



# Ten Forty Matrix Newsletter

July 2025

[www.olderdykes.org](http://www.olderdykes.org)

## What's On

**TIME TO SHINE**  
**at the Big Indoor Picnic**

**Celebrate lesbian and other women's feminist activism from 1975 to 2025**

**Saturday 2 August 2025**  
**11.00am - 3pm**  
**at Leichhardt Town Hall**

In 1975 the world celebrated International Women's Year. Australia was fortunate to have a progressive government under Gough Whitlam who, advised by women, supported many events. This included strong government and non-government delegations to the first world conference on the status of women held in Mexico City. We are celebrating the lesbians who have been activists in our community for 50 years or more.

We will provide the entertainment, including our roll of honour of lesbian activists. There will be coffee, tea and individual lunches to meet your dietary requirements. You just need to bring your own personal drinks and a sense of fun. Numbers are limited to 80, and all care will be taken to ensure you have a great time together.

To register for this event email Sylvia skinder@bigpond.net.au with your full name, email address and phone number and put 'Time to Shine 1975-2025 registration' in the subject line.

Any questions please contact Sylvia Kinder

Email: skinder@bigpond.net.au  
Mobile: 0438 225 333

## **Dykes for Dinner**

**Thursday 14 August@ 6.30pm**

Bar Italia  
171 Norton Street, Leichhardt  
The menu has a wide range of choices.  
[Bar Italia](#)

Please RSVP to Fiona  
[fionarimes@gmail.com](mailto:fionarimes@gmail.com)

## **Country Lesbians Association**

**A Zoom event**  
**Sunday 27 July @ 5 PM**

Topic: Wills and other preparations

CLA is aimed at connecting older lesbians, wherever in Australia you live. You don't have to live outside of Sydney to join us on Zoom.

More details will come out on Contact later.

Contact Diann if you are interested.

[Maude\\_au@yahoo.com](mailto:Maude_au@yahoo.com)

## **Popcorn at the movies**

**First Tuesday of the month.**

This group is for anyone who is interested in having company to go to the movies and maybe have coffee or refreshments after the film. Palace Cinemas in Norton Street has \$10 tickets on Tuesdays.

**Our next gathering is Tuesday 5 August.**

Film selection will be posted on the Contact email as soon as possible on Thursday afternoon or Friday morning the week before.

Hope to see you at the movies.  
Krystyna

## **Elsie (and Minnie): Archival Display and Film**

**17th June, 2025 - 5th September, 2025**  
**UTS Library, Level 7**

Explore the history behind Elsie, Australia's first women's refuge. Founded in 1974 in Glebe, Gadigal Nura/Sydney, the home was established by a core group of feminist activists who sought to create a safe space for women and children fleeing domestic violence. This archival display offers a glimpse into the early stories of the Women's Refuge Movement and the wider feminist activism of the 1970s in Australia and beyond.

Featuring rare photographs, periodicals, posters and audio materials, the display highlights the stories and struggles of women who challenged social and political structures to demand that domestic violence become a public issue.

More details [here](#)

## **How the F\*ck would I know?**

**Book launch of a memoir written by one of our own.**

Kate Rowe has written a selection of life stories - some harrowing, some funny and some light. One chapter includes being a lesbian in the eighties.

There are two launches organised and all are welcome though you need to book (free) as there are limited numbers.

**Saturday 12 July 4pm - 5:30pm at Qtopia**  
<https://events.humanitix.com/book-launch-how-the-f-ck-would-i-know-by-kate-rowe>

**Saturday 19 July starting 5:30 pm for 6:00 pm at Gleebooks**  
with three other authors sharing their hearts and souls as they launch their books together.  
<https://gleebooks.com.au/event/real-lives-bold-stories/>

## Report on June event for Older Lesbians An Afternoon of Storytelling

Saturday 14 June

We had an outstanding storytelling afternoon, with moving stories and stories that made us reflect on our own herstories. Five women were invited to tell their story. Afterwards we had a bit of a Q & A session, then fabulous afternoon tea.

Jan McCoy has entertained many events in the past with her impersonations of ABBA as well as storytelling. Her event took a humorous focus; she morphed into a teacher who taught the 'class' present, some relaxing exercises and kept the laughter rolling. Jan was a teacher so was well able to keep the 'class' entertained.

Kaye Paton has been a regular storyteller at past events and shared her notes from her diary. She gave us an insight into her life in her Blue Mountains retirement village. She is learning chess in the heritage listed boiler room café of the village. This got some laughs with the audience envisaging chess amongst boilers! Amongst her reported events she shared the success of a young 19-year-old who raised \$9,000 for charity, a large amount.

Sylvia gave a detailed description of her grandmother's rented house in the slums of Liverpool UK. Not that any of the residents thought of their homes as slums. They took great pride in whitening the door step which went straight off the pavement, and having very clean windows, scrubbed floors, and clean curtains. This

house had no electricity only gas, one cold tap, no bathroom and an outside toilet until it was pulled down in the late 1960's for a new road.

Following a short interval the next speaker was Bridget Cleaver who gave a passionate story of her friendship with Cate. When a young mother with small child she met Cate Turner while working at the WEL Office. Cate is more than 30 years older than Bridget and offered Bridget support and friendship when she needed it most. This friendship has endured for over 33 years. Cate a powerful, committed lesbian feminist, unlike us today had to keep her lesbianism a secret most of her life. Cate now in her late 90s has left a strong legacy of lesbian feminism.

The concluding speaker Liem Bui bravely related the amazing story of how as a 23-year-old engineering graduate and mother of a 2-year-old, she organised not only the rebuilding of an excellent seaworthy boat, to escape poverty and oppression in Vietnam in 1980, and also raised the money for this from those also wanting to leave. In deep secrecy they made their escape in a well-supplied, boat. Sadly, they were met on the high seas by three Thai fishing ships, fishermen turned pirates aiming to capture young women for sex trafficking, steal any wealth and leave the others to die in a sinking boat.

Thanks go to all the speakers and the great audience for making the event so enjoyable.

We are sharing 2 of the stories in this newsletter. Possibly more to follow in the next newsletter.





## Bridget and Cate Turner's story

We all have our own personal story, with characters who have impacted and shaped who we are today. If we are lucky, we have a couple who have been a constant, that we simply couldn't imagine living without. They almost become part of our DNA.

It was when I overheard a bunch of women talking about a recent book launch they had attended, that I decided I needed to speak about a very special woman who loved me when I thought I was unlovable.

Before I start however, I need to give you some context.

The book I overheard the women discussing was "100 years of Betty" by Debra Oswald, a fiction book about the life of a woman born in the early 1920's. It is about Betty telling her life story, on the eve of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her story was one of betrayal, unexpectant friendships and feminist liberation.

Betty's story got me thinking about my dear friend Cate who will turn 97 in a couple of weeks. I have known Cate for over 32 years. Betty and Cate share many similarities; Cate also migrated to Sydney by boat, although from a small dairy farm in NZ. She too is a passionate feminist, an adventurer, and has travelled the world several times on her own. She also lived through decades of major social change, most notably the women's liberation movement. Cate also reinvented herself many times during her lifetime.



Cate dressed up as an old lady for a Murder Mystery game

The difference between Cate and Betty however is Cate is an actual person. Her life experiences although in ways similar, were also very different to that of Betty's. Cate never married but had many long-term lovers, was highly successful in her career and devoted her retirement to voluntary work. Cate also lived much of her life in secret. It made me realise that my friend Cate deserves her own book, a non-fiction one, titled "Almost a hundred years of Cate". And she deserves to be the person I speak to you about today. For she is one of the most significant women in my life.

Of course, I have not known Cate for 97 years. I met her when I was 28 years old when I began working for the Women's Electoral Lobby in Sydney. WEL is a feminist lobbying organisation. I was a young and idealistic and couldn't believe my luck that I had landed such an important job. I was working with incredible older feminists, who at the time, are my age now. I was in awe of them.

I started this job as a single mum. When I told my own mum I was pregnant, she disowned me. Mum's words were "well Bridget you made your bed, now you sleep in it". I felt terribly alone. I needed a mum to guide me through the most difficult time of my life.

Enter Cate Turner a few months after I started at WEL. I vividly remember our first meeting. She had just retired and joined WEL. She came to the office to introduce herself. The first thing she said was "Hello, I'm Cate, Cate with a C". I introduced myself as "Hi Cate, with a C, I'm Bridget, Bridget with a B". We got chatting and we soon discovered we were both New

Zealanders. That sealed our fate. We were to be friends for ever.

Cate was my mother, big sister and best friend rolled into one. She was always up for a bit of fun (we went night clubbing one night and partied until 3am). She taught me so much about kindness, thoughtfulness and what ethical behaviour looked like. Through observation, I learnt from Cate never to feel sorry for myself or to doubt my abilities. Cate also taught me how to be a friend. She taught me that friendships need love, nurturing and often times, patience. One of her favourite sayings to me was “never to judge people, be curious, but not judgemental.” What I also learnt from Cate was the importance of service to others, particularly to those who are in need.

Over the years, Cate would tell me stories of what life was like for her growing up. Cate was awarded dux of her school every year until she left at 18. She was also a swimming and basketball champion. Yet for all her success and positive demeanour, she kept a secret, one she couldn't share with anyone. She was a lesbian.

After several years of friendship, I told Cate that I had fallen in love with a woman and had come out. I would tease Cate that I could spot a dyke a mile away and she was definitely one. I'm sure all my teasing got on her nerves so she reluctantly fessed up, however she made it very clear this was not to become public knowledge. I didn't understand why but I respected her wish.

When Cate knew she could trust me, she finally told me her life story. When she left the farm and trained as a primary teacher, belief at the time was all homosexuals were paedophiles. Cate was so distressed that she ended up seeing a psychiatrist who advised her to leave teaching as she was a risk to children. Feeling disgusted with herself, she joined Ansett Airlines and became a flight attendant.

Cate enjoyed her time in Ansett however before long was asked to leave. This was because she continually knocked back the advances of the male flight crew. They suspected she was a lesbian. Fearful that her secret would be exposed, she ran away again and travelled to Darwin with her brother. Cate later moved around NSW, eventually calling Sydney home in the 1970's.

I don't have enough time today to detail all of Cate's life story. Getting to know Cate and other lesbians of her age group, the fear of discovery was life destroying, both personally and professionally. As a woman coming out in the late 90's, my experience was very different to Cate's. I would wear my sexuality as a badge of honour (and I did) but Cate even up until very recently never felt comfortable talking about it.

When I met Cate, I had no idea she was caring for her partner, Elizabeth, who was dying of emphysema. They had been together for over 25 years when Elizabeth died.

A small group of us went to Elizabeth's funeral. This would have been in the mid 2000's. There was no

mention at the funeral of Cate being her devoted partner, who nursed her during many years of ill health. Cate was able to speak at the funeral but was denied to read a poem by gay writer WH Auden, instead she had to read a bible verse.

When Cate had a bit to drink, she would tell us about her sexual escapades. One notable story was about the local lesbian hang out in Maitland in the 1950's – the municipal library. After hours, the library's front door was locked and the curtains drawn and the lesbian fun began. Cate had a very loving relationship with a librarian named Mavis, they were together for several years until Cate broke her heart when she ran away with a visiting writer during Writers Week – Elizabeth Kata.

When Cate turned 80, she decided that she would treat herself to a posh hotel in the city. She had booked herself a room for the night and was planning to have dinner there. I attended but had to leave early as I was feeling really sick. The next day I rang Cate and she acted all silly and coy. When I took her out the following week for her birthday, she told me she picked up a woman that night and had had the most wonderful sex. The woman was also much younger too, she was 68!

Cate has been extremely active until very recently when 3 years ago, she had a debilitating stroke. Although surviving, she quickly deteriorated. Cate is almost blind, can barely hear, is wheelchair bound and cognitively quite muddled. She can no longer feed or

toilet herself. I visit her often but I am unsure if she still knows me.

Cate at 97 might not be the woman she once was, but she still has a sparkle in her eye, a smile on her face and warmth towards everyone around her.

To me, Cate will always be the wise, loving and kind 65-year-old who took me under her wing over 30 years ago. There are no words to fully express the love and gratitude I have for this extraordinary woman. My darling friend Cate, Cate with a "C".

For more of Cate's story listen to her interview on our website. [Podcasts at Older Dykes](#)



Cate in her  
late teens



Cate at her  
80<sup>th</sup>

## Liem's Story - Woman Rising, New Beginnings

In 1975, the Vietnam War ended, and the North Vietnamese Army captured Saigon and took over the southern part of Vietnam where I lived. The whole country fell into recession. My dad had died while fighting in South Vietnam. All families of the former South Vietnam military were treated as second class citizens and had many limitations placed upon them. This punishment continued until quite recently.

I had been studying engineering at university but my mum could not support me anymore. I had to join the University choir which provided accommodation and food and enabled me to continue my studies and I finally completed University, graduating as an electrical engineer at the age of 21.

I was allocated to work for the HCM City Planning and Designing Department where I met my husband and married at 22. I had a beautiful baby girl a year after that.

My mum was struggling to feed my younger siblings and I could not help her. Escaping was the only way out for my family, and that was my new beginning.

I did not know how to escape, it was impossible by plane. Walking across Cambodia was also impossible. By boat was the only way. I couldn't pay smugglers to take us on their boat, so I decided to build a boat.

My husband did not believe that I could do it. I sent my 12 months old daughter to my mum to look after while I worked, and I began my plan. My husband didn't come with us.

### Building the boat

Without any experience in boat building, I needed someone who knew about boats to help me. I finally found an ex-navy man who had grown up on the Mekong River Delta. He had experience in building small and medium timber boats and I employed him as my operations manager.

First of all, I sold all my valuable belongings and after a few months, I had only convinced two university friends to join me on my journey. I had to change my way of choosing passengers, so I decided to approach rich people. I found a respectable woman who had connections with some jewellery shop owners. I made a deal with her that if she found four people who were willing to pay 50% upfront, one of her children would go for free. Not long after that, she came back with 20 people who handed me the money that I needed, in gold!

That night, I travelled to Bac Lieu, South Vietnam, where I wanted to build a boat, hiding on top of rice sacks in a truck to avoid the police checking my travel papers. It took days of discussing and planning with my operations manager. We decided it would be cheaper and faster to buy an old, river merchant, timber boat and upgrade it to a seaworthy transport boat.

We bought a boat, two truck engines, two large fuel tanks and two propellers, just in case one did not work during the trip. We found a boat-building workshop and a marine mechanic to do the renovation.

The main boat had to pass police checks on the delta channels, therefore we needed to buy four small boats to carry passengers before we took them on the main boat.

The operations manager's job was working with the boat building team to make sure everything went as planned.

I then had to employ four local families near the departure point to accommodate people before leaving. Their other jobs were feeding them and taking them to the big boat on the four small boats.

At the same time, I kept raising funds to provide what was needed to support the project until it was completed.

There was a long list of problems I had to solve during the boat building process, including the travellers' demands, blackmailing, and the bailing out of some travellers who got into trouble with local police. I also let one person on my boat in exchange for a gun, ammunition and grenades to fight back pirates if we encountered them. This was scary and there was the risk that I could be caught and executed. I still did this, for the safety of everyone on the boat. Unfortunately, my operations manager threw them into the water before our departure without informing me.

In early August 1980, the project was completed. The operations manager and I had a few test sails on main and small river channels to make sure the routes were safe to travel.

I then went home to collect my family and all the travellers. On the 18th of August 1980, I led 27 people to the departure location. I divided them into small groups. To keep them calm I mixed my family members with the other travellers and put everyone to stay with the families that I had employed for the few days before departure.

## Departure

Around 10pm on the 22nd of August 1980, I ordered people to move onto the four small boats and travel on the main channel, to meet the big boat which was sailing on a small channel, where the two channels merged. My operations manager's family and I were already on the big boat travelling to meet the small boats. As it was dark and we looked like regular local boats we had no problem passing water-police check-posts. When we found the small boats, we picked up the people. However, I could not find the boat carrying my daughter. After 4am, everyone started to panic. I reluctantly decided to partially block the exhaust pipe to reduce the engine noise, and we slowly moved out to sea while keeping on searching for the last boat. We found the boat eventually, half a kilometre past the last police check-post. Happily, we loaded them on board; I thought my responsibility was over.

## Pirates

One day after departure, we met six Thai fishing boats. Greed had made the fishermen become pirates as they knew that the refugees usually brought all their possessions with them. They had rifles and we had no weapons. They locked all our men in the cabin, damaged our boat and engines, took all the gasoline, tipped out all the drinking water, then searched for the money, gold and precious stones, raped all the girls and took them onto their boats, some of the girls were only 16 and 17. They killed one of the men for fun, and threw some children into the water, including my younger brother. Luckily the children were saved but the suffering and fear of death took its toll.

They terrorised us for hours until another Thai fishing boat owned by a Chinese man appeared. He also had a rifle. He made a warning shot. The pirates were afraid of confrontation, knowing he could radio to the authorities about what they were doing, and they returned all the girls, who would have been sold to brothels in Thailand as sex slaves, then they sailed away.

We were loaded onto the rescuer's fishing boat and our boat was towed behind to the border of Malaysian and international waters. He then sent our men to fix the hole and the engines on our boat. But the hole couldn't be fixed. We had to bail out the water but it was a slow process. He gave us some gasoline and fresh water then pointed us to three American Oil rigs in Malaysian waters, and directed us to the nearest. It took us eight hours to get there.

## Rescue

After inspecting our boat, the people on the oil rig decided to take all of us onto the rig as the boat was unseaworthy. Our boat sank half an hour after that. We all had health checks by a doctor on board, were washed and fed. Next day, we were sent to Palau Bidong, a refugee island off the coast of Malaysia.

We were welcomed at gunpoint, and body-searched by Malay Water Police. Then they handed us to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Organisations to finalise paperwork.

## Migration

One week after we arrived, our family's application to migrate to Australia was accepted. The two months living on the island was the best time of my life. My daughter and I went swimming and built sandcastles every day to make up for the lost time together. We were then sent to a Kuala Lumpur transfer camp ready to fly to Australia. We arrived in Sydney on the 24th of December 1980.

From then, another new beginning of my life started, in a country of freedom and opportunities; a new life for me and my daughter.





## 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](http://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](mailto: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, Krystyna