

**S**OMETIMES the reasons people choose to live in small country towns are impossible to define.

It may be a vague sense of belonging, a reluctance to face a move, or simple inertia.

Tess Rule has lived in Marong for 66 years — most of her life.

Pushed on why she likes Marong, she rummages around in a drawer in her neat High Street kitchen and produces a sheet of paper.

She wrote the words on it one summer's evening after watching the sun set over her front garden.

It reads:

*"One summer's evening, just on dusk, I strolled along the picturesque banks of the winding Bullock Creek which encircled the little township of Marong.*

*"On glancing towards the west, I beheld a magnificent scene of rare*

*beauty — a picture only an expert artist could paint.*

*"The golden sun was fast sinking in a glorious hue of vivid red colors. Birds were chirping in the tall gum trees nearby and tiny white lambs were frolicking in the green grass.*

*"White fluffy clouds seemed to be scurrying across the clear blue sky, and frogs were croaking in a little pool in the creek.*

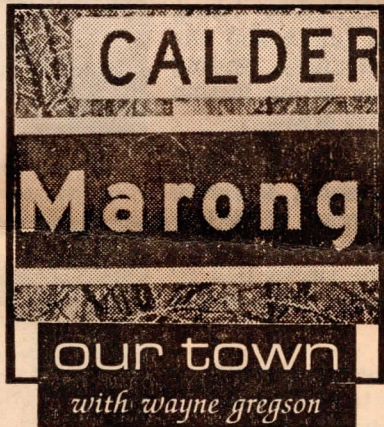
*"All this was heralding the signs of another lovely summer's day tomorrow."*

Tess asked me to read it out loud.

As I finished, she burst into raucous laughter: "I bet you're sorry you called in now."

Tess' infectious laughter does nothing to dampen her enthusiasm or genuine affection for Marong — a town gathered around a major crossroad about 15 minutes west of Bendigo.

Her family farmed just outside the town and she has lived here



since she completed her schooling — a time, she laughs, of great rejoicing for all — and here she will stay.

"I just love it. I love Marong and I love the people in it. They're so friendly. I have a lot of lovely friends in Marong."

As towns go, she says, it has almost everything. Occasionally she has a lady friend drive her to Bendigo to pick up items not available in Marong but where possible she buys from her own town.

"I think that's very important in a small town."

The saddest thing about Marong is that the hundreds of thousands of people who pass through it every year know only the Calder Highway, the major intersection with the Alternative Calder.

