

NEWSLETTER

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

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June 2003

GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001
Tel (02) 9265 9486 Fax (02) 9265 9646

Level 1 Town Hall House
456 Kent Street Sydney NSW 2000

Email info@jessiestreetwomenslibrary.com
Website www.jessiestreetwomenslibrary.com

PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON GUEST SPEAKER: FAITH BANDLER

Faith Bandler, elected a National Treasure by the people of Australia, was born in Tumbulgam in NSW, and educated in Murwillumbah and Cleveland Street Night School in Sydney. After working in the Women's Land Army during World War II and later in a woman's fashion house and a men's shirt factory, she co-founded the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship, which was solely responsible for the removal of all legislation discriminating against the NSW Aborigines. In 1957 she helped launch a petition for a Federal referendum to amend the Constitution, which would allow indigenous Australians to be counted in the census and thus be regarded as Australian citizens. Jessie Street, whom Faith had met at a peace talk in the 40s, drafted the constitutional amendment. It was a 10-year-long campaign, and the referendum of 1967 resulted in an overwhelming 'yes' vote, when 90.2% of the Australian people voted in favour of the changes.

From 1957 to the 1973, Faith was a central figure in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. The welfare of indigenous people and the removal of discrimination against them is an area which has absorbed much of her energies. In 1973 she reported to the World Council of Churches in Geneva on progress in Aboriginal Affairs and in 1974 she founded the Australian South

Seas Islanders National Council and made submissions on it to the Royal Commission into Human Relationships. Faith refused an MBE in 1975, saying she could not accept such an award from a government that had kidnapped her father from his village in Vanuatu (then the New Hebrides) and brought him to work in the Queensland canefields.

Faith has written several books, one of which, *Wacvie*, a prize-winning novel, tells the story of her father. She has been involved with writers and writing for many years, representing the Australian Literature Board at the South Pacific Festival of Arts in PNG in 1979. She was a special guest at the first International Women's Writers and Publishers Conference in London in 1984 and in 1989 won the Pandora Press Award.

Faith was awarded an Order of Australia in 1984 and in 1995 had an honorary D.Litt. conferred on her by Macquarie University. In 1997 she was awarded the Human Rights Medal, Australia's highest award for Human Rights.

Faith's biography, *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist* by Marilyn Lake, was published in 2002 and launched by the then Governor General, Sir William Deane. Faith has always been interested in Jessie Street National Women's Library and at the luncheon takes as her topic, 'Jessie Street for Peace'.

JSNWL FUNCTIONS

Lunch-Hour Talks, 2003

Because of renovation work in the Town Hall, we are unable to use the Lady Mayoress' Rooms for our June, July and August talks.

CHANGED VENUES and DATES
June 19th talk will be in the Marconi Room.

July 24th and August 28th talks will be in the Southern Function Room. Both rooms are on Level 4, Town Hall House, 456 Kent Street. Only entrance is via Kent Street.

Entry: \$15 (members) \$20 (non-members) Sandwich lunch included.

To book ring (02) 9876 3927 or the Library on (02) 9265 9486 or email shirleyjones@ozemail.com.au

June Talk — Thursday 19th
Deirdre Macpherson — Betty Archdale: Her Life and Impact on Women's Education.

Deirdre, writer, journalist and teacher, talks about Betty Archdale, feminist, sportswoman and educationalist. Deirdre's biography of Betty was published in September 2002.

July Talk — Thursday 24th
Jane Innes — Towards an Australian Republic??

Jane, Senior Lecturer in Law at Wollongong University, has been teaching constitutional law since 1972. In her talk she raises the question as to whether Australia is not in effect, already a republic.

August Talk — Thursday 28th
Anne Whitehead — Mary Gilmore: Blue Stocking in Patagonia.

Anne talks about Mary Gilmore's two years of incredible difficulty and privation in Patagonia in Southern Argentina and her own encounters following in Mary's footsteps in a country in economic and social collapse.

PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON

MONDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2003

BOOK EARLY! BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED

As a member, you have the opportunity to book before invitations are issued to the general public. Don't miss out on a place.

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

The Library is open to the public Monday to Friday, 10 am to 3 pm

Australia's national women's library is a specialist library with its sole focus on collecting and preserving the literary and cultural heritage of women.

Aims

- to heighten awareness of women's issues
- to preserve documents on women's lives and activities
- to support the field of women's history
- to highlight women's contribution to this country's development

Borrowing Policy

The public may borrow items on interlibrary loan. A loan collection is available to financial members of JSNWL.

Location: Level 1, Town Hall House
456 Kent Street, Sydney

Public Transport Services

Trains Town Hall Station

Buses Queen Victoria Building,
George St, York St and Druitt St



DID YOU KNOW THAT ...?

Chinese women, over hundreds of years, developed a language of their own called Nu Shu or 'women's language'. It was developed in secret in Jiangyong country in the Hunan province, where women never got an education. By creating their own secret language, women could use it to criticise feudal China's unfair policies towards females, including footbinding, without fear of reprisal. Nobody knows how old the language is.

Nu Shu has been in decline since China started educating females and giving them more freedom. In 1998, only two women — one then 93 and the other 59 — could still speak the language.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

'The best laid plans of mice and men' (and also those of the secretary) certainly went astray on 29 March. The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts failed to produce any mechanics on the day to help us to reach our venue on Level 1. A lift security failure during the night not only locked us out of the room but also prevented us from retrieving the pile of paperwork essential to the meeting, taken there the day before. This meant that we were unable to proceed with much of the business of the AGM.

Fortunately one level was accessible by lift and we were permitted to hold the meeting in a section of the library on condition that we remained very quiet. It appears that we complied as no one ordered us to stop talking! At least we had somewhere to sit down and the Chair, Victoria Rubensohn, rose to the occasion admirably, presenting a summary of the Annual Report which was circulated to those present.

Shirley Jones was nominated as Public Officer. Expressions of thanks were minuted for Sybil Jack, Beverley Perel, Marianne Rajkovic and Suzanne Davies who all retired from the Board this year.

Wilga Pruden, as Returning Officer, put forward the 11 names nominated for the

Board for 2003. These were duly approved. The new Board is:

Executive

Chair — Victoria Rubensohn

Deputy Chair — Jane Waddell

Secretary — Christine Lees

Treasurer — Robyn Harriott

Board Members

Wendi Balbi Olive Briscoe

Virginia Gordon Shirley Jones

Cathy Sanderson Sandra Sherwood

Penny Street.

The Treasurer, Robyn Harriott presented the financial statements which had been audited by Jann Skinner. Both Jann and Robyn were thanked for their considerable effort in preparing the papers.

As copies of the minutes of the 2002 AGM were unavailable it was proposed and agreed that they be tabled until the next AGM. The amendment to the constitution was also unavailable and this will be put on the agenda in 2004.

Unfortunately the meeting did not end with the usual refreshments as they were also locked away, but a number of those present continued to talk over a welcome cup of coffee in a nearby cafe.

Christine Lees, Secretary

ANNUAL RAFFLE

Drawn at the Luncheon at Parliament House on 22 September, 2003

FIRST PRIZE

A framed painting, entitled 'A Good Swing', by Max Mannix, valued at \$1200 and donated by the artist.

Max Mannix was born in Victoria in 1939 and is a self-taught painter. He once managed a 1300 square mile property in Queensland called Heartbreak Corner, and knows the outback and the people who live there intimately. His paintings depict life in the outback in the 1960s in a light-hearted vein. He has been exhibited in many galleries here and overseas.

SECOND PRIZE

The second prize in our raffle is a beautiful pair of 18 carat yellow gold drop earrings set with a large zircon. These have been donated by Cerrone Jewellery in Castlereagh Street and are valued at \$345.

Photo not available

Earrings donated by Cerrone Jewellery, Castlereagh Street, Sydney

THIRD PRIZE

Book tokens to the value of \$200.

A book of five tickets is enclosed. You can obtain extra tickets/books by contacting the Library.

**SUPPORT YOUR LIBRARY
BUY GENEROUSLY**

LIBRARY MATTERS

VOLUNTEERS' NEWS

The team of library volunteers has risen to twelve and besides using their knowledge of library matters, they each have their own special project. Myra Keay, whom we are very happy to welcome back with us, trains the newcomers. The team consists of **Sue Baker** (coordinator of the poster collection)

Phoebe Basson (coordinator of office needs)

Gwen Clarke (research and reception)

Audrey Green (archives)

Julie Gregory (Tapestry project)

Penny Moyes (liaison with publishers)

Helen O'Rourke (serials)

Monique Reiher (cataloguer)

Margaret Rowland (cataloguer)

Lynn Sitsky (cataloguer)

Judy Webb (archival photographs).

Additional new volunteers include:

Jill Harris (reception and Fact File coordinator)

Emilia Renouf (reception)

Margery Tate (secretariat)

Adelle Webster (mail-out and Lunch-Hour Talks)

Maria Zarro (reception and computer operator) and last but not least

Emily Elder, poet and feminist, who is with us briefly while studying.

Wendi Balbi, Volunteer Coordinator

DONATIONS OF MATERIAL

We thank the following for their generous donations.

Joyce Clarke

Irene Coates

Merry Cooper

Stella Cornelius

Edith Gilmour

Bronwyn Hanna

Shirley Jones

Penny Kane

Barbara Munday

Valwyn Wishart

AIATSIS

Allen & Unwin

Clouston & Hall

Film Australia

Fremantle Arts Centre Press

Friends of Ipswich Library Service

HarperCollins

Hodder Headline

Indra Publishing

Lothian Books

Penguin Australia

Random House

University of Queensland Press

Wild & Woolley

LIBRARY NEWS

Visitors

We are gratified to find that more and more students and researchers are making use of our resources and that increasing numbers of members of the general public who are interested in seeing our specialist collection, are paying us a visit.

Researchers using the library have come to us for information on: the changing role of women in Australia; gender development; research on gender; women in the Bible; women's poetry; domestic violence in lesbian relationships; visual presentation of feminism; religious aspects of gambling; women and unemployment; abortion; prostitution.

Our Unique Serials Collection

The National Library recently contacted us about two newsletters which we hold and they don't. They wanted to know the publisher details so that they could try to get copies. We only hold one copy of each newsletter 'Australian Women in Archaeology Newsletter' and 'Networking to Win'.

Request to Members

We (and the National Library) would be interested in obtaining more copies of the above newsletters. If any of our members have any copies at home, or knowledge about these titles, please let us know.

Among the recent researchers was a student from the University of Western Sydney who is doing a thesis on domestic violence among lesbians for her PhD. She was delighted to find that, among the 200 titles of periodicals we hold, were copies of DVAR (Domestic Violence Action Resource), including the issue containing the particular article she was seeking. Having had great difficulty in locating this periodical, she thought we were probably the only library in Australia holding issues. She made a small donation in appreciation and will donate a copy of her thesis when it is completed.

Recent Donations

A Virginia Woolf Collection

Irene Coates has donated a large collection of books she used as reference material when she was researching for



for her book *Who's Afraid of Leonard Woolf?* These include, among many other books, hardback copies of Virginia's published diaries and journals. When the collection has been catalogued, we will be able to offer this unique resource to researchers interested in Virginia Woolf.

'Australian Women's Digest'

Our grateful thanks to Audrey McDonald who has donated copies of the *Australian Women's Digest* to the Library. Copies of these journals are extremely scarce and, thanks to Audrey we now hold all the issues published. Jessie Street founded (and funded) this journal, which was established to provide 'a channel of communication for women's organisations' and was linked with the 'Charter' the 'feminist agenda for postwar reconstruction'. We plan to publish excerpts from the Digest in the newsletter as space allows.

ARCHIVES NEWS

Work continues on the vast quantity of material from the late Helen Leonard. Two new volunteers, Shelley Brann, history student from Sydney University and Margo McKenzie, a trained archivist, are diligently undertaking the tedious tasks of replacing metal paper clips with plastic ones, replacing folders and other preparatory work. These time-consuming jobs are necessary before we can begin on the the business of sorting and boxing the material.

Visitors

Megg Kelham from Alice Springs has visited the Library several times to look at our collection of material on the Canberra Women's Pine Gap Peace Camp. With funding from the NT Government Megg is preparing an exhibition on Pine Gap.

Donations

Barbara Munday has donated some papers and photographs from the writer Susan Yorke. These include a diary written when she was a young girl. Susan is the author of nine novels and more than 500 published short stories. At different times, she held the positions of President and Secretary of the Society of Women Writers.

Beverley Sodbinow, Archivist

FEBRUARY LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: SUSAN STEGGALL

***“From Sand to Snow and Back Again:
One’s Heart in Two Countries”***

Photo not available

On 20 February, Sue Steggall gave an intensely interesting talk, which gave us an insight into her life in the Haute-Savoie in France and also into how she tackled the business of turning her experiences into a book.

It might seem strange that a book about a mountain adventure actually has the word ‘beach’ in the title. When Zali won a world cup slalom at the end of ’97, the journalists, who’d never heard of her, reported all these strange biographical details — that she was born in France and came here as a baby, and learned to ski somewhere and grew up somewhere else. So I started ringing journalists saying she was an Aussie, born within sight and sound of Manly Beach. ‘Beach’ in the title also comes from the fact that we spent our summers camping on the Mediterranean coast. Our life in France wasn’t luxurious. We had plenty of time and the fact that we didn’t have that much money didn’t really matter. The people in our alpine area were quite plain living.

We had gone just because of adventure and this attraction to the snowfields. There’s been a lot of talk in the last few years about alternative lifestyles and I suppose on reflection, that’s what we did. It wasn’t actually a conscious motivation but we were quite happy to leave our fairly comfortable middle-class professional lives and head off into the unknown, just the four of us and very few possessions.

We intended to stay two or perhaps three years. Well those years actually stretched into ten. We learned some French. We put the children into school where they picked up French very quickly. We didn’t have to work. We had a small income from rental properties

back here and we lived a fairly simple life. The children had to earn their places in the local ski team but we had time to take them to ski races. We packed the car with our children and everybody else’s children as well, because other parents were busy. And this was all adventure for us. The people accepted us. We had this enthusiasm for joining in and helping them do things. Then the children started getting good sports results and I thought I should be writing it down. So about 1983 I bought an exercise book, sharpened a few pencils, wrote a couple of very pretentious paragraphs and then threw everything away because I wasn’t a writer.

It was then I started keeping a scrapbook. We had quite a bit of trouble getting Zeke into the ski club — but he was finally accepted and picked for a race and he actually won it. So that is on page one of my first scrapbook, which covered two years. However, when we started doing other sports — running, wind surfing, cross-country skiing, cycling — I filled virtually a scrapbook per year. They are amongst my most treasured possessions. When we came back to Manly in the early ’90s, I thought I should write about our time in France, but each time I got out my diaries and notebooks I found I simply couldn’t do it. It was really only after launching myself back at university and being required to write essays, a thing I’d never done before, that I started to enjoy writing. So in about ’95-’96 I started writing the book in earnest.

But how to do it was quite a dilemma. I read everything I could on writing biography and autobiography and I practised my style. When I reread the first draft I can see my Virginia Woolf period, or my Robert Dessai moment, all of which of course had to come out. Gradually I did find my own voice. Something Jill Ker Conway wrote stuck in my mind — to write in the active voice, to look at incidents clearly and to apportion blame where blame was due. T.S.Eliot said. ‘And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started.’ So I thought OK. I’ll see

what I can do’. I didn’t want to write ‘A Year in Provence’. It would have been very boring. I kept in mind something Andrew Riemer said — that when you’re writing about someone’s life, you just write about the parts that really made you want to write it in the first place. So I decided I would just literally write about the ten years we spent away, starting it on the day we left in September 1978 and finishing it on the day the children and I flew home in January 1989.

One of the difficult things to write about when you’re a mum is your children. I had two children, both very good athletes, very competitive, very ambitious, but very different personalities. I hope I did them both justice without overinflating the achievements of one or downplaying the achievements of the other. As well as the sport, which was a big part of our lives, I also tried to include the geography and the culture and the lives of the people who make up these mountain communities.

I wrote the book in the present tense because I wanted to take the reader along with me, as we discovered the mountains and as things happened, trying not to be too wise after the event. I tried also to be honest about things. I wrote a few pages about coping with visits. When John’s Mum and Dad came to stay we’d just bought our old, small house and because it was autumn and the village was just closing down, there wasn’t really much for them to do. It was too unpleasant to go for walks, and because we were thrown together inside quite a lot, little eccentricities became magnified and we all got quite irritated with each other.

My one book is actually now two books — one in English and one in French, which is actually selling quite well to British tourists. The local bookshop is really happy about that. I’m very aware of the rule in translation, that you only translate into your own language, not into somebody else’s. So I resisted doing the translation for a long time, but I finally succumbed. So for the second

continued on page 0

To keep women’s words, women’s works, alive and powerful – Ursula Le Guin

MARCH LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: GINA LENNOX

“Voices from Kurdistan”

Photo not
available

On 20 March, the day the US started bombing in Iraq, Gina Lennox gave an extremely interesting and topical talk on the Kurds, their traditions, culture and present situation and what a war with Iraq might mean for them.

My interest began when I interviewed Iraqi Kurds for ABC radio programs and it culminated in the writing of the book *Fire, Snow and Honey: Voices from Kurdistan*. This is a collection of life stories from 50 Kurdish men and women aged 23 to 103 from all parts of Kurdistan — Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, as well as Armenia and Georgia — who have wound up in Australia, 40 of them as refugees in 1999. One quarter of the book is life stories based on these oral histories.

Fire, Snow and Honey are symbolic for the Kurds.. ‘Fire’ comes from one of their legends and indicates freedom. The fires of freedom are lit on Newroz (New Year’s Eve) and the first day of spring. Fire is also a sacred object and as well, it represents genocide. Snow has particular relevance in Kurdistan. where the mountains are a source of the major river systems of the Middle East, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which supply water and electricity to Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. Snow refers to the way Kurdish history has been rewritten or stolen from the people. Honey represents the physical landscape — soaring mountains, gorges, waterfalls, forests. It can now be seen as a symbol for oil, used not to develop the country, but to buy weapons,

I used a translator in interviewing, but even so it was difficult to get Kurds to talk, particularly the women. Kurdish culture is strongly patriarchal and women are afraid to say anything that their husbands or the community would disapprove of. However, when women were able to speak in the third person under assumed names, they spoke freely, telling stories about otherwise taboo subjects, such as female circumcision, menstruation, humiliating wedding night practices, and honour killings of women, and one told the story of the school principal raping her best friend. One woman, Surma Hamid, speaking from experience, described a woman’s life under Saddam Hussein when, in late 2000, 200 women were beheaded and

their heads put over the door of the family home because their sexual or political behaviour was judged to dishonour their families. She also spoke of women being raped to get information from them — a form of torture. The good news is that Kurdish society is changing rapidly. There are far fewer circumcisions and multiple marriages, younger women are being educated and are working, they have more say in whom they will marry, and honour killings are now regarded as murder.

The greatest internal problem is the Kurds’ inability to unite, due partly to the geography of the country separating tribes, partly also to the different religions, dialects and political parties. I found the Kurds from Turkey the most reluctant to be interviewed for the book. Turkey, whose population is one-third Kurdish, has the worst reputation for abusing the human rights of this minority. Under Attaturk, it was treason to speak Kurdish, to write or broadcast in Kurdish, to play Kurdish music or to dress in Kurdish clothes. In reaction to such suppression, there were Kurdish uprisings and out of these in 1978, the PPK was born, which was labelled a terrorist group by Turkey and the US. Because Turkey now wants to join the EU, the government is relaxing many of the restrictions forced on the Kurds.

I also had difficulty collecting Syrian Kurds’ oral histories. In 1962 the Syrian government evacuated Kurdish villages in border areas and replaced the Kurds with Arabs. And in 1968 it withdrew citizenship from 150,000 Kurds. As non-citizens, and without identity cards, they were not eligible to receive subsidised food, to be educated, to own land or to travel freely between towns and they were forbidden to speak Kurdish.

In Iran the Kurds were allowed to speak Kurdish, but they were not allowed to dress in Kurdish clothes at school or at their jobs. The Iranian government did not slaughter the Kurds in the numbers of Iraq and Turkey, preferring to execute the Kurdish leaders.

Iraqi freedom fighters were the most willing to tell their stories. Ironically Kurds in Iraq used to have more legal and cultural rights than those anywhere else. Schools in some areas taught in

Kurdish, and Kurdish publications and radio and TV broadcasts were allowed, although censored. However, all this altered under Saddam Hussein, who began a policy of genocide.

Which brings me to the war. I blame three parties for this — Saddam Hussein, the USA and Europe. In 1992 Kurdish leaders met several times with US officials to discuss the role the Kurds could play in replacing Saddam’s regime. The Kurdish leaders, for once united, wanted protection from Saddam, and a guarantee that a multi-party federal democracy would be established in Iraq. The US sidelined the Kurdish leaders and negotiated with Turkey who, for their help, wanted millions of dollars in direct grants and loans, the right to have troops occupy Iraqi Kurdistan to protect the oilfields, the disarming of the Kurds and a written undertaking that the US would not support any form of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq.

With the war, the Kurds greatest fears are: a Turkish invasion, Saddam using chemical weapons against them, Saddam replaced by another dictator and betrayal by the US. Many Kurds dream of an independent Kurdish state, but this will be hard to achieve.

Summary by Shirley Jones

The book is a mine of information on the Kurdish people and the 5000 years of their history. — Ed

Gina’s book is not available in bookshops. You can order it directly from Gina for \$53 including GST and postage. Send a postal address and cheque made out to *Fire, Snow & Honey*, to 46 William Street, Redfern NSW 2016 or send card details (name, number and expiry date) by fax (02) 9319 7728 or email kurdconference@optusnet.com.au

APRIL L.UNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: JACQUELINE KENT

“The Art of Reading Other People’s Mail”

Jacquie Kent, author and editor, gave a fascinating and informative talk on 17 April on the nuts and bolts of writing biography, illustrating this with reference to her award-winning biography of the legendary editor, Beatrice Davis.

I thought I’d start off by talking about the nature of biography. Biography now has changed its function from being a record of an exemplary life to which we should all aspire, to using the techniques of fiction to present the results of research into somebody’s life.

Biography is story-telling. Basically it tells the story of a person’s life from birth to death. It is popular, I think, because we all are curious about our fellow human beings. The form that curiosity takes determines the kind of biography presented. It sometimes is on the obvious level of ‘what is he/she like?’ and all the detail about people’s lives including their sex life. But what you’re really after is not the story of the subject’s private life, but an insight into their mind. Straight information doesn’t quite give you that. You might be told, for instance, that Mary Shelley’s children all died very young. And you might be given statistics of neonatal deaths in the early 19th century, but that doesn’t tell you what she felt about the deaths. You have to look elsewhere for that. If you’re very lucky you find letters, where people told their correspondent how they felt. Basically, though you have to intuit how Mary must have felt, but you’re a 21st century person. You know how *you’d* feel, but you need those neonatal death statistics to colour your perception of how *she* must have felt.

What is really needed here is empathy. Claire Tomalin has just written a brilliant biography of Samuel Pepys. Here she is, a 21st century journalist, writing the life of a 17th century English civil servant and diarist. She found out all she could about Pepys’ life in London, what he ate, what he liked and there’s a fantastic bit in it where she describes Samuel Pepys having an operation for gall stones. By the end of it you’re writhing in a corner of the sofa, but you now know how these things were done in the 17th century. Your

knowledge of the period and of the person, can enable you to build a portrait, but it’s got to be based on verifiable facts, and it has to be grounded in some kind of reality. And, of course, it’s got to be interesting. What the reader wants from any biography is to understand the person written about. Good fiction does the same thing, of course, which is where the two types of writing meet.

Now to the questions, How far can you trust the written record? And how far can you trust your intuition when you’re writing biography? I thought it would be interesting to explore some of those things.

Beatrice Davis, *A Certain Style: A Literary Life*, was published by Penguin a couple of years ago. Beatrice Davis was born in Bendigo in 1909, she died in 1992. For 37 years, until 1973, she was the editor at Angus & Robertson in Sydney. A& R, as some of you will probably remember, were the only publishers of Australian work until the late 60s. Because Beatrice was there so long, she actually is the bridge that connected Miles Franklin and Tim Winton. She worked with both of them and she was a friend and colleague of very many Australian writers — Douglas Stewart, Hal Porter, Xavier Herbert, Thea Astley, Ruth Park and Darcy Niland, and she had a fair amount of say on what books A& R published, particularly literary fiction. She was even more influential as a literary tastemaker. She was on the inaugural Miles Franklin award judging panel and was among judges of many other literary awards. Her importance really, and the reason why I wrote the biography, was because she was one of the first persons to insist that Australian writing, in Australia, for Australians, was important and that Australian writers were important. This was at a time when we were all meekly thinking that we weren’t as good as ‘them’ — usually England.

I knew Beatrice. She was a small fierce woman and she could be pretty intimidating. Everybody had stories about her. She had a pretty raunchy sex life, I think, but she did not kiss and tell.

I knew that she was forthright, that when she’d had too much to drink, which she frequently did, she was apt to bowl up to writers and tell them they couldn’t write for nuts. Only to people who couldn’t. She was so genteel and well-behaved, that when she let go, she really let go. I got the feeling there was another person struggling to get out from under this carapace. So while she was alive, I rang her and said ‘It’s Jacquie Kent here Beatrice, from the Society of Editors.’ ‘Yes dear.’ ‘I wonder whether I could bring a tape recorder and interview you about your fascinating life?’ ‘No dear.’ So she would not be interviewed.

Beatrice had left a well marked paper trail through the A& R collection at the Mitchell Library, which contains letters from authors to authors, correspondence, bits of publicity and photographs. I spent lovely times there, reading other people’s mail. I found out a lot about how Beatrice treated certain authors, and the way she did her job. And that also interested me — her job. There’s not been an enormous amount yet written about professional women and their jobs, so the written record was interesting. The stages a book went through was all documented in letters, but the relationship between Beatrice and the author was not so well documented. And this is where having worked as an editor for a long time came in very handy. I knew that marginal comments like ‘I was concerned to see’ and ‘I rather wish you hadn’t ...’ probably equated to tearing pieces out of the cushions. And then there are the letters from authors, which lecture her about her job. ‘Who do you think you are, Beatrice Davis? I’m the writer here.’ ‘Thank you for reminding me of my position.’ There were times that I almost felt as if I could look up and catch her eye.

This also brings up something else — are you supposed to love your subject?

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To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful – Ursula Le Guin

CANBERRA NEWS

Inaugural Lunch-hour Talk

Speaker: Carmen Lawrence
“Peace, Not War”

Photo not available

Carmen Lawrence with Wendy Sanderson, organiser of the talks

What a great beginning to the Canberra Lunch Hour Talk series! Over 70 people gathered at the Canberra Museum and Galleries theaterette on Thursday 6 March to hear inaugural guest speaker, Dr Carmen Lawrence. Her talk focussed on our international obligations both to uphold international law and to stand by those treaties we have ratified. She, succinctly and forcefully, put forward her views on Australia's participation in the Iraqi war and the plight of people detained in isolated camps. A lively question and answer session followed.

The light luncheon provided before the talk allowed people to mingle, meet the guest speaker and catch up with old friends. We were delighted to welcome members Betty Searle, Belinda Mackay and Anne Edgeworth among the guests. We were delighted too, to nibble on cup cakes appropriately iced in green, white and lilac, the feminist colours.

Cathy Sanderson

Copies of the full text of Carmen's talk will be available shortly for \$4 (+ \$1 postage if mailed).

JULY LUNCH-HOUR TALK IN CANBERRA

Speaker: Ann Curthoys — *From Freedom Ride to Women's Liberation*

Thursday, 3 July, 12.45 to 2 pm at the Canberra Museum and Gallery (Civic Square). \$15 (non-members JSNWL) \$10 (members) \$5 (students/unwaged) Bookings essential. Contact Wendy on 6249 7537 or email wendyandel@netspeed.com.au

Ann Curthoys is Manning Clark Professor of History at ANU and author of *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers*. She participated in the 1965 Freedom Ride. Her book was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards this year.

May Lunch-hour Talk

Speaker: Dawn Casey
“Sticking to Your Principles”

May Day in Canberra saw 70 people at the Canberra Museum and Gallery to hear Dawn Casey, Director of the National Museum of Australia, give the second in our series of Canberra Lunch-Hour Talks.

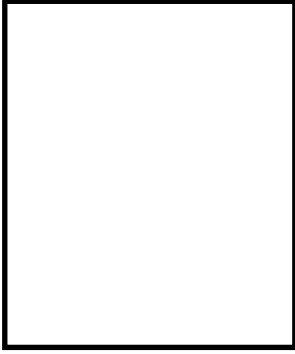
Dawn's talk focussed on the ups and downs of juggling the many differing viewpoints that have to be balanced in assembling and exhibiting a collection of national significance. She touched on the aims and objectives of the Museum and how these are being met. She also responded to some of the sustained criticism of the Museum from the conservative right and pointed out that leftists too have problems with some of

the exhibitions. Everyone's a critic it seems — even people who haven't set foot inside the Museum! In conclusion Dawn said 'If we stick to our principles, we will continue to challenge or surprise people, take them beyond the comfortable and the familiar and keep reminding them that their kind of person, or their experience in life, is not the only one. We cannot hope to grow mature as a nation without doing that and I'm sure you'll all agree that Australia needs to change.'

The question and answer session following Dawn's talk was very lively and interesting. A highlight of the refreshments were the gingerbread-persons in their bright red May Day overalls!!

Wendy Sanderson

POEMS FOR PEACE



Anne Edgeworth, a Canberra poet and JSNWL member, along with Hazel Smith, Deputy Director of the University of Canberra Centre for Writing, presented a bound volume of *Poems for Peace* to Senator Brian Greig, one of the members of 'Parliamentarians for Peace' at an informal ceremony at Parliament House on 5 March. The *Poems for Peace*, over 100 poems by Australian poets, was part of a worldwide project, started in the US by Sam Hamill, a publisher, who had been invited to organise a poetry symposium. This was to have been hosted by America's first lady, Laura Bush, but was officially cancelled when it was discovered that Hamill had invited some leading American poets to present anti-war poems. He then contacted poets' organisations

worldwide requesting that their members email him poems for peace. He received over 12,000.

The handing-over ceremony of the Australian volume of *Poems for Peace* was recorded by ABC radio and Channel 7 television, who interviewed Anne and Hazel about the enterprise.

NOTES & QUOTES

A six-year old reported to her grandmother that the school library had been broken into and the computers stolen. 'But Grandma' she said, 'we were very lucky. They didn't steal any of the books.'

Item seen in Column 8
Sydney Morning Herald

NEWS OF MEMBERS

Thank you all members who sent in items for this column in response to the editor's request. They were very welcome. To all of you, keep the news rolling in.

We are delighted to have **Maria Zarro** back with us. Maria was a volunteer when the Library was located in the NSW Writers' Centre at Rozelle and has returned from an extended period overseas.

She says: 'It pleases me to see the changes since I was last a volunteer nearly 10 years ago. The Library is really flourishing. For a start, its central location is attracting volunteers from various parts of Sydney and beyond. It now has more than three times the number of volunteers it did when it was based in Rozelle.'

'It's refreshing also to observe how the library has progressed from being manually-based to a highly organised, computerised organisation. It now has an online catalogue, an OPAC system for public access, compactus storage, four PCs, and a reception area. It has become systematic and streamlined.'

Joan Godsall, one of our Queensland members, wrote the following in response to the editor's plea for more news of members from outside Sydney. 'You know that I am a Master swimmer and since 1990 have been competing regularly in carnivals, last March swimming internationally in New Zealand. I was then in the 80-84 age group and gained a bronze and four Top Tens in the World. Now I am swimming in the 85-89 age group and at my first carnival this year broke four State records and three National records for both freestyle and backstroke. I intend to break 'em all!

We are sure you will Joan. Congratulations — Ed

Congratulations to **Katie Bird**, who has won the Margaret Jennings Award, given by the Australian Society of Archivists to the top student at the Edith Cowan University Archives Course. Katie did her 75 hours' work experience for the course at JSNWL last year, helping archivist Beverley Sodbinow, obviously to very good effect. Both enjoyed the experience.

Jenny Heidtman, one of our Library volunteers, has recently returned from

a holiday in Cuba, where she and her husband and four other friends spent four weeks on a cycling tour. They set out in Havana with the *Lonely Planet Guide to Cycling in Cuba* to keep them on track. They visited most of the major towns and cities and also rode extensively through the countryside in remote areas, averaging 90-100 km per day. They stayed in Casa Particular — family homes, which they found wonderful, friendly, clean and with great meals.

While they were there the Festival of Books was in full swing. All the towns they passed through had stalls with copies of great literature (including Dickens, Jane Austen and the like) and there was music and dancing. This annual festival is held to promote reading and literature. It must certainly be effective, Jenny says, since Cuba has a surprising 98% literacy.

Valwyn Wishart is delighted to find herself a grandmother at last, with the arrival of her grandson, Jarrah David Wishart on 18 March in San Francisco. Val has recently paid the family a visit and established contact with the new member.

We congratulate **Betty Searle**, a long-time member from the ACT, who was one of four Canberra women awarded the 2003 ACT International Women's Day Award on 7 March. Betty's mother marched with suffragettes Emily Pankhurst and our own Jessie Street in London in 1911. Betty has kept up the family tradition by campaigning for women's rights and equal pay since she was young, and has worked with Jessie Street.

Shirley Randell, who works in Vanuatu, sent us news of recent Vanuatu publications. She herself edited and wrote the preface of *Creative Writing in Memory of Grace Molisa*, a tribute to a woman who was pioneer, poet, author, publisher, women's activist and stateswoman from Vanuatu. Shirley also edited *Ni-Vanuatu Role Models: Women in Their Own Right*, the stories of 20 distinguished women from every major island and province of Vanuatu, told in their own words. The stories are remarkably frank and touch on early pregnancies, domestic violence and discrimination in the workplace.



NEW MEMBERS

We extend a very warm welcome to the large numbers of new members who have joined the Library over the last three months.

Kristen Blume
Olive Briscoe
Sophie Chessell
Susan Chessell
Jennifer Dunn
Emily Elder
Thalia Goldspink
Helen Greer
Julie Gregory
Katherine Halliday
Jill Harris
Thea Harris
Michael Jiang
Megg Kelham
Patti Kendall
Josephine Krelle
Ruth Lathlean
Angela Luvera
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Gail Radford
Emilia Renouf
Ceri Ritchie
Virginia Ryan
Ruth Shatford
Lynn Sitsky
Jarinya Soieprasouk
Lesley Taylor
Judith Webb
Adelle Webster
Pei Lin Wei
Maria Zarro

Congratulations to **Liz O'Brien** on winning an Edna Ryan Award in the category 'Community Activism'. Liz has encouraged the voice of women at Community Radio 2XX in Canberra. She is currently Convenor of the National Association of Community Legal Centres and is particularly involved in helping indigenous women with legal services.

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

CONGRATULATIONS

Quentin Bryce

Congratulations to Quentin Bryce, the newly appointed Governor of Queensland. Quentin, who takes up the post in July, joins NSW's Marie Bashir and South Australia's Marjorie Jackson Nelson, as women who are constitutional heads of state governments.

A soiree to farewell Quentin was held on Wednesday 28 May in the Jubilee Room at Parliament House. Christine Lees, secretary, and Olive Briscoe, board member, represented JSNWL at the function. Quentin was Chair of Jessie Street National Women's Library Management Committee from 1996 to 1998.

Margaret McDonald

Congratulations also to Margaret McDonald who was awarded an OAM in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to the community as an advocate for social justice in adoption policies and practice. Margaret, along with co-worker Audrey Marshall, was guest speaker at a JSNWL lunch-hour talk in 2002, speaking on the subject of adoption in Australia.

2003 JSNWL ESSAY PRIZE

A Reminder — Essays entered for this year's prize must be submitted by 30 June.

The prize of \$1000 in this year's Essay Competition has again been donated by Hon. Elizabeth Evatt, who has made \$3000 available to the Library for use over the next three years to help get the competition firmly established. We are extremely grateful to Elizabeth, our Patron, for her support and her commitment to the cause.

News from Hailey Baldwin

Last year's prize was won by Hailey Baldwin of Adelaide who wrote to tell us what she is doing now. She says:

I've moved to Sydney to study economics and social science at the University of Sydney. I finished High School with a score of 99.5 and had the exciting surprise of being dux. I also won the state prize for economics. Unfortunately I missed out on law at Sydney by 0.1 points, but am hopeful I may be able to transfer next year.

I'm enjoying university a great deal and have already made plenty of friends. I even caught up with Mimi Zou, whom I first met at the dinner [at Women's College when I was presented with my prize.] We ran into each other on ori-

entation day, which was wonderful, because I didn't know anyone in Sydney at the time and was feeling a little lost.

I still have wonderful memories from the dinner night last year.

PROOF — Portraits from the Movement

Photographic Exhibition by Juno Gemes

**National Portrait Gallery,
Commonwealth Place, Canberra
11 July – 11 September 2003**

B/W and colour photographs show the Aboriginal Struggle for Justice in Australia, 1969-2002. The exhibition includes intimate portraits of Aboriginal leaders, artists, educators and important political events and achievements in the Movement.

Born in Budapest in 1944 Juno, a JSNWL member, is a committed photographer with many exhibitions, both here and overseas, to her credit. She has worked extensively with Aboriginal communities.

ADVERTISE THROUGH THE NEWSLETTER

Send your advertisements in writing to the GPO Box address or email or fax them to the Library.

Or discuss your requirements with the editor by phoning (02) 9876 3927.

Space Charges

Members/friends: 6 x 3 cm = \$15

6 x 4 cm = \$20 6 x 5 cm = \$25

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OBITUARY
Edith Gilmour (1901-2003)

Edith Gilmour was born on 6 January 1901, the year of Federation, and died on 8 February, 2003 at 102. Her grandfather helped establish a co-operative on land that had been granted by the South Australian Government on the banks of the Murray River. The settlement folded after some years due to droughts and an economic depression. Her parents met and married there, but when the settlement broke up they travelled to Queensland and lived sixty miles from the railhead of Charleville where Edith was born. In 1903 the family moved to the Gilgandra area in NSW. Edith was one of seven children, five girls and two boys. She was the second child and eldest girl.

I first met Edith over 50 years ago. I was a young teacher down from the country for the Annual Conference of the NSW Teachers' Federation (NSWTF). When I arrived at the Conference, I still remember seeing a remarkable group of women gathered together for morning tea, plotting and planning their strategies for success in the coming debate — women like Alma Hamilton, Margaret Kent-Hughes, Bea Taylor, Lucy Woodcock, Florence Hornibrook, Sheila Cleary, Mary Reid, Ethel Lewis, Elizabeth Mattick, Joyce Clarke and Edith and Lorna Gilmour. These were the leading women in the Federation—the women who were the forerunners, fighting for better working conditions and equal pay and equal opportunity for women. Of them all only Lorna and Joyce are now alive.

Edith joined the NSWTF in the early 1930s and was the Federation Representative in her schools for 30 years. She was the quiet one, but the one always ready to do more than her share of the background work. At meetings she took copious notes. When a friend asked her why, she replied 'It keeps me awake.' She and Lorna were the stalwarts, dedicated to improving working conditions for teachers and improving the learning environment for children in the public school system of NSW. As Edith herself said, "My own role was supportive; I have to be driven into a corner to become active". If that is the case the corners in Edith's life were the whole world, for she was active till her death in all humanitarian, world peace, and social justice issues, and she was there, committed, dedicated, consistent and persistent.

Edith trained at Waverley Kindergarten Training College, began teaching in 1923 and taught for 40 years. As an infants teacher she taught in many schools around the state and finished her career in Sydney.

On her retirement she did not stop. She joined The United Association of Women. Jessie Street was co-founder and president and Edith called her "the amazing Jessie Street". This organisation worked for the status of women, human rights, world peace and social justice. When the Jessie Street National Women's Library was formed in 1989 Edith became one of its strongest supporters. Through the other organisations she belonged to, like United Nations Association, Union of Australian Women, Australian Peace Committee and especially the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, she continued her commitment to making a better world for us all.

Edith was a remarkable woman, not only in her commitment to the children and teachers in the public school system in NSW, to world peace, to equal opportunity, to social justice for all people, especially for Aboriginal people, but to the fact that she lived for 102 years and fought and consistently campaigned all the way. What a life and what a woman. I say well done Edith. You will live forever.

Marie Muir

Edith and Lorna, as early members of JSNWL, attended nearly all Library functions over the years, including the Parliamentary Luncheon and the AGMs. Until she went into a nursing home in 2002, Edith regularly attended the nine lunch-hour talks held each year.

We are grateful to have received many books from Edith's library. We will treasure them. — Ed

Sue Steggall talk continued from page 4

half of 2002, I spent almost all my waking hours translating. I launched it last week in France and while I'm sure there are mistakes and wrong expressions and idioms, so far the comments have been very good.

It's 14 years since we came back, but our connections to that area are stronger than ever. My son is marrying a French girl and there's going to be a French grandchild in July. So the whole notion of having one's heart in two countries to me is very much the case at the moment.

*Transcription and summary
Shirley Jones*

Jacquie Kent talk continued from page 6

I didn't love Beatrice, but there were times when she did some really dopey things and you could empathise with her. In biography I think you should note the flaws and make sure that these are part of the picture. I got to respect Beatrice and honour her, especially her generosity of spirit. She never complained about people who had treated her badly and she never bore grudges.

This brought up one problem about biography generally, and Beatrice's in particular, and that was her sex life. In her late twenties, Beatrice married a doctor 20 years older than she was who had tuberculosis and died when she was 36 or 37. She never married again. She had long-term relationships with at least two blokes and according to dark gossip around A & R was extremely happy to leap into bed with anybody else. Now this was interesting — not who she went to bed with so much as why people said she was this kind of woman.

There were all sorts of rumours about her — rumours that no man was safe from her predatory clutches, and rumours that she was a lesbian. But you can see why the rumours were there. She had a killer combination really. She was small, and therefore not threatening. She was very pretty, she was stylish, she was very sophisticated, she was a bit enigmatic and she was very bright. Now that's an interesting combination. She was a powerful woman with a final say over the literary destinies of blokes, so she was prime gossip fodder.

*Transcription and summary
Shirley Jones*

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

MONETARY DONATIONS

We wish to thank the following people who have given generously to the Library. We are grateful for their donations.

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 Barbara Murphy
 Helen O'Sullivan
 Jane Pollard
 Wilga Pruden
 Jan Roberts
 Sheryl Scott
 Susan Steggall
 Helen Tuckey
 Rosalind Wallis
 Maureen Ward
 Rosemary Webb

BEQUESTS & ENDOWMENTS

Membership subscriptions and donations are not adequate to fully support our Library and its activities.

We need endowments and bequests to supplement our income.

JSNWL is a young and vigorous specialist Library with a collection unique in Australia. It is totally reliant on volunteers for its functioning and on membership subscriptions and donations for its running expenses. It receives no support from taxes or government contributions, except for an occasional grant or small amounts for special projects.

Do you want to make a contribution to the Library but are unable to do so at the moment? Then
Please remember us in your will.

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Jessie Street National Women's Library wishes to contact women with archival material of interest to other women.

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..... Postcode

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Email (please print)

Do you hold records of an organisation or association (if so please name)

-
 personal papers other (please specify)

Please return forms to

Jessie Street National Women's Library GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001