



Virginia Adlide at the Queen's Birthday Honours Investiture, 1993; inset, Virginia's award

On with the dance

Virginia Adlide, Beechwood

Virginia Adlide OAM is a tiny lady with a huge heart and a beaming smile. She works tirelessly in her community, always ready to extend a helping hand. Virginia was awarded the Order of Australia for her work in developing the first Ronald McDonald House in Australia. 'There are many other people who have done better things than me,' she still insists, yet her actions show that even our smallest contribution can help to build up our community.

I was born and raised in the country, mostly at Cundletown where my mother's family lived for generations. After finishing school in Sydney, I trained in general nursing and midwifery and ran a post-natal ward. There I met and married my first husband and became a step-mother to his 3 children. We had a son of our own in 1973. We were living in England when the final crunch came and our 13 year marriage ended. I found myself back in Sydney with a

10 year old son, no home, no job and no confidence at all.

I marched up to both hospitals where I had trained many years before. The only nursing positions available included night duty or shift work — not ideal for a single parent with a young son to nurture! The Director of Nursing mentioned another position, saying 'It's not actually nursing, but it might help you in your current domestic situation; the interviews are on this afternoon.' She then told me about Ronald McDonald House (RMH). I hadn't even heard of it as it had only been running in Australia for a few months.

The interview was something else and consisted of some of the Hospital's 'heavies' sitting in a semi-circle facing the chair I was to sit on. I was scared, but fortunately, I remembered some of them from my training days and within a few moments they all had warm and friendly smiles on their faces — and I got the job!

In those early days the Hospital believed RMH only required someone to manage it for 3 hours a day, and therefore wasn't worth a real salary. I was given a 2 bedroom flat at the back of the house in place of a salary. I was also able to apply for the Supporting Parent's Pension. The working hours were eventually recognised as being unrealistic, as I was putting in 10-12 hour days. Over time things changed; I was paid a salary, charged rent, and the job grew.

RMH is a multi-bedroom, community-living house close to a major children's hospital, where families from the country who have seriously ill children requiring specialist treatment can stay for any length of time. Each family has its own bedroom but they all live together, which is the key to the support structure.

The children's illnesses are different, and some terminal, but the families each benefit by recognising, even subconsciously, that there is

always someone worse off than themselves. This can be the degree of a child's illness, the strain and pressure on a marriage, troubled family dynamics, or a terrible financial situation. Not only do these families have a seriously ill child, many of them have never been to Sydney, have no knowledge of hospital 'life' and their normal home routine is just blown away in a tornado of the unknown. Where possible, they all help each other.

My basic role was to coordinate bookings, liaise with hospital staff and generally oversee the day-to-day management of the House operations. There was much, much more to it though. I felt it was important to be kind and 'soften the corners' for the families however I could. This chapter in my life was a real coming of age for me.

Early on, the hospital bureaucracy attempted plenty of distraction from the main game of helping these families through the roughest times imaginable. I had continuing battles, but wonderful support from the cancer unit and gradually I was able to maximise the benefits for the families.

The fact that families felt comfortable with me was indeed an honour. Even when a child was dying in hospital, if the parents asked me to be with them at the bedside, I never said 'It's not my role, I'm not supposed to do it', because I knew it mattered so much to them. I felt it was one of the highest privileges one could ever be given.

So it was the families and their circumstances that provided the motivation for me to do what I did - it was

their strength to live with adversity that made me want to do whatever I could to help.

I resigned to marry John in 1989 and settled into a new life. It came as a total surprise when in 1993 I received a letter stating I was being considered for the Queen's Birthday Honours List! I had no idea who was behind the nomination, and it was only when the announcement was made that I found out it was the parents from RMH who worked on the submission. I was very emotional because I felt it was the parents themselves who deserved any medals.

So there you have it, one Australian story. There's been no plan - things happened, as they will for all of us and I believe my response has mostly been positive. That's the secret. It's easy to be negative and say 'poor me', or procrastinate by saying 'I can't', 'I don't want to' or 'I'll do it one day'. I say 'if it's going to be, it's up to me', and just get on with the dance.

John and I 'retired' in 1996 and moved to Beechwood (near Port Macquarie). On my first drive into Beechwood, I saw what I thought was a disused church opposite the public school. I discovered services were actually held there, so I took myself off to church to meet local people. The congregation was small, the minister was young and also new to the area. The church had as many broken windows as it had unbroken, but it had a good feel about it.

I found out the church was heritage-listed and could attract some heritage funding towards restoration. I put my hand up to help because I thought this was such a lovely part of the world, and perhaps

it was a way I could put something back into my new community. I was promptly nominated to the church Property Management Committee. As the only woman, I gritted my teeth and persevered.

A degree of resistance from people who aren't comfortable with progress has been a disappointing fact of life to me. However, we now have a \$500 grant towards the replacement of the church's stained glass windows, and our small fund-raising group is eager to raise more funds so that full restoration can continue.

How do I link Beechwood church to my time at RMH? At RMH I was in an inside position and part of a small self-contained community which worked together with a common purpose. Now, to some minds, I'm an outsider, but I feel that I'm more of a newcomer, and a part of this community. We all need to work with each other and not against each other, be it in business or otherwise.

I see my small contribution in the church's restoration as simply doing my bit, or having a go, that's all. It would be so easy for me to do other things I like without any hassle, and do nothing about the condition of the church. Working for something that we can all share, no matter our differences, is worth the effort so that the whole community can be feel proud. None of us is as good as all of us!

Queen's Birthday Honours Secretariat

Freecall 1800 552 275

or check out the web site at <www.itsanhonour.gov.au>

Ronald McDonald House, Westmead Office 02 9845 0600

The Women's Gathering 2000

We are proud to announce that Wellington will host the 2000 Women's Gathering, previously known as the Women of the Land Gathering. Approximately 400 women will gather in Wellington to network, gain and exchange information and take these experiences and knowledge back to their communities and families.

The theme for the Women's Gathering at Wellington is **Information + Inspiration = Innovation.**

The two and half day program includes a host of activities - women's stories, displays, workshops, guest speakers, panels, farm tours, entertainment, exhibitions and maybe even belly dancing! Childcare is also provided if required.

Workshop and information sessions will include discussions on our local produce and issues relating to our community such as its unique culture, industry, tourism and environment, health, internet/computer technology, creative innovations and local talent.

Research has identified women as the 'information gatherers' within our society. They are the first to access advice or help and they are also recognised as the change agents within rural populations. The informal networks in which women typically operate have been found to be most effective vehicles for the implementation of community planning and development.

We are all looking forward to seeing you at Wellington on Friday 6th October to Sunday 8th October 2000 at Wellington Civic Centre. Registration and workshops etc will be placed in the next Country Web (August) and will be available in June 2000 from the Gathering Committee or RWN.

Gatherings are aimed at women of all ages, cultures and denominations, principally from rural Australia.

In 1993 NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network and FarmSafe Central West held the first NSW Women of the Land Gathering in Orange, followed by Gunnedah, Yanco, Cobar, Tocal, Cooma and Moree. Each Gathering reflects the unique culture, industry, tourism and environment of the host community.

The Gatherings are an important avenue for forging links between urban and rural women and also offers an opportunity for rural women to work with decisionmakers and service providers. It is instrumental in raising the profile of women through the wide media coverage.

For further information please contact Elizabeth Jones, Convenor on 02 6845 1866 or 0418 636 897

The Country Web

THE NEW BEGINNINGS EDITION

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Passing Cloudburst

Anne Andrews, Uralla

I awaken to a fresh and sparkling morning,
Pause once more to scan the southern view.
Blue smoke gilds the hills
and earth is yawning,
A brown lamb snuffles grass
for drops of dew.

Peach blossom, at its zenith,
proudly quivering,
A cool breeze chills my body to the bone.
I slip inside the door, reluctant, shivering,
And storm clouds brew while blocking
out the sun.

A brown hawk in its glory, nearby swooping,
His prey escaping down a garden hollow.
Pomegranate boughs fall full and drooping,
As the winsome mare entices
foal to follow.

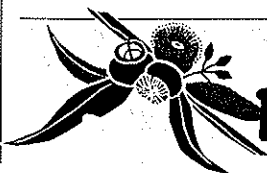
The playful gusts of wind
pick up some dust,
Ruffle restless feathers, annoy the dog.
Cattle turn their rumps towards the blast,
As heavy droplets fall on leaf and log.

The raving rumbling sounds
of rampant thunder
Fill the tiny valley edge to edge,
Flailing trees and bushes in its plunder,
As torrents tumble over moss and sedge.

Then just as quickly as the storm
had started,
It continues on its harsh destructive way.
The strong winds and the heavy
rain departed,
And so began the bright
and bounteous day.



Courage is the power to let go of the familiar. *Raymond Lindquist*
Make a new beginning in your life today



Let's make it happen – together

Rural Women's Network

NETWORKS ■ OLDER WOMEN OUT THERE! ■ SUICIDE PREVENTION

