



NEWSLETTER

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

Vol 21 Nos 3/4
July/November 2010

GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001
Tel (02) 9571 5359 Fax (02) 9571 5714

Ultimo Community Centre
523-525 Harris St, Ultimo

Email info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au
Website www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au

OUR TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON

Our Annual Fundraising Luncheon, the Library's 21st birthday celebration, was held on Monday 20 September in the Strangers Dining Room Parliament House (NSW). This congenial event attracted 258 people. The return of our usual drinks and socialising before lunch was much appreciated, as was our choice of speaker. We raised almost \$11,000.

Marie Muir, Vice-Chair and convenor, acknowledged the traditional owners of the land, and our co-hosts - the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC and the Hon Robyn Parker MLC. She welcomed guests and asked everyone to contribute generously at this major annual fundraising event by purchasing raffle tickets and contributing to the Capital Investment Fund (now \$60,000). Encouraging people to join the Library, to volunteer, and attend Lunch Hour Talks, she mentioned that Jan Wood would show her video of the luncheon soon on her Coffee Break program airing Mondays, Fridays and Sundays on Channel 44.

Christine Lees, Chair, introduced guest speaker, Ann Sherry, CEO Carnival Australia, feminist and former senior Commonwealth public servant. Her distinguished awards include: in 2001 a Centenary Medal for banking services for disadvantaged communities; an AO in 2004 for services to the community through the promotion of corporate management policies and practices that embrace gender equity, social justice and family partnerships; and in 2009, nomination in the top 50 businesswomen in the world.

Ann Sherry spoke from the following script for her talk, 'From Country Queensland to the Bridge of a Cruise Shipping Business: One Woman's Journey':

Jessie Street was a key Australian suffragette, feminist and human rights campaigner who was born in India. My background was not quite so exotic,

having been born in the Queensland rural town of Gympie. However, I'm proud to say we have some things in common. Jessie was heavily involved with Aboriginal and women's rights which have been my passion too.

Also, Jessie was a strong woman shaped by her upbringing. So am I. Growing up in Gympie, I was surrounded by strong women. My mother, a pharmacist, always worked; my mother's mother was a nurse; my father's mother, a formidable single mother, loved horse racing and ran a hotel. Fortunately, my mother valued education. She also was a woman of her time and valued marriage. By encouraging me to be a radiographer, she hoped I would meet and marry a doctor. Well, there was not a lot of love in the air in that hospital - and not much to love about the job either.

University in Brisbane defined me in many ways. At the time, Joh Bjelke-Petersen was Queensland Premier so politics was polarised. Anne Summers had written *Damned Whores and God's Police*, giving me an understanding of what was going on in Australia. I found a husband there too! The ultra-conservative government had imposed all sorts of draconian rules on political activity and abortion, and was anti-women in general. As outraged students, we spoke with our feet. Street marches were banned so I marched against the ban. I also marched against the outlawing of abortions.

The world got a whole lot wider when I accepted a scholarship at England's Warwick University. The UK was in political turmoil on a totally different scale: the last days of 'Red' Ken Livingstone's reign at Greater London Council, the time of the Brixton Riots, and the British Government in the hands of Margaret Thatcher. The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp opposing movement of nuclear weapons in the UK was underway, a protest that was to last

continued on page 2



Ann Sherry AO

JSNWL FUNCTIONS

Lunch-Hour Talks

Venue: Southern Function Room, 4th Floor, Town Hall House, 456 Kent Street

Date/Time: 3rd Thurs of month 12.00-1.30pm

Cost: \$16 (members) \$22 (non-members) includes light lunch. Pay at the door.

To assist catering, please book by noon Tuesday before talk: Ph (02) 9571 5359

or email info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au

NOVEMBER 2010 — Thursday 18

Babette Smith

Out of Sight: The Civic Legacy of the Convict Era

Babette Smith, freelance historian and author of *Australia's Birthstain* (2008) and in 1988 of *A Cargo of Women* (which she has also novelised), says: 'The reality and strongly developed ethos of a flourishing convict society is neither remembered nor understood.'

FEBRUARY 2011 — Thursday 17

Caroline Graham

Juanita Nielsen: The Enigma

This talk covers Juanita's life and death in NSW's heady era of Green Bans, rapacious developers and the Askin Government. Caroline, founding member of WEL NSW, has been involved in the peace movement, Green Bans and Palestinian human rights.

MARCH 2011 — Thursday 17

Dr Sam Pari

The Tamil Perspective: A Silenced Story

Dr Sam Pari is Director of Public Relations and National Spokesperson of the Australian Tamil Congress. She has done much volunteer work in post-tsunami North-East Sri Lanka, and represents the Tamil Community at human rights, political and academic forums.

APRIL 2011 — Thursday 21

Sharyn Killens and Lindsay Lewis

The Inconvenient Child

Sharyn Killens is better known as Sharyn Crystal, a successful Australian singer and entertainer. But her childhood at times resembled a living hell. *The Inconvenient Child* (2009) tells about her extraordinary journey, her success, and her quest to find her African-American family and own identity.

CHRISTMAS CLOSURE

JSNWL will be closed from Friday 17 December 2010,
and will reopen on Monday 17 January 2011.

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 focus on collecting and preserving 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 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.

Location: Ultimo Community Centre
523-525 Harris Street, Ultimo
(cnr William Henry St)
Ring bell for admittance. NB For level access enter via Bulwara Rd.

How to Reach Us

Trains To Central Station or Town Hall Station

Buses No. 501 from Railway Square (Central Station) or from George Street (opp Town Hall Station)

On Foot From the city, through Darling Harbour to Harris St. opp Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre. From Railway Sq north along Harris St.

A BIG THANK YOU

Warm thanks to everyone who helped to make the day a success: dining room staff for cheerful, responsive service; Marie Muir our MC; the Luncheon Committee; volunteers who toiled for months beforehand and discreetly kept things running on the day; photographers Nik Trevallyn-Jones (stills) and Jan Wood (video), our guests and the organisations who contributed so generously, and finally our members who bought raffle tickets and organised tables.

19 years. Quickly, I had gone from what I thought (after Gympie) was the big wide world of Brisbane to a truly global centre.

Returning to Australia, I worked in the trade union movement in Melbourne. At the time, Bob Hawke was president of the ACTU. I became involved in local government and various social movements, including affirmative action, provision of child care and sexual discrimination. I then spent six years as a senior executive in the Victorian Government, initially in the Women's Policy Coordination Unit, where I worked on setting up government-funded after-school care programs, helping women gain access to the labour market and fairer access to superannuation, expanding childcare and, eventually, on improving primary healthcare.

In 1992, that job took me to the role of First Secretary with the federal Office of the Status of Women in the Prime Minister's Department where my horizons were further broadened. While there, I was vocal about the poor performance of the private sector in employment of women and women's access to senior roles. Now, of course, it is all about women and boards. So when I got an offer from Westpac in 1994, I thought I should be true to my beliefs and see what I could achieve. The corporate sector has been good *to* me, and *for* me. To get things done, I had to learn to do the economics of the back-up argument. As an example, my 'baby' at Westpac was paid maternity leave, an issue debated in Canberra when I was in the Office of the Status of Women. There was a view that the whole world would get pregnant if implemented. When I first ran the argument at Westpac on grounds of fairness, dollars were the concern. Once given the numbers, it was a different story and Westpac became the first private sector organisation in Australia to offer paid maternity leave (hard to believe that that was so radical in 1995!). At Westpac, I worked on change involving the employment of women and women as customers. I was also driving community engagement and social responsibility – getting the bank engaged with programs for banking services for indigenous communities and helping to set up a secondment model for corporates to work in communities all over Australia – rolling out 'Talking ATMs' so visually impaired customers could do their own banking. For this, I was awarded a Centenary Medal.

Then came another life-shaping event: a meeting in the Gulf of Carpentaria town of Weipa, organised by Noel Pearson when he was first launching the Welfare Reform Agenda. In his speech, he talked about how hundreds of millions of dollars were being pumped into Cape communities yet living conditions were worse than most Third World countries. I visited the local community on the fringe of Weipa, built on an old rubbish dump. From that moment on, I was set on a path of engagement with indigenous communities.

Next came the wonderful opportunity in 2002 to be the first female CEO of a New Zealand bank with responsibility for seven Pacific countries. This was followed by the offer to be CEO at Carnival Australia in 2007. Why, you might ask, did I cross the Tasman to what looked like a sinking ship? The male-dominated organisation had a poor reputation, largely because of its treatment of women. It was ripe for transformation. Ultimately we, Carnival Australia, are a business that sells holiday experiences for couples and families, largely bought by women. When I joined, P&O Cruises and Princess Cruises combined carried a total of 140,000 passengers annually. Next year, we're expecting 475,000. Staff numbers have surged too. We employ 6,500 people from over 30 countries.

When you come to a company like this, you have a chance to touch lots of things. At Carnival Australia, I have engaged with the Pacific through the training and hiring of hundreds of women and men who do not get a lot of work opportunities. I have also worked with Ian Frazer, inventor of Gardasil, the world's first cancer vaccine, on directing aid to the Pacific. Further, in a board role with Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships, a not-for-profit organisation, I am helping to channel corporate and philanthropic resources into indigenous development. Much needs to be done. Ultimately, you can pass through jobs and nothing happens except you get paid well. Or you can take steps to make the world a better place – and in doing so help other women. That is the Jessie Street view of the world.

Barbara Henery giving a vote of thanks, to everyone's delight exclaimed, 'What a journey! What a cruise!' We'd come a long way, she said since her father attitude that women had no career path in business. But she fervently agreed with Ann that much still needed to be done. She presented Ann with a gift.

Honorary Librarian, **Jane Pollard** remarked on the audience divide between school girls – digital natives, and the rest of us – digital aliens who haven't grown up with digital technology. The digital revolution means access to library catalogues across the world. KOHA, our new library system, improves use of JSNWL resources. 1,500 posters are now digitised on DVDs. Several hundred audio and video tapes will also be digitised. We need an external hard drive to store data for replacing discs in due course. Many thanks to Nick Trevallyn-Jones (Shirley Jones' son) who installed new computers for KOHA, and Anita Pollard, my daughter-in-law, who digitised posters. The company converting tapes free-of-charge to disc is doing it in return for my husband offering free consulting hours. We use family at every opportunity! More technological change is a certainty.

Margot Simington

LIBRARY MATTERS

JESSIE'S BACK!

The National Portrait Gallery is now the owner, through a Deed of Gift arrangement, of the original portrait of Jessie Street, which has been hanging in our Library since 2002.

Acknowledgement of Jessie Street National Women's Library and the Street family will accompany the portrait and be included in any books and pamphlets.

The National Portrait Gallery re-photographed the painting, having received copyright approval from the artist's son, Laurie Nathan, who was delighted to support the request. This high-resolution digital image has been printed onto canvas, and the portrait now hangs near the reception desk, occupying the same position as did the original.

We welcome Jessie back!

DONATIONS OF MATERIAL

We thank all those people and organisations who have so generously donated books and archival material to the Library.

Juno Gemes
Fleur Gowland
Nola Harris
Marja Harris
Terri Janke
Chase Livingston
Joan McCarthy
Anna Kerdijk Nicholson
Margaret Puchett
Lula Saunders
Viti Simmons
Mardijah Simpson

Australian Scholarly Publishing
Clouston & Hall
Douglas Stewart Publishing
Hamilton Literary Society
RWB Gartrell
The Vulgar Press
University of Queensland Press
Wakefield Press



GRANT APPLICATIONS

In May the Library submitted an application to Arts NSW for funding for a part-time position for an archivist and an administrator. Unfortunately the application has again been rejected.

We were also unsuccessful with a City of Sydney Community grant for a project on Chinese Women Writers but were successful in getting a grant of \$2,500 for technology training. This will go towards the cost of training volunteers in understanding the new Koha Library system.

OTHER LIBRARY NEWS

Digitisation of Posters

Anita Pollard has done a wonderful job in photographing all the posters in our collection. These have now been transferred to the computer so they can be catalogued and used in many ways. There will be the opportunity to show the world using our website. They can also be used for our own promotion in publications.

Labelling of Books

We have bought a new Dymo labelling machine, which makes the work of labelling much easier to do. The old hand-written Dewey labels on the spines of books left much to be desired. Some of the old labels had faded almost beyond recognition and in some the hand-writing was not easy to read. The clarity of the new labels and the consistency of style is much to be appreciated.

Re-shelving the Collection

A new volunteer has taken on the responsibility of re-shelving the books in our Research Collection. This work appears to be progressing well.

Digital Recorder

We have also bought a digital recorder to enable recording of events to CD.

Updating the Website

Thanks to our new and very efficient web master, Fiona Lam, our website updates are going through very quickly. She tries to keep it completely up-to-date for the benefit of both members and general browsers. Please enjoy the new look and the easy access to our catalogue.

THIS NEWSLETTER EDITION

JSNWL has continued to grow and develop over its 21 years, thanks to the loyalty, dedication and enthusiasm of its volunteers. Some have moved on or away, others have arrived to take up roles across the whole range of needs of a research library. Some have created new aspects, both local and interstate.

Shirley Jones is a unique stalwart and has been an integral part of the Library since its inception. Amongst doing a myriad other things, she has been the Newsletter editor and publisher from its first edition in February 1990. It is interesting to see the Newsletter was originally produced using a basic computer and a dot matrix printer.

In the second half of this year Shirley has been organising a major house move, so for the first time responsibility for the Newsletter has passed to a small team of inexperienced desktop publishers. It is only when the reality is presented that one can appreciate the tremendous effort and commitment needed for this task.

Thank you Shirley and all good wishes for your move to North Sydney.

NEWS OF OUR MEMBERS

Congratulations to **Jan Burnswoods**, our JSNWL Board Secretary, who received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Western Sydney in September. She was a member of the University's Board of Trustees 1995-2009 and the award was in recognition of her 'sustained and exceptional service to the University and to the community'.

Congratulations to Emeritus Professor **Jill Roe**, author of the acclaimed biography of Miles Franklin. Last year Jill was awarded the Queensland Premier's history book prize for the biography. At the Adelaide Festival this year the biography earned her the South Australian Premier's non-fiction prize, and on 7 July she was presented with the Margarey Medal, awarded on a biennial basis by the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) and the Australian Historical Association (AHA).

COMMUNITY EVENTS

THE EDNA AWARDS, 2010

There is no doubt that news that one of our Jessie Street National Women's Library volunteers had been nominated for an Edna Award added to the interest and excitement of the evening held at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts on Friday 14 May. A welcoming arrival, a bite to eat and something to drink, together with the busy buzz of conversation created a definite party atmosphere.

WEL uses this annual award to celebrate the life and work of Edna Ryan, a champion of women's rights, particularly in the field of equal pay. (See <welnsw.org.au/images/Ednas> for more information.) Again this year, the presentations honoured a number of women from many walks of life. The stories of their work, often done voluntarily, to educate, support and improve women's lives, ranging from war-torn areas of the world to helping women here in Sydney were both sobering and uplifting. It was heartening to see that there is a group of young, feisty women who are readily picking up the feminist baton and enthusiastically running with it.

Then it was our own Jane Pollard's turn. In a most witty speech, Jane thanked those who nominated her, Edna's family, who had made such a contribution to the evening, and her own husband, whom she described as a staunch feminist. The citation on her award reads:

To Jane Pollard for a special contribution to the education of women and girls. Jane is a qualified librarian, and the Honorary Librarian at Jessie Street National Women's Library, which is an education and information centre specialising in material concerning women and women's issues.

She has professionalised the Library's services and driven the growth of the collection which she has catalogued and arranged for digitisation; this will make it accessible to all through the Library's website.

She oversees and supervises work placement of tertiary students, providing young women and others with an education in the history of the women's movement, as well as an example of institution-building by women for women.

The Library has been in existence since 1989, but it is the work of Jane Pollard which has given it standing in the community of women's library collections through the world. She believes strongly in education making a difference to women's lives, as it did to hers.'

Michele Ginswick, Board Vice-Chair

DONATION FROM INNER WHEEL BALMAIN



At a recent meeting, Michele Ginswick, Vice-Chair of JSNWL, received on behalf of the Library a donation of \$500 from members of Inner Wheel Balmain.

Pictured l to r are: Michele Ginswick, Carmen Polifrone, Jenny Lo Surdo and Linda Palmara. The cheque was presented on behalf of outgoing President, Wendy Volpatti, who was unable to be present.

Jessie Street National Women's Library is very grateful to Inner Wheel Balmain, whose members raise money each year to donate to groups with specific needs.

ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON 2010 RAFFLE PRIZES and WINNERS

Jessie Street National Women's Library wishes to express its appreciation to the individuals and organisations who so generously donated the raffle prizes for our 21st Birthday Fundraising Luncheon.

Congratulations to the winners!

1st Prize—Limited Edition coloured etching 27/50, 'Angels Trumpeting' by Charles Blackman, valued at \$500. Donated by Jane Pollard
Won by Leonie Gale Ticket No 1926

2nd Prize—Dymock's Book Voucher, valued at \$250. Donated by Penny Street
Won by Audrey Wacks Ticket No 1461

3rd Prize—Lunch for two on cruise ship, valued at \$198. Donated by Cruise Express, Balmain
Won by Janet Bean Ticket No 2469

4th Prize—Book token to the value of \$50. Donated by The Feminist Bookshop, Lilyfield
Won by Jozefa Sobski Ticket No 1862

5th to 10th Prizes—Each prize two bottles of wine. Donated by the NSW Teachers Federation and produced by Mt View High School, Cessnock NSW, as part of the agriculture curriculum.

5th—Madeleine Scott Ticket No 2111

6th—Denise Taylor Ticket No 2491

7th—Joan Graham Ticket No 2145

8th—Gail Hewison Ticket No 1649

9th—Kelly Morgan Ticket No 2047

10th—Michelle Cook Ticket No 2337

REMEMBERING HELEN LEONARD FEMINIST LEADER, NETWORKER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Helen Leonard (1945-2001) worked with numerous women's organisations including the Nursing Mothers' Association (now the Australian Breastfeeding Association), Women's Electoral Lobby, National Women's Media Centre, the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the National Foundation for Australian Women, Women's Services Network and CAPOW (the peak national women's organisation, Coalition of Australian Participating Organisations of Women). As a lobbyist and photographer in the women's movement from the 1970s onward, Helen recorded the activities of many women's organisations, building an extraordinary library of photographs and recordings. JSNWL holds a large collection of Helen's photographs and archival papers.

To celebrate History Week, on Wednesday 8 September 5.00-7.00pm, JSNWL hosted in the Library a panel discussion about Helen Leonard. The discussion was moderated by Library Board member and WEL activist, Jozefa Sobski. Panellists Anne Deveson, Jean Gledhill, Gael Walker and Eva Cox discussed Helen's life, philosophy and amazing achievements.

This event was an opportunity for those attending to view some of Helen's photographs and to help identify for the Library's records various of the women photographed participating in International Women's Day marches, WEL conferences, and many other women's activities over the years.

A large crowd attended this evening event and all expressed their appreciation of the time and effort put into the occasion. Special thanks must go to Beverley Sodbinow, our Archivist, and Jan Burnswoods, Board Member, for this successful function.

MAY LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: ELIZABETH MOONEY
The First Licenced Female Real Estate Agent in NSW



Elizabeth very kindly agreed to step into the breach on Thursday 13 May, when the advertised speaker was unable to attend. She gave a short, relaxed and enjoyable talk. Elizabeth is to be congratulated on her enterprise, her perseverance in the face of difficulties and the fact that she still has a foot in the business after so many years!

Many years ago, if you went along to the local police station and you didn't have a criminal record, you could open a real estate agency. But in NSW in the 1960s, there were so many applicants, that a requirement was introduced — applicants had to pass a law exam and an accountancy exam. So I had to do just that before I could become licenced.

As the first woman real estate agent who officially passed the law and accountancy exams of the Real Estate & Business License course (now known as the Property, Stock & Business Act 2002 course), I still hold my licence. Although I'm 83, I'm very proud of the fact that I still do the exams every year.

In the early 1960s I had to repeat law in the first year I sat for the exam. Doing the course was quite an effort because I had two children — a daughter in high school and a son just starting school. I held down a full-time job as a cashier and manager at a wholesale grocery store in Chatswood (in Sydney). There were 32 men in the course who were much more relaxed than I was, because they had a wife at home fondly preparing their dinner! Things weren't easy for me because I was 'teased' by the men. Why did I think I could become a real estate agent? It made me very determined to continue my studies and get that qualification.

Even as a child, I was very interested in real estate. I can always remember, when we lived in Auburn during the Depression, my father saying to me, 'We're going to let you go up and pay the rent.' It was the Jack Lang Real Estate Agency in Auburn. I was only nine or ten — it was in the early 1930s — and I had to go and pay five shillings a week for the rent on the house. I used to think, 'I'm going into this shop and giving this man money!' I thought that was a wonderful idea. And that has stayed with me ever since!

Later I found that when I approached an agent with my husband, I was seriously ignored! This was quite common in those days. The protocol was that the man earned the money, so what's the woman got to do with buying the house? I was so frustrated at being ignored.

While I was doing my studies and repeating law, I made a friend who also wanted to do the course, so we'd go off

on a Tuesday to sit for our exams. We decided to go to her home in Castlecrag every Sunday to study together. This was a great idea because, with two children at home, I never had the time at home to sit down and study. So that was the reason I think that we succeeded. The arrangement worked well and eventually Hilda Chapple and I opened our very first real estate agency on the beachfront at North Curl Curl. We opened in a little block of four shops at the end of Pittwater Road, as you go up the hill to Dee Why. We agreed to put in \$5,000 between us, to set up an office and pay the rent. \$5,000 was about a year's wages in those days. We agreed that if we didn't make an impression in six months, that would be the end of it.

I remember our very Spartan office with that awful grass matting on the floor — it was so cheap but all we could afford. Everybody walked in with about ten tons of sand from Curl Curl, so it was just as well we didn't have carpet. We had two desks, and we did pay to get a very fancy sign with a wave crashing over our name 'North Curl Curl Real Estate'. We hoped we would soon be on top of the wave!

We did a letter drop to tell people that we were 'women only' real estate and every single person who greeted us said, 'It's about time!' There were many highlights, and I'll tell you one. Hilda was in charge of the rental for all the years we were together, but she was a soft touch. Somehow I became suspicious of two young men renting a house in Allambie Heights. They always seemed to be behind in their rent, but at the end of the month, as I came to check the signing of the cheques, I asked Hilda, 'How come they have caught up with all their rent?' She said, 'Well, I paid it!' So we had to find the money to pay her back, and at the same time the owner of the property, who was overseas, needed the money to pay his mortgage. I thought, 'How are we going to get around this problem?'

There was a very well-known detective (RR), who knocked on my door one day and said, 'Hey, good day girls. You've started up a real estate agency, have you? Well, I'll tell you, if you have any bloody trouble with them tenants, come to me.' So I rang him up and I took my hat off to his services. For \$50 he and his cohorts arranged it so that every bit of furniture in the house was put out

onto the footpath and all the locks were changed, and there was a sign on the front fence, 'To Let'. And not a word or phone call from the tenants. Luckily we had been holding a bond that compensated us for some of the money that Hilda had paid.

After five years Hilda and I sold that agency and I moved onto other agencies when she retired. And I'm still handling sales today for some of my former clients.

*Transcription by Helen Ruby
Edited by Kris Clarke*

MONETARY DONATIONS

We thank all those who have generously made monetary gifts to the Library. These donations help pay for its day-to-day running costs.

Margaret Bettison
Michelle Brock
Lesley Eckels
JM Fisher
Angela Gisa
Betty Graham
Tricia Jackson
Christine Lomax
Kathy McClellan
Judith Newton
Maria Popoff
Robin Porter
Jozefa Sobski
May Steilberg
Eve Stenning
Kay Vernon

Inner Wheel

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to our new members.

Irma Birchell
Sharon Chambers
Rima D'Arcy
Archana Datt
Susan Hansen
Vera Harper
Lindsay Hartley
Sandra Lee Hodel
Susan Margarey
Jessica Mayers
Dione McDonald
Maria Noyales
Linda Palamara
Maria Popoff
Jenny Reeves
Leanda Smith
Robyn Tracey

JUNE LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: ANNE FERGUSON

Sculpture: An Unlikely Career

Drawing the audience into her life as a sculptor, Anne Ferguson provided a fascinating glimpse into her artistic inspiration and creative process.

Sculpture, like architecture, literature, painting is 'art'. So what is art? Two poems express my artistic concept. Peter Handke's poem, *Song of Childhood* (1987), in Wim Wender's film script *Wings of Desire*:

When the child was a child
it walked with its arms swinging,
wanted the brook to be a river,
the river to be a torrent,
and this puddle to be the sea.

And Jacques Prevert's *To Paint a Bird's Portrait* (1945):

First of all, paint a cage
with an opened little door
then paint something attractive
something simple
something beautiful
something of benefit for the bird...
If the bird doesn't sing
it's a bad sign
it means that the picture is wrong
but if it sings it's a good sign
it means that you can sign
so you tear with sweetness
a feather from the bird
and write your name in a corner of the painting.

Notice the cage door is always open. That's the oblique way of looking at the world that artists have.

I began late. Unsuccessful at university, I had three children before knowing I wanted to do something. In my late twenties I enrolled in a 3D night class, unaware '3D' was sculpture. I had a wonderful teacher once a week for several years, until I lost patience and left. Then I learnt welding with a welding supply and training company, and casting, ceramics and etching from other teachers. I'm an autodidact really.

In the mid-1970s I had carved a granite work for a school when a wonderful friend, sculptor May Barry (now in her nineties and still carving stone) said someone was wanted for carving granite in Japan and suggested I go. So I left my husband and three children to live and work for three months with 27 men in Hagi City, Japan. I, as one of an international invited artists group, joined Japanese designing and making granite furniture for a large park aside the Sea of Japan. I worked with three artists (one Dutch, two Japanese) making a long jetty extending into the sea from flat stone blocks supporting two pillars plumbed so water pours out from on high (1981). I learnt a lot about stone carving. Those Japanese master carvers provided a master class I could never otherwise have had. They were all men, so I could ask them only once! I learnt to write on the inside of my arm whatever I was told. We made an almost superhuman effort: I even lay underneath rocks helping install plumbing, about which I knew nothing. In the end, it was good – at the beginning, impossible. I often thought to use the ticket home my husband had given me.

Several years later I was invited to Canberra. The architect of the new Parliament House wanted carvings for the ends of the Great Hall's two large staircases. I asked him to explain the brief as if it were music. A charming Italian, he responded, 'Each staircase is a Bach fugue. As people descend, hands on balustrades, the music must continue, no-one noticing transition to the finials.' I asked why use Italian carrara marble and not Australian stone. He said, 'Stone in Australian quarries is damaged by dynamite.'

It was a very hard brief. Like other people working on Parliament House, I was pushed beyond my experience. Unlike tougher Australian stone, carrara — Michelangelo's beautiful, strong material — is more fragile, porous, and easily stained or bruised. But I had great help along my way from architect Romaldo Giurgola and art consultant Pamille Berg who became and remain my friends and lifelong influence. A wonderful Italian stonemason, Emilio Gabriel, also advised and helped in time of (occasional) catastrophe. The four finials gracing the staircases (1988) are each slightly different – like times of day: morning, noon, afternoon and evening. I'm very grateful for that experience.

My first major public commission (having been 'nursed' by Pamille on Parliament House work) came through an Australian War Memorial invitation to enter a competition for an Australian Servicewomen's Memorial. I don't do competitions but agreed to submit a watercolour drawing. There was no precedent for a servicewomen's memorial. I thought it should differ from men's memorials. My concept was a low, horizontal patchwork of granite blocks from all over Australia symbolising women and their sense of 'place'. Your grandmother put down a rug for picnics; my grandmother grew an extraordinary desert garden in Broken Hill. For women, it's about place. And everyone is in tune with that: a man I know escaped with his sister and father from Hungary, but his mother had been killed and Russians had slashed carpets in which family possessions had been rolled up; he always kept one repaired carpet on the floor of his house. War does this – leaves a wound. So a black, narrow stream crosses the centre of my patchwork, a remembered tear in the fabric of lives.

Unfortunately I made the mistake of not explaining this story early on to stakeholder representatives, three WWII ex-servicewomen. I hadn't realised that with public work you must tell the story, not keep it secret (as poems can do). The AWM art department was wonderful and, with director Steve Gower, we struggled two years for a go-ahead. On completion (1999) stakeholders were still unhappy. I think and hope young people understand. Subsequently the AWM commissioned a WWII Sandakan (Borneo) death march memorial and this is also in AWM grounds (2004).

Canberra has a lot of my work. At the Peter Baume Post-Graduate Medical School (Australian National University), above north and south entrances three stories high I used clear toughened glass on glass, screenprinted (using powdered glass mixed with flux and fired to 600C) with a pattern I developed from histological specimens, including student chromosomes (2004). This wonderful almost underwater pattern reflects into a white corridor connecting both entrances so students pass through their own shadows. I lost money on the job, but it was worth the fun, experimentation and knowledge.

In 1998 Romaldo Giurgola called me and two others from the Parliament House project to join his last major job: a rebuild and renovation of burnt-out St. Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta. All three of us non-Catholic, Robin Blau would do metalwork; Kevin Perkins, timber; I would do the stonework – in black granite: altar, font, and the Bishop's chair and lectern (combining timber with the granite). For the design task, I in particular needed to understand the liturgical background; also for me, this job of a lifetime seemed impossible without suitable Australian granite and trained people. My stone yard suggested using Chinese granite — that I carve full-scale works from concrete blocks for steel-crating to China and exact copying. And that's what we did. To finish the job I lived in a remote northern Chinese village. I toiled on that sesame black granite, often lying in dirty stone yard water, brilliant people

Continued on page 10

JULY LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: DR DAWN CASEY

Indigenous Representations in Museums: Politics behind the Politics

Dr Dawn Casey, Director of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, mentioned that she usually did not accept speaking invitations but was honoured to accept JSNWL's request because of Jessie Street's central role in success of the 1968 referendum and the felicitous timing within National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week.

My talk today 15 July during our annual NAIDOC Week is in the spirit of what I believe Jessie Street represented. Born into privilege, labelled Jessie the Red and the Socialist Socialite, she campaigned persistently and courageously for peace, social justice, equality for women, and citizenship for Australian Aboriginal people.

Indigenous representations in museums today compared with only a few decades ago have changed considerably. How has this happened and why?

European culture entering Australia from 1788 took intense interest in the new fauna and flora and in Aboriginal people. This was very soon reflected in museum collections in Australia and overseas on a surprisingly large scale. Sometimes scientific research was the motivation, sometimes vulgar curiosity. Overriding every other consideration was the familiar assumption that Europeans had a right to know; that the natural and human world was theirs to explore, classify and understand. Secret, sacred objects and even skeletal remains were displayed as objects of curiosity; photographs and film of secret ceremonies were published. Knowledge was pursued for the sake of knowledge alone.

The presumed audience was, of course, European. Occasionally, sensitivities were known but considered less important than the interest of the collecting institution. Sacredness of object or ceremony provided titillating, sensational interest for viewers. This happened also with indigenous people in Canada, New Zealand and the United States. Kenn Harper's book, *Give Me My Father's Body: The Life of Minik, the New York Eskimo* (2000), is about an Inuit family kept by the Natural History Museum in New York in basement dungeons as a living human display. Minik, the only survivor (the rest died of tuberculosis) wanted to bury his father according to tradition but subsequently found that the museum's 'ceremony' only pretended, and had not really buried his father.

Indigenous people in Australia pursued changes to museum practices and included these issues in the much larger political agenda, including human rights, land rights

and recognition of their cultural heritage as the original owners of Australia. By the end of the 1980s, the fight was in full swing for repatriation of indigenous human remains and secret, sacred objects, and for changes to the way a cultural *matura* is displayed, interpreted and researched. The indigenous position is best summed up by Aboriginal artist Ros Langford when addressing the Australian Archaeological Association in 1983. She said, 'You seek to say, as scientists, you have the right to obtain and study information of our culture. You seek to say that because you are Australian you have the right to study and explore our heritage, because it is a heritage to be shared by all Australians, white and black. From our point of view, we say, you come as invaders, you try to destroy our people and now, having said sorry, want to share picking out the bones you regard as dead past. We say this: it is our past, our culture, our heritage and forms part of our present life. As such, it is ours to control and it is ours to share on our terms.'

In 2001 Australian museums held some 7,000 indigenous remains. In recent years many have been returned to indigenous people for reburial. In 1993 Australian museums launched a document called *Previous Possessions — New Obligations, the Policies for Museums in Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (revised and renamed in 2003: *Continuous Cultures — Ongoing Responsibilities*). This document incorporates major attitudinal changes and generally reflects the position of museums regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage. It acknowledges: that museums are still modifying their approach to indigenous art and cultural collections to incorporate custodianship (not ownership); recognition of the value of stories and other intangibles associated with objects, and of contemporary, as well as historic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices (ie recognition that an object may not just be an object, but a living cultural link, and the validity of contemporary culture); and the creation of genuine relationships of recognition and repository between traditional custodians and museums.

In my view, museums today have a social role. They represent the culture of a particular society by acquiring items of national, local or community significance. They act as the collective memory. They are the repositories of the sum total of everything that is important to us. Museums also have an educational role — intellectual and experiential stimulus for people of all ages. This may range from curriculum-based information or specialist knowledge, to inspiration, or emotional insights. Museums use real objects and a

range of media and methodology to match the range of learning needs, and styles The New Dawn which visitors bring.

Museums have a civic role too. They are a public space for pleasure and enjoyment as well as learning and exchange of views — perhaps the balancing of one perspective against another. Essentially they are meeting places in which differing viewpoints are accorded respect, scholarly research can be accessed, and there is opportunity for a wider interpretation of Australia's people, flora and fauna by museum professionals. Museums have become cultural story books where objects and technology come together to tell stories.

The new Melbourne Museum launched in 2000 and the National Museum of Australia (Canberra) that opened in 2001 both developed exhibitions incorporating aspects of colonial history not previously told in museums, including stories around massacres and the Stolen Generation. Ways used to present the history included artifacts, and individuals telling stories through video clips, digital video media, artwork by indigenous artists, and political cartoons. These innovative tools helped visitors feel part of the story, looking through an interactive prism rather than being outside a window, looking in. If you go to museums today, there is nothing more moving than seeing and hearing people telling their own stories, rather than it being interpreted through text and through objects alone. The interpretation of the indigenous story in the Melbourne Museum was intentionally directed at the Koori audience and included a manikin of former honorary director of the Museum and well-known anthropologist, Baldwin Spencer, housed in a glass cabinet — to demonstrate how indigenous people had been displayed in museums. Perhaps it was so subtle that the point was lost on some people — but not on the indigenous audience who have long suffered from insensitive museum practice.

At that time (as many of you would know) this new approach in museums to interpreting indigenous peoples' history and culture attracted an extreme response, albeit only from a minority. These exhibitions became the focus for those involved in the 'Culture Wars'. Much discussion revolved around the question of whether these museums were political and whether they were biased towards a particular political view.

The big issue is, of course, not whether museum curators or historians are politically biased. It is their choice of subject matter. They deal with complex truths of indigenous history: massacres supposedly exaggerated, even invented;

continued on page 10

AUGUST LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: ANNE HENDERSON

Enid Lyons: An Independent Woman

Sydney Institute Deputy Director Anne Henderson, author of Enid Lyons: Leading Lady to a Nation (2008), revealed the strong woman behind a stuffy image.

Ladies who lunch can be formidable. Activists like Vida Goldstein and Jessie Street lunched while they voluntarily networked to advance women's status. So did Enid Lyons. But she is largely overlooked by feminists. Despite being the first woman to enter the House of Representatives and later the federal cabinet, with her conservative 'wife and mother' image she does not feature in radical women's liberation traditions.

In the 1970s, I myself judged Enid Lyons to be stuffy and conservative. She was no Einstein. At Teachers College she spent much time drawing pictures of brides. Becoming a Catholic to marry at 17, by age 36 she'd had 12 children. She could not accept family planning nor imagine being without a baby. She became a good housewife, enjoyed her kitchen, covered chairs and sofas, sewed children's clothes. She tirelessly supported her husband to follow his ambitions, seemingly the antithesis of the modern, independent woman that writers and feminists like Jill Ker Conway enjoin us to be — the woman charting her own course in life regardless of convention, hurdles and patriarchal expectations. Enid Lyons did not set out to chart her life — she was instinctive rather than strategic, rose to meet challenges. So how did she become extraordinary while adopting so many norms for the average woman of her day?

Firstly, Enid, born in 1897 in a small northern Tasmania timber town, grew to womanhood amidst the rawness of pioneering life and the energy of a fledgling nation which by undermining Old World conventions opened up certain opportunities — adult suffrage came early to women in Australia. Of Enid's itinerant parents, neither politically astute, her mother Eliza Burnell beenexerted a formative influence. Eliza, who herself had to leave school at Grade 5 to help rear four siblings, was determined her own family would be educated. Eliza explored Fabian politics through contacts in sawmilling camps. Her community standing rose once the family settled in 1904 west of Burnie, running a post office and dance hall. Eliza subscribed to Fabian periodicals and joined the Labor Party. Friends included Labor MPs in the Tasmanian Parliament. In 1912, Eliza presented her two older daughters to some Tasmanian politicians. One of them, Labor MP Joe Lyons, fell in love with 15 year old Enid. They married in 1915 — Joe then 35 and already Minister for Education and Treasurer in the Tasmanian government. They honeymooned at a Premiers' Conference dining with Australia's most senior politicians.

Enid's marriage proved the perfect match. Joe Lyons, devoted to her and believing in gender equality, saw her not only as his companion and lover but also as a political asset. He taught her politics and brought her into his political team, aware of women's voting power. On stage, Enid could draw out women's issues. She never thrust herself forward (often recalling legs like jelly as she approached a platform) yet became an accomplished figure, intellectually sharp and confident, excelling at repartee. Years of elocution with an ambitious mother stood her in good stead, as did watching Joe, a master campaigner. They formed a strong political 'for Joe' partnership during his many years as Tasmanian Labor premier in Tasmania 1923-28, federal Labor minister 1929-31 and conservative Prime Minister 1932-39.

Enid, Joe and their extended family were committed to public life. Enid often encouraged women to get involved in public affairs. She became increasingly politically active despite pregnancies and small children. Though not rich, Enid and Joe spent what money they had to make their public life possible. She was comfortable leaving her children with carers, getting home help once there were four, and having nurses for young ones in the Lodge in

Canberra. Her mother was a reliable backstop, and sister-in-law Mavis Lyons twice moved her own children into the Lodge while Enid was overseas. But it was not easy. In 1925, aged 27 with seven children, she stood for State parliament unsuccessfully. Shortly afterwards, when her baby Garnet died of pneumonia and meningitis, hate mail blamed her for the death. Enid's own health was always delicate and, as necessary, she would withdraw from the limelight, resuming afterwards with renewed energy. Often today young women are told they cannot have it all. But Enid Lyons did: she lived the life of any contemporary high-powered mother.

Enid Lyons always rose to meet challenges. When Joe Lyons died in April 1939, leaving her with six children still dependent on her, she faced dire financial circumstances. Using her talents, for some three years she rallied a huge fan club as a radio broadcaster. Then in 1943 she stood for the Tasmanian federal seat of Darwin (later renamed Braddon), the seat adjoining Joe's former electorate. She won on preferences, against the tide of John Curtin's massive Labor Party victory. As a conservative MP, Enid Lyons spoke out on family issues and helped build for government, never allowing disagreements with colleagues in a dispirited Opposition to reach the media. She had two years in federal Cabinet from 1949 (during which she was responsible for extending child endowment), retiring at the 1951 election. She then worked for several years as a syndicated twice-weekly columnist, was ABC Commissioner for over a decade, and for years continued public activities promoting family and women's issues.

Finally, Enid Lyons placed her independent spirit on public record. She wrote two books of memoir, *So We Take Comfort* (1965) and *Among the Carrion Crows* (1977), and she organised a legacy for the nation. Several years before her death in 1981, she sold Home Hill (which she had built with Joe) to the Devonport Council. She allowed her children to choose a few small mementos from the house but kept the rest for the National Trust. This became Australia's first prime ministerial museum, preceding the Chifley and Curtin homes.

Enid's advice for young people was no passive philosophy: 'Our generation is obsessed with ...security. Tell youth to forget ...it... [H]ave faith in God, self-discipline and a sure standard of moral integrity; then let them dare to do the things they dream about.'

Even Jill Ker Conway would have to concede that, like Enid Lyons, women can be tools and agencies for change, not only by our strategies but also by our responses.

Edited by Margot Simington

JESSIE STREET SAYS 'NO' TO EXHIBITION

Merle Hight, a sister of member Della Elliot, recently phoned JSNWL with an intriguing reference enquiry. Her brother John Xenodohos, a professional artist, painted a large 'realist art' work in oils depicting workers on the march. This large painting was due to be exhibited at David Jones in the 1950s. According to Merle, the picture, entitled *The New Dawn* and somewhat contentious at the time due to paranoia of communism, was withdrawn from the exhibition. As a protest, his friend Jessie Street pulled off the whole exhibition and it did not proceed.

Merle wondered if JSNWL had any knowledge of where the work might currently be. I remembered seeing the work at the Trades Hall some time ago. Enquiries there have drawn a blank so far. Any ideas? If you can help, please email JSNWL: info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au

Barbara Henery

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN POETS AND THEIR WORKS

Further to our occasional series on the Library's collection we present a brief look at DDC 821 — the Dewey Decimal Classification for poetry. We hold nearly 400 books in this section from Ada Cambridge and Dorothea Mackellar to Beverley George and Dawn Bruce. Chronologically that covers a period of about 160 years. It also encompasses almost every known poetic form from ballads to haiku.

Writing poetry is comparable to acting — seldom do poets become rich even when honoured and respected. Thus it is that many poets have other working lives to support their creative endeavours. Mona Brand is probably better remembered as a playwright; Fay Zwicky was a concert pianist and academic before concentrating on poetry; Rosemary Dobson studied design with Thea Proctor and worked as an illustrator.

Dame Mary Gilmore (1865-1962) wrote for various newspapers and for over 20 years edited the women's page in the *Australian Worker*. Gilmore is a legendary figure whose poetry is today perhaps overshadowed by her association with William Lane's New Australia movement. In 1895 she accompanied his Utopian followers to Paraguay where the plan was to establish a colony founded on Socialist principles. In 1902, now married and with a son, Gilmore returned to Sydney. The experiment had failed 'but not' said Gilmore 'because of Socialism'. Her belief in socialist principles imbued her lifelong interest in the rights of workers, especially women, and the rights of Aboriginal Australians.

Gilmore taught at schools in Wagga Wagga and Broken Hill where she first encountered the hard living conditions of shearers and other workers and, aged 23, wrote her first revolutionary verses published in the *Australian Worker*. A sympathy for Aboriginal Australians possibly developed from a childhood association, as she had an Aboriginal nursemaid at the family's property near Goulburn. All her very long life her poetry spoke to discrimination and disparity, balanced by her love of nature voiced in lyrical verse and ballads. In 1954 she published *Fourteen Men*. The title poem records seeing the bodies of 14 Chinese who had been hanged. In a later note she distinguishes from the clothes and the 'golden lily' feet, that one of them was a young woman. In *To Helen Cameron Roberts* the woman asks her Aboriginal friends how they came to make the boomerang:

We watched the new moon in the sky
The old man said;
We watched it go, and saw
That it returned. From it
We made the boomerang.

Finally, from a collection so rich it is difficult to choose, an example as relevant today as it ever was:

Are these our people's leaders? These
Whose babbling voices
Sound in familiar keys
Like farmyard noises?
The world churns like a maggot-pit,
Turmoiled in strife
While the mice-minded sit
Nibbling at life.

Gwen Harwood (1920-1995) has been called by her peers 'the best poet to appear in this country since Judith Wright'. Harwood's influences spring naturally from her family background that was full of music, philosophy, religion and language. She trained as a pianist and organist and became a music teacher. She learned German in order to widen her reading and married a linguist before moving from Queensland to Tasmania where she spent her last forty years. Her first poems were published in *Meanjin* in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1968 Angus & Robertson published *Poems/Volume Two* (1968).

In this collection, the first several poems used the fictional character of Professor Krote to express Harwood's love of music, and her dislike of pretentiousness and materialism. Krote reflects

on the past glories of his career in Europe and asks: 'Who would know me now, /a second-rate musician in an ignorant town?' At the Arts Club describes Krote's revenge on his society audience:

Krote lets the loud pedal blur
a dubious trill. The variations
on Handel's foursquare theme occur
to most as odd manipulations
Of something better left alone.
They suffer. Krote knows they do:
with malice adds some more, his own
and plays all the repeats right through.

Harwood's poetry has an ability to describe human experiences and emotions with which every reader can identify. In *The Farewell* she writes of thwarted love:

... Your righteous town
affords desire no refuge so we taste
looks, words, no more; and burning remain chaste...
What's virtue without grace? A useless trinket...
I rise and walk away to the dry bread
of heartbreak, thirsting for the wine untasted.

The verse novel is a modern form and **Dorothy Porter** (1954-2000) is today its best-known Australian exponent. She has written five verse novels. *The Monkey's Mask* (1994), a murder mystery, has won many awards, been adapted for stage, radio and film, and been widely translated. Apart from the verse novels, Porter also wrote lyrical poetry, opera, libretto and children's fiction. Although the Library holds four of her verse novels, here we briefly examine poems from the collection *Driving Too Fast* (1989).

Porter rejected the academic or obscurantist style and sought to popularise poetry with open and direct communication; she tried to write 'with a tongue of fire'. In the third part of this collection the poems are certainly direct and personal, sensuous with sexual desire:

Driving too fast
I can't wait to see you -
Driving too fast
I'm wet. I'm nuts. too much pop music.
Driving too fast
how tight can you hold me?
Driving too fast
be a tiger shark. Maul my mouth... (Title poem)

In *Strawberries Sonnet* a lover is described as:

... all bones
You're all quicksilver skin...
You're my murder and my delight
You're not strawberries.

The loss of desire is captured in the image of love still:

hanging around
like a forgotten dressing gown...
you reach for a book
instead of your lover's hand (When Desire's Gone)

Dorothy Porter wanted to reach a popular audience and made her poetry 'open to all, immersed in the sweat, blood and tears of contemporary life' (as Michael Brennan says on the website: australia.poetryinternationalweb.org).

Jane Pollard, Honorary Librarian

To be continued in the next issue

alongside working so hard you wouldn't believe. I left them my safety equipment, their own virtually non-existent. St Patrick's was re-consecrated in 2003. Three books, including Giurgola's *Luminous Simplicity: The Architecture and Art of St Patrick's Cathedral Parramatta* (2006), document its amazing, high quality Australian art and craftsmanship.

I always work on three or four things at a time. For creativity I treasure solitude, silence. Usually my work has a literary origin or, as I'm working, ideas come from something heard or read. Working in Japan I could hear music I didn't know I knew, often one long movement of a symphony I've not heard since. With commissions you can sometimes experiment at the client's expense. Creating *Annunciation* (2003), one of several sculptures which evolved from carrara leftover from my Parliament House work, I was very interested in how much this stone would allow me to take away and still hold steady. A name for a piece may emerge very late. I carved — argued with — one granite piece for about fifteen years before it became *Ithaka*, from C.P. Cavafy's *Ithaka*, a poem about a journey and not expecting anything at the end. Following several *Ithaka* installations, in 1999 its installation at Acton, Canberra created a shadow line and added a wonderful wooden seat incised with a line from Cavafy's poem — demonstrating I'm not always right in how I see placement of my work.

I'm always carving something personal. At present a small composite of bronze, stone and glass is slowly taking shape. It reminds me of my artistic journey — the land I've come through. Yes ! As of today, that's its name: *The Land I've Come Through*.

There have been so many lessons:

be strong, true to self;
have integrity;
ask only once;
treasure silence for creativity;
take inspiration from all art forms;
welcome collaboration; and,
remember to tell the stories.

*Transcription by Helen Ruby
Edited by Margot Simington*

Note: JSNWL holds Anne Ferguson's papers.

and either denial of a 'Stolen Generation' or assertion that in the case of removal from families this was being done for their own good.

I see exhibitions as more challenging than books. Exhibitions are now set out in public places for a general audience disposed to offer opinions as never before. A book, especially a scholarly one, may escape general public attention, but an exhibition confronts people in a very physical way. These are real challenges for museums, having as they do the task of re-examining important issues in Australian history.

It's pointless to argue whether museums should be political. They already are! Whatever their choices, they can scarcely avoid it. Politics is inherent in what museums chose to tell and not just in how they tell it. Even the smallest local history museum must decide whether to represent the local indigenous people in their exhibition, and if so, how to depict that culture and history in the context of European settlement. The War Memorial in Auckland includes the wars in which Maoris fought for their country; the Australian War Memorial in Canberra does not and that too is a political choice.

The role indigenous art plays in museums and galleries and responses by visitors vary substantially between whether what is being interpreted is in a social context, or is part of an exhibition in an art gallery. The reason is that on the gallery side of what may be called a 'divide', Europeans have traditionally valued paintings and sculpture as the highest cultural expression. We are used to hearing that Aboriginal artwork has fetched record prices in an international auction or seeing exhibitions of the work of Rover Thomas or Emily Kngwarre in major galleries, but generally it wasn't until the late 1980s that those major galleries included these paintings in their collections. Such gallery acquisitions reflect the interpretation by many viewers looking for beautiful constructions of colour and form — simple and memorable shapes in black, ochre and other subtle colours. On the museum side of the 'divide', Rover Thomas's paintings — like *Bedford Downs Massacre* or *Camp at Massacre Creek* — could be used, and seen, to interpret the frontier conflict. His landscapes are silent witness to atrocities from the 'killing times'.

For many urban indigenous artists, because their work arises from the desire to assert cultural identity, it is inherently political. Fiona Foley's artwork, *The Annihilation of the Blacks*, which is a row of hanging black figures presided over by a white man, was inspired by Wik artist Arthur Pambejan's traditional piece, *Bonefish*, which is a row of carved wooden fish. Fiona's work is overtly political — very disturbing and confronting. For Fiona Foley and other artists, including Lin Onus and Brooke Andrews, the aesthetic expression and the demand for social justice are inextricably linked.

There is no doubting the upsurge of interest in the complex histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That interest proceeds sometimes from the knowledge of indigenous art, sometimes from an involvement with political issues, sometimes from personal encounters. Many white Australians are beginning to understand that they know very little about the people whose land they share. What concerns me, however, is the question of whether we are becoming desensitised with so much said about Aboriginal disadvantage that people think they've heard it all before. Incredibly, a number of Australians still do not accept the historical facts of indigenous dispossession and the human rights issues which follow from that. Do they really not know or care?

For this reason, I believe art remains powerful and useful, a deceptive means of witnessing to the truth: art is a way of smuggling human rights issues into the public arena. It gets past the guardians of good taste or political neutrality because it is beautiful, stylish, and even fashionable. But whether it ends up in a museum, exhibition gallery, an office foyer, a parliamentary forecourt, the lounge room wall or the coffee table art book, it has very many things to say. Therefore let us celebrate that role of Aboriginal art and give it every encouragement.

*Transcription by Helen Ruby
Edited by Kris Clarke*

MEMBERSHIP

During 2010 the library administration team has been challenged by technology changes. It is hoped that the new Koha Library System will make the management of membership records easier and more efficient for our volunteers to handle. This year renewal reminders were not issued so there are a number of regular members who may not have paid their subscription for 2010. As we rely heavily on this income, we would appreciate that you look at the date of your current membership on the address label and perhaps cover the cost of 2010 as well as 2011.

Your continued loyalty is greatly appreciated and early next year a survey will be distributed. When it is returned it is hoped that JSNWL will be able to take on new and exciting developments.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND

The JSNWL Board is delighted with the response to the recent initiative of a Capital Investment Fund. Since it was launched in September 2009 it has now reached \$60,000. But we still have a long way to go to reach the target of \$500,000, the interest from which will provide essential support for the continued operation of the Library.

If you would like to contribute please indicate on the membership renewal /donation form attached to this Newsletter.

At the recent Helen Leonard Event, a member of the audience suggested people could follow her example and include a bequest for Jessie Street National Women's Library in their Will. Please contact the Library for further information.

CIF DONATIONS SINCE MAY 2010

Karen Banfield
Joan Bielski
Jane Bridge
Christine Burvill
Helen Farrell
Vera Harper
Barbara Henery
Inner Wheel Club of Balmain
Beverley Kingston
Kathy McClellan
Jane Pollard
Helen Reddy
Jill Roe
Michele Sacco
Mary Sexton
Margot Simington
Eve Stenning
Hetti Verge
Kay Vernon
Lynda Wong
Anonymous

AIM: \$500,000

October 2000: \$38,000
January 2010: \$43,000
April 2010: \$45,000
September 2010: \$60,000

MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL / DONATION FORM

I wish to: join the Library renew my membership make a donation

Date / /

Title: Ms / Miss / Mrs / Dr / Other

Name

Address

Tel (h) (w) mob

Email (please print)

Member \$50 Concession \$25 (pensioner/unwaged)

Supporting member \$100 Life member \$500

Organisation \$100 Student \$10 (conditions apply)

I wish to make a donation of \$ (donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

I enclose a cheque/cash/money order for \$.....

OR Please charge \$ to my Mastercard Visa

Name of cardholder

Card No Expiry date /

Signature

I was introduced to the Library by

AutoDebit Authorisation

I authorise JSNWL to charge this, and all future membership renewals as they fall due, to the credit card number given above on this form.

I authorise JSNWL to charge \$ annually to the above credit card as a donation to the Library.

Signature

Donation to the Capital Investment Fund

I wish to make a donation to the Capital Investment Fund. Please charge the amount of \$ to the above credit card.

I am willing to have my name published. I wish to remain anonymous.

Signature

Become a Volunteer

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

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

Please forward the completed form to:
Jessie Street National Women's Library GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001

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

ISSN 1838-0662

ABN 42 276 162 418

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**



Proudly
sponsored
by the



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