



Ten Forty Matrix Newsletter

September 2024

www.olderdykes.org

What's On

Dykes for Dinner

Thursday 12 September @ 6.30pm

Cafe Jolly - Italian Restaurant
165 Norton Street, Leichhardt
Our September Dinner will be at Cafe Jolly. It's a classic Italian Restaurant with homemade pasta and fresh Australian seafood. Gluten free and Vegan options available. BYO with \$2 per head cover charge. We will be sitting in the front section.

Situated opposite The Royal Hotel near to Short Street (cross street). Near to Bar Italia.

Free Parking available in the Council Car Park on Marion Street near the Town Hall. Looking forward to seeing you there!

Please RSVP to Fiona
fionarimes@gmail.com

Message: 0412954573

Out and About

Sunday 15 September @12 noon

Lunch at the
White Cockatoo Hotel
30 Terminus Street
Petersham

RSVP

Email Sharon at
biara1@optusnet.com.au

Country Lesbians Association

A Zoom event

Sunday 29 September 5 PM

Lesbian Fun
What do we do for fun?

You don't have to live outside Sydney to join us.

RSVP

Email Diann at
maude_au@yahoo.com

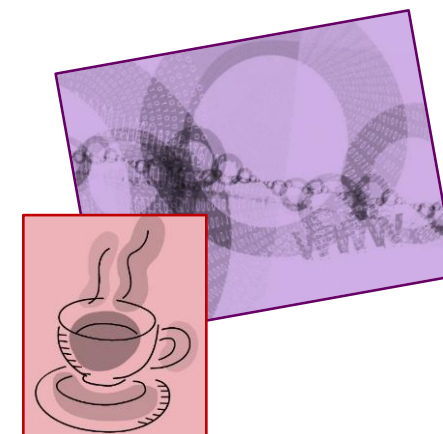
Recruitment for Websisters

Do you enjoy using computers? Would you like to learn how to help look after the Ten Forty website olderdykes.org and our Contact emails?

We are looking for women to join Websisters. We are a very friendly and supportive group, learning and sharing computer skills.

We meet once a month to discuss how things are going and have lunch.

If you are interested, contact Jan
ambrosia@bigpond.com.



Report on Dinner and Discussion for Older Lesbians

Held on 3 August 2024 6pm-8.30pm

Lesbian Antique Show

Thirteen enthusiastic older lesbians with their 'antique lesbian artefacts', attended a fun night at The Jimmy Little Community Centre. We gathered in a semi-circle to show our 'antiques' and give their provenance.

Jewellery

Krystyna had a fascinating collection of old jewellery. A rainbow Opera House, and a 40-year-old pendant engraved with two naked, entwined women, were interesting items. She also had other pendants, a large labrys and a double woman's symbol. Some items were gifts, others had a lost provenance.



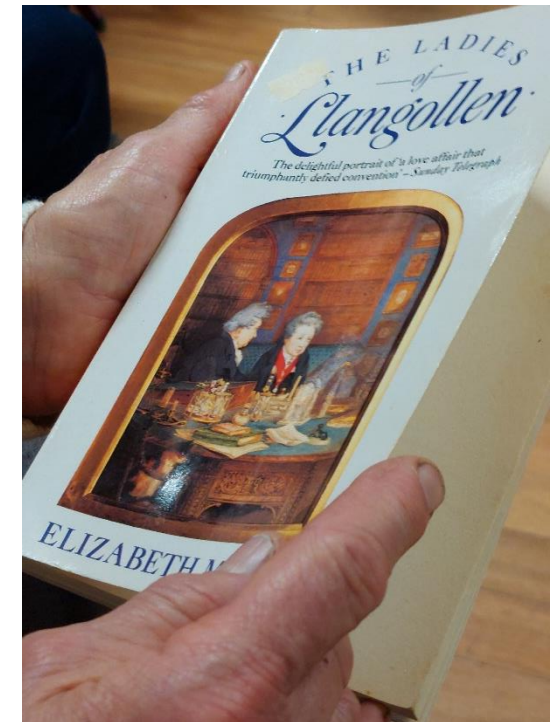
Badges

Jan produced a box of badges. The Ten Forty badge from 1992 must be rare. We all had our memories stirred by some of the badges we recognised. This generated much discussion.



Books and carvings

Sue G. had a lovely copy of the carving of the very ancient Venus of Willendorf, found in 1908 in a Palaeolithic village site in Austria. It was actual size and although not made of limestone, was an excellent replica. She bought it at the historical Feminist Bookshop 25 years ago. A quick check on the internet showed similar models selling for up to \$100. She also displayed two significant books; "Lesbian Short Stories," and "The Ladies of Llangollen."



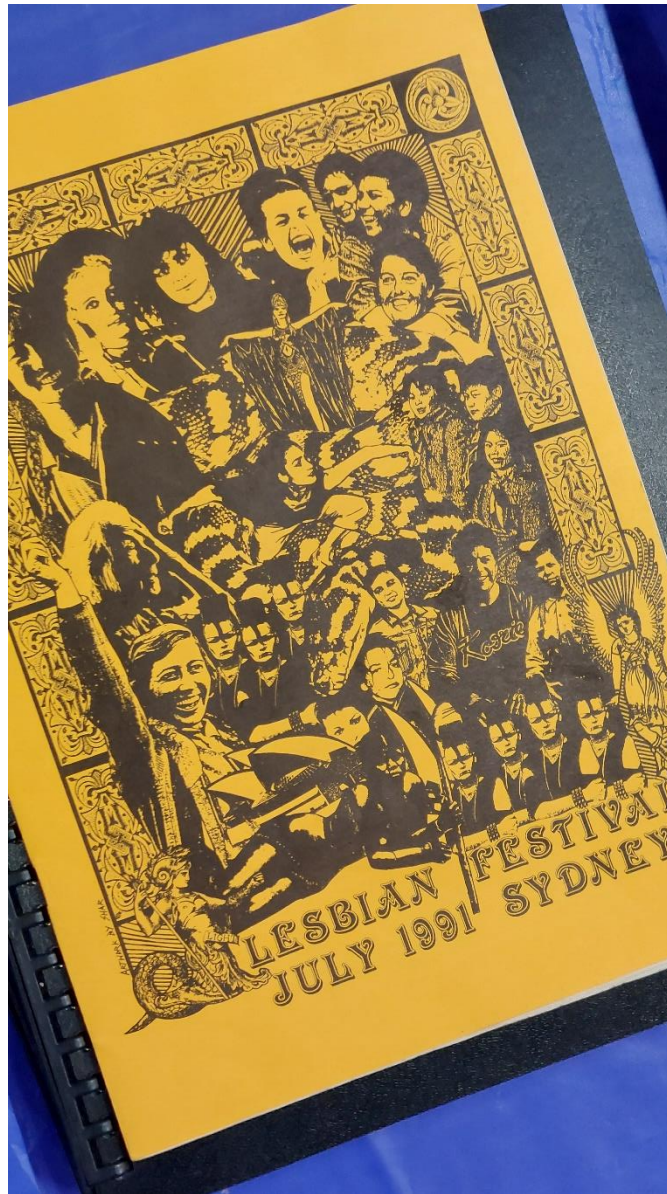
1991 Lesbian Festival

Diann, our brilliant photographer, brought a small selected collection of black and white photos from the 1991 Lesbian Festival in Sydney. She was one of the photographers for the event. More discussion was generated and eyes searched the photos for friends and well-known lesbians.

In 1991, we had a lesbian festival here in Sydney. It was a 10-day festival with a wide variety of events that was timed to coincide with a national lesbian conference that was happening at UTS. There was an art exhibition, a trade fair, there were plays, comedians, Unearthing Birdwood, an event from the women's lands, choirs and many women's bands. The festival culminated in the Opera House concert on the Sunday of the conference. Some events happened at Glebe High School, including the launch. Choir, comedy and theatre pieces happened at the Tom Mann Theatre and the Bondi Pavilion. Women's bands played at various Sydney venues.

The festival was partly a Lesbian Visibility event and partly a fundraising event for a project that envisaged buying a building that could become a lesbian culture and community centre in Sydney. It was definitely an uplifting 10 days.

Diann



Clover Club

Sylvia had her rare memorabilia from the Clover Dinner held on the SS South Steyne, to farewell the 30 years of the Clover Club. The ship itself is famous and in 2002 was still a floating restaurant near the Maritime Museum.

Clover Club was formed in Sydney by four lesbians who had been rejected by the Gay Clubs in Sydney on a night out in 1972. Sylvia was invited to write a story about the event for LOTL, which she did. Everyone there was given a badge and pen marked Clover Club.



Life size model of a clitoris

Wendy had a sexy surprise, a life size silicon model of a clitoris. This life-sized medical model of the clitoris was developed by Dr Ea Mulligan of Flinders University in Australia, and Professor Helen O'Connell of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, whose research had shown the full extent of the clitoris. It is possible to buy your own life size model from Sexual Health Quarters for only \$9.55. <https://shop.shq.org.au/product/clitoris-model/> Vale Dr Ea Mulligan who died only weeks ago at a very young age.



T-shirts

Sue I had a T-shirt which hailed from the National Lesbian Conference in Daylesford in 1998. Now that has to be a rare item today. How many lesbian conferences were held in Daylesford, and how many T-shirts have survived the ravages of time?



I am a lesbian tart

Rob brought her famous or is it infamous, T-Shirt with bold print, I am a lesbian tart. She gave us the following provenance story.

This T-shirt was designed by the brother of Anne Summers and was sold from stores set up in the lower Town Hall before the International Women's Day March in March 1973.

The t-shirt is owned by Robyne Plaister and has been worn to virtually every demonstration that Rob has attended for the Women's Movement or Lesbian Movement. The T-shirt was often photographed and also featured on News Reports on TV.

*The T-shirt is being left to the NSW Library Archives. **Rob***



Dancers

Margo had a small woven Aboriginal Flag with her. This was no ordinary flag but with her at the 1978 World Youth Festival in Cuba! Written on the very small flag were the words, Not Australian Uranium, and Aboriginal Land Rights. 46 years later those statements are still significant. The small flag is extremely rare.

Margo also had a model of two women Tango dancers, a gift from her friend Elsa who was from Buenos Aires. Elsa was an active member of Ten Forty who chose a natural burial when she died.



Greenham Common

The most unique item of historical and political significance was produced by Pearlie. Four curved green plastic-coated metal items, embedded onto a plastic stand. It was similar to a toast rack and could have been used for this purpose. No one had any idea what it was. Pearlie explained the metal curves were pieces from the fence which surrounded RAF Greenham Common.

Women's peace camps with thousands of women were set up from 1981-2000. All the women wanted was the removal of cruise missiles and end of use of nuclear weapons, and World peace. Pearlie tells us in her own words.

In Berkshire, England, at an RAF base, the USA set up their own nuclear weapon base that became known around the world as Greenham Common. On 5th September, 1981, a Welsh Women's group walked from their homes in Wales to the US base to protest the decision by the UK government to allow cruise missiles to be stored there. Their actions were ignored.

Women became more outraged and began creating camps at the various gates. In March, 1982, 250 women protested, attempting to get inside the base. 34 were arrested. Lesbians were among these activists and, as the numbers of protesters increased someone came up with an idea to Embrace the Base.

This took place in December, 1982, on a cold miserable winter's day. An estimated 30,000

women came from all over the British Isles to take part. Buses were queued up for miles. The perimeter fence was decorated with so many personal and political statements; posters, knitted items, photographs, ribbons, hand painted signs, banners and so much more. Someone had brought bolt cutters and from a section of fence pieces of barbed wire dropped to the ground. Some of those barbed wire pieces were kept as souvenirs. There were workshops to do something with the scraps. I have one such piece and I doubt I will ever forget that December day in Berkshire.

Pearlie



To round off the evening the participants were asked to decide which of three feminist magazines had the longest print life. Was it:

The Adelaide Women's Liberation Newsletter; Lesbian Network; or Lesbians on the Loose LOTL.

The answer: The Adelaide Women's Liberation Newsletter, 40 years 1970 – 2010. LOTL in print lasted 31 years and Lesbian Network ran for 22 years.

Feedback from the event

Despite the small numbers the energy and laughter of those present made it feel like a crowd. The key feedback was hearing the stories and enjoying the company of other older lesbians. The history embedded in the stories was not all known to everyone and we all learnt more about our activists. There was much laughter and fun sharing and seeing such interesting objects. The event was hailed a good idea. This idea was actually developed from Chris Sika's, Lesbian Antique Show held at a Meet in the Middle Camp, in western Victoria.

Sylvia 2024



Report on the Country Lesbians Association August zoom meeting Lesbian Antique Show

We had the Lesbian Antique show again with our CLA group. Great fun and some laughter and good memories. On our screens we shared our memorabilia and stories. Some of ours included:

Lesbian Network "more than just a newsletter."

It grew out of a lesbian publication workshop run by Lavender and Judith at the 1994 Women and Labour Conference, Brisbane, July 1984. This is the cover of first issue, September 1984.

Cover design and art by Lorri. Issue produced by collective - Penny, Judith, Lavender, Suzy, Marg, Pat, Barb, Sue, Annique; printed by lesbians of the Moruya Women's Refuge.

This was Australia's first national lesbian newsletter, promoting lesbian feminist community and politics, visibility and access.

Lavender



LOTL - Lesbians On The Loose

My time with LOTL back in the 90s is a highlight of my life. Seeing how the magazine helped so many lesbians of different backgrounds to meet one another and feel better about themselves was so rewarding. We did have some criticism for including all lesbians, but I think that was important. Most of us at the time had had experiences of being excluded by family, school, church or the wider straight community and it mattered that there was something that included everyone. And then of course, it was through LOTL that I met Barb and we had 25 wonderful years together before she died in 2018.

Most of my special memorabilia has been archived - primarily with the NSW State Library, but also as their collection criteria narrowed (the library doesn't accept original artwork for example) with the Australia Queer Archives.

<https://www.lotl.com/archive/1995-archive/>

Frances



The Pink Flag

I found a pink triangle flag in my garage. I would have bought this around 1979 when I was 19 to go in the second Mardi Gras. Originally the pink triangle pointing downwards was used by the Nazis for male homosexual prisoners in the concentration camps. Lesbians were included with other "anti-social" women and given a black triangle. I didn't know this back then and me and my lesbian friends were fine with the "homosexual" or "gay" labels.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_triangle

Frances



Michfest – Michigan Women's Music Festival 1976 – 2015

Michfest had a profound influence on lesbian and feminist lives, including mine. I managed to attend in August 1998 using my long service leave, then in August 2015 to the last one. Imagine, or remember, the on-site organization for establishing the temporary facilities with volunteers, for 5 days of festival activities for 3000 – 10,000 women/festies, enabling camping, rostering/supervising shifts for food preparation, ablutions, concert venues, medical matters, general communication on 650 acres of privately owned woodland near Hart (population 2000). Management decisions were made through worker community meetings. Community service support

included ASL interpretation at performances, mental and physical health care, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, camping for disabled women, as well as a tent solely for women of colour. It was an inspiring/empowering experience of how life could be.

At the last Michfest, due to conflict with Transgender Issues there was candle ceremony, and a 'pass the flame along'. Here is my candle from then. I wood-turned the holder, shared my story of being at the Michfest, and passed the flame onto others' candles at Berry 2015 10/40, Adelaide 2016 Stacy & Jackie, and Sydney 2016 Easter L40. I would be interested to know from others who have a candle from any of these events or gatherings and have received or passed the flame along.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160219055404/>

<https://www.michfest.com/>

Kaye



And some humour was shared by Anne.



Housing Older Women's Network calls for social generosity

The NSW Older Women's Network knows that housing is a critical problem for many older women and works to do something about decades of decline in the availability of affordable housing.

Yumi Lee, OWN CEO at Newtown, believes the problem lies in social attitudes that give priority to money, not human value. For Yumi it's simple – a country does better when its people are housed and vulnerabilities are cared for.

Ageing of course is a time of increased vulnerability – in fact, you can see in big letters on the OWN website: "...one of the most disadvantaged demographic profiles for a person to have is to be old, single, poor, female and in private rental accommodation..."

OWN lobbies, participates in interest groups and even helps provide housing opportunities. It is part of the Ageing on the Edge Coalition, which has three main aims:

to increase the stock of social housing to 5,000 new builds a year, with 20 percent of these allocated for older people; to drop the age limit for priority housing, currently set at 80, to 55 years; and to promote specialist housing services for older people.

OWN also collaborates with the community housing provider Women's Housing Company to support their building programme, and has

contributed to two units, thus housing two older women in western Sydney. Together these organisations run a permanent donation campaign called Buy a Brick to finance shelter for older women. And OWN in the Blue Mountains, "horrified by the housing situation", decided to do something. They received a Mercy Foundation grant to create a matching service: to match housing-insecure older women with homeowners.

Launched at end of May, they have housed 13 women already. Julie Nance coordinates the Blue Mountains HOMES FOR OLDER WOMEN programme (HOW), a not-for-profit initiative, a free connection service trying to link homeowners with older women who need affordable housing. HOW is a connection service only, for women aged more than 55 seeking accommodation. Each homeowner decides on the agreements made with their tenant.

Julie says that this model is resonating with the Blue Mountains community, among those who may have housing available in granny flats, units, or bedrooms in homes.

Many of the home seekers are women who have raised children, had a working life and now find themselves in a precarious and emotionally draining housing situation. Some are sleeping in cars, couch surfing, have been pet-setting for long periods or living in hotels that they can't afford. One woman Julie has met has lived in 50 different places over five years. Some are working full or part time, yet can't afford rents, others are on

disability or age pensions and have to cut back on other spending in order to pay the rent.

One difficulty the HOW programme faces is that many older women don't want to share housing, and it is difficult to find safe affordable self-contained accommodation.

Yumi thinks that solutions lie in more generous social values and social investment. Housing policies in force over many years have been based on the idea of investors making profits, rather than on providing secure and affordable homes for our population. Governments, instead of investing in housing, have handed the sector over to private market forces, resulting in "an abject failure on every front". She suggests that superannuation funds, for example, could think about long-term social investment rather than maximum financial return. Strengthening the fabric of your country is the best investment, she says, better than a profit-based system that has created housing crises where workers can't afford to live in areas close to their workplace.

Furthermore, says Yumi, we're not being smart enough about building housing. And when asked if she had anything else to add, the OWN CEO replied: Well, let me say to older women who have money: Come and see us, because we have a lot of good ideas on how to help older women!

Some further reading:

If only there were as many bricks as there are words on this topic...

Earlier this year, the People's Commission into Australia's Housing Crisis released its report, Voices of the Crisis.

<https://everybodyshome.com.au/peoples-commission/final-report/>

<https://ownnsw.org.au/our-work/homelessness/>

<https://how.ownnsw.org.au/>

Jacqueline



Sylvia Plath

Many of you will know this story but perhaps not all of the details. I see it as a story in three parts.

Part One

We begin with Sylvia Plath. When we meet her, she is already an established poet and married to Ted Hughes. At their house in Devon, on the west coast of England, they often entertained other poets and writers. One day a couple are invited for lunch.

Assia Wevill was a German-Jewish woman. She and her family had escaped the Nazis at the beginning of WWII. A successful advertising copywriter, Assia was also a talented translator of poetry. She had already been married three times before she met Ted and Sylvia. Let's call her companion that day Peter.

Sylvia immediately senses the attraction between Ted and Assia. Later she wrote ...

*We didn't find her. She found us
She sniffed us out.*

(Part of a poem Plath wrote after that lunch)

Despite the clarity of her words, Sylvia is alarmed. Sometime later, suspecting that Assia is pregnant with Ted's child, Sylvia becomes anxious and painfully distressed. On 11th February, 1963 Sylvia takes her own life via the gas oven. Assia has an abortion shortly afterwards.

There is speculation still about Plath's suicide. Did Sylvia really want to die or was she hoping to get Ted to think about what he was doing?

Al Alvarez, a poet and author himself, became the poetry editor and critic for the British newspaper, The Observer. In this role he was able to commission and publish poems written by Plath and Hughes. He also wrote a book about suicide, entitled 'The Savage God'. The first chapter is all about Sylvia, the suicide attempt she writes about in The Bell Jar, and her death by suicide in 1963.

The book makes for interesting reading. His theory was that Sylvia Plath's story of a suicide attempt as described in The Bell Jar, was a genuine attempt to die.

She was found by accident. In 1963, the woman who came to help her each day, was held up by a snow storm and couldn't leave her home all day.

Plath had left food for her children and did all she could to keep them safe. It makes some sense to consider her situation in this troubled scenario.

Whatever the reasoning, Ted and Assia moved in together. Their daughter, Alexandra Tatiana Elise is born on 3rd March, 1965. It wasn't clear at first, but Assia is haunted by Sylvia's death. Then, on 23rd March, 1969, Assia dies in a copycat suicide. But the gas oven is a means of death not only for Assia but for her daughter too.

Part Two

American poet, Robin Morgan, published a poem 'Arraignment' in which she accused Ted Hughes of the battery and murder of Sylvia Plath. Lawsuits followed. In 1972 the poetry book 'Monster' that included the poem was banned in the UK. In underground fashion, Canadian women pirated an edition of the book. Women in Australia and New Zealand followed suit. Whatever Ted Hughes tried to do the story was out. Women in England made it impossible for Hughes to give public poetry readings in his own country and his planned tours abroad were cancelled because of threatened mass protests by what came to be called 'Arraignment Women'. Robin Morgan wrote more about the impact on Hughes in her memoir 'Saturday's Child'.

Part Three

In 1974, Ted Hughes renovated his 18th century mill-owner's house, Lumb Bank, in West Yorkshire and leased it to the Arvon Foundation, a venue for residential workshops for poets and writers. This is Bronte country, and the Bronte Parsonage is about eighteen miles to the west. Heptonstall, a village down the hill from Lumb Bank, is a typical Yorkshire village, lots of grim stone and a shadowy mood embraces the churchyard. It is here that Sylvia Plath is buried. She never lived in this area, though Hughes's parents did. Plath wrote about it in a poem entitled 'November Graveyard'.

Her gravesite is bleak, as though she were an afterthought or a problem to be dispensed with.

There is nothing to acknowledge the greatness of her poetry, the story of her life.

In 1982, I attended a creative writing workshop at the Arvon foundation. One of the other students was Jeanette Winterson, as yet an unknown writer.

One afternoon I walked down to Heptonstall. The village sits above Hebden Bridge, the location used in the TV series Happy Valley. You could say Hebden is as popular with lesbians as a place to live as inner-city Sydney. There was the grave and there was her tombstone with the wording:

Sylvia Plath Hughes "Even among fierce flames the golden lotus can be planted".

Even in death he claimed her though they had been separated six months when she died. He also benefited by being the Executor of her estate. Can you imagine the power, the reflected glory, the financial security this gave him?

It was after I'd visited Heptonstall that I heard about two women were spotted kneeling in front of the grave, determined to remove the word HUGHES. They were partly successful. Then, the tombstone disappeared altogether.

I imagine a group of lesbians, dressed in dark clothes, creeping into the graveyard and hefting that tombstone down the hill a bit, to a vehicle parked close by.

The last I heard the tombstone is back. But is it the original or a new one? The name and the wording are back in place. Did he win or does the tombstone stand as a truth to be understood and explored by those who care, those who remember.

Catherine Whittaker's play is on the dramatic, courageous, moving life of Sylvia Plath, ***Sivvy Plath's Birthday Present***, is part of Sydney Fringe. 10-14 September. Loading Dock Theatre, Queer Hub- Qtopia Sydney 301 Forbes Street, Darlinghurst, Sydney 2010 (Gadigal Country) Tel: (02) 7258 8300



Arraignment

I accuse
Ted Hughes
of what the entire British and American
literary and critical establishment
has been at great lengths to deny
(without ever saying it in so many words, of course):
the murder of Sylvia Plath.

Not that it isn't enough to condemn him
of mind-rape and body-rape, infidelity,
abduction and brainwashing of her
children, plagiarism of her imagery,
hiding of her most revealing indictments
against her jailor,
making a mint by becoming her posthumous editor,
and writing, himself, incidentally,
peurile, pretentious dribbles of verse, but
real blood on real hands.

And
if he's killed one wife,
he's killed two:
the second, also, committed suicide,
or didn't you know?
Her name was Assia Guttman Wevil.
He never married her formally.
She translated poems from the Hebrew,
and was afraid of losing her beauty.
She is the woman in Plath's poem, "Lesbos"
and, in time,
she chose the same method as her predecessor--
finding the oven's fumes less lethal
than their husband's love.

A Jewish mother in the most heroic sense,
she took their daughter, Shura, with her.
Otherwise, identical.
What a coincidence.
He's a one-man gynocidal movement.

I accuse
A. Alvarez,
George Steiner, Robert Lowell,
and the legions of critical necrophiles
of conspiracy to mourn Plath's brilliance while
patronizing her madness, diluting her rage, and
burying her politics, as well as
conspiring to frustrate true justice
by aiding, abetting, rewarding, her killer.

But then we women change our minds alot.
That's our prerogative.
So we might not, after all,
free Freida and Nicholas,
and one night ring that doorbell
to enter a covey of his girlish fans,
who then disarm him of that weapon with which he tortured us,
stuff it into his mouth, sew up his poetasting lips around it,
and blow out his brains.
Who knows?

In the meantime, Hughes,
sue me.

The Newsletter

We, Diann and Jacqueline, hope you have enjoyed reading the newsletter.

Please keep giving us your feedback and let us know topics of interest you feel need to be shared in the newsletter.

Follow us on FaceBook
[Ten Forty Matrix NSW](https://www.facebook.com/TenFortyMatrixNSW)

Browse our Website
www.olderdykes.org



About Ten Forty and Older Dykes

The first national conference of Ten Forty in the mid-eighties attracted politically active feminists of all hues and sexualities. 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 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 <http://www.olderdykes.org> encourages national and international connections between older lesbians. Ten Forty is not an organisation you have to join, though members do get some discounts. If you want to receive regular information about our activities and our bi-monthly newsletter, visit our website and put yourself on our email list.

Newsletter

The newsletter comes out on our email list. If you do not receive it, email us contact@olderdykes.org. The web edition and back copies of the newsletter are available for download from our website.

Who currently does what?

Events planning: Sylvia, Diann

Contact email list: Diann, Ruth, Julie

Archives: Sylvia and Jan

Money Management: Fiona

Websisters: Jan, Ruth, Diann, Julie

Newsletter: Jacqueline and Diann

Management committee: Jan, Sylvia, Pearlie, Diann, Fiona, Jacqueline, Dori