

YOUR SAY

Josephine Stone is not amused with us. And she has a story to tell...

Australian War Memorial council member Josephine Stone had some choice words about Bernard Keane's take on the AWM.

JOSEPHINE STONE NOV 25, 2020  25



JOSEPHINE STONE (IMAGE: THE STONE FAMILY IN AUSTRALIA)

war memorial. Today, council member Josephine Stone responds to some of his criticisms.

I read with some disappointment the article by Bernard Keane, dismissing my involvement with the Australian War Memorial (AWM) as no more than as someone's wife. As an online publication which prides itself on its progressive views, when it comes to the punch you are just as sexist and misogynist as the next man.

It may interest you to know, should you care to engage in some genuine investigative journalism, that I am a lawyer and have worked in a number of private and public institutions, including the NT Legal Aid Commission and Law Society.

I have been on a number of task forces including looking into internet and phone services in remote and rural areas, and chaired the Red Cross (Katherine Flood) Appeal, plus had involvement in a number of other charities. Decades of work and public involvement would appear to count for nought according to Keane, who sees me no more than someone's wife. I hope your readership is more enlightened.

As to your comments regarding the AWM let me say this.

There are nine members of council representing a variety of groups. There are four women including myself, all of whom are wives (one

I alone of all the members have no direct involvement with the ADF or government, although 40 years ago I worked as a low paid clerk in Veterans' Affairs whilst funding my law degree. I see myself as representing the average member of the public.

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What, as a member of the public, do I want to see at the AWM? Some history, of course. It is, after all, a place that records and displays history, but I can read much more detailed accounts from the numerous publications of Australia's involvement in conflict. Weaponry, tanks, etc (the big machinery)? These are commonplace in every military museum in the world. Graphic photos and paintings of death and destruction? Not necessarily to my taste but it is part of the ugly story of war.

It's one thing to read about it, quite another to see a small part of it, especially for those of us who have never been, and unlikely ever to be, participants in such conflict. Access to the archives perhaps? Well, my parents were war torn European refugees who fled to Australia as teenagers after World War II with just the clothes on their backs, after years in refugee camps. As far as I know I have no military personnel in my family tree. However, the archives are hugely

No, for me, it's about the why. Why does Australia send its citizens overseas to fight, maybe die, for people whose cause at first blush does not seem to have any direct relevance to the Australian way of life? Why do Australian men and women choose to enlist in a service where they may very well be sent overseas to serve as peacekeepers, engage in community rebuilding and maybe have to bear arms against other ordinary people?

I have been on the AWM council now for five years. I have come to the conclusion that we engage in foreign conflict to preserve an ideal.

Australians do not like bullies, we don't like seeing ordinary people subjugated and kept poor and uneducated. We consider democracy to be the highest form of political expression and want that for others. And we don't like religious and political fanatics telling us how to live, plotting to kill us on our streets where we go about our lawful business or to disrupt our normal means of commerce and communication.

I do believe the average Aussie has a "live and let live" philosophy. But do not mess with us. We will not stand down when faced with harm to ourselves and those we care about. And despite the criticisms of racial prejudice we do care about the rest of the world. That's why we spend billions on foreign aid, that's why (until this year) we had the highest rate of immigration

most of us have never been to.

Those who dismiss the AWM as no more than a theme park have probably not been there in the last 10 years and certainly do not understand what we are about. And we are not going to let a few rotten apples spoil it for the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Australians who have served with integrity and honour.

Let the legal processes begin. We will not speculate or prejudge or engage in the feeding frenzy of blame currently espoused by some. But we will be there at the end and we will tell that story too when it is known.

Josephine Stone is a lawyer and was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2006 for services to the law and the community.

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