

Still pulling on her workboots

EMMA-JAYNE SCHENK

THERE is no stopping Cecily Cornish, who lives a life of times gone by.

The 81-year-old Wando Bridge farmer still works seven days a week, managing her farm, entertaining guests, tending to her sprawling homestead - and refusing to be put out to pasture.

She concedes she should probably be enjoying her twilight years, playing bridge or golf, but she has never been one for sports or card games; she prefers hard work and farming instead.

Cecily remembers working on her parents farm when she was just nine years-old, when she pulled up her socks to make up for the loss of many who had been sent to war.

Now, despite an ageing body, Cecily continues to impress others with her unquenchable spirit and never-give-up attitude.

"The hardest thing about farming is the paperwork ... but they will have to carry me out for me to stop," she said.

The only thing that reveals her age is the fact that



WOMAN of the land ... 81-year-old Cecily Cornish will not be hanging up her gumboots anytime soon; she loves hard-work and farming too much, to be put out to pasture.

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she has 'nanna naps' each afternoon, but she said she definitely did not see herself hanging up her gumboots anytime soon.

This determination is perhaps why her life story has been featured in Women of the Land, a best selling book by Mount Gambier author, Liz Harfull.

Her children still tease her about being featured in the book and Cecily said even she was cautious about

sharing her story, at first.

But now, the book serves as a slice of history and reveals the story of an amazing woman who remains humble about her achievements.

"I am a bit embarrassed actually because I have to ask so many people to do things for me now," she said.

"I guess they thought I warranted a story because I'm so old and still doing it, but I honestly don't know what made my life a worthy story.

"It's certainly an honour and reading it has brought back many memories that I'd more or less forgotten.

"I also relate to the other women in the book, who all have a story to share."

While cooking a chicken casserole on her Aga and laughing about how the world is becoming a hectic change to what she is used to, you get the sense that Cecily is a woman with character, humour and memories to fill dozens of books.

"I had to step up at a

young age and work hard and that must have instilled that work ethic," she said.

"We actually enjoyed it and had a lot of fun, simple fun. There was no television so after a days' work, we would play board games at night and listen to the news on the wireless.

"I don't really think I even realised how serious it really was but it must have been awful for the adults.

"Back then, the locals organised that when the Japanese came, they would blow up Murray Bridge and we would have no way of getting the children home from school.

"So they decided that they would bring us to the river and then somebody would come and meet us on the other side ... I don't know how we were supposed to get across though."

Her life could form the plot for a glamorous movie; as a 19-year-old, she sailed to England with her aunt, to select an Arabian stallion, Riffayal, which continues to influence the breed today.

She left her family in Wando Bridge for a city life in Melbourne and New Zealand, where she raised three children who now spur her on to keep working.

Cecily returned to her Wando Bridge family farm, Barnoolut, in 1979, with her husband, John, where she continued to learn more about life on the land.

The accomplished horsewoman had many highs and lows in her life but said her proudest moment was raising her last foal to a successful show-horse.

"You can't win in farming and it's been hard this year but we will get through and I'm so lucky to have so many people I can turn to for help," she said.

"Of course there are times when I don't think I can cope with all of this but you have to.

"I will keep plodding along and hope I don't fall over - that is every old person's worry."

The Spectator has five copies of Women of the Land to giveaway. For your chance to win, fill in the coupon and drop it into the Spectator office by 5pm this Friday, May 1.

Name:.....

What is the name of the family property, currently run by Cecily Cornish?

Daytime phone:.....

