

THE COUNTRY MOUSE AND THE TOWN MOUSE

By Sue Jackson

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Earlier this year my sister Jude, the co-ordinator of the Inglewood Community Resource Centre in north-central Victoria, invited me to be guest speaker at the Centre's International Women's Day celebration on March 8th. I was honoured by her request but also thrown - life-long city dweller that I am - what could I possibly have to offer country women living with the daily threat of bush fire and struggling to survive the worst drought in history?

Fortunately help was at hand. Aesop, the most famous Greek slave of all time, came to my rescue. One of his fables, written in around 600 B C, seemed particularly apt. You probably know it - The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse.

Two friends decide to try out each other's life-styles by living in each other's homes. After a run in with some fearsome dogs, the country mouse realises that despite the glamour and luxury of city living, the price to be paid is too high and the country suits him better. The town mouse, appalled by the simplicity of country cuisine, doesn't give country life a chance, and rushes back to the city, none the wiser. Determined not to make the same mistake, I decided to take a good look around in Inglewood.

The first thing I noticed was the effort women had made to get together. Some of the record 80 women who attended had travelled long distances to join in the celebrations. One mentioned that because of fuel costs and the increased work load due to the drought, this was her first social outing in months.

They obviously delighted in catching up with old friends and making new ones – as the headline in *The Loddon Times* put it 'Laughter abounds for local women'.

Abounding too were floral decorations, champagne, a fabulous spread, numerous raffles and door prizes, and beautiful gifts handmade for everyone by the Centre's Arts and Crafts group.

I couldn't get over how stoical everyone seemed. No one wanted to talk about the pressures they were under; they were obviously determined to make the most of every minute of their day out. One woman even laughed as she told me how though their crops had failed, she'd hit on a novel way of making money – she had discovered a cache of worms under her house, which she'd started selling for bait.

This is one town mouse who has grown to love the country. Rather than high-tailing it back to the city after my talk, I lingered as long as I could in Inglewood hoping that some of the joie de vivre, the community spirit and the courage I discovered there would rub off on me.