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PROFILE



OBSERVE AND
INTERACT

ROSEMARY MORROW: A PERMACULTURE PIONEER

Edited from interviews by Delvin Solkinson, Dana Wilson, Annaliese Hordern, Robyn Rosenfeldt and Kym Chi

Living a committed life of service to humanity and this beautiful planet is natural for Rosemary (Rowe) Morrow. She has been working and supporting people in areas of need for more than four decades through teaching permaculture in places where others don't go. Without permaculture, the needs of people and the land would be less adequately met.

Her work has helped establish permaculture as a globally relevant, accessible and practical way for addressing pressing planetary problems. Rowe's career in permaculture has been dedicated to helping people in the greatest need. She has journeyed to meet and learn from farmers and villagers in some of the most challenged places. She seeks to offer information that makes a difference in places affected by worsening climate change, and countries facing the impacts of financial crises.

As climate change impacts become more extreme, Rowe has offered courses on local resilience and designing for disasters. She has trained and empowered other people around the globe to do aid work and offer service. She often teaches low-cost or free Permaculture Design Certificate courses for communities, then assists in implementing their designs. This reflects permaculture's ethics of care.

Together with co-founder Lis Bastian, Rowe established the Blue Mountains Permaculture Institute, which offers diplomas to people who have done outstanding work yet cannot access or afford accreditations through other pathways.

Rowe has always been on the earth trail in some way. In her childhood she played in the bush and climbed trees. 'Luckily I had parents who didn't feel the need to supervise children,' Rowe says. 'I grew up on farms and around 11 years old I decided I wanted to go and live on a huge cattle station. I said

that regularly and it became my mantra. When I was 15 I got a job with a travel agent, earning 45 pounds and two shillings, and bought a plane ticket from Sydney to Darwin.'

In Darwin she worked with Qantas before heading into the outback. 'It was 80 miles to the next-door neighbour and the rivers flooded five miles wide. The droughts and the heat were awful, as were the mosquitoes and flies, but I loved it. There were thousands of head of cattle and five hundred head of horses. After about five years, family circumstances took me back to Sydney but I always thought I would return.'

Agricultural science studies came next, but Rowe found the course to be 'reductionist, boring and poorly taught'. She decided to travel to Paris to take up a scholarship at the Sorbonne to study rural sociology. 'I started doing a PhD but left and volunteered at L'Arche in northern France for a year, working with people with intellectual disabilities,' she says. 'I learned so much that year. I learnt respect for everyone. I began to learn how to communicate when you don't have words.'

'It is everyone's right to have the tools to feed yourself and your family'

After completing a Masters in Rural Development in Reading, UK, Rowe was sent to Lesotho in southern Africa, where she lived for four years. 'I was engaged in the politics of South Africa – it was the time of the Soweto uprising and apartheid, and I got caught up in all of that,' she says. 'Desmond Tutu was the bishop of Lesotho and you'd see him around town every day. However I was confronted because I did not know