida Cullen, Co-chair of the Rural Women's Network (RWN) State Advisory Committee (SAC) and past Junee high school teacher.

Nerida was a most interesting speaker and the figures she produced about the lack of women on boards were really most disturbing.

The next speaker was ex local girl Kerryn Macauley who enthralled us with her life story. She started by saying she was really just an ordinary person, however, she proved to have lived an extraordinary life.

Kerryn has packed an immense amount of experiences into her forty something years including teaching and becoming a commercial pilot. Her current role is as one of Australia's foremost air crash investigators!

Over 50 workshops were offered in three sessions throughout the weekend - such a choice.

These included - climate change; colour coding & fashion; bread making; line dancing; creative writing; becoming a grey nomad; mosaics; silk & fabric painting; meditation through yoga, to name but a few.

I enjoyed having the chance to try things that I have wanted to do but had not had the opportunity.

The tutors were very professional and knowledgeable – we all had a ball learning and chatting together.

Pink bubbly was served at pre-dinner drinks on Saturday night in keeping with the breast cancer awareness theme. Over \$800 dollars was raised on the night for this worthy cause.

The entertainment was enjoyable and varied including a very talented local classical ballet troupe and the spectacular internationally acclaimed *BJ Bandits* line dancers.

Neil Smith was again very entertaining... including an entrance as his alter ego bowling mother *Eilean*!



Nerida Cullen, Co-Chair of the RWN SAC opening the Gathering on Saturday morning.



Kerryn Macauley shares her extraordinary life story.



Ella James (guest speaker) sharing in the workshop run by workshop facilitator and kinesiologist Robbie Chapman.



'Eilean' Neil Smith.



Richard Sheldrake, Director-General of Industry & Investment NSW (I&I NSW) addressed the crowd and announced the ongoing support for rural women by the NSW Government with a \$42,500.00 funding package for the 2010 Wentworth Women's Gathering.

Ella James a comedian, has notched up 20 years in the Australian media including being the voice on our satellite navigation systems. She had everyone exercising their laughing muscles.

Her recipe for happiness was to ensure we all have someone to love, something to do and something to look forward to.

The evening concluded with some great dance music and women were able to really let their hair down.

After breakfast on Sunday morning an ecumenical service was held in the marquee with the gathering – 'making tracks' theme woven beautifully through the service.

Petrea King was the final motivational speaker who led us in a 10 minute group meditation. She also spoke of ways to build resilience and appreciate our lives by taking responsibility and committing to really appreciating and loving life on a daily basis, developing challenges and building connections.

Petrea is the Founding Director and CEO of the Quest for Life Foundation and bestselling author of many books and CDs.

A large area was devoted to displays of information and goods we could visit throughout the weekend. Most were set up Friday afternoon so any early birds were able to sample their wares before the crowds arrived.

Extra optional tours allowed time to visits local attractions such as the Junee Locomotive Roundhouse Museum, Liquorice Factory and Monte Cristo Historic House.

Men accompanying their partners were also well looked after with a men's program so they too had a great time and experienced the value of networking and taking time out.

I thoroughly enjoyed my weekend and am looking forward to next year.

I recommend it to everyone and hope to meet you wandering west to Wentworth on 29-31 October 2010.



Richard Sheldrake, DG I&I NSW & Co-Chair, RWN SAC with members of 2010 Wentworth Gathering Committee at the 'touch of pink' Gathering dinner.



Guest speaker, Petrea King framed by the fabulous 'Junee station' backdrop.



Novelle Hasling I&I NSW chatting with a Gathering participant visiting the RWN display.



Di Pollard, Chair 2010 Wentworth Gathering Committee accepting the Gathering candle from Junee Gathering Coordinator Nikki Condon & Chair Gail Commens.

