



OWN MATTERS

Newsletter of the Older Women's Network New South Wales Inc.

No. 31 July 2004

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Our conferences are different!

We all know that conferences can be somewhat tedious affairs, often with too many long-winded speakers and not a lot of meaningful interaction between those attending.

Thank goodness OWN conferences aren't like that! Having members involved at all levels of planning, facilitation and entertainment means a stimulating and memorable experience for all. And this year, with a theme of *Older and Bolder*, there's every reason to believe that our 2004 conference will be one of the best.

One of the main principles upon which OWN was established in 1987 is inclusiveness. In practical terms this means including older women of all shapes and sizes, all ethnic backgrounds and all colours and creeds. It means tolerance of personal difference and not defining ourselves by excluding people who are not like us, or who irritate us. When we accept and practice these values, noticeable by their lack in the 21st Century, we can return to our groups revived and renewed.

Healthy ageing is and always has been a central focus for all Older Women's Network groups. This year, conference workshops will not only provide opportunities for participants to explore a range of issues and factors involved in healthy ageing, they will also provide feedback and guidance on key healthy ageing issues to our members, and to government agencies, including the Office for Ageing. OWN's concept of healthy ageing includes, but is not limited to, the development of a sense of identity and purpose as well as access to health, housing and community services, and financial security.

This year, our guest speaker is a woman well known for her achievements, strong views and social justice activism. Pat O'Shane is a leading magistrate in New South Wales. She is also an Australian Aborigine.

If you haven't registered for the conference there is still time, but you must act now! We need to firm up numbers so that accommodation and food arrangements can be confirmed with the Women's College, University of Sydney.

Cate Turner

OWN Matters

is the Newsletter of the Older Women's Network (OWN) NSW. It is published 11 times a year. Subscriptions are \$20.

OWN Matters is available on audio cassette at no extra cost.

Who Are We?

OWN NSW is the peak body for nineteen OWN groups in NSW.

OWN promotes the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women through a range of activities and resources, and advocates on issues of concern to older women.

Contributions

Members of all 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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Point of View

What's going on here?

Something is not right here. Mark Vaile and the Australian government are telling us, on the one hand, that there will be no significant changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, but his opposite number, the negotiator for the USA, Bob Zoellick, proudly told the US Congress that the proposed deal was a 'breakthrough' for US pharmaceutical interests.

Sorry, Mr Vaile, the Free Trade Agreement can't do both!

We were told that all the US got was the ability to challenge the price of new drugs that may be covered by our PBS, through the creation of a new joint committee of both governments. In reality, though, the buck will ultimately stop with the health minister and treasury officials and *not* the committee. In other words, it's the politicians who will decide the cost of new drugs.

The big drug companies in America have convinced the Australian Free Trade negotiating team that because they lead the world in developing and patenting new drugs, which they say costs them between US \$300 and US\$500 million, it's only fair that other countries should contribute to the cost. The reality is that the largest proportion of the cost of drugs – 30 to 40% – is spent on advertising and marketing!

The driving interest of US companies is to ensure that the drugs we use have brand names that are covered by patents. It's patented products that provide the pharmaceutical industry with their very large profits.

And while I'm on about the Free Trade Agreement, please remember that it doesn't get signed until August. We can help stop this agreement coming into force by asking the ALP to block legislation bringing it into effect. And we can do this by clicking onto www.nofta.org and typing your name in the space provided.

If you are computer-free, please give me a ring on 9692 8427 and I will be happy to send your name via my computer. The more names Mark Latham receives, the better.

Muriel Hortin

Pianist wanted!

The OWN Theatre Group is looking for a relief pianist to stand in for our regular pianist who will be away for some time. We need keyboard backing for rehearsals on Tuesdays and for performances, which could include being away overnight. This is a paid position.

If you are a pianist who can play by ear as well as read music, please contact Josie Jackson on 8399 0434 for further details.

OWN NSW Coordinators' Report

We are pleased to report that planning for the conference is running according to plan and that we are really excited by the way the program is shaping up. We've also had some good news on the money front. A new application to our funding body, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, was rewarded with a small contribution towards conference costs.

So far, we have only received delegate registration forms from ten OWN groups, but as this report is being written on 21 June and the closing date is still a week off, it's probably too soon to be concerned that all groups won't be represented at the conference.

Following a draft program being distributed in your last *OWN Matters*, some of you questioned

the two workshops on Healthy Ageing. While groups and individuals suggested the general focus of both workshops, the term 'healthy ageing' was added for the following reasons. In 1998, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), in conjunction with NSW Health, produced a Healthy Ageing Framework 1998-2003, which outlined six key areas for government policy and action. The Office for Ageing (within DADHC) is currently undertaking a process of discussion, planning and consultation, to lay the groundwork for the development of a new *Healthy Ageing Framework* for the next five years. While consultations have been planned (and some held) on transport and mobility, housing and location, and money matters, the key issues of identity (the

meanings we give to our activities as we get older) and health, are not being publicly debated until a government-sponsored Forum on Ageing in September. Because we think OWN members have lots to say about these topics, we decided to define them as 'Healthy Ageing' topics. We plan to submit your workshop recommendations to the Office for Ageing in the hope that your ideas and suggestions will inform and shape discussions at the September forum.

Now to something a little different – congratulations to Lucy Porter and Muriel Hortin, who each received an Edna Award at the recent WEL conference for their feminist contributions to community life. You can read their successful nominations on p.12 and 13.

Lucy Porter, Cate Turner and Anne Warren

Please join the OWN NSW Management Team!

For those of you thinking about joining the Management Team at this year's AGM, we thought some information about what's involved might help you make the 'right' decision.

First of all, being a member of the Management Team is interesting, stimulating, and sometimes a lot of fun.

We think that anyone who has been in paid employment, brought up a family or worked as a volunteer has the capacity to make a valuable contribution to the management of OWN NSW.

As a new member of the Team, you'll receive a tremendous amount of support to help you settle into the role, so don't feel you have to know everything before you start!

Thirteen members of the Management Team (MT) are elected at the AGM: six from Sydney OWN and seven from other groups. Meetings are held on the second Monday of each month. Questions and issues at MT meetings are decided by consensus, with each person's opinion being of equal value.

A Treasurer and four Coordinators are appointed at the first meeting of the new MT.

The projects and groups that the MT supports and resources are the Theatre Group, the Aboriginal Support Circle, the Advocacy Coordination Group, the Wellness Coordination Group and *OWN Matters*. These projects are self-funded and report to MT meetings on a monthly or quarterly basis through a MT liaison person.

Groups in NSW now number twenty. They are supported and resourced by our Community Development worker and by Coordinators, acting on behalf of the MT, who are also responsible for attending quarterly meetings and organising regional meetings.

Please give it some thought! Contact the office if you would like to learn more about what's involved, and then send in your nomination form – it's enclosed with this newsletter!

Lucy Porter, Cate Turner and Anne Warren

ATSIC - *Where To Now?*

At our June meeting of the Aboriginal Support Circle, we viewed a video of an *Insight* program, presented by Jennie Brockie, on the proposed government scrapping of ATSIC. (In April, the Howard government announced that it would introduce legislation to abolish ATSIC by 30 June, moving all its programs into government departments ("streamlining") and replacing the thirteen-member elected board with an appointed body of "distinguished indigenous people" with an advisory role only.)

In the *Insight* audience were a large number of well-informed and well-known Aboriginal people, and a hapless government official who didn't have a leg to stand on. During discussions, it became apparent that ATSIC is a flawed body, and does need a major overhaul. However, mainstreaming has never worked in the past, and without elected representatives, Indigenous people will be shunted right back to the past, where governments can ignore recommendations and refuse to consult with them. When the audience was asked if anyone would be willing to serve on a government-appointed body, you guessed it, no one put up their hand!

As Maisie Cavanaugh wrote in our book *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up*, "Aboriginal people have had 200 years of not being listened to." We hope that, finally, this government will listen.

Pat Zinn

Lynn Pollack's Award

Congratulations to Lynn Pollack who received the Eastern Region Local Government Community Award for Reconciliation.

Lynn was not only one of the founders of Esora (Eastern Suburbs Organisation Reconciling Australia) in 1997, but was an active and valued member of the OWN Aboriginal Support Circle group and the Women's Reconciliation Network. She also played a major role five years ago in establishing and running an Aboriginal studies course, together with Gillian Fisher, at the local evening college in Bondi. Despite caring for her mother, who died recently, and now undergoing cancer treatment herself, Lynn continues to compile and distribute "What's On", which lists all coming events in Indigenous affairs each month. We wish Lynn a speedy and complete recovery.

Pat Zinn

Pathways to Reconciliation

Sir William Deane, the Patron of Reconciliation Australia, recently launched the final stage of Pathways to Reconciliation at a celebration attended by many notable Australian fighters for social justice, including Faith Bandler, Evelyn Scott and Evonne Goolagong Cawley.

After Aboriginal Elder, Allen Madden, gave the traditional welcome to Gadigal land, Sir William reminded people that the Pathway began 37 years ago, when Aboriginal people were given the right to be counted as citizens in their own country. Since then progress has been erratic - sometimes fast, sometimes slow, but it did produce the magnificent march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000. He emphasised

that it is no longer sufficient to *walk* together and *talk* together. We must now *work* together to build a great grass roots movement.

Paul Newman, a Wiradjuri man, and Chairman of the NSW Reconciliation Council, commended the many reconciliation groups who have been working tirelessly for years to further the cause of reconciliation.

Aboriginal role model, Linda Burney, NSW MLC, and Aiden Ridgeway, Federal MP, were appointed as inaugural ambassadors for *Pathways to Reconciliation*. Linda said that as a young person she endured many racist taunts, one of them being "You are the closest living example to Stone Age man". She urged

people to go from *unfinished* business to *urgent* business and to reinforce that Aboriginals want rights, respect and reconciliation.

Aiden said that reconciliation could succeed if young people as well as elders are heard, because the young are now learning about Aboriginal affairs and recognise the importance of reconciliation. He would like to see Australia legislate for and commemorate a National Sorry Day each year on 26 May.

With disadvantage and racism still experienced by many Aboriginal people, it appears that there is a long way to go before Aboriginal people can experience the rights, respect and reconciliation they deserve.

Lucy Porter

Make Mine Mucus!

In *Not a Dry Eye* in the last *OWN Matters*, I described how I manage my dry eyes; this time I'll run through the solutions I've found to deal with my perennially dry mouth.

Although many commonly used medications, including antidepressants, antihistamines and diuretics can cause a dry mouth, in auto-immune diseases like Sjogren's Syndrome (which I have), the mucus-secreting glands around the jaw and the mouth are actually destroyed as though they are foreign bodies. (I imagine that glands might also become less efficient with age, as happens with other parts of our ageing bodies, but I can't confirm this.)

With less saliva swishing around your mouth to clean it, you are likely to have more teeth and gum problems, especially ulcers. I find that toothpastes, even the special ones for dry mouths, are actually too hard on my mouth. A pharmacist suggested cleaning my teeth with a solution of good old bicarbonate of soda – a teaspoon to half a cup of water – and this seems to work really well, and it's cheap!

My dentist told me to brush my *gums*, not my teeth, and to brush across the gums not up and down, which encourages receding gums. When my gums become dark red and engorged with blood I firmly brush them with a toothbrush, which seems to do the trick. The dentist also suggested using toothpicks routinely as they massage the gums.

The medical specialist I see recommended that I take Bisolvon, which stimulates mucus production in the mouth. I take it first and last thing, and in between if my mouth is very dry, and so far I haven't noticed any side effects.

No script is needed, but it is expensive, so shop around, and please read directions for use on the packet.

Then there are foods that are friendly and unfriendly. For instance, I find fizzy drinks hard on my mouth because they are mildly acidic, yet I've found that lemon drinks stimulate mucus and fruit nectars go down well too. Other foods that stimulate mucus include lettuce (not the bitter ones) and melons, especially rock melon, and iced drinks and iced lollies keep my mouth comfortable. I find tea very drying, but milk coffee is good.

I should reiterate that I have no medical training and that all my best hints have come from other women with similar problems to mine.

Jan Aitkin

My day of rest

Today I decide to do absolutely nothing. With my daughter away and the house clean enough, I can please myself. So I make breakfast, go back to bed, settle back against my nice big pillows and switch on Foxtel.

A nice looking young man is reading the news...very pleasant. Hang on, why is he taking off his clothes? Good Lord, he is completely naked, with all his dangly bits exposed! Must check the TV guide – it's the *Naked News*. Not with breakfast, thank you.



I change to CNN to see a car wreck, people screaming, total devastation – give that a miss.

Ah, this is better, a bride in a nice gown and a man in a dress suit. Wait a minute, what did he say? He wants to marry his daughter,

the other man is sleeping with his wife's mother, and the glamorous looking girl is here to tell her boyfriend that she is really a man. Holy Moley, it's the *Jerry Springer* show.

Coronation Street should be a safe bet...such a nice show...wait a minute, Richard is tipping cement on his wife's body. Oh, Richard, how could you? Gail loves you so much!

Eastenders has got to be better. Little Mo, for goodness sake leave the man...surely putting a hot iron on your hand must have told you something?

OK, that's it, switch to *Animal Planet*...ah, look at those baby animals, so sweet. Get away, you horrible lions, leave them alone...oh, well, that's nature for you!

How about a cooking show? This cook is one of those who peels nothing and puts lots of green stuff on the meal...why do TV chefs never cook stuff like bangers and mash?

I am *exhausted!* The next time I want a day doing nothing, I'll disconnect the TV, toss down a couple of Mogadons and spend the day sleeping!

Josie Jackson

SOMETIMES

*Sometimes...
when you cry...
no one sees your tears.*

*Sometimes...
when you are in pain...
no one sees your hurt.*

*Sometimes...
when you are worried...
no one sees your stress.*

*Sometimes...
when you are happy...
no one sees your smile.*

But FART! just ONE time...
And everyone knows!

Josie Jackson

A Sign of the Times

Something odd has been happening to me in recent months. I've started shouting at the television, well, not the television exactly, but various politicians who appear on the screen. It's a worrying trend, particularly if a neighbour or a friend knocks on the front door unexpectedly and there's me, my face contorted with ugly rage, screaming at the TV. Not a good look you might say.

I'm a practical kind of person, so in an attempt to distract myself from this unseemly behaviour, I thought I could write something, but all I ever come up with are a few opening lines of what is best described as atrocious poetry.

Take these, for example:

The PM comes into view and all I can think of is this one line... "I'm not a violent woman, but..."

Then there's the Treasurer. Why do I keep thinking about his mother? "Poor Mrs Costello, she gave birth to a smirk." (And of course smirk rhymes with jerk, but I try not to be too corny.)

Then Ruddock shows his lost-my-soul, twisted-in-agony face and involuntarily I break into "Ruddock in the morning, Ruddock in the evening, Ruddock at supper-time..." (Now, if you do decide to try this at home, here's a tip – 'time' rhymes with 'slime'.)

And what about the other side?

Well, Latham does *not* make my heart sing with hope, and even atrocious poetry is far from my thoughts when he starts talking.

What he does get from me is a wagging index finger (especially when he sprouts tales of his impoverished youth) usually accompanied with my thin-lipped advice that he should sit at Carmen's knee, or maybe Julia's, and listen to stories about Labor women and their early struggles.

And Crean? Metaphorically speaking, he's like the stand-up comedian who staggers onto the stage with a bag full of old jokes, just when the crowd is packing up to leave.

So you can see I'm a bit worried. You might even say I feel I might be contagious.



Pearlie McNeill

Boldness is my friend!

"Don't you be so bold!" we were admonished in my youth...but only to the girls! Bold now means different things and has different connotations, as in the title of the NSW Conference, *Older and Bolder*. I've also noticed it used in death notices, as in: "She was a feisty old lady."

I was not bold in my youth, but I

make up for that now. As one man told me, "You have more front than David Jones." It was not meant as a compliment, but I took it as one. Men still have an ambivalent response to boldness in girls and women, older or not. I remember there was no talking back to my father, male bosses, my husband or some members of the

family. Don't answer back, don't stick your head up. It was conform or else. There were few places for us in decision-making processes and we had few weapons to help us break the glass ceiling. We do now...and it is called feminism. We no longer allow men the divine right to speak first in a debate or in right of reply or sometimes even to venture an opinion.

Be bold and bite the head off patronage to older women. Know your rights and be positive about claiming them. And when you're confronted with sexist attitudes to wrinklies, don't bother with Botox, just tell 'em, "I earned every one of these lines." Even when you are shaking in your shoes, raise your hand and your voice, whether face-to-face, on talkback radio or on television. Enter all kinds of forums by writing letters to newspapers and to newsletters. (We certainly have a role model in OWN's Josie Jackson!) By practice and experience we learn objectivity so that criticism runs off our backs, and we get better at it. Blow your OWN trumpet!

Let "it's not good enough" be your catchcry. Reject feelings of alienation about "who'd take notice of little old me?" There are enough 'little old me's' when polling day comes around to make a difference. Analyse what is of benefit to you in the promises of politicians and if you have something to say, say it, and then translate your words into action. Organise that protest about inappropriate development in your street or suburb, sign that petition or make one of your own. Represent your sisters on committees. Learn to be a decision-maker. Let your light shine! Wear bright green and be the heroine you always dreamt about. And have fun doing it! Move out of our way, we are coming!

Mighty Mouse
a.k.a. Enid Harrison

I could have kissed our cockatoo

Our dear little house at Willigobung, between Tumarumba and Batlow, was half a mile from the gate and built on a hill. The road from the gate to the house hadn't been bulldozed for twenty years and was full of ruts so deep that they came up to the hub caps on the car. After rain it was too treacherous to drive on, so I used to leave the car at the gate and walk up to the house, always keeping a wary eye on the dozen or so cows and one bull wandering over the paddocks.

One afternoon, with my four daughters aged between sixteen and four, I drove my husband to Wagga to catch the train. While we were away, it had started to drizzle, not too heavy, but enough to make the road up to the house muddy and slippery. By the time we arrived at the gate, it was *very* wet, and because we were eleven miles out of town, and there was no moon, it was pitch black.

I parked the car at the gate and we started up the road. I tried to use my instincts for direction. My twins, aged five, had just started school and had new school shoes. Angela (who still has a fetish with shoes thirty-three years later!) was crying because her new shoes were getting muddy! I said, "Be quiet, just keep walking." I had no idea where we were heading, and was scared stiff that I would bump into a cow, or, heaven forbid, the bull.

Six months earlier, my husband had bought home a baby sulphur-crested cockatoo. Although I'm not a lover of wild birds being held in captivity, Cocky had become part of our family. I was trying to keep our spirits up, when very faintly I heard, "Hullo Cocky, hullo Cocky." He must have heard our voices, so I followed where the sound was coming from, and, "Hallelujah," we came to the house. Cocky had rescued us!

Jennifer Cole

A Cultural Feast

Guilt was out the door, being very kind to ourselves was definitely in, as we four senior persons treated ourselves to three days at the recent Sydney Writers' Festival. What fun it all was! A program of such diversity and length, it took us an afternoon, prior to our departure, to choose which sessions we would attend.

The first day was so enlivening. After each session, we strolled down the boardwalk at Wharf 4, gazing at Sydney harbour, which sparkled in the pre-winter sunshine.

In the late afternoon we enjoyed a ferry trip to Parramatta. At the Riverside Theatre, we found ourselves seated amongst a much younger audience listening to the blogger from Baghdad, (pseudonym - 'Salam Pax') about life in present day Iraq and how he communicated with thousands around the world via the internet.

The next morning, we met the dazzling women of Paris with Lucinda Holdforth, whose book, *True Pleasures* is quite seductive and delightful. Then we were taken for a dramatic ride as actors Annie Byron and Philip Dodd brought to life the works of four new writers who are being encouraged by Varuna Writers' Centre in the Blue Mountains.

After lunch, we enjoyed the life and writing experiences of two authors of medical background,

Peter Goldsworthy and John Murray, both from Adelaide. Our political appetites were stirred by Robert Manne, speaking of mandatory detention and former U.S. President Nixon's Counsel, John Dean, who suggested that the present U.S. regime is *Worse than Watergate*.

Our Saturday took in *Four Women, Four Cultures*, a session delivered by four short story writers, followed by a lovely walk to the Art Gallery of NSW, where we enjoyed lunch prior to viewing the captivatingly beautiful works of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, who was one of the most innovative and skilful of the Western Desert Painters.

By the time we drove home again on Saturday afternoon, we had researched the novel, with four women authors, three Australians and a New Zealander, tasted a bit of James Joyce, and in American writer, Julian Ninio's session, listened to his take on his *Troubled Nation*.

Yes, that was the end of our cultural feast for this year. We are already making plans for next year's Writers' Festival. Through OWN we make so many friends. It was good to see Pearlie McNeill and Meg Coulsen at the festival and to meet and chat to Joy Ross on a city bus. 'Tis truly the best time of life.

Jo Krelle

Some good news

The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health has been funded for three additional years beyond the current contract, thus we have funding until mid-2008. The bad news is that the allocation from Department of Health and Ageing is somewhat less than we need, but it is enough to be confident that we will be able to supplement with other funds and keep this valuable national resource going.

Christina Lee
Project Coordinator

Letters to the Editor

Breaking the mould

In the world of books, it is understood that the shelf life for any newly launched book, fiction or non-fiction, is six weeks. So what a remarkable feat then, that *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up*, launched last November, is receiving so much media attention all these months later. I refer to the review in the Sydney Morning Herald's *Spectrum* by Rosie Scott and Anita Heiss's review on the *Message Stick* website.

This is proof indeed, if proof were needed, that *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up* adds to a greater understanding of the lives of older Indigenous women and their experience and achievements. A tribute indeed to the work of the Aboriginal Support Group and OWN for producing such a fine publication.

Pearlie McNeill

Men off the hook

I was interested to read in the Higher Education Supplement in *The Australian* 10 June 2004 why volunteers are the invisible workforce.

Melanie Oppenheimer, an historian, suggests that one important reason is that: "When feminist historians arrived in the 1970s, they were looking to promote women in particular ways - they were looking for women who broke barriers, set precedents, challenged the status quo and the patriarchy. These historians were not interested in volunteering - it was too mainstream, too ordinary, something the vast majority of women did. So they decided, quite deliberately in my view, not to write about it."

Thank goodness it wasn't the fault of male historians!!

Historically (or should that be hysterically?) yours,

Carole Ford

Audio Newsletter

I am replying to Josephine Conway's letter. I wonder if she knows there is an audio cassette version of the *OWN Matters* newsletter. It costs just the same as the printed version. To receive it every month members can contact me on 9660-5925, or Kris in the OWN office. It would help if readers would alert each other about the audio version when reading print becomes a problem.

I also hope she is not 'simplifying' too much. Lots of reading material is available now on cassette for people with poor eyesight, especially from the Royal Blind Society on 1300-654-656.

My macular degeneration began when I was fifty. So I have had over a quarter of a century in learning to manage life with it. I am always glad to hear from women who have a later start than me so we can share experiences.

Margaret Sargent

Stimulating!

There were so many informative articles in the recent issue of *OWN Matters*, for which I'm grateful. *Lament for Margo* gave me food for thought and maybe some future words for *OWN Matters*. Also, Pat Zinn's and Isabel's articles about being good, guilt free and smelling the flowers were great encouragement for me to continue being a free spirit. I loved *Oh, Sweet Revenge*. Thanks, Cate. Although when we told the tale to a very liberated OWN husband, he thought that once again the fellows "got the wrong end of the deal".

Keep up the good work! You keep us up with our rights, stimulate our minds and give us laughs. Thanks a million.

Jo Krelle

Abuse

I have had allergies all my life, but because of appalling downsizing of the staff here (a retirement village on the Central Coast), my washing was brought in after I had gone to bed and was just left on a box on my verandah.

The box had a vase full of *dead* flowers on it, a dustpan and broom, and a stone from my garden. I am allergic to dust mites and flowers, so I complained to staff. Yes, in a very upset way, but I had felt sick all day with rapid heartbeats. A sister came down and screamed at me that I had upset the staff. My rapid heartbeats were so bad then that I had to contact my grandson, who immediately phoned for an ambulance, as I was on the verge of a heart attack.

Other people here, mostly women, of course, are also suffering abuse. I think it is a 'witch hunt' against women.

Name withheld on request

Absolved

To the women who have been writing in about feeling guilty about 'wasting time' by reading when they should be doing those expected-to-be-done-things...remember...*Time you have enjoyed wasting is not wasted time!* (Printed on a bookmark found when wasting time reading a library book.)

Peg Hewett

The best!

Thank you all for a year of wonderful newsletters, full of pearls of wisdom, good general comments and funny anecdotes. The best \$20 I spend!

Rita Walker

Letters to the Editor

Supporting Home Exchange

This letter is a follow-up to Karen Clulow's letter titled *Home Exchange*, I just received.

I would like to support her in the idea of setting up a 'Hospitality Holiday Exchange', for members of OWN only. Many of us are alone with a spare room; many of us find it hard to travel to an accommodation on our own (travel being couple orientated); and after living on our own, some don't want to be or go everywhere on our own.

Karen's suggestion opens many doors for going somewhere and being invited back. A great idea! What do others think? Some feedback would be most welcome.

We could make our 'OWN' extended family as I did for a villa in Spain and hope to do so again.

Thanks to OWN for all the good work and helping us to touch each other's lives.

Jacinta Martini

The new Office for Women

Following structural changes across Government generally, the Department for Women will become the Office for Women, within the Premier's Department from 1 July 2004. I will continue as the Minister for Women.

The major priorities and the Government's commitments to women remain and will determine the work program for the new Office. The Grants Program will continue. The work of the Premier's Council for Women will carry on, as will consultation and liaison with the Peak Women's Groups and other women's organisations.

The Department is currently working with the Premier's Department on the priorities and structure of the Office for Women.

The Office will continue to implement the whole-of-government framework in areas impacting on women through working with the Premier's Council for Women, other agencies and the community to support the Government's social justice objectives.

As more details come to hand we will keep you informed. We look forward to your ongoing support.

Sandra Nori MP
Minister for Women

Just right

The piece Dorothy Cora wrote about Pam is just right...sort of Tom Yum soup: warm, filling, spicy and a little bit sour (or at least not sweet!).

Terri Jackson

Women say NO!

Have you seen the Howard government's 'revised' anti-violence ad campaign on TV? It's another bit of evidence that they just don't get it. The campaign they dumped in favour of this new politically correct revision had the right message - the emphasis was placed on the perpetrators, warning them that violence against women will not be tolerated because women deserve better.

The new campaign slogan is, 'Australia says no'. So, instead of teaching men that violence against women is wrong, this ad meekly proposes that victimised women call the local shelter. The narrow message of this new campaign, designed not to offend 'the usual suspects', does nothing to encourage women that violence against them, whether physical or verbal, is not acceptable. This watered down campaign won't get my vote, and neither will John Howard.

Phyllis Gorman

I've got an issue

Reading the Letters to the Editor in June *OWN Matters*, I noticed that Barbara Silverstone is inviting readers to put forward issues to be raised at the next meeting with Centrelink.

My issue is this: next October, I will be 70 years of age. I have worked for forty-seven years in this country, I am Australian and I think I well deserve my pension. I am still able to do some (very little) casual work. On the amount earned, if I pass the limit, I am taxed and this is fair enough.

The thing that annoys me is that when I inform Centrelink every three months, I am also cut in my pension for this little earning. Why? The consequence is that they have killed my incentive so I work as little as possible. I am getting bored and sick with depression. Won't I cost the government more if I get sick?

I am not aware that this system exists in other countries. Could Barbara discuss this issue with Centrelink?

Silvana Gruber

NB In the USA, age pensions are also reduced by earnings, but only after the tax free threshold is doubled, and the earnings exceed \$25,000 per year (Ed.).

Who pays, how much?

I recently received in the mail the latest news on Medicare from the Prime Minister. It came in the form of a booklet, which seemed to me to be an expensive exercise. I returned it in an envelope addressed to Mr. Howard with a covering letter and asked him how much this unsolicited mail cost to produce and where did the funds come from that produced it.

I'll let you know if I get an answer.

Barbara Malcolm

At and Beyond the Rocks

OWN Sydney

With the OWN NSW Conference approaching we are looking forward to catching up with members from other OWN groups again, and hearing about their doings. The program is looking good with a great guest speaker, Pat O'Shane, and an array of interesting workshops which will no doubt be very productive for OWN's future direction. Our Sydney Annual General Meeting will be held on 20 August, with elections for ten Working Group positions. We're hoping that some members will take this opportunity to become part of the team.

There will be a holiday break for the Sydney Wellness crowd during the school term, which starts on Wednesday 7 July. On 21 July the Wellness group will be back in the Mott Hall again, gliding around on a beautifully sanded and oiled floor. We've decided to keep to the new program, ie, gentle exercise, tai chi, and then drumming after lunch.

The two *Psychology of Happiness* workshops with Dr. Robin Murray were greatly appreciated by participants, who were so enthused that they came together several weeks later to see how the 'homework' exercises had gone. Lots of laughter! We'll meet again on 2 August. (Please see Nina's report, below.)

The *Life Writing* workshops with Pearlie McNeill have hit the spot, and eighteen women picked up their pens on 21 June. We hope to have some interesting contributions to *OWN Matters* from these workshops.

Fab Fridays have had many interesting speakers, although not a lot of members have participated. One of the most remarkable speakers was Sister Pauline Fogarty from the Brown Nurses. They provide health services to some of

Sydney's most destitute people including homeless clients, and those who heard Pauline's account of their activities were full of admiration for the courage and commitment shown by the Brown Nurses.

The Department of Community Services 24-hour Domestic Violence (DV) Line have supplied some statistics to the OWN Sydney Domestic Violence Committee for the years 2002 and 2003 on the numbers of older women using this service. There was a 17% increase during the second year in older women's calls! All DV services in NSW are also noting an increase. We learned from the office of the Minister for Housing that the Department can assist clients escaping domestic violence with Rentstart to establish accommodation in the private rental market. Rentstart assists eligible applicants to meet the cost of a bond and advance rent. The Department also resources the Temporary Accommodation (TA) Line which provides after-hours assistance from 4.30pm to 10.30pm for people who are homeless and want to secure an immediate form of accommodation.

Louise Anike and Joy Ross

The Pod

We had our first meeting of *The Pod* on 7 June. The name was suggested after Dr Robin Murray's two workshops on the *Psychology of Happiness* in May.

Blacktown

We welcomed a couple of new members to our June meeting, which is very encouraging. Janet Boreham and Iren Balding were our guest speakers at the meeting.

Janet spoke about her role and the role of her service, the Blacktown Domestic Violence Court Assistance Service. In describing why someone

Robin's skill, knowledge and good humour inspired us to reassemble. Seven of us met – and certainly found out we are not all like peas in a pod! (Maybe a pod of whales?) We revelled in our differences, shared laughter and became interested in each other's lives. I felt a good deal of empathy in the room and, of course, odd twinges of irritation. There was also curiosity and interest in the different life situations we all face, as well as the similar ones. Perhaps the pleasure of the morning was simply getting to know each other better, to listen attentively, be heard and continue in our pursuit of wellbeing and happiness.

The exercise I really enjoyed was writing down at the end of each day, for one week, three incidents: the best thing that happened, the worst thing that happened, and a seemingly ordinary happening.

After each entry I had to write the positive meanings I could find in each event, followed by the long-term benefits that could flow from the experience. For me this proved to be a thoughtful, interesting and revealing daily practice. On one or two nights when I felt worn out, I didn't do the exercise, and found it didn't work nearly as well for me doing it the next day, although others said this was OK for them.

We're looking forward to our next meeting in August, when we plan to discuss whether we will continue to meet again and whether or not we will open the group to new members.

Nina Walton

At and Beyond the Rocks

would take out an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO), Janet explained that domestic violence is not just physical – it can be psychological, emotional, financial, or sexual. She also emphasised that fear of violence is a legitimate reason for taking out an AVO.

Back in the 1970s, when Elsie Women's Refuge (the first women's refuge in Australia) was set up in Glebe, women did not take out AVOs to stop partners from abusing them because of fear of intimidation. In the prevailing culture of that time, society really didn't support women in violent situations to take out AVOs. Today, it's a different story. By 1996, there were twenty-six schemes throughout NSW similar to Janet's service. Janet's service supports women who go court to obtain AVOs and also refers women to appropriate services. Their office is based at the Blacktown Police Station where between 15 and 40 AVOs are taken out every Wednesday. There are two ways to obtain an AVO – via the police or via the Chamber Magistrate.

Irene Baldinge, from Western Sydney Sole Women's Accommodation Service, also spoke about her service, which accommodates women in crisis situations who do not have children. In 2000 they obtained a property in Doonside which is being used as a refuge. Women can stay for up to six months. There are three full time workers and they can accommodate up to nine women at a time. Domestic violence, Irene reminded us, is a violation of human rights. In 2003, 34% of the women were aged over 45. Irene's service will produce a booklet soon dealing with specific needs of older women who are subject to domestic violence. There are 55 women's refuges in NSW and only three take women without children.

A number of our members (along with around 200 other interested people) attended the Mobility and Transport Seminar run by the Office for Ageing at Parramatta on Thursday 10 June. Public transport in Western Sydney is a huge problem for many older women in the area who can find themselves extremely isolated.

Women are being constantly told to have a breast screen, but one of our members was recently told that because her life expectancy at 70 was only a further 15 years, it was not cost effective to screen her. A letter from our group went to the Minister for Health pointing out that the practice of not screening women over 70 is a discriminatory practice. A copy of the letter was sent to the Management Team of OWN NSW to see if they also want to follow up on this issue.

One of our members, interviewed by a student from Community Radio about the Federal Budget, raised many important points, including funding for homeless people, increases in accommodation bonds for nursing homes which cause hardship for older people, and the increases in pharmaceutical costs to the elderly. Well done, Coral!

We have a Laughter Workshop planned for our meeting on 7 July, which will be in our new home, the Rooty Hill Senior Citizens Centre, only two minutes from the station.

Penny Hilton

On Radio National's Health Report, Monday 21 June, there was a whole half hour on breast cancer. The issue of screening for women up to 69 came up. Worth checking out. (Ed.)

Sutherland

Believe it or not our Older Women's Network Wellness Centre at Sutherland has been operating for three whole years – definitely an occasion for celebration! And as our OWN group has been operating for two years, we made the celebration, in late June, a joint one. An enthusiastic planning group lined up an exciting range of talented performers and a lavish spread for members and their guests.

Wellness Centre enrolments have maintained their numbers and our three outreach programs: computer skills, *New Horizons* and *Out & About*, have happily resumed.

The OWN Group committee meeting in May was the best yet attendance-wise with twelve members present including one of seven new women who have joined OWN. At our meeting, we discussed a report from one of our members about a Consultation Day conducted by the local council, with representatives of community bodies, to share views on Council's Social Plan. Several members expressed interest in attending further sessions on the Plan. We appointed two delegates to the OWN NSW Annual Conference. Three other members indicated they would like to attend as observers. We also reviewed our program, deciding that our next outing, held on the last Friday of each alternate month, will be to the Jewish Museum at Darlinghurst.

The Wellness Centre is currently rearranging its program of discussion sessions. We hope this works out as a way around the ever-present problem that busy women have of finding enough days in the week!

Barbara Burnham

Making it against the odds!

Lucy Porter was recently awarded an Edna Award in recognition of her lifelong struggle for freedom and fairness for herself and for other disadvantaged women. This is part of her story.

Born the eldest of six children at Happy Valley, La Perouse, during the depression, Lucy lived for the first six years of her life in a camp with around 200 other families from many different racial backgrounds, all existing on dole rations and mostly living in dirt-floor humpies. Through her father's militant and passionate unionism, Lucy came to understand at a very early age the huge social and economic barriers existing between the *haves* and *have-nots* in our society.

At 10, Lucy was selling the Communist newspaper *Tribune* around La Perouse and at 16 began full-time work at the *Tribune* office. She also joined the Eureka Youth League and became involved in campaigns for social justice and equal pay.

Married at 19, Lucy had four children in five years. A controlling and violent husband worked hard to wear away her self-esteem, but never managed to extinguish the flame of rebellion in Lucy, a characteristic which she has quietly fostered all her life. In 1971 Lucy discovered Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and, like many of us, took the children and left.

Working all her life in banks and hospitals, which have a high percentage of women employees, Lucy became very militant about wage discrimination and lack of promotional opportunities for women. She attracted the nickname, 'man-hater', which came from the men, of course!

Living and working in La Perouse meant that Lucy developed a strong and compassionate understanding of the disadvantages and discrimination suffered by Aboriginal women. When her sister and brother married into Aboriginal families, her support for Indigenous struggles took on a personal dimension.

Lucy joined the Older Women's Network (OWN) in 1992, and was immediately drawn, kicking and screaming, into performing with the OWN Theatre Group, which she did for ten years. Some years ago, with other cast members, Lucy developed a script about domestic violence based on their own experiences and presented it to audiences across the Metropolitan region and on country and interstate tours. The domestic violence segment has encouraged many other older women to break their silence and to take positive action.

In 1994, Lucy played a central role in establishing and coordinating the OWN Aboriginal Support Circle, which has been successful in raising

awareness and supporting older Aboriginal women in their ongoing struggles to achieve their social and economic goals. The Aboriginal Support Circle has been acknowledged with an award from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation for "*creative involvement of women in Indigenous issues and events*".

To achieve the aim of the Aboriginal Support Circle – Listen, Learn and Understand – Lucy suggested that Aboriginal women be invited to monthly meetings to talk to the group about their lives. The women's stories of surviving in a hostile world were powerful and poignant and Lucy felt strongly that their stories should be told to a wider audience. In 2003, with Lucy again playing a central role, the Aboriginal Support Circle published a book of oral histories called *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up*. The stories honour the tradition of generations of Indigenous women who have worked within and beyond their own communities to achieve social justice.

The book is a testament not only to the continuing courage and tenacity of older Aboriginal women, it also represents Lucy's lifelong commitment to women voices being heard.

Lucy is currently a member of the OWN NSW Management Team and one of three OWN coordinators. At 72, she doesn't even look like slowing down!

Dorothy Cora

Spellbound

When my first granddaughter was born I was not prepared for my heart to take a flip, for my common sense to go out the door. I know Nanas are supposed to offer sensible advice, know everything about breast-feeding, cracked nipples and wind and sleep patterns, but my mind was a blank about these matters.

Cuddling this tiny perfect being, my mind was future-focused on cuddling, giggling and playing monsters under rumped bedclothes and comforting her when she fell and scraped a knee. I imagined us running and tumbling together on warm grass in the summer

sunshine. I saw her cosily wrapped in a hooded pink parka against the chill wind as we strolled on the beach, her tiny hand entwined in mine. Giggling, she would escape my hand to run, wobbly, wobbly, across the sand to the swings. "Swing, Nana, swing," she would laugh, and I would always be happy to oblige.

Four years later, I am totally spellbound by my darling granddaughter's enchanting personality and spirited antics. And my decision not to be a daily baby-care-Nana is working marvellously – for us both.

Helen Mitchelhill

Just being herself...

Those of you who have been long-time readers of *OWN Matters*, and before that, the *Sydney Newsletter*, will be very familiar with the broad sweep of Muriel Hortin's political passions and social activism. Muriel has now been acknowledged for her community activism through an Edna Award. This is part of her story.

Muriel came to Sydney on the first ship out of New Zealand after World War II. She became a member of New Theatre, joined peace groups and supported other organisations which reflected her passionate belief in social justice. Muriel was an active unionist (she was on the Council of the Teachers' Federation) and an inspired high school English and French teacher. With the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in 1975, Muriel was appointed to head up one of only five Intensive Migrant English classes in the state.

Muriel has been a central member of the Older Women's Network since the early 90s, first editor of its newsletter and now a regular contributor on issues relevant to women.

She is a tireless letter and petition writer to government departments, politicians and newspapers and is always available as a volunteer, planner and initiator of women's programs.

Among Muriel's more recent exploits is the revival of her interest in French, to help her granddaughter impress her university tutors with "an elegant use of the subjunctive".

Just by being herself, Muriel challenges the stereotype of older women, gently prodding them into action and by her personal example, showing us that we are capable of doing a whole lot more than we thought we could.

Roseanne Bonney

Morning

*The dawn warble of the
magpie's carol,
Its notes falling in limpid song,
Competes with the grinding
machinery
Of the garbage truck.
A plane roars overhead
And, in the trees,
Small birds greet the day.
Two cats lie blinking
In the heavenly bamboo,
Its leaves and red berries
A playground and a haven
For their feline mystery.
The sky spreads a rosy glow
Heralding a rising sun.
Trucks clash their gears
Setting out on the commerce of
their day.
A small breeze suggests fresh
air,
The dichotomy of a city
morning.*

Judith Mustard

A little light reading?

On The Australia Institute's website, www.tai.org.au, you can read extremely interesting papers written by people concerned with community, environmental and ethical considerations in public and private decision making. Two papers of real interest to OWN members are *Silencing Dissent – Non-government organisations and Australian democracy* and *The Benefits of an Ageing Population*. They are both available at the office if you don't have access to the internet.

Silencing Dissent is a report about the important role played by NGOs in public debate in Australia. It presents the results of a survey of 290 NGOs who were asked about whether or not they felt their advocacy role compromised the funding they receive from governments. The answers to this

question provide a disturbing picture of the limits put on public debate in Australia. For example, 90 per cent of the NGOs who completed the survey believe that organisations that dissent are at risk of having their funding cut, and 76 per cent believe that current Australian political culture discourages public debate on critical issues like public housing, income support and youth policy.

The Benefits of an Ageing Population provides a wonderful antidote to current pessimistic attitudes towards older people, who are covertly blamed for the increase in public expenditure in health and welfare. The writer, Judith Healey, argues that the ageing of the population should be seen as a transition not a crisis, with opportunities as well as challenges in society's response to the ageing question. The main challenge is to promote healthy and productive ageing and to adjust societal practices and structures to include older people as contributors to society. The next 20 years will see significant changes to aspects of the labour market, the health system and the aged care industry, but, she argues, a wide range of personal, social and economic benefits will accompany these changes.

Dorothy Cora

Finding Inner Peace

By following the simple advice I read in an article, I have finally found inner peace.

The article suggested that "The way to achieve inner peace is to finish all the things you've started". So I looked around to see all the things I had started and hadn't finished.

Today I have finished one bottle of vodka, a bottle of red wine, a bottle of Jack Daniel's, some Prozac, a couple of Valium, three large boxes of chocolate and half a litre of gin. You have no idea how good I feel!

Contributed by Gabrielle Sneddon

**Honest stories, told with humour and dignity**

With all the current discussion around the dismantling of ATSIC and the disempowerment of our people, to read *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up* was a great reminder to me of the inner power we have as Indigenous women and the role our aunties, mothers, grandmothers, sisters and friends continue to play in the development of our communities.

This anthology of fifteen women (thirteen Indigenous and two honorary gubba-rigines) is testament to the strength of Indigenous women in this country, and each personal story is told honestly, with humour and dignity, with passion and detail, and at times reliving pain and trauma in order to explain the significance of family and individual strength in identity.

In her introduction to the anthology, proudly produced by the Older Women's Network of NSW, Betty Little writes:

"Early in the 21st century, we bring heaps of knowledge from our heritage and many experiences we've had to face in our own country since 1788. It is with this wealth that we contribute to the great diversity of our Nation."

That wealth of experience and knowledge is shared through stories of controlled lives on missions, stories of loss and separation, domestic violence, poverty and discrimination. Stories of struggling and searching for identity. In Lorraine McGee-Sippel's poem *Belonging Where?* she writes, "Too black to be white/ Too white to be black/Caught in the middle/Belonging nowhere."

But these are stories of survival, of strength and dignity, and of the

sheer will to maintain a place in this country, a place largely denied through ongoing government policies of cultural genocide. They are memoirs of women who continue to be advocates for justice and equity in their communities, locally and nationally.

Sylvia Scott writes, "Our people have always been great yarners. They would sit under a gum tree and talk, and I think we inherited that. Our stories are our survival." This collection brings truth to her claim.

I read with particular interest the stories of women from the area in which I spent my youth, and continue to live, in and around La Perouse, formally known as Happy Valley, and long the home of the late Lola Ryan (who collected shells from local beaches as a child and went on to exhibit her shellwork later in life), Jean Carter, Joyce Woodberry and Shirley Murphy.

But perhaps the hardest story to read, and I procrastinated for fear of reading the pain, was one by my own mother, Elsie Heiss. Her own story highlights the significance of her close family upbringing, the role of the church and later in life education, all aspects of life she has instilled in her own children.

The women in this book are from the Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, Yorta Yorta, Bundjalung and other nations. Together they highlight the diversity of our nations but also the shared experiences of being born black in Australia.

Maisy Cavanaugh writes, "People will speak up, and speak out, if they know they are being listened to and Aboriginal people have had 200 years of not being listened to." Well, Aunty, people are listening now, thanks for sharing the stories and if you haven't read this

amazing collection yet, then your learning as an Australian in lacking a key read!

Anita Heiss

(First printed on *Message Stick*
www.abc.net.au/message)

Tottering down

As you totter down the icy slope of life into your eighties and beyond you couldn't find a better companion than John Mortimer. To tempt you, here is the opening of *The Summer of a Dormouse: A Year of Growing Old Disgracefully*, the third volume of his autobiography.

"The time will come in your life, it will almost certainly come, when the voice of God will thunder at you from a cloud 'From this day forth thou shalt not be able to put on thine own socks.'

"To the young, to the middle aged, even, this may seem a remote and improbable accident that only happens to other people. It has to be said, however, that the day will most probably dawn when your pale foot will wander through the air, incapable of hitting the narrow opening of a suspended sock. Those fortunate enough to live with families will call out for help. The situation is, in minor ways, humiliating and comical.

"It's a law of script writing that scenes get shorter and the action speeds up towards the end. In childhood, the afternoons spread out for years. For the old, the years flicker past like the briefest of afternoons. The playwright Christopher Fry, now ninety-three, told me that after the age of eighty you seem to be having breakfast every five minutes. These film scenes, building to an inevitable climax, tend less to tragedy than farce. Dying is a matter of slapstick



and prat falls. The ageing process is not gradual or gentle. It rushes up, pushes you over and runs off laughing. No one should grow old who isn't ready to appear ridiculous."

If this excerpt leads you to read *The Summer of a Dormouse*, you might also enjoy the two previous volumes of Mortimer's autobiography, *Clinging to the Wreckage* and *Murderers and Other Friends*, all published by Penguin.

Mary McCusker

Osama – Despair or Inspiration?

Osama is a powerful and well-crafted film from Afghanistan which has been showing at Valhalla and Chauvel cinemas. Visually the film is strong, but it is hard to watch and even harder to leave the cinema without an overwhelming sense of despair.

The main story, set in the time of Taliban rule, follows the fate of a young girl who, in family desperation, is sent out to work with shorn hair, dressed as a boy (Osama). Her widowed mother has been thrown out of her job at the hospital and she and the grandmother are left with no means of providing for the family. As women without male relatives, they are barred from work and risk attack being outside the house without the company of husband or son.

Although the Taliban are no longer generally in control of Afghanistan, in most areas of the country the situation for women is still largely one of powerlessness. At the same time it is amazing to remember RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan and to imagine their courage in

developing undercover work in education, health and welfare with women in Afghanistan and in refugee camps in Pakistan in the period of Taliban rule. Moreover this work continues in the present still turbulent and dangerous political context.

Support for RAWA's work is now being coordinated in Australia by SAWA - Support for Afghan Women, Australia. They produce a newsletter and are able to channel donations to specific RAWA projects. For more information, go to www.sawa.australia.org.

Meg Coulson

Diseased English

At the Writers' Festival the English novelist, Louis de Bernieres complained of 'diseased' English.

Don Watson and Lynne Truss, concerned that the disease might be terminal, have given us two books which, if sales mean anything, show that we too care about the loss of our language.

Watson's book, *Death Sentence*, deals with 'public language', the collection of platitudes and clichés, addressed to us daily by politicians, bureaucrats and, alas, very often the media. He shows us how the sloppy use of words carries over into our 'private language', particularly the teaching of English in most of our schools. He reminds us of our losses, from Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* to Yeats' *Lake Isle of Innisfree*, memorised in primary schools even before WWII. If the book has a fault it is too allusive to appeal to the age group which should benefit from it most.

Eats, Shoots and Leaves by Lynne Truss deals with punctuation and

its disappearance. Leaving aside the alternative title, the gun-toting panda shows just how a misplaced comma makes nonsense of a sentence.

Who has not suffered from this? Not only writers at the mercy of editors and proofreaders, but any aged person offended by the phrase 'poor old people'.

When Don Watson's book was being discussed on air, a caller complained that her mentally alert, ninety-four year old mother finds difficulty filling in forms because of unfamiliar terminology and then had the nerve to pity "these poor old people". Certainly at ninety-four one is 'old', but 'poor' is a matter of conjecture. Poverty is relative in an affluent society and if one is poor in health, it's an invasion of privacy to have it proclaimed. So care with commas is compulsory for clarity.

Perhaps it is because of these two timely books that the Plain English Foundation was launched at the close of the Writers' Festival. Its aim is to simplify the composition of official documents, to make them understandable to all.

Helen Monaghan

Example of diseased language

"In accordance with your request and in consideration of the fact that significant time has elapsed, it is incumbent upon you to facilitate the identification of the certificate. It would be appreciated if you would ascertain this information in a timely manner."

What it actually means in English is:

"To meet your request, we need you to find and send us a copy of your certificate as soon as possible."

Lao (the French put the 's' on it) Remembered

I was in Lao, crushed in a narrow motorised canoe without a backrest and with little space for my feet, watching the mighty Mekong River slowly rising between the slatted boards on which I sat. We were on a textile tour of this tiny country, squeezed between China, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanma. We had the advantage of having Valerie Kirk, head of Textiles at the Canberra University, accompanying us as a guest lecturer. Lao's weaving tradition is famous – glorious silk fabrics dyed and woven in natural colours, and we were there to see them.



This Buddhist communist country is one of the poorest countries in the world, and the most bombed in the history of warfare. It has survived three hundred years of war, the latest being the Secret War when the Americans bombed it incessantly for nine years during the Vietnam war, ignoring Lao's neutrality, the Geneva convention and their agreement that no American troops would invade the country. So the US Air Force did it, dressed in cowboy hats, dark glasses and torn-off jeans! America has written the Secret War out of its history, but the Lao people remember four hundred people killed in our guide's village one night. They bear little resentment, and, in their Buddhist way, accept it and get on with life. (Paul Theroux called Lao one of America's expensive practical jokes!)

Orange robes brushed us in the streets, and the booming of the gong that called them to prayer woke us at 5am, vying with the roosters crowing, the hens clucking

and the pigs grunting even in the capital city, Vientiane. It is a very safe city and a safe country, but up in the mountains where the great limestone peaks soar into the sky and the valleys are covered with mist, we needed to go in convoy at one stage, because of a group of bandits. Villages perched precariously on the edge of ravines, and we shooed chickens, pigs and children off the road as we passed by.

Markets were everywhere every day in the villages and towns, selling exquisite handmade articles for a song, and glorious glowing silks.

Workshops we visited were busy places, the women squatting on the ground in their traditional wrap-around skirts, their arms up to the elbows in the big ceramic pots of indigo dye, nearby a cauldron bubbling away over a wood fire. A heavy wooden log with a hammer-like head and operated by foot, crushed the materials which made the dye – plants, insects, bark and fruit. Up and down it went. No crash of machinery here. Women were at their spinning wheels or looms, sometimes sitting with legs straight out, weaving from memory their intricate patterns. A workshop for young people in Lang Prabang, founded because of the need to employ young girls who would otherwise go into the sex trade (some to Australia), sold cotton bags and shirts, in those marvellous earthy colours that only natural dyes produce.

Life expectancy is 52, so when I met a 79 year old woman, she went into paroxysms of delight, touching me, rubbing her cheek against mine.

"You strong," she said.

My eighty-year old bones didn't feel so strong when I clambered onto an old cart driven by a tractor engine which, after jolting along for ten minutes, broke down. So I hitched a ride on a motor bike, bumping wildly over the potholed road.

We visited many beautiful Wats, one in Lang Prabang, spectacularly covered in a mosaic of tiny, mirrored glass, sparkling in the sunlight. One village we visited had no water supply. They walked kilometres for a bucketful. It was the dry season, and life is tough.

The Lao guides were so kind to me, carrying my things, always on hand to help, even buying me a present from a meagre wage. But living is cheap. \$1.50 buys a substantial meal.

My Lao adventure was worth every jolt of the old bones, the discomfort of the squat, smelly lavvies, and beds as hard as bricks.

Joan Johns

Lifting weights lifts spirits too

Depressed older people can ease their condition by lifting weights, a medical expert said yesterday. Dr Nalin Singh, a geriatrics specialist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, said the benefits were "as powerful as the antidepressants used by psychiatrists".

Speaking outside the Australian Association of Exercise and Sports Science conference in Brisbane, Dr Singh said the treatment of 1,000 older people with clinical depression had shown weightlifting had a powerful effect.

"All the symptoms of depression get better," he said. "Their sadness goes away."

Reprinted from *Sunday Telegraph* 18 May 2004

Adventurous Women

Once Mary and I became involved in adventure activities with mixed groups, it became obvious that the men took over the 'important stuff' and the women stood back, especially when things became challenging. There were lots of incidents when we felt patronised, so it was such a relief when women-only adventure groups started up in the mid-80s.

Women in the Bush introduced women to skills, such as backpacking, canyoning and abseiling, so they could access the more remote bush within a day's drive from Sydney, like Kanangra Boyd and Morton National Parks. Mary (who was given her first abseiling gear for her 60th birthday), and I joined *Women in the Bush* and on a variety of trips and day-walks learnt sufficient 'bushcraft' to take turns in leading some.

A few years later, *Wildwise*, a women's adventure company, began offering extended backpacking walks and canoeing trips to many parts of Australia. In 1992, Mary, by now aged 65, and I, signed up for a backpacking trip leaving from Jabiru, NT for an outlier from the escarpment in Kakadu National Park called Baroalba. We trained earnestly, walking 4 km to work and at weekends carrying backpacks loaded with telephone books!

All five participants on this trip were inexperienced or modestly experienced backpackers, so we sighed when the co-leader distributed food for each to carry. My lot included heaps of rice and salami, a cauliflower and 1 kg of cheese – quite a burden on top of my 12 kg of camping gear. Fortunately it was an easy amble to our first campsite beside Gubara Spring. Next day we embarked on a strenuous scramble up boulder strewn Baroalba Creek to the upland valley and a base-

camp, where the surrounding overhangs contained ancient Aboriginal rock paintings. As we explored further along the valley, there were more.

The reward for effort over succeeding days stunned us. In fact it was a life-changing experience, as Mary and I stretched ourselves physically and started on a path of learning about Aboriginal culture in Northern Australia.

During the *Wildwise* all-women adventure holiday, we met Marian, a woman with a deep love and knowledge of Northern Australia. A couple of years later she started her own adventure company called *Sirius Adventures*, which offered customised 4WD and backpacking trips. We saw a huge benefit in having a third, very fit, knowledgeable and supportive woman with us on our adventures, doing things at our pace, accompanying us to places we particularly wanted to go and being a backup for difficult situations. We became her first clients.



Marian suggested three walks: *Piccaninny Gorge* in Purnululu National Park, a walk in Keep River National Park and her local favourite *The Numerous Pools* walk in the Carr Boyd Range. The first two take a single day to get to a base camp, while the third goes from Flying Fox Waterhole to Packsaddle, taking six (or in our case, seven) days with a rest day halfway. We chose the latter.

The three of us set off with little more than a change of clothes, a mozzie-proof canopy for sleeping, a tropic-weight sleeping bag, some safety equipment, our quite luscious dehydrated food and a survey map.

Imagine walking in warm weather, alongside plentiful and pristine pools waiting for you to step aside to drink or swim in! Imagine balmy nights without a need for thick heavy clothes or tents. Imagine being where there are no flight paths, no noise of neighbours or vehicles of any kind – in fact no one else but your like-minded and cheery group of walkers! That's what it's like in the East Kimberley in northern WA in the Dry Season!

There were remarkable landscapes – hazy blue-grey smoky horizons; red, red cliffs; valleys covered with high, dry cane grass; moist pockets of tropical greenery; clear, deep, crocodile-free pools with pink and white waterlilies; majestic boab trees and birds of prey overhead.

Our pace was leisurely, with time to take in details and photograph them. To cross one pool between high cliffs we did a 'swim-through' by securing our backpacks, boots and clothes in large orange plastic bags and pushing them in front of us as we swam across. Each afternoon we camped on warm flat rock ledges by water and there was time to relax and revel in the luxury of utter freedom from care.

This wonderful and indulgent taste of the Kimberley set us on yet another adventure holiday path together, that of using Mary's 4WD to get us to remote locations further west.

Sadly, Marian's business could not withstand the increase in Public Liability insurance costs for adventure tour operators plus the collapse of Ansett, which halved the number of tourist flights to the Kimberley.

Judith Hammond

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:

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
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
purpose 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.**

For Your Information

Laughter Workshop

On Wednesday, 7 July at 9.30am, Blacktown Older Women's Network is holding a Laughter Workshop, run by Maureen Nash.

All welcome...bring your friends to the Rooty Hill Senior Citizens Centre, Rooty Hill Road South, Rooty Hill. For further information, call Penny Hilton on 9688 3780 or Pam Hawkins on 9839 6287.

DisAbility Options

Care Connect DisAbility Options provides a short to medium term case management and brokerage service for people with a disability, to maximise their independence and community access.

Adults with a disability who have complex needs, require short to medium term case management, and live in Randwick, Waverley, Woollahra, Sydney, South Sydney and Botany are eligible.

Services provided include case management, information, flexible and individually tailored services, independent living training and carer support.

These services are funded by the Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care as a 'Case Management and Brokerage service'. Phone 9310 3699

The Mother

From the Director of *Changing Lanes* and *Notting Hill*, comes *The Mother....* May is a conservative grandmother from the suburbs. When her husband dies on a family visit to London, she finds herself alone for the first time in decades. Initially May recedes into the background of her busy, metropolitan children's lives. Stuck in an unfamiliar city far from home, May fears that she has become another invisible old person whose life is more or less over. Until, that is, she falls for Darren, a man half her age. As May discovers a new independence and confidence, for the first time in her life she feels alive.

Opening in cinemas on 1 July.

Women in Black

Women in Black monthly vigils for peace with justice are held monthly on the first Thursday of each month on the Town Hall steps.

The time has been changed to 6.00 - 7.00 pm.

For the next few months, someone will be there from 5.30pm as we try to spread the word about change of time.

RENEWAL REMINDER

- If you wish to continue receiving *OWN Matters*, and you haven't returned your renewal notice - **now's the time to do it!**
- You can pay by cash, cheque or credit card - \$20
- Many thanks for your comments on *OWN Matters* - we have enjoyed them.
- Membership to OWN Sydney is also due now - \$5

OWN Sydney Notices

Film Discussion at '75'

Monday 19 July 2004
12.30pm.

Bring a sandwich for lunch.

Films for discussion:

Twin Sisters

Bon Voyage,

Dirty Pretty Things

Touching the Void



Fab
Fridays
Future!



Fab Fridays has floundered without fuss! Frankly, fractured! Despite the fabulous few faithful, failure has fatigued and foiled the fantasy feat with a fantastic future!

Maybe it was a fatuous farce; maybe it was unfashionable, yet the fervour felt from the fabulous few females fundamentally flopped! No fracas, no furore, no flurry, no flicker, Fab Fridays is a flummoxed fizzer! To Fantastic Joy Ross and The Fabulous Few, Fondness without Fret,

Cherie Thompson

Are you interested in Feldenkrais?

I'm a Feldenkrais teacher using the *Bones for Life* method, designed by Ruthy Alon, International Feldenkrais Trainer, based on her 40 years experience teaching Feldenkrais throughout the world.

Our bones are as healthy as nature meant, if our movements are natural and all our body parts are harmoniously coordinated. Through the simple effective movement processes of *Bones For Life*, people will learn gradually and safely how to:

- * Stimulate your bone strength
- * Coordinate a springy and dynamic walk
- * Align your posture into safe weight-bearing uprightness
- * Develop your skill of restoring balance
- * Enhance the pleasure of moving

I am interested in teaching this method to older women at OWN. If you would like to join a class, please contact the office and leave your name and phone number. The cost would be around \$5 per session.

Margery Hellman

Strrrretch Your Mind...

Think you are getting Alzheimer's because you can't remember what you went into the kitchen for? Or you forget your best friend's name when you are introducing her to someone?

Of course you aren't getting Alzheimer's, you are simply having a 'senior moment', – lots of us have them.

A bit of memory training can help!

Joan Gemmelli will conduct a series of mind-stretching exercises at the *Stretch Your Mind* workshops on Monday 19 and Monday 26 July at 75 Windmill Street, Millers Point, between 10.30 and 12 30.

If you would like to attend, please phone the office to let us know.

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in ***OWN Matters*** are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Older Women's Network.

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Dorothy Cora, Phyllis Gorman, Polly Gow, Muriel Hortin, Joan Johns, Mary McCusker, Jacqueline Schofer, Renee Simons, Ermes Solari, Wilhelmina van Dorp and June West.

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**