

A life of many loves for a rural woman honoured on Australia Day

"Over the years I'd met so many amazing people. I wanted to start my own search for inspiration and record those stories before it was too late." Marg

Marg Carroll, who runs a mixed farm near Molong in Central West NSW has been recognised in this year's Australia Day honours for her life's achievements, particularly for supporting rural women and families. She has lived a colourful and busy life with involvement ranging from saving elephants in Kenya to establishing low cost housing for older Australians.

Marg Carroll has lived life to the full, taking many paths on a colourful journey.

She was recognised in this year's Australia Day honours with an OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia) for her life's work which includes being a rural women's advocate, a youth mentor, establishing a housing complex for low income older people and writing three books.

As a nine year old, Marg Carroll, was sent to a Sydney boarding school, giving her an understanding of city life, a thirst for meeting and understanding new people and the value of an education.

Despite planning to work in urban planning with the poor in India, she fell in love with Molong farmer, Bill whose family has farmed the mixed property, 'Redbank' for more than a century.

Along the journey of being a wife, mother, grandmother and farmer, Ms Carroll helped work to better the lives of rural Australians including establishing the NSW Rural Women's Network and a rural financial counselling service.

"I'd had lots of experience with drought myself, particularly in the 80s, you know we had an interest bill of a thousand dollars a week and it was just crippling and there were no services around," she said.

"One of the jobs I was given at one stage as a health promotions officer was to 'do something about drought' [laughs], Ms Carroll said.

"So I'd heard of Fran Rowe out at Tottenham and got a group of people together, invited her over and as a result we set up I think the second rural financial counselling service in NSW, and it's still going."

Ms Carroll said setting up the NSW Rural Women's Network within a male dominated agriculture department had its challenges.

"It was a first of its kind, launched with great fanfare, but I had half a support person and I think over seven thousand women to deal with and a big state," she said.

"Those women for instance talked about lack of communications and isolation and the need for information and services and I think probably some of those issues are still nodding around."

As a community housing officer at Orange, Ms Carroll helped set up Abbeyfield House for older people with low incomes.

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She was a founding member of the Upper Mandagery Landcare Group and Co-Chair of the first Women on the Land Gathering.

More than a decade ago, with a daughter seriously ill with anorexia nervosa, a sick husband and following the death of her father, Marg Carroll made a life switch and moved into writing.

"Sitting on a hilltop on the Kimberley, I was meditating and I thought I'm going to have to change some things I need to be home not working so hard for the rest of the world and concentrate on my family," Ms Carroll said.

"Over the years I'd met so many amazing people and I wanted to start my own search for inspiration and record those stories before it was too late.

"I've done three books now, so that's 57 men and women from every stage, all walks of life and they inspire me hugely and I think to bring those stories to the wider world has been really marvellous and for me it's been a revelation," she said.

Most recently her life took another path and Ms Carroll started working as an oral historian for the National Library of Australia on projects such as recording the growth of resilience in victims of terrorism.

Marg Carroll has loved animals all her life and continues to volunteers as a guide at Taronga Western Plains Zoo and has helped in conservation counts of lions and elephants in Kenya.

When not off on her many travels she breeds turkeys at 'Redbank' and is never far from her beloved peacocks, Freddie and Flora and her cat Miss Grace.