



Ten Forty Matrix Newsletter

July 2023

What's On

Dykes for Dinner

Thursday 13 July@6.30

Zeus Street Greek
2&3/362-372 New Canterbury Rd,
Dulwich Hill NSW 2203

This restaurant offers Greek Food, with a modern twist. Vegetarian and vegan options available.

RSVP to Fiona fionarimes@gmail.com

Message: 0412954573

Dinner and Discussion for Older Lesbians

Saturday 5 August 2023 6pm-8.30pm

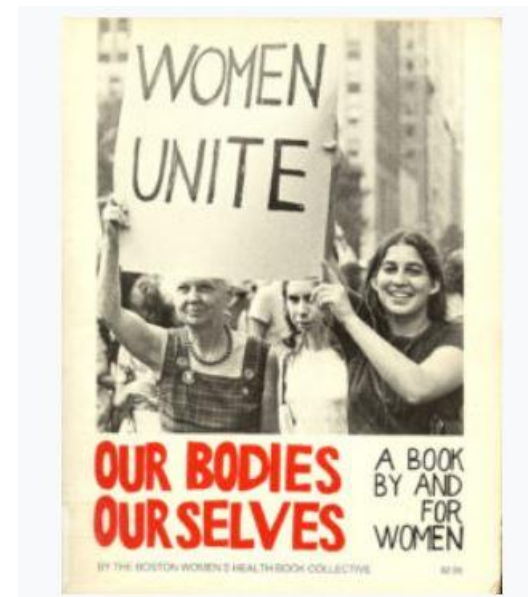
Looking back, Looking forward

**Location: Jimmy Little Community Centre
19 Cecily Street, Lilyfield**

Bring a plate of food to share and your own drinks. Coffee, tea, cups, plates and cutlery are provided.

What were the books you remember from your early days as a Lesbian / Feminist? What sort of reading do you prefer these days?

Early days for you might be the 1970s or the 1980s, or possibly later. Did you read lesbian fiction? Or the feminist political books or magazines of the time? Did they make an impact on you? Come and join us in the discussion and share a meal.



If you have any books you want to give away, please bring them, but please take them back if they do not find a good home.

Report of Dinner and Discussion for Older Lesbians

Saturday 1 April

Women's Libraries in Australia past and present

"To keep women's words, women's works
alive and powerful" — Ursula K Le Guin

Twenty-one women showed up for a very informative and enjoyable evening discussing Women's Libraries, and the power of feminists in providing these wonderful spaces. All three speakers have been or are still very involved in voluntary work in women's libraries and have retained a passion for their importance. The speakers were Sylvia Kinder, Sherri Hilario and Margot Oliver

Sylvia Kinder was active in the establishment of the Adelaide Women's Studies Resource Centre (WSRC) in 1975 and was a seconded teacher, working there for over two years. She continued as a volunteer and member of the collective for nine years until she went overseas. This library came from an idea of Sally Jackson's (now Sally O'Wheel). She was a young high school teacher and wanted to introduce Women's Studies to all South

Australian high schools, by gaining funding for a library bus to travel from school to school – an ambitious idea particularly considering how few women's studies resources were then available.

Following a suggestion from Danny Torsh, then working as a consultant for the Commonwealth Schools Commission, and who published a Newsletter called *Blue Stocking*, the Women's Liberation Education Group was successful in their application to get Federal International Women's Day funding to establish a resource centre.

They set up the first library in a room the size of a large cupboard in the Wattle Park Teachers Resource Centre. Yvonne Allen left her job as librarian at the Sturt College of Advanced Education to establish the collection.

Volunteers and donations became the backbone of the WSRC. For many years one full and one half-time staff, selected by the collective were seconded teachers. Constant moves over the years (four locations in all) and continued negotiations for funding were needed to keep the centre going until a government funding cut meant closure in 2010. The WSRC has now become part of the history of lost Women's Libraries.

Valuable archival material from the Adelaide Women's Liberation Movement and other feminist groups has been moved to the South Australian State Library. Some has even found its way to the Jesse Street National Women's Library. The majority of those who set up, fought for, and maintained the WSRC were lesbian feminists.

Sherri Hilario is a long-standing volunteer at the Jessie Street National Women's Library. She is currently the secretary on the executive committee. She explained that the inspiration for the establishment of the library was the celebration of the 100th year of Jessie Street's birth on 18 April 1889. The idea of establishing a women's library, conceived by Shirley Jones and Lenore Coltheart, was born of frustration with the difficulty of finding and accessing material on women in Australia. An initial steering committee was established with Shirley Jones, Lenore Coltheart, Jenny Crew and Una Ellis. Immediately they stepped into the daunting issues and tasks of: drafting a Charter, funding, publicity, canvassing support from interested groups/individuals and possible sponsors/donors, publicity, and accommodation.

The first Annual General Meeting of the Jessie Street Library Association was held in August 1989. Virginia Blain was the first

chairwoman. Sir Laurence Street, the Hon Elizabeth Evatt, Judith Wright and Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) were the Library's first Patrons.

In March 1990 the proposed constitution was accepted and the association was incorporated as Jessie Street Library Association Inc. Its objectives were to heighten awareness of women's issues; to preserve documents on women's lives and activities; to support the field of women's history and to highlight women's contribution to this country's development.

The core collection of 500 books came from the estate of the feminist Eva Maria. Donations of archival materials from Women's groups such as Canberra Women's Liberation organisation, the closed Women's Studies Resource Centre, and individual women have made the collection diverse. Preserving and documenting archival material requires skilled work, as does the cataloguing of books, posters, serials and ephemera.

A grant in 1998 enabled part-time employment of an archivist. To maintain the library fund raising is an ongoing program. The main fund raiser has been the Annual Luncheon held in State Parliament Strangers

room with fabulous speakers, from a diverse range of backgrounds. Also, the Library receives donations and bequests.

Another key event is the Lunch Hour Talks held in a meeting room at the **Customs House Library**, at Circular Quay. Other projects are The Tapestry Project, which encourages women to write their own stories or those of their mother, grandmother or friend. There have also been various Oral History Projects interviewing women from various cultural backgrounds. The library also provides resources to other cultural institutions and research support to a wide range of researchers both across Australia and internationally.

The library produces a regular Newsletter, has a website, <https://www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au>, and an online catalogue. Well worth a visit. Membership is \$35/\$70 which supports the library and has benefits for members with reduced costs at Lunch Hour Talks, the Newsletter and early access to key events.

Jessie Street National Women's Library like all women's libraries, has had many locations and struggles to gain funding. Its existence is the result of the sheer determination and persistence of many volunteers and donors, and currently the

generous support of the City of Sydney through its Accommodation Grants Cultural Program. It is located in the Ultimo Community Centre 523-525 Harris Street (cnr. William Henry Street) Ultimo 2007, access via Ultimo Community Centre, Bulwara Road.

Margot Oliver, the current Convenor of The Women's Library (TWL) in Brown Street Newtown, spoke about the revival of the library in 2022 following closures during the worst years of the pandemic.

Although a long-time user of the library, Margot's history with working at TWL is fairly recent, unlike that of fellow Ten Forty member Freddie who has been Treasurer of The Women's Library for eight years.

Margot took on the role of Convenor at the end of 2021 with an energy that saw a small fund for painting substantially increased, thanks especially to the generosity of Judy Small, whose fundraising concert, held in 2022 at the Gaelic Club, was a highlight. Gone the crumbling and dull walls, the Library is now a rearranged space with a comfortable lounge area suitable for group discussions and meetings, as well as for drinking a coffee and reading in a beautifully re-furbished centre.

The history of the genesis and development of The Women's Library (TWL) is a remarkable 30-year story. Building the collection started in 1991 and the library first opened in June 1994. All books in the collection have been donated by the public and by specialist publishers, such as Spinifex Press. Further information on this 30-year history can be accessed via The Women's Library website:

<https://thewomenslibrary.org.au/twl-herstory/>

Although the library is first and foremost a lending library of books by and about women, fiction and non-fiction, with a good collection also of feminist periodicals, TWL is also a community centre for women.

Margot expressed how pleased she is to see this use reviving since the years of the pandemic. Like the Jessie Street Library, The Women's Library is run by volunteers, with an increasing number of new and younger women dropping in and becoming active in using and running the library.

Book groups, social groups and discussion groups are meeting there again, as is **Women Write Wiki**, a group that has created over 300 new Wiki pages on Australian and New Zealand women over the last few years. Most recently on International Women's Day, a

women's play reading was held to an enthusiastic crowd. Previous star events such as the *Visual Art Exhibitions Herland 1 and Herland 2*, are yet to be repeated - but it is always good to have something to aspire to!

The library is [open](#) five days a week including weekends (closed Monday and Fridays) at 8-10 Brown Street, Newtown. Go down the side gate next to the Newtown Library and walk to the end of the courtyard. Women who support the aims of The Women's Library are invited to become [members](#). Membership is \$30.00 or \$5.00 per annum, your choice.

<https://thewomenslibrary.org.au/membership-application/>

End Note: Too many magazines, newspapers, bookshops, women's centres, women's libraries, publishers of women's books, women's record distributors, which existed and flourished from the early 1970s until well into the 1990s around the English-speaking world, are now gone and so to part of Women's Liberation history.

Eradication of women and their organisations appears to be in full force. Remarkably, we still have two libraries in Sydney and we need to keep and support them. Both libraries have their premises provided by the City of Sydney, and neither would be able to survive

without these accommodation grants, but the rest is up to fund-raising and membership. Please think about joining and making use of these wonderful resources.



A Brief History of Women's Libraries in Britain, USA and Australia

FAWCETT LIBRARY UK

Now: Women's Library at the British Library of Political and Economic Science

By Sylvia



Ruth Mary Cavendish-Bentinck (née St Maur; 21 October 1867 – 28 January 1953) was a Morocco-born British aristocrat, suffragist and socialist. Her library was the basis for what is now the Women's Library, together with the former Fawcett Library. Bentinck was born in Tangier in 1867. Her father was an aristocrat, Ferdinand Seymour, Earl St. Maur.

Her mother, Rosina Elizabeth Swan, was a maid. Her father was already married, so could not marry her mother.

Her parents brought her to England, where they had a son, Harold St. Maur. Her father died in 1869. She and her brother were brought up by her paternal grandparents after her mother married again and her stepfather died.

Her illegitimacy was a problem during her childhood but this was balanced by the education and care that her *de facto* parents gave her. They also gave her their surname. When her grandmother died, she was left £80,000.

In 1909, she joined the Women's Social and Political Union. This was a militant organisation who believed in "Deeds not Words". Bentinck did wear a sandwich board but unlike many of its members she was never arrested. She wrote *The Point Of Honour: A Correspondence On Aristocracy And Socialism* in 1909. The key event in 1909 was founding a library that was to become in time the Women's Library.

Dame Millicent Fawcett [GBE](#)

(née Garrett; 11 June 1847 – 5 August 1929) was an English politician, writer and feminist. She campaigned for women's suffrage by legal change and in 1897–1919. She led Britain's largest women's rights association, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The library is considered her most important legacy. The NUWSS gave the library to the Women's (Service) Library in 1931. The library and archives of the Society, formerly the Fawcett Library, are now a core part of the Women's Library at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, the main library of the London School of Economics and Political Science.



Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square statue by Gillian Wearing

The erection of this statue was the result of a massive feminist campaign and 82,000 signatures. Fawcett's statue holds a banner quoting from a speech she gave, after [Emily Davison](#)'s death during the 1913 Epsom Derby: "*Courage calls to courage everywhere*".

In February 2018, Fawcett was announced as winner of a BBC Radio 4 poll for the most influential woman of the past 100 years.

USA Lesbian Herstory Archives (still operating after 49 years)

Tucked away on a quiet street in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the famous, Lesbian Herstory Archives, contains the world's largest collection of photographs, periodicals, books, personal letters, T-shirts, buttons and other objects made by, or about, women who love women. It holds 20,000 books, 12,000 photographs, and 1,600 periodical titles.

Founded in 1974, the Lesbian Herstory Archives was a response to the growing awareness of lesbian cultural identities. Co-founders Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel, Sahli Cavallo, Pamela Oline and Julia Stanley created a consciousness-raising group geared to lesbian women interested in academia.

"They just started discussing among themselves the fact that lesbian desire had been written out of history and that other archives would make it very difficult to find such materials," says Rachel, the coordinator of special collections. *"So they decided to make an archive."*

The goal was to protect artefacts that would help future generations of women understand the stories of the lesbian community. The founders initially gathered the materials they had access to and put out calls for donations.

"It is interesting reading the announcements now, put out in 1974 and 1975 because back then, there were grandiose statements referring to what was a milk crate in Joan's apartment," Rachel says.

The collection began in the apartment of Joan Nestle, slowly taking over room after room until the entire place was packed to the gills with photographs, periodicals, books, personal letters from activists and artists, and more. As the space became unliveable, the group started a fundraising campaign and purchased its Park Slope residence in 1992. The diverse archive has largely been shaped by donations. When the [Women's Liberation Centre](#) folded in 1987, all its records came to the archive.

Everything in the archive is by or about lesbians, but it has a strict policy to never out anyone in the collections.

Interestingly, Joan Nestle now 82 years old, lives in Melbourne with her Australian partner Dianne Otto, a Melbourne University



academic, who was active in Adelaide University 1971-73.

The Archives. Photo: Judith Schwarz, Deborah Edel, Arisa Reed and Joan Nestle meet on West 92nd

Street, New York | Courtesy of the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation



Western Australia: Lespar Library of Women's Liberation

Now: The Gay and Lesbian Archives of Western Australia (GALAWA), at Murdoch University, **Lespar, Library of Women's Liberation** is a Western Australian feminist library. The library was opened in 1979 in a building owned by Karin Hoffmann at Darlington, Western Australia.

There are some 3000 titles in its collection. It is housed within the Gay and Lesbian Archives of Western Australia (GALAWA), located in the Geoffrey Bolton Library at Murdoch University.

Holdings include international as well as Australian feminist magazines, including the Union of Australian Women's *Our Women* (1953–1971), *Everything: Anarchist Feminist Magazine* (1979–1985), *As If* (1973) and *Lip, A Feminist Arts Journal* (1976–1984). The library's catalogue has not been digitised, but three editions have been published in book form, the most recent in 1986.

Murdoch University Library LGBTQI and Women's Studies collection

The Gay and Lesbian Archives Western Australia (GALAWA) Inc. was formed in the mid-1990's to collect and protect various materials produced by and for the gay and lesbian community in Western Australia.

The collection consists of street press, newsletters, magazines, organisational documents, photographs, newspaper clippings, manuscripts (published and unpublished), posters, costumes and various other items. Also it includes the Lespar Library of Women's Liberation.

The Women's Library Sydney Newtown (31 years of operation)

Work on setting up The Women's Library commenced in 1991 when a group of women decided there was a need for a library focused on lesbian and feminist literature along the lines of the Women's Library in England.

A long list of prominent Australian women supported its establishment including Eva Cox, Ann Deveson, Justice Elizabeth Evatt, Dorothy Hewitt, Caroline Jones, Clover Moore, Meredith Bergman, Sandra Nori, Dale Spender, Faith Bandler and Bobbie Sykes. With the coordination of Vicki Harding, it was formally established as an incorporated association in 1992 to comprise a lending library, a reference library, an information exchange and community centre. Under its constitution it is stated that it should, "be a safe and supportive space where women, including lesbians, can relax, read, study and exchange information".

In 1993 The Women's Library became a registered charity, enabling it to receive tax deductible donations. It opened its doors in its first home in the Alexandria Town Hall in 1994. It moved to its current home in Brown Street, Newtown, at the side of the Newtown Library, in January 1998 and continues to occupy these premises, courtesy of an accommodation grant provided through the City of Sydney Council.

In 2016 The Women's Library received an Edna Ryan Award for making a feminist difference through its contributions to the Arts. The award was accepted by Vicki Harding who had returned as Public Officer. It celebrated 20 years in Newtown in May 2018.



The Women's Library group, 1992
Left to Right: Juliane Reilly, Robbie Wilde, Roz Hanratly,
Vicki Harding, and sitting Jude Fiander
C. Moore Hardy Photography

Jessie Street National Women's Library- Sydney

The **Jessie Street National Women's Library** is a specialist library that collects, preserves, and promotes the awareness of the literary and cultural heritage of Australian women. In response to the difficulty of locating material about the experiences and issues relating to women in Australia, Shirley Jones and Lenore Coltheart decided to develop a women's library. The objectives of the Library are, *"to heighten awareness of women's issues; to preserve documents on women's lives and activities; to support the field of women's history and to highlight women's contribution to this country's development."* A committee was established and the *Jessie Street Women's Library Association* held an inaugural Annual General Meeting in August 1989.

The Library's patrons include Jessie Street's son Sir Laurence Street, the Hon Elizabeth Evatt AC, and poets, Judith Wright and Oodgeroo Noonuccal.^[2]

The Library is currently staffed by volunteers and located in the Ultimo Community Centre, a venue provided by the City of Sydney Council.

In memory of Jessie Street

Jessie Street (1889 – 1970) fought hard for many years as an advocate for women's rights in Australia. She was a key figure in Australian political life for over 50 years, well known for campaigning for human rights and women's issues. In 1945 at the founding of the United Nations she was the only female Australian delegate. **In 1967 she initiated a successful amendment to the Australian constitution to remove discriminatory references to Aborigines.**

Collections

The collections include archives of the papers of Australian women's organisations, the personal papers and letters, diaries and journals of Australian women and also audio recordings of interviews. Many of the books and personal archives in the collection have been donated, including 500 books donated from the estate of feminist Eva Maria and a collection of 110 books by or about Virginia Woolf. In 1993 the former Canberra Women's Archive was donated to the collection.



Women's Studies Resource Centre, Adelaide From 1975-2010 Adelaide, South Australia (35 years of operation)

Last location was 64 Pennington Terrace
North Adelaide SA 5006

In 1973, the first national conference on Sexism in Education was convened by the Women's Liberation Movement, fuelled by concern for the position of women and girls in society and following the demands of feminists.

Women's Studies courses were established at Flinders and Adelaide Universities. Feminists Teachers and Students quickly became aware of a shortage of materials in this area and a group of women educators began meeting in the Women's Liberation Centre in 1974 to redress this.

Sally Jackson, a lesbian high school teacher, had the idea to get funding for a Women's Studies Library bus to travel to schools around the state. Advice from Danny Torsh, who was acted as consultant for the Commonwealth Schools Commission, and who published a Newsletter called *Blue Stocking*, led to the group applying to the Australian National Advisory Committee for International Women's Year, for funding to establish a library. A story of feminist connections so important in the 1970s.

Support from the Education Department enabled in July 1975 the establishment of the Women's Studies Resource at Wattle Park Teachers College. Staffing was always, one full time and one part time worker, with many volunteers and a feminist collective to manage the centre. After the first year these paid workers were seconded teachers. Resource funding was always difficult and came eventually from Ministers Miscellaneous funding, budgeted ever year.

After moving several times the WSRC relocated to its last address in the suburb of North Adelaide. Every year was a political struggle and finally in 2010 the centre was forced to close due to no funding. Much of the material has been rehoused in the State Library of SA, North Terrace.

Aim of the WSRC

The WSRC's primary function was to provide resources that counter sexist assumptions in society, and a Newsletter four times a year for all schools. It also provided a women's studies course in the early 1980s, feminist materials and for a few years the first feminist bookshop in Adelaide, *MsPrint*.

The collection contained over 18000 items including fiction, non-fiction, videos, DVDs, CDs, vinyl records, cassettes, posters, and journals and teaching kits. It also held

extensive records concerning many key women's groups and organizations such as the Women's Art Movement, Women's Liberation Movement, Women's Electoral Lobby, Rape Crisis Centre, and the St Peters and Hindmarsh Women's Community Health Centres. There were also a number of items from specific issue groups such as Women Against Nuclear Energy, Association of Country and City Women Writers, Women's Abortion Action Campaign, and Women's Action Against Global Violence. These records take the form of minutes, financial records, submissions, articles, photographs, posters, pamphlets, constitutions, newsletters and more.

Many significant activists are also represented such as Anna Yeatman, Anne Summers, and Jill Matthews. These records were mainly housed in filing cabinets. Additionally, the collection contained many sensitive papers.

Much of the material from the Women's Studies Resource Centre is now located in The South Australian State Library, on North Terrace.

Sylvia



Ten Forty goes to Canberra in May 2023

The trip to Canberra was good fun – the weather was fine; the autumn trees were lovely and we survived the zero temperatures in the mornings. There were about 15 of us, mainly staying at Alivio Tourist Park which has the advantage of having The Verandah, a very large café/bar, which was a good meeting place for us and did good coffee and food.

We met up there on Monday night and were able to sort out introductions and arrange car sharing which was really useful for meeting new members and for parking. We had issues about the late delivery of dinner. We hit a very busy night and the need to pay en bloc for dinners proved a real problem. We did much better for our last dinner when we had sorted out the system and had a lovely chef who was very friendly.

On Tuesday we went to Old Parliament House to see their display of last year's political cartoons. This was really very good. We went on to have lunch in the garden courtyard which was lovely, a reminder that this used to be the real Parliament and the place is fitted out accordingly.

We liked the shop too which was full of goodies such as socks with political messages!

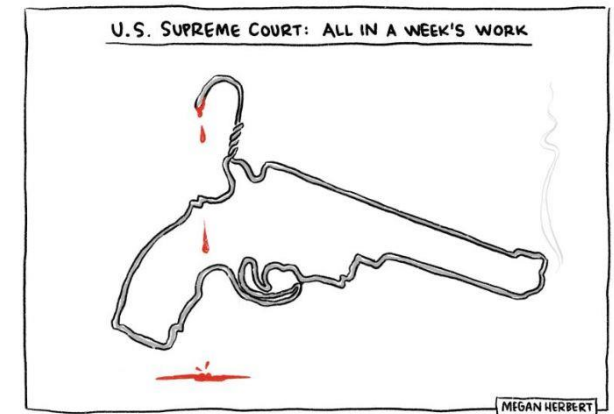
After lunch we spread out to other attractions including the National Art Gallery which is being massively refurbished after its well-publicised problems with leaking roof and buckets. Nonetheless the Aboriginal art section is splendid. Dinner was at the Indian Diners Club and was well received.

Wednesday was our day at the Australian Museum where they had the exhibition: Feared and Revered: Feminine Power Through the Ages. There was also an excellent and very extensive aboriginal exhibition which we shared with many school kids. We had a group lunch and some went off to Jerrabomberra Wetlands which was lovely but no rare birds, except us, were seen. We had an excellent Thai dinner at Ayutthaya.

On Thursday some of the group returned to Sydney to attend to pets etc. A few of us went to the Australian Parliament House, the big one, for a guided tour which was excellent. The place is immense, the view from the roof splendid and the artwork, if you like portraits of polities, was very interesting. And the café is really nice.

Our farewell dinner was back at Alivio, only 9 of us left but a good time to reminisce and celebrate new friendships.

Jan



You can see the entire exhibition of cartoons here.

<https://behindthelines.moadoph.gov.au/10/40 Committee>

Report of Country Lesbians Association (CLA) 25 June Lesbian and feminist poetry

CLA is an association of Lesbians, regional and city based. Ten Forty set it up as an online meeting place, on ZOOM . We want to create an online space where regional women can share, and city-based women are welcome to share too. We advertise on Contact, so keep an eye out for our next zoom session. The last session we had was about Lesbian and Feminist poetry. Women read out poems that they wanted to share. Poets included May Sarton, Marjorie Pizer, Black Crow Walking.... One participant reminded us that poetry is also the basis of songs. She shared songs from Jan Cornell's and Elabeth Drake's *Failing in Love Again* production; songs like **Idiosyncracies**. Here is a link to remind yourselves of the words.

<https://soundcloud.com/jnana511>



The House of Gathering

May Sarton

Published in *The Silence Now: New and Uncollected Earlier Poems*,
Norton, NY and London, 1988.

If old age is a house of gathering,
Then the hands are full.
There are old trees to prune
And young plants to plant,
There are seeds to be sown.
Not less of anything
But more of everything
To care for,
To maintain,
To keep sorted out,
A profusion of people
To answer, to respond to.
But we have been ripening
To a greater ease,
Learning to accept
That all hungers cannot be fed,
That saving the world
May be a matter
Of sowing a seed
Not overturning a tyrant,
That we do what we can.
The moment of vision,
The seizure still makes
Its relentless demands:
Work, love, be silent.
Speak.

Beach Walk

Marjorie Pizer

Down, down the long bush track to the beach we
went

Past the old sandstone cliffs and the great,
rounded rocks,

Beside the pink, knotted apple gums and dark
banksias,

Surrounded all the way by the delicious damp
smell of the bush

To the empty beach.

Then back we came up the long haul,
Through the bracken and cycads,

And up the Innumerable sandstone steps.

My two friends and I reached the top of the ridge

In a sudden fury of rain and wind off the sea.
Wet to skin

We drove home for crumpets and talk and tea,
While the rain and the wind flung themselves
Around our little snug house.

The unveiling of Feminist Icon Zelda D'Aprano



In October 1969 Zelda D'Aprano chained herself to the doors of the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne, protesting the failure of a recent Equal Pay case. Ten days later Zelda, Thelma Solomon and Alva Geikie chained themselves to the doors of the Arbitration Court. In early 1970 these three founded the Women's Action Committee which initiated the Melbourne Women's Liberation movement.

Thelma was known to many lesbians. She came to our L40 reunions, and Zelda came to one of our 10/40 gatherings.

Meanwhile Alva has just finished writing a book - **1969-1975 The Women's Action Committee and the Women's Liberation Movement Melbourne** which will be available later this year at the Victorian State Library, Victorian Trades and Labour Council and some other places to be decided.

The url below gives details of the unveiling of Zelda's statue on 30th May. Alva is the only surviving member of the trio of militant equal pay activists, she lives near me and always supports the IWD activities I've organised over the years.

<https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/monument-al-change-a-statue-of-feminist-icon-zelda-daprano-is-unveiled-in-victoria/>

Lavender

Dear Stevie,

Thank you for your letter. I hope your health remains good.

It seems we must now begin a letter this way, with a Victorian tip of the hat to physical well-being: it's become a social prerequisite, as leaving calling cards once was. And we must end by saying, "Keep safe". What a ridiculous concept! There is no "safe". At any moment the fragile thread by which we dangle may break, and we may plummet into the unknown. "Safe," the word, ought to be outlawed. It gives people false ideas.

Sorry. I'm becoming cranky about language, a thing you don't do unless you're past a certain age. For youngsters, things were always called what they are called right now, but for oldsters, not. We notice the gaps, the chasms. And the jokes of former decades have ceased to be jokes, while new jokes have arisen, jokes that are not always understood by us. Joking happens less frequently in the puritanical moment we are passing through – not that I wish to sound judgmental – but still, a few laughs are still permitted, it seems.

Though each generation's catchphrases die on the vine as a matter of course. What did "23 skidoo" mean? I said it as a child, but it was old even then and conveyed nothing to me except as part of a skipping rhyme. A sinister skipping rhyme, now that I think of it: a number of robbers have broken into a lady's house – grown-up women were called "ladies" then – and are giving orders to her, such as turning around and touching the ground. No good would come of this: there were 23 of the robbers and only one of her. But "skidoo" was this lady's exit line, so maybe she ran away.

What fun we used to make of death! Hallowe'en was a chance to put on a sheet and pretend to be a ghost, or to fill a bowl with peeled grapes, blindfold our little friends, and guide their hands to the bowl. "Eyeballs," we would say in sepulchral tones. "Ewww!" was the expected reply. Next would come a chant about dying, being buried, becoming worm-infested, and turning green. All hilarious, to us, then. But how many of our once large basket of impish children are left? Not many. Gone, and with them the vestiges of the grape eyeballs and the green decaying bodies. A few old cronies clinging on to the cliff's edge, having tea and cookies in the sun and spilling crumbs and milk on their not entirely clean T-shirts, or distressing their neighbours by trying – slowly, ponderously, slipping dangerously on the ice – to shovel the snow off their walks. "Here, let me do that for you." "Oh no, I can manage, thank you." Beetles near the end of their life cycles, still gamely making their way up the once-familiar flower stalk. "Where am I and what am I doing here?" the beetle might be wondering. "How long can they go on?" the neighbours muse. "Surely not much longer."

Oh, don't suppose for an instant that we don't know what they're thinking. We thought it all ourselves, once. We still think it.

But none of this is happening to you, dear Stevie. You are much younger, although you don't think so now. If you live another 30 years – which I sincerely hope you will, and more, depending on your condition by then, of course – if you live another 30 years and are still enjoying it, or most of it – if anyone will be enjoying, or indeed living, considering the huge unknown wave that is already rolling towards us – I expect you will look at

a picture of yourself as you are today, supposing your personal effects have survived flood, fire, famine, plague, insurrection, invasion, or whatever – and you will say, "How young I was then!"

But that's a long digression. You asked me how I was doing, another social pleasantry. No one wants an honest answer to that one.

What you mean is how am I managing to cope, now that Tig has died. Am I lonely? Am I suffering? Is the house too empty? Am I checking all the boxes of the prescribed grieving process? Have I gone into the dark tunnel, dressed in mourning black with gloves and a veil, and come out the other end, all cheery and wearing bright colours and loaded for bear?

No. Because it's not a tunnel. There isn't any other end. Time has ceased to be linear, with life events and memories in a chronological row, like beads on a string. It's the strangest feeling, or experience, or rearrangement. I'm not sure I can explain it to you.

And it would alarm you unduly if I were to say to you, "Tig isn't exactly gone." You'd jump immediately to ghosts, or delusional states on my part, or dementia, but none of those would apply. You will understand it later, perhaps, this warping or folding of time. In some parts of this re-folded time Tig still exists, just as much as he ever did.

I don't intend to share any of this with you. I don't want you calling my younger friends and relatives in a state of concern and telling them something must be done about me. You were always a well-meaning busybody. I don't fault you for it – you have a kind heart, you are filled to the brim with good intentions, but I don't want any casseroles or oblique, probing questions, or visits from professionals, or nieces talking me into buying an assisted-care condo. And no, I do not wish to go on a cruise.

Meanwhile, I'm hanging out with a clutch of other widows. Some of them are widowers: we have not yet got around to a gender-neutral term for those who have lost their life partners. Maybe TWHLTLP will appear shortly, but it hasn't yet. Some are women who have lost women or men who have lost men, but mostly they are women who have lost men. More fragile than we'd thought, those men: that much has made itself clear.

What do we talk about? The curious folding nature of time, the phenomenon I have just described to you: that has been experienced by all of us. The quirks and preferences of the lost ones. What they would have said – or are indeed still saying – on any given occasion.

The death scenes. We are a little obsessive about those: we share them, we revisit them, we edit them, arranging them to make them, perhaps, more tolerable. Which dwindling was the worst? Was it better to have witnessed a lingering fade out, with pain but with lots of time to say goodbye, or on the other hand was a sudden stroke or heart failure preferable, easier for him, harder for you? I could tell this was it. I left the room for five minutes and he was gone. We knew it was coming. Ten years? That must have been terrible.

The tidying up. There's a lot of that. So much accumulates, year after year. Then there's a mini-explosion, and all the items that have been gathered together – the letters, the books, the passports, the photos, the favourite things kept in drawers and boxes or on shelves – all of this is strewn in the wake of the departing rocket or comet or wave of energy or silent breath, and the widows must sweep and sort and donate and bequeath and discard. Pieces of a soul, scattered here and there. The widows are thoroughly engaged by this task, and are being driven crazy by it in equal measure. We phone one another, all in a hand-wringing dither, and say, "What am I possibly supposed to do with ... fill in the blank?" We offer lots of suggestions for one another, none of which solve

the central problem.

We talk about our regrets, too; or some of them. If only I had known. If only he had said. If only I had asked. I should have been more ... fill in the blank. If only we had ... fill in the blank. There are a lot of blanks.

We're bad luck, of course, we widows. We know it. Awkward silences occur around us. People tiptoe. Should we be invited to dinner, or will we cast a pall? We certainly try not to cast palls: palls are unpleasant.

It used to be worse, in other places and in other eras. We'd get buried alive with the dead king, or we'd join him on his funeral pyre. If we escaped sharing his death, we'd have to wear black, or else white, forever. We had the evil eye. Black widow spiders, venomous enough to kill, were named after us. People crossed themselves and spat to avoid contamination by us. Or, if we were not decrepit – if we still had some blood left in us – we'd be merry widows, off the leash, looking for a little unbridled sexual action. An older man actually hinted at this to me at a party. (We do still go to parties. We paint our toenails red, though we put shoes on our feet so no one will see our flashy toes. We know this toe enhancement is absurd, but we do it anyway. A tiny dead-end pleasure.) I'd just met the man. No sooner were the introductions over than he gave the ghost of a leer and said, "So, are you dating?" Meant as a joke, though possibly not. Widows are thought to be wealthy, and also susceptible.

I answered, a little sternly: "I'm a widow. Tig just died."

"So, you're hunting?"

It was a form of geriatric flirting on his part, I believe. People of our age can flirt like that without it being seriously inappropriate, because both parties know nothing will come of it. Or, more precisely: nothing can come of it. Flirtation village, that's where we live. If I'd had a fan, I would have tapped him with it, archly, as in some grotesque Restoration comedy. Oh you are so naughty!

I could not have said, "Don't be silly. Tig is still here." Instant gossip would have resulted: "She's turned the corner into bonkers-land." "Well, she was always a little odd." And the like.

So we keep such notions to ourselves, we widows.

Needless to say, dear Stevie, I will not be sending you this letter. You are on the other side of the river. Over where you are, your beloved is still in tangible form. On this side, the widows. Between us flows the uncrossable. But I can wave to you, and wish you well, and that is what I will do. Thus:

Dear Stevie:

Thank you for your letter. I hope your health remains good. It's nice of you to ask how I'm doing. Quite well, I'm pleased to say. The winter dragged on, as it did for everyone, but now it's spring and I'm busy in the garden. Already there are snowdrops, and the daffodils are sending up their first shoots. I have my eye on some oriental lilies that I intend to plant in the front border. I used to have them years ago but the lily beetles got to them before I noticed. I'll be ready for those beetles this time: forewarned is forearmed.

The children are fine. The grandchildren are full of beans. I'm thinking of adopting a kitten. Not much other news. Let me know when you're coming this way and we'll grab lunch.

Stay safe.

Fondly,

Nell.



Extract from *Old Babes in the Wood* by Margaret Atwood

More from this

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/26/old-babes-in-the-wood>



Old Babes in the Wood

By Margaret Atwood

April 19, 2021

Camilla Parker-Bowles and Violet Trefussis

Camilla Parker-Bowles is now Queen Camilla. Her great grandmother Alice Keppel married a duke, George Keppel in 1891, but was mistress to King Edward VII from 1898 till he died in 1910. Edward had many mistresses, including Lady Churchill (mother of Winston) and Sarah Bernhardt.

Queen Victoria had a low opinion of her eldest son and was quite critical of his sexual adventures. She is known to have said “I never can, or shall, look at him without a shudder.”

But back to Alice Keppel. Did you know she had two daughters Sonia and Violet. Violet’s married surname was Trefussis, and she was hopelessly in love with another socialite, Vita Sackville West. Friends since childhood these two were close friends in their teens and lovers in their twenties. They escaped to Europe at one stage of their tumultuous affair and were brought home in shame-faced disgrace by their respective husbands.

So, Queen Camilla has a radical love history handed down by her great grandmother, her Aunt Violet, and it’s a tradition she continues to this day.

Vale Julia Ryan

Julia Ryan died in Canberra on 3 May, 2023 at the age of 85. Lyndsay Connors a dear friend has remembered her in this notice. Please circulate to others.

Julia was the daughter of Edna Ryan, a leading campaigner for women’s rights in Australia. Julia was also a feminist, teacher and historian. Her career included periods of teaching in NSW, Queensland and SA as well as the ACT. Most of her adult life was spent in Canberra, where she was a member of the first Canberra Women’s Liberation Group in the 1970s, remaining in that movement throughout her life. She was also a founding member of the women’s refuge in Canberra in 1975, and later of the National Foundation for Australian Women, serving as its honorary secretary for 5 years from 1991. Julia also served on the ANU Council and the ACT Women’s Consultative Council, and a range of other community and professional organisations which reflected the range of her political and professional interests.

A secondary school teacher, Julia taught at both high schools and senior colleges in Canberra; and in the women’s studies program at the ANU. She was also a founding member of the progressive School Without Walls. As a dedicated traveller, Julia gathered knowledge and experience on her odysseys which enriched her teaching.

Julia had time before she died to recognise how widely she was respected and loved by many students, as well as her friends and her family. She is survived by her sons, Keir and Neil McFarlane, her grandchildren Grace, Charlie and Oliver Williams and her sister, Professor Emerita Lyndall Ryan.

Vale Jacqueline Hardy

Early last year a new woman joined our 10/40 committee. Her name was Jacqui Hardy. She had recently moved from the Blue Mountains to the city’s inner west. We were all impressed when at that very first meeting Jacqui brought home made Lemonade scones.

A few months later she learned she had cancer. Though the diagnosis was shocking, she was optimistic about a full recovery.

We want to acknowledge the contributions Jacqui made to our committee discussions, she was keen to be involved and was full of enthusiasm.

Sadly, Jacqui’s situation worsened. She was forced to withdraw from her various activities and concentrate on her health.

She died on 16.05.2023. We wish to convey our condolences to Jacqui’s friends and family.

10/40 Committee

A demonstration in poor train planning

If you live in an outer suburb of Sydney or a regional area some distance from the city centre, you will be no doubt be familiar with parts of our local and country train services. But have you grasped the implications of the new train services being built by three different private operators that are going to make a right mess of things over the next few years?

We already have a driverless, privately run, Metro service running between Tallawang station (near Blacktown) and Chatswood.

Work continues on this route, extending it under the harbour and along to Parramatta, and in time maybe, further west. This Metro line uses, where they still exist, train lines that were already in place. This service is presently known as Metro Northwest/City and Southwest.

Another Metro service, known as Metro West, is still in the planning stage.

A third rail service is underway to connect Badgerys Creek to the city. At the moment this service is known as the Airport Line.

So we are talking about two Metro services and one airport service.

The section of the existing Metro line Metro Northwest/city now under construction from Chatswood to Sydenham, and hopefully on to

Parramatta, is expected to be up and running in 2024.

Carriages for the entire route are being built in India by a French company and have to be of a limited size to comfortably fit in the many tunnels along the route.

So, although there will be eight carriages pulling into the planned stations, that also have to be altered or built anew to accommodate the shape of the new carriages, we can expect less space, fewer seats and more standing room. But hey, these Metro trains are going to come along every four minutes so what are we worried about?

Four carriages is the plan for the Airport Line running from Badgerys Creek, and this service is estimated to cost \$11 billion. It's confusing to understand that this line will use a 25 kilovolt alternating current to power the trains but the Metro Northwest trains will operate on a 1500-volt direct current.

You don't have to be an engineer to work out there's something wrong here with the maths.

What it means is that the 12 carriages being built in Germany for this airport line will not be able to run on the two Metro lines and these carriages will be noticeably wider (about 30 centimetres) than other trains in order to allow for passenger luggage.

And to add to this strange grid plan, those 45

driverless carriages as I mentioned earlier, being built in India by a French company, for the existing Metro line, will not be able to run on the airport line.

Nor will they be able at any future time to run on the planned Metro West line because the power for this \$25 billion Metro West line service is predicted to run on 25 kilovolts.

The SMH recently quoted a Transport and Planning consultant as saying "Instead of getting one Metro we will end up with three distinct, and to varying degrees, incompatible systems.

Go figure!!

Pearlie

The Newsletter

We, Diann and Pearlie, 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.



From Changemakers exhibition at Old Parliament House

Changemakers celebrates the activists, icons and allies behind 120 years of women's rights in Australia.

<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/exhibitions/changemakers/>

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, Wendy

Contact email list: Diann, Julie

Archives: Sylvia and Jan

Money Management: Fiona

Websisters: Jan, Ruth, Diann, Julie

Newsletter: editing and layout Pearlie, Diann, Jacqui

Management committee Jan, Sylvia, Pearlie, Diann, Fiona, Wendy, Jacqui, Alex