

Community Builder



Drover Nella musters spirit of community

NELLA Willis moved from country South Australia to Alice Springs with her husband and their young family in 1978.

Now retired, Nella is the chairperson of local volunteer organisation The Drovers. Awarded the Chief Minister's Medal for Volunteering Service in 2015, her time, care and support have been appreciated by countless patients and staff at the Alice Springs Hospital over the years.

Nella sat down with Centralian Today's Morgan Richards to share more about the Drovers, what they do, and why they need you.

So how did The Drovers come about?

It started in 2007 with a lady called Di Deans. Red Cross had a hospital program they ran which finished up around then, so Di and few other ladies decided they would see if they could get some volunteers together to put something else in place. They contacted a few of the businesses in town, got some donations together and it grew from there.

I saw an ad in the Advocate for the volunteer group's first meeting, and I said to my husband, that's exactly what I want to be part of.

What sort of things do The Drovers help with specifically?

We go around the hospital with a book and magazine trolley, supplying reading material, toiletries, pencils, cards — all those things that people might need while they're staying in hospital. They're all given to the patients so they don't have to buy them.

Why is this important?

There's a lot of hospital patients that don't have family here and they're very, very lonely.

Even sitting with them for five or ten minutes really helps. Some people need to have a

bit of a hand with their meals.

So it's just being kind to people and that type of thing.

You come across people who have mental problems and you can sit and talk to them. You don't growl at them if they go off a bit. You just talk to them softly.

Do you have enough support as a volunteer organisation?

We don't receive any government funding. All our money comes from private businesses and fundraising.

At the moment, we're focusing on building our volunteer numbers back up.

We've been lucky to get four new volunteers in the past couple of weeks, but we're still building up after being really knocked about by Covid.

It wasn't just the Drovers hurt by Covid, the Lions Club folded and lot of other volunteer organisations are still building up again.

What makes a good Drovers volunteer?

Anybody who likes speaking to people, helping and providing a bit of care and support for a patient.

We do all the wards in the hospital, so you meet up with lots of different people.

Sometimes you stop and talk to them for half an hour.

That's what we're about — we care about people and we support them when they need it most.

To volunteer with The Drovers, call 0458 973 653 and leave a voicemail, or email DroversAliceSprings.DOH@nt.gov.au.



Faces of Australia Ted Egan



Roger Was No Death Adder

ROGER Jose of Borroloola. Picture the man. Medium height, piercing blue eyes, beard to his waist, hair tied in a bun. Middle aged when I knew him first, in 1957.

Roger defied all the rules. He wore a striped pillow case as a type of burnous and always rugged up; on the hottest of days, he wore a couple of "granddad" undershirts and often had an old army greatcoat as well. He either went barefooted or sandals that he made from wallaby skin.

I was told at the outset that he took strychnine. Of course I found that hard to believe. But one day Hector Anderson and I rode to get a killer bullock. We overlanded the beast and took the meat back to The Loo, where we salted some and packed little bags full of fresh meat for a few friends and ourselves.

Next morning I took two bags of beef — one fresh, one salted — over to Roger's Tank. Oh, I forgot to mention: Roger and his two wives lived in an upturned 5000 gallon rainwater tank! On top of that was "The Mezzanine" a 2000 gallon tank where they slept. 100 metres away was the dunny, which Roger called The Amenities Block.

As I approached, I spotted Roger sitting outside the tank, talking to himself. I paused, then approached and gave him the two bags of meat. He was grateful: "Thank you, young man. One often sits here craving one of The Master's oxen, but I usually have to slaughter yet another marsupial".

I responded: "Roger I noticed you talking to yourself. Do you do that often?" "Oh yes", he replied. "Ever since I developed my superior-

ity complex, I find it stimulating to talk to an intelligent person occasionally". I wasn't too impressed with that outcome, but was still curious.

"I've been told that you take strychnine?" I asked.

"Yes, I do, as a heart stimulant. Many ancient people took various poisons for that reason in days gone by". I still didn't believe it.

"Could I watch you do it?" He told me to visit him "next Tuesday". Sure enough, he took me out onto the airstrip three days later. "Stand back" he warned, and promptly downed a teaspoonful of strychnine, shuddered and shook for a couple of minutes and then invited me to check his heart beat!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Readers, please don't try it, but that's a true story.

Roger and his two wives are buried at The Loo. Here is an excerpt from my song, which you can hear on iTunes Ted Egan.

Roger Was No Death Adder

In another place, another age, Roger would have been treated like a Sage, Plato and Socrates, out at The Loo Would probably be called Death Adders too.

Roger liked astrology, history, anthropology, Poetry, politics and theology, Geography, philosophy, he'd read of all of these And liked to sit and argue underneath the shady trees.

Cheers readers. Aritjinanga. See you next week with more "Faces of Australia."