



Ten Forty Matrix Newsletter

May 2018

www.olderdykes.org

What's On?

Dinner and Discussion Group for Older Lesbians

Topic: All About Us
Our lives and histories as lesbians

5.45 for 6pm

Saturday 2 June 2018

Cate Turner, who has had a long and active life as a lesbian, will open the evening with a little of her herstory. Then we will all get a chance to share and compare our own stories in small groups.

No bookings required, and we warmly welcome any newcomers.

Mervyn Fletcher Hall, 81 Dalhousie Street (cnr Dixon St), Haberfield.

BYO food to share and your own drinks.

Gold coin donation

For further information

contact@olderdykes.org

Dykes for Dinner

6.30pm Thursday 14 June

The Royal Hotel
156 Norton Street Leichhardt

No BYOG

440 bus from Central

RSVP to by Sunday 10 June

contact@olderdykes.org



6.30pm Thursday 12 July

Surjits Indian
215 Parramatta Road
Annandale

BYO and licenced

Any bus along Parramatta Road

RSVP by Sunday 8 July

contact@olderdykes.org

Out & About

A monthly social group in the Sydney area.
For details about the February event, please email contact@olderdykes.org

For your diaries...

Future topics for Dinner and Discussion Group for Older Lesbians

August: The Demented Fear of Dementia

Presented by Pearlie

Saturday 4 August 6-9pm

More info in the July newsletter

October: Open Mic Night

Saturday 6 October 6-9pm

Advance notice seeking musicians, singers and comedians for a fun night of entertainment, music, song and more.

Contact Sandy to register your interest in performing.

Email: contact@olderdykes.org

More info in the September newsletter

Summer Solstice Party

Saturday 22 December

More info in the November newsletter

Report from our April meeting

The topic was 'Choose a lesbian and/or feminist (dead or alive!) to take to dinner'.

What was interesting about our choices was that of the eleven lesbians invited to dinner seven were from the USA, one was Australian, one Swedish, one Irish and one Mexican. Interestingly no women from the UK!

Below is an overview of our chosen lesbians...

Jane Addams 1860-1935



Jane was a USA suffrage and social activist. She is known as the mother of social work. She was from an affluent, conservative home but her father supported her attendance at University. Her studies were interrupted

by illness, the result of childhood spinal tuberculosis, and she suffered ongoing health problems for the rest of her life.

Jane read widely and was influenced by writings about 'settlement houses'. These houses were for educated people to live with poorer people and support their education. Jane visited the first settlement house, Toynbee Hall, in England.

She and her partner Ellen Gates Starr bought a decrepit mansion called Hull House. Together they repaired it and over many years established both a home for themselves and many other women (many of them lesbian) as well as needy poor women. Activities included caring for children of working parents and nursing the sick. Over time the settlement grew to include an art gallery, a public kitchen, elder care, a gymnasium, public baths, literacy and citizenship preparation classes, health clinics, an art studio, a music school, a drama program, a circulating library, a meeting place and museum for labour unions, and an employment centre.

Though deeply rooted in the local neighbourhood, Jane's activism extended well beyond it. She was devoted to causes such as women's suffrage, the rights of children, the peace movement, the eradication of racism and other progressive and reform movements.

Jane helped to establish the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and was president for many years. Her extensive political activity in so many fields led to her being awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1931.

Jane fell in love with Mary Rozet Smith and lived with her for 30 years until Mary's death in 1934.

Queen Christina 1626-1689



After her father's in death in 1632 Kristina (her original name) became Queen, aged 6. Her father had given instructions for his only child to be educated as a prince which meant she studied art, philosophy,

languages as well as ballet to improve her grace and poise. It's hard to think that she enjoyed the latter very much, as she was always somewhat contemptuous of "feminine" things, probably preferring fencing, which she learnt along with horsemanship.

In 1644, aged 18, Kristina was crowned Queen of Sweden. From an early age she wore men's clothing and made her distaste for the idea of marriage obvious.

She had an intense relationship with Ebba Sparre with whom she maintained correspondence for many years after leaving Sweden.

Kristina converted to Roman Catholicism which was forbidden for a ruler of Sweden.

This combined with a lack of interest in men and her desire to live as an open lesbian led her to abdicate in 1654.

The drama of her abdication inspired no less than four operas, as well as multiple novels and plays. It was even the subject of a Greta Garbo movie in 1933. The Hays Office made sure producer Louis B Mayer knew that any overt reference to her sexuality wouldn't be tolerated, so he had to give her a male love interest as the "real" reason she abdicates. Others were more open to her unconventional sexual identity. Throughout history there have always been people like Kristina – people who didn't fit into the narrow boundaries of society and gender.

Del Martin 1921–2008 and Phyllis Lyon 1925 –



This famous pair of USA activists began a relationship in 1952 until Del's death in 2008, aged 87. Phyllis is now 93.

Their key activism was the formation of the first lesbian organisation, Daughters' of Bilitis, which eventually had chapters all over

the USA and even one in Melbourne. Del and Phyllis produced a magazine called *The Ladder* which for a long time was the only journal written for and about lesbians.

They were active in NOW (National Organisation for Women) and were the first lesbians to take on senior roles in NOW, which had been opposed to out lesbians in earlier years.

In 1989 they joined the organisation Older Lesbians Organising for Change (OLOC). Their pioneer book *Lesbian Women* written in 1972 is still seen as a landmark text.

Rita Mae Brown 1944 –



Well known USA lesbian activist and writer of 37 lesbian fiction books, Rita Mae Brown is best known for writing one of the most influential lesbian novels of all time, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, which she wrote in 1973

She was a founder member of Lavender Menace, a radical lesbian feminist group set up in 1970 to combat lesbophobia in the National Organisation of Women (NOW). The president Betty Friedan, and many liberal members believed that having open

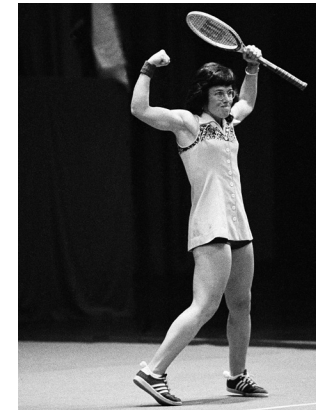
lesbians in NOW would alienate women and supporters from the organisation. Rita Mae was ultimately thrown out of the organisation. Twenty years later Betty apologised, acknowledging she was wrong.

Rita Mae and other lesbians from the Gay Liberation Front created *The Woman-Identified Woman*. The group then went on to become the Radicalesbians.

In 1979 Rita Mae Brown and Martina Navratilova began a relationship. They bought a horse farm in Charlottesville where they lived together until their breakup three years later. Rita Mae still lives on the farm, where she is surrounded by animals.

She is still a feminist activist, also a mystery writer, fox hunter, (the foxes are not killed) screenwriter, novelist, and animal rescuer.

Billie Jean King 1943 –



American tennis great Billie Jean King broke down barriers by pushing for equal prize money for women and becoming one of the first well-known gay athletes.

Although married, Billie Jean began a secret relationship with Marilyn Barnett, her hairdresser and personal assistant, in 1971.

What unfolded between the two women was marked by the repression of that period, although their relationship was clearly portrayed in the 2017 film, *Battle of the Sexes*.

In 1971, Billie Jean became the first woman athlete ever to win more than \$100,000 a year. She was the No. 1 ranked woman tennis player in the world through most of the 1960s and early 1970s, winning 39 Grand Slam titles.

In 1973, at age 29, she won the “Battle of the Sexes” tennis match against 55-year-old Bobby Riggs who was an arrogant and outspoken misogynist.

Billie Jean has been a consistent and strong advocate for gender equality and has long been a pioneer for social justice.

Regarded by many in the sport as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, King was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1987.

Dorothy Porter 1954 – 2008



Dorothy Porter was born in Sydney and attended the prestigious Queenwood School for

Girls before studying for an Arts degree at Sydney University, and later on a Diploma of Education. Before she became famous she worked on an Israeli kibbutz, as a bus

conductor on the Sydney buses, and taught creative writing in schools, prisons and community workshops.

Over the years Dorothy developed into a celebrated poet, best known for her many verse novels, in particular *The Monkey’s Mask*, which became a stage play and a film. Her verse novels tackle interesting and difficult issues: psychiatric hospitals in the 1960s, child sexual abuse, a lesbian detective, and a recreation of the life of Nefertiti’s husband, Akhenaten – a story of incest, heresy, androgyny and a massive cult of personality.

Dorothy found many outlets for writing, including fiction for young adults and libretti for chamber operas. She was working on a rock opera called *January* at the time of her death.

Dorothy (she preferred to be called Dot) was openly lesbian and in 1993 moved from Sydney to Melbourne to be with her partner, fellow writer Andrea Goldsmith. They lived together until Dorothy’s death, aged 54, from breast cancer. Dorothy was also a self-described pagan, committed to pagan principles of courage, stoicism and commitment to the earth and beauty.

Alix Dobkin 1940 –

Alix Dobkin was born in New York City into a Jewish communist family and was raised in Philadelphia and Kansas City. She gained a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1962. She



began her full-time career as a musician, playing guitar, and singing her own lyrics, in the Greenwich Village coffee house scene in the early sixties. In 1965 Alix married Sam

Hood who ran the Gaslight Cafe in Greenwich Village. Their daughter Adrian was born in 1970.

In 1971 she left the marriage and came out as a lesbian in 1972, turning to writing and singing for women in general and to building lesbian culture in particular. Alix was a well-known public personality and this was a brave stance. She identifies as a radical lesbian feminist; her first 1973 album *Lavender Jane Loves Women* is a lesbian classic.

Alix has been a highly vocal proponent of women-only space through her consistent exclusion of males. In a letter to the National Center for Lesbian Rights, she explained, “For over twenty years men have declared themselves ‘women,’ manipulated their bodies and then demanded the feminist seal of approval from survivors of girlhood. My lyrics are not ‘oppressive’ but refer to those of us who have a girlhood and a clitoris, and no one else”. She is a leader in Older Lesbians

Organising for Change (OLOC), a cooperative community of Old Lesbian feminist activists from many backgrounds working for justice and the wellbeing of all Old Lesbians.

In 2009, Alix wrote a memoir, *My Red Blood*, which was published by Alyson Books. Today, as well as her work in OLOC, she spends time with her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren.

Olive Byrne 1904 – 1990



Olive Byrne was the daughter of Ethel Byrne, who famously opened the first birth-control clinic in the United States with her sister Margaret Sanger. Olive would have been exposed

to her mother's strong feminist and radical views.

Olive, Elizabeth Marston and William Marston fell in love during the late 1920s at Tufts University where they were working as psychological researchers. The three became intimately involved in a polyamorous relationship and lived together for many years, with both women having Marston's children.

Olive and Elizabeth embodied the feminism of the day. They told census takers that Olive

was Elizabeth's widowed sister-in-law. Olive and Marston had two sons.

Inspired by Elizabeth and Olive, William would go on to create *Wonder Woman*, portraying lesbianism as normal and good, and women as powerful, loving, and in control of their own desires.

Jill Lepore reported in her book *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, that Olive has been credited by some as being Marston's inspiration for the physical appearance of *Wonder Woman*.

After William died in 1947, Olive and Elizabeth continued their relationship until Olive's death in 1990.

Eleanor Roosevelt 1884-1962



Eleanor was America's longest-serving First Lady – from 1933 to 1945 – before her husband Franklin D. Roosevelt died in office. Despite being born into great wealth and privilege Eleanor

became a fierce advocate for human rights, feminism, and the underprivileged.

Eleanor had a thirty-year love affair with journalist Lorena Hickok, an out lesbian whom she affectionately referred to as 'Hick'.

Lorena Hickok was loud and brash, loved food and drink, played a good game of poker, smoked a lot and swore frequently.

Meeting Hick transformed Eleanor's life. Lorena had grown up poor in rural South Dakota and worked as a servant after she escaped an abusive home. Hick's admiration drew Eleanor out of her shell, and they quickly fell in love. For the next thirteen years, Hick had her own room at the White House, next door to Eleanor's. Over the next thirty years, at different stages, they were lovers, confidantes, professional advisors, and caring friends.

Both were fiercely passionate and inspired each other to right the wrongs of the turbulent era in which they lived. During the Depression, Hick reported from the nation's poorest areas, and Eleanor used her reports to lobby the her husband, the President, for New Deal programs, which created jobs and provided financial support for the unemployed, the young, and the elderly.

Many people questioned the truth of a lesbian relationship between Eleanor and Hick, but if proof was needed, the following extracts from a letter she wrote tell a story.

"Hick my dearest – I cannot go to bed tonight without a word to you. I felt a little as though a part of me was leaving tonight. You have grown so much to be a part of my life that it is empty without you...I wish I could lie down beside you tonight & take you in my arms. I've been trying to bring back your face — to

remember just how you look. Funny how even the dearest face will fade away in time. Most clearly I remember your eyes, with a kind of teasing smile in them, and the feeling of that soft spot just north-east of the corner of your mouth against my lips.”

Frida Kahlo 1907-1954



Frida Kahlo was born to a Jewish German father and a Spanish/Indigenous mother. As a result Frida had a strong connection

to Mexican and indigenous culture and always dressed in traditional clothing.

Frida had polio as a child and in her teens was involved in a bus accident in which she was impaled in the pelvis with an iron rod and her spinal column broken in three places. This left her with a life of pain. She began painting during her long recovery.

Described as a surrealist painter, Frida employed a naïve folk art style to explore questions of identity, postcolonialism, gender, class, and race in Mexican society. Her paintings often had strong

autobiographical elements and mixed realism with fantasy.

Frida joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1927 and there met her long time (married-divorced-remarried) partner Diego Rivera, Mexico’s famous muralist and communist. Diego believed in free love and had many affairs. Although he did not tolerate Frida’s affairs with men, he encouraged or was open about her affairs with women. Frida herself was open about having many affairs with both men and women, including one with bisexual singer Josephine Baker.

The relationship between Frida and Josephine was impressive because they were two strong-willed women who stood up against racism and bigotry, which were wrapped up in the social conventions and norms of the early 20th century.

Frida’s other relationships with women are less known. Apparently, after Frida died her friends edited and destroyed parts of her diaries. It is possible that this aspect of her life was destroyed or edited out of history because of homophobia.

Dervla Murphy 1931 –

Dervla Murphy is an Irish travel writer who spent her early travels on a bicycle travelling alone with little in the way of resources, worked abroad and wrote many travel books.

As a young girl of 14 she left school to care for her disabled mother. She made short trips on her bike of between 3 and 6 weeks, and began

writing articles about her travels. Her father died in 1961 and her mother in 1962 which enabled her at 31 years old to set off on her famous trip from Ireland to India.

Dervla has a deep social conscience and her writings include her political concerns and opinions about the places she visits. She is a strong advocate for the disenfranchised and poor.

Despite the rumours there is no evidence of Dervla being a lesbian. Her relationship



with the late Terence de Vere White, who was literary editor of the Irish Times and a writer, resulted in the planned birth of Rachel in 1968.

Asked if it was tough being a single mother back then, Dervla says: “It wasn’t in the slightest bit tough because it didn’t bother me”. She and her daughter are very open about their lives and a documentary *Who is Dervla Murphy?* addresses this. However she remained single and travelled with her daughter when she was a child. More recently she has travelled with her daughter and her three grandchildren.

Big Rough Stones

by Margaret Merrilees

Award winning author Margaret Merrilees visited Sydney on 23 May to launch her novel *Big Rough Stones*. The title comes from a poem by South Australian Miriel Lenore, *the walls of lesbos* and mirrors the characters in the book who now, in their late sixties, deal with ageing as older lesbian feminists and recall their younger radical days.

Clearly Merrilees has lived the life she has illuminated with insight, wit and humour in her novel. Set in South Australia with flash backs to the seventies, eighties and nineties, those who were active lesbian feminists during these years will identify with the trials, tribulations, loves and joys of the characters.

This is a must read page turner for older lesbians. Get your library to order it if you can't afford to buy it. You may also like to read, *Fables Queer and Familiar*, also by Margaret Merrilees. This started out as an online serial and was also broadcast as a radio serial. Some of the same characters appear in both books.

Check out www.margaretmerrilees.com for more information. She leaves you wanting to read all about yourself because that is what you will find in the book, yourself and all your friends.

Sylvia

On the Water at Woy Woy

Sixteen women hungry for seafood arrived by train at Woy Woy. The train ride is a treat as it crosses the Hawkesbury River and then skirts Mullet Creek up to Woy Woy. From the station we found our lunch venue Fishermen's Wharf and from there some women went for a walk along the Brisbane Waters waterfront, while others had coffee or hit the op shop.

The seafood lunch was delicious and copious with fresh prawns and oysters and salt and pepper squid, salmon and more.

The day was full of friendly chatter and laughter which was only a problem if you found yourself in a designated quiet carriage on the train!

Many thanks to Jan for suggesting and organising this great day out.

Kel



About Ten Forty

The first national conference of Ten Forty in the mid-eighties attracted politically active feminists of all hues and sexualities. However, over time it became obvious that a huge majority of women attending follow-up meetings and activities in Sydney were lesbian feminists.

Today Ten Forty Matrix and Older Dykes refer to the same group of women. We enjoy discussion on the issues we face in work, life and at home, and hold regular fun events to keep us in touch with the lighter side of life.

Our website www.olderdykes.org encourages national and international connections between older lesbians.

You can pay an annual fee to join Ten Forty Matrix, or you can participate as a casual member. If you want to receive regular information about our activities and the free bi-monthly newsletter join our mailing list www.olderdykes.org/maillist/?p=subscribe

Newsletter

To receive a free emailed newsletter, please email contact@olderdykes.org

The web edition and back copies of the newsletter are available for download from our website www.olderdykes.org/about_us/newsletters.html

Who currently does what?

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Sandy

Newsletter: editing and layout Ruth and Dorothy