



Carman's millionaire Carolyn Creswell enjoys the farm life

Kath Sullivan, The Weekly Times

February 4, 2015 6:00am

HOW many multi-millionaires do you think were chasing ponies down a South Gippsland road last week? Probably not many, but Carolyn Creswell certainly was.

The owner of Carman's — a business estimated to be worth \$83 million — was chasing her kids' runaway pony after it had escaped from her Bena property, near Korumburra.

Carolyn, who bought Carman's muesli for \$1000 as an 18-year-old, tries to spend as much time as possible on the 40ha property where she and husband Peter run Angus cattle.

Speaking to *Country Living* from her orchard, with a view to the Strzelecki Ranges on one side and the ocean on the other, Carolyn says she tries to spend at least three nights each week at Bena.

"I feel very connected to this part of the world." Carolyn says.

"I think if you have a country property, you really are blessed."

It would seem that Carolyn's life is full of blessings.

She bought the farm seven years ago and is clearly delighted that her kids Will 10, Lily 8, Olive 6 and Grace 4, have the opportunity to grow up in a rural setting.

As one child runs past flying the kite he received at Christmas and headed straight for a hay bale, she says "that's the joy of country life, having space to roam and be free".

Carolyn grew up in Melbourne (although the family did head to the US for a four — year stint when Carolyn and sister Jo were at school) and later studied at Monash Uni.

“I wanted to study law, but didn’t get the marks.”

So she went on to an Arts degree “choosing subjects with essay assessments rather than exams”.

While studying, she took on a part time job at a small family-run muesli business.

In 1991, when the business went on the market, she and a friend put up \$1000 each and made it their own.

Two years later, Carolyn bought her friend out and the company has continued to grow.

“We’re still growing. I am so lucky that I own my company 100 per cent.”

The success of Carman’s, now exported to more than 30 countries, landed Carolyn in the top 25 of *BRW*’s 2014 Young Rich. Yet Carolyn, 40, says she never set out to achieve such success.

“I started out on a check-out at Coles, and that’s the joy of being in Australia. You can start out and build up.”

Her success has led to meetings with Richard Branson and Prince Charles, among others.

“I never imagined how successful I could be.

“It’s like one day you look in the rear view mirror and say to yourself how did I get all these children?”

“I have amazing people who work for me and I feel very lucky.”

There are 25 staff in head office and 107 staff across factories at Dandenong and Scoresby.

Carolyn insists her staff don’t eat at their desks, telling *The Australian* in 2013:

“I’m a big believer in sitting at a table, having a meal together and looking people in the eye as you have a conversation. A local mum comes in, heats up everyone’s lunch from home and sets the table. At 12.30 she calls out lunch is ready.

“ We eat, do the quiz in the paper, have a laugh and then everyone goes back to their desk.

“Food needs to be enjoyed. It’s not just a fuel.”

It’s her philosophy for dining at home too. Each night Carolyn’s family shares what she calls a sparkle and kind moment.

“Everyone has to explain one thing that made their day sparkle and then say one kind thing about somebody else.”

“Everyone has a conversation. It’s about respect. And it’s a good time. Some nights we could go on forever.”

As for Carman’s could it too go on forever?

“I want the best product, the best staff. Yes Carman’s is valuable but it’s not for sale. I still have a mortgage!” she says.

It seems Carolyn’s future is destined to include more than muesli.

After appearing on Channel Ten’s *Recipe to Riches* last year (a move that saw a 10 per cent increase in Carman’s Australian sales) Carolyn is now short-listed for the Logies Best New Talent.

And if career, television and family commitments are not enough to keep her busy — Carolyn is a board member of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation and has been appointed to the board of the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity

Commission.

And of course ... there's that pony that must be tamed.

“How random is that?” Carolyn says. “And I'm still chasing ponies down the road.”