

## INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY WELLNESS

*The following is a brief extract from an address by Dorothy McRae-McMahon, guest speaker at the Older Women's Wellness Forum dinner, July 1999*

Wellness of people is never only individual, it relates to the context we make for each person in our community and their capacity to engage with the community as a meaningful and unique part of it. I believe that, as women, we are more aware of that than most. Deep within, most of us know that the best life for us all is not through competing with each other but by co-operation and sharing of resources.

We are living in a society that is fundamentally unwell and, in my view, becoming ever more so. It is a society which places us all at risk and confounds us with rhetoric of justice and rationality which is actually based on many lies. It uses words like "self-reliant" to cover its lack of care for the most vulnerable. It speaks of streamlining of services to cloak its forcing of human beings into computer systems. It turns people who would like to contribute to the wellness of us all into exhausted systems stretched thin and who are now being trained to cope with the systemic distress of those they wish to serve rather than simply focussing on delivering services.

Our society tells us that everything, including our human compassion, is scarce in one of the richest nations in the world so that we do not challenge the careful and clever redistribution of wealth. All this in a community in which the still dominant culture is not known for its respect for those who are ageing, which mostly assumes that we have little to offer once we are past 50 years, let alone 60.

So, who are we within this challenging context? We may be well or ill, educated or less educated, strong or frail, of many races, cultures and languages, with differing abilities, living in country or city with different political, ideological or religious commitments or none, and many combinations of all these things.

It seems to me that Wellness Projects assume that older women are freer to choose their own way of expanding within the limits of their capabilities. In my view, we are often less needing to please others not because we are less concerned for others but because we realise that some of our sensitivities were either not warranted, or that older women can be a bit more outrageous than most without losing anything!

When we ask ourselves what wellness means to us as an older woman, I imagine that most us, like me, face the parts of ourselves that we never cared much about or neglected in our earlier years. Age is like that - it faces you with things. For this reason Wellness Projects are often about dealing with that in each woman: bodies (neglect, process of ageing); minds (lost opportunities, ageing, mental illness, dementing); hearts (loneliness, loss grief, unfaced pain) and souls (weariness, questions, search for peace and restoration or healing)

I do not place the entire welfare of women in the hands of Wellness Projects, but I am conscious that for many of us who connect with them, they begin to restore us in relation to some of these issues.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon

## COORDINATORS' REPORT

**N**ow that the International Year of Older People is drawing to a close we are being bombarded with promotional material directed to the ongoing needs of older people. The nature of much of the material draws attention yet again to the reluctance of service providers to be gender specific. Indeed, some of the material implies that all older people belong to one gender only. It therefore seems timely to remind ourselves that older women are the majority within our ageing population and that assumptions that older men's and women's needs and concerns are the same are, quite simply, not true. In short there is good reason for the Older Women's Network to continue its impressive work in ensuring that older women do not get lost behind the façade of 'political correctness' and suffer yet another layer of 'invisibility'.

Early this month Margaret conducted a workshop at the Women of The Land Gathering at Moree. Amongst the many impressions Margaret brought away from the Gathering was the sense of despair felt by many of the rural women who see their towns dying and their livelihoods reduced. Another impression of Moree itself was the feeling of frustration and powerlessness expressed by many women over the rise of youth vandalism, drug use and criminal activities. Clearly the town is faced with a huge problem, one that seems to be shared by a number of rural districts. Despite this it was wonderful to feel the positive energy that always seems to flow when women get together and start to share their experiences. Indeed, the strongest impression of all was the sense of optimism, courage, resilience and adaptability of these women which permeated the entire conference.

Early this month the new working committee held its first meeting. It was agreed to invite Caroline Eggington, whose particular interest is in Home and Community Care, to join the Committee. Welcome Caroline! This brings our Committee to ten. We are still looking for a Treasurer (Margaret is acting in this capacity for the time being) so please keep your antennae out for a person who is willing and able to take on this task.

In this edition of the Newsletter you will find the first of our exposés - a light hearted approach to introducing our Working Committee members. This might well become a regular feature of our Newsletter giving us the opportunity to meet many of our members who make their contributions to the Network.

Margaret Bridger and Pam Ledden

## EXPOSÉ

*Meet* Margaret Bridger, Coordinator of OWN and member of the Working Committee

*Where is your favourite place to go?*

Vietnam

*What do you like to do the most?*

Explore books, politics and new ideas over a long lunch (or dinner) with friends.

*What is the one thing you never want to have to do again?*

Wash some man's socks...

*What gives you your greatest sense of satisfaction?*

The successful completion of a difficult piece of work.

*What is the best thing you get from the Network?*

Encouragement to keep on keeping on.

*What is your greatest contribution to the Network?*

Challenging current thinking and practices.

*What do you think is the single most important issue for older women?*

Having a voice that is heard.

*What are you most passionate about?*

Social justice.

*What causes you most distress?*

Not being heard by people who believe that their truth is the only truth.

*What do you wish you had done that you haven't done yet?*

Given my hidden jazz pianist and blues singer a chance to be.

## WOMEN 2000: BEIJING + 5

It is four years since the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Women's Conference and Non-Government (NGO) Forum were held in Beijing, China. The outcome was the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), which identified Twelve Critical Areas of Concern to women: poverty, education, health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, power and decision making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl child. The Australian Government made a commitment to address areas of Indigenous Australians' health, violence, communication and information technology, and the inclusion of women in the private sector.

The Beijing Plus Five Asia-Pacific Sub-Regional Preparatory Meeting was held in Sydney from July 8 to 11, 1999 to review implementation of the Platform for Action (PFA) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The outcome of this meeting will be presented at a special session of the UN General Assembly in New York in June 2000.

Over 200 women attended the two and a half day meeting including representatives from Australia and the Torres Strait, Canada, Thailand, China, New Zealand and eight or more Pacific Island countries. More than one third of the women were of indigenous origins. Eleven members of OWN were also present.

The meeting took the form of three plenary sessions, twelve workshops and twelve optional interest groups. Participants were treated to wonderful entertainment by women from Chile; the Fijian Choir; and dancing, foot tapping and satirical songs from the Older Women's Network Theatre Group.

Some of the GAINS that have been made since Beijing include:

- \* rape is now a war crime and women can gain refugee status for reasons of rape and other abuse
- \* the International Labour Organization has passed a law against child labour
- \* some Australian States have passed laws criminalising female genital mutilation
- \* landmines have been banned (Bougainville and the Solomon Islands were victims of their use)
- \* women are leading in the use of Conflict Resolution (CR) in Bougainville
- \* UN peacekeepers are now not armed and include women (Fiji and Papua New Guinea)

- \* some land rights have been gained by Indigenous Australians
- \* a National Forum on Women in Agriculture and Resource Management has happened
- \* the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) has a home page

**GAPS:** Funding is required for education, health, environmental issues, child care and much more; women with special needs; waiting time for social services for migrant and refugee women must be reduced; Indigenous women's health; too few women in areas of decision making (though some improvement with 21% in Federal Parliament); lack of action from governments on the effects of globalisation; failure of government to ban uranium mining; widening gap between rich and poor, that is, more poverty (over 2,000,000 live below the poverty line in Australia); and security of women's work

**CHALLENGES:** To have 50% of women in all areas of governments; to revamp the UN to make it more effective; to have laws such as rape in war implemented; to eliminate all poverty in the region; to eliminate all forms of domestic violence; to cut violence out of the media; to dismantle the mechanisms of war; to have conflict resolution taught in all schools; to use UN peacekeepers as a pre-emptive manner to prevent conflict.

**PERSISTENT AND EMERGING ISSUES:** The privatisation of education, hospitals, nursing homes, funeral directors etc; globalisation & multinationals; global warming (two Pacific islands have become submerged and are uninhabitable); genetic engineering; colonisation of the mind; women's spiritual needs; and inclusion of gender issues in programs of sustainable development.

(Betty Johnson, who led an evening discussion on Women and Ageing, expressed disappointment that the issue of Women and Ageing was not recommended as 'an emerging issue'.)

Repeated inadequacies in the special requirements of indigenous women, women of non-English speaking background, disabled women, lesbians, women in gaol, older women and refugee women came to the fore during workshops.

The challenges from the Conference are to turn the rhetoric into reality. Women must work locally and 'hands on'. The effects of globalisation cut across all areas concerning women and we must act to force governments to curb the negative effects. NGOs must work together to develop trust so that we can speak for each other at meetings when some groups cannot attend.

(Extracted from an article in PEACE AND FREEDOM written by Mary Ziesak)

## IYOP Endings and Beginnings

Friday, October 1 is the UN International Day of Older Persons and Minister for Ageing, Faye Lo Po, is launching the new NSW Committee on Ageing's paper, "A Two-way Street: Older People and Volunteering" in Penrith. You can enquire about a copy by ringing 9367 6811.

We are currently preparing for the last of OWN's '99 IYOP events, and also the beginning of a community-based 3-year 'Platform for Action'.

At our 'Literary Lunch' on Saturday, October 16, we will launch our latest book of untold stories, *Tell Me More...* Published to celebrate older women during IYOP, the book will be launched by Joyce Stevens, OWN member, long-time feminist, social justice activist and writer.

The launch is a fund-raiser for the OWN Theatre Group to assist them in their wonderful, entertaining 'work'. Come prepared to enjoy limericks, libellous lines and a wonderful lunch, or bring your skills, financial offerings and a good appetite. I'm looking forward to that great OWN buzz of activity and camaraderie.

We have chosen an Italian theme for the food this time, so if you have not phoned to RSVP please do so now, as we really must know how many are coming for catering purposes. If you would like to be involved in any aspect of the event from cooking a pasta dish to cutting bread, cake and fruit or selling books, please phone me on 9247 7046 to talk about it.

We would really like to encourage your participation in the Forum on the Platform for Action which will be held on Wednesday October 13. Older people's and community organisations have now made their submissions to what will become a 3-year plan of action around identified concerns for older people. At the Forum we will be given an overview of submissions that have been made and then have an opportunity, in workshops, to continue to develop and strengthen our proposals. The Platform for Action will be presented to the NSW Government, and will be reviewed and updated each year. It is intended that the concept will be taken up nationally and even internationally.

You will need to register as seating is limited to 170. Registration forms are available by ringing us on 9247 7046.

Finally, November 15-16 sees the first-ever national conference on inter-generational issues, *The Meeting of Generations*, which will be held in Darling Harbour. It is a major initiative for IYOP, organised by the NSW Department of Ageing and Disability with financial assistance from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. The keynote address will be given by Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidotti. Again, registration forms are available by ringing us on 9247 7046.

Remember to join us in the Grey Mardi Gras on Saturday, October 2. The street parade starts at 11am from York St. behind the QVB then moving off to Hyde Park North for a festival. Look out for OWN's parade (No. 17) and our stall (Stall No. 8.)

Cheers, Joy Ross

OWN IYOP coordinator

## ISSUES FROM THE HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE (HACC) WORKING PARTY

Hedi Roggeveen and I represented OWN at the meeting on August 12th, attended by representatives from HACC areas of Newcastle, Illawarra, St. Marys, and Fran from CPSA.

The main issues of concern are the many various organisations providing help. Their varied funding and the help they provide often leave gaps for the client, who at times moves between agencies such as HACC, Community Aged Care Package (CACP), Community Care Packages (CCP), Provision of Aids for Disabled People (PADP) or Home Care Services (HCS). Confused? So is just about everyone!

The Working Party is addressing the need to continue lobbying for adequate funds to provide low cost help through HAAC, and to resist the privatisation of services to "For Profit Organisations" and "User-Pays" (i.e. Dial An Angel.)

The enormous reliance on volunteers in the Newcastle area for transport to medical appointments is a case in point, leaving the volunteers often with out of pocket expenses (i.e., increase petrol costs) and very long hours of waiting as it is impractical to make a second trip for the return journey. Willingness of the various agencies to work and PLAN together is vitally important, as is the need to become flexible enough to accommodate the different priorities of need for each individual.

Noreen Hewett

## AT LONG LAST....

Earlier this month before food was dropped to the starving people of East Timor, a group of older women wanted to take a message to the Prime Minister. We wanted to tell him our hearts were breaking for the hundreds of women and children dying by the minute in the hills of East Timor.

We wanted to know why was he not sending food drops immediately. Why was he dithering and dithering when food and planes were waiting in Darwin?

About forty older women from all walks of life, aged from 50 to 92, Sisters of Mercy, Older Women's Network members, Uniting Church women and other concerned individuals gathered at the Mitchell Library. We decided to walk to the Prime Minister's office in Phillip Street to beg him to send food immediately to these starving people.

We were to be a delegation, quiet and orderly, to ask our Parliamentary representatives a simple request. Simple, you would think! But no, on the 11th floor we were refused admittance to the reception area of the office, and we couldn't speak to anyone, because we "had not gone through the correct channels." We had not written for an appointment!

We were locked in the small carpeted vestibule between the lifts and the big comfortable reception area, with the glass doors locked. We made our requests known to the security officers, who urged us to "wait downstairs in the foyer, where it is cooler". We politely refused and waited, and waited . . . The vestibule grew hotter and hotter. We leant on the walls, we sat on the floor, we fanned our faces, but still we sat, determined to stay until we could speak to the Prime Minister.

Martha Ansara, on her mobile, alerted TV and Press, who soon arrived, flashing their lights and getting busy with their notebooks. We were photographed and interviewed, and got hotter and hotter.

A member of Aden Ridgeway's staff and Senator Victor Bourne came out from their inner sanctums offering support. A young policewoman came out with plastic cups of cold water after a couple of hours.

In answer to a reporter who wanted to know how long we would stay – "For as long as it takes," said Noreen, "This is a very small sacrifice we are making compared with what's going on at this moment in East Timor."

Amongst our group some wonderful spokeswomen talked to the Press. Noreen Hewett spoke movingly, as only she can. Dani, a young Timorese Resistance fighter, said she wanted to let the Prime Minister know where there were three safe places where food could be dropped instantly. She would tell him where they were, if she could speak to him. Martha Ansara, calmly, politely but persistently on our behalf, refused all efforts to remove us, repeating our concerns to all the media, who had by now increased in number.

So, time dragged by. After about three hours, with much talking on mobile phones by the police at the desk in Reception, a message came to us. The Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, would speak to us from Canberra! We could send in four spokespersons to talk to him. We had got his ear at last, and we sent in Noreen Hewett, Martha Ansara, Dani, the Timorese woman, and a Sister of Mercy.

They conveyed our message to the Prime Minister, who actually replied (no doubt with his hand on his heart!) that he felt the same way we did, and he was going his utmost to facilitate the food drops – just as soon as certain difficulties could be ironed out.

A week later, thankfully, as we now know, peace-keeping forces from Australia and the United Nations have landed in East Timor and food drops to the refugees have begun.

Joy Ross and Muriel Hortin

### WORLD FOOD PROGRAM

Every 3.6 seconds someone in the world dies of hunger and 3/4 of the deaths are children!

Please visit the Hungersite <http://www.thehungersite.com> to see how you can make a free donation of food. All you do is click a button and somewhere in the world some hungry person gets a meal to eat at no cost to you. The food is paid for by corporate sponsors. You're only allowed one click per day so spread the word to others.

100% of what sponsors pay goes directly to the World Food Program for Food. There are details on the web site to show how you can help to find sponsors. Be sure that we can count only one donation that you make each day. Please check it out!

## Road Testing Access to Olympics

After a guided tour of the Olympic site at Homebush on August 27, I attended a meeting of peak groups representatives with Jane Woodruff, Senior Director of the Olympic Co-ordination Authority. Access issues for people with disabilities or sight impairment (including older people with these or other special needs) were raised.

Jane talked about taking up such issues in preparation for the Olympics. She saw the embodiment of them in Olympic planning as leaving a legacy that could be incorporated into all Australian standards for development of cities, buildings, transport, sports venues etc, of the future.

I'd travelled to Homebush with Christine Regan, Policy Officer at NSW Council of Social Service. At Central ground level no one knew where and when the train to Olympic Park went. The only sign found, eventually, was on the country platform. Yet PAMPAC swimming events were on that day.

On our mini-bus tour of the Homebush site, a member of the group quickly detected failings in the railings at the hockey venue pavilion. Their height obstructed the view of any wheelchair seated spectator.

Jane Woodruff acknowledged the value of such observations and called for more road testing of all areas connected with the Olympics. This included not only Homebush, but satellite venues such as Bankstown, Bondi etc. The city would also have a great influx of visitors. Access, including the public transport system, needed to be evaluated. People with special access needs beyond those of the physically able citizens were just the ones to do the evaluating.

Jane Woodruff asked for comments and further issues to be provided to her (ph 9228 5009, [emailjanewoodruff@oca.nsw.gov.au](mailto:emailjanewoodruff@oca.nsw.gov.au)), Karen Fletcher (ph 9228 3398 email [karen\\_fletcher@oca.nsw.gov.au](mailto:karen_fletcher@oca.nsw.gov.au)) or Sue Bailey (ph 9228 3884 email [sue\\_bailey@oca.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sue_bailey@oca.nsw.gov.au)) with a view to developing a more streamlined system.

Noreen Hewett

## EXPOSÉ

*Meet* Pam Ledden, Coordinator of OWN and member of the working committee

*Where is your favourite place to go?*

Central Australia

*What do you like to do the most?*

Fiddling around making things.

*What is the one thing you never want to have to do again?*

Menstruate.

*What gives you your greatest sense of satisfaction?*

Stimulating conversations.

*What is the best thing you get from the Network?*

Contact with older women.

*What is your greatest contribution to the Network?*

Asking questions.

*What do you think is the single most important issue for older women?*

Income security.

*What are you most passionate about?*

Friends.

*What causes you most distress?*

Injustice.

*What do you wish you had done that you haven't done yet?*

Learn to play a musical instrument.

### Qi Gong

Qi Gong is considered to be of great help to sick people, giving them the means by which to rediscover their life energy. Qi Gong has a calming effect and is beneficial in the treatment of anxiety, insomnia and depression. It is also beneficial to older people whose physical capabilities are beginning to diminish and whose endurance is no longer what it was. Qi Gong practice can provide a sensation of well-being, and gives the impression of your body as less grey and heavy, more harmonious and transparent. I feel it is well worth exploring. If you would like to find out more about Qi Gong, please phone the OWN Wellness Resource Project on 9252 2040.

## *Not good enough, Minister*

*As a result of her recent experience in hospital, Muriel Hortin wrote letters to the powers-that-be, illustrating the effect of Government funding cuts. Here is her letter to Craig Knowles, Minister of Health.*

Dear Minister,

It is with deep regret that I write to you about my recent experience at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. It was a miserable experience, which sadly seems to be very common for many people at the moment. I regret this complaint because I have, in the past, received wonderful treatment at this hospital including triple by-pass surgery.

Seven weeks ago I broke my leg which was expertly mended and encased in plaster at RPA. My problems began when I went to the Orthopaedic Clinic on Friday, August 20 to have the plaster removed. The saw that was used to cut off the plaster bit into my leg lightly in three places. The bleeding soon stopped and I went home. No disinfectant had been applied in the Clinic, so I attended to the wound myself when I got home.

In spite of this, infection set in and at 11.30 on the Monday morning, with a badly swollen leg and visible red weals, I presented myself at Casualty. A queue had already formed. I was put on a trolley in a cubicle and resigned myself to waiting two or three hours to be attended to. (I have experienced such waits, or longer, on previous occasions.)

Minister, I waited until 12 midnight before an orthopaedic doctor saw me. He said that I had to be admitted as an in-patient and I waited for a further hour and a half for a bed to be available. I discovered the next morning, as it was taken away, that the bed on which I had slept (from 2 am!) had been borrowed from the Intensive Care Unit!

Fourteen hours in Casualty! I was one of the lucky ones who was on a trolley in a cubicle. Other

people were waiting on benches, on chairs and even leaning along the walls. The anger in the casualty ward was palpable. The staff was run off its feet, stressed, and trying to keep everyone calm. One nurse was working a 60-hour week and had only one day's rest before the next one started. When distressed patients asked the reason for the interminable wait, the reply was, "Funding cuts."

I spent three days (Tuesday – Thursday inclusive) in a ward with an intravenous antibiotic drip in my arm. On the last day, after an ultrasound, I was wheeled out on a trolley into a corridor to wait for a porter to return me to the ward. I waited for forty-five minutes before he appeared. The reason? There were only three porters in the entire hospital on that day. Why, I asked? "Funding cuts" again was the reply.

So due to the negligence of the orthopaedic clinic (caused by pressure of work and shortage of staff) I suffered three unnecessary days of pain and discomfort, and at great cost to the hospital. And all due to funding cuts.

The bottom line of our hospital crisis is obviously money. So why can you not immediately address the \$53 million owed to NSW by the Commonwealth Government (a statement you yourself made on Saturday August 28 in the Sydney Morning Herald)?

Until something in the way of a serious enquiry into the whole hospital system is initiated and procedures set in place to deal with these increasing problems, the crisis will deepen. This adds further grist to the mill of those who oppose our Medicare system and who are waiting to jump on the bandwagon of private funding for their own profits.

We must preserve Medicare at all costs and to ensure this, the State Government must demand adequate funding from the Commonwealth.

Yours sincerely, Muriel Hortin

## Theatre Group Report

The Theatre Group members are 'girding their loins' for a busy time ahead. So far, between September and December, we have 36 performances booked. Not a bad effort for the chronologically challenged!

We've had our meeting with the new Working Committee to discuss the future of the Group and what issues need to be addressed when Peg steps down as co-ordinator at the end of the year. As the Theatre Group has a high profile and is often the initial introduction to the Older Women's Network, it was felt that continuation of the Theatre Group was very important and this was recognized by the Working Committee and Group members.

Decisions were made that three roles were necessary, a director, a co-ordinator and an administrator. It was also suggested that a campaign for Friends of the Theatre Group be started. Louise Anike has accepted the Director's role, and Theatre Group members have agreed to act as temporary co-ordinator and administrator – but help and money is still needed. On 16th October the launch of 'Tell Me More...Voices of Older Women' is a special fund raiser for us, so come along and join in the fun.

From Wyong, Woy Woy, Wollongong, Nowra, Sydney and Katoomba, 26 women came to attend our Theatre Skills Workshop at the Mott Hall. It was a very successful day, and amid much laughter, fun and good food, three scripts were written and performed.

Our performance at the Public Service Association Women's Conference was received with a standing ovation.

By the time you read this we will have performed with three other State OWN Theatre Groups at Parliament House, Canberra, entertained at the OWN National Conference and be half way through our tour of the Murray/Mallee area of South Australia. Phew!!

Peg Hewett and Lucy Porter

## Expendable

Keep young and beautiful if you want to keep your job! Many women under fifty are finding that to stay in a job it's probably a good idea to forge a new birth certificate, dye the hair and resort to plastic surgery. 'Over the hill' can mean less employment opportunities even though women under fifty may still be active sexually and able to reproduce, attributes which are not encouraged by some employers, except when their own enjoyment is at stake.

One wonders if cosmetic surgery and blonde hair dye should be regarded as tools of trade and therefore attract an industry allowance, particularly for those who are expected to look young and attractive like receptionists, secretaries and shop assistants.

For us of riper years we remind you that older women of eighty (like Gladys) have attained degrees in Sociology, Psychology, Oceanography and Nuclear Physics. Some of these admirable women are given opportunities for advancement in work, but I think it is an extremely rare occurrence. (As an aside, how's about a degree in 'Life Experience and Acquired Wisdom'??)

Fifty-plus women usually have to stick to the job they have and force themselves to front up for work in resignation, hope or despair until they reach the age of retirement and can get a pension, which now varies according to when you were born. This is a tough outlook for single or separated women who may be renting or paying off a small unit.

These reflections were triggered off by a tale I heard from a female clerk of fifty years who had suffered three company mergers with increasingly less work satisfaction, and is now facing new demands to master difficult skills. Where will it all end? We need to make loud noises for a better distribution of resources in a culture where all ages are valued for what they have to offer. And pigs might fly!

Enid Harrison

Do you have a strong vocation  
To design a working station  
For those women doomed by nature  
To a fading beauty's future?

J  
S  
M

A tinted mirror is more kind  
To boss and secretary, you will find.  
A drawer for make-up, well designed  
Need not by bosses be defined.

A light, no stronger than a candle  
(Fluorescence is a scandal)  
It shows up every wrinkle  
Denies the eyes their twinkle

Room for powder, patch and colour  
Will bolster up her fading valour  
The bosses strong aesthetic sense  
Seeks a visionary recompense.

## Over the Top

The idea of bushwalking has always seemed to me the ideal way of spending a few leisure hours along the foreshores, streets and bush tracks of Sydney. Having recently joined a walking group I found myself in the pleasant company of those who delight in these interesting and often historical adventures. From the club Newsletter I selected several walks I thought would suit my particular needs. I was seeking easy pace, not too many hills or steps, although distance would not be a problem.

I confided to a friend that I had no desire to climb Mount Everest, just to work on becoming fit. Finding myself among a group of varying ages, I was amazed at their expertise and endurance. It was amusing to hear another new member tell me that in her opinion, "These people are like mountain goats! And some of them older than me!" Practice makes perfect, we both agreed.

The next weekend, feeling more confident of my bushwalking ability, I made a big mistake. The walk description read 'Lovely views – National Park fire trails, some ups and downs.' Off I went, full of expectation. As we entered the National Park I was horrified to learn that we were to climb the mountain. By the time I realised that it would be a three-hour climb, it was too late to turn back, I would have become lost.

Crawling, slipping, clutching at slender trees and scrub, we made a fast ascent. At least the others did. Stumbling over rocks, ruts and gullies, falling behind the group, the climb became a nightmare. Aware of my distress and embarrassment, watching me panting and exhausted, scabbling my way upward, offers of assistance were offered by the group. My backpack was taken from me, and given to a short, squat climber with a thick fuzzy beard who reminded me of an old-time swagman.

With his own pack behind him and mine swinging from side to side around his neck, he calmly climbed on. We reached a huge boulder, which, in order to pass, required that I lift my foot to shoulder height. A pair of strong masculine arms reached down and hauled me over the monster,

I began to feel terrified that I might injure my knee or ankle. The downward climb was no better, slipping and sliding, tripping over ruts, stones and tree roots, I was almost at the point of frustration and despair..

One of the group became my escort, walking (?) with me at the rear, encouraging me with kind words when I threatened to sit me down and die! She assured me

with a look of amusement, that they had never lost a climber.

I couldn't believe my eyes when we finally reached the road. How marvelous it looked, and the dirty railway station that we reached hours later. Not one of the group made me feel that I had been a nuisance. How wonderful they were to this poor ragged exhausted wretch who should never have undertaken such a venture.

Needless to say, I chose my next outing with great care. Some time later I met with one of my mountain companions who remarked that she was glad that I had not given up on bushwalking. When asked about ill-effects from my mountain climb, I was happy to report that, apart from the need to walk backwards down the stairs at home for several days - my thigh muscles refusing to allow a forward movement – I suffered no ill-effects at all.

I hope to enjoy many more years of my newfound pastime, and perhaps the time will come when I, too, will become like the mountain goats. Just for now, I am content to leave the mountain to them, and I really believe it will be a long time before I again venture "over the top!"

Marie Williams



## FILM REVIEW

### IT ALL STARTS TODAY

This is a courageous film made by director Bertrand Tavernier as a protest against social neglect. Philippe Tarreton gives an extraordinary performance as the director in charge of a kindergarten school in a district in France which is plagued by unemployment and the apathy of the bureaucracy. There is joy and tragedy in this film, where the children are the 'real thing' and not actors. As a result of public opinion, when this film was shown in France, the government made moves to improve funding and conditions. A film not to be missed.

Jean Smallwood

## MRS MAC

*I'd let my piano playing lapse during the years when my children were young, but now that they seemed to be self-sufficient, I thought I would take it up again. Someone recommended Mrs. Mac to me, and as she lived not too far away from me, I thought it was a good idea.*

She was about my height but certainly much wider, and her legs were very bowed, probably through arthritis, but she never complained about it. I was in my mid-forties, and she was some years older. She always wore layers and layers of technicolour make-up, almost clown-like, and had jet-black hair, which looked as though it was pasted to her head. She played the violin quite well, and actually was a member of the Rockdale Philharmonic Orchestra (what a pretentious name.)

Anyway, I started my studies with her, and we got on fairly well. She had five daughters. Her husband was kept in a shed in the back garden. Sounds incredible doesn't it? But it's quite true. He just wasn't allowed in the house, poor man. I met him once, when he was doing a bit of painting indoors, probably as a special privilege. He seemed to be a very nice man, rather meek, but pleasant. Mrs. Mac actually said to me one day, "I think marriage is a farce, don't you?" I said that I couldn't agree because I was happily married, and the subject never came up again.

She wasn't a brilliant teacher, but she introduced me to Bach, and for that I will be eternally grateful. I'd always thought of Bach as dry and uninteresting, and didn't look forward to the idea, but once I began I was enraptured. She insisted that I should play one of the Preludes and Fugues for an Eisteddfodd - she thought I was absolutely certain to win. (She saw everything through rose-coloured glasses.) Came the evening of the Eisteddfodd, I was a mass of nerves. I sat down at the piano, couldn't find out how to raise the stool and caused a furore by shouting out, "Can somebody help me?" and then began to "play" with shaking fingers, hardly ever hitting the right note. What a mess. But Mrs Mac was full of praise for me, and said that I'd played really well and said I should have won...

She asked me one day if I knew how babies were born. Since I had four children, I thought I had a

fair idea. But before I could answer, she told me that during pregnancy the mother's navel went inwards and the baby's went outward, and the umbilical cord was attached to both navels. The baby just dangled inside the mother. (No womb, no way!) My jaw dropped, and she said reprovingly, "I thought you'd have known that, you've had four."

One day she decided that I had to learn to play the violin. (Remember, I was in my forties, somewhat late for that.) I bought a second-hand violin, and we started my studies. She thought I was making absolutely remarkable progress (my family was horrified at the awful screeching sounds I made when I was practising) and within a few months she decided it was time for us to play duets together. I used to giggle all the way through, because most of the time, my bow wasn't touching the strings, it was scraping on the edge of the violin. But she was absorbed in her own playing and didn't notice at all. She would praise me lavishly when we finished. I didn't pursue my career as a violinist for long.

But she got me through my Associate Diploma with the Trinity College of Music, and she deserves all praise for that. Soon afterwards, I heard of a much better teacher, Paula (Bobby) Williams, the most musical person I've ever known, and I farewelled Mrs. Mac.

Renee Simons

### A PRAYER FOR OLD AGE

God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference.

Renate

## CONNECTING WITH RACHEL

Phoned Lexington, MA.  
Rachel answered straight away.  
Felt so close, so near.  
Voice, musical and clear.

Hardly missed a beat,  
Phone connection complete.  
USA to Sydney seemed next door,  
Visiting shore to shore.

Adjusting to life alone,  
Remaining in family home.  
Seventy-four years wed.  
At ninety-six, husband's dead.

Chattered, laughed and joked.  
Shared news of family folk.  
Hardly drives any more.  
Devoted to books she adores

Reads many languages with ease,  
Serious or humorous please.  
Biblical Moses exploring,  
New information absorbing.

Connecting friends a passion,  
Networking the fashion.  
Her USA friends in Sydney town  
Happily shown around.

Phoned Rachel to share news,  
Friends and I nicely fused.  
Felt so close, so near  
To Rachel, so very dear.

Frayda Myers Cooper

## IYOP EVENTS

- 13 October: Platform for Action Forum: Parliament House, Macquarie St., Sydney. Forum contact: Anthony Brown 9299 4100.
- 13 October: The Entrance 14km Walk, Memorial Park, Cnr the Entrance & Marine Parade The Entrance, 9.30am. Contact NSW Sport and Recreation, 13 13 02.
- 14 October: Older people working the system - a one day workshop for people who want to take a more active role in decision making in their community, Port Macquarie. Organised by Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Rural Women's Network, Central West Adult & Community Education, contact (02) 6583 7288. 3 November in Orange, phone (02) 6361 3122 and 4 November in Young, (02) 6382 3176.
- 14 October Staying Healthy and Happy activities: Bookings essential, Glebe Library 9367 9262.
- 16-17 October Northern Rivers IYOP Festival, 10-5pm daily. Contact Bob Sworss (02) 6624 7900.
- 18-24 October Hawkesbury Seniors' Challenge, events in Hawkesbury area, Jennifer Bousfield, Hawkesbury City Council (02) 4560 4586.
- 19 October Self Banking, Cove Room, Lane Cove Civic Centre, Martin Butcher (02) 9911 3593.
- 27-28 October Long Lives on Screen Film Festival, Dendy Cinema, Martin Place; bookings Senior's Card Customer Service 1300 364 758.

Dear Older Women's Network:

Wilhemina answered the phone when I rang your office for some information last Thursday, and I was really tickled to receive a large envelope the very next day! That is the fastest, most efficient reply I have ever had in my life! Most impressed. Are all your members so gifted with such overwhelming efficiency? Lemme in there! At once! Lemme join pul-ease!

Eunice Flynn

# NOTICE

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

1 October Tel: 9262 5111 for  
more information

## Women Online Week

From mid-October 1999 you can go to the Online Women's Web site to find out how you can participate in expanding a site dedicated to the needs and interests of women. The site will be launched on October 27th. To get involved, contact Juliana Ngiam, 9240 0900, email [juliana.ngiam@noie.gov.au](mailto:juliana.ngiam@noie.gov.au) or check out the web page at [www.noie.gov.au](http://www.noie.gov.au) or [www.onlineaustralia.net.au](http://www.onlineaustralia.net.au).

## COUNTRY CARE LINK

A confidential family support and information service for country NSW provided by the Sisters of Charity Outreach, includes:

- Legal assistance
- Confidential personal counselling
- A referral service to find required information
- A volunteer to meet country people coming to Sydney
- A volunteer to provide transport
- An interschool contact program linking country and city children
- A friendly voice for a chat
- Visit country people in hospital, on request
- Can assist with short-term accommodation for country people in the city.

## WELLSPRING SECOND ANNUAL WOMEN WRITERS COMPETITION 1999

- \* Short Story - fiction
- \* Short story - non Fiction (Articles)
- \* Poetry

Wellspring extends a warm invitation to interested women to participate in this national competition, which is open to all women resident of Australia, 18 years or over. The competition encourages women of all levels of writing experience to express themselves about topics such as local, national and world-wide current affairs, women's issues, the environment, healing, spirituality, education, work, politics, family and relationships, social justice issues, the arts, and other subjects of interest.

### MAXIMUM LENGTH;

- \* Short - Story/ Fiction (any style, any subject): 1600 words
- \* Short - Story/ non - fiction (Articles, any subject): 1600 words.
- \* Poetry (any style, any subject): 30 lines

CLOSING DATE; November 30, 1999. ENTRY FEE; \$5 per Item

ENQUIRIES to Shelley Jackson, Editor/Publisher/ Wellspring, PO Box 287, Lismore NSW 2480. Phone (02) 66 867 093, Fax (02) 66 867 983 or e-mail [sjackson@nor.com.au](mailto:sjackson@nor.com.au)

## STOP VIOLENCE WEEK EVENTS

Monday 25 October : Homeless Women's Speakout,  
YWCA Café, 5-11 Wentworth Ave

Wednesday 27 October: Open Day on Homophobic  
Violence. 2-4 pm, Room 6, 94 Oxford St, Darlinghurst

October 28-30 : "Tell her that I love her ". For venue  
phone YWCA 9285 6223

Friday 29 October : Reclaim the Night, Hyde Park

# BOARD

## LEADERSHIP, WHY ME?

Forum: BPW Parramatta & the Greater West INC

12th October 1999

Guest Speakers: Rebecca Barry - Stadium Australia, Maria Doolan - Endeavour Credit Union and Marilyn Forsythe - Nepean Hospital

Venue: Linden Room, Parramatta 6:30pm for 7 00pm \$25.00 including two-course dinner.

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL. For Registration Form Contact: Beverley Roberts,

tel: 04 1229 7898 email: [beverleyroberts@bigpond.com.au](mailto:beverleyroberts@bigpond.com.au)

## Inner West Tai Chi and Gentle Exercise Classes

You are invited to join a small, friendly and supportive class for either Tai Chi or Gentle exercise with Judy Laws: OWN member, Registered Fitness Leader, Accredited Tai Chi Instructor, and affiliated with the Better Health Tai Chi Chuan, founded by Dr Paul Lam.

Classes commence Thurs 14 Oct and finish 6 Dec (Glebe & Haberfield start 20 Oct.)

Fri. at Balmain, Wed. at Glebe and Haberfield, Sat. at Lilyfield.

Cost: Tai Chi - \$6 or \$5 conc. and Gentle Exercise - \$5 or \$4 conc. Contact Judy for more details on 9564 1528

PS I am also running two subsidised classes on Thurs mornings at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital at a cost of \$4.00 per class for 8 weeks. For this class, please phone Robert 9515 3146.

## Hydrotherapy Pool: Cook and Phillip Park, City.

The Millers Point Activity Centre (next to the Mott Hall) is inviting older people to avail themselves of a free bus to Cook and Phillip Park pool for Hydrotherapy classes. Cost is \$2 for a 30 minute class with an instructor (maximum 6 people in each class.) Bus leaves the Centre around 8.45am on Tuesdays and Fridays. Bookings are essential: ring Cassie or Rosemary on 9244 3692.

## Asking the Ombudsman for help

Most industries have an ombudsman you can complain to. Here's where to contact the offices.

Telecommunications: national, 1800 062 058

Banking: national, 1800 337444

Insurance: national general, 1300 363 683: Life, 1800 335 405

Private Health Insurance: national, 1800 640 695

Health: (02) 9219 7444

Energy: (02) 8218 5290

Legal: 1800 357 772; Sydney, (02) 9377 1800

State Government (and Police) (02) 9286 1000

Federal government: 1800 133 057; Sydney, (02) 9428 057

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK INC.

IS OPEN TO ALL OLDER WOMEN.

### Annual fees:

Membership including Newsletter.....\$15.00

Newsletter only (for Gov't Depts. institutions and organisations .....\$20.00

Send your cheque, name, address and phone number to:

Older Women's Network  
87 Lower Fort Street  
Millers Point NSW 2000

Tel: (02) 9247 7046

Fax: (02) 9247 4202

email: [ownnsw@zip.com.au](mailto:ownnsw@zip.com.au)

Web site: <http://www.zip.com.au/~ownnsw>

