

Cow Girl Nun Returns to Australia

In 1974 Sister Stella received a oneway ticket to Australia from the late Archbishop of Melbourne, Cardinal Knox. In Terang and Lilydale, Victoria, she studied dairy farming and agriculture and completed a Diploma of Artificial Insemination. This, coupled with her existing Master's Degree in Sociology (USA), made for a very unlikely set of qualifications for a nun!

Many Australian families were inspired by her determination and welcomed her into their homes providing physical and moral support. Even after 33 years those bonds remain incredibly strong.

"I do not know how I could have done all these things without the kindness of my Australian friends," she says as she nods her head in that very Indian way.

After completing her studies, Sister Stella was offered a novel assignment and a cheap way to get home: She volunteered to accompany 33 Friesian cattle on a cargo ship to Calcutta. In return for this she was promised four cows and a bull. On the 17th of November 1974, the ship named Viswachethana set sail from Melbourne with the cattle in the hold and Sister Stella the only passenger apart from the crew. The voyage via Fremantle and Penang, Malaysia took 55 days and was marked by plenty of high seas.



Single-handedly Sister Stella tended the cows during the voyage, feeding, washing, milking twice daily and cleaning up after them. During the trip, eight calves were born, adding to her already heavy workload. It was an enormous physical and emotional challenge that she happily carried out, energised by the knowledge



that her goal of a dairy project was getting closer. On the 14th of January 1975, the ship finally reached Calcutta, and thus began the most difficult part of the entire journey: The Import Licence papers had not arrived to meet the ship and customs officials insisted that the cows could not disembark until the papers arrived. Sister Stella and the cattle remained onboard for another 10 days during which time the cows contracted Foot and Mouth Disease. They were struggling and Sister Stella recalls what a terrible time she had washing and medicating the cows. It took another 15 days before the herd was well enough to finish the journey south by train.

Along the way, many Australians heard of this amazing voyage and wanted to reward and assist Sister Stella's great efforts. Donations enabled her to finish the journey and eventually purchase 32 hectares of land. With the assistance of many, including Sister Deepthi and Sister Piusha, a commercial dairy and farm was scratched out of the jungle hillside and training programs commenced. Assisi Farm still operates today and, as well as the herd, has rubber, coconut, banana and spice trees. Income from the farm continues to fund a variety of development programs designed to alleviate poverty in the region.

Sister Stella is now preparing to return to Australia to talk about her work with Assisi Farm & Training Centre as well as the self-help groups which are supported by Assisi Aid Projects here in Australia.

AGENDA

DATE	LOCATION
Sunday March 7th - Tuesday March 9th, 2010	Diamond Creek David Hayes 03 9710 1635
Wednesday March 10th - Friday March 12th, 2010	Gippsland Bill Darmody 03 5127 4498
Saturday March 13th - Wednesday March 17th, 2010	Bendigo Helen & Tony Britt 03 5430 4512
Thursday March 18th - Sunday March 21st, 2010	Melbourne Bob Hooper 03 9484 7579
Monday March 22nd - Wednesday March 24th, 2010	Terang Cath Glennan 55927273
Thursday March 25th - Friday March 26th, 2010	Hopetoun Chris Halpin 03 5831 3446
Saturday March 27th - Sunday March 28th, 2010	Mildura Brian Bleeser 03 5024 6312
Monday March 29th, 2010	Wycheproof Stuart McLean 03 9650 1291
Tuesday March 30th, 2010	Kerang Lui & Marie Basile 03 5450 4007
Wednesday March 31st - Friday April 2nd, 2010	Shepparton Tom Dumaresq 03 5829 0230
Saturday April 3rd - Sunday April 4th, 2010	Melbourne Bob Hooper 03 9484 7579
Monday April 5th - Thursday April 8th, 2010	NE Shepparton Tom Dumaresq 03 5829 0230
Friday April 9th - Tuesday April 13th, 2010	Open Chris Halpin 03 5831 3446
Wednesday April 14th, 2010	GALA DINNER

Would you like to meet Sr. Stella?

Register your expression of interest NOW

We are preparing an itinerary for the visit of Sr. Stella. If you would like her to visit your area, please call Nathalie Michel in our office on (03) 9650 1291 or email assisi@assisi.org.au

Enterprising Women

This Self Help Group is running a business that manufactures disposable plates and bowls using dried leaves of the beetle nut tree. There are plenty of raw materials available at low cost in the area. The ladies use an electric press to shape the plates and create an upmarket alternative to plain banana leaves that are sometimes used to serve meals.



Beetle nut leaves dried and bundled ready for production.



Pressing leaves into plates. The smile says it all - income generating enterprises offer the chance for women to take control of their own destinies.



The finished product - plates ready for sale to the public in Assisi's Trade Centres.

Assisi Aid Projects 25th Anniversary Dinner

Wednesday 14th April 2010 at 7pm for a 7.30pm start

Moonee Valley Racecourse, Committee Room

750 Mt. Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds



With a Keynote Address, Sr. Stella
Guest Speaker, The Hon. Bob McMullan M.P.
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance

Reg: A0006479K

To book, fill in this form and return it to Assisi Aid Projects, Ross House, 4th Floor, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne Vic 3000 or fax to (03) 9650 1391 or email to assisi@assisi.org.au or call our office on (03) 9650 1291.
Bookings close: Wednesday 31st March 2010

Please reserve _____ seats at \$120 per head or _____ table(s) of 10 (\$1,200 per table)
Please list guest names and any dietary requirements

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I am unable to attend but would like to donate towards Sr. Stella's work.

PAYMENT DETAILS - TOTAL: \$ _____

Cheque/Money Order enclosed OR Credit Card: VISA MasterCard
(made payable to ASSISI AID PROJECTS)

Expiry Date: ____ / ____

Cardholder Signature: _____

Cardholder Name: _____

CONTACT DETAILS

Title: ____ First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

_____ Email: _____

Tel (H): _____ (W): _____ (M): _____



Community Enterprise Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Bendigo Bank. The Foundation believes philanthropy is about giving where and what you can to make your community stronger and more self-reliant.

The Foundation's expertise in giving and their understanding of local community needs helps to assist communities to create opportunities and deal with challenges.

Community Enterprise Foundation was a major donor to Assisi's Tsunami Appeal contributing more than \$220,000. The Foundation continues to support our sustainable Self Help Group programs with invaluable advice and ongoing funding.



Australian Government
AusAID

AusAID (the Australian Government's overseas aid organisation). These funds are being used to support a range of our development projects in the Asia and Pacific regions. To secure funding from AusAID, Assisi must meet stringent financial and project management requirements and is subject to periodic audit by AusAID staff. The on-going support of AusAID is acknowledged and very much appreciated.



integrity · values · accountability

Assisi Aid Projects is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct that defines minimum standards of governance, management and accountability for non-government development organisations. An independent Code of Conduct Committee elected from the NGO community monitors adherence to the Code. Our voluntary adherence to the Code of Conduct demonstrates our commitment to ethical practice and public accountability.



Ross House 4th Floor
247-251 Flinders Lane
Melbourne Vic 3000

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA



Water Tank for Leper Community

Sr Stella is based at Kanyakumari close to the southern tip of India on a two-acre block of land that she shares with a local leper community. While all of the lepers are now cured, they still live as outcastes.

Assisi recently provided funding for a water tank to assist the leper community.

Photo: 'Sr Puisha presents the water tank to the local leper community'.