

# Coordinators' Report

At the start of the new millennium, we wish all OWN members a safe, healthy and happy new year.

During 2000, OWN came to a new stage of development with the process of establishing an OWN NSW and the setting up and consolidating a separate Sydney OWN. At a meeting on December 8, members discussed a draft of the NSW OWN Constitution. Our comments will go to a meeting of the NSW Steering Committee on January 23, then the next draft will be circulated for ratification at the NSW groups' Quarterly Meeting on 21 February. Hereafter, an Interim Management Team will be elected to carry on the work of registering OWN NSW, liaising with the Ageing and Disability Department (our funding body) and any other tasks that the NSW quarterly meeting decides upon.

Members are determined to respect and support the process of the formation of both the new NSW OWN and Sydney OWN, and that we now start the process of consolidating Sydney. Some suggestions for the direction of Sydney OWN included focusing more closely on metropolitan older women's needs, continuing to provide the social support which is very much part of OWN, being involved in state-wide projects and seeking funds in our own right.

The Working Committee's six-monthly Review and Planning Session (RAPS) on 6 December was a productive one with valuable input from a number of regular volunteers (see Muriel's article on p.3) Members can participate in the production of a planning agenda for our next RAPS (in March) at the quarterly members' meeting in February (see enclosed flyer.)

**And then there was fun ...** At the end of 2000, as we do every year, we held an 'end of year party' to celebrate our work and ourselves. The day before our planned celebration, we found that the Mott Hall had been double booked! As a matter of necessity, we quickly set up the meeting room at '87' to accommodate the many members who came to hear Aboriginal elder, Nancy de Vries, tell her very moving and often funny story (see Lucy's article on p. 4), before indulging in fabulous food and conversations. Fortunately the weather goddess smiled on us, which meant we could spill out under the beautiful Robinia tree in our front 'yard'.

And then there was New Years Eve! Talk about an intergenerational assemblage! There were older women, some from OWN and some from Ten Forty, a few sons and daughters and grandkids plus quite a few locals of all ages and backgrounds (see Pearlie McNeill's article on p.2.)

Several hours later (are we mad?) ten of us, inveigled by Lucy Porter, participated in the Federation Parade as 'older women'. We were part of the section 'I am Woman', which also included a group of suffragettes and women's liberationists. It was good fun, but very tiring for many of us.

On January 12, as a nod to Federation and the New Year, a number of us met over lunch at '87' to explore what OWN in Sydney means to us and to listen to members tell their stories of migration to Australia. We agreed that, with or without extended family, OWN offers the opportunity to be part of something important: to have our minds taxed and to grow old together, being inspired by other older women. The stories told by women not born in Australia touched us deeply; stories about why they came here, the challenges they faced and the things that made survival possible. All spoke of the dislocation, being made to feel different, never feeling they belong 100% to their country of birth or to their new home.

We've now been back in the office since January 15 following a four week break and already it's all systems go. This year promises to be one of change at many levels. It's now up to all of us to do our part in helping to maintain the vibrancy so characteristic of OWN, to enjoy each other's company and to have lots of fun as we work towards our many goals for the year.

Joy Ross, Pam Ledden, Louise Anike and Renate Watkinson



## **Theatre Group Report**

Well, here we are again, happy and relaxed after our holiday break (ha ha.. Well, I hope some of us are! We didn't finish performing until 20th December, so we were all pretty desperate for our annual break, even if it was less than the full four weeks. Anyway, since our last report, we have done five gigs to incredibly discerning audiences.

The first one, on 22 November, was a ten-minute compilation of various songs at the "Supportive Neighbourhoods Seminar" in the Sydney Mechanics Hall. Though only four of our members were invited to perform we gave our all, as usual. Anne Cunnyghame accompanied us, and did a really great job. They seemed to love our songs, if the long applause is anything to go by. Thank you.

Five days later we were in Women's College for a rendition of our "WOW 2000" show. I think changing costume in full view of our audience was a first, but we were still greeted with applause and laughter.

We always seem to be made so welcome at this venue, and we really enjoy being invited back. See you next year, hopefully.

Kiama was our next whistle stop. We were invited to perform in a really nice spot, on a really nice day for local women who were interested in starting up an Older Women's Network group. They decided to start their own group, and we (obviously) were the inducement. See what you can do when you try? We were happy to see so many women come to the centre, and the organisers were thrilled.

Once again the Mercy Foundation invited us to entertain some of the many people they help at a Christmas party at the Balmain Leagues Club. We were fed a scrumptious, sumptuous lunch, and even given a small gift. We had help on the stage – a man who was enjoying the show so much came up to help us along! The audience gave us a great reception and a good time was had by all.

Our last show was at the War Memorial Hospital, Waverley, where Peggy Hewitt had her knee operation earlier in the year. Peggy volunteered us (meaning we weren't paid!) but we went anyway! There we met a great group of people who really laid out the red carpet. We were fed well, greeted with enthusiasm, and Santa Claus gave each of us a gift. The song we sang "Pills, Pills, Pills", went down really well, and all in all, we had a great time. I am sure Peg must have enjoyed her stay there – why else would she want to go back?

We are learning a new show for 2001, which means two rehearsals a week and practising on public transport and in the shower! We've already booked seven shows between the middle of February and the end of March and this includes a five-day tour to northwest NSW.

Josie Jackson

## **New Years Eve**

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine I can take you on a journey, back in time, to New Year's Eve at Clyne Reserve. There are about forty of us and as you can see we're an intergenerational group with grown up children and grandchildren in our midst. We're gathered on the grassy knoll; spreading ourselves around the area in small groups, laughing, sipping champagne, eating the wonderful food that is such a feature of OWN, and Ten Forty Matrix occasions, and catching up with each other's news or introducing people around.

Now we're preparing for the big moment and moving closer to the stone wall so we can see the bridge. Isn't that a million dollar view? And hasn't the evening turned mild? One of the fireworks barges is down there on the water, immediately in front of us and you'd swear they were putting on a private show just for our lot.

There is something quite majestic about that Harbour Bridge aglow with colour, and the rainbow serpent adds a touch of magic reminding us of important things about Australia. Okay, you can open your eyes now. So did you have a good time?

Pearlie McNeill

# LET'S RAP!

"I want to have more fun!" Thus the first speaker at the RAPS meeting held before we went on holiday.

RAPS! What on earth is RAPS!

This constant use of acronyms can be very irritating but they can also make writing a good deal quicker. In this case RAPS stands for Review and Planning Sessions. We hold them twice a year, at the beginning to plan and at the end to review what we have done over the past twelve months and we evaluate the highs and lows and the successes and failures.

As an inveterate non goer-to-meetings member I have often felt guilty about expecting the working committee to sit through hours of gruelling meetings month after month while I sit back and feel free to applaud or criticize their decisions.

So this time my conscience got the better of me and I decided I should at least attend RAPS meetings twice a year. Other members must have felt the same because several non-working committee members came to the last meeting and very rewarding it turned out to be.

We all sat round the big table at '87' with Judy Laws, combining her skills as Project Worker at the Bankstown Wellness Centre and her years as a teacher, summarising and notating the salient points of our discussion under headings, subheadings and dot points on the whiteboard. Louise Anike sat with her pencil ready to tap on her glass tumbler keeping reasonable order as chairwoman.

We were each asked to state one issue that was our major concern. I racked my brains to think of an issue that would be useful to discuss. I suggested that we could be a little more pro-active when it came to political or social justice issues that are not exclusively older women's issues but which affect us all as citizens. We can surely make a stand on issues such as environmental degradation, the fate of the ABC, the WTO talks and globalisation, and such burning topics. I thought we should show that older women have not resiled from the mainstream of current affairs.

Around the table concerns ranged from, "Not

enough fun", to communication, to advocacy and the evergreen problem of lack of space, which all went up on the whiteboard to be later prioritised. (Sorry!)

The issue of "Who are we?" started a lively discussion as to what our core philosophy was. This went on for some time with Louise madly clinking away because we do tend sometimes to all talk at once when ideas start to flow, but morning tea gave us pause and at the next session we arrived at a consensus. We decided that OWN's core business and our field of expertise is women and ageing!

Well, that's absolutely what we are about. We are about celebrating our age and certainly having fun, but also, importantly, we want to make sure our voice is heard on all the issues that are essential for the wellbeing and happiness of older women. To do this we must be constantly on the alert as such issues arise, using our skills to write submissions, lobby politicians and be persuasive advocates on public committees.

Our two great successes still are the Theatre Group and the Newsletter, both carrying our message to hundreds of people far and wide and contributing to the image of an organisation that appears to be much bigger than our true membership would suggest.

We decided we were quite pleased with the work of the new advocacy group in areas of transport and housing and in compiling a database of members' profiles and resources for future research.

Of all our special interest groups, the Aboriginal Study Circle has attracted the most members and aroused the most interest. OWN is very committed to Reconciliation and this group, with its dedicated activists, has provided us with many wonderful speakers and performers at their functions this year.

Overall the Review Session was considered a success. Nobody needed to be treated for exhaustion, we all left after a pleasant "happy hour" in good spirits with ideas to think about and our enthusiasm for OWN undiminished.

Muriel Hortin



# Nancy De Vries



Our end-of-year function in December was a great success, with Nancy de Vries as our guest speaker. What a woman! From the moment we spotted her speeding up Argyle Cut in her wheelchair with her young grandson running beside her, we realised here was a woman with courage, initiative and dignity, pitting herself against any adversity which may come her way.

Nancy told a thought provoking, emotion-stirring story of being stolen from her mother as a child. She was the eldest of nine children, and the only one taken. Her mother made sure the authorities didn't get the others.

A succession of foster homes followed her abduction. Nancy told us that when she first saw a black child, she screamed with fright; nobody had told her she was an Aboriginal. Taken to Yarra Bay, near La Perouse, by her foster parents, local Aboriginal children were pointed out to her as no-hopers, dirty, and drunks. Most Aboriginal children who were taken from their parents were told their parents didn't want them but Nancy couldn't accept this. She identified as Aboriginal and began a long and determined search for her people. At Sydney Registrar's Office she found out her mother's name was Ruby.

The first time Nancy experienced love was when her first baby was born and she held her in her arms – a love that was unconditional. Nancy said schooling was difficult, despite having a keen interest in sport and education, because of constantly being shifted from foster homes to institutions and back again.

At seven years of age, she was raped. Her foster mother said she was lying, and terrified her by saying she'd have her tongue cut out if she ever spoke about it. At twelve years of age she was sexually assaulted by a church minister. She was told that she was a liar – another case of blame the victim. Nothing of this is noted in the Welfare Board papers which Nancy has seen.

At one stage, Nancy was sent to Eurambie Mission where Aboriginal men hunted and fished to supplement meagre mission rations, cooked on open fires, told stories in the evening. She loved it there but once again she was moved on.

Because Nancy would not accept her situation and constantly rebelled against injustice, she was sent to Parramatta Girls' Home – called "the finishing school" by the girls. She was told she was bad and was locked up. Her resilience helped her to survive, and she now says she thrives on adversity.

Despite the abuse and neglect Nancy suffered during her childhood, adolescence and marriage, she is a compassionate and caring woman. She told us Aboriginal history should be for all Australians, and non-Aboriginal people should not feel guilty, but should know, listen and understand.

Nancy finally found her Mum, and met her for the first time in Bourke. The reunion was very difficult, as her mother had always blamed herself and could not accept this grown woman as her child. She said, "That old woman is not my baby." At last her mother accepted her in silence. All of her nine brothers and sisters and Nancy's own children have been affected by Nancy's struggle. There have been a lot of tears shed at gatherings when family members meet for the first time. It has been a long journey of healing for Nancy and her family, and it wasn't until she met her mum that she felt she was able to get on with her life.

In spite of the difficulties they faced, many of her family have been successful in their chosen careers, which include nursing and social work. Nancy graduated from the University of Western Sydney in 1988 as a Registered Nurse at the age of fifty five. Racism still prevailed at university, with one lecturer saying, "What if she takes of her clothes and dances?" Nancy's humorous reply was, "I'll frighten the life out of you, old girl!"

As a member of the stolen generation, Nancy continues to speak out in support of Aboriginal rights. She told us that she may be a legend, but she is no myth! With her warmth and compassion, she reached out to every one of us, making us laugh and cry. Her story once again makes us realise the strength and survival skills of Aboriginal people, despite the terrible injustices our society has inflicted on them.

Lucy Porter

## DISCUSSION GROUP

Many wise thoughts were expressed during our discussion on Wisdom - its importance and acquisition. We agreed that wisdom can be learnt from experiences and from whatever comes into our lives, and that we all have the capacity to develop wisdom. We need wisdom when making life-changing decisions, we agreed that wisdom and contentment go hand in hand and that it is wise to live for the day. We learn wisdom through life's experiences and if we are wise we won't repeat our mistakes ...

The more we know about life and the more we learn, the wiser we can become. Using our commonsense is part of being wise.

On 'the getting of wisdom', we thought a "survival philosophy" is important: to be realistic and hopeful, to enjoy life, listen to others and observe, work out what works in everyday life, what is important and what isn't and learn to flow with it.

Readings from the writings of "Desiderata" and "The Prophet" were acknowledged by the group as true wisdom. By the end of the session each of us had learnt much about the getting of wisdom and realised that collectively we had amassed a lot of it.

Next meeting will be on Monday, 19th February, 2001 at 10.30am at 75 Windmill Street.

The subject "Is our commitment and responsibility today less than it was in our youth?"

Joan Hook.



### FAIR CONCESSION FARES:

#### What do you think?

Currently the Pensioner Excursion Ticket (PET) is \$1.10 per day and is available to all those over 60. It allows unlimited travel on all forms of government owned public transport. It does not, however, extend to privately owned bus services that operate in several regions of Sydney.

The NSW Government has been holding regional consultations on the issue for about two years now and no decision has been made about extending the PET concession to cover travel on privately owned buses. It seems unlikely that this extension will happen if it costs the government more money in subsidies to the private bus companies.

At present, the position of the OWN Working Committee is that the PET should be extended to cover travel on privately owned buses but that the fare should not be increased.

The OWN Transport Group, following consultations and discussions on the matter, is recommending to the Working Committee that it supports an increase in the cost of the PET from \$1.10 to \$2.20 (or whatever figure is revenue neutral to the government.) This would mean that travelling on government transport and privately owned transport would then cost the same throughout NSW.

Our main arguments for this position are as follows:

There has been no increase in the cost of the ticket in eleven years. In this time pensions have increased substantially.

PET prices should be available to all people over sixty regardless of where they live

Increasing the use of public transport through offering the PET fares to everyone over 60 would decrease the use of private cars – environmentally beneficial in reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

If extended state-wide, the associated administration costs of the scheme would be proportionately decreased. Some regions of Sydney and many country areas have none or very limited public transport options. Equity dictates that people should be able to use the concession on private buses where this is their only transport option.

***Before the Working Committee discusses this policy issue, it would like to know what our members think.***

Have your say by writing, phoning or emailing us before the next Working Committee meeting on Monday, 12 February.

Pam Ledden

## SUMMER DIET ROUTINE

Summer is the perfect time to get into shape and this is the diet to do it. Of course, the diet can also be used to tone up after that Christmas splurge. Remember, stick to the diet strictly, and don't forget the rules.

### BREAKFAST

1 Grapefruit  
1 Slice whole wheat toast, dry  
1 Cup skim milk

### LUNCH

4 oz lean chicken breast  
1 Cup steamed spinach  
1 Cup herbal tea  
1 Tim Tam biscuit

### MID-AFTERNOON SNACK

Rest of Tim Tams in pack  
2 litres of vanilla ice cream  
1 bottle of chocolate topping  
Nuts, cherries, whipped cream

### DINNER

2 loaves of garlic bread  
Family size Supreme pizza  
3 Violet Crumbles or Mars Bars

## RULES FOR THIS DIET

If you eat something and no-one sees you eat it, it has no calories.

If you drink a diet soft drink with a chocolate bar the calories in the chocolate bar are cancelled out by the diet drink.

When you eat with someone else, calories don't count if you don't eat more than they do.

Food used for medicinal purposes NEVER counts, such as hot chocolate, brandy and Sara Lee Cheese Cakes.

If you fatten everyone else around you then you look thinner.

Movie related foods do not have additional calories because they are part of the entire entertainment package and not part of one's personal fuel. Jaffas, pop corn, chocolate dip cones, Twisties and Fantales are all exempt. Biscuit pieces contain no calories. The process of breaking causes calories leakage.

Things licked off knives and spoons have no calories if you are in the process of preparing something, e.g. peanut paste on a knife making a sandwich; ice cream on a spoon.

Foods that have the same colour have the same number of calories, e.g. brown rice and chocolate ice cream, mushrooms and white chocolate.

NOTE: Chocolate is a universal colour and may be substituted for any other food colour.

From the Net

## Little Old Ladies

Not all old ladies are little, you know. I am definitely one of the vertically challenged, but not all old ladies are. Quite a lot are well over the five-foot mark. (Can't stand metrics - I mean, how could you translate "Five foot two, eyes of blue...." into centimetres - it wouldn't work - "155 centimetres, eyes of what..."? Doesn't make for a catchy song.) Anyway, as I was saying, there are a lot of larger old ladies. But what kind of an acronym would you give them? "Large Old Ladies", "LOLs" would be confusing, not derivative enough. You wouldn't

know what size women it referred to. And "LOL" is used on the Internet to mean "Laughing out Loud". Even more confusing. How about "TOWs"? (Taller Old Women?) "BOWs"? (Big (or bigger) old women?) "NOWs"? (Normal Old Women?)

And surely there are some Little Old Men? LOBs or LOGs? Little Old Boys, Little Old Gents. BOBs, Big Old Boys. Or TOMs or TOGs. Taller Old Men, Taller Old Gents... Anyone have any suggestions?

Renee Simons

## The World's a Stage

It was to be the greatest show on earth. Australia would be the International star. Eager to be a part of the action I landed a role as one of the 47,000 Volunteers. Inspired by the Homebush sets, I would happily leave early, sometimes at 4am, and travel long distances to attend training and test events. Public controversy kept nervous energy levels high.

Finally the day arrived when "Wardrobe" distributed the costumes plus a ticket to the opening ceremony rehearsal. Trying on the now famous shirt and raincoat, I thought "Wow! All this for free." I started work a week before, catching the train to the opening ceremony rehearsal, unprepared for the total theatrical experience that enveloped us.

After the Flame it was easy to stay happy. Working in a team assigned to a Darling Harbour tent, we issued Officials with identification passes. There were plenty of Volunteers for too few simple tasks. Often being deployed to an area where the main action was, I knew I had it better than a lot of other "vollies".

Recognising the costume, tourists would stop me to have a chat, give them directions, pose for or take their souvenir photo, shout "oi oi oi" on cue. It was all part of the street theatre. That costume took the show live out into the suburbs. Going home on the bus we smiled, talked to each other and gasped at the public transport efficiency. In Sydney something had gone awfully right. Everyone new their role and played it well. Accolades still come in but the players have left.

The next production? I am writing a synopsis now.

Coleen Greene

### Nuclear Night

Can we say it serves us right  
To find ourselves in hopeless plight?  
Global warming, Salinity  
Polluted Planet  
Insanity  
Coming fast the Nuclear Night.

Marie Williams

## Dancing in the Park

Talk about necessity being the mother of invention... In December, in all the pre-Christmas rush, I left my office keys at home. I was supposed to pick up the cassette deck for our International Dancing. Rather than miss the opportunity to dance we all went up to the Rotunda on Observatory Hill, without music, and danced to a bemused audience of people, amongst them guests at a wedding party. It's a wonderful spot, overlooking the harbour. We had gone up to the Rotunda before *with* music, but on this occasion the wedding party had beaten us to it, so we resorted to dancing on the path under the trees and, bold as brass, we sang as we danced!

Our next 'public performance' was at Enmore Park in January where we were joined by dancers from the Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre. This time, in the heat of the day, we danced to music in front of the Enmore Park Pool with kids, families, and pool attendants all agog at the sight. Then it was back to Alita's (our dance teacher) for a fabulous lunch\*, a quiz, and catching up. Come February we will return to the scruffy but polished boards of the old Mott Hall - with music!

\* **Avocado Dip.** Combine 1 mashed avocado, clove garlic, 1/4 red capsicum, 6 olives and 1 small onion finely chopped, 1 tspn lemon juice, 2 tbspn sour cream, cracked pepper and salt to taste. Refrigerate one hour before serving with crackers.

\* **Cabbage and Coriander Salad.** Shave an ordinary cabbage finely, add a bunch of chopped coriander and add lemon juice, salt and olive oil to taste.

Joy Ross

### Post-menopausal women wanted for clinical trial

Would you like to help increase our knowledge of pain and analgesia? This study requires you to have a blood sample, a medical examination, take the study medication and receive brief pain stimuli at intervals over five hours. Remuneration for time and travel expenses is available (at a rate of \$12/hour).

If you are a healthy postmenopausal female (up to 65) who either takes HRT or doesn't, and has no aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug allergies, please phone Belinda Giles, School of Physiology & Pharmacology on 9385-3810 or email [b.giles@notes.med.unsw.edu.au](mailto:b.giles@notes.med.unsw.edu.au)

## LINDA ADAMSON

Linda Adamson, passionate advocate for social justice and an extraordinarily talented colleague and friend, was only forty three when she died on 27 November 2000 following a long illness. Her husband, Alan, and her seven-year old daughter, Ruby, survive her.

I first met Linda when she and John Barber (now a consultant) worked as Policy Officers for the Combined Pensioners, Association (CPSA) in the early 80s. When I became Secretary of the Australian Pensioners Federation in 1987, Linda and John were appointed Executive Officers. Linda's immense intelligence and pixieish humour enlivened the work of lobbying, meeting preparation, workshops and all the other paraphernalia involved in national activities. Whenever I saw myself mirrored through Linda's eyes, I felt I was a stronger, more committed and valued person. Our collaboration over these years and our continuing warm personal relationship, made them happy years indeed.

They were exciting times for older people. Pensioners suddenly found themselves in alliances with students, professionals and community organisations securing greater rights for older people. New laws were made and new advocacy organisations funded. Of course, there were tense times too and it was often through Linda's people skills, her understanding of different views and her talent for working out solutions, that many barriers were overcome.

In 1985, against opposition from some men at CPSA, Linda got funds for research and workshops which ultimately led to the formation of the Older Women's Network and the OWN Theatre Group. OWN has benefited enormously from Linda's brilliant research and writing skills which, in 'A Picture of Wellness: the Story of the Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre', has so inspired older women and health professionals. Over the years she researched issues and produced a number of other publications for OWN, which has greatly added to its prestige.

There is no Thesaurus with the range of words to adequately describe the multifaceted woman so many of us have loved. Sweet Linda.

Noreen Hewett

## News from OWN (Australia)

OWN (A) has received \$25,000 to explore, through focus groups and research, the creation of supportive neighbourhoods for older women. A project worker will be appointed soon to coordinate the project. We hope that members of our NSW groups will take the opportunity to participate, as it is very much about what OWN groups do already, and it will be valuable to have our model written up as a contribution at the national level and for wider dissemination.

The first in a new series of news-sheets providing information to affiliated groups about OWN (A) activities has been produced by Gwenda Fulford from Newcastle OWN. Called "Keeping in Touch", the news sheet includes a report from the OWN (A) conference held in November, 2000 and outlines organisational changes agreed to by delegates. If you would like your own copy, please phone the Sydney office on 9247 7046.

Joy Ross



## International Year of Volunteers

As a volunteer managed and run organisation, this year has particular significance for OWN, as it is the United Nations International Year of Volunteers. To make a contribution to IYOV, OWN has applied for funds to hold a seminar in March during Seniors Week at which Jenny Onyx (lecturer at UTS and an OWN member) will be the keynote speaker. Jenny and Rosemary Leonard, UWS, have written about the complexity of volunteering in a chapter 'Women, Volunteering and Social Capital' for a book to be published soon.

We have also made an application for federal funding to hold a one-day seminar for members of OWN groups in NSW to talk about their experiences of volunteering and to share their strategies for including other older women in their areas in workshops and fun activities.

As the year progresses we will endeavour to keep you informed about special events focusing on older women whose volunteer efforts are spread so generously across so many areas of life.

Joy Ross

DEMON



DRIVER

**H**elp! A Police car was directly behind me. I had been driving in the middle of the road, turned sharply into the kerb without indicating, and pulled up abruptly at an intersection. "Police," I hissed to the man beside me as I quickly indicated a left-hand turn. He was clutching a large camera between his legs and hastily did up his seat belt. The Police car whizzed past, obviously not after small fry like us who had only disobeyed four traffic rules!

I had been doing some work at OWN when Channel 7 rang asking if an older woman driver would go on their program that night. Dorothy handed me the phone. "Does it make you angry that the State and Federal Government are considering legislation that would forbid people of 75 years and over to drive at night or during peak hours and restrict their highway travel?" "I fit into that category, and of course it makes me angry."

So I agreed to go on television that night, and found myself being driven to Hunters Hill, where an older man and I went through the hoops. One of my hoops was to drive a strange car so that I could be photographed at the wheel. I hate driving any car but my own. As I had boasted about my driving record, I nervously put the car into reverse, placed my foot on the accelerator and shot out over the kerb onto the road, giving a few kangaroo hops and stopping with neck breaking suddenness. The camera man was unperturbed, and off we went. The road was bumpy and he told me to drive in the middle of the road, it was smoother there. We were approaching an intersection. "Do a U-ie," he said. Thank goodness I didn't. Doing a U-ie at an intersection with a police car on my heels! Phew!

The cameraman sat in the back, better able to photograph me. "Turn the rear vision down," I was told. I now had my rear vision obscured so that he could photograph my eyes in the mirror. How many rules had we broken by this time? The situation was ironic. The young man was used to

such things in his deadline life. Channel 7 paid their fines, except for speeding. There I was, hair standing on end, (no make-up artist to powder and primp), vehemently defending the rights of older people. "Balderdash," I said. The male interviewer liked that one and repeated it. Unfortunately, my plugs for OWN were deleted. I pointed out that I had not lost one point in my fifty-four years of driving, and that my grandson had lost many. "Now that says something, doesn't it?" I said to the camera.

When I asked my grandson how he felt about my statement, he chuckled. "You were great. It was cool." His friend had lost his licence five times!

Why then discriminate against the older generation? Why not a constructive idea – lessons in driving skills available to all?

## Dying with Dignity

Late last year the NSW Health Department released a draft new version of the Dying with Dignity Guidelines for public comment.

These are guidelines for doctors and other health professionals when making decisions about the care of people who are dying, in hospital or elsewhere.

They include:

- principles for the care of people who are dying
- discussing treatment options with the patient
- involvement of family members
- deciding about continuing or withdrawing treatment
- the use of medication to relieve pain but which may also shorten life
- the role of advanced health care directives.

These issues affect all of us at some stage. To ensure that older people's views are fully considered, the NSW Committee on Ageing is holding a consultation with older people and older people's organisations at 9.30am-12.30 pm on Tuesday 13th February 2001 at the Coles Seminar Room, State Library of NSW, Macquarie St, Sydney. Free. Morning tea provided.

Please RVSP to Alex Cowan or Sarah Fogg 9367 6860 by 8th February.

## EDITH GILMOUR

### A treasure trove

Edith Gilmour, longtime activist for women's rights and peace, turned 100 on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2001. Her story is a treasure trove of events and of women who have dedicated their lives to the advancement of Australian women.

Edith was born at Comongini in western Queensland, the second of seven children. When she was a few days old her mother asked local Aboriginals if they would like to see the new white baby and give her a name. They named her Evillali, which means, "A baby bird just leaving the nest." Edith's mother asked "What kind of a bird?" and they replied, "An eagle hawk." Any 'hawkishness' Edith might have had was definitely cancelled out by her strong feelings for peace.

At six, Edith began her school years in a school of only ten children and one teacher. To attend high school, Edith boarded with a Mrs. Cummings in Orange, a widowed school teacher, and her three sons. When Mrs Cummings moved to Sydney, Edith went with her and attended Fort Street Girls High. Mrs. Cummings had a great influence on Edith's life. She took Edith to political rallies and anti-conscription rallies in the Domain during 1916 and 1917. Edith and Mrs Cummings attended Workers' Educational Association (WEA) lectures, classes and weekend schools.

Between 1920 and 1923, Edith trained at Sydney Kindergarten Training College. At Auburn Public School, she was elected infants' staff representative on the governing body of the NSW Teachers' Federation, which marked the beginning of her dedicated trade union activism.

Edith became involved in a number of other organisations, which have been an influence in her life. For instance, in the Teachers' Federation she learned to debate and take action on major issues of the day, here and overseas. One important issue which concerned Edith was the 'sacking' of Beatrice Taylor, an education delegate to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, who spoke in public (out of school hours) about her experiences in USSR. The Federation successfully struggled to have her reinstated. Edith remained a Federation representative for 30 years.

Other organisations Edith has actively supported during her long life include the Women's International League for Peace and Friendship (WILPF) and was a founding member of New Housewives Association, which, in 1950 was renamed the Union of Australian Women (UAW). The UAW is still active in a broad range of national and international affecting women. Edith remains a member of The Australian Peace Council, People for Nuclear Disarmament and the Australian Vietnam Society. During World War II, following the magnificent campaign organised by Jessie Street called "Sheep Skins and Medical Aid for Russia", Edith joined the Australia-Soviet Friendship Society.

I have known Edith for fifty-six years. I owe her so much. She and her sister Lorna and her colleagues in the Teacher's Federation showed me how to operate at the grass roots level, and to respect all shades of opinions. It's fascinating to remember that, in 1946, the Federation had 100% financial membership! This meant they were able to make a wages and conditions claim to the government that couldn't be refused!

(My thanks to Maria Harding, Edith's niece, for notes from the biography she is writing on Edith's life.)

Merle Highet

### INTERNET SURVEY PANEL

#### Volunteers required!

COTA (NSW) is establishing a special internet panel ('The Older Australians Panel') to undertake surveys of members on policy issues that can help us better promote the interest of older people. We need online volunteers for this purpose.

What it involves is answering between one and four online surveys per month, taking no more than ten minutes. You will receive the survey as an email, which you simply answer and then submit. The process is simple, enjoyable, and completely confidential.

Members of the panel will also be linked as a special e-group and will thus be kept informed by COTA about the surveys and their outcomes.

If you would like to be involved, please email COTA (NSW) on [abrown@cotansw.org.au](mailto:abrown@cotansw.org.au)

## “BE HAPPY”

“It gives me the willies” is an outdated phrase, but there are plenty of “willies” for many older women today. Some are troubled about being able to pay the rent now or in the future and replacing whitegoods, which have aged with us. We worry about access to hospital beds and hostels, being widowed and living on one pension, being robbed – you name it! The “willies” can also afflict women who are intimidated by relatives, neighbours and bureaucrats.

The end result for some of us is that we feel pretty depressed. While this may not be, strictly speaking, ‘clinical depression’, the miasma of negative feelings can be quite debilitating.

Medicos, on the whole, review ‘the old dear’s’ vague symptoms and quickly tap out a pill prescription. They know that depression is more prevalent today than ‘flu, yet it is simple to prescribe ‘happy pills’ in the belief that they can’t cause much harm. How many take the time to enquire about her life? About her relative poverty in an area with good transport, but lacking good support services?

Many older women are alienated in a hypocritical value system based on the unreal expectations and values of nuclear families and ‘friendly’ community clubs with their ranks of poker machines and vulgar consumer competitiveness – always more apparent at Christmas time.

Years ago I attended a meeting of women (not an OWN one,) where a woman exhorted the audience to “be happy”. How does one get happy? Well, it’s easy-peasy to take the happy pills and stay unaware of what the problems are, but did you know that older women who use these ‘happy pills’ can sometimes fall and break a bone? I’d rather be depressed than dopey.

Clinical depression is, of course, a serious matter when people are unable to attain a mood level above despair. Then, support of different kinds is a necessity. If you feel like this, do not hesitate to consult a good doctor as there is a need for assessment by professionals in these circumstances. Membership of a self-help group like OWN, where we do discuss issues affecting us, is a positive step to stave off depression. Therein lies OWN’s gift to all older women and for the coming generation.

Enid Harrison

## KEEP THAT WHISKY FLASK HANDY, BUT DON’T OVERDO IT!

Do the health benefits of alcohol flow through into old age? This was the question asked by French health workers when they tested the effects of alcohol consumption on bone density in 7,598 French women aged 75 years or older (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, 2000;151(8):773-80).

Bone density at this age is important because of the high incidence of osteoporosis leading to bone fractures – the highest cause of injury in older people.

Compared with non-drinkers in the sample, women who drank the equivalent of 1-3 standard alcoholic drink per day (11-29g of alcohol) had higher bone mineral density, suggesting there are some benefits of alcohol intake, even at this age. Surprisingly the positive effects existed even in women who were smokers, who took hormone replacements therapy, who were inactive, who had a low educational status and who had otherwise poor health.

On the other hand, where alcohol intake was more than 30g per day (eg, 2-3 standard drinks) there was an actual decrease in bone mineral density, suggesting, as with other health benefits from alcohol, that while a moderate intake is good, too much can have an opposite effect. Still, 2-3 glasses a day for someone in their eighth decade and beyond should keep us happy!

From the Net

### So, who said it’s not worth bothering ...?

Remember our snippet in the December Newsletter about the sexist Chivas Regal advertisement? Apparently the company has been bombarded with complaints and as a result the wording on the ads has been changed. On Brisbane buses the wording has been changed from ‘Yes, God is a Man’ to ‘When you know’ and in Sydney, the ad has either vanished or been replaced by the same poster without the “Yes, God is a man” slogan.

So much for the argument that advertisers deliberately provoke offence to get attention and that we only play into their hands by complaining.

And have you noticed that Chivas Regal was heavily discounted in many bottle shops during the lead-up to Christmas? Does this mean sales were slow (the boycott was biting?) and needed a boost? I hope so.

Dorothy Cora

# notice

## *Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre Phone 9569 3011*

**COFFEE MORNING FOR MIGRANT WOMEN**  
Support group for women from non-English speaking backgrounds every Friday, starting 16<sup>th</sup> February, 10.30am to 1pm.

**VERY GENTLE YOGA** For women who might not be fit, who are arthritic, overweight, mild stroke victims. Thursdays from 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2.30 to 4pm (10 weeks). Donation: \$5 per class. Please book.

**TIRED ALL THE TIME?** A six week group for women to understand the physical, social and medical causes of chronic tiredness and learn how to boost energy and minimise stress, Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February, 10am to 12 noon. Donation: \$8, \$5 or \$3.

**GENTLE YOGA** Drop in Yoga for women of all levels of fitness, Thursdays 6.30 -7.30 pm during school term at Annandale Neighbourhood centre, 79 Johnston Street, Annandale, \$5 per class.

## **International Women's Development Agency BREAKFAST**

**8 am, Saturday 10 March**

**Host: Julie McCrossin**

**Special Guest Speaker:  
Hseng Nuong Lintner**

*Following the breakfast, we plan  
to join the International  
Women's Day March.*

**OWN has booked a table for ten  
at \$35 a head.**

**Please send your money to Joy  
Ross at OWN by 27 February**

## **Housing for older women**

Vasey Association NSW has been providing independent living for widows and single women 55 and over for almost forty years, offering privacy and security within a supportive environment. Our villages are situated in some of Sydney's most picturesque suburbs including Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Maroubra, Waitara and Epping. We currently have a limited number of units available and are happy to receive enquiries. Please contact Rosemary Vine on (02) 9299 3951 (Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm) for info.

## **SISTAJIVE WOMEN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL**

23, 24, 25 February, 2001

South Coast of NSW

For more info phone

4268 3393

## **Found**

A black home-made shirt  
and a pale grey and navy  
all-weather coat – both left  
at OWN before Xmas.  
Please contact the office.

## **SENIORS INFORMATION SERVICE**

If you have a question on Centrelink entitlements, retirement accommodation, concessions, legal information, health services, education, Senior Citizens' clubs and much more, we have a database with 8000 entries which cover all of NSW. We also provide a telephone typewriter service (TTY) and TIS (interpreting service.)

Phone **13 12 44** Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm to speak to a *real* person.

# board

## ***Grandparents Support Group***

The aim of this group is to support grandparents who are suffering because of family breakdown, to lobby governments to keep grandparents to the fore in family law and to encourage grandparents with emotional and peer support.

For more information, please phone  
Council on the Ageing:

9286 3860

## **INTERESTING WEBSITES**

A great site for older women is at

**<http://own-europe.org/>**

If you are just starting to explore the internet, a good place to start is

**<http://www.learnthenet.com>**.

If you want a jargon-buster, try

**<http://www.whatis.com>**.

If English is not your first language, try

**<http://babelfish.altavista.com>**

for a translation of words and phrases.

## **Hearing our Voices**

Hearing our Voices is a collection of ten moving and hopeful stories from carers of people with a mental illness. The stories deal with both the practical and the emotional issues of caring and contain different perspectives on caring: parents siblings, spouse and children.

**\$16.50 from Carers NSW, Level 17  
323 Castlereagh Street, Sydney 2000  
Ph. 1800 242 636**

## **TV & VIDEO**

**If you are thinking of upgrading your 1980s-plus TV AND VIDEO**

**please think...**

**“Older Women’s Network”**

**Our current TV is very old  
(we can only get Ch. 7!)  
and we have no video.**

**Call 9247 7046 and we’ll  
arrange a pick-up.**

## **Congratulations**

**Congratulations to Mary McCusker who received an Australia Day award from Waverley Council for her services to the community.**

## **BEQUESTS**

*When making your will,  
you may wish to make a  
bequest to the Older  
Women’s Network to assist  
us in continuing to promote  
the rights, dignity and  
wellbeing of older women.  
Please phone 9247 7046  
and we will send you  
suggestions for wording  
your bequest.*

**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

Tel: (02) 9247 7046 Fax: (02) 9247 4202 email: ownnsw@zip.com.au  
Web site: <http://www.zip.com.au/~ownnsw>