

VISIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Traditionally, New Year is the time for making resolutions. Usually it involves a resolution towards personal improvement: to eat less, be healthier, kinder, more tolerant – a thousand ways to become a better person.

As this year is the International Year for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence, we canvassed some of our members over the summer break, asking them what sort of world they wanted in the future. This is what they said:

We want a world...

Where older women's abilities, life experiences, and contributions to family and community are fully acknowledged and valued

Where kindness is our social norm, scepticism and rationality our discourse and social justice our goal.

Where governments listen to and act on recommendations made by older women about issues affecting them

Where all women can live free from violence and abuse, and free from fear of violence and abuse

Where younger women and professionals are enthusiastically working in partnership with older women to create a better future for all women.

Where there's time for calm reflection in the autumn of older women's lives, where there's support for the fortitude needed in our winters, where intergenerational creativity buds in springtime and blossoms into innovation for change throughout our summers. A society for all ages in all seasons!

Where all older women, regardless of sexuality, culture or race, are welcomed and included, and where prejudice is openly challenged

Where social connectedness, mutual respect, tolerance and trust are paramount

Where the need for a life-sustaining planet informs all personal and political decision-making, and where re-establishment of the natural environment is a global goal

Where children are valued and loved, not only for themselves, but also as our most important investment for the future.

Editor

GENDER'S ON THE AGENDA!

During International Year of Older Persons (IYOP), the Older Women's Network in NSW has celebrated older women's contribution to social and cultural life through a diverse range of activities, and worked with other organisations to ensure enduring changes.

We identified gender issues in a paper "Why Older Women?", and circulated it to women's organisations and politicians, and at marches, rallies, conferences and stalls. We organised older women to lead the 1999 International Women's Day march, and for an Aboriginal Female Elder to address the International Women's Development Agency breakfast.

The OWN Theatre Group worked tirelessly to put gender on the agenda with their satirical IYOP show illuminating the diverse realities of older women's lives.

During the year, the Theatre Group performed to fifty-six audiences, and toured the Murray/Malley region in South Australia and the Southern Highlands of NSW. The Mercy Foundation honoured the Theatre Group cast for their "Achievement in the Field of Social Justice", presenting them with an imposing wall plaque and a cheque for \$1000 to assist the Group to continue to present, in theatrical form, the social, cultural and political attitudes and issues that discriminate against older women.

As a follow-up to our exciting and nostalgic 1998 book of short stories, "Untold Stories: Voices of Older Women", we published "Tell Me More ...Voices of Older Women", which focused on significant personal and social changes older women have experienced this century. We also published "Ripe

for Repetition", a small volume of members' contributions to the Sydney Newsletter over the past six years.

A research project focusing on older women and their experience of domestic violence was another first. A questionnaire was developed by OWN and distributed to all members in NSW with the aim of creating a body of knowledge based on older women's personal experiences of violence and abuse in a domestic setting, and finding out what services and resources could be useful to older women. The results of the research emphasise the lack of, and need for, studies to increase understanding and knowledge of domestic violence and its effects on older women, and to work on policies for support and prevention strategies.

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OWN conducted the first-ever forum focused solely on women's experiences of retirement. We were curious about whether the emphasis on financial security in most research and discussion papers reflected the primary concerns of women. The women who attended the 'Gains and Pains Forum' spoke of a wide range of issues such as the effects on identity, social isolation, balancing increased leisure with the desire to contribute to a better society, and the need to remain healthy and active.

Since advocacy is a central activity of many OWN members, we established (with a grant from the Department for Women) a Peer Support Advocacy Network database to assist members to become more comfortable speaking out on issues which concern them and develop a range of advocacy skills.

Wellness for older women is a central feature of OWN's activities. We conducted an Older Women's Wellness Forum (with the support of four government departments and the Benevolent Society), where older women shared ideas about their involvement in planning, organising and running wellness activities. OWN seized the opportunity to include health and community workers in the discussions and planning sessions, so that the future spread of wellness activities can happen through partnership with service providers who understand and support what we do.

As IYOP drew to a close, Australian Coalition '99 (NSW), in which OWN played a key role, launched a 3-year Platform for Action to bring about lasting changes in the quality of life for all older people. Included in the Platform for Action is a commitment to gender-specific research, the promotion of positive images of older women, and acceptance that older women are predominantly the victims of violence towards older people.

IYOP has provided us with a solid platform to place gender firmly on the ageing agenda – let's make sure it stays there!

**Joy Ross, Judith Mustard and
Dorothy Cora**

COORDINATORS' REPORT

Here we are again at the start of a whole new year and, perhaps, millennium depending on how you count. We finished the year in great style at our Summer Solstice party. As usual there were lots of laughs, good food and warm companionship helped along by fantastic prizes donated by our members following an S.O.S. in the December newsletter.

Pam and I hope that you had a pleasant holiday break. We wish all our members a 2000 full of enthusiasm and joie de vivre.

I write this report on behalf of both of us as Pam is in Cambridge having a much deserved break. She will be back in February in time for the first Working Committee meeting of the year.

This year we are celebrating the International Year for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence. What a challenge this is, first of all to grasp what is actually intended and secondly to find ways to make a significant contribution.

We will be having our first Members' Quarterly Meeting on Wednesday, 9 February, and hope that many of you will come along. We need your thoughts on how we can make this year a meaningful one for our members and a consciousness-raising one for our politicians and decision makers.

As the year progresses we will also need to ready ourselves for the 2001 International Year of Volunteers, a year of special meaning to OWN.

Both Pam and I look forward to a year of much sharing, fun and thoughtful action.

Margaret Bridger

New Year's Eve on the Rocks

It's difficult to imagine a better way of celebrating the arrival of 2000!

OWN's fundraising New Year's Eve party continued from Saturday morning till New Year's Day breakfast, the focus shifting between Windmill Street and a carefully selected site at Dawes Point offering prime views of the Harbour Bridge. Women arrived early to drop off food and drink, sleeping bags and mattresses. A few stayed around. More gathered as the afternoon wore on; some joined in just for an hour or two.

Women ebbed and flowed between home base and harbourside. Food and fireworks. Sparkling conversations. Small parties of locals nearby were in jovial mood too. The good natured atmosphere spread. We shared the oohs and aahs at the spectacular firework displays (dare we ask how many hospital beds went up in multi-coloured smoke?) Midnight brought more champagne and hugs. Afterwards, as we drifted up the street good humour hung in the

still air, in friendly exchanges between strangers, and carried over until morning, at breakfast, around the table in the courtyard.

Such warm enthusiasm expressed about the time spent together as well as appreciation for the thought and preparation that had gone into setting up such a great occasion. Might this become an annual OWN event?

Meg Coulson

SUPPORTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS

In early December, fifteen members met to discuss the idea of supportive neighbourhoods, linked also to ideas such as social capital, social connectedness, and so on.

First of all we discussed what we wanted from a 'supportive neighbourhood' and came up with such ideas as

- meeting and getting to know like-minded women in our local areas,
- taking up issues to do with older women at a local level
- offering support in times of difficulty
- sharing information of interest to older women in a local area.

We talked about what shape a local group might take and came up with a fairly diverse set of ideas. It was suggested that a neighbourhood group need not necessarily be an OWN group and need not necessarily be a Wellness group. It could be anything the participants wish to make of it. However, there was a definite understanding that 'five good women' (a term coined by Noreen Hewett) meant five aware women. So, it seems clear that everyone was expressing a preference for a local group with participants having some understanding of and commitment to issues affecting older women.

Questions arose about ways of proceeding at a local level and two strands emerged. One was to join an already established group if there was a chance that it might meet some of the requirements in attending to older women's issues. The advantage here would be that it would be a simpler approach, taking less effort. The main disadvantage might be that introducing older women's issues into an already established group might prove frustrating.

Noreen Hewett and Barbara Burnham are currently exploring this approach in the Sutherland Shire – finding out what groups are already operating, who the members are and what issues are before the group. (They have already formed one group of 'Five Good Women' – you can read about their summer holiday adventures on this page!)

The other possibility would be to start a new group with local women, and here it seems that the preferred way of proceeding would be to start with other OWN members who live near each other. If some women wish to proceed this way, the OWN Database, our Newsletter and a forthcoming questionnaire will be useful in putting members in touch with each other.

At the end of the meeting there was agreement that we would find out information from local councils about services for older women through council directories, and investigate ways of putting OWN members in touch who live close to each other. We also agreed that there were many possibilities before us and that the implications for OWN (Sydney) need to be discussed. We'll continue to discuss the development of this exciting new concept at a meeting on Monday, March 27.

Joy Ross and Pam Ledden

Refugees from Xmas Turkey and Plum Pud!

We decided earlier, we thought that we could become refugees from the turkey and pud. We'd already persuaded our families we ought find a venue with room to recline or cavort.

Through Pat, an OWN member and longtime a friend, a roomy brick cottage was lent at one bend of the scenic south coast, Dolphin Point the address, and it's there that we settled to cast off all stress.

We went on great tours of the district each day exploring each inlet, each lake and each bay - On a lake cruise the skipper would stop, talk, then go as we snapped gliding pelicans, three in a row.

Then came Xmas morning, we'd planned well ahead. The menu for luncheon - beef, mustard and bread. We eschewed the trimmings (but bon-bons for three) And a glass of fine red to toast Christmas-free sprints.

If you think it's a fine thing to set up a model of escape from all Christmassy exploits and twaddle, get together a batch of Good Women and make plans for next year or after - give yourselves a good break!

Noreen Hewett

Whatever Happened to Bateman's Bay?

Barbara and Noreen, and Jacqui in another car, started out early on December 22nd for Dolphin Point. We "knew" Bateman's Bay was before Ulladulla and Ulladulla was our destination, and when we sailed through a fair sized town, we thought it was Bateman's Bay. But in minutes we were at Dolphin Point. Noreen consulted the map but couldn't find Bateman's Bay. It must have moved inland! We finally found it – after Ulladulla and nearly 50kms further south! On many occasions during our tours, we were travelling north instead of south, or turning west instead of east. However, it all added to the fun, and, oh well, we don't expect to be perfect. Nor were we. We tried out our imperfections on Scrabble and Patience - and Samba, a card game which Noreen insisted we unwilling novices learn. We ate out a lot, including a good nosh-up at the local restaurant the night before Pat and Shirley joined us. For them, a home-cooking reception.

Thus we became a 'Five Good Women' team, combining enjoyment with the odd drama. We farewelled our holiday home reluctantly. These refugees did well!

Contributed by Barbara Burnham, Jacqui Graham, Noreen Hewett, Pat Elphinston and Shirley Renshaw.

Voluntary Work

On 29th November, twenty women came to a meeting at '87' to talk about 'voluntary work'. The meeting was prompted by the recent publication of a booklet by the Ageing and Disability Department (ADD) called "A Two Way Street". Sarah Fogg, who is probably known to many members because of her earlier connection with the Australian Pensioners and Superannuants Federation, did the research, wrote the booklet and came along to speak to us about it.

We were made aware of the various kinds of voluntary work in such prominent organisations as the State Emergency Service, Fire Brigades, lifesavers, sporting clubs and service organisations. Louise Anike pointed out that the usual perception of the work done by these and similar organisations is "heroic" and primarily done by men. Voluntary work in the welfare sector, e.g. Visitors for the Isolated and Meals on Wheels is usually done by women and is not seen as heroic at all.

It was of great interest to be told that the work of carers is not considered to be 'voluntary work'. Is this correct and, if so, is it fair? Are carers really conscripts? Is that too strong a word? Offensive, even? A question was raised about grandparenting. Is this voluntary work increasing due to childcare cutbacks and increased fees?

There was concern that voluntary workers may be taking jobs from the unemployed, but nobody knew whether there was a related increase in the hours worked by volunteers and the number of unemployed.

The federal government has been speaking lately about 'mutual obligation' applying the term mostly to people who are welfare recipients of one category or another and suggesting that while they are recipients of money from the government their obligation is to try to change that status by gaining employment. Work-for-the-dole is

one outcome of this idea. Is the federal government's interest in increasing the number of older people who do voluntary work tied to any notion of work-for-the-age pension?

Do government's, State and Federal, intend to do anything by way of recognition of the many hours of voluntary work, particularly in areas from which governments are withdrawing funding? What is the mutual obligation of government to voluntary workers?

None of those present were aware of any clear-cut guidelines available to employers of volunteers. We were unsure whether it is compulsory for employers of volunteers to pay out-of-pocket expenses. What happens if a voluntary worker is injured at work? What kind of insurance covers a voluntary worker? Do trades unions have a role to play in negotiating terms and conditions for voluntary workers? In some sectors? In all sectors? Would they be interested in doing that? Do we need a Volunteer Workers' Union?

Discussion turned to subjects closer to home and to OWN itself and the way it manages voluntary work. What role should the Working Committee, who are all voluntary workers, adopt in relation to regulating the conditions of voluntary workers in OWN? How is this best achieved? Are we offering the right mix of conditions for women to feel comfortable about volunteering to work at OWN?

Sarah's research indicates that people volunteer when they feel sure they'll fit in, that their skills match the work to be done and that their out-of-pocket-expenses will be paid. Voluntary workers want flexibility in work time because they want to be available to meet the demands of family and friends. They don't usually want a replication of the workplace, for

instance, not too much paperwork, not too much training. Voluntary workers, Sarah suggested, usually become involved in an organisation when someone they know specifically asks them to be involved, and when the organisation is known to them as a credible enterprise.

Whilst discussion was lively and informative, one of the main outcomes of the meeting seemed to be a rise in understanding that the issue of voluntary work is extremely complex. If you count the number of question marks throughout this report, and multiply by twenty, it will give you some idea of the degree of puzzlement we were all experiencing.

The meeting decided that I should begin to draft a policy statement on behalf of OWN (Sydney), which may form the basis of future action or negotiation with governments on the issue of voluntary work. And the issue of voluntary work at OWN is on the agenda for the Working Committee's Planning and Review Session in February. Watch this space!

Pam Ledden

ARE YOU FREE?

The Older Women's Network is run by voluntary workers right through from management to answering the phone. We always have vacancies for voluntary workers!

At the moment we need a Treasurer who can be available for two to three meetings a month (approx. 9 hours) and for occasional phone contact.

If you would like to talk about this position, please phone Margaret or Pam on 9247 7046.

A message for the 21st Century?

There's no place like
<<http://www.home.com/>>

ABORIGINAL SUPPORT CIRCLE

On December 5, we had our last meeting of the year and a Christmas break-up party. Betty Little sang two songs and I read a poem which the group encouraged me to submit to the OWN Newsletter. It was an enjoyable morning.

As our contribution to Reconciliation, the Aboriginal Support Circle has decided to publish a book of stories, poetry and drawings written by Aboriginal women who have been guest speakers at our ASC meetings, and by Aboriginal women who have been otherwise connected with OWN. The material will be collected and edited by ASC members. The provisional title of the book is 'IN MY OWN VOICE'. A subcommittee will be selected from the ASC to take responsibility for the project, which we anticipate will take at least one year to complete. We will be seeking funding in the new year to cover transport costs, tapes and production costs.

Our group arranged to present a \$50 award to an outstanding student at Cleveland Street School and Matraville High School. Pat Zinn and Margaret Walker will represent our group at Cleveland Street School, and Lucy Porter will make the presentation at Matraville.

Plans for 2000 include an intergenerational meeting between our group and children from an Aboriginal Study class at Cleveland Street School. We also plan to have a field trip to the Observatory, where we will explore the dreamtime stories and learn more about the constellations that are important to Aboriginal people. As usual, we will invite a number of Aboriginal guest speakers (or people closely associated with the Aboriginal community) to talk about their lives, their organisations or issues of importance to them. Other OWN members are welcome to attend these sessions.

Frayda Cooper

Dear Editor

Please note that I made two errors in my Aboriginal Support Circle report in the December OWN Newsletter. I wish to apologise to Margaret Walker, who has been keeping a scrapbook concerning Aboriginal issues for twenty (not eight) years, and I also need to correct the information about Margaret Brennan. The grants Margaret received were secured by the members of her group ANTAR LOWE Action Group, not by Margaret alone.

Frayda Cooper

Essie Coffey Memorial

The Department for Women's Reconciliation Group has taken the initiative to support the family of the late Ms Essie Coffey in their quest to establish a memorial to this remarkable Aboriginal woman.

Essie, also known as the "Bush Queen", lived in Brewarrina for most of her life, and raised ten children. She was instrumental in working with Aboriginal organisations to improve basic living conditions and protect human rights, and represented her people on numerous boards and committees such as the first Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Essie made two films about her life, both of which won national and international recognition. In 1995, she was awarded the medal of the Order of Australia.

Essie died in 1998 and her family is fundraising to establish a memorial for her in Brewarrina as a memory of her life and as an inspiration for the future.

Donations to the Coffey Family Memorial Trust Fund can be made at any Commonwealth Bank – Account Number: 5007 205 Branch Number: 762 504.

Look, Listen, Stay Alert!

Two years ago a number of OWN members signed a petition against the Multinational Investment Agreement (M.I.A). This was an attempt by powerful international corporations to break down the barriers to world markets. If successful these companies, under the free trade (i.e. globalisation of trade) rules of the World Trade Organisation, could override national laws if they endangered profits. Several examples come to mind. Local programmes to protect old forests could be overruled; asbestos exports to countries which have banned asbestos products could infringe free trade laws. Such rules could also allow genetically modified food exporters to sell GM foods without labelling.

Globalisation means the exploitation of the poorest countries of the world, of the women and children who provide the cheapest labour, environmental degradation. All of this in the interests of the wealthy in the richest countries in the world.

Owing to world wide protests the MIA was abandoned ... but not for long. The World Trade Organisation met last December in Seattle. The push for free trade was on again! Again they were not successful, as disenchantment with the international system of trade had grown. Four hundred protesters were arrested and the police used tear gas to clear the streets.

The Australian Government sent a delegation but EXCLUDED delegates from environmental groups and social justice groups but allowed business and farming delegates! Even the Australian Conservation Foundation was refused. Our Foreign Minister called those who opposed the current round of talks as 'Luddites'. In that case, one must say, Luddites include most of the world's major aid and environmental agencies and non-government organisations!

So these talks have broken down, but they will be back. As aware and concerned citizens, we can keep informed through the Internet at 87 Lower Fort Street and be ready to dissent in any way we can, through letters and lobbying our MPs.

Muriel Hortin

* The World Trade Organisation has nothing to do with the United Nations.

CUSTOMERS BEWARE

These days we've been cast as "customers", customers without much choice, customers of CentreLink, customers of public transport, customers of police services and customers of telephone services. Citizens have been dispossessed of our shared wealth, and our points of view almost incomprehensible to the "Providers of Products" who are busily cutting their costs and looking after the interests of shareholders and stakeholders.

At every turn, our civil needs are being redefined out of existence, and I have become aware of how important it is to resist the invisibilising sleights of hands of the Managers.

In October last year, I travelled on a two carriage CityRail service between Morisset and Newcastle, and exper-

enced an incident of assault, being the only passenger in the rear carriage (incorporating the Guard's van) which was subsequently occupied by a three-pack of disruptive and threatening youths. Fortunately, I did not suffer physical harm, although the experience left me feeling menaced and threatened. I wrote to the Minister for Ageing and Disability, who referred my letter to the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport.

In my original letter, I remarked that a clear message had emerged from the Premier's Forum on Ageing in Gosford (7/10/98) that older people want an expansion of safe and economical public transport, and that my most recent experience suggested that options were contracting. The response I received reflected current Government policy. "Safety" has become a security issue, and the public transport system, especially rail, has become host to a Big Brother Surveillance System ("Improved safety means investing in State of the Art technology"). We have high-tech video surveillance cameras, direct lines to the police, brightly lit and barriered/barred platforms, push-button help points

and safely locked toilets, but no staff. In all, a forbidding desolate atmosphere at many of our railway stations.

Of course, the surveillance is just that. As a woman, just try "running away from home" on public or private transport, and chances are that surveillance cameras will pick you up on a railway platform or at a Safe-T-Cam site on the Expressway, and you'll be safely escorted home to your abuser. Have a careful look at the new corral-style fencing on stations, and imagine how easily civil disturbance will be quelled when crowds of citizens venture out to public events. A 1984 scenario? Yes indeed.

As an older women, I want a community that is safe

As an older woman, I want a community that is safe, because people like mixing with one another, because they feel included, because they have a real share in this country's wealth, and because they take one another seriously and value dignity. Our requests for a safer, more civil world have been met by offers of increased surveillance and patrols by "security" police (very lucrative for the providers of security "products"), but women in particular know that proffered protection services can easily transform into abusive attacks.

So, I don't want a security/surveillance "e-economy" geared to the profit of stakeholders of the Olympic Games or football matches. I want a civil society burgeoning with goodwill, and cooperative, friendly, gainfully employed citizens. Surely, a critical mass of dedicated public transport users can quell the threatening and disruptive behaviour of marauding three-packs? Or are we going to lie back in our metal womb-tomb-cocoons-on-wheels (private vehicles) and allow speed, competition and violent, alienated rage to become the norm of our society?

Carol Rose

AN 'EXCITING' TRIP

I boarded a train the other day,
We were giving a show down Cabra-Vale way.
The train left the station and tootled along,
Then at the next station these boys got on.
Oh boy, I thought, these boys lack charms
As they sat with needles affixed to their arms.

Remove thyself, I head for the stair,
Hold on lady, you're not going anywhere,
Got any money, as they stripped my bag,
Then one of them nonchalantly lit a fag.
They formed a circle with me in the middle.
I realised that fear makes you want to piddle.

They pushed and they shoved, and called me names.
I wondered if I would survive these games.
You Can't Beat a Woman, my T-shirt said.
One raised his fist to belt my head.
Don't hit her, she lives at Waterloo.
I thought to myself, I bet you do too.

Without finesse, I exited the door.
On my hands and knees, I fell on the floor.
My goods and chattels were thrown after me.
Hoo-bloody-ray, they set me free.
I entered the first pub that I could see.
I said, quickly, I need a brandy.

Now, on television, they just toss it down.
It's supposed to hit the spot and not cause a frown.
I coughed and I spluttered and couldn't get air.
The patrons in the bar, all they did was stare,
Don't believe everything you see on TV,
'Cos chucking back brandy just doesn't work for me.

What to say about Sydney trains?
Some passengers are bloody unfriendly!!

Josie Jackson

Train Passenger Extraordinaire!

We Reply to Jocelyn Newman

At long last the Federal Minister for Family and Community Services has released the discussion paper, "The Challenge of Welfare Dependency in 21st Century", she has been promising since before last October. OWN received a copy just before Christmas and Joint-Coordinator, Pam Ledden, was able to read it before she went on holidays. On our behalf she sent off some pertinent comments to the Minister.

She pointed out that the paper failed to spell out what the Government is planning to do for welfare recipients to end their dependency. OWN's main concern, said Pam, is to address the issues that relate to older women. The discussion paper does not include people of pension age who may wish to work. This is discriminatory and takes no account of the capabilities and experience of older people, nor their wishes about continued employment. Older women leaving the workforce through redundancy have difficulty finding other work. The common uninterested attitude of employers together with community attitudes of ageism and sexism can have a demoralising effect on the victims and force these people, unwillingly, to accept unemployment benefits.

The question of volunteer work is another issue that needs careful attention, although we are assured by Senator Newman that this issue will be addressed later by a review committee. Pam's submission emphasised the great service to the community performed by this entirely unregulated workforce, a workforce that saves the Government squillions at the expense of caring and compassionate people, (usually women).

For these volunteer workers with limited incomes there is no guarantee of reimbursement for out of pocket expenses, no effective insurance for a worker injured at work and the care-giving is usually unacknowledged in the accounting practices of the government or by the media.

Volunteer work accounted for the equivalent of 50,000 full time jobs in 1994 in the welfare sector alone. This questions the correlation between volunteer work and unemployment, something Senator Newman might address.

... the government's real intention (is) to make savage cuts to welfare payments and pensions ...

After I had read the "Discussion Paper", I was convinced the rhetoric cloaked the Government's real intention, which remains hidden at the moment, to make savage cuts to welfare and pensions by some means or another.

The main problem in Australia is the rising level of need amongst low income and disadvantaged people. This is where money is

urgently needed. Pam pointed out that the \$50 billion dollars the Government say they have spent on welfare payments and services is much less than the subsidies offered to business interests.

In the NCOSS survey 1998 called "Australians Living on the Edge" we learnt that 2 million were living below the official poverty line. We learnt that Community Welfare Agencies are turning away needy people with no assistance. Some agencies are coping by increasing unpaid hours worked by staff and some by using up their financial reserves.

So let's have a discussion by all means about "reconstructing the welfare system" but let's make sure Senator Newman understands the costs if support to the poorest section of society is further stripped away by reining in welfare payments.

Muriel Hortin

P.S. If you feel like sending your comments to Senator Newman you can read the Discussion Paper at our office, 87 Lower Fort Street.

Revisioning Aging: Empowerment of Older Women

Edited by Jenny Onyx, Rosemary Leonard and Rosslyn Reed.

'Revisioning Aging' is a collection of writings challenging the dominant social constructions that devalue and discriminate against older women. The aim of the book is to deconstruct the limiting images, attitudes, discourses and practices surrounding ageing* that currently prevail, and to construct alternative options and possibilities for older women to participate in creating more equitable social and material conditions for themselves.

The book has three sections. The first section contains chapters showing how prevailing social, political, economic and discursive contexts have shaped the experience of ageing for women. The second section looks at specific aspects of older women's lives: work (paid and unpaid), living space, and health. The final section begins a reconstruction of the experience of ageing for women presenting positive and empowering images, languages and actions that have made and will make a difference in women's lives.

OWN has a copy of 'Revisioning Aging' in its reference library at Lower Fort Street. Some copies may still be available from the Feminist Bookshop, and it can be ordered from www.amazon.com.

* Australian spelling

Dear OWN,

Many thanks for a great magazine and all the lobbying and other things you do on our behalf. It is much appreciated. I'm maintaining the rage re funding and writing to the appropriate people. Thanks again,

Yours sincerely,

Marjorie Scott, Wagga Wagga

Theatre Group Report

Isn't December supposed to be a time for slowing down? Someone forgot to tell the Theatre Group! We maintained our usual hectic schedule; finally finishing up after the Sydney office closed on December 17th.

The audience at the Age and Retirement Conference held at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research, University of NSW, was a mixed bag. Consisting mainly of academics, many of them male, they appeared either stony faced or appreciative. Overall, we were quite successful in getting our message across. According to Dr. Diana Olsberg, people throughout the day expressed enthusiasm for our presentation, and used it in their speeches as an example of how the vitality of older women can be channelled. She said we had "hit the Internet" and a check of their web page the following day showed a photo of our fairy segment.

At the University of Technology's International Conference for Education through Cultural Action, we performed in a windswept courtyard with no electrical facilities. Luckily our guitarist had a battery-operated amplifier so we were audible to the audience of about 30 women and a handful of men. They showed their appreciation by clapping and taking up a collection for us!

The program at the Fairfield Council International Senior's Day included a Vietnamese group, twenty minutes of yodeling, a male comedian/comper, a glitzy ballet with thighs exposed through side-slitted skirts, a juggler who kept dropping his juggling balls, and us!

We received a standing ovation from TAFE teachers and public servants in the Bankstown and surrounding areas following our performance at the Spokeswomen Program of the Public Service Conference.

Our final performance was for older nuns at the Mercy Foundation's Monte Saint Angelo Convent at North Sydney. Some of the retired nuns had seen us at the award presentation earlier in the year and were delighted to welcome us back.

The year finished with a delicious smorgasbord luncheon at the Manly Pacific Hotel for the entire cast plus five "Friends of the Theatre Group". We anticipate that there will be many more "Friends" at our 2000 end-of-year party, so if you want to ensure your place, book now!

We farewelled June Goss, a member of the Theatre Group for eight years, and said au revoir to Peggy Hewett who is finally taking her well-deserved 'long service leave'. Janet Waters and I will be acting coordinators of the Theatre Group for the next three months.

A new year with the hope that the Theatre Group continues to grow and prosper: new members, new ideas all welcome.

Lucy Porter

Welcome, Judy Laws!

AN INVITATION

Interested members are invited to join the OWN Health Group, a small, dedicated group which meets once a month on the 3rd Tuesday, at 10am.

We discuss current health issues, provide back-up to the OWN Wellness Resource Project, respond to requests for consumer representatives, and provide comments on government health policies when required. We also organise workshops on health issues for OWN members.

For more details about what's involved and how you might be able to contribute, please contact me on 9957 6377 or email renate@zip.com.au.

Renate Watkinson

Judy Laws, member of OWN and well known for her experience and commitment to working with older women, will be joining the staff of OWN on January 31 as Project Worker for the Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre.

Judy joins our other part-time paid workers: Dorothy Cora (Community Development), Kris Ferguson (Office Manager) and Cara MacDougall (Project Worker for Northside and Wellness Resources.)

Our workers' skills are highly valued and appreciated by members, who are responsible for managing and running OWN.

Sam Smart

Thanks ...

To friends at OWN, I thank you for the many messages and phone calls expressing concern, love, good vibes to myself, family and especially my daughter Varvara who has been in hospital, critically ill over the past 8 weeks. I feel sure that all this love and caring is therapeutic.

Varvara emerged from a comatose state on Boxing Day and now recognises her family and the hospital staff although she is still spending a lot of time dozing.

I have responded to as many calls as possible but all this takes time and energy, and I visit Varvara every day. The family approaches the situation one day at a time.

Merle Hight.

What a Joy!

Joy Ross, Coordinator of our International Year of Older Persons (IYOP) activities during 1999, was one of twenty older people in the federal electorate of Sydney to receive an IYOP Commonwealth Recognition Award for Senior Australians for "significant contributions to the community".

Other people in the electorate of Sydney received awards for their contributions to Aboriginal communities, saving the Glebe Housing Estate, entertaining older people, public tenants' rights, local government, Reconciliation, Witness Watch, local playgroups, Neighbourhood Watch, the environment, gay and lesbian pride, local artists, AIDS sufferers, local charities, pedestrian safety, the visually impaired and community newspapers.

The awards, presented by the Member for Sydney, Tanya Plibersek, at an afternoon tea party in her Camperdown electoral office, were part of a series of awards initiated by the federal government to honour older people's contributions to the community.

Other OWN members to receive awards include Betty Johnson, who received a "Recognition Award" for her contributions within the Bennelong electorate, and to Stella Cornelius, who received a NSW "Achiever Award".

This was what OWN wrote about Joy on the nomination form:

Joy Ross was born in 1934 into a Western Australian working class family. From her parents, Joy came to understand at an early age the great divisions between the haves and have nots, but it was not until she was married with two children and living in Newcastle in the early seventies that she became, in her words, 'politicised'. Women's Liberation had arrived, and Joy's life took on new meaning and direction.

For the past thirty years, Joy has made an outstanding contribution to social justice. Her first formal voluntary position was as secretary/volunteer coordinator of the Northcott Residents' Group Inc. in Surry Hills, Sydney. In this role, Joy initiated the development of community facilities for public housing tenants including community transport; remodelling of a park; a community centre, English classes for tenants from NESB and tenancy advice services.

Joy further honed her impressive management, advocacy and lobbying skills on the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre Management Committee and as Project Officer for the Public Tenants Development Project.

photo

Joy Ross and Tanya Plibersek

In 1987, following an increasing awareness of the social, cultural and political marginalisation of older women, Joy, with others, formed the Sydney Older Women's Network (OWN). Today, there are fourteen OWN groups in NSW and a national organisation with groups in all states and the ACT.

Joy coordinated OWN, in a voluntary capacity, for over twelve years until late 1998 when she accepted the huge task of coordinating OWN'S IYOP activities and events. She also worked with Coalition '99 to ensure that IYOP would be a resounding success in NSW.

Joy's unswerving commitment to fairness and justice for all, together with high levels of competency and a friendly and inclusive disposition, make her an inspirational role model for all women.

Poetic Licence

There once was a cat I named Roza
I called her my gorgeous - girl - poser
They say cats chase birds
But here's one for the nerds
The birds swooped, Roza looped
And speeded for home and reposer.

Nina Walton

MEET ...

Ermes Solari

Member of OWN and
voluntary worker
(membership)

Where is your favourite place to go?

Symphony Concerts

What do you like to do the most?

Cooking, gardening and travelling

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

Suffer protracted ill health

What gives you your greatest sense of satisfaction?

Being needed and loved

What is the best thing you get from the Network?

Companionship

What is your greatest contribution to the Network?

Looking after the members and membership

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

Quality of life

What are you most passionate about?

Peace

What causes you most distress?

Inhumanity

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

Be a musician

MEET ...

Renate Watkinson

**Working Committee member,
member of the Health Group
and the Wellness
Coordination Committee.**

Where is your favourite place to go?

The Snowy Mountains

What do you like to do the most?

Walking and skiing

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

Cook for a family every night of the week.

What gives you your greatest sense of satisfaction?

A project followed through to the end and well done

What is the best thing you get from the Network?

Stimulation, friendship, connectedness

What is your greatest contribution to the Network?

My involvement with health and wellness

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

Economic security

What are you most passionate about?

Good friendship and relationships

What causes you most distress?

Other people's pain

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

Walk the whole coastal path in Cornwall.

An Item From the Late News

Very soon hundreds of women from around the world will meet in Manila to assess what impact the Beijing Conference has had on governments since it was held in 1995. A large delegation attended from Australia, including many women from OWN.

But this time, in Manila, Australia is to have no official delegates. Jocelyn Newman, Minister assisting the PM on Women's Affairs said she would not attend and Senator Stott Despoja's request for official government status was refused by Parliament. The only other woman from Australia will be MLC Janelle Saffron. Neither of these two women is endorsed by either the Federal or the State Parliament.

So no official representatives from our country at an important Conference that will see New Zealand's PM Helen Clark, as well as women like the President of the European Parliament Nicole Fontaine, the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament Birgitte Dahl, and Dr. Mo Mowlam Chief Minister for Ireland in the British Parliament.

The three day meeting in Manila is described as a conference for women political leaders who will look at ways of increasing the number of women in parliaments and representative bodies.

Best wishes to our two lone women ... Natasha and Janelle.

Muriel Hortin

No comment!!

"With the medical possibility of ovary transplants women are now truly in control of their own lives. They may choose to have children after a corporate career, but having enjoyed their independence may not want to spoil this by living with a man. With sperm banks, all this could mean that, by 2010, men will be redundant in women's lives. By the year 2010 it could be an accepted pattern for men and women to retire at the same age - but for men to take up golf and for women to have children."

From 'You're A Man? How Quaint' by Richard Scase, Professor of Organisational Behaviour, University of Kent.

AGEING AND ACTIVE:

AUSTRALIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In November, I attended an inaugural conference at the Research Centre on Ageing and Retirement at the University of NSW. Conference speakers focused on a wide range of issues of concern to older people including funding retirement, dental and physical health, work and leisure, and 'Lifelong Learning'. We heard about the impact of Telecare (a new concept of long distance care), and of a pilot community development project in Waterloo called 'Lifestyle Transitions', which is showing some promise as it addresses major issues such as inadequate bed-sitters, inappropriate placement of tenants, lack of crisis support and social isolation.

The importance of maintaining independence through continuing to drive cars cannot be underestimated, explained a representative of the 'Years Ahead' driving program at the NRMA. However, he warned that older people's driving skills will be increasingly scrutinised to ensure they can drive safely. A number of older people are being trained by the NRMA to use modern technology in their talks to community groups on older drivers' needs and safe driving.

A professor from the UNSW spoke about social and economic differences and the ways these affect older peoples' health and wellbeing. In 'Sex and Ageing' the speaker acknowledged that sex and sexuality are an integral part of older people's lives, and that the absence of intimacy can lead to behavioural problems and depression. In a pilot study, it was found that many professional and non-professional staff in residential care institutions don't have adequate knowledge of aspects of sexuality in the elderly.

It was a very long, intense and academic day. The new Research Centre proved a blessing with its latest technology, architecture and comfort. And the generously donated briefcases from the NRMA will enable me to carry more and more paperwork, which I accumulate at these conferences!

Hedi Roggeveen

Corporate

Kindness

In the OWN office, we use a particular planning calendar that is exactly right for our needs. Before Xmas, I checked out dozens of newsagents in an effort to replace our 1999 calendar with the 2000 version – with no success.

In frustration, I phoned 'Hallmark Cards', the company that produces the calendar, and to my amazement (after I had explained our problem), the woman I spoke to offered to send me one – free! If only more corporations realised that small acts of kindness, costing very little in dollars terms, produce so much good will.

Dorothy Cora

'Medical Technology – its uses and abuses'

The first of our monthly Discussion Groups attracted twelve women eager to discuss the topic, 'Medical Technology – its uses and abuses'. Some of the issues raised were controversial while there was almost complete agreement on others. For instance, we agreed that the community's commitment to hospitals is as great in dollar terms as it ever was, and yet our money is going more and more into high tech diagnostic tools like MRI scanners (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and intensive care beds with their myriad of devices to monitor and sustain seriously ill patients. The increase in the use of technology means that most hospitals now shift non-acute patients out into other facilities such as nursing homes, hospices or back into their own home! The new technologies mean fewer people in hospital beds and, in the future, more procedures being done on a day basis.

Some group members thought the use of medical technology should be paid for by the people who can afford it, although the Medicare Levy is applied according to our capacity to pay.

In discussing the ethics of prolonging life at all costs, we thought that litigation is the thing feared by the medical profession even though the cost of medical intervention in many cases is astronomical and does not prolong life. The decision as to who should undergo treatment is made by a specialist in the particular field. We learnt that a "living will" can be drawn up by us (prior to needing medical intervention) stating what level of medical intervention we want to prolong our lives beyond a certain point. Leave a photo copy with your doctor and ensure your personal copy is easily found. A "living will" form can be obtained from the Euthanasia Society, from the Benevolent Society and from OWN, which also has copies of an interesting booklet called, 'Taking Charge: Making Decisions for Later Life'.

Joan Hook

PS The focus for the February Discussion Group is "What is an Australian?" Please see the flyer and diary page for more information.

The Database Exposed!

At the November members' meeting, we were asked to write a reader-friendly article explaining how our Peer Support Advocacy Network (PSAN) database works. The design of the database, which was funded by the Department for Women in 1999, is now complete. Members are currently being trained to enter information and to use the database. A new questionnaire to update members' records is being designed and will be included with the next newsletter.

A database provides a good way to sort out information so that it is easily accessible. It's like a filing cabinet, but instead of your fingers wandering through the files to find material, you push buttons to get the electronic 'drawers' to open on the computer screen.

The OWN database has four 'drawers'. The first contains lists of general contacts e.g. politicians, organisations etc. The second one contains our membership records, including their volunteer activities and an advocacy profile (if provided). The third one contains a complete list of all the articles, books and journals that we hold (this is called the 'Resources Database'), and the fourth one contains information about all the projects that members of OWN are currently involved in.

One of the great benefits of this database to those of you interested in advocacy will be its capacity to help you find out who else is interested in a particular issue; to find relevant information about it; and to explore approaches to action to suit your particular needs.

Members will be able to come in and use the computer to get the advocacy information they are interested in. We eventually hope to have voluntary database workers rostered to provide assistance every day, but in the meantime, help will be available most days.

Pam Ledden and Dorothy Cora

**SUPPORT WOMEN'S
PROJECTS IN
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

Each year, prior to the International Women's Day March, a breakfast is organised by the International Women's Development Agency as a fundraiser for women's projects in developing countries.

At this stage, it appears that the breakfast will be held at the Convention Centre at Darling Harbour.

If you are interested in being on an OWN table at this year's breakfast, which is on Saturday, 11 March, please call Joy on 9247 7046 for details.

Investing in Future Generations

This was the title of a workshop I attended led by Vivian Schenker at the recent 'Meeting of Generations'. Although a number of young people were present, the absence of Aboriginal people was again noticed and commented upon.

Some people who attended the workshop thought it was going to focus on money! And one of the more interesting aspects of this workshop was trying to think 'outside money', and concentrate on the broader aspects of what 'investing' in the future generation might mean.

We identified key issues, which were consolidated into five topics: education, planning, role models, mentoring, and communication.

The outcomes for action summed up at the plenary were:

Creating an administrative infrastructure through the Local Government Association to facilitate forums with representatives from local community groups who could work together to address issues. Also having access to planning and decision making on common issues such as transport and public space.

Quality of life, which come from a wholistic approach to the environment, active participation and access through transport and information about development programs planned by Council.

Family and community support which is crucial to productive and continuous intergenerational exchanges and activities.

Opportunities for older people to support and mentor younger people through socialising, education and employment.

A most productive and enjoyable workshop, with positive outcomes.

Hedi Roggeveen

WHAT WILL THE NEW MILLENNIUM BRING?

The number's small
Who can recall
1900 to 2000,
Century of turmoil.

Amazing new world,
Electrified,
Motorised, computerised,
Commanding the skies.

Looking backwards
Forty millennium,
Aboriginals
Ranged Australia's land.

Cared for this land.
Left pollution free.
The land fed them;
Let the land breathe.

Two centuries Europeans
Pushing foreign ways,
New inventions,
Harmed land and peoples.

Will new millennium
Correct these wrongs?
Provide togetherness?
Reconciliation?

Frayda Myers Cooper

JELLO!

Another of my travel memories. This happened way back in the 70s. We had spent a couple of days in Las Vegas, such a busy, brassy place, where you don't go to bed unless you have to because there's so much entertainment, so much to do. The myriad hotels are palatial, but accommodation in them costs very little because you're expected to lose money gambling on their machines which they thoughtfully provide for your use twenty-four hours a day. The restaurants never close. I remember having smoked salmon and beignets at 3am, tired but too stimulated to sleep, after an evening of wonderful entertainment (which included our own Kerry Biddell) and poker machines.

The desert air in Las Vegas is so dry that you encounter static electricity everywhere. Walking on the carpets gives you electric shocks, touching the doorknobs, car doors, inserting your key in the lock, so many unexpected things.

We spent a few enjoyable days there and left late in the afternoon on the third day. We found a Motel not too far away, checked in and went to have our evening meal. It was a smorgasbord, where you helped yourself to whatever you wanted. There was a large bowl of opaque pink stuff which I couldn't identify. I looked around to make sure no one was watching, and stuck my finger into it, intending to taste it. I got an enormous electric shock. I thought it must be a warning from Above. I regained my composure and asked a nearby waitress what was in the bowl. She gave me a strange look. "Why, that's Strawberry Jello," she said.

Renee Simons

Thank God My Prayers Weren't Answered

When I was seven years old my parents separated. I was the eldest of four children. The family was Catholic and to my mother's family and her friends horror, my mother proceeded to divorce my father.

My early childhood was very unsettled with my mother moving around quite a bit. Each time we all ended up in a Catholic school. At each new school I would be taken into the Reverend Mother's office where it would be carefully explained to me that my mother was doomed and that I would have to live a very sin-free life if I were to be saved at all. The general impression I got was that that was not very likely to happen, the child of divorced parents was beyond salvation. It was also impressed upon me that the word divorced must never be uttered inside the convent grounds and should be avoided altogether, if possible. To me this was a piece of cake since I had a lively imagination and there was a war on. I had no trouble explaining the absence of a father at all. I merely killed him off.

His first death, I thought very exciting at the time. He was in a train, going over the Harbour Bridge, when he fell out of the train, down between the tracks, off the bridge and was killed. My pals in third class were most impressed and looked on me with great respect. Soon after that we changed schools.

By then I was well into this exciting death mode and decided that falling off the bridge, though unusual, did not really conjure up any hero image. I needed a hero now, as I really was missing my father. I did not want to think of him living with his girl friend in Bondi. So he was shot down over Germany. He may still be alive and a captive of the Germans and when the war was over, he may come home. Fourth class girls accepted that.

About that time I had learned lots of sinful ways, one of which was telling Irish jokes about Pat and Mick. All these jokes had one thing in common. They were, though very juvenile, a bit risqué. Each year we had what was known as a Mission. Priests would visit each parish and conduct a Mission, which was designed to keep us on the straight and narrow by scaring the daylight out of us. Fourth class girls (about nine years old) were considered to be on the verge of promiscuity and when these priests lectured us about impurity, I felt their eyes burning into me.

Of all the sinners in that church, somehow, deep in my heart, I knew that they knew I was the child of divorced parents. If we had bad thoughts, told rude jokes, (oh no, he knows!) or treated our bodies improperly (what did that mean?), we were impure, we were sinning against the sixth commandment. Straight after the talk was over, we were all placed in a pew near the confessionals, heads bowed in shame, nearly wetting our pants in fear, as we waited to tell the priests what he already knew - we were sinful wretches who did not deserve to live, let alone be let into heaven when

we died. When I got into the darkness of the booth, I whispered as loudly as I dared that I had broken the sixth commandment. For several weeks, not a single Pat and Mick joke passed my lips but eventually I heard one that was too good to keep to myself and I had to tell someone. Back to the confessional, again admitting to having broken the sixth commandment. This went on till I was about fifteen when I found out what, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" really meant.

Of course, this was not my only sin; I was still piling them up. Over the next three schools, I killed Dad in a submarine fighting the Japanese in New Guinea and had him working for the French Resistance. Meanwhile he had joined the armed forces and I was hopeful that something might happen that would prevent him from coming home. If that didn't happen, all my friends would know my parents were divorced. Believe me, to a very young girl, in the Catholic school system, anything was better than being the eldest daughter of divorced parents.

Luckily for my Dad, being a sinner, my prayers were not heard and the war ended before he saw active service. After the war, there were so many fathers missing that when asked, I was able to shrug my shoulders and say, "The war, you know." Still, I was glad when the mid-fifties arrived and divorce became common. Why, even film stars were doing it.

Barbara Malcolm

Best Friends

I've just returned from staying with my best friend.
And so, in thanks, a book to her I send.
A book that says that Dottie Cox is one
who knows full well what pleases Bett MacLean.
It also shows that said Dorothy C
was overjoyed to find that B.MacL
has not changed; not one whit.
She's still that confidante of earlier times,
when books and plays and food and laughs and
kids
enveloped us in loving sisterhood.

Dorothy Cox

REFLECTIONS OF AN OLDER IMMIGRANT WOMAN

Imigrated to Australia from London in my fifties, in my fifty-ninth year, to be exact, under 'parental category'. Although the majority of my offspring were permanent residents here (at that time, anyway), the decision to leave the comfort and security of my life in the UK was met with incredulity by my friends and neighbours. They were, and to the best of my knowledge still are, busily organising retirement plans, topping-up pension funds, paying off mortgages and making plans for the next Saga Holiday offering, special discounts to retirees on coach tours around a damp British Isles, while I was arranging for all my worldly goods to be shipped twelve thousand miles away.

Now that I have lived here for over two years, I think it is time for some reminiscing about what it means to be an 'older' woman migrant. Well, firstly one of my children who provided the parental category status has returned to the U.K. Our family motto, "Divided we are united", is being taken literally. My son's favourite gripe is that he left home ten years ago to escape the family influence, but it has relentlessly followed him here. Therefore his only recourse was to go back to the U.K. However, he is threatening to return here despite my obstinate refusal to leave Sydney!

I love Australia. I have no regrets about my decision to migrate, and I am one of Australia's most fervent supporters. It's true what they say about converts (not convicts!) being the most ardent supporters in any chosen life style.

What do I love? I love the beaches, the weather, the place where I live (Lane Cove), but most importantly I love the people, especially the Australian women. In my previous life, I was persuaded by your (now our) famous feminists, Germaine Greer and Dale Spender, to seek out the society that had produced such powerful feminist intellects. The Female Eunuch changed my life irrevocably, and later when I began my MA in Gender Studies, both these Australian feminists influenced my own thinking.

And now, having lived here for over two years, I am beginning to understand the country that provided the birthplace of their strengths and opinions. Maybe it's the beauty of the environment, climate, land, sea, but I think not. It's unlikely to be the flora and fauna. From my perspective as an ex-Pom, it is the way women here have constructed their gender. They stand strong and resolute. They bow to no one, and do not apologise for being who and what they are, and I find this resoluteness nowhere more apparent than in OWN.

I never found such an organisation in the U.K., and I find myself asking whether the Queen or Queen

Mother would join such an organisation - I doubt it. Despite having a woman at its head, the monarchy perpetuates hegemonic patriarchy.

So, here I am, an older migrant woman, looking forward to a future in Australia, with or without my 'parental category' status, in which I can find myself. A future in which, having found my voice, I can speak to those who will listen, of the older woman's experience of living in Australia.

Christine Musk

FAME AT LAST !

Some time in the dim and distant past (and I use not lightly the word 'dim', considering my fading memory!) I sent off a poem to the International Book of Poets. They wrote back, to Poet Cox, saying that my poem would be included in their next anthology and would I like to buy it? I said no thanks, but yes, you can enter it in your competition.

Another letter to Poet Cox, this time with the news that my poem had achieved Third Prize winner status, along with another seventy prizewinners from thousands of entries! And then ... and then came a commemorative coin and a display case! I have to tell you, that poem ... called 'Single', has already appeared in the OWN Newsletter ... so you can truly say that You Read it HereFirst!

Dorothy Cox

MY PARENTS TELL STORIES

My parents tell stories. They have a web of anecdotes about family and friends that covers just about every occasion. Mostly they are amusing. They are about self-reliance and inventiveness and they often take themselves or others down a peg or two - usually gently. Pretentiousness in any form is a target. Like the friend whose practical-joking husband had the habit of ringing her and pretending to be someone else.

One day she had a call from someone purporting to be Mrs De Witt Batty, the bishop's wife, asking her to do some chore for the church. Sure it was her husband, she replied, "Well you tell Mrs De Witt Batty to get off her fat botty and do it herself." Of course it WAS the bishop's wife - or that's how the story goes. Or the one about the Jewish friend who called in on his way to visit the rabbi and had forgotten his hat. My father offered to loan him his, but it was too big. So his friend grabbed a sheet of the Sydney Morning Herald and folded it up inside the rim to make it fit.

The stories cover just about any event - or can be made to fit. Have a photographic mishap or make a trip to Manly and you'll be told about the uncle, then a boy, who took a photo of the Manly ferry with his new Brownie Box camera. He was careful to follow the instructions, but the photo when developed showed the ferry as a speck on the horizon. He was incensed. "It said five feet or further, and I was further!" he said.

My father's professional life as a surgeon features in lots of stories. My father always told us about his work and I remember many a meal time when he would be drawing diagrams of the day's operations for us. One tale I like is of my father as a young man coming home late at night after an emergency operation. I think my parents had not long been married. My mother woke up and he tossed her something she says she thought was a small fig from the Morton Bay fig trees growing nearby. "There you are," he said. "You've been wanting to know what gall stones look like." He knew my mother's reaction would be more of scientific curiosity satisfied than horror - though there was a touch of drama in the presentation.

The stories cover all their lives, from my father's early childhood in Fiji and later at a Spartan boarding school in Sydney where a highlight was a trick pepper-filled chocolate for a teacher who always ate the children's sweets if he caught them eating in class. His standing with the class rose considerably when he ate the chocolate without any visible reaction. From the age of seven my father

only saw his parents every second Christmas holidays.

My mother's stories cover a very different childhood. First, in a gold mining town on the New England tablelands and later in the new north shore Sydney suburb of Roseville where she and her brothers played happily in the bush with, at my grandmother's insistence, newspaper tied around their legs to scare off the snakes. There was always a pet possum that pinched the apples, an impossible dog or a cicada smuggled into class only to burst into song at just the wrong moment.

Later, as a young teacher just out of university she was required to teach at Penrith. She lived in a boarding house during the week and only saw my father and her family on weekends. The headmaster was a demon who roamed the corridors with a feather duster (used to hit and intimidate children.) He held it behind him so it just protruded above his bald head.

As children we loved these stories. My mother compiled books about each of us, with unreliably framed black and white photos to accompany the stories. After we grew up and left home, the stories were about patients, friends and chance acquaintances...then grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Ros Gordon

RACISM

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

A writer on the Internet offered the following points as a way of identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege. We published some of them in the December Newsletter - here are some more.

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.
3. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my colour.
4. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

notice

COMPUTER WANTED

I want to buy a second-hand computer that's powerful enough for an internet connection, and also has the capacity for a memory upgrade and to take a 17 inch monitor. I would also like a compatible printer. Please ring Russ Aroney on 47827250 or write to me at 45 Loftus Street, Katoomba 2780.

COMPUTER PRINTERS WANTED

Does anyone have 'old' inkjet printers that can be used with an Apple Mac SE (System 6.0.7) or Mac Classic (7.0.1)? Please contact Dorothy at the OWN office 9247 7046

Centrelink Crisis Payment

Crisis payment is a one-off payment to existing welfare recipients, which can be made to people in severe hardship who are forced to leave their home due to extreme circumstances such as domestic violence. The amount is equal to one week's payment of their basic social security benefit. Tel 13 1021 for more info.

'BEYOND THE BLACK STUMP'

<http://home.mira.net/~lions/women.htm> includes massive links on women's issues sorted by topic e.g. feminism, arts, business, computers etc.

SHOPPING ON THE INTERNET

The Commonwealth Government has developed a set of Fact Sheets for consumers, which cover all aspects of shopping on the Internet. Available from the OWN office.

'Making Memories'

The Alzheimer's Association NSW has launched 'Making Memories', an education and support program for people with early stage dementia and their partners. The program aims to assist people to extend the length of time they can be cared for in their own home, and to provide access to individual counselling, support groups, individualised education and activity based services. For details on referrals, assessment and the program structure, please contact the 'Making Memories' coordinator, Roxane Daniels on 9888 4216.

TAI CHI CLASSES & GENTLE EXERCISE FOR WOMEN

Lilyfield Community Centre, Starting 5 Feb.

Phone Judy Laws 9564 1528
Cost:
\$70 or con. \$50 for 10 weeks

board

TEN /FORTY/MATRIX

Ten/Forty/Matrix is a social group for lesbians and feminists over 40 who meet at Ashfield every second month for dinner and discussion. On Saturday 5th Feb. at 6pm, guest speaker Sharon McGee (Uni of Western Sydney) will talk about *Older Women's Encounters with the Medical Model*.

Phone Jan 9810 1862 for more info.

ENHANCING SPIRITUALITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

One Day Workshop with Dorothy McRae-McMahon and Judy Laws. Sunday 26 March 2000 from 10.00am to 4.30pm at the Writers' Centre Rozelle Hospital Grounds.

Cost: \$125 (includes lunch, morning and afternoon teas)

Limited number of concessions available. For info phone Judy Laws 9564 1528

communitybuilders.nsw

This website is a project of the NSW government and is designed "for people wanting to make their communities stronger, healthier and more successful."

There are two parts to the website. Community Voices is where YOU can have your say by sharing your story, joining in the discussion of community issues or promoting your seminar, conference or community event. The second part, a community builders toolkit, has lots of information, techniques, web links and case studies to help you work in and with communities.

ACCOMMODATION AVAILABLE

Self-contained bed-sitter for low income person over 60 in the McIntyre Centre for Seniors in Lane Cove. Ten minute walk to shops and handy to city bus. \$26 per week.

Please phone Cate Turner for more information on 9428 2905

Attention Folk Dancers

Our application for the OWN International Folk Dance Group to dance at the National Folk Dancing Festival in Canberra during Easter (21 - 24 April) has been accepted. We need 8 dancers for two 20 minute performances. For further information, please phone Alita Tanswell on 9798 9169 as soon as possible so we can organise accommodation and transport.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK IS OPEN TO ALL OLDER WOMEN.

Annual fees:

Membership, including Newsletter.....\$20.00

Newsletter only (for Gov't Depts. institutions and organisations)\$25.00

Send your cheque, name, address and phone number to:
Older Women's Network, 87 Lower Fort Street, Millers Point 2000

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