



JESSIE STREET  
NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY  
NEWSLETTER

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

## PROFESSOR PHELPS SHIFTING PARADIGMS

JSNWL's Annual Luncheon held at Parliament House Sydney on 19 September continued our tradition of enjoying lunch with like-minded friends and listening to stimulating speakers.

Professor Kerryn Phelps AM launched her address, 'From Fringe to Mainstream: Turning Unconventional Ideas into Conventional Wisdom', quoting C19 philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer: 'All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident'. She said anyone in public life who challenges conventional wisdom experiences this. Jessie Street fought for women's rights and rights for Indigenous Australians, issues now self-evident but on the fringe early last century. Jessie Street and other activists dared to challenge dominant paradigms of their time. Professor Phelps identifies shifting paradigms also as the key theme of her own life.

She chose Medicine, not Law, surprising family and friends. She was the first married and pregnant intern at her teaching hospital where she was instrumental in having a part-time resident position created enabling her to work through her second pregnancy. As a young GP committed to empowering patients with information, she began health media work when 'health' journalists were unknown and doctors rarely commented publicly. She was medical consultant in Channel 9's controversial Sex series (1990-1) exploring issues then taboo on primetime TV: breast cancer self-examination, testicular cancer, prostate checks, sexual identity etc. Elected first female President of the Australian Medical Association in 2000, she promoted medical/socio-political policies new for the AMA. Her textbook with co-author Dr Craig Hassed, *General Practice: The Integrative Approach* (2010) sets out for the first time an approach which looks outside western conventional medicine, directed not at 'alternative' but at C21 best practice: whole patient care — lifestyle changes, effective treatments — offering patients choice. Decision on treatment considers acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, herbal treatments, meditation, yoga etc as well as conventional methods. Her 'lofty



ambition' is that the book 'revolutionise medical practice' in Australia and internationally. Already, her five year old integrative medicine clinic is viable, and US medical schools (including Stanford and the Mayo Clinic) have adopted an integrative model.

Her personal life challenges the ruling marriage paradigm. Twice wed — once to a partner of each gender, her 1998 same-sex 'marriage' to personal/professional partner, Jackie Stricker, at a religious ceremony in New York, was a vanguard for marriage equality, causing huge public furore. She and Jackie returned in September 2011 to have their marriage recognised under new NY law, and recently lobbied Prime Minister Julia Gillard hoping she will take policy change for marriage equality to Parliament.

Professor Phelps does not agree feminism has had its day, despite progress since Jessie Street. Women still don't have equal pay, are under-represented in politics and boardrooms; women in relationships with men still do most household work and child rearing; some who could seek leadership positions baulk at opportunities. She likens fighting for women's rights with building a house: as their builder told her and Jackie, the last 10% takes 90% of the effort. Feminism now, including the new marriage equality paradigm, is about a level playing field regardless of gender — about 'agenda, not gender'. She counsels against using gender in one's favour or to explain non-achievement: even if true, it fosters a mindset of disadvantage and excuse. Her message, especially to schoolgirls present, was 'being different can be your greatest opportunity, provided it is used for leverage'.

In conclusion, Professor Phelps advocated strong leadership driven by passion and compassion, backed by facts and by vision mindful of community views but able to challenge convention. 'We grow as individuals, as a nation, from cultural fringes, our political system and our intellectual leaders. From fringe to mainstream: the genesis of scientific invention, medical discovery and social progress'.



*Jackie Stricker and Kerryn Phelps*

### CHRISTMAS CLOSURE

**JSNWL closes Friday 16 Dec 2011, reopening Monday 16 Jan 2012. Best wishes for the Festive Season.**

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### From the Editors

Readers will have noticed changes to the *Newsletter* over the past year as your co-editors work their way into the job. This current issue continues that process with more changes in style and layout. And there is a larger number of photographs to celebrate our gala event, the Annual Luncheon. As we explore options for this library magazine which sits between a traditional newsletter conveying information, and a journal having a literary or other subject focus (represented in our magazine by edited Lunch Hour Talks and articles), change will continue. Indeed, for the time being change is likely to be the only constant on the horizon.

That makes for an exciting ride. As they say, stay tuned!

### JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

*Australia's National Women's Library is a specialist library, its focus being the collection and preservation of the literary and cultural heritage of women from all ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.*

#### Aims

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

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## Annual Luncheon 2011: Raffle, Silent Auction



*Ros Leal offers raffle tickets once again*

The Library expresses its warm appreciation to individuals and organisations who so generously donated prizes.

Congratulations to the winners!

**1st Prize** Two night's accommodation, dinner, breakfast and Ghost Tour for two, at Q Station Manly, value \$920  
Donor: Elizabeth Fitzgerald  
Won by Alex Byrne – No. 2326

**2nd Prize** Bridge Climb for two, value over \$500  
Donor: Bridge Climb Sydney  
Won by Andrew Robinson – No. 0203

**3rd Prize** Three-course lunch and ship's tour for two on cruise ship 'Pacific Pearl', value \$200  
Donor: Cruise Express, Balmain  
Won by Faith Bandler – No 0546

**4th Prize** Middle Harbour Coffee Cruise for two, value \$98  
Donor: Captain Cook Cruises  
Won by Julia Genisson – No 1030

**5th Prize** Book voucher, value \$70,  
Donor: The Feminist Bookshop, Lilyfield  
Won by Tina Russell – No 2452

**6th Prize** Book voucher, value \$50  
Donor: Gleebooks, Glebe  
Won by Penny Bethune – No 0922

**7th-10th Prizes** Two bottles of wine produced by Mt View High School, Cessnock, donated by the NSW Teachers Federation

**7th Prize** Won by Sue Comrie-Thompson – No 0712

**8th Prize** Won by Jennifer Furness – No 0057

**9th Prize** Won by Judith Szukacs – No 0626

**10th Prize** Won by Judith Lipp – No 2101

**11th Prize** (Unclaimed Lucky Door Prize drawn as raffle)  
Won by Vicki Marquis – No 1511

#### Silent Auction

- Framed Poster of International Women's Day 1995  
Won by Elizabeth Evatt
- Framed Postage Stamp and Signature Set – 'Advancing Equality: Australian Legends 2011', featuring Eva Cox, Elizabeth Evatt, Germaine Greer, Anne Summers  
Won by Mary Henderson

## JSNWL'S NEW DIRECTIONS SEMINAR

Board Member Sybil Jack suggested, and on 3 August convened, a seminar to discuss library strategies into the future and possible initiatives for JSNWL. She invited senior librarians, Gabrielle Gardiner, University of Technology Sydney, and Ross Coleman, Fisher Library University of Sydney. About 30 members attended.

Gabrielle Gardiner, UTS e-research manager, focused on the new UTS library currently at the planning stage. Workshops, even with high school students, have shown client demand not only for traditional quiet library space but also for interactive communal spaces — open, light-filled, customisable, for a social/communal hub, and for 24/7 access.

Using slides, she outlined how UTS' new library will operate. A range of behaviours (both individual and communal) will be catered for, utilising space and lighting and employing elements like atriiums, meaningful signage, intuitive technology, greenery and water. Supporting technology will include: underground book retrieval systems; 'virtual' e-bookshelves (or similar) to maintain opportunity for 'serendipitous browsing'; and RFID (Remote Frequency Identification) for automating library processes (including for tracking books left in random places or hidden). Provision of library services will benefit from re-design to offer choice in levels of expertise (as does Apple's business model) and from location central to the (Broadway) campus (more convenient than the existing facility). Design of the new library and services will take account of UTS library's broader responsibilities for industry and community relationships which the university considers highly important.

Ross Coleman, USYD manager of digital and information services, has extensive collection experience. He stressed that the purpose of libraries in the digital age is essentially unchanged: their role in preservation of and access to data is ongoing, and not tied to the future (or death) of the book as we know it. Libraries also provide various services, a human face, institutional continuity and community space. Moreover Fisher, like JSNWL, has a niche resource: specialised collections and related expertise. And the publishing role of libraries is now expanding as academic publishing declines. Libraries partner with researchers, utilising new technologies — UTS has an e-press, Sydney University Press prints on demand. Ross mentioned how use of new production and business models, of data re-purposed in XML formats, and of Open Access options can get good peer-reviewed research journals out to the world. All this, however, raises copyright and royalty issues

(especially for publicly-funded research, in principle publicly available), also issues of storage and management of data, either 'born digital' or digitised. Library practice increasingly uses remote data warehousing under specialist management. Questions include, 'Is digital life forever, 15 years, or whichever comes first?' Given information redundancy, how much data should be kept? And where — in the library or remotely? Members queried how to archive/store material, and the appropriate balance between remote storage and Library staffing.

There appear to be no clear answers, even for funded libraries! But a perhaps promising strategy for JSNWL emerged. Gabrielle suggested a 'pathway' may lie in collaborating with UTS researchers (including student project tasking) on technical issues. A follow-up seminar was proposed. All in all, a very worthwhile seminar. Many, many thanks to our speakers, and to Sybil.

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### Out and About: One Thing Leads to Another

For years, in fulfilling its service to the community objective, Balmain Inner Wheel Club Sydney has donated to the Library. In 2009, they contributed substantial prizes to, and with JSNWL jointly ran, a very successful short story competition. Some Balmain Club members regularly attend Lunch Hour Talks.

At Balmain Inner Wheel's invitation to their 2011 executive changeover function, on 16 July Board Member Christine Lees with Margot Simington attended a congenial dinner. Jennifer Furness, JNSWL Membership Secretary, was also present — in her capacity as President of Regional Inner Wheel.

Accepting Inner Wheel's \$350 donation for our Capital Investment Fund, Christine illustrated the Library's role with stories about interesting inquiries such as from the Australian Electoral Commission Canberra concerning a unique photograph we hold, from Lithgow NSW regarding women who had worked in the local munitions factory, and from Wales UK asking for a copy of an article in *Spare Rib* (a UK second wave feminism magazine).

During the dinner, a Rotarian invited Christine to speak at Five Dock Rotary Club Sydney. On 8 August, Five Dock Rotary men and four women were fascinated to hear why there is a national women's library, how it functions and justifies keeping real books when the world is falling in love with electronic devices. They asked lots of questions and sympathised with our search for sponsorship, for support in kind, and for a means of providing paid employment to oversee the Library.

### LUNCH HOUR TALKS — SYDNEY

**NOVEMBER 2011 — Thursday 17**

**Dr Maria Hill**

***Diggers and Greeks: The Australian campaigns in Greece and Crete***

Dr Maria Hill, military historian, expert in the WWII Greek and Crete campaigns and author of *Diggers and Greeks*, will focus on the relationships forged between Australians and Greeks during battle, how these bonds helped Australian troops survive and the bearing of people's emotions, temperament and behaviour on what occurred on the battlefield and beyond.

**FEBRUARY 2012 — Thursday 16**

**The Honourable Margaret Renaud**

***Legal reasoning in the midst of emotion***

In her talk, Margaret, formerly a barrister and Family Court Judge, will reflect on the way women barristers in the 1960s and 1970s who practised in family law were stereotyped as 'not real lawyers'. Yet, because 'every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way', these women were working in an emotive yet complex and dynamic area of law which must be flexible enough to achieve unique but just outcomes.

**MARCH 2012 — Thursday 15**

**Heather Saville**

***Friends in deed: Are we helping the people who need help most?***

Do we do any good? How could we do it better? These are questions raised in Heather Saville's book, *Friends in deed*, about Quaker Service Australia (QSA). Formerly Chair of QSA, she will discuss successes and challenges in QSA's development experience over 50 years, including small-scale agriculture and food and water security in SE Asia and Africa.

**Date/Time/Venue:** 3rd Thursday of the month 12.00—1.30pm. Southern Function Room, 4th Floor, Town Hall House, 456 Kent Street Sydney.

**Cost:** \$16 (members), \$22 (non-members) including light lunch. Pay at the door. Please book by noon Tuesday before the talk: Ph (02) 9571 5359

# 17th ANNUAL



*Australian Legends: Elizabeth Evatt, Faith Bandler, and Meredith Burgmann*



*Shirley Jones, Ruth Robinson, Christine Lees*

Jozefa Sobski, Board Member, officiated at the Library's 17th Annual Luncheon in its 22nd year. She acknowledged traditional owners of the land on which the NSW Parliament sits – Gadigal people of the Eora nation, elders and descendants – and Aboriginal people present. She then paid special tribute to longstanding volunteer Elizabeth Mooney who, after battling Sydney Botanical Gardens administration, had in 2011 achieved her vision to have a memorial acknowledging Sydney's original inhabitants: a plaque and carving by Aboriginal artists Vic Simms and Glen Timbery of a forest red gum stump in the Gardens. (*Newsletter July 2011*).

Jozefa thanked co-hosts, The Hon Penny Sharpe NSW MLC and Minister Robyn Parker NSW MLA (who was unable to be present), welcomed patrons Elizabeth Evatt AC and Sir Laurence Street AC KCMG, Faith Bandler AC, Sydney City Councillors — The Hon Dr Meredith Burgmann (representing patron, The Hon Clover Moore MLA Lord Mayor of Sydney), Chris Harris and Phillip Black — and

The Hon Helen Westwood MLC and Chair of the International Women's Day Centenary Committee. She congratulated NSW State Librarian Dr Alex Byrne on his recent appointment, thanking him for supporting JSNWL and adding, 'We will be knocking on your door in due course!' She saluted students and staff from 13 secondary schools: 'our hope for a future in which women's lives and works have equal status'.

With JSNWL almost entirely self-funded (City of Sydney provides and subsidises Library premises) and our Capital Investment Fund at c.\$75,000 with a target of \$0.5m, Jozefa urged everyone to 'dig deeply' during this function (our largest source of income), attend monthly Lunch Hour Talks and, if asked, to participate on camera in a promotional video JSNWL is producing. She thanked the volunteers for all their hard work in organising the Luncheon, and Jenny Sparkes and Strangers Dining Room staff.



# LUNCHEON 2011



## JSNWL: AN ACQUISITION PERSPECTIVE

Barbara Henery, volunteer librarian since 2006, and now Acquisitions Librarian in the Library Team, recalled how the idea of a specialist library — born of difficulties in accessing material on women and first mooted at 1989 centenary celebrations of Jessie Street's birth, generated such enthusiasm that the Library materialised that very year. Despite no acquisition budget then or since, our Library continues to acquire material for its collection — some 10,000 books and over 200 archive collections.

Emphasis in the acquisition of fiction (including poetry) is on Australian women writers, and for the acquisition of non-fiction on women's issues written by men or women. Barbara herself writes to publishers framing requests for donation of specific books in terms difficult to refuse, a 'useful skill to hone'. She seeks review or proof copies, sometimes identifying a particular one as invaluable for our specialised collection — and is successful often enough to keep her trying. Her effort supplements acquisition through unsolicited donations by women authors, by individuals and organisations culling their libraries, and by bequests.

JSNWL's archive collections comprise personal papers and records of women's community groups, reflecting the Library's significant role of preserving material which might otherwise be abandoned. Largely, given the type of material available, archive collections document second wave feminism and Australian women's lives from the late 1960s onwards, varying in size from one slim file to one of over ten metres shelf length. Sometimes entire libraries are received. This year, closures of the South Australia Women's Resources Library and the Women's Legal Centre Library (Sydney), resulted in JSNWL accepting some material not already held, but sadly not videotapes documenting women's issues (given technological incompatibility and limited storage space).

Barbara noted that stewardship of our precious Library resource continues to benefit from guidance by longstanding volunteers recently retired — co-founder Shirley Jones after 22 years and Jane Pollard after 15 years (six as Honorary Librarian). The Library also taps into, and is opening up directly to, the wider world with new technology such as the digitisation of posters, and continued introduction of the KOHA system featuring worldwide public access to our catalogue (soon to include archives). The *Newsletter* went online last year. However, as confirmed at our New

Directions workshop in July, two Sydney university librarians talking about changes ahead for their (funded) libraries in the digital age noted that the new technologies bring various problems including finite life cycles, obsolescence and incompatibility (CDs, DVDs etc as well as videotapes).

Barbara reaffirmed that, despite e-books and the demise of Borders and Angus & Robertson bookchains, in the foreseeable future JSNWL will continue acquiring books, focusing on retaining rarer items rather than all titles by or about women and on constantly weeding the collection to ensure relevance.

Permitting a glimpse into managing Library acquisition, she said, 'We always seek topical writing on women's issues. Recently I wondered how JSNWL's collection should reflect increasing feminisation of politics', including Women's Electoral Lobby activism. She found that current holdings include M. Sawyer and M. Simms *A Woman's Place — Women and Politics in Australia* (1984, rev 1993). They concluded 'Australian political science has not registered ... changes in any substantial way', that is, they noted that the discipline of political science had yet to recognise what was a developing trend. Dr Madeline Grey's *Challenging Women: Towards Equality in the Parliament of Victoria* (2009) based on her doctorate shows Victoria's women politicians increased from one in 1972 to 40 by 2003. A similar trend appeared at the Federal level. JSNWL holds Helen Dodd *Pauline, the Hansen phenomenon* (1997), Alison Rogers *The Natasha Factor: politics, media & betrayal* (2004) about Natasha Stott Despoja's leadership of the Australian Democrats, and Leckie Hopkins and Lynn Roarty's *Among the Chosen* (2010), a biography of Pat Giles, WA Labor senator and UN representative under Prime Ministers Hawke and Keating. Cathy Jenkins *No ordinary lives: pioneering women in Australian politics* (2008) spans 86 years of political history focusing on Australia's 'first women' from Edith Cowan, first female MP, to Anna Bligh, first female Premier of Queensland.

Barbara commented that future writing about another first woman — Julia Gillard, first female Australian Prime Minister — 'remains to be seen', but ABC TV's series 'portraying her and partner Tim in comedic caricature is not auspicious'. Melbourne writer, Sophie Cunningham considers women are increasingly marginalised in the arts, media and public life. Cunningham's recent, acclaimed Melbourne Writers Festival address identified a profound problem in Australian culture: women over-looked, disavowed, and sometimes hated — issues not resolved by the free market. The audience appreciated Barbara's observation that as JSNWL continues acquiring material, its irreplaceable collection will become an even richer vein for researchers to mine.



Co-founder, Shirley Jones, toasts the Library

## Somewhere Down A Crazy River

*Energy, resourcefulness, humanity and compassion shine through Robyn's racy autobiography, Somewhere Down a Crazy River (2010), about her extraordinary life: professional fishing around Queensland including in the pristine 'wild rivers' back country, interaction with Indigenous people, and nurturing motherless children. In 1990 she found her lodestar in Buddhism.*

Born in the late 1940s in conservative Adelaide, with two bullying brothers and the surname Catchlove, I quickly learnt to fight for myself. By the age of 24, waltzing down the aisle with an eight foot long veil and four bridesmaids, I suddenly realised, 'Lovely man, but I need adventure, not just a happily-ever-after marriage'. When work transferred us to tropical Cairns QLD, I went gladly: getting away from his and my wonderful families made separation from my husband easier.

In Cairns, I met Les, bright, spunky, wild. It was instant love — well, passion anyway. 'Let's go to sea and live happily ever after!' said Les. That should have rung alarm bells in my head. We hired a shed and built our dream — a 30x11ft fiberglass boat (2,000 kg freezer, 4x cylinder diesel engine). What one does for love! I didn't even know if I would be seasick. On our first trip out, we struck a humungous storm, waves higher than Mt. Everest, no life jackets, no dinghy, no radio. Thank goodness the storm slapped us into Cooktown with every other fisherman on QLD's east coast. Trapped there, we heard about unpleasant Dave Mulligan and his M1 repeating rifle. We headed north to his river, the Normanby: *Rattatta tat ... M1 bullets whizzed right across our bow ... [On a] homemade wharf ... a right cranky fella stood before us carelessly waving around the loaded repeater ... 'Er, sorry, I thought it was a shark!' the bristly bloke yelled angrily. Shark my arse, I thought...whispering urgently, 'You got us in here, so you betta pull one outta the hat, real quick.' So Les ... stepped ... onto the rickety wharf ... 'Dave, no shootin' ... till you get to know us.'* (p 67)

The three of us drank rum together. Dave immediately set us up to catch barramundi, imparting knowledge and giving us nets, dinghies, outboards, petrol. The country, fecund and beautiful, smelt musk-like: the river was full of flathead, groper, barra, blue and king salmon, dart, prawns, octopus; on land there were kangaroos, wallabies, cattle, brumby horses; in the sky were cockatiels, cockatoos, swans, brologas, jabaroos, frigate birds. A Gondwanaland or Babylonian paradise. For meat we shot cattle, slung them across shoulders, braved crocodile-infested bush back to the boat, smeared the bare cattle flesh with crushed green ants to deter blowflies, and next day did the butchering: as a guide, if your thumb went through, it was steak; if not, stew. After several years we had money in the bank, our own gear — and knowledge.

Heading further north we ran aground, nearly losing the boat. Unexpectedly, we found wild oysters and sold them on reaching Thursday Island QLD. Money soon ran short there, so I took a job waitressing in a local pub. At an islander-only party:

*[T]three wizened toothless women ... [each with] one spindly leg slung over a deliberately dented empty 5-gallon kerosene tin ... beat out a centuries-old rhythm ... [O]ne of the ... men ... invited me to join in the song enactment circle ... With Les close [by, I] ... let the man lead me further into each movement. We danced, rowing off in a dugout canoe ... into the story unfolding.* (p 139)

I had always craved adventure and a hero. I saw that in Les, but on Thursday Island he became violent. To resurrect ourselves we steamed on to Bramble Cay, Australia's northernmost international sea border, through the passage used historically by Dutch, Malay and Indonesian 'Canoes of Legend'. There we fished for Spanish mackerel, totally naked, puffing on cigars. When a flying mackerel sliced open my arm, Les washed it out in beer and pulled the gash together in butterfly bandaid style. But we learnt the lesson — we donned clothes pretty quickly.

In the late 1970s we headed south in the Gulf of Carpentaria to the mining town, Weipa, and pristine Archer and Kirke 'wild rivers' country. This red bauxite land was full of exquisite birds, redneck miners and fishermen. Waiting for the wet season to end, I worked at the only hotel and saw Aboriginals suffering at the white man's hand. Joh Bjelke Petersen's QLD government manipulated them into a shanty town and they got no return from Comalco (Rio Tinto) mining for bauxite on the land where they had previously lived. Absentee hotel owners cared nothing for those who each morning slumped at the pub's back entrance — drunk, no money, no food, no self-esteem. At nearby Aurukun mission, Wik Munkan people were similarly afflicted. One day I found myself fighting Aboriginals outside the hotel:

*Skinny, black skeletal arms stretched out toward me, pus-filled eyes sought mine, empty souls begging for relief. 'You got good fella. Money, plenty money. Give us some there, sis, eh sis?' 'Sorry girls, not today.' ... Wild and cunning, two women ... came at me. 'Fuck you, bitch' ... they urged me to step up: they wanted white blood, they wanted mine ... They ... sparred into my face. It was strong, exciting and my belly-fire came alive ... I saw the women's warrior beauty, felt my own and stepped into the space ... I could have, wanted to jettison the spindly fighter women into next year ... Still, my conscience ... leapt into the fight, reminding me ... this was the white fella doing it all over again ... I tripped the snarling woman backward, gently broke her fall ... 'Stay there, sister. I won't fight you. We are all sisters.'* (pp 189-90)

We made firm friends with the Wollomby clan. Their country was the land stretching from Weipa in the north to south past the Kirke River. Once, just before the fishing season opened (when you really make your money), one tribesman died so the clan closed the country to fishing for six weeks: his spirit needed a resting place. The prevailing white attitude was, 'Why ask for permission?' Only Les and I respected Aboriginal wishes. When they opened up

*Continued on page 10*



## ***Killing the Dream***

*Norma Tracey, member of the Australian Association of Social Work, and drawn to help the disadvantaged, has worked with Aboriginal mothers and infants for the last ten years. In practice for 52 years and a psychoanalytic psychotherapist for 25, she has published two books and many papers, and co-founded Gunawirra, which supports Aboriginal women and children.*

In the Aboriginal community, I found a very serious and disturbing problem among our people: a people cut off from their roots, the essence of what one is, found in one's culture. I wanted to make sense of the traumatised existence many of them live with today. I make use of psychoanalytic concepts, and in particular, two concepts embedded in the roots of aboriginal culture — 'the dreaming' and 'Dadirri'. I use these two concepts to demonstrate how the traumatised have lost boundaries and the emotional value and meaning for themselves and those around them. Trauma kills 'the dreaming' and the capacity to give meaningfulness and value to people and objects in their world.

Dreaming 'is an ancient wisdom passed down from Aboriginal elders in oral and art form in caves and gives meaning to the world around us.' The ancient concept of 'the dreaming' is a set of rules, of mores and mythology: 70,000 years ago were born the rivers, the trees, the rain, the rocks. The tragedy is that when a person loses their core self, of who they are, they lose their meaning. That meaning makes sense of selfhood, community and culture. The rules or laws that bind it become sacred because they create a boundary in which to contain and hold that meaning.

'Dadirri' is one of the Aboriginal tribe's words for ritualised forms of 'deep listening'; empathic witnessing, as a way of healing trauma. It is the oldest form of healing trauma in the world and in every known Australian Aboriginal tribe, but with a different name. The troubled person goes to the elders and acknowledges being in trouble. The elders gather in a circle around the traumatised one and listen for hours, in the very depth of their being, in deep silence. They soak that in till the person feels the pain is shared and neutralised, and is able to leave in peace. Dadirri is about tapping into the dead 'springs' within us. We have a strong sense of community; all persons matter; all belong. That is the essence of psychotherapy, of the empathy required in social work, the basis of all good teaching, nursing and any other profession. It's also what a mother does for her baby — every negotiated moment between them. She takes the pain, puts it inside her, neutralises it and gives it back in a tolerable form. The young Aboriginal mum in Glebe or Redfern with her baby propped up with a bottle — you know no-one has done it for her. Something went terribly wrong: Stolen Generation, loss of community, land, or spirituality; or, to our shame, the substitution of a 'better' religion which tells them theirs is no good.

So Dadirri, the most ancient and most important form of healing, transposes to the therapy room. The therapist listens and witnesses pain in a special way: enabling the patient to express, to be, to speak from within their own culture. The therapist works with the patient to restore a primary sense of meaning to who they are, to give a sense of value to their primary way of doing and being.

Two stories illustrate this, the first an excerpt from a partnering ritual, the second a story from a present day taped session (with the

patient's consent). The question is: What happened in the space between these stories?

Gidegal the moon man myth: When the Moon Man was on earth he was a great lover of women and made many songs to make them fall in love with him. In the sacred ceremony of Djarada a man could sing a woman to be his wife. This ceremony is still practised today. When a man sees a woman he would like to have, he and his close male



relatives go out into the bush and create a sacred piece of ground with a big circle on the ground, with an oval shape painted with red ochre and white pipe clay and a feathered pole inside the circle. The men decorate their bodies with paint and ochre bird dung. The Djarada man stands before the feathered pole with his grandfather and uncle and begin singing the circle of love songs, swaying their hips. In the first song the dream is that the man will be strong and attractive to the woman he has chosen. In the second the dream is that she will think sweet things of him in her own dreaming, and the dream in the third song is that she will dream of making love to him. The fourth song is to make himself more attractive to her; and he rubs juice from the roots of a special bush over his body. He sings all day and all the next night. These songs never fail and the woman can't help falling in love with the singer.

Here is the second story from a young Aboriginal woman. It's a common one. I'd been down at the pub with my girlfriends. On the way home Anthony Crowl was coming along the road behind me. I knew he had a bad reputation and I was very uncomfortable about the way he seemed to be following me. Next he drags me down the passageway between the buildings. I try to scream, but his hand is over my mouth. He bashes my head hard against the bricks. My mouth starts to bleed, my jaw is broken and I had two black eyes. Only that my cousin saw my shoe sticking out from behind the building; he could have killed me, because I knew who he was. My cousin yelled for help and dragged him off me. I don't remember anything else. I woke up in hospital two days later. My mum (a drug addict) was sitting by the bed. She said, "Daughter you been raped. It's okay because we gonna get a lot of money from this." There I was nearly dying, and all she could think about was the money. She pinched my jacket while I was unconscious and took all my wages out of the pocket for drugs. I was so low I didn't care.'

The first story has meaning; the second is stripped of every symbolic meaning. Extremely disturbing cases like this show how trauma kills meaning. It turns dreams into nightmares; and kills the capacity to dream. So the state of non-existence comes about, entering the psyche, robbing the 'other' of personhood.'

There are towns in NSW where no child reaches puberty without sexual molestation. We asked the eight mothers in one inner city

*Continued on page 9*

## The Wisdom of Hunger

Former women's rights advocate, Joanne Fedler emigrated from South Africa to Australia. Approaching forty, Joanne decided she needed to lose weight. Little did she know that her journey would not only achieve her physical goals, but that she would find new meaning in her life. Joanne realised she needed to lose not only the weight of kilos but also of her fear, guilt and anxiety.

In August 1994 I was honoured with an award, one of my most treasured achievements — my *Hustler* magazine Arsehole of the Month Award. My face appeared in a donkey's bum alongside an article attacking my intelligence and my view that violent pornography was not appropriate in South Africa. It was an interesting experience to be so publicly humiliated, even though I was a law lecturer and my students thought I was 'super cool' for making it into *Hustler* magazine. American poet, Mary Oliver, wrote, 'someone once gave me a box of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift' — these words have helped me through many difficult times.

Ten years later, I had moved from South Africa to Australia with my young family. On my son's fifth birthday we went down to the beach for pizzas. When I got the photos back, I saw myself in a bikini and I said, 'That is NOT me.' I used to be sexy. But in that photo I saw somebody who'd lost her way. It inspired me to make an appointment to see a dietician. She told me three things: firstly, that I was 'obese'. I never had a problem with the word 'obese' until it applied to me. Secondly, she said, 'You eat too much.' I thought, 'Nobody ever breastfed you and that's your problem.' Where I come from, people who care about you never say you eat too much, they say, 'have some more.' I looked at the eating plan and said sadly, 'I'm going to be hungry.' To which she replied, 'I want you to be hungry.'

I left her office feeling unhappy — jostling between hatred, self-loathing, and looking for excuses. This is what Gloria Steinem meant when she said, 'The truth shall set you free, but first it will piss you off.' As soon as we do this blaming dance, trying to shrug off responsibility and find excuses, we know that we have to look deeper into ourselves. But how had I gotten to this point? Stupidity and ignorance would be a good excuse. But the truth is, I knew what I needed to do to lose weight. It isn't rocket science — you only need to pick up any women's magazine to learn that you have to eat less and exercise more, eat low GI foods and lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. I knew all this stuff, so why had I paid her \$160 to tell me that? Why does knowing the wise thing to do not necessarily translate into being able to do the right thing? That became the starting point for my book *When Hungry, Eat* (2010).

In South Africa we grappled with a similar question while working to promote women's equality, to try to reduce the numbers of rape victims and curb the incidence of domestic violence. We found it

difficult to transform people's attitudes towards women within a social and historical context of endemic misogyny. We were trying to educate people who worked in the legal system and change entrenched ideas, for example, that women's testimony in rape cases should be treated with caution because of its inherent unreliability (in other words: women lie). We devised practices to help people think differently by stepping into the shoes of another person. To do this, people need information about 'the other' ie, what is it like to be a poor black woman without a job, what are the facts of her existence. But information, we found, did not shift attitudes. Only when people 'feel' the reality of the other, does change happen. We only change when we feel. We taught people to listen actively, to listen to stories without judgment, without ego. We used the Chinese symbol of listening — with the ear on the left

hand side, the eye on the top right, underneath that the symbol for undivided attention and underneath that the heart.

Insights that I'd gained in my past made me think, 'Can I apply this to my eating? Can I listen to my body, watch what I'm doing and then move from my heart?' An example of how I was not listening to my body was my habit of always taking something to eat — invariably a banana, which I would eat, whether hungry or not. I'm ashamed to say that living in a hungry world, I had never experienced hunger. Firstly, I didn't know what would happen to me if I got hungry. As I write in my book, 'does hunger present as a strident, shrill shriek in the middle of the day, panicking one to excessive pastries? Does it creep up like a nasty rash, starting on the elbows and spreading everywhere? Is it like tinnitus — almost an imperceptible whine in the middle ear, never ceasing its pitch, which you simply have to train yourself to ignore?

The truth was I simply did not know. I was illiterate in the language of my own hunger.'

I grew up in a family where being full was never a reason to stop eating. Hunger conflicts with the person I like to think I am. I like the idea of generosity and abundance, the feeling of plenty. The worst thing for me would be if someone came to my house and left hungry. But most importantly, hunger is ugly. I associate hunger with the selfishness of the West and our failure to humanity. It makes me so sad and angry.

But I decided to try and make friends with my hunger. I learned to say, 'No, thank you.' I started to listen to my body. I ate just until I was no longer hungry. I found I could differentiate if my body needed something sweet or salty, or if I was thirsty. Everything tasted SO good when I was hungry. I really tasted everything, and learnt the distinction between being hungry and wanting something because you see it, like toddlers shrieking, 'I want chocolate.' I also understood that you can't ignore a craving. So in those moments, I just had a taste of chocolate, not a whole chocolate bar.

*Continued on page 10*



# BOOK REVIEW

**Diane Bell (ed) *Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking/Kungun Ngarrindjeri Miminar Yunnan* Melbourne, 2008. ISBN: 9781876756697**

*Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking* is a captivating collection of stories, including creation myths, told by women of the Ngarrindjeri Nation. The women hope 'everyone will read this book and have a ... more accurate idea of who we are, what we do and what we care about'.

This book represents another step in the process of asserting Ngarrindjeri identity, following lodgement in 1998 of a Native Title claim for traditional lands southeast of Adelaide — running south from Murray Bridge along the Murray River to the sea, extending from the river mouth west to Cape Jervis taking in the eastern half of Fleurieu Peninsula, sweeping southeast to Kingston, and including coastal waters. It was in 1998 that Ngarrindjeri women campaigned against a bridge linking mainland Goolwa to Hindmarsh Island at the mouth of the Murray. The bridge opened in 2001 violating sacred places they termed 'secret women's business', a phrase now part of Australia's vocabulary. Accused during the campaign of lying, these women have continued since, with their men, to tread a path of practical reconciliation including with local and State authorities. They pro-actively seek to care for their lands and nurture culture.

In 2007 at Camp Coorong east of the river mouth they held women's workshops directed at encouraging care for lands, waters, culture, families and for the future of a strong Ngarrindjeri Nation. Diane Bell, an Australian anthropologist and author with previous professional experience of working with the Ngarrindjeri, was asked to help facilitate. Resulting from these workshops is this handsome, slim Spinifex Press publication splashed with many colour photographs of the workshops, of traditional weaving (including Sister Baskets), of paintings, and of personalities. It contains an eight page bibliography, quite extensive indexing and an epilogue by the editor.

The workshop process was an emotional journey for all involved and cemented lifelong friendships. Diane Bell clearly cherished this experience. She worked closely with Indigenous women, honoring their culture by framing the text with the women's own words. Ngarrindjeri women's stories were recounted within a weaving circle and then committed to paper in a way that respected the timeless traditional oral process by which these stories were, and still today, are shared. The reader feels as if beside a campfire, actually listening to the stories as they unfold. So documentation of this process is one of the most fascinating features of the book, which highlights the potential for trust and growing awareness to draw Indigenous and non-Indigenous women's cultural groups together.

This enriching book of Dreamtime and other stories reveals Ngarrindjeri women's thoughts, daily challenges and visions for the future. It also outlines government policies and lists the goals of the Ngarrindjeri Nation. The Ngarrindjeri women speak of caring for country, maintenance of land, the delegation of responsibility, caring for family, the Stolen Generations (workshops ended before the Australian Government's Apology to the Stolen Generations February 2008), the position women hold within the community

Many women contributed stories — Auntie Ellen, Auntie Eileen, Auntie Maggie who told Auntie Leila's story, Auntie Alice, Auntie Rita and many more. These women, young and old, shared their wisdom and experiences. The stories reflect social and personal injustices of Indigenous people, including racism and genocide. They all offer profound insight into Indigenous beliefs and culture. The messages deriving from culture, community and motherhood are powerful, and issues raised are a poignant reminder that as women we share many of the same tribulations and are all one in this universe.

Natalie Donovan

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Norma Tracey *continued from page 7*

group if any had been raped, seven of the eight women answered, 'yes'. In the knitting group, one woman told the story of how her child died. While she was knitting, she lost a stitch and the knitting was falling apart. One of the centre staff came to show her how to pick it up. She said 'you can't if your baby has died'. When the personhood of the mother has died, the core of the person is lost, and only a terrible numbness is left.

The organisation I co-founded, Gunawirra, provides emotional and psychological support for Aboriginal families and communities, and supports 30 Aboriginal preschools in NSW. Gunawirra is an Aboriginal word meaning 'the invisible seed of all creation'. It is focused on prevention through early educational intervention — programs that encourage young Aboriginal mothers and fathers to avoid the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and sexual abuse. Gunawirra works with many Aboriginal organisations to support Aboriginal women, pregnant and/or with infants in inner Sydney suburbs.

One of the many services Gunawirra offers is the Family Camps. The camps are designed to work through issues in an intensive, supportive, but enjoyable environment. The biggest single issue is anger management. Helping parents to understand the source of their anger has a profound impact on their path to healthier communication and emotional healing. Mothers who had eyes downcast are now in the kitchen making a cup of tea and will share what's happening with them. In the street, they stop and talk and joke about things they did in the camp together.

Therapy groups reduce social isolation and give parents an opportunity to explore and understand their past relationships and how these impact on their parenting. Home visits conducted by highly trained professionals provide support and understanding through pregnancy and beyond. We also put on a puppet show for kids where puppets talk together, about violence, about drunkenness; then the kids talk to the puppets. The Radford College Program in Canberra has enabled 19 students from Radford College to visit our country preschools for a week's experience with young Aboriginal children and their families.

This is only a bit of what we do. We have opened a new house in George Street Redfern. It's now ready for the women to come and use whenever they want — to get away from violence, to give kids a better chance in preschool and a better chance in life.

*Transcript by Helen Ruby, edited by Kris Clarke*

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Robyn Catchlove *continued from page 6*

the country again, they gave just to Les and me permission to hunt and fish there for life! An extraordinary honour. It was in 2009 when I was completing my book and heard about threats to QLD's *Wild Rivers Act 2005*, that I realised my rollicking tale was the pioneering factual account of this wilderness, my heart country.

Neither Les nor I had the skills or wisdom for a stable relationship: however brilliant at sea, on land we were driven apart by drinking and bickering. Beer was part of the culture. Men swam in it — I pined for intelligent outside conversation. No SATNAV, computers, blogs, TV, only a little sideband radio, little music. I belonged to libraries from Cairns to Aurukun, reading voraciously which Les discouraged. Locked in for months on a river, one night I burst into maudlin crying. Les hurled me overboard into a crocodile creek and refused to help me back. This was the last straw: my man had broken the unwritten code of mateship. On a sandy beach, exhausted, I abandoned myself to crocodiles. I did return to the boat, but only to obey and with no hope for us. Back in port, using Mum's birth certificate I opened an 'escape fund' bank account. Soon afterwards, way upstream and unknowingly pregnant, I haemorrhaged. After a huge logistical battle getting back to Weipa, I flew to Cairns where sadly I lost the baby. My recourse — leaving Len — involved violence but the reward was freedom after an extraordinary eight years.

Life is unpredictable. Back in Melbourne, at a friend's suggestion I enrolled at university but after just one year I gave it away and went on the road with a Maori in a 30 tonne gas tanker: I was still bubbly and giving but restless, and *very, very lost*. A bobcat contractor from Tully QLD asked me to care for his three kids (their mother had died of asthma). I did, and with so much love to give — those traumatised cherubs and I — a healing process began. Alas, with me in their lives eventually they didn't want their father when he came home at weekends. He became jealous, suspicious, and then one night threatened violence. Incredibly sad, I left the next day, grandparents in charge. I've always kept in contact. Years later I visited and their grandmother showed me photos, saying, 'It's time you let go'. I accepted her advice, but have never stopped loving those kids. On one occasion, I apologised to Mum for the life I'd led. At her reply, 'if you'd been a boy it would have been fine but you are my daughter', we both burst into tears.

Finally, in 1990 karma led me to Tibetan Buddhism. At last, here was a clear and profound pathway for my life. Who would think a sassy, outsider fisherwoman would meet His Holiness? And become Buddhist?

That said, I'm sure there's no need to label yourself one way or another. We are on this earth to help each other. All you need is compassion for every living thing, to pick up all the plastic you see, and to keep yourself on your toes, to break the law 'intelligently' at least once every day.

*Transcript by Helen Ruby, edited by Margot Simington*

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### **Eve Masterman Peace Poetry Prize**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Tasmanian Branch will award the 2012 Eve Masterman Peace Poetry Prize for a poem of no more than 60 lines relating to peace and human rights. Entries close 31 March 2012.

For more information contact:

Eve Masterton Peace Poetry Prize

Mrs R Martin, Hon Secretary WILPF Tasmania

3 McTavish Avenue

North Hobart TAS 7000.

### **Chase Livingston Celebrates California**

In 2011, Californians celebrated the achievement of women's suffrage in their state 100 years ago. Chase Livingston, an avid collector of material on American women, displayed items from her collection during the celebrations. Chase, a JSNWL member living in San Francisco, became involved with our Library largely by accident. In 2003 she bought at auction a book that had belonged to Jessie Street, called *Why Wars Must Cease* (1935). Her friend, a well-known American women's rights campaigner and author of this book together with Rose Emmet Young and Eleanor Roosevelt, had inscribed it: 'Mrs Street, bravest of brave women, here's to you, Carrie Chapman Catt, July 2, 1945.'

On behalf of Jessie's family, I contacted Chase to ask would she consider selling the book. Learning about Jessie's life and JSNWL, Chase decided to give the book to our Library. Eventually, in 2006 she posted it with a letter saying, 'I had wanted to bring it to you myself, but ... I think the Library has waited long enough.' The book arrived, along with *Women of the Pacific: Proceedings of the First Pan-Pacific Women's Conference* (1930), which complemented the book we already had covering the second Pan-Pacific Women's Conference held in 1930, two years after the first.

Since then, Chase has enlarged JSNWL's holdings by donating much extremely interesting material on Australian women. She has also visited. Jane Pollard and I keep in touch with her.

*Shirley Jones*

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*Joanne Fedler continued from page 8*

I also started to exercise with a vengeance. I began to differentiate between what I do and do not have control over. I have no control over the rising price of petrol and mortgage rates or the little wrinkles appearing around my eyes. But one thing over which I do have control is what I choose to put in my mouth. As I lost weight, I wanted to record it for others in the hope that might help them too. As I started to write I recognised that I had made this journey before when I left my homeland South Africa. These were twin journeys. Changing my eating habits meant leaving my comfort zone, and feeling empty and learning new ways of being, which I'd done when I'd migrated to Australia. I'd moved from a feast of a life to a small portion. There I'd been surrounded by people who loved me. I had to leave it all and move to a country where I was hungry for love, for grandparents, for my children, for invitations to sit around a table with other people, whereas I had to make my home in a place of exile.

So my book is also about the hungers of immigration. The poet David Whyte says, 'To live an authentic life, you must have a fierce conversation with life ... and sometimes you only understand your conversation through exile and feeling far away from yourself and your world.' When you leave a home, no matter what 'home' is — perhaps a bad marriage, an illness, a gambling or drug habit — there is a small way in which you die. You will hunger for what you have lost. We all have to leave 'home' and experience loss in this life. All of us go into exile at some time or another. We will all have to leave the home of this earth some day. Dying is the greatest giving up and letting go. *When Hungry, Eat* is about these journeys that we all must take into our hungers.

That is the gift I found in the box of darkness I was given when the food fascist told me I was obese. My hunger opened me into compassion for the hungers around me. The hungrier I became, the more I recognised hunger in other people. I learned that the best way to satisfy my own hunger was to feed someone else.

*Transcript by Helen Ruby, edited by Kris Clarke*

## Centenary of Women's Suffrage



*Items from the collection of JSNWL member, Chase Livingston, on display in Sacramento*

### CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND

Since its launch in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has now reached \$77,494. Our target is \$500,000, the interest from which will provide essential support for Library operations. If you would like to contribute, please indicate on the membership/renewal/donation form on this page.

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Maureen Ward	WAAAF	

#### Donations of material expand our collection:

Lyn Eggins	Joanne Fedler	Dr Kerry Phelp AM
Lyn Reeves	Spinifex Press	UWA Publishing
War Widows Guild		

### New Members

#### A warm welcome to our new members:

Isobelle Barrett	Margaret (Peggy) Clarke	
Natalie Donovan	David Hind	Mary Kostakidis

**The Feminist Bookshop** at Lilyfield has been sold by Gail Hewison and Libby Silva. We thank them for their support of the Library over the years. New owners, Caterina Giuliano and Jo Agri, invite you to drop in and browse their extensive collection.

### Farewell

**Della (Kondelea) Elliott**, militant feminist, unionist and former JSNWL Treasurer and Public Officer, passed away on 2 October 2011, aged 93. See our next issue, February 2012.

**Reverend Theodora Hobbs**, longtime member passed away in Canberra on 23 July 2011.

**Zena Sachs** passed away on 31 July 2011, aged 97. She was a longtime member and supporter of JSNWL who had attended Annual Luncheons until her mobility deteriorated and always took a great interest in the Library.

NOTE: NEW MEMBERSHIP FEES — FIRST INCREASE SINCE 2007

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I would like to help the Library by becoming a volunteer. (You will be contacted for an interview.)

**The membership year runs from January to December. Members joining after 1 October are financial until December of the following year.**

Please forward the completed form to:

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From Railway Square north along Harris Street

Use intercom for admittance  
NB For level access, enter via Bulwara Rd (parallel to Harris Street).

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