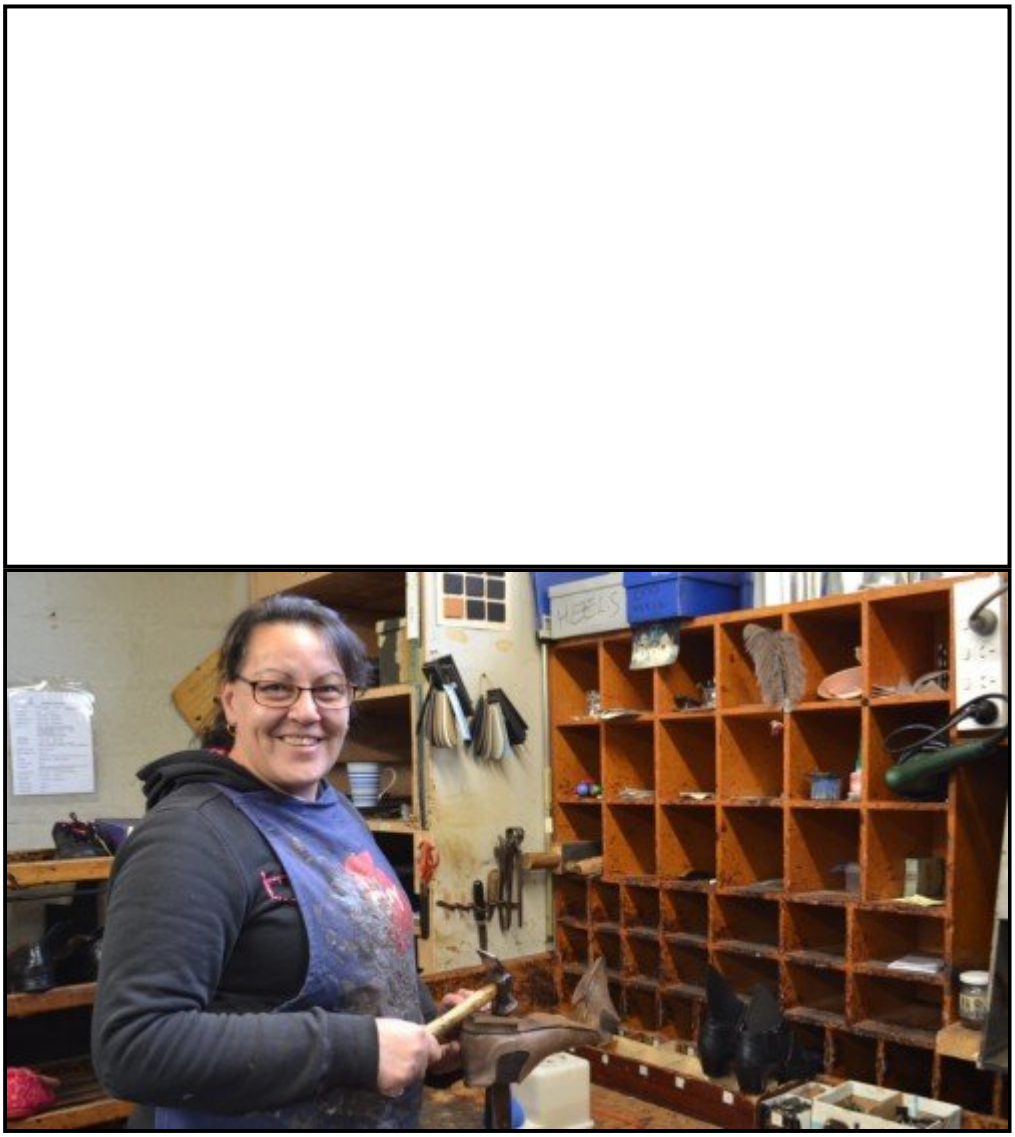
Life as a sole sister

Description



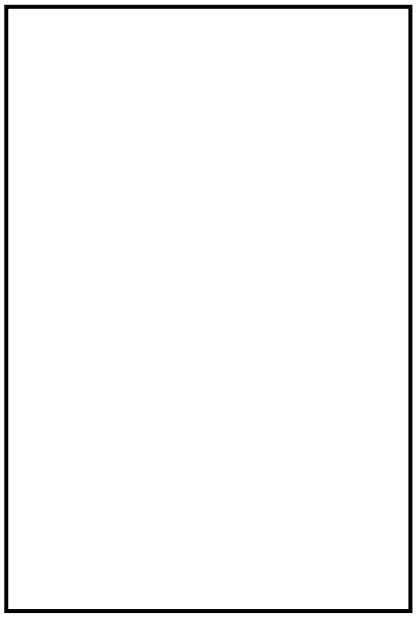
At its height, legendary shoe store Rauert's, in Warrnambool, employed seven shoe repairers. Now they have just one. Bluestone went to meet her:

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T [/dropcap]here are so many witty one-liners that can be used about a shoe repairer, so let's start with one: **Heather McVickers** saves soles.

In fact, she has saved so many in the past 12 months that a priest is known to have quipped that she was doing far better than he was.

Heather has also helped the down at heel, worked on several annoying wagging tongues and proven to be a deft hand at nose jobs.

"There is always a different challenge that needs to be solved, and that's one of the things I really love about my job," Heather, 46, said while cutting a piece of rubber with what looked like a very sharp paring knife.



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] H [/dropcap]eather began as a shoe repairer for Rauert's a little more than a year ago after seeing the position advertised. She had no shoe repairing experience, but she could sew.

"I was a sewer from the age of seven, when Mum bought me a hand-driven Singer sewing machine.

[quote]I would ask Mum to make me something on it, but she would say 'no, you make it,' so I would work out how to do it. Sewing taught me how angles work, how to draft patterns and how you need to cut to make things fit together,' she said.[/quote]

Despite a flair for sewing, Heather spent most of her adult life working as a dairy farmer and calf rearer and only revived her sewing skills for a living after she moved to Portland about 12 years ago.

There, she started an alterations business, but it was so successful that the number of people needing help with their hems, buttonholes and seams became overwhelming.

"I was working on my own and, I know it sounds a bit funny, but I got burnt out. I would have piles of jeans next to the sewing machine and the pile never seemed to get any smaller," she said with a laugh.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] H [/dropcap]eather left the business and, after another stint back in farming, spotted the vacancy for a shoe repairer. Skilled shoe repairers are hard to find, with few young people taking on the trade.

“I thought I might enjoy it, so I applied and I got the job. Ken (Brown) was retiring (from Rauert’s) and he spent seven weeks training me up, which was wonderful,” she said.

The workshop at Rauert’s is full of character with some of the equipment used to repair shoes little changed from that used by cobblers a century ago: metal shoe lasts, pots of glue and industrial strength sewing machines.

It is heaven for someone with the skills of Heather.

“I can honestly say that I haven’t had a bad day at work since I started,” she said.

“I am one of those lucky people who can say that they love their job.”

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