

CL Miranda

with Genevieve Barlow

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For some new mums, life gets only harder

SOME time in the almost 16 days it took for my sister to deliver her baby, I recall holding her shuddering body in the shower. For a moment I felt fear. Was she dying?

Largely ill-informed about the birthing process, certainly inexperienced (I've never had children) and living far from her in another state, I wasn't necessarily the best person for the job of birthing companion.

Yet I am her sister and though I'd not been with her for the nine months of her pregnancy, I was keen to offer fly-in support around the hospital birth and homecoming.

The experience gave me an insight into the physical, psychological and emotional trauma that can be associated with having children.

But birthing is just the tip of the peri-natal iceberg.

Then there's feeding and sleeping and building the all-important mother-child attachment that helps the child's brain to develop.

Submissions to Victoria's inquiry into peri-natal services suggest that women — especially in rural Victoria — are in dire need of more mental health and social and emotional wellbeing support to ensure this happens.

Without it, women, especially those experiencing family violence, isolation, homelessness and poverty, are falling through the cracks of help post-birthing.

Volunteers connect with mothers who are sleeping in their cars, or fleeing domestic violence

Dulled by depression, they don't engage with their babies and toddlers and, whammo, five years on, or even earlier, society starts to contend with the consequent problems — the child's inability to learn, to speak well or to socialise.

The Caroline Chisholm Society, which supports mothers with their babies and toddlers and offers services in the Goulburn Valley as well as in metropolitan areas, warns that governments are investing too late to arrest this scenario.

It also says demand from families with issues such as violence, isolation and poverty is growing.

The society provides new and preloved baby goods in Shepparton and it's here that volunteers make a connection with mothers who are sleeping in their cars, are transient workers, have no homes or are fleeing domestic violence.

Society chief executive Helen Cooney says developing the mother-baby attachment is vital.

"It's those first 1000 days when a baby looks at its mother and if the mother doesn't smile and look at the baby, he or she won't learn to see."

"If you have a flat effect you have

no capacity to engage with your child and the child won't develop brain capacity," Ms Cooney said.

"These things are very real and from our experience in the Goulburn Valley we know it's a skill to look at a child or smile when they smile and if you've never been taught that your child is at risk of being remedial."

Corangamite Shire has similar concerns.

Almost one in four children have speech or language problems at school entry (23.8 per cent) and are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains (23.1 per cent).

The shire has no support services to target the prevention and treatment of family violence, according to maternal and child health co-ordinator Cassie Austin.

She says this is remarkable given the Crime Statistics Agency reported a 47.1 per cent increase in family violence incidents in the shire from 2015 to 2016.

Ms Cooney says that while parents with psychiatric issues post-birthing can be treated elsewhere, training parents to have supportive relationships must be local.

The statistics I've presented here are selective and from rural areas, and a thorough examination will tell us how support looks across the state. But I suspect that when it comes to caring for our country mums (and dads) there's a lot more communities and governments could do to support them.



Deb Perry has wowed audiences on *Australia's Got Talent* and but it has come at the cost of plenty of bruises, as she tells S

READERS SAY

Exercise, but safety

WHILE it's important for us to exercise regularly, and is evident many people are making this a priority seeing the increasing numbers out walking, rain, hail or shine, it concerns me that while they're looking after their health, they may be being negligent with their personal safety.

It can be quite boring walking alone and understandably having music playing would be a great distraction but it also means you're oblivious to what's going on around you, putting yourself at risk.

Maybe walkers could lose the ear phones and be aware of their surroundings?

I've also observed many people walking in the dark, wearing dark clothing, on the wrong side of the

road, endangering their own lives as a motorist may not see them.

Is it time for a campaign to remind walkers to wear light-coloured clothing and to walk on the right side of the road so that oncoming traffic can see them?

D Collins
Mount Gambier, SA

Towns deserve better

I BELIEVE that there is a significant employment issue in rural areas.

In country towns there are only a small number of educated jobs.

I am 11 years of age and I live in Chariton and I have huge plans for the future, however education and employment prospects restrict them.

I think that this issue should be dealt with immediately.

Firstly, country people pay more than city people when it comes to university expenses.

We have to pay rent, fuel and many other things that city students do not have to pay for.

Secondly, when there are no jobs in a small town, unemployed people may move away to seek jobs.

And if there aren't any employment opportunities, nobody will move to Chariton.

That will decrease the town's population.

This is not just Chariton. We are one of many rural towns in Australia that one day could be left isolated.

Please keep our issues in mind, not just for us, but for Australia's future.

E Olive
Chariton

OPERA AUSTRALIA COMPETITION



Opera Australia's *The Merry Widow* (Nov 15-25) takes a light-hearted look at love amid the Champagne and exuberance of Art Deco France.

The operetta, by Austro-Hungarian composer Franz Lehár, follows the story of a beguiling rich widow who becomes an inadvertent heiress to the city's fortune, and the society set's attempt to wed her to a local.

We have two A Reserve tickets for the November 15 performance to give away, worth \$286.

For your chance to win, write to Miranda about a regional issue that concerns or interests you.



Send your entries to: The Weekly Times Opera Australia Competition
PO Box 14693, Melbourne VIC 8001
Email: countryliving@theweeklytimes.com.au

ENTRIES CLOSE
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AT 68, Deb Perry may be Australia's most famous spoon-player, but don't for one minute think that means she's a reserved, old-fashioned type.

"When I got up on stage with a whole heap of bleeks you've got to be heard, so I can bash myself and get quite bruised," Deb says, adding that she is fresh back from the gym.

"If I want to keep doing what I'm doing, jumping around, high energy, then I've got to do a lot of leg work at the gym."

It is true. Watch any of her YouTube videos and they are designed for her target audience: "I call them my modern rockers."

As a finalist on *Australia's Got Talent*, she performed the spoons to Spiderbait's heavy duty version of *Black Betty*.

On her sheep farm in Western Australia's southwest, Deb shot a YouTube video — which has almost 1.6 million hits and was shown on the *Ellen* show in 2012 — of her playing the spoons to the Black Keys' *Lonely Boy*.

This year she was flown to the US to appear on comedian Steve Harvey's show, where she had the audience whooping.

No body part is spared — even her forehead gets a slap from the spoons.

"When I first did a solo performance with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (1990) I got quite bruised and so I put a table mat under my black pants to take the blow," she says.

"So now I wear a boy's cricket thigh pad on my leg."

"The whole act has evolved and I've made it up as I've gone along."

"My slogan is be inspired by having fun."

As much fun as Deb is clearly having, there is a strong musical undercurrent to her performances.

Growing up in WA, she says her talents shone at a young age.

"At kindergarten my teacher told my mother when Deb plays tambourine she keeps everyone in time. The percussion, beat and rhythm were inside me all along. In a way it's a gift," she says.

At school she took drum lessons, alongside piano, later followed by being a drummer in bands.

Even today she performs drums with the Margaret River Concert Band.

"If there are spoons in one corner and drums in the other, I'll go straight for the drums," Deb says.

"I still have my drum kit from the 1950s, and two or three evenings a week I go out to the shed and play. All the neighbours say they love it. I tell them I can quieten down but they tell me not to."

Deb went on to become a primary teacher of physical education and music, marrying Bill, initially living on a farm station in WA, then living around Australia while Bill worked in the mines. Most recently they ran a 120ha sheep farm, retiring three years ago to Augusta.

Describing herself as an "old rocker", Deb was introduced to the spoons early on, in 1972, by an elderly man she met in a wine bar in Fremantle, who occasionally performed in her brother-in-law's band.

"I went up to him one night and asked how he did it. He showed me how to hold them. You've got to be the boss of the