



OWN MATTERS

Newsletter of the Older Women's Network New South Wales

Vol.4 No.10 – November 2007

Making Choices

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OWN has come of age, and we owe it to ourselves to celebrate our achievements. In the last twenty years we have blossomed from a single Sydney-based organization to a Peak Body representing older women.

OWN was born of the desire to give older women a voice and a visibility that had been denied to them at a time when, in mainstream Australian society of the mid 1980s younger women were wrestling their way into workplaces, in Jackie Collins/Dallas inspired powersuits, teetering on an uncomfortable ideological mix of feminism and the hyper-sexualization of female power.

This dubious marketing of female empowerment had marginalized the issues of older women. There was no role on this new set for the grandmother, the crone, or maiden aunt, and as usual, these were the only positions regularly advertised for older women. Older women were considered socially redundant.

At the same time these younger women were being encouraged en masse to identify with the possibility of envisaging a different future for themselves, and importantly creating a 'break' between their 'lifestyle choices' and the perceived lack of choice that their mothers had encountered. They were persuaded to see themselves as 'different', as the 'next wave' of feminism, and politicians were quick to coopt this concept of choice.

The *right to choose* - which had once been a slogan for a woman's right to determine her own fertility - was soon being harnessed in a cunning armory of Weapons of Mass Destruction against the feminist cause itself. OWN women had seen it all before. Many of them had been there championing the rights for this future generation in the '60s. Now, sadly, the most destructive weapon created was this generational division that convinced '80s women that they had succeeded where their mothers had failed and that, by extension, their mothers were not equipped to offer them advice on the best way to lobby for equality. Why maintain the struggle, when governments and media assured this generation they had already achieved equality!

Adding to this campaign of assurance has been the steady dismantling of women's services and women's studies at universities over the last decade.

By interfering with this intergenerational advice on issues that would ultimately impact on their real life choices – this generation undermined the momentum for action on equal pay, access to affordable child care, and job security, believing the battle was won. Twenty years later, and women's life choices again return to biology, a biology that impacts on not just one generation but all the generations of women in a family. If a woman delays parenting, she delays grandparenting for her own mother, and ultimately for herself. This impacts on the cost of caring at all ends of the spectrum. We now have first-time mothers in forties, asking their mothers in their seventies and eighties, to care for infants, or conversely, the mother of these young children, is needed to provide support for her ageing parents.

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Who Are We?

The Older Women's Network (OWN) NSW is the peak body for 19 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 interest and concern to older women.

OWN Matters is the newsletter of the Older Women's Network NSW. It is published 11 times a year. The annual subscription for individuals is \$22 and \$40 for organisations and includes GST.

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 Tuesday of each month.

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POINT of VIEW

Time to OWN UP!

Here's what OWN UP (Unashamedly Political) has been getting worked up about lately...

Full employment in today's Australia is defined as having work for one hour per week. So how many of the 40,000 jobs the government is claiming to have created are of the one-hour variety?

In the light of his previous disgraceful attitude towards Aborigines, we see the PM's promise to amend the preamble to the Constitution to acknowledge Indigenous Australians as just another pre-election ploy. Where was the apology? Where is the hope of a bill of rights? It all seems too little, too late.

Included in the latest surveillance technology in the USA are high-tech, insect-like drones – robobugs that can follow suspects, guide missiles to targets or navigate through collapsed buildings to find survivors. These flying robots logged up more than 160,000 flight hours last year. We think that George Orwell, author of *1984*, got the year wrong. He should have called it *2007*.

See Notices for information concerning forthcoming meetings.

Meg Coulson

Making Choices (...continued from page 1)

There are the wider political issues: we have women retiring with little or no superannuation because they 'chose' to raise children, and lost the opportunity for careers. We experienced 20 years of record low birth rates because women 'chose' to delay 'settling down' to a family life like their mothers. We have families that once would have chosen to live in the same suburb, living in different states, socially isolated because they can't afford to remain together. We have 'WorkChoices' legislation that undermines the rights of part-time and casual workers, most of whom are women working to support their families. What choices? Increasingly carers are being told that they will have to make some difficult choices, or face further cuts to services. Most carers are women. Just how much choice do they really have?

Intelligent governance is about managing communities to support social development. Without society, economies are meaningless. It is precisely because of the political myopia in relation to women's issues that this disaster has been engineered. OWN has been at the coalface of this struggle for 20 years. While our focus has been on issues that impact on older women, increasingly we have found that when it comes to women's rights, ALL women, regardless of age are left holding the baby. We acknowledge the wisdom of the women who went before us. Thanks to them, we have the right to vote. Your daughters may still not heed your advice, but you can be sure that the 'choice' you make on November 24 will impact on them for generations to come.

Beth Eldridge

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in OWN Matters are not necessarily those of the Older Women's Network NSW, and we do not guarantee the accuracy of the facts in articles supplied by members. The Older Women's Network NSW accepts no responsibility for any loss occasioned to any person acting, or not acting, upon any material in OWN Matters.

Coordinator's Report

OWN has made it! We are now 20 years old, and are celebrating it on Friday, 16 November at Rooty Hill Community Centre. Of course all OWN members are invited. Peggy Hewett will be coordinating the exploration of the anarchy at Parliament House that got us started. Some groups have arranged a community bus, as has Sydney OWN. Some members might be travelling by public transport. Your group needs to notify Joan Van Halen ((02)9626 6647) about the numbers coming, whichever way you are getting there. If you have put your name down for the Sydney bus, we will let Joan know. As we go to print, we have twelve seats left on the bus from Lower Fort St. There is a \$10 per head charge for catering - the bus is free!

About sixty people came to celebrate Louise Anike, including her family and friends, some from as far away as Adelaide and Canberra. Peggy was a great MC, and we heard many tributes to Louise's life and work. There were

stories told, some sad, many funny, and the theatre group was in great voice. What a send off!

Our management group liaison roving ambassadors, Brenda Hodgkinson and Barbara Malcolm, attended a regional meeting at Newcastle OWN. Representatives from Wyong and Hastings zone were among the 30 members there. Feedback was positive and they laid the basis for further similar meetings.

Our Quarterly Meeting was held at Mott Hall this month (October), with many of our members from our different groups. Some of them demonstrated their favourite activities, just to show us the variety present in OWN. It was a great chance to share and chat and enjoy a delicious lunch.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at our 20th Birthday celebration.

Lorraine Inglis

20th Birthday!



Friday 16th November
10:30am to 3:30pm
Rooty Hills Senior Citizens' Centre
RSVP Joan Van Halen
by 9 Nov
Phone: 9626 6647

Where Have Those 20 Years Gone??

I received a letter in November 1987 to attend a get-together with the Combined Pensioners, to revive the Project of the Older Women's Workshops which were held in 1985/1986 in Sydney to research the much neglected needs of older women. I was very impressed with the way the day was conducted. We weren't "talked at" but our experiences were listened to and used, "experiential learning" the facilitator called it. I was hooked on the idea of an older women's network.

At the Christmas meeting in the park there was a decision to hold an older women's deputation in the form of a picnic on the lawns outside old Parliament House, Canberra. "To beard them in their dens" was our aim; to show how to get the message across, that older women would no longer tolerate the attitude of ignoring the existence

and value of older women. Invisibility was the theme of the deputation. Songs and sketches were developed highlighting the crucial issues of housing, health and social justice. Not only was it fun, but we achieved very effective results, including front page coverage in the *Age Newspaper* with a photograph of an older woman holding a placard saying "Age is not a disease" with Old Parliament House in the background. Perfect!

This is how I helped spread the news of OWN. With the OWN Theatre Group (of which I was co-coordinator for 15 years) we continued with the songs and sketches and thereby hangs many a tale. In 1988 Joy Ross and I took on the task of building OWN for three months, and we're still working 20 years down the track. Noreen Hewett, the mover and the shaker of OWN from day one, and a passionate worker for women's rights, is still beaver away. Noreen led the challenge to the government, with the assistance of many OWN members, to develop the concept of Wellness Centres. We achieved government funding and these are now established in several areas of the state. Today we have lost a lot of the members who contributed to the history of OWN. How about writing down your part of O.W.N. history? Why not share your story with us? No matter how small, it could be the basis for the history of OWN let alone the basis for greater things to come.

Peg Hewett O.B.E. (Over Bloody Eighty)

Letters to the Editor

Something For Everyone!

I always read the Aboriginal Circle pages in the Newsletter first, especially Pat Zinn's articles, which are always so well researched and contain information that is often not obtained from the daily newspapers. Her article in the October issue about the litany of abuses being perpetrated in the Northern Territory after the recent legislation was shocking. I hadn't fully comprehended until then just how really bad they were. Like Pat, I felt despair.

Josie's tale about the woeful Molly leavened my gloom, and also Joan John's wonderful Outback accounts of her adventures with her delicious old husband. More of both please!

I'll add my little doggy yarn. My poodle, Frederik, is quite the most quirky and intelligent dog I have ever had. Lately he has taken to opening my wardrobe door, if it is slightly ajar, and sits looking at himself in the full length mirror inside the door. Sometimes he woofs at his image, but mostly he is content to sit and look at himself admiringly.

Muriel Hortin

It Pays to Ask

Anyone getting a Third Party Insurance reminder that includes a hefty increase should query its validity. We had a shock when ours arrived recently – an increase of 50% on last year. We understood that a new levy had been introduced to cover people seriously injured in motor vehicle accidents, but our levy seemed extraordinarily high. In addition, a note said that our premium was influenced by the fact that I'd had an at-fault collision in the past year. Initially, we grudgingly accepted the new rate – sympathy for injured people combining with guilt at having caused an accident.



Then I said, Hang on! My prang was very minor; total cost of repair was \$650, of which I paid the \$500 excess – hardly a great impost on the insurance company. We rang the company; a pleasant, helpful young man said he'd check – and, yes, he agreed the accident had been so minor (and his company had actually paid nothing to the other company!) that he'd override the original estimate for this year. To our astonishment, our revised premium for this year was only \$5 more than last year – and that included the levy!

The moral of the story – if it sounds like too much, it probably is. Anyway, it's worth querying.

Pat Carlton

The Tangled Threads of Immigration

My father came from a little hilltop town in Sicily, which had a three-tiered society: the extremely poor, the poor middle-class and the landed gentry. My mother, although born in Australia, was brought up as though her parents had never migrated.

My parents adapted somewhat to Australian culture, but when it came to the important life milestones like marriage, naming children, their upbringing and facing death, they reverted to the customs of the motherland.

This puts great strain on the children. Children of such parents lead a double life. At home they are Italian (or whatever) and as they go out the

front door they put on their Australian skin. Children in this position are made to feel guilty by their parents. They see their children rejecting the values and customs that they, the parents, see as being the only way to live. It is understandable from the point of view of the parents, because it is what they are comfortable with, but the child has to negotiate the two worlds. Some do this more than others.

This problem usually sorts itself out by the third generation, which still possibly holds to a few of the old customs but none which make life difficult. It is the first and second generation that bear the brunt of assimilation.

Carmen Stillone



Dear Friends,

So good to see so many women in attendance at our gathering for our dear Louise. Thanks to all those willing helpers who made available a lovely lunch.

The little plant that Louise gave to me a few months ago has bloomed. Dear little apricot flowers.

By the way, whoever took home leftovers in a plastic container forgot to take my air-tight lid. I would like it back if possible. It had contained the coleslaw I brought along. We spent ages looking for the other half.

Thanks a million to the finder of my sunglasses.

Cheers for now,

Marie Williams

Theatre Group Report

The Theatre Group has been involved in several presentations recently, as well as preparing for those to come. We were very glad to present a few of Louise Anike's own songs expressing her wit and wisdom at OWN's September Celebration of her life.

We had a Sing/Talk presentation on the topic of Domestic/Elder Violence at Westmead Hospital in early October. A Sing/Talk is a theatrical item devised to educate through speech and song. The Theatre Group used to present these more regularly in the past, especially to students studying welfare or health. In fact for most of the present members, a Sing/Talk is a new experience. This was made more problematic by the absence of our director, Brigid Sen, who is on holiday. However we have been rescued by Peggy Hewett and Lucy Porter, old time members of the Group, who have a great familiarity with the Sing/Talk format.

In the absence of Brigid, Susan O'Brien has been leading meetings and rehearsals, which, in the light of her

newness to the group, is a wonderful effort.

We are also preparing songs for OWN's 20th Anniversary event on 16 November at Rooty Hill.

There is also the likelihood of a three-day tour at the end of November near Dubbo. This means a separate half-hour program to prepare, including a Domestic Violence segment.

For those of our loyal supporters who love the "Fairies" item, it is to be revived –bigger and even better!

Theatre Group members are not often grumpy old women but we were, recently, when we had to perform in a tiny space crammed against a curtain with absolutely no room to move easily for our dances and routines. We'll have to be sure our venue managers know how many performers are in the group and that we are movers and shakers!

Joan Modder



Celebrating Louise

It was a good celebration, and made extra special by having Louise's daughter, Marianne, her son, Paul, and close friends with us to fill in the family links and good stories that we didn't know about. Such as Louise's writing at the kitchen table on the back of envelopes, Paul a sounding board (he likes the way that women think), or how she would fossick around for second-hand music sheets for the theatre group when shopping with Marianne. They are both proud of and miss their Mum. Then there were several moving tributes to Caz, Louise's long-time and younger friend, who has been so caring of her particularly in the last illnesses. Elsa told us that she learned from Louise

about getting older, about no longer being able to dance or drive a car and how friendship is so important. We learned from Jan that Louise was a mean belly-dancer 30 years ago.

We didn't have much time for lots of reminiscences but there were enough, some were sad but many were funny. And it was such a pleasant surprise to have old friends with us, Mollie Brannigan from Adelaide and Barbara Silverstone from Canberra, among the crowd of about sixty.

Peggy was wonderful and funny as the MC and talking about Louise's script and song writing, Joy gave a run-down of Louise's long and passionate involvement in older women's issues and OWN, and Matina Mottee who spoke of Louise's dedication to the prevention of violence against older women.

A great line-up of theatre group members gave a rousing rendition of several songs, including "I Am Woman", and Noreen, ever the toast-mistress extraordinaire, made a moving toast, which was followed by a terrific lunch.

Many thanks to the slaves in the kitchen, Cate with the drinks and all the helpers who made it all flow smoothly.

I guessed it was the first of many, but hey, what better company to send us off?

Joy Ross

The Mother Load

My Mother, Myself

‘Mother’s in hospital. She’s had a fall. Just thought you ought to know.’

My sister’s voice on my mobile was full of concern, but calm nevertheless. She urged us not to cut short our holiday. There was no immediate urgency.

A few days later, I sat with the patient in hospital. Normally, Mother is – even at 90 – in full control of her very independent way of life, a keen bridge player and involved gardener, always quick to speak her mind authoritatively, and perennially impatient. Now, recovering from two fractured ribs and infected cuts, she felt helpless. But she was still impatient, this time to be home. She was also bored and lonely. I felt sad for her, wrestling at the same time with our life-long and still unresolved power struggle, and wondering how to comfort her as any relaxed intimacy between us does not exist. It was a relief to find that the doctors had decided she was well enough to return home. I paid her a visit there the next day.

To my dismay, I found her lying on her bed retching uncontrollably, complaining of diarrhoea and almost too weak to go to the bathroom. It was Saturday and her doctor was not available. I called the ambulance and was advised: ‘Take her yourself. It will be quicker.’ Taking my mother’s hand in mine, I said as gently as I could, ‘I’m sorry, Mother. You are too ill to stay here by yourself. I shall take you back to hospital.’

She glowered at me in silence for a moment, hating my words, before flopping back on her pillows, resigned to this most unwanted turn of events. Soon she was resting in the hospital Emergency Ward. As there was nothing I could do, I left – my mind in a tumult. Over ensuing days I visited her while her condition was diagnosed and treated.

For the first time, Mother began to contemplate a different future as she battled the indignity of enforced dependency. She still complained impatiently of boredom and loneliness. She appeared newly weak and fragile. I encouraged her to think of some respite care before returning home. She looked at me directly and said acidly, ‘I suppose you think I’m a nuisance?!’

Startled, for the effort of caring for her on top of my already busy life was becoming difficult, I declared stoutly, ‘No, Mother, you’re not a nuisance. But I am very worried about you.’ The atmosphere had become suffocatingly tense. I made some small talk and left promptly. That evening when I called her, her voice had softened. Now she spoke

with acceptance of the idea of further care. I sighed with relief. At least we could still dialogue at some level.

Her condition, however, deteriorated further. Doctors had detected fluid in her lungs, a consequence of her fall. As soon as that was treated, her condition and emotions began to return to normal, including her low threshold for boredom and her impatience to get on with life. But the doctors advised her to stay in hospital for a few more days. When she asked for my opinion, I agreed with the doctors. She sighed regretfully.

At the end of my next visit, she walked to the lift with me, putting her arm around my waist for support. I put my arm around hers, though reluctantly as such closeness was almost more than I could bear. The staff, noticing us, smiled. I kissed her awkwardly on the cheek and stepped into the lift.

Mother was moved to a private hospital to spend a few days gathering strength. She requested that her make-up and some better clothes be brought to the hospital. ‘It’s alright for family and women friends to see me looking dreadful, but I need to look my best for my men friends when they visit,’ she said. ‘I suppose that’s vanity.’ I was careful to say nothing. I had been taken unawares by this unexpected confession of a characteristic that has long been common knowledge to my family. I drove away, collected the various items requested and delivered them to Mother who was by that time, enjoying entertaining a male friend. I left discreetly.

The next day, Mother ‘phoned me, saying she would be going home in a few days. I expressed concern that she should not rush back to normal life too quickly as I felt she may be much more tired than she anticipated. She dismissed my fears, but she agreed she might need to use a walking stick from time to time.

Some days later, Mother called me early in the morning. ‘I’m ready to go home now. Can you come and get me?’ I was dismayed at the imperious note of expectation in her voice and could only politely point out my day was already very full, but I would come the following afternoon. Unwilling to wait one moment longer than she had to, Mother enquired if B, my husband, could come instead. Alas, he too, had other engagements. Finally, we settled on the next day.

I arrived at the hospital to find her sitting up dressed and ready, surrounded by her possessions in the guests’ reading room. ‘I’ve been here since 10.00 am,’ she said, smiling sweetly. I swallowed the rejoinder that rose to my

lips and assisted her to get in the car before packing her luggage in. We set off. Conversation was difficult as Mother doesn't hear as well as she used to and my voice is frustratingly soft. She asked the same question several times and I gave the same answers. Tension mounted.

Finally, she was home. I made some tea and sat with her for a while. Conversation was sporadic as I was now quite wrung out with the continuing stress of such intimate relating to the mother I hardly know and yet know so well. When she had finished her tea, I left.

I called the next day, concerned for her welfare. She had spent the night in the retirement village respite care facility, but had already been out driving again, doing some shopping, weeding and watering the garden, talking to friends and arranging bridge and social outings for the following week.

'I won't need any extra care', she said cheerfully. 'I feel quite normal again.' Her voice had its familiar clear, matter-of-fact and authoritative tone. I could only wish her well and put the 'phone down slowly. I was completely exhausted. I reached for the 'phone and made an appointment for professional help.

Bev Cameron

Trials and Tribulations of a Born Again Mother

Delivery: On the night of 28 June 2007, exactly one week after having a pacemaker operation, I was presented with two frightened little boys, one 10 years old and one 7 years old by the courtesy of the Department of Community Services (DoCS). They then gave me \$150 to assist me financially until the foster parent allowance was set up. This was the only money I received until 3 August.

I was greatly shocked and surprised by how the situation was handled as I am a 75 year old pensioner, but nevertheless I girded my loins and welcomed my grandsons. They were like newborn babes, no possessions, no singlets, underpants, pyjamas, school clothes, socks or shoes that fitted them.

When I questioned this with DoCS they promised me lots of help, advice and assistance and told me to buy what was necessary and they would reimburse me. The next day I went out and \$600 later had bought the boys all the necessities; eventually I was reimbursed on 24 August. They also told me that they would buy me a new dryer. I advised them I liked to hang clothes out in the sunshine. My trusty old Hills Hoist had survived generations of grandchildren but, like the owner, was showing signs of age and drooping towards the ground. I was told no financial assistance would be available for this. I was afraid the boys might hurt themselves so I bought a new clothes line costing \$450.

I was advised that I was entitled to Family Support Payment and that DoCS would give me a letter of support for this. This letter eventually arrived, dated 24 August.

With two new bodies in the house everything had to be rearranged to make room for them. I didn't have a spare wardrobe, so had one built in costing \$1,200. I needed one this big, as the two younger children will also be coming to live with me when things settle down a bit. I also had to buy another lounge costing \$1,000 to make room for the boys.

The next drama occurred when I requested the two single beds which DoCS said they would provide. The beds duly arrived on my 75th birthday. It was like a jigsaw puzzle, all these cardboard containers which I was expected to open and assemble. Luckily, seeing it was my birthday my granddaughter had flown in from the Gold Coast and another member of my family arrived to celebrate. They celebrated, and three hours later they had solved the puzzle and we had two new single beds, but no pillows which DoCS promised to provide.

A few years earlier I had obtained a Seniors Loan (SKI) loan (spending the kids' inheritance) and still had some money left in it. Without this to fall back on I don't know how I would have managed as there seems to be no awareness by DoCS of the financial or physical problems which arise. I also requested DoCS to provide counseling for both boys, as they have been traumatised by various events; so far nothing has been done to facilitate this.

In spite of this the boys are doing well. They know that they are well loved and secure. Boundaries have been put in place which they acknowledge and accept.

From what I have experienced it appears to me that a lot of changes need to be implemented by DoCS. Maybe more staff need to be employed to help case workers, more counselors provided, a checklist established so that money and resources are available sooner. Let the Federal Government loosen the purse strings so that we look after our own children instead of grandstanding to entertain and grovel to the so-called world leaders.

Lucy Porter

That Special Communication

I was telling my daughter about the choir at the Mass last Christmas:

"The autistics were magnificent!" I gushed.

"Were they all sitting in the front row, not looking at each other and counting the bricks?" came back at me.

Barbara (malaprop) Malcolm

Free Speech ... Who Said So?

Are we drowning in a sea of information? Not so, say Australia's top media executives, who are concerned that a great deal of it is being withheld from us.

In a joint statement entitled "Australia's Right to Know," the chief executives of print, radio and television media have stated that "we are deeply troubled by the state of free speech in Australia". They state that their ability to report to Australians facts about how we are governed and how our courts are administering justice is being severely hampered.

If we think we live in a land where free speech is an absolute right, it will come as a bit of a shock to discover that the latest worldwide press freedom index, compiled by the independent organisation Reporters Without Borders, ranks Australia 35th – equal with Bulgaria and behind nations such as Bolivia (16th) and South Korea (31st). At 19th, New Zealand is way ahead of us. Ireland has joint Number 1 ranking.

We have only to look at what happens to whistleblowers to feel a deep sense of unease. Federal prosecutors have a policy of tracking down and prosecuting any public servant found to have leaked official information, even when it is urgently in the public interest that the information is known.

* A public servant who the government believed had leaked information to a newspaper about serious lapses in airport security was convicted for his trouble. Yet the story led to a \$22 million upgrade of airport security.

* In Victoria, two journalists are facing jail for refusing to reveal their source on a story which embarrassed the government by exposing that war veterans were being short-changed on their benefits.

"Cover-ups" have become an art form, making a mockery of the concept of Freedom of Information, let alone equal justice for all. Suppression orders are regularly issued from courts banning the naming of defendants because they are public figures and "may be embarrassed" ... to hell with Joe Blow and his embarrassment.

* A Victorian court issued an order to stop a newspaper from identifying a major public figure accused of fraudulent company dealings – and then imposed another order to stop the paper saying it had been gagged. Police State?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

* The Federal Government claimed it was "not in the public interest" to release information on the number of wealthy people fraudulently claiming \$7000 grants under the First Home Owners scheme. A newspaper took the case to the High Court and lost.

* A major newspaper was refused an auditor's report on suspected rorts of Commonwealth MPs' travel expenses. When the paper appealed to a tribunal and won, the government demanded \$1 million in fees to hand it over. The paper refused.

The Joint Statement from the media executives (who are all named) cites many other attempts to get information which have come up against a government brick wall. Questions that remain unanswered include:

* How much extra tax do workers have to pay when they get a pay rise?

* How much water does the NSW Government allow the Lake Cowal gold mine to take from the Murray-Darling aquifer?

* What are the contents of an Education Department report on violent incidents in schools?

At an international level, it has become almost impossible to get balanced reports from war zones, as it has been in the past. Our military will cooperate only with embedded journalists to ensure that only the official line is reported.

Freedom of speech is fundamental to a democratic society, and the examples given show that it is being eroded in this country. We rely on the media to provide us with information on how we are governed and how our courts are administering justice, and it is a matter of concern that the very bodies that are supposed to be there to protect us are resisting our Right to Know.

Helen Young

At and Beyond the Rocks

On 'Being There' with Barbara

For those of you who missed the **OWN NSW Quarterly Meeting** in October I can only say you missed a great opportunity to see exactly how the "Heart of OWN" works; how a problem affecting older women can only be identified by older women and that older women know how to have these needs met.

Bureaucracy is hard to convince that change needs to happen, especially if an "older women" is the one trying to do the convincing.

Here is an example of how Connie Kondilious went about having the needs of women from the Bankstown Greek Older Women's Network firstly recognized, then met.

At the meeting Connie gave her report and I offered to type it for her for *OWN Matters*. Connie has been a trend-setter since she joined OWN. I could not write up her report without commenting on how her persistence achieved her objective.

This proved to be another first for Older Women when her actions led to the creation of an English class for older women who share a common goal. Here is Connie's report which shows a system that, until the bureaucrats were worn down, had failed to recognize this need. Persistence paid off, advocacy does work. Well done Connie!

Barbara Malcolm

Bankstown Greek OWN

In August the group took part in the Vietnamese Festival of Food. It was our pleasure to share our cultural ideas, songs, dance and food with these wonderful people. This was enjoyed by all who took part.

Regretfully we have some sad news to share - four of our members recently have lost loved ones and many others have been unwell for a long time. Our thoughts and support goes out to them all.

On a lighter note some more fortunate members were lucky enough to make a pilgrimage to the motherland, taking advantage of the European Summer which turned out to be a very hot one.

Since our last report we have welcomed two new members. Our dancing group has been entertaining residents in nursing homes and on 16 October they will be dancing in Marrickville for "Mental Health Week".

A booklet telling the childhood stories of some of our ladies is about to be published and we are all looking forward to that.

Having had no schooling in Australia I wanted to learn more about the English language and decided that I should try to encourage others in the group to come with me to a class. I approached Bankstown TAFE College to start a group class to teach us. There was no provision for such a class of only Greek people and I was repeatedly told this. However I persisted and eventually they gave in and accepted us, creating a

precedent. Eighteen women enrolled in a beginners' two-days-a-week class. We are now in our second year and next year some of us will continue into our third year, but for the first time since we started the course, we will be placed in different classes. We will be integrating with students from different backgrounds. The college thinks this will be better for us all and we will see how it goes. They now accept that this has been a very successful undertaking and are looking for similar groups of other nationalities that may feel they would like to do the same.

I think it is never too late to make up for lost time and to do the things that, for whatever reasons, we could not do in the past. Learning more about the English language has helped build our self esteem and the studying has kept our brains active.

On 15 October we held again "Australia's Biggest Morning Tea" to raise money for breast cancer research foundation. As in every Pink Ribbon week, we invited everyone to come and share the day with us.

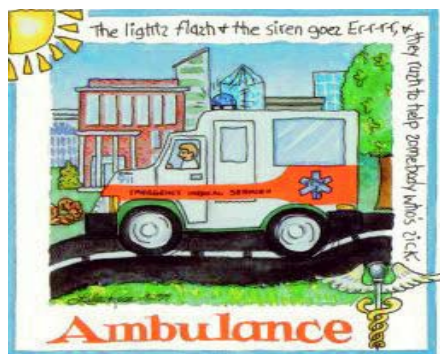
Connie Kondilious

Nowra

In a medical emergency, dial 000 and ask for Ambulance. Stay calm, speak slowly and answer the operator's questions. Some of the most basic information can get confused in an unforeseen worrying situation.

This information, plus much more, was imparted by not one but three delightful women officers from the Ambulance

At and Beyond the Rocks



Service of New South Wales at a recent Nowra OWN meeting - it felt like we had won the Jackpot.

Each officer had equal time to tell us about her job - from being an officer attending to medical emergencies, to being a member of the crack rescue team, to being a call taker at Ambulance call centre. All equally important roles.

We were told that currently approximately one in five patients attended by ambulance officers is not transported to an emergency department. These officers are Extended Care Paramedics (ECPs), which enables them to attend to many situations on the spot. This is just one among other innovations that are taking place in selected areas. Like most workplaces, new technology is being embraced, and thus, the Ambulance Service has changed and adapted.

Numerous fact sheets were distributed - all important information. These ranged from CPR chart, to Chest Pain, Safety in the Home, Preventing Falls and Road Safety.

This meeting was one of the more illuminating that we have had for a while

Gretina Norton

Ashfield Greek

The spring season has just started and Ashfield council is organizing its "Carnival Spring Festival". Our members are invited to participate by performing gentle exercises in the park for the second year.

As well as being involved in the Greek Ashfield OWN I also became a bilingual volunteer to help the Greek Community to understand their medical and health issues. For this I was given the opportunity to be trained by the Health Promotions Service for Older People funded by NSW Health, auspiced by Combined Pensioners & Superannuants of NSW Inc. This training provides education sessions for older people (in 17 different languages - and it's all free).

Anyone wishing to be a volunteer or to use this service can contact Health Promotions Service for Older People on (02) 9281 3588 and material will be provided free of charge. The education is on medication management, falls prevention, dental care, diabetes, osteoporosis and many other subjects. My training has helped our group to understand that prevention is better than a cure. All the Greek members who took part in these seminars enjoyed hearing it in their own language and it made a real difference to their lives.

On 7 December, 2007 they will receive a certificate of participation and the award ceremony will be held in the Ashfield Town Hall. At the same time we will be celebrating our Christmas party with our VIPs,

friends and families. This is our last Newsletter for the year 2007 and on behalf of AGOWN and myself we wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2008 to all the staff and members of OWN NSW.

Maria Camelin

Jubilation

We are getting into the swing of our new routines, the idea being to have two of our monthly meetings at Lower Fort St then, on the third month, to go out to dinner together at an inner city eatery.

For our September meeting we went to Holy Cow, which is an Indian restaurant in Surry Hills. Good food, great service and fun companions.

This month we are meeting at Lower Fort St and our discussion topic is, 'I Can Do That!'

In other words, we are talking about what we can do as individuals to minimise our effect on the environment.

Last Sunday was our monthly walk. We started at the park behind Wynyard and walked across Pymont Bridge, around Glebe Point and Blackwattle Bay to Rozelle, then back across Anzac Bridge to the city. This was part of our walk around Sydney Harbour, which will take many walks to complete. It was a beautiful day to be walking.

Our November 16 meeting will be at Lower Fort Street, with the discussion topic 'Moving On'. Our December 21 meeting will be our Jubilation Celebration, also at Lower Fort Street.

Lorraine Inglis

At and Beyond the Rocks

Bankstown Wellness Centre

Term 4 at the Older Women's Network Bankstown Wellness Centre begins Monday 15 October. Activities include: Gentle exercise (including Greek and Arabic speaking groups); Massage; Aqua Exercise; Discussion; Information on women's health; International dancing; Relaxation; Writing workshops. New activity: "Beating the Blues" support group.

Telephone: (02)9708 2245 or (02)9247 7046 for a program.

Jan Malley, Co-ordinator



Sutherland

Can't believe we are well into the last quarter for 2007! Our Own Group for most of this year has confined activities to short business meetings followed by open discussion and enjoyed time together over lunch at a local club. Reports back from the NSW Conference and current and local events have generated plenty of talk.

We have so far retained this functioning of the Group separate from the management of the Wellness Centre and include several members who do not participate in the WC activities. We have adopted this low key format as all our more active members are also

the main contributors of time and energy to the management of our Wellness Centre.

While all social and fund raising events are shared between both committees, we have not found it necessary or practical to duplicate functions. This cooperation creates opportunity for building an awareness of OWN among the Wellness Participants who are not yet members of OWN.

We were sorry that our group could not participate in the last OWN NSW Quarterly meeting, but our members continue to play a major role on the Wellness Coordinating Committee and to contribute to the demands of the ongoing WOW Project.

We have endorsed two members to represent us at the OWN Australia Conference in Canberra and have offered to also subsidise expenses to enable other members to attend as visitors. This is made possible by the great effort put into fund raising events such as our local Shire Council's Annual Arts and Crafts Festival where

we conduct a stall selling pre-loved treasures. Our very active and efficient social organiser has several events in the pipeline. i.e. Melbourne Cup function, and several end of year 'doos' and of course a submission to DAD&HC for an '08 Seniors Week event. More on this later (we hope)

Own Group members have booked seats on the bus to Rooty Hill!!! Some long time members and newer ones also, feel the 20th anniversary of the foundation of OWN is an occasion that must be marked.

Not to miss an opportunity when it is on offer, yet another application for substantial funding has been launched for a grant from local Council. With much time and effort from many contributors, a submission has been lodged. Some intensive lobbying should help it to be in there with a chance! Look in future issues for a description and reports on progress for this project if it gets up.

Barbara Burnham

END OF YEAR CELEBRATION

Friday, 14 December 2007

at OWN office, 87 Lower Fort Street

Drop in any time 9.00am to 4.00 pm

What to bring

OPTIONAL: A plate (and maybe a bottle) to share

MANDATORY: Good humour, Big smiles, Gossip, Jokes and

HAVING A GOOD TIME!

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS * NEWS FROM THE GROUPS * NEWS FROM THE GROUPS * NEWS FROM THE GROUPS * NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

Aboriginal Support Circle Issues

WIK Women Power

Women for Wik was formed in 1997, the name referring to the Wik people of Cape York, whose native title rights were found by the High Court to be able to co-exist on pastoral properties in 1996. At that time, 130 organisations around Australia supported the organisation, including high-profile women.

In response to the Federal Government's intervention in Aboriginal communities, prominent women such as Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue, Lady Deane, Olga Havnen, Christine Olsen (writer/producer of *Rabbit Proof Fence*), Dr Helen Caldicott, Anne Deveson, Rosie Scott, Kate Grenville, Gabi Hollows, Faith Bandler, Dr Anita Heiss and Tammy Fraser have revived the organisation in order to monitor independently the Federal Government's intervention in the Northern Territory. They are raising awareness all over the world, and here in Australia they are organising meetings and rallies throughout the states and territories. The first meeting in Sydney took place on 14 October, 2007.

I urge you to visit their website, where there are accounts by Indigenous women "telling it like it is" at <http://www.womenforwik.org>.

Following a three-day gathering in Alice Springs, the National Aboriginal Alliance (NAA) was formed in September. The NAA has rejected discriminatory elements of the Commonwealth's emergency intervention, called for the immediate removal of business managers from Aboriginal communities, and the restoration of the permit system. They have also urged Canberra to restore integrity to the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 and called on Indigenous people to actively but peacefully resist the intervention.

Women for Wik have reported that there is not a single reference to child protection in the hundreds of pages of legislation passed by the government.

Pat Zinn

Rocking for Reconciliation

Silverchair and Powderfinger, two long-time favourite Australian rock bands are embarking on *Reconciliation Across the Great Divide* tour which will encompass 30 gigs around Australia to encourage reconciliation. Both bands have admitted that up until now they knew little about Indigenous Australians and that many young Australians are unaware of Australian history vis-à-vis the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are encouraging young people to check their website (www.reconcile.org.au) and intend to have heaps of information in the foyers where they perform and also in their programmes. What really motivates them is that they consider reconciliation as a human rights issue.

Pat Zinn

Successes in Land Claims

In the Kimberley region of Western Australia, a significant amount of land (50,000 hectares) has been handed back to the Miriuwung Gajerrong people as freehold title. This was after much of their land was flooded in the 1960s when the Argyle dam was built. It destroyed their homes, traditional hunting grounds and sacred sites. This is the largest land hand-back in Western Australian history.

After an eight-year battle, Native Title has been upheld over Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory, the first time a claim has been made over a whole town, and the first time a native title determination has been made by consent rather than by litigation. The claim covers 65% of the town and compensation involves the granting of freehold title over some residential and industrial blocks, the creation of a park and a \$250,000 education trust fund for local Aboriginal children to further their education. Already five children are earmarked for university and college studies.

The Queensland government has finally granted back the summit of Mount Lindesay, "the heart of the nation", on the NSW-Queensland border, to the Githabul nation.



Aboriginal Support Circle Issues

Previously the NSW government had returned their land, the biggest land-use agreement ever reached in NSW, up to the southern slope of the mountain. The Githabul have further land claims in Queensland and hope that the new Premier, Anna Bligh, will be sympathetic.

Pat Zinn

Rescuing Aboriginal Languages

Some years ago, at a function organised by the Women's Reconciliation Network, several women from non-English-speaking backgrounds gave greetings in their languages. I remarked at the time how sad it was that none of the Indigenous women who were there were able to do the same in one of the Aboriginal languages. Linguists believe that there were approximately 70 Aboriginal languages spoken in NSW before 1788. However, in 2002, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that there were fewer than 3000 people who were able to speak an Aboriginal language in NSW and by 2006 this figure had fallen to 800.

Yet things are looking up. In NSW at present there are approximately 50 schools teaching Aboriginal languages to about 5000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous pupils. Many of these languages are actually being rediscovered through the teaching process.

The importance of being able to speak your language to build a strong culture is beyond dispute.

Teachers are reporting that, where an Aboriginal language is being taught as part of the curriculum, there is better attendance at school and more children are staying in school, with improved engagement with learning activities. Elders become involved, which leads to the local Aboriginal community being involved, which in turn encourages school attendance. Through studies here and in New Zealand it has been proved that learning any second language actually helps the student to speak, read and write English better. A Canadian study has shown that for every extra year of schooling a young Indigenous mother has, her baby's life expectancy increases by four years.

The NSW Government is the first in Australia to adopt a formal Indigenous language policy. Through funding worth \$260,000, its Community Language Assistance Program has granted \$17,000 to La Perouse Gujaga Aboriginal Corporation to conduct the Dharawal Language Project. This program aims to create teaching tools for the Dharawal language of southern Sydney and the Illawarra. It will help deliver a learner's dictionary, posters, flash cards and a training manual. The Darug language of Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains will also be funded as a language project. The Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative and the Many Rivers Aboriginal Language Centre at Nambucca Heads have been funded for two adult beginners' summer schools in Gumbaynggir and Gamilaraay and one summer school in Wiradjuri at Sydney University. Funding has also been granted for the publication of *The Handbook of NSW and ACT Languages* - a linguistic resource for all NSW and ACT Aboriginal languages by Dr Jim Walker.

Pat Zinn

Triple Award Winner - Alexis Wright

Indigenous University of Western Sydney researcher Alexis Wright has won the 2007 Miles Franklin award for her novel *Carpentaria*. She has also been awarded the Australian Literature Society gold medal and has won the \$25,000 Fiction Book award in the 2007 Queensland Premier's Literacy awards.

The novel focuses on native title rights in north-west Queensland in the late 1990s, and is written in colloquial Aboriginal voices. Alexis has said "a lot of thought went into the writing. Every element of *Carpentaria* was thoroughly considered and I was forced to ask myself some serious questions about who I am".

Onya, Alexis! I've joined the queue at my local library and look forward to reading your book, no matter how long I have to wait.

Pat Zinn



Aboriginal Support Circle Issues

Dare To Lead - Leading the Way

Dare To Lead (www.daretolead.edu.au) is a project dedicated to raising the rate of improvement outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The project has been launched in Government, Catholic and Independent primary and secondary schools. Almost 5000 school leaders from across Australia have pledged to help make a difference for students in their schools.

Recent data reveals that there is ongoing improvement in literacy (reading and writing) in Year Five and in Year Twelve. Recently, four Indigenous and two non-Indigenous recipients were presented with awards in Adelaide for their outstanding efforts.

Pat Zinn



Christmas Party Raffle for La Perouse Children

The ASC is happy to be involved in supporting Black Santa give the kids of La Perouse a fabulous party on 16 December. Thanks to Barbara Malcolm, who has created one of her exquisite patchwork

quilts, we are having terrific success with our OWN raffle.

Tickets are still available in the office at one for \$1 and three for \$2 and prizes will be drawn at the OWN 20th Birthday Party.

UN Declaration a Milestone for Indigenous Peoples

On Friday 14 September 2007 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, welcomed the decision of the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

"Today's decision is a milestone for the world's Indigenous peoples and for the United Nations," Commissioner Calma said.

"It is the culmination of over two decades of negotiations at the United Nations and fierce advocacy by Indigenous peoples from all over the world since the 1970s.

"The declaration reaffirms that

Indigenous individuals are entitled to all human rights recognised in international law without discrimination. But it also acknowledges that without recognising the collective rights of Indigenous peoples and ensuring protection of our cultures, Indigenous people can never truly be free and equal.

"That a declaration of such controversy has achieved near universal support at the General Assembly is testament to its importance and appropriateness. We should remember that such enduring human rights documents as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights did not receive this level of support at the time that they were adopted by the General Assembly.

"However, it is a matter of great regret that Australia and three other nations have opposed the declaration, particularly given that Australia had indicated its support for the vast majority of the declaration's provisions during the negotiations of the text.

"As I detail in my Social Justice Report 2006, the Australian Government's reasoning for opposing the declaration has no sound base and does not interpret the declaration consistently with international law. In fact, their arguments had been roundly condemned by both Indigenous peoples and other governments in the negotiations of the declaration in recent years," he said.

Mr Calma said the declaration was among the first international human rights instruments to explicitly provide for the adoption of measures to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoyed protection and guarantees against all forms of violence.

"The challenge laid out by the declaration is for Indigenous people to develop partnerships based on the principles set forth in the declaration and on the basis of mutual respect."

For further information on the declaration, including fact sheets, see: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/declaration/



To Bill or Not to Bill

That is the question. Do we need a Bill of Rights in Australia?

Australia is currently the only Commonwealth country, and one of only a few industrialized nations, that has no official legal protection for human rights. Australia has signed many international human rights conventions. But commitments do not become real until laws have been passed or government policies, programs and services have been established.

The weakness of human rights protection in Australia in recent years has become obvious as some rights have been reduced or lost. Many of us have discussed and protested about

- changes to Medicare and tertiary education
- workplace relations laws
- the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees
- changes to native title laws
- anti-terrorism laws

So which rights are protected in Australia? The 1901 Australian Constitution spelt out the relationship between the Commonwealth and State governments, but it has no Charter or Bill of Rights. It provides only limited protection for rights including

- freedom of religion
- trial by jury
- acquisition of property on just terms
- some implied rights such as freedom of political expression

Some rights are protected in state and federal laws but these are obligations and restrictions placed on governments and individuals and human rights are rarely clear in legislation. The exceptions are anti-discrimination laws which clearly refer to the human rights they protect, for example:

- the Race Discrimination Act
- the Sex Discrimination Act
- the Disability Discrimination Act

But even here there are gaps in Australia's legislation. Discrimination based on someone's religion or sexuality is not banned in federal legislation.

Common law is the area of law not covered by legislation or the Constitution. It includes decisions made by judges, which set a precedent for future decisions, and

"[A] bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular, and what no just government should refuse."

— Thomas Jefferson December 20, 1787

unwritten principles of law. It concentrates on providing methods of protection rather than spelling out human rights. In the High Court decision *Mabo v Queensland Justice Brennan* said that international human rights standards are "a legitimate and powerful influence on the development of the common law". The *Mabo* decision allows courts in Australia to look at international human rights principles when making decisions about people's rights. Not surprising that it is not liked by our current leader!

I started my research for this article because of my perception that my rights were being increasingly eroded. Then when I looked hard, I was horrified to find how few rights I have, written down in black and white. If I were to enter a contract of some kind I would like to see what I was signing up for. I regard my Australian citizenship as a contract, and I would like to see my human rights clearly enshrined in that contract. It is all very well for the Australian government to insist on certain things from those applying for Australian citizenship. I think we should be insisting that Australian citizenship brings certain rights and that these rights are guaranteed by protection in law.

The most effective way to ensure full and ongoing protection of human rights is to adopt a Charter or Bill of Rights based on international human rights standards. This can be done two ways – by the introduction of ordinary legislation or by constitutional reform. A Bill of Rights introduced by ordinary legislation could give broad guarantees of rights and freedoms that do not exist now. However, it could be amended to reduce human rights protection, and is subject to the political climate, as we have seen recently with those rights we thought we had. UK and New Zealand both have legislative Bills of Rights. A Constitutional Bill of Rights protects human rights and freedoms from being changed easily. It would have to be introduced or changed by referendum, and we all know the difficulties there. The USA, Canada and South Africa all have constitutional Charters or Bills of Rights.

The only way we will get a Bill of Rights is to demand one. If you are writing to candidates during this election campaign, perhaps one question you might ask is whether they would support a Bill of Rights. If you discuss the need with others, they might do the same.

Lorraine Inglis

Our OWN Writers

Walking Stick

I have joined the Walking Stick Brigade – when I can find the bloody stick that is. Mine assumes a life of its own and hides itself in the most unlikely places. Why should I put it in the bookcase or behind the washing machine? Sometimes, out walking, it manoeuvres itself in front of my foot so that I almost trip over it. It is a malicious bit of a stick.

However, it comes into its own in the supermarket. I am vertically challenged, and for years I have lusted after the arcane goodies on the top shelf. Now I raise the stick and gently nudge my prize to the edge where, hopefully, it falls into my waiting trolley and not onto the back of any innocent bystander or a sleeping baby. This is not to be tried on jars, tins or bottles.

I am now working on a device which grasps the object and carries it within my reach. Look out for me on the next *New Inventors*.

Judith Mustard

Campervanning in Outback Queensland

Doug gently wound the campervan through the wattle and bottlebrushes and found the perfect place to stop for a couple of days with just the scents and sounds of the bush to delight us. So quiet. And then we heard a distant rumble coming our way, disturbing our peace. I turned to Doug and was surprised to see a smile on his face.

“Train!” he shouted and ran through the bushes towards the sound. Yet, it was a train in a deep cutting below us. Doug waved – no response.

“Fifty-three carriages, full of coal I guess. Wow!” Trains are one of his favorite things ever since his Hornby set when he was a kid. So this was

idyllic to Doug, and I got into the fun of it. We’d hear the distant rumble and scoot off to the edge of the cutting.

“Here it comes,” we’d yell as it curled its way round the track below us. Doug waved and shouted. No reply; so I took off my hat, jumped up and down – and got two waves and two toots!

Woman power!

Joan Johns

Body Snatchers

Most of you have read the scare-mail about the person whose kidneys were stolen while he was passed out. Well, read on. While the kidney story was an urban legend, this one is not. It’s happening every day.

My thighs were stolen from me during the night a few years ago. It was just that quick. I went to sleep in my body and woke up with someone else’s thighs. The new ones had the texture of cooked oatmeal. Who would have done such a cruel thing to legs that had been mine for years? Whose thighs were these and what happened to mine? I spent the entire summer looking for my thighs. Finally, hurt and angry, I resigned myself to living out my life in jeans and Sheer Energy pantyhose. Then, just when my guard was down, the thieves struck again.

My backside was next. I knew it was the same gang, because they took pains to match my new rear end to the thighs they stuck me with earlier. I couldn’t believe that my new bottom was attached at least three inches lower than my original. Now, my rear complemented my legs, lump for lump. Frantic, I prayed that long skirts would stay in fashion.

It was two years ago when I realized my arms had been switched.

One morning I was fixing my hair and I watched horrified but fascinated as the flesh of my upper arms swung to and fro with the motion of the hairbrush.

This was really getting scary. My body was being replaced one section at a time. How clever and fiendish.

Age? Age had nothing to do with it. Age is supposed to creep up, unnoticed, something like maturity. NO, I was being attacked repeatedly and without warning. In despair, I gave up my T-shirts.

What could they do to me next?

My poor neck suddenly disappeared faster than the Thanksgiving turkey it now resembled. That’s why I decided to tell my story. I can’t take on the medical profession by myself. Women of the world, wake up and smell the coffee. That really isn’t plastic that those surgeons are using.

You KNOW where they are getting those replacement parts, don’t you? The next time you suspect someone has had a face “lifted”, look again. Was it lifted from you? I think I finally found my thighs - and I hope that Cindy Crawford paid a really good price for them!

This is not a hoax. This is happening to women in every town every night. **WARN YOUR FRIENDS!**

P.S. I must say that last year I thought someone had stolen my breasts. I was lying in bed and they were gone! As I jumped out of bed, I was relieved to see that they had just been hiding in my armpits as I slept.

Now I keep them hidden in my waistband.

Contributed by Sandy MacDonald

If a Dog Were Your Teacher



If a dog was a teacher you would learn things like:

- * When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.
- * Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.
- * Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy
- * Take naps.
- * Stretch before rising.
- * Run, romp, and play daily.
- * Thrive on attention and let people touch you.
- * Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.
- * On warm days, stop to lie on your back on the grass.
- * On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.
- * When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.
- * Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.
- * Eat with gusto and enthusiasm. Stop when you have had enough.
- * Be loyal.
- * Never pretend to be something you're not.
- * If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
- * When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.
- * Be always grateful for each new day.

Contributed by Barbara Malcolm

Jubilation Celebration

End of Year, Christmas, Hanukkah, Summer Solstice, Holidays...

We celebrate them all, any excuse, so come along!



Where:
OWN Office 87
Lower Fort
Street

When:
Friday, 21
December,
6.00pm

What:
Bring a plate, or a
bottle, and join
us!

Theatre Group Christmas Luncheon

Wednesday 12th December,
12.30pm

We cordially invite our friends to join us.
Please phone Brigid Sen on (02) 9665 1345
by 27 November if you wish to join us.
We look forward to seeing you there

The Venue -

The Adam Room - Masonic Club, 169
Castlereagh Street, Sydney (Opposite the Great
Synagogue, between Park and Market Streets)

Cost per person \$40.

If you include a glass of wine on arrival the cost
will be \$44.

Menu: Roast turkey and ham and trimmings
with rich turkey and cranberry sauce.
Christmas Pudding with Brandy Anglaise
Sauce

Bon bons on table

If preferred the main course can be
changed to fillet of salmon on a bed of
lemon and dill with mashed potato and
white wine and watercress sauce

Cheques payable to OWN NSW by 27 November
2007

Train the Brain and Body

November 12 10am to 1pm

Worried about your memory? Think you're
losing it? What can we do to prevent the
deleterious effects of ageing?

Scientists and clinicians from the University of
NSW and the Prince of Wales Hospital will
answer these questions at a free forum aimed at
older people living in the community.

You are invited, so come along, enjoy morning
tea and learn how to "Train the Brain and
Body". Easts Leagues Club, Spring St, Bondi
Junction.

Contact Filomena Romano 9382 3753

Our OWN Writers

Death by Fire

I heard the ABC news and then settled back comfortably for the 7.30 Report, expecting to hear the latest desperate promises being made by the increasingly agitated John Howard in his frantic attempts to go on living in Kirribilli House after the elections. Well, the 7.30 report started and I stopped being comfortable!

It was a story about the women of Afghanistan and what is happening to them every day. We in the Western world rather believed (or wanted to believe) that the end of the Taliban regime in 2001 meant social change in Afghanistan: girls could now go to school, conditions for women had changed, they were no longer immured in their houses behind darkened windows, they were not forced to wear the burhka any more. Unfortunate refugees who landed illegally in Australia were now sent back to their “democratic” country. Mr Ruddock said it was safe for them to return.

BUT it seems that the male-dominated culture has not diminished or changed one iota. Nor has any social welfare been introduced. Thousands of war widows, with no social benefits at all, are forced to beg every day for sustenance for themselves and their children. The film showed hundreds of these poor women covered with their blue burkhas and peering through the grills, lining the filthy, dusty streets of Kabul and other cities every day begging. Men stand around and mock them and call abuse. Women should be home! Sometimes they are thrown a coin. A woman reporter from Rawa (more later) films one woman as she goes to her squalid room at the end of the day. Her two teenage daughters are there. They tell the reporter they would like to study. It is now legal for women but they cannot afford books, notebooks or even pencils. So they cannot attend school.

Now comes the most shocking part. In sheer desperation, women are resorting to self immolation which is happening in huge numbers in Afghanistan. In Herat alone there have been 56 self immolations this year. Women who are forced into marriage and suffering chronic abuse are quite simply pouring kerosene over themselves and setting themselves on fire. One such burn victim in the hospital aged 20 told the reporter she had been sold into marriage by her father when she was 14 to pay his gambling debts. After six years of misery she set fire to herself. Even though divorce is now legal in Afghanistan she was not able to do so because she had been legally sold and was the property of her husband! She was photographed, huddled in her hospital bed, in great pain and not expected to live much longer.

The horrific stories continued. One husband, a college lecturer, murdered his wife because she was a well known poet and “more popular” than he was. He was sent to gaol but released four months later. For half an hour I watched this litany of horrors.

Of course I knew something about the awful lives of Afghan women, but the graphic pictures on our National TV drove home the full horror of it all.

A group of far-sighted and courageous women began an organisation to further education and organisation of women, but after the Soviet occupation in 1979 they became quickly involved with a war of resistance. Since the overthrow of the Soviet puppet regime in 1992 they have focused on the political struggle against the fundamentalists and the Taliban. It is called RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women) and after the defeat of the Taliban by the USA and Northern Alliance, they tried to warn the world that the Northern Alliance was equally fundamentalist and dangerous. RAWA continues to lack any formal support from major democratic countries around the world.

They say that the current government under President Karzai has no popular support and that fundamentalists under the old warlords are still enforcing anti-women laws as they were under the Taliban, and women are still forced to obey strict dress and behaviour codes.

In spite of this, RAWA and their supporters from round the world continue to create secret schools, orphanages and nursing courses.

I felt despair that there was nothing much one single woman, far away from Afghanistan, could do, so I ‘googled’ RAWA, to be better informed and I learnt more about these extraordinary women who are devoted to changing the age-old culture of male-domination in their country and helping to improve conditions for women. At least you will be made aware of the utter indifference of our government and other so-called democratic forces in the world to the plight of many women in the Third World.

Muriel Hortin

The Future of Women’s Health Policy

You are invited to attend a strategy meeting to discuss OWN’s response to The Australian Women’s Health Network discussion paper, “Women’s Health: The New National Agenda”.

on Tuesday 13 November from 10.30 to 12.30 at 75 Windmill Street, Millers Point



Prescription Medicines for the Elderly

I was recently prescribed two drugs to improve absorption of calcium into my bloodstream. Fortunately I was being monitored, as one of them caused a drop in my sodium levels to below normal and the other resulted in excess calcium in my urine. Consequently I was instructed to cease taking both medications immediately. Other patients have not been as fortunate, according to an extensive article published last August in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The article cites research by geriatricians at major NSW hospitals and surveys by the University of South Australia and the University of Western Australia which show that tens of thousands of elderly patients are being poisoned by the very medicines that are supposed to help them. Each year between 85,000 and 110,000 people are admitted to hospital due to adverse effects of their medication. A survey of Western Australian hospital admissions showed that adverse drug-related admissions for people over 60 more than doubled between 1991 and 2002.

A study of more than 192,000 veterans and war widows found that the figures could be extrapolated nationally and equated to show that almost 400,000 Australians aged 70 or over are taking at least one drug considered potentially harmful to the elderly, for which there is a safer alternative.

It seems that too many doctors – working in isolation – are either over prescribing or prescribing the wrong medication! Pharmaceutical companies make a huge amount of money from drugs as do some doctors with conflicts of interest. This, together with the fact that many



people expect either to remain well in their latter years and/or to live forever, is apparently the underlying cause of the problem.

Studies also show that up to 30 per cent of hospital admissions, of people aged 75 or over, are not only related to their medication, but almost half are preventable. The president of the Australian and New Zealand Society for Geriatric Medicine, Dr Peter Hunter, said that medical students are told that drugs are definitely the main cause of confusion in older people. The drugs most often implicated are long-acting benzodiazepines, tranquilizers used to treat sleeplessness and anxiety, which can increase confusion and drowsiness, leading to falls and broken bones. Other drugs prescribed to treat depression, heart conditions and bladder ailments are also implicated.

Another study of well functioning older people indicates that the number of drugs taken by a person may be less of a problem than the kind of drug. The fact is that most drugs prescribed for older people are trialed on younger people and many doctors tend to treat the disease rather than the person. **However, it is vital that patients should not discontinue their medications without first consulting their doctors.**

June West

The New National Agenda

Australia's *National Women's Health Policy* adopted in 1989 led the world in delivering health policy that responded to the specific health needs and issues facing women. It was based on a social model of health and acknowledged that social, environmental, economic, biological and gender factors influenced health outcomes.



It resulted in a tremendous collaboration between States and Federal Governments, targeted groups of women at risk and tackled seven priority health issues for women.

One of the groups seen to be at risk were older women which was the starting point for the development of the model of wellness achieved by OWN.

Other outcomes were more women's health services, provision of health information for women, research and data collection on women's health, participation in decision making for women, training of health care providers. It ran over two four-year periods to 1997 and then, after the introduction of the new Public Health Outcomes Framework agreements (PHOFAs) in 1997, the specific focus on women's health policy at the national level was lost.

The Australian Women's Health Network at its recent Summit in Canberra presented a discussion paper which proposes that "A New National Agenda" on women's health for Australia is now essential, and needs to be established before the 2010 election. Anyone interested in making comments can obtain a copy of the paper from Beth Eldridge, at the OWN office.

The Wellness Coordinating Committee has decided to call a **meeting on Tuesday 13 November at 10.30am** at 75 Windmill Street to discuss this document to help us to develop a response from older women. To make sure that older women are part of the development of this new policy we need to act now. We would be pleased to welcome women interested in health policy issues for older women.

Renate Watkinson

OWN ADVOCACY

Driving Licenses for Older People

The following letter was sent by OWN NSW to the Road and Traffic Authority in response to their Discussion Paper on the subject:

At the outset, we would like to express our approval of being given an opportunity to comment on the proposed licensing system for older drivers, rather than having it mandatorily imposed. From that point on, we strongly protest the ageist, paternalistic and ill-supported attitudes that pervade this proposal.

We do not contest the current requirements regarding health checks at 80 and a driving test at 85, but the arguments contained in your own Discussion Paper on the subject are contradictory and unconvincing.

You state that “older driver crash risk is difficult to determine,” and that “older drivers may have a marginally lower crash risk per kilometre than other drivers,” yet you suggest the imposition of a 10km radius (or nearest country town) restriction on drivers over the age of 85. In fact, your graph on average annual road fatalities shows that the over-85’s are much more likely to be the victims as pedestrians or passengers rather than as drivers.

Although your paper contains two graphs of road casualties by age group, we note with interest that there is no graph to indicate what class of driver is responsible for the majority of accidents. This suggests that such a graph would show little need for restricting elderly drivers, in spite of the various possible performance impairments you list. This may be because, as you have acknowledged, elderly

drivers self-restrict with regard to factors such as daylight, traffic conditions and fatigue. Judging from media reports of the loss of many young lives in horrendous car crashes, it would seem more reasonable to consider imposing daylight and radius restrictions on drivers up to the age of 22.

You have acknowledged that loss of a driver’s licence strips an elderly person of his/her freedom, contact with their important network of family and friends and access to food and medical services. All this is a crushing blow to that person’s lifestyle, especially if they live far from public transport or are unable to climb into a bus.

Suggestion 1. Provide elderly citizens distant from public transport with half-price cab fare vouchers similar to those already available for disabled people. Such a system also operates in Vacaville, California. The offer may have to be restricted to a distance limit, but at least it would provide useful support for citizens at a time when they need practical help.

Suggestion 2. Introduce and subsidise 70+ driving refresher courses. These would undoubtedly delay the need for Suggestion 1.

As you acknowledged in the introduction to your Discussion Paper, today’s older drivers are healthier and more active than previous generations and in most cases have a great deal more acuity than their parents at the same age. It is unjust, insulting and ageist that they should be subjected to unnecessary tests because the RTA needs to be seen to be taking some action to reduce the number of road accidents, when its own statistics show that the elderly cause marginally fewer than the rest of the population.

OWN NSW

NSW Aged Care Alliance Federal Election Issues Kit

The NSW Aged Care Alliance Federal Election Issues Kit is now online at <http://ncoss.org.au/hot/ACA-Election-Kit-2007.pdf>

The Kit sets out the Alliance’s priorities for older people in NSW in the upcoming election. The Kit is designed for use by older people and their supporters when approaching local candidates. They can either use the entire Kit or simply take out the issue of their choosing. The Kits will also be useful after the election, indicating the Alliance’s priorities for the Australian Government for older people in coming years. [Similarly, the NSW State Election Kit from early 2007 is available on the NCOSS website www.ncoss.org.au]

OWN NSW can email you a copy if you have difficulty accessing the site. Under special circumstances we will arrange to send you a printed copy of this 30 page document which will make an invaluable resource for planning your OWN local campaign of political action. Contact the office on 9247 7046 to discuss.

Why Doesn't Somebody Do Something?

Ever found yourself in a difficult or frustrating situation and discovered these words erupting like some ancient mantra?

It's a bizarre phenomenon that as women age, despite the fact that statistically many of us increase in mass, we curiously become increasingly invisible to those younger than ourselves.

Unfortunately this social invisibility is also accompanied by a systemic disregard for our changing needs and desires, and a lack of recognition for the contribution that we make to the effective functioning of the societies in which we live.

It's up to you to decide if you are going to let these kinds of moments disempower you, or turn the anger and frustration into action, and ask, how can I change things?

Look around you and ask 'How many other women like me feel the same way?' What set you off? Is it a particular issue that impacts on you locally - like the withdrawal of a bus service, or the fact that your group has to pay to use a community room to meet, when other groups get it for free? Is it something wider - like the state of Dental Care, or lack of support for Carers? What ever it is, you can be sure you are not the only one feeling outraged. By the same token, you can't always assume there is some agency that will be able to effectively lobby and communicate your particular perspective. Many organizations approach OWN NSW, asking us to submit discussion papers on proposals, send representatives to meetings, or nominate women to sit on advisory boards, because they do value - and in many cases are obliged to consider - the perspective of older women.

As the population ages, this demand for advocates is increasing, and unfortunately within the OWN network my existing core of advocates are already overstretched, and would love to mentor a new generation, and develop our advocacy skills across all OWN groups

Essentially OWN advocacy is about identifying situations where you feel older women's rights, dignity and wellbeing are being compromised, or that there is potential for enhancement, and action needs be taken. You then connect with other like-minded women to work towards lobbying for a solution. It is also importantly about keeping issues of concern to older women on the political agenda at all levels of government, and ensuring that older women remain a visible and viable force.

Contact Beth Eldridge, OWN NSW if you'd like to discuss joining our Advocacy register.

OWN NSW 87 Lower Fort Street Millers Point NSW 2000 PH: 9247 7046 info@ownnsw.org.au

Women's Housing Company Ltd.

Established in 1982, the Women's Housing Company (WHC) assists single women to obtain affordable housing options. What they can offer is

- Long term housing
- Short, medium and long-term partnerships together with support agencies for women who require support services as well as safe housing
- Affordable long-term housing for women who work

Only women who live alone can apply for long-term housing and the same eligibility criteria apply as for public housing with the Department of Housing (DoH). Women already living in DoH accommodation are not eligible unless they live in a bedsit. There is usually a waiting period of 2-6 years depending on need, location, health and social requirements. Women may apply on compassionate grounds if otherwise they are ineligible.

Rent is charged at 25% of total gross (before tax) income and reviewed 6 monthly. This includes any financial investments and all forms of income and assets. Once housed, changes of income and assets need to be documented to WHC immediately and take effect immediately. A standard property consists of a one-bedroom unit with a shower or bath. Security is provided by a deadlock on the main door in combination with a security screen on the unit door or a security main door to the block of units.

Application forms can be requested by phone, email or in person from WHC (please refer to the contact details below). All applications will be assessed and applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome. Once an applicant has been assessed as eligible they will be placed on a waitlist. It is important that, once a applicant is on the waitlist, they keep touch with WHC regularly with relevant updates on individual housing needs.

76-84 Foveaux St Surry Hills, NSW 2010
Phone: 02 9281 1764
Fax: 02 9281 0148
E-mail: receptionn@womenshousingcompany.org

Public opening hours are:
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday:
9am-4.30pm
Wednesday: 1pm-4.30pm or by appointment.

Application Forms are also available from the OWN NSW office, 87 Lower Fort St. Millers Point.

Notices

Future of Volunteering Survey - has been extended!

Please contact OWN or go via web to participate.

Is volunteering a doomed activity? Where will the volunteers of the future come from? What will motivate them? What might volunteering look like in the future? What forms might volunteering take?

The key objectives of the project are to develop an understanding of policy issues and implications given the changes in demographics and patterns of volunteering, as well as guidance for those organisations funding and managing volunteers. The initial focus is New South Wales; however there is already interest from other states and countries to replicate the project.

Any organisation or individual with experience in volunteering or managing volunteers is encouraged to participate in this programme. The more stories we are able to collect, the greater the pool of stories that can be used to identify themes and patterns around volunteering.

For further information please contact Chris Fletcher on 0402308403 or www.cognitive-edge.com/surveys/fov/

OWN Aust Conference 26-27 Nov 2007

Will be held at Burgmann College at the ANU in Canberra, where OWN (Action) hosted the Conference four or five years ago.

For registration forms contact your group Coordinator.

Elections will be held for OWN (A) Council, so please consider nominating for a position. We will need a new Convenor, Secretary and Treasurer, plus state Councillors for those states not represented in those positions.

Up for some Romance?

Dendy Films are releasing the romantic melodrama **ANGEL** nationally on November 8.

Picture this, England, 1905, Angel Deverell is a gifted young writer who dreams of success, fame and love. But what will happen if all her dreams come true?

Like Baz Luhrmann's Moulin Rouge!, **ANGEL** revels in its penny novel plot and uses it as an excuse for a design that seeks to be on par with the oversized emotions of the story.

Acclaimed director Francois Ozon's lavish story pays homage to the Technicolor studio films and Hollywood melodramas in the grandest style possible (think *Gone with the Wind* meets *Absolutely Fabulous!*).

Starring Romola Garai (*Amazing Grace*), Michael Fassbender (*300*), Sam Neill (*Jurassic Park*) and Charlotte Rampling (*The Wings of the Dove*).

www.dendyfilms.com.au

Healthy Ageing Talk 'Managing Arthritis'

Jacqui Louth, Arthritis Educator and Coordinator of the Challenging Arthritis Self-Management Program at Arthritis NSW

Dealing with common arthritis conditions, self-management, exercise, healthy diet, complimentary therapies and medication, looking after your joints and joint replacement.

Thursday 8 November 2007 at 9.30 am

Venue: Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney

Bookings essential (02) 9286 3860

Morning tea will be provided at 9.30am for a 10.00am start. Attendance is free for COTA (NSW) members, \$5.00 for non-members

Requests 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's 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% of my estate to the Older Women's Network for its general purpose or the specific purpose of

The gift you make to OWN will be an enduring record of your generosity.

OWN Sydney Notices

Subscribe NOW!

- Subscription to *OWN Matters* is \$22 per year, these are due every JULY 1.
- Want to join **OWN Sydney** at the same time? We can fix this up in the same way, if you tick this box and include just another \$5
- Would you like to donate? \$.....

Payment method

- I enclose a chq/money order for \$22/\$27 - to Jun30, 2008 made payable to OWNNSW OR
- Please debit the following credit card for \$22/\$27 (plus any donation)

Visa

Mastercard

Bankcard

Total amount:

Card no.

____/____/____

Exp. date __/__/__

Name on card (please print)

Signature

Address

State & Post Code

I need the large print version (on A3)

I'd love it on email

Email only - don't post

Email address:

What are friends for?

Please send the above subscription to:

Name:

Signature

Address

State & PC

Members and friends are welcome to attend all activities

Wellness on Wednesdays

9.30am-11.45am every Wednesday

Held in Mott Hall, Argyle St., Millers Point.

Film Discussion group

You are invited to join **Tuesday 13 November**, to see *A Mighty Heart*, other films recommended for viewing are *Michael Clayton* and *Away from Her*.

Please ring Yetty on 9665 2050 to check details.

Creative Movement

Join us in Mott Hall on Thursday mornings at 10.15 to discover your inner rhythms! Check with office for term dates:

9247 7046

OWN UP – Unashamedly Political Discussion Group

10.30am to 1.00pm, next meetings Friday 9 November at 75 Windmill Street, Millers Point.

Have an early cuppa with us and bring a sandwich for lunch. This is our last meeting for 2007, our next one being Friday 9 February 2008, then monthly on every 2nd Friday

Contact Lola on 9665 8741.

Inner-West Networking Group - IWNG

- Meet on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month from 2-4pm **IWNG Meeting** - Leichhardt Market Place, Cnr Marion & Flood Streets, (Community Room ground floor behind Tandy).

Networking, mutual support, sharing interests, social activities.

Buses serving the area are: 470, 435, 436, 437, and 438

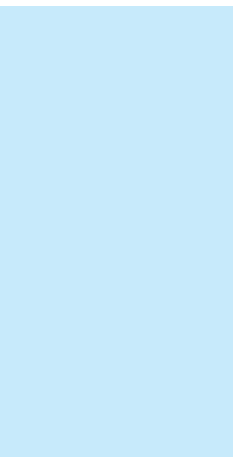
All OWN members are welcome. Just turn up, or contact the OWN office on 9247 7046 or Jan on 9692 9400 OWN Members from other areas are welcome!

Jubilation -

Reaching out to retirees, all OWN members welcome 6pm-8.30pm, the 3rd Friday of each month, at 87 Lower Fort St, or dining out together at affordable Sydney eateries. Contact OWN NSW on 9247 7046.

IF UNDELIVERED PLEASE RETURN TO:
Older Women's Network NSW Inc.
87 Lower Fort Street
Millers Point NSW 2000

OWN Matters



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