



# OWN MATTERS

*The Newsletter of the Older Women's Network New South Wales Inc.  
No.4, February 2002*

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### **'Twas the month after Christmas**

'Twas the month after Christmas, and all  
through the house  
Nothing would fit me, not even a blouse.  
The cookies I'd nibbled, the eggnog I'd taste  
At the holiday parties had gone to my waist.  
When I got on the scales there arose such a  
number  
When I walked to the store (less a walk than a  
lumber),  
I'd remember the marvellous meals I'd prepared;  
The gravies and sauces and beef nicely rared,  
The wine and the rum balls, the bread and the  
cheese  
And the way I'd never said, 'No thank you,  
please'  
As I dressed myself in my husband's old shirt  
And prepared once again to do battle with dirt—  
I said to myself, as I only can,  
'You can't spend a winter disguised as a man!'  
So—away with the last of the sour cream dip,  
Get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and chip,  
Every last bit of food that I like must be banished  
'Till all the additional ounces have vanished.  
I won't have a cookie—not even a lick.  
I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.  
I won't have hot biscuits, or corn bread, or pie,  
I'll munch on a carrot and quietly cry.  
I'm hungry, I'm lonesome, and life is a bore—  
But isn't that what January is for?  
Unable to giggle, no longer a riot.  
Happy New Year to all and to all a good diet!

## OWN NSW Coordinators' Report

### **OWN Matters**

is the Newsletter of the  
Older Women's Network  
New South Wales Inc.  
It is published 11 times a year.  
Subscriptions are \$20.

### **Who Are We?**

OWN NSW is the peak body for  
sixteen OWN groups in NSW.  
OWN promotes the rights, dignity  
and wellbeing of older women  
through a range of activities and  
resources, and advocates to  
government and non-government  
agencies on issues of concern  
to older women.

### **Contributions**

All members of OWN groups in  
NSW are encouraged to  
contribute to **OWN Matters** with  
items of interest to older women  
and letters to the Editor.

They can be sent by mail or email  
marked 'Attention – Editorial  
Team'. Please include contact  
details.

Contributions must be received by  
the second Monday of each  
month.

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The OWN NSW Management Team met in mid December for a productive final meeting for the year. We looked briefly at our achievements over our first six months, identifying areas where things have worked well and areas that need some attention. Overall, we are making progress and are keen to continue.

A special planning meeting has been arranged for the end of January where we will attempt to plot our course for the coming year. The plan will then be reviewed quarterly to see if we're on track.

In various forums we have been discussing the issue of Aboriginal women who are invited to speak or entertain at OWN functions. A research paper issued at the Premier's Forum on Volunteering, produced by a group called Heartbeat Trends (how trendy can you get!), outlined the ways in which volunteering for Aboriginal people is a way of life. Much of their time is given to supporting each other in their daily lives and working toward understanding and reconciliation with the non-indigenous community, all for no monetary gain. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, lack of recognition, both monetary and symbolic, is a key issue. We believe it is crucial to be aware of the views of Aboriginal people towards their volunteering efforts, and to not respond seems another significant instance of non-indigenous people not listening.

So, following discussions with members of the Aboriginal Support Circle, the Management Team has decided on a policy of offering an honorarium of a (suggested) \$75 per session to Aboriginal women who attend OWN events as a speaker or entertainer. We understand that some women might refuse to accept the honorarium and that some of the smaller OWN groups may not be able to afford this amount, in which case it will be necessary to achieve a negotiated outcome.

Some of our members have no doubt been affected by the bushfires but we hope none severely. It has been a terrible, anxiety-provoking time and we hope all is well now.

Best wishes for a happy, rewarding and productive New Year. May we all have increased opportunities to thoughtfully and purposefully advance OWN's agenda as we move into the second six months of our new structure.

Pam Ledden, Sam Smart and Betty Murphy

## The Aboriginal Support Circle Goes Back to School

Our guest speaker in December was Margaret Simpson, a retired teacher who introduced Aboriginal studies into her NSW primary school in 1958. Margaret confessed that she had no knowledge at all in those days, and was forced to embark on her own indigenous studies as it was obvious to her that the information she sought from various white stakeholders was biased and inadequate.

After a break of six years raising her young family Margaret returned to the classroom to cope with 'the Year Fives from Hell' and soon discovered that these children would only respond to active learning which involved them directly – a technique which became known as 'enquiry learning'. They studied primary industries by first baking bread, by spinning and weaving, by playing and singing relevant folk songs with a bush band. The inspector who assessed her work in 1970 sent her to a pioneer course in developing children's thinking skills through direct observation, question-raising and real research, and gave her the freedom to develop a program for Australian children on an area of real importance to them – Aboriginal Studies. Margaret has come to realise that traditional Aboriginal culture is an invisible culture to those of us blinded by the material nature of our own. It lives in people's heads and in shared experiences, not in 'things'. She also knew that in order to understand contemporary issues and current values, conflicts, traditional social organisation, kinship, values, the relationship with the land must be understood. She learned from the desert people that every person has a role through ritual in maintaining the wellbeing of the world – a beautiful concept.

To tackle this huge task she needed a real family – faces and names and relationships – living in a real place, in real time, and she was able to gain access to a series of films about one of the last desert families who still lived the traditional life. The children came to know this family while coming to grips with the 'invisible' culture, through simulation. The hypothetical tribe was set up complete with a simplified kinship system which related every member of the class in different ways to every other member. Each relationship has expectations and obligations and it takes many weeks to consolidate this while the children are involved in other related activities. Margaret demonstrated a tiny part of

this to our group, creating a classificatory sister relationship among us. Similarly she also taught her pupils about dreaming groups and songlines, using simulation.

Without funding, a kit of child-friendly materials was developed. Many scholars gave their support and access to their material without payment, believing in the project. In contrast, the usual bureaucratic barriers were erected because Margaret was 'only a teacher'. When she needed to work directly with the film-maker, she was prevented. This was to be done only through a 'development officer' but she and the filmmaker went ahead anyway – there was nothing to lose for a classroom teacher without status! When invited to address a UNESCO conference on teaching about indigenous cultures, Margaret was initially refused permission to go until the chairman insisted. When the program was to be shown in the USA at the International Showcase for Social Studies, she was refused leave to go and a Ph.D. from Melbourne University took it over. The program stirred up ultra-right-wing groups concerned that it taught 'paganism' and Queensland, under Bjelke Petersen, banned it. There were no Aboriginal Consultative groups in education in those days. When they began to emerge, there were some fiery times confronting a white woman teaching Aboriginal culture, which were resolved when members attended full training programs which were offered to all teachers handling this sensitive material. Margaret feels there is no copyright on ideas that work and is happy to see her simulation activities taken up and developed by others. She is concerned that although there is now an active and compulsory Aboriginal Studies program in all schools the emphasis tends to be on teaching rather than learning.

Margaret now gives courses for U3A Endeavour Region, but finds the older generation in general with entrenched attitudes very hard to interest in this field. She was delighted to be among us not as an evangelist but among like-minded people. She has offered to give us a workshop in kinship next year and she assures us it will be a lot of fun!

Margaret Simpson and Pat Zinn

# Sydney OWN Highlights

A big welcome to 2002 to all members and readers – let's hope it brings a little more joy on the international scene than last year. Our thoughts of course, over the holiday period, have been with those affected by the bush-fires and hoping now that these are all contained.

Last year was a heady one negotiating the formation of NSW OWN and OWN Sydney. Now, following a four-week break, we are back and looking forward to developing them both. We also welcome OWN(Australia) who, having had to close the King St. office, has moved into 75 Windmill St.

Although Judith Mustard wrote a fitting tribute to the Wellness Open Day in November OWN Matters, the organising committee has only just 'officially' evaluated what we all agreed was an exceedingly successful day. Our main recommendation, accepted by the OWN Sydney Working Group (previously known as the Working Committee), was to hold a members' meeting to explore the expansion of OWN Sydney's activities (Feb.21). Another recommendation was to use the many excellent photos taken on the day by Val Brown to promote OWN. More about this at a later date.

OWN Sydney was officially launched on November 23 with champagne and a warm acknowledgement of the women who have got us to this point in our development. Members elected to the Working Group are Louise Anike, Peg Hewett, Merle Highet, Betty Johnson, Jan Monson, Joy Ross, Mollie Smith, Ermes Solari, Jetty Windt and Beryl Winter. We have a new brochure and have planned a meeting on February 15 where members can 'have a say' about how to achieve our goals in 2002.

Our end-of-year party was a great success, with Pam Young, Aboriginal speaker, enthraling us with the story of her life. She was followed by heaps of nonsense from members of the Theatre Group, singing by the a capella group and a slap-up lunch out under the tree. Many thanks to Jetty Windt and Pat Keighran for their bring-and-buy fundraising effort which netted \$182.30 for OWN Sydney.

We were off with a bang to 2002 –with an outing for a fish lunch, a lively crowd joined with guest speaker Dr. Bronwyn Winter to discuss Feminism and it's Impact on Older Women (more on this later), and the computer course started at Ultimo TAFE.

Peg Hewett and Joy Ross

## Humour in Our Lives

In our November discussion of "The role of humour in our lives" we quickly agreed that humour has a very useful role in human affairs helping to sustain our spirits in times of adversity.

The sense of humour of an individual varies enormously from person to person often depending on upbringing and culture.

Each of us cited our favourite funny television shows and there emerged a great difference of opinion as to the comical merit of the shows and names put forward. Some aspects appear to be universal, such as small children's delight in using naughty words which are officially banned by their parents.

We are aware that a great number of talented performers devote their time and energy to the stimulation of our sense of humour on stage, television and other media.

The old saying that "laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone" was as true today as ever and the therapy of hearty laughter was recognised by the group.

Joan Hook

## A Great Day at La Perouse

It seems that fish lunches have captured the interest of some OWN members; in fact, it extended beyond OWN Sydney. It was very pleasing to welcome and enjoy the company of Ann and Jo from OWN Nowra and Hedi and Iris from OWN Penrith. All fourteen enjoyed good food, pleasant and attractive surroundings. Please let us know your favourite venue, bearing in mind it needs to be a place without time restrictions, as the whole purpose of this activity is getting to know each other.

We had a great time and look forward to our next date, which will be the Harbord Diggers Club, Friday 22 February. See Flyer for details.

Ermes Solari

**OWN Matters February 2002**

## Theatre Group

Well, we finished off another year in our usual style with three shows in three days!

Our performance for the Southern Sydney Institute Spokeswomen at Bankstown TAFE was mysteriously billed as "A Musical Experience". I'm not sure what they expected, but they certainly enjoyed what they got.

At the OWN Sydney end-of-year party, a number of us performed to an appreciative audience following Pam Young's interesting talk. Lucy Porter and I had them laughing as we performed a Joyce Grenfell skit illustrating the difficulties that buxom older women 'face' when they dance together. Lucy and I have been bosom' friends for over fifty years now, but we have never been as close as we were that day! Tits also featured prominently in Dorothy Cox's poem while Norma Bastock had us cheering and jeering to her menopause number, sung to the tune of Darling Clementine. The Lady is a Tramp, performed by Jo Allon and Janet Waters was a winner as were various other acts.

Our final performance for the year was for a mixed Probus group of more than 100 people at Lidcombe. We didn't know what the audience would expect or how they would respond to our material. Well, what a wonderful audience they turned out to be. As we finished, one woman stood up shouting "Bravo, Bravo". Other joined her and we finished up with a standing ovation. Suddenly, we weren't so tired! Spontaneously, Ann Cunynghame began to play "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" on her keyboard and we joyfully joined the audience singing and shaking hands as a finale to a wonderful experience.

Finally, twenty-six women, cast members and Friends of the Theatre Group, kicked up our heels over a delightful Christmas lunch at the Kirribilli Club. Thanks to Jo Allon for organising a great day!

Happy New Year to everyone.

Peggy Hewett

## A Valued Volunteer

In 1988, Ermes Solari was working as Assistant Secretary at Combined Pensioners Association (CPSA) alongside Noreen Hewett and Gwen George when she heard about "a very exciting development for older women". She joined the Older Women's Network (which at that time had office space at CPSA) straight away, but she didn't get involved for another three years because of her five-day a week commitment to her work with CPSA and Australian Pensioners and Superannuants Federation.

In 1991, following a visit to Italy, the beloved country of her birth, Ermes turned her attention to OWN. The warm friendships she developed then, and which continue to this day, remain profoundly important to her sense of wellbeing. Ermes describes OWN as "my family".

Ermes brought a wide range of administration skills to OWN, but she also wanted to have fun! She became involved in the Arts Discussion Group, Music Group and the Aboriginal Support Circle, and with her exceptional culinary skills, became a dedicated contributor to the BYO feasts, for which OWN is still famous.

Her administration skills did not go unnoticed and Ermes was invited to get involved in OWN's membership administration. In those days it meant at least two days a week dedicated to recording payments, banking money and sending out reminder letters – all without the benefit of technology. In 2000, following the development of OWN's database, Ermes enthusiastically embraced the idea of computerised membership records and undertook training with Kris Ferguson, our Office Manager. With virtually no computer skills to start with, Ermes now manages the membership database one day a week – everything from sending out reminder letters to balancing the money for banking.

Ermes' reliability, meticulous attention to detail and caring approach to problem-solving are really appreciated at OWN. Like the rest of us, she's a complex character – she's got a great sense of humour, a great sense of what's 'right' and what's not, and she still struggles to believe in her own worth!

Dorothy Cora

## A Night to Remember

In mid-November, Aboriginal activist Betty Little launched her new 'Invasion Wheel'. The 'old' Invasion Wheel, which Betty had made to structure her lectures, charts the history of Aboriginal people from the time of invasion to the present day. The new, streamlined model was designed and created with funding from The Illawarra Reconciliation Group. Betty will use the new Wheel in her important educational work influencing attitudes of non-indigenous people towards Aboriginal people.

Betty's sharing nature and generosity of spirit has touched literally thousands of people and made a great difference in their outlook towards Aboriginal people. It was a joyous occasion as Betty's family and friends, past and the present, honoured Betty for the vital and active role she has played for so many years in advancing cultural awareness.

The hall was decorated with large boards showing Betty's own personal time chart and her relationships with family and organizations. As each representative of an organization came to the mike and shared their experiences about Betty's unique and thought-provoking talks, they were presented with a beautiful tile, hand-painted by Betty's friend, Jagamarra, and presented by Betty's young grandson, Jay.

For two hours we listened as one after another person spoke of Betty's contributions within the educational sector (schools, TAFE and universities), women's organisations and government departments – both federal and state. Aboriginal Elder, Gloria Matthews, a Yorta Yorta woman, spoke about Betty's family and childhood and Jimmy Little, Betty's brother, sang a beautiful song about their land.

During the evening Betty performed a moving ceremony of remembrance by lighting candles to honour ancestral spirits and departed friends in the spirit of reconciliation for all people.

Sally, from the Women's Reconciliation Network (WRN), presented Betty with an outstanding painting, a copy of which decorated the cover of the WRN video 'Around the Kitchen Table' – a video about reconciliation and ordinary Australians.

Jagamarra, actor, storyteller and singer, clad in an exquisite handpainted kangaroo skin garment closed the formal part of the launch with a haunting song which called upon ancestors to teach and walk beside us.

The evening ended with a sumptuous feast arranged by Eastern Suburbs Organization for Reconciling Australia (ESORA). What a night! Thank you, Betty.

Lucy Porter

## Refugee Children

I hope all those women who donated money to providing the refugee children in Villawood with drawing materials saw the article by Tony Stephens in the Sydney Morning Herald on 15 December. Photographs of the children's drawings next to the article were done with books and pencils, charcoal and crayons that we helped provide!

Tony's article has pre-empted most of what I was going to say about the number of children in camps, the adverse effects that being cooped up is having on them and the growing tension within the camps generally.

The other day I was listening to a man (on CNN, I have to confess) who is concerned with the reconstruction of Afghanistan. He said that the most important first step was to get the young men off the streets, either tending the family herds, working the family farm, or studying in school, because a purposeless, disaffected cohort of 15 to 25 year olds is disruptive of any society. It seems to me that by treating refugees as the Government is, it is hell-bent on creating just such a group, leaving them bitter and resentful with a huge readjustment to make to fit into any society. Utter stupidity.

More people are now visiting the refugees and it seems that more are becoming interested in protesting at the inhumane treatment the government is meting out to them. Let's hope that this year will see a change for the better in their situation.

Pam Ledden

## Having a say ...

I found Samantha's story about her friend's death deeply troubling. When asked, most of us say that we want to have a say about the health treatments we receive (or don't want to receive) when we can no longer make such decisions. Yet most of us also say that we haven't yet got around to letting our family, friends and doctor know what we want to happen in the event of a terminal illness or a very serious illness or accident.

Obviously, many people believe that doctors and nurses should be the ones to decide on the treatment we get. However, many of us feel, like Samantha, that leaving treatment decisions to doctors and nurses can be incredibly disempowering for the dying person as well as for their families and friends.

If you want your family, friends and medical people to know your thoughts and feelings about when to maintain or withdraw treatment or when to give pain-relief that might lead to your death, check out how much power you can legally exercise in these matters.

At OWN, we have a large amount of information about decision-making for later life, including *Dying with Dignity*, *Taking Charge – Making Decisions for Later Life*, and *Voluntary Euthanasia*. We also have copies of *How to Administer an Estate*, *What to do When Someone Dies* and *Why You Should Choose an Eco-Coffin*.

Dorothy Cora

## Permission to Die in Peace

I would like to raise the issue of elderly people being permitted to die naturally – if they so desire. As a trained nurse I have seen many people go through the process but now, as an older woman, I begin to question the attendant procedures that go on in a hospital. This year I saw my 98-year-old friend, clear mentally and sociable to the end, go through a normal dying process with unnecessary medical interference.

The last time I saw her in the nursing home she told me that she was ready to go but didn't want to die in a hospital. But, as she would never speak up for herself, or request that her friends do, other authorities determined her fate.

So it was she arrived in St Vincent's Public Hospital struggling with the onset of heart failure and all the things she dreaded happened. Number one was the insertion of a urinary

catheter. For a dignified old lady this was an unnecessary invasion of her privacy. Another pain was the insertion of a cannula on the back of her thin, frail hand to provide easy access for drugs.

To the uninformed these procedures seem highly professional, practical and even caring. But I question their invasiveness and non-nurturing nature. Especially to someone going through the dying process. These procedures do nothing for the dying person and much for the convenience of the hospital. There is no point in 'monitoring' the amount of urine produced by a dying person.

The introduction of a catheter almost invariably produces bladder infection, even more so in a person whose defense system is crumbling by the minute. Bladder infections can spread to involve the kidney and when this happens blood pressure may increase, which can lead to stroke.

To my mind, and for these reasons, urinary catheterisation is not good nursing or medical practice.

What my friend had to endure, in her final days, is an example of what can happen to any one of us *if* we don't take certain steps to protect ourselves.  
Samantha McKay

## A Lament

Remember the one about "When I'm old I'll wear a purple dress? And learn to spit...and rattle on railings? Well, now that I'm 80, I'll go a lot further than that. If ever again someone says to me, "I'm not a feminist but...", I'll spit in her eye.

If ever again someone says to me "Oh, you're not old...", I'll wet myself.

I don't care if you think, "It's not a nice look" to wear my clothes inside out. And I'll do my pelvic floor exercises while waiting for a bus, even if it looks as if I'm belly dancing.

I'll never do another self-improvement course, or justify my computer illiteracy. Or go to boring meetings. (Spare me, Lord, from being bored!) Or struggle upstairs and down to plays I can't hear and can't see.

I will shamelessly take out my teeth to clean them in public places (oh, thank you, John Marsden!) And I won't grovel to apologise if I pass wind in your presence. And I'll say "fuck" when I want to.

'Cause that's how I feel about this terrible business of ageing.  
Dorothy Cox

## Pam Young Strong Koori Woman

Our guest speaker at OWN's end-of-year party was Pam Young – actor, performer, social educator, storyteller, discovery-ranger and activist.

Pam was taken from her family at the age of five together with her younger sister Julie. They were fostered by a non-indigenous family who had twin sons and nine foster children of different nationalities. Pam and Julie, being the only girls, had to tackle the household chores.

It was only when she started school that she realised that she and Julie were black. They were sexually interfered with, and it must have been a relief in one way when they were transferred to children's homes. Unfortunately Pam and Julie were separated. At Burnside Home Pam was well treated, but Julie received cruel treatment at Parramatta.

At the age of sixteen Pam was finally reunited with her mother and family, including her third sister Diane, whom she didn't know existed! Her mother and grandmother had also been removed from their families as children, in spite of parents rubbing their children with charcoal to make them appear blacker than they were, and telling them to hide when the authorities came.

At sixteen, Pam met her husband who had been at Kinchela. They are still together, with three sons and three grand-daughters.

Pam is not bitter, in spite of her unhappy childhood and teen-age years, the shock of the sudden death of her sister Julie, and the subsequent death of her mother. She accompanied her foster mother when they took presents to places such as Callan Park, and learned compassion and self-reliance. Her tremendous sense of humour helped her to become the vibrant, vivacious woman she is today.

Pam described how she began her acting career by making the children laugh at one of the Homes she was sent to. She was trained as an actor at the Belvoir Theatre and has appeared in films, advertisements and on stage. She now works part-time at the Museum of Sydney and as a tour guide with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the only Koori woman in both positions. How much longer will it take to overcome the humiliation of being the 'token Koori' and the 'token woman'?

Pam treated us to a performance of the beautiful song, 'Cammeray Gal'. I have a feeling that we will be inviting her to come again – and soon!

Pat Zinn

## Strong Woman

Strong woman  
I watch you  
hands for holding  
hands for giving  
novels in the lines upon your face

Strong woman,  
stubborn  
you make me think  
of time and flowers  
of giving birth  
and watching growing things  
reach out for sunlight  
of the green times  
hands in the earth  
to bring out life

Strong woman  
life-giver, you endure.  
you are  
the cycle turning,  
the seasons coming home.

This poem was written by the 23 year old granddaughter for a friend's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and used again in a thank you note, for those people who had expressed sympathy following her death at 97 years of age.

Betty Murphy

## Help Us Hear You!

To all within the Network, please lend us your ears.  
There are some of us among you, words we cannot hear.  
Next time you have a meeting, of whatever ilk,  
Spare a thought for sisters who are struggling to the hilt.

It can be so very isolating hearing talk and such,  
Yet words are beyond us because our ears are stuck!  
Would it be too much to ask that whoever has the chair  
Just turns her face a little to those who cannot hear?  
Then we too can be as one with the group.

Janet Waters (who wears a hearing aid)

**OWN Matters February 2002**

## Patrick

Patrick was one of the male nurses at St Luke's Hospital, and one of my favourite people. He was very dedicated, efficient and experienced – the other nurses were always coming to him for advice.

He was tall, male, but not masculine. He dressed beautifully, exquisite shirts and trousers, obviously expensive. His speaking voice was lovely, and he had a great sense of humour. He had black shiny neck-length hair, held back with a black plastic hairband. His huge, brown eyes were so dark that you couldn't distinguish the pupil from the iris. His skin was light brown. He told me he had been born in Mauritius of an Irish mother and a Mauritian father.

Patrick was probably in his late twenties (he wouldn't tell me how old he was). He had a birthday while I was in hospital. It must have been a really riotous affair, because he lost his voice for a few days afterwards because he had done such a lot of singing.

I found out from one of the other nurses that he was a singer with a well-known jazz band. My grandson visited me one day. He had brought his new guitar to show me, and Patrick happened to come in. We closed the door, and they played and sang together. I did enjoy it. It was one of the few bright moments of my stay in hospital.

Patrick claimed to be a good Scrabble player. My daughter had brought in a Scrabble set for me to use. Patrick played with me just once, but I soon found his boast was an empty one. His spelling was atrocious. We never played again.

One Monday morning he came in looking so happy. "I've had a wonderful weekend," he said.

"I've bought myself a new bed, and it's so bouncy. I've spent the whole weekend bouncing on it." He'd invited friends to come and bounce with him, and had even rung his mother in Ireland to tell her about the bouncy new bed.

I really came to appreciate Patrick. I had many low periods of utter depression in hospital when I felt life didn't hold anything worth living for and never would. (This was during the time when I was laid low with Golden Staph infection, confined to my room for about five weeks, not eating, not reading, hardly speaking, not interested in anything at all). Patrick was a great help in getting me back to normal.

He said he would be in touch with me after I left hospital, but I haven't heard from him. Never mind. Hospital is a world within itself, and what goes on outside is of no consequence.

Renee Simons

## Washing in Burragorang Valley

Whenever I am tempted to complain about having to do some washing of clothes, which these days is mostly pushing buttons, I remember the times my sister and I used to do the washing.

Our Mum died when I was thirteen and my sister seven, so we had to take over the family washing. We had no electricity or running water, but we did have a washing machine. Bernice and I ran the machine. It had a cone shaped plunger which we pumped up and down – the dirtier the clothes, the more times we pumped the handle.

Washing Day... "Dad, don't go down the paddock 'till you have chopped the wood for the copper." Grabbing two metal buckets we would head around to the other side of the house to get water for the copper. Then we'd light the fire under the copper if Dad had remembered to chop the wood, otherwise we would split it ourselves. While the water was heating up, it was more buckets of water for the tubs.

Then... buckets of hot water into the washing machine, add clothes and *Rinso* and start pumping. When the clothes, or us, had had enough, one of us turned the hand wringer while the other fed the washing through into tub No1 and then into tub No 2 and then into the basket. What fun!

Put basket in wheelbarrow and wheel up the back, past the old tennis court to the clothesline and peg out. Hanging out the washing on very hot days could be interesting – our bees used to come to the washing for moisture and as my sister and I had long hair, a bee would occasionally catch in our hair – much yelling until the bee was free.

Norma  
Norma Bastock

## Meroogal – The Women’s History Place

Nowra has a gem of history that members of OWN traveling through the Shoalhaven could enjoy while doing their obligatory ‘rest and revive’ thing. Built in 1886, Meroogal resonates with the warmth and character of the women who lived here for nearly a century. Explore the lives of four generations of women from the same family: mothers, wives, sisters and aunts. Enjoy as much or as little time as you like in the house and 1920s garden. Meroogal is open Saturdays 1-5pm, Sundays 10-5pm.

Meroogal also promotes an annual Women’s Art Prize, and this year’s theme is ‘An Artistic Response to the Interiors at Meroogal’. The exhibition was on recently with many and various the interpretations, but all expressed Meroogal to a “T” – this was my impression anyway! Meroogal is also the setting for the Shoalhaven Women of the Year Awards, in conjunction with International Women’s Day activities – a great day of fun, laughter, singing and dancing. Each Award Day fills me with pride to acknowledge the dedication and service given to the community by women of the Shoalhaven.

Anne Warren

## Witness the Suffering

I recently went to an “Indigenous and Refugee Women’s Human Rights Court” held at University of Technology in Sydney. In the packed theatre (many of my friends could not get in) we witnessed stories from around the world told by refugee women.

Shocking stories of terrible abuses from such places as Uruguay, Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Bougainville, as well as the Aboriginal stories, were balanced by wonderful children’s choirs and the Bosnian Women’s choir. The extraordinary courage and the life spirit of women who have suffered almost indescribably terrible tortures and losses will always amaze me. These women were the first to jump up and dance at the end when a tall, stunningly beautiful woman from Sierra Leone had everyone singing and some moving to a song.

We were there to witness the suffering, to hear these terrible stories – some of them heard maybe for the first time, especially by such a large crowd. I’m still shaky from the stories,

but also awed by the life-spirit of the women. A Tibetan woman, a Muslim and a few others were down to speak but the time ran out. I hope they got to tell their stories in the evening session. It would have been so hard to be keyed up to speak and then time running out.

The next day, in my writing group, I wrote a poem with a refrain of “a second look”.

### **I was challenged to take a second look**

I paused  
Opened my eyes  
Took that second look

I saw, yes  
A woman a child  
A shanty  
I took a second look

The woman held the child  
The child so thin  
So weak  
I took another look

My heart wanted to close  
I didn’t want to look  
The child she holds  
So tenderly  
Is dead?  
I take another look

I dare to take another look  
The mother’s arm  
Cradling the child  
No hand, a stump  
I don’t want to take this second look  
Oh, God protect me  
From that second look.  
I want to be blind  
To not see  
To not know  
No second looks

No brutal amputations  
No dead infants  
No ruined shanties  
No raped women  
Tortured beyond belief  
No second looks.

Caroline Davis

## A Worthy Cause

The world has witnessed more than two decades of war imposed on Afghanistan. The constant devastation, human rights violation, drought, poverty and the recent bombing by the USA and its allies on Afghan people has made the situation too tense for those innocent people, especially women and children, to flee their homes and live along the borders of Pakistan and Iran. They do not have food, clothes or even a shelter to live in.

The Afghan Women's Network has recently collected a considerable number of blankets and winter clothes for those desperate Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The consignment is estimated about 7000 kg. To send this freight to Pakistan or Iran, we urgently need at least \$5,000. We appreciate every individual and any organisation to assist us in this regard for the sake of humanity, love and compassion. Any donation and contribution to this project would give one a sense of serenity and spiritual satisfaction.

We would appreciate it if the Older Women's Network would provide any donation to this project for those Afghan refugee women and children in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. Your contribution to this rewarding project is highly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me on 9708 2245 if any inquiry or further information is needed.

Rukshana Sawar

### Photo ID for Older People

Are you having trouble obtaining a photo ID? You are not alone! At the Seniors Information Service we have had many calls from people who need a Photo ID as they do not have a drivers licence or do not wish to purchase a passport.

There is a solution if you live in the metropolitan area. If you are able to pay \$29 you can obtain a photo ID from the Births, Deaths and Marriages. If you would like more information phone us at Seniors Information Service on 13 12 44.

Barbara Lorback

*Manager, Seniors Information Service*

## Hospital Tucker

The meat dishes provided in wards at our local hospital definitely encourage carnivores to become vegetarians! They try to emulate mod café menus with descriptions such as tangy or piquant, but it would have been more satisfying to chow down on the plastic menu. A male patient in the next ward felt the same way, commenting that "the chicken had been scratching around in the yard for far too long". The lamb, as in roast, must have been hanging in the freezer for yonks – it was dry and grey and tasted of cardboard even when dressed with tomato gravy. Vegetables were plentiful but cut in chunks in the shearers' cook tradition.

I asked if the staff were served the same food in the cafeteria and was told by a nurse, "much the same, as it's prepared in the hospital's kitchens". I suggested they should serve smaller portions of meat (there was always so much) and better quality, but she just smiled – maybe this had been suggested before.

Once during my stay, we had a tasty beef stir fry with rice, carrots and green beans, and every plate was wiped clean. A relative in a Queensland hospital told me that one of her ward mates used to send out for pizza, their food was so inedible.

After I was discharged, I eagerly gobbled up everything my husband cooked – even the brussel sprouts!

Enid Harrison

## Quest For Life

A few weeks ago I was fortunate enough to visit the Quest For Life Centre at Bundanoon run by Petrea King. The seminar I attended was called *Spirited Women* and was for women cancer sufferers. Most of us were undergoing chemo and finding the going tough. It was so good to get away, share experiences and learn so much about what we could do to help ourselves at this difficult time.

Having been recently diagnosed with breast cancer and sent speeding down the medical shaft, I was definitely feeling shell-shocked. No sooner was the diagnosis made when my life went into overdrive. You don't get time to think – it's surgeons, theatre, physios, oncologists, counsellors, tests every time you blink. There

seems to be no time to think, "What about me? Is this what I want to do?"

I had heard about the Centre and when one of my doctors suggested that I get in touch with them, I thought. "Is this what I want to do?" I was not sure I wanted to spend five days with twenty other people all suffering from cancer. After talking to family and friends, I learned that several knew women who had attended the course and they all spoke very positively about it. So I enrolled.

What a great experience it has been. Bundanoon is a magic place, the venue very comfortable and the food excellent. The variety of food was just amazing. I tried things that I had never been adventurous enough to try and found them really delicious. I must admit that though I ate a healthy diet at home, I was very limited in the variety of food I chose to eat. As I learned of the ways different food benefited those on chemo, I decided I would give it a go and the reward was great.

But a good venue and good food need the support of good facilitators and a more skilled and supportive team you could not imagine. To handle the twenty-one participants, there were at least five facilitators available most of the time and at least one available all through the night. How could anyone ask for more than that?

Besides learning how I felt about myself and my situation, I learned some strategies that would help me in numerous ways. I made many new friends and was humbled by the courage of each of the women taking part. Sure, over the week we cried buckets of tears, sometimes in sorrow for our own situation and more often than not, in sympathy for each other. But the laughter and the lessons learned will be remembered long after the tears are gone.

Quest for Life is not just for cancer sufferers; it is for anyone with stress and trauma in their lives. They can be contacted on 4883 6599.

Barbara Malcolm

## U3A – the good news

There is a 'quiet revolution' going on in our midst. Its aim is to expand the quality of life of older people. I am talking about organisations like the Older Women's Network and University of the Third Age (U3A). Since the merits of OWN are well known to us, I would like to tell you a bit about U3A.

The name 'University of the Third Age' refers to learning in the post-retirement stage of life. It was founded in France in 1972, and quickly spread through continental Europe and Britain. By 1988 U3A had reached Sydney.

I joined U3A in 1989 – a year after it came to Sydney. My membership number was 395! Today, the membership in the metropolitan area has risen to about ten times that number and there are over 200 courses available at 75 centres. U3A is run entirely by volunteers on a mutual-help basis.

Courses are led by retired experts in their fields and attended by people eager to have intellectual stimulation as well as social contact. There are no exams, but some courses have assignments. The variety of subjects is staggering.

All of this is available for \$25 a year, with no extra charge for courses although sometimes a small amount is charged for the use of premises or materials. A Course List is provided to members twice yearly and a quarterly bulletin publicises interesting projects and developments.

Over the years, I have enjoyed and learnt from several courses such as Comparative Religion, Crossroads of Civilisation and Vienna at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I also conducted a course on Basic Music. In the last three years I have concentrated on learning Creative Writing, each year choosing a new tutor as I find their different approaches really helpful. There are about ten writing courses available all over Sydney.

So, if you feel inspired to find out what U3A can do for you, ring 9252-2033, and you will be given all the assistance you need.

Trudy Davis

## On the Gem Fields

Rubyvale is a unique Queensland town – dusty, dry, hot, scarred by mullock heaps and rusty machinery decaying beside abandoned mines. A corrugated iron tank on its wooden stand leaned at a crazy angle, a threatening warning painted on its rungs – “Trespassers keep off!” A wooden sign pointed to the sky, “Goanna Flat Road”, and a willy-willy of dust spiralled down the street.

The tall gangling figure that came towards me was straight out of a Drysdale painting; his ancient droopy hat pulled over his eyes, his clodhopper boots emphasising his skinny legs. I stopped and said “Hullo”. He nodded and brushed away a few flies. “Great little town.” I encouraged a conversation. “Yeah.” “Lived here long?” A nod. “Dry, isn’t it?” No response. “I’m told it hasn’t rained here for eight months.” “Yep, that’s right.” Having exhausted the conversation, he wandered off to the pub, a magnificent building of locally hewn ironbark with high beamed ceilings and hand-carved bar – an amazing contrast to the unpretentious shops and shed-like houses tucked into the hard, dry earth.

An Aladdin’s cave of elegant expensive jewellery, beautifully displayed, dazzled our eyes when we walked under an arch of brilliant bougainvillea into a Federation style house. Working in the corner, as in other shops, the precious stones are cut and polished. One large orange sapphire, found locally, cost a cool \$98,000. Buy it, have it set on the premises and walk off with it on your finger. “Now you couldn’t do that in Pitt Street.”

We visited many shops, getting to know the friendly people. “We love it here. You’ll be doing some prospecting, of course?” Well, we had sifted through a bucket of dirt from a mine last year and enriched ourselves with a teaspoonful of worthless gems the size of a pinhead. “Stake out a claim next time you come, and stay a couple of weeks. Come to our Gem Fest. You’ll have a ball.”

We eased our campervan into the bush amongst the trees and watched an ant heap, those busy little creatures carting loads three times their size uphill. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard,” I thought, as I watched one little fellow struggle to get its load into the hole. It was a small greenish stone. Could it be a sapphire? I prised its burden from its claws. “Hey, Doug, have a look at this!” We examined it excitedly. Then Doug remembered that we had cleaned out the grocery cupboard. It was a dried pea! So, we apologised to the ants by scattering bread

on their nest, sending them into a frenzy of excitement.

I bought a pair of pale blue sapphire earrings for my granddaughter, and so ended our mining enterprise on the gem fields of Central Queensland.

Joan Johns

## FRIENDS

My friends enrich my life  
In times of confusion I turn to them  
Listen to their wisdom  
Feel comforted by their caring  
Learn from their experiences  
We share the good times  
Laugh together  
Have lively conversations  
They accept me as I am  
To them I give myself  
My emotional support if needed  
Respect for privacy  
Admiration for the people they are  
We are growing old together  
Physically more fragile  
Still the fire is there  
Burning bright  
Dear friends

Joan Hook

### Haiku

In depth of rock-cave  
gossamer of spider’s web;  
which is the stronger?

Kaleidoscope of  
autumn splendour – revealing  
life’s beauty in death

Last dry maple leaves—  
plumping buds on cherry tree;  
renewal bekons





# NOTICE

## **Bequests to the Older Women's Network**

If you would like to include a bequest to OWN in your will, the following options will guide you in its wording. Please specify which Older Women's Network you wish to be the recipient of your gift: the Older Women's Network NSW or the Older Women's Network Sydney

**Option No. 1** I devise the sum of \$ .....to the Older Women Network for the general purpose of the Older Women's Network OR for the specific purpose of ..... such purpose being consistent with the aims and objectives of the Older Women's Network, to be administered by the Older Women's Network.

**Option No 2** (for a proportional bequest) I give to the Older Women's Network for its general purposes or the specific purpose of ..... % of my estate (or .....% of the rest of my estate).

The gift you make to the Older Women's Network will be an enduring record of your generosity.

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