

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

### The Week for all Women

March 8<sup>th</sup> is International Women's Day (IWD). It is an occasion for women, young and old, worldwide, to come together to make demands for a better world for women and to celebrate the contribution women have made to society.

The history of International Women's Day is a history of taking action. You may know that the event originated from a public demonstration by women members of the International Garment Worker's Union in New York in 1908 who were demanding a change to their intolerable working conditions. Of course, much has improved for women since those early days but we still have a long way to go to achieve equal opportunity for women, not only in Australia but also throughout the world.

The theme for this year's IWD is "Women and Peace". The theme is being taken up with schoolgirls and the big stores are being asked to stock up on purple socks and stockings for Purple Stocking Day on Friday 10<sup>th</sup>. It's great to see the events planned across the State, e.g., Coffs Harbour, Wagga Wagga, Lismore, Orange, Penrith etc.

Here in Sydney we will see the World March of Women 2000 launched on March 8<sup>th</sup>. This is a campaign to eliminate poverty and violence. See details in box below.

The first IWD for the new century will be held on Saturday, March 11, beginning at 12 o'clock at the fountain in Hyde Park. We will circle the city and return to Hyde Park for the rally and entertainment. We want as many older women as possible to be involved, so please watch for our OWN banner! Please see the Newsletter Notice Board for more details.

As a beginning to IWD, we have booked a table at the International Women's Development Breakfast – proceeds of which will go to women's projects in Tanzania and on the Thai-Burmese border region. Details can be found on the Newsletter Notice Board. If you would like to join us (\$35/\$30) you will need to have your cheque in by March 1, made out to OWN.

**World March Of Women 2000 - Australia**  
**"2000 Good Reasons to March: Eliminating Poverty and Violence"**  
**Fight Poverty! End Violence Against Women!**

Women from more than 143 countries are this year demanding that the UN and its member States take concrete measures to:

- \* ELIMINATE poverty and ENSURE a fair distribution of the planet's wealth between the rich and the poor, and between women and men.
- \* ELIMINATE violence against women and ENSURE equality between women and men.

Action begins with many launches on March 8, and culminates on October 17 with a World Rally in New York when millions of signed support cards will be presented to Kofi Annan at UN HQ in New York. In Australia, a range of events, including song and dance festivals, are being planned for October 17.

The distribution of the support cards, which can be signed by women and men, is happening now! We have asked for cards to be sent to OWN where you can pick them up or have them posted. Or you can contact Kathy Picone c- WILPF, GPO Box 2094, Adelaide 5001, ph 08 8296 4357.

## Coordinators' Report

This coordinator hasn't got much to report except that the UK was very cold, but it's still possible to have fun there despite walking around hunched over for five weeks. Good to be back in the heat of it!

There has been much buzzing and humming as we shift into top gear for the new year. The activity groups are back into full swing, with all the current ones meeting during February. Feedback from The Life Writing course with Pearlie McNeill, which was fully booked, is very enthusiastic, and there is talk of running another one.

Margaret attended the first in a series of community consultations with the Ageing and Disability Department on identifying current and future issues to do with ageing. These consultations will also take place in other regions of NSW. Margaret is asking that anyone from Sydney who wishes to talk to her about issues to take to the consultations to please phone her. In other regions members should contact their local OWN group and feed opinions to the local consultations with ADD.

At the NSW OWN Groups quarterly meeting, which took place on 2 February, a recommendation was made to the Working Committee that the issue of forming a peak organization in NSW be revisited. This has been referred to our Review and Planning Session (RAPS), which will be held in early March, and will also be a focus at the NSW conference planned for the end of June. I hope the outcome is to press ahead with the formation of OWN (NSW) Inc. as I believe that the existence of a state OWN has many implications for on-going funding from the state government.

A number of important issues were raised at the "Have Your Say" quarterly Members Meeting on 9 February, including information technology and who has access to it; supportive neighbourhoods; and the need for information to be made available so that members know how they can influence decisions made by the Working Committee.

This being the International Year for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence the Working Committee has decided that the speaker(s) at the next quarterly members meeting on May 10th will address this issue. Some of the insights and information gained may then be useful in the lead-up to the Reconciliation March later that month on 27th.

Happy International Women's Day!

**Pam Ledden**

## VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED ...

The Medicine Information Persons Project (MIPs) of the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW has been operating successfully in NSW since 1991. MIPs is looking for volunteers to work in a trial with General Practitioners in central Sydney and on the Central Coast.

An initial training and regular up-dated training session will be provided in May if you would like to work for this project. MIPs is particularly interested in recruiting older people living in these two areas, including those who speak languages other than English, who would then be able to provide information that is culturally appropriate.

If you are over 50 years of Age and living in Sydney or the Central Coast, please contact Maria J Velasco on 9281 3588 by the first week in March 2000.

## ADVOCACY REPORT

### Healthy Ageing

On the advocacy front, Sam Smart, Renate Watkinson and I met to discuss the issues raised in "Healthy Ageing Discussion Paper" published by the Federal Government. I have replied with our comments and suggestions.

The main emphasis in the document is on a medical interpretation of ageing, maintaining that health through older age is not a concept that has received much attention. Nor did a notion of a holistic approach to a healthy old age, which would include attention to life style, housing and emotional well-being, get support from this paper. Rather the approach of government is to treat ageing people as a problem and a worry, which ties in neatly with the current view that the ageing of the baby-boomers is going to be an intolerable strain on government resources. An excuse for more rationalisation and probable cuts to services, do we think?

### Transport

I would like to remind everyone who has indicated they're interested in Transport as an issue, that there is a meeting about transport issues on 15th March at 11.am at Lower Fort Street. There will be a guest speaker, lunch and a discussion session. Please contact me if you wish to attend. I am usually at '87' on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings or you can ring me at home on 9797 9803.

**Pam Ledden**

## Wellness in the Bush

**T**he Rural Women's Network (RWN) has followed the lead and set up a project to enable older women in rural and isolated parts of NSW to make contact with each other and with others, to talk about the issues and topics that they feel are important to them and to their lives, wherever they are. Like us, they define 'older women' as women who choose to call themselves older, and they describe 'rural women' as women who live in remote locations, agricultural women, mining women, women in the fishing industry, Aboriginal women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, town women, village women, women who live in regional cities and coastal women!

This project will be in three phases, beginning with a series of radio broadcasts over ABC regional radio and 2WEB Bourke. The broadcasts will be mainly live, with some interviews and the opportunity for women to call in and tell their own stories, or ask for information. The ABC is being very supportive, offering their 1800 number so that women phoning in don't have to use STD.

Phases two and three will involve use of the Internet. Older women have said that they would like to have help with using the 'net, so RWN is setting up a website for older women's wellness issues, and OWN will be working with them as this develops. The wellness website will be linked to OWN's page, and we will inherit the site when this part of the project is completed. Training sessions are being organised in regional centres around NSW, to bring the technology closer for older women who want to learn and practice using computers. We know that computers aren't everyone's cup of tea, but this is what older women in the bush have asked for, and the NSW Health Department has provided yet another IYOP grant to enable the project to go ahead.

Any questions or comments from OWN members are very welcome, particularly if anyone from the NSW OWN groups would like to be involved. Write to Wellness at OWN, or phone the Wellness line on (02) 9252 2040

Sam Smart

## OWN'S 'SUPPORTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS' OR 'SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS' INITIATIVE

In the February Newsletter, we reported on OWN's Supportive Neighbourhoods meeting, where we came up with ideas of meeting like-minded women in our local areas, taking up local issues to do with older women, sharing information and support.

Well, we are delighted to report that we have had interest expressed by women in South Sydney, Hurstville, Leichhardt, Bondi, Ashfield and, of course, Sutherland.

Someone asked why the term "Five Good Women" couldn't be 'hundreds of bad women'! Perhaps we need to explain that the term 'Five Good Women' comes from OWN's advice to women who want to set up an OWN group in a new area that it is best to start with a group of three to five women. The 'good' refers to the group having older women's issues as its focus.

The next step is to look at the various ways members can be put in touch with each other. We will discuss this at our next meeting on Monday, March 27 at 10 am at 87 Lower Fort St., Millers Point.

All OWN members will shortly receive a questionnaire, which includes a question on this topic. If you want to talk over some of the issues involved in our 'supportive neighbourhoods' initiative, you can phone Pam or Joy on 9247 7046.

Pam Ledden and Joy Ross

### SENIOR'S WEEK, 2000

The theme of Seniors' Week 2000, held between March 19 and 25, and arranged by the NSW Ageing and Disability Department, is 'The New Age'. A list of events are included with your Newsletter.

OWN's contribution will be a concert called "Older Women Centre Stage", which will be held on Saturday afternoon, 18<sup>th</sup> March from 2 to 4 p.m. Performers will include our own Theatre Group, who will be performing their totally new script. Please see the flyer for more details.

# Congratulations!

Betty Johnson, a long-time member of the Older Women's Network, has received an Officer (AO) in the General Division of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day honours list. Betty was recognised for her services to the community as a consumer advocate in the areas of aged care and related health issues, and for her work on behalf of the Older Women's Network (Australia) and the Australian Pensioners and Superannuants Federation.

Betty has worked tirelessly in a voluntary capacity to promote and protect the rights of older people. She has been the National Secretary of the Older Women's Network Australia since 1998, National Convenor from 1993-1997, and is a member of the OWN Inc. Working Committ. Betty has also been the National Secretary of the Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants Federation since 1998, and was Assistant Secretary from 1994 to 1997.

In her role as consumer advocate for aged care and related health issues, Betty was appointed the consumer representative on the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Health Advisory Committee in 1997, and is a Board Member of the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency. She is also active on a large number of other committees including the Australasian College of Physicians Ethics Committee, the NSW Committee on Ageing, the Commonwealth Aged Care Working Group, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Ethics Committee, the NSW Premier's Forum for International Day of Older Persons' Steering Committee, the Hunters Hill Seniors Support Group, the NSW Director General of Health's Research and Development Committee and the NSW Minister for Health's Quality in Health Care Advisory Committee, the University Research Centre on Ageing and Retirement Advisory Committee, and the Self Service Banking and Older Australians Project Management Committee.

We warmly applaud Betty for her dedication in promoting the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women, and offer our sincere congratulations for her achievements.

## What an inspiration!

Last month, we profiled Joy Ross, who received an IYOP Commonwealth Recognition Award for Senior Australians, and this month we are proud to acknowledge Betty, Stella and Isabel for their respective awards. Not only is it wonderful to see older women's contributions being so publicly recognized, the awards also highlight the Older Women's Network.

Editor

Dr Stella Cornelius AO OBE, Founder/Director of the Conflict Resolution Network, recently received a Senior Australian Achievers Award for her many achievements. Stella has been the initiator of the Peace Conflict Resolution Network, Media Peace Awards, Ministries for Peace campaign, the 'Building Conflict Resolving Government' program and the 'Work for All Who Need It' campaign – an initiative to eliminate involuntary unemployment.

Stella also served as Director of the UN 1986 International Year of Peace and for the Department of Foreign Affairs. She is a Member of the National Consultative Committee on Peace and Disarmament, the National Committee on Human Rights Education, is a Life Member of the Red Cross and a valued member of the Older women's Network.

Now eighty years of age, Stella continues with her many responsibilities, including researching, developing, teaching and implementing the theory and practice of Conflict Resolution.

A truly wonderful inspiration and role model for all women!

Congratulations to Isabel MacCallum for being awarded an IYOP Commonwealth Recognition Award for Senior Australians for "significant contributions to the community".

Isabel has had a great passion for improving the quality of life for senior citizens even before she became one. Despite having Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, she has more energy than most people half her age, working hard at not letting this affliction overcome her by swimming and other exercises.

In her role as Community Development Worker with the Aged and Younger Disabled, Isabel achieved much to improve life for the aged in the Shoalhaven area. Her philosophy is to empower older citizens by ensuring that they are fully informed on issues that affect them. This can be no better illustrated than the fantastic Conference Isabel organised during 1999 for International Year of Older Persons.

Isabel is not only a great example to older people on how to continue to achieve and to help others through her professional career, she also shows her sense of adventure by travelling to exotic places. And her devilish sense of humour helps make her the wonderful person she is.

Isabel, after leaving Council to semi-retire, felt that she had more to contribute professionally and it was a tribute to her to be able to re-join the workforce in her mid-sixties, which is extremely rare today.

## GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOOD – AN UPDATE

### 1. Labelling

Do you remember that last year, all the Health Ministers of Australia and New Zealand decided on mandatory labelling of all GE foods? The plan was to introduce labelling by 1st July, 2000. The decision followed lobbying by concerned citizens from all over Australia and New Zealand.

Well, you will not be surprised to learn that there is now a delay. The first objection comes from industry: It will cost too much. That issue is being addressed by another cost study (which, of course, delays things further).

Another development is that the USA Government has pressured John Howard not to proceed with labelling. The objection: There could be international repercussions. It seems that, once again, Australian citizens are learning that the US Government can override our democratic processes.

If you want to take action on this issue, write before 15th March insisting that labelling proceed as originally planned, by 1st July, 2000. Letters can go to:

John Howard, Warren Truss (Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) and Mark Vaile (Minister for Trade) Parliament House, Canberra, 2600.

Craig Knowles, NSW Minister for Health, Level 33, 1 Farrar Place, Sydney 2000

### 2. Public Un-"Awareness" Campaign

The Federal Government body, Biotechnology Australia, at great public expense, is distributing a leaflet through supermarkets. The aim is to convince us all that it is OK to buy and eat GE food.

If you want to take action on this one:

- Ring, write or visit your local supermarket and ask that they present balanced information and that they support labelling by 1st July, 2000.
- Participate in local actions on World Consumers Rights Day, 15th March.

### 3. Petition for a 5-year freeze

There is now widespread support for a five year freeze on:

- release into the environment of GE organisms
- imports of GE foods
- patents on living organisms

There is a petition circulating throughout the community about this.

Source of information: The Gene File Australian GeneEthics Network, PO Box 24243, Fitzroy MC 3065.

Janet Grevillea

## WANTED

VOLUNTEERS FOR

OWN's

SENIORS EXPO STALL

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

March 21 - 23, 10 - 3 pm.

Half or full day .

Please leave message for Joy, 9247 - 7046.

## What's Bugging You?

We're hoping that this new segment, which will appear from time to time will take off like a firecracker. It will be a forum for your opinions and for different viewpoints about anything that concerns or interests you. It doesn't necessarily have to be anything on OWN's agenda nor reflect its view.

Here goes for our first contribution, a news item that has upset Muriel since she heard it on the ABC news recently.

Halon gas is a unique fire retardant BUT it is probably the WORST and most damaging gas to the ozone layer. So damaging is it that technology has been trying to find a way to destroy it. The Australia Government persuaded industry to stop using it. This they did at some cost to themselves.

Now it seems the Government is selling 250 tonnes of the gas to the U.S. Military. What has been taken out of operation for industry has now been sold at a profit to the U.S. The rationale? The Minister for the Environment, Robert Hill, says that to prevent the the gas being reproduced here he is recycling it!

## Another Day, Another Dollar!

When one realises that more than half of the socially necessary work in the community is done by unpaid workers, it is easy to see how quickly society would grind to a halt if there were no volunteers, say, for Meals on Wheels, or no support groups for people with schizophrenia, alzheimers, Parkinsons ...if there were no volunteers as guides to art galleries, the State Library. The list is endless and this work goes on day after day, year after year and covers every aspect of our lives. This great workforce is entirely unregulated and done with no compensation. Frequently volunteers work at great cost to themselves, often receiving no out-of-pocket expenses or travel allowance.

Our own organisation is kept going by our active members, many of whom spend hours in order to keep us functioning, so that OWN can continue to provide a service to older women, and who else but OWN works so hard and so effectively to promote the rights and well-being of older women. I went into our office at '87' when we resumed in the New Year. By 10 am the place was buzzing, a hive of activity! It occurred to me to try and estimate the hours that are so willingly given to OWN and what a staggering amount of money it would take if all our volunteer workers were paid for their time and their skills.

Here is my run down on this particular day in January, 2000, a day that will be replicated at least three days every week for the next eleven months until we close for next Christmas.

There was Margaret, coordinator, at her desk with a mountain of correspondence. She would then write a report and plan work. Judith is at the computer, sorting stuff out for the February newsletter and conferring with Dorothy about the lay-out, Wilhelmina is in the middle room at the table putting stamps on a big "mail-out". Later she will photocopy over 600 Newsletters. Ermes, our bookkeeper, is studying how to use a new program on the computer, with Kris's help. Sam is running off leaflets for her work at the Wellness Centre and I am at Peg's desk going through research material that I will put on our data base for PSAN, (Pam wrote about this in the last newsletter). Joy, who had been working at our Windmill Sreet office,

stopped by for lunch. Half an hour later, goss and holiday chat over, we were all back at work again.

Next week the 600 newsletters will be labelled by Mary ready for the members who will come in and spend at least three hours collating the pages and bundling them into postal districts and big bags. Another member will then take them by taxi to the big Print Post place at Waterloo.

Already in the first week or so we have notched up more than 100 womanhours. Multiply that by, say \$15 an hour – a cleaner's wage. I'm not working out the costs for a year but you can get the picture. Add to these basic costs for administration and newsletter, the enormous amount of time, dedication and skill that goes into keeping the Theatre Group going. Think of all the time needed to write, learn and rehearse as well as perform, and the cast often travelling for hours to get to a venue, the arranging of bookings, programming and transport when they take their shows to the country.

Then there are the hours spent by members at meetings with government departments and regional committees, keeping us in touch with anything that concerns us as older women.

Now nobody wants to be paid for what is given so freely and generously... not only at OWN but in all those other NGOs that contribute so much to Social Capital. Our voluntary workers receive a dollar a day travel allowance and a small lunch allowance if they work all day.

We are concerned that the enormous amount of voluntary work done in our community is grossly undervalued by our Government and we would, at the very least, like to see that these workers receive out-of-pocket expenses through some sort of Federal funding.

Pam Ledden has prepared a draft statement on behalf of OWN which may form the basis for future action or negotiation. If you feel you could make a contribution to this discussion you could either attend, or send a letter to the six-monthly planning and review session this month. Details in the Diary.

**Muriel Hortin**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### **Advocating for Consumers or Providers?**

Recently, by dint of unremitting efforts of the Retirement Village Residents' Association (RVRA), of which I am a founding and executive member, significant legislative reform on the rights of residents was won in NSW Parliament early this year.

RVRA was set up twelve years ago in response to the huge number of complaints coming through to the Combined Pensioners' Association (CPSA), The Accommodation Rights Services (TARS), Council on the Ageing (COTA) and legal advocacy bodies. Residents have been extensively lobbying successive governments ever since to get better consumer protection through legislation.

Imagine our dismay, therefore, when we found that COTA was opposing the new Act in the lead-up to the deciding vote in parliament. Along with owners and operators of retirement villages, they lobbied government members in opposition to the Bill, fortunately unsuccessfully. As a consequence I and other RVRA representatives met with COTA officers to discuss our differences.

COTA is publicised as advocating for older people, and receives substantial funds from state and federal governments on this basis. So, I was further alarmed at the joint meeting when an executive officer explained that as retirement officers were represented on COTA's board, he'd felt they were entitled to support. Such a policy ignored the interests of residents in age specific accommodation who presumably should also be seen as COTA constituents, even if not represented on its board. It seems there had been no special consultations with residents by COTA. It was suggested that it was a matter of who first asked for support as to who got it. That suggests that if RVRA had asked first, they might have got COTA's support. Is this the way policy is formulated at COTA?

To give due credit to Sheila Rimmer, national president of COTA, it was clear she had a better grasp of the situation than the employed officers. Her quiet intervention brought assurances about such developments in future.

However, this happening inevitably raises important questions of conflicts of interest for any organisation with business interests, or private/charitable representatives on its governing body, which is in a position to influence vital government decisions affecting older people.

Some older people's organisations have grassroots consumers only as their membership base. Unfortunately, they are often the least able to finance

campaigns because of government funding cuts and lack of private donors. Sadly, some donors believe that "He who pays the piper calls the tune".

Accountability to consumers should surely be an abiding principle for organisations seen to be representing consumer interests when they campaign on important issues.

**Barbara Burnham**



Congratulations on the February 00 Newsletter. I have really enjoyed the creative writing each edition brings. A feast of interesting and sometimes challenging articles. Have you any more of Joan John's outback stories? She is so interesting – almost inspires me to do some more travelling. Maybe she is permanently on walkabout? Would love to know!

Please keep up the good work! Best Wishes

**Margaret Burgess**



The Internet yields some interesting stories and if you like to be kept informed on the state of the nation it pays to tune into [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au). The following item appeared on February 8. It was also in the Telegraph. I verified the facts from Hansard, the relevant pages of which were kindly sent to us by Senator John Faulkner's office, at my request. I am sure that many OWN members will feel as outraged as I was in view of the fact that OWN(A) was defunded this year, along with nearly all the other hard-pressed NGOs.

Headed, "Goward pay queried", the Internet item said, "The Federal Government's high profile Olympic spokeswoman, Pru Goward, will earn \$175,000 for 14 months work but has rarely been seen or heard from, a Parliamentary Committee was told yesterday.... After questioning, a public servant revealed that Ms. Goward was paid about the same as a Cabinet Minister but had only given about five interviews and had issued no press releases in her four months in the job. Prime Minister and Cabinet Department's Grahame Cook told the Senate Committee that Ms. Goward, a close personal friend of Mr. Howard, had been chosen for the job, which was not publicly advertised."

....But no largesse for OWN (Australia).

**Muriel Hortin**

## AGEING IMAGES\*

When an Australian journalist recently described a sixty seven year old public figure as 'aged and otherwise irrelevant' she revealed, probably unconsciously, her own prejudices and those of many other people! Superficially, her comment was spiteful and ill-considered but at a deeper level it confirms widely held negative attitudes to older people and the process of ageing. Her appraisal raises many questions – Why do such attitudes exist in our society? Are they fostered by the media? Do they affect the wellbeing of older people? What can older people do to counteract their public devaluation?

We are frequently reminded that the proportion of older people in Australia is growing and that current management trends make early retirement an increasingly common experience. The fact that retirement can occupy a third of a life span emphasises the national social and economic need to optimise the physical and emotional well being of retired people.

Negative attitudes to ageing, which reflect collective and individual insecurities as well as anxieties about the present and the future, are often caused by rapid social change. Increasing urbanisation, extended life expectancy and decreased family size have all tended to shield many people from contact with events such as grave illness, serious decline and death in the way that our rural forebears frequently encountered in their family life. Modern negative attitudes to ageing may be attributed to more limited life experience and an unwillingness to confront reality.

The media and advertising industries exploit our insecurities by extolling the desirability of youth often presented in highly exaggerated and unnatural forms. As a corollary to the concept which equates youth and beauty some advertisers portray older women as bossy, outspoken haridans who are also depicted as natural targets for ridicule and demeaning practical jokes. Not only does this type of advertising portray a false and unfair stereotype, it discloses inherent weaknesses in our society – an emphasis on ephemeral and shallow values, an inability to accept ageing as a natural stage, a willingness to condone the devaluation of a significant social group based on age and sex. Humiliation is always demeaning. It undermines emotional well being, saps self confidence and distorts self image. These are all significant actions in destabilising health.

Many older women maintain positive attitudes towards the management of their lives including their physical and emotional welfare. Most of us are

confident of our individual and collective worth and tolerant of others. In exchange we seek to be respected for our positive qualities and for our past and present contributions to life's fabric.

Anne Macdonald  
OWN ACTION (ACT)

\*This is an extract from an article first published in 'Healthlink', Autumn 1999

## Women and financial security - what does the future hold ?

The Older Women's Network (Australia) has received funding from the Office of the Status of Women to undertake a study on women and retirement incomes. The research will build on previous research by OWN (A) such as the landmark 1996 report Difficult Decisions – older women speak about money, life and retirement. The study will be an audit of current issues facing women in relation to financial security in retirement, and will focus on finding solutions to the many challenges facing women in a rapidly changing environment.

OWNA will be organising a series of small discussion groups to seek the experiences of older women, and, in particular, your views on the options outlined in the soon to be released discussion paper on welfare reforms and how they might impact on older women's financial security.

The study will also look at older women's use of, and experience in dealing with, various complaints handling schemes. Have you ever had a problem with a bank or financial service provider? If you complained, how was your problem dealt with? If you didn't complain, why not?

If you would like to be involved in a discussion group, or would like further information, please contact OWN (A) on 9221 4618 or fax 9221 4805. We'd also like to hear from you about any issues you think should be looked at during the research. Please write to OWN (A), Level 4, 135 King Street, Sydney, NSW 2000.

Gerard Thomas

## Theatre Group

What a start to the new century! Contrary to expectations, the year 2000 'promises' to be as full as that of 1999 (for our sins!). However, like all good troupers we refuse to be intimidated.

We are all working frenetically to learn the new script that Louise Anike, our director, worked on with dedication over the Xmas break. The new script deals with such pertinent subjects as hospital funding, the G.S.T, banks etc. Louise's effort is greatly appreciated by all members of the Group.

We welcomed two new members Ann Cunynghame and Jean Jacobs to the Group, which means we now have eleven women. The push is on to be ready in time for all the bookings we have received for International Women's Day and Senior's Week events. We are rehearsing twice a week so if you see older women muttering and humming to themselves on footpaths, trains and buses, do not be alarmed – it's only members of the Theatre Group practicing their lines!

Among our invitations to perform is one at a joint conference organized by female employees from the Botanical Gardens and the Opera House. The venue will be the Opera House. WOW! We are operatically polishing our colaratura scales!

Other bookings have been received from local Councils, Neighbourhood Centres, and a Jewish Welfare group for holocaust survivors.

So, on and ever upward!

Lucy Porter and Judith Mustard

## Aboriginal Support Circle

Our first meeting for the year was a planning meeting, and we also held elections.

The newly elected officers are: Coordinators: Pat Zinn, Monique Reiher and Betty Little. Minute Secretary is Margaret Walker; Correspondence Secretary, Frayda Cooper; Treasurer, Ermes Solari; Working Committee Representative, Frayda Cooper; and Librarians and Archivists; Helen Monaghan and Cate Turner.

Our meeting in March will be Kate Belear (see flyer) and all OWN members are invited to come along to a stimulating talk. In April, we will visit the Observatory to learn more about Aboriginal Dreamtime stories and Constellations. In May, we hope to have an intergenerational meeting with students from a 'Sorry Day Picnic'. For the second half of the year we are considering some more interesting speakers and a field trip to the State Library to learn more about their Aboriginal collection.

Lucy Porter is seeking information from the Social Education and Research Concerning Humanity (SEARCH) Foundation about funding our new oral history project on Koori speakers who have made presentations to our group. We are seeking a grant of two thousand dollars.

Lola Ryan, an Aboriginal elder, who has been very helpful to our group when OWN held activities at La Perouse, was one of the Randwick Council's Australia Day Community Award winners. We sent her a congratulatory note.

Frayda Cooper

### Stop Press

*On Monday, 3 April, the ASC is meeting at Sydney Observatory at 10 am to hear*

*Dreaming Stories of the Skies – \$3.*

*You must RSVP on 9247 7046 by 15 March.*

### Older Women Speak up – Violence in the Home

Two members of OWN, Margaret Sargent and Jane Mears, are producing 10,000 copies of a booklet of stories of experience of violence in older women's own voices. The University of Western Sydney is sponsoring the publication through a grant from the Department for Women.

In order to trial the draft booklet and the accompanying form, volunteers are needed to read the booklet and fill in the form. The volunteers do not need to have the experience of violence themselves.

If you can help, please ring Margaret Sargent on 9660 5925 or 9523 9558

MEET...

## Janet Waters

Acting coordinator of the  
OWN Theatre Group and  
performer.

Where is your favourite place  
to go?

*The theatre*

What do you like to do the  
most?

*My early morning walk*

What is the one thing you  
never want to have to do  
again?

*Commit myself to full time  
paid work*

What gives you your greatest  
sense of satisfaction?

*Watching my children grow up  
and achieve their aims*

What is the best thing you get  
from the Network?

*A sense of achievement and  
friendship*

What is your greatest contribu-  
tion to the Network?

*Theatre Group*

What do you think is the single  
most important issue for older  
women?

*Having the right to stand up  
for ourselves and be heard*

What are you most passionate  
about?

*Reading*

What causes you most  
distress?

*Lack of access to shops and other  
public places for the disabled*

What do you wish you had  
done that you haven't done  
yet?

*Write a book*

## LONE MARINERS

There by the sea  
Land stranded,  
Whorled shells  
Vacant now,  
Lie in fretted abandon  
While the boys,  
Dressed in black and motley,  
Suits moulded to their lovely youth,  
Trail tight-shod feet,  
Beckoning the breaking waves  
On which to cast their sturdy  
shields,  
And ride their foaming steeds  
To shore.

They put to sea  
Chasing the waves  
And turning, balance  
Like tight-rope walkers  
Defying gravity.  
Mermen risen from a far ocean,  
They steer for shore.  
Froth-feathered, curling water  
Soaring to break on black rock,  
sighs.  
The riders, lone mariners,  
Fight the suck and swell  
And, cast ashore, turn, and  
Embark on another Odyssey.

Judith Mustard

## Membership Information and Records

All membership records are now kept and maintained in our new database. Please be assured that only our administrative staff have access to the database and your right to privacy is respected.

As a general rule, receipts are not issued for membership subscriptions. However, the address label on each Newsletter will indicate the date of your next renewal. This also serves as an acknowledgement of payment. A reminder letter will be sent the month before your subscription is due.

MEET ...

## Yetty Windt

Member of the Health Group  
and voluntary general  
factotem.

Where is your favourite place  
to go?

*Alpine mountains*

What do you like to do the  
most?

*Listen to music, go to the  
theatre and films, be with  
friends and family*

What is the one thing you  
never want to have to do  
again?

*Be in fearful situations*

What gives you your greatest  
sense of satisfaction?

*Giving and receiving*

What is the best thing you get  
from the Network?

*New skills and  
friendships*

What is your greatest  
contribution to the Network?

*Being a reliable voluntary  
worker.*

What do you think is the single  
most important issue for older  
women?

*Economic security, good  
health services*

What are you most passionate  
about?

*Justice*

What causes you most  
distress?

*Injustice, abuse of any kind*

What do you wish you had  
done that you haven't done  
yet?

*Taken more risks*

## NEW CAPRICORN

It was peaceful, beautiful, out there in the Queensland bush, with a tiny curl of new moon setting in the West and the orange glow of sunset silhouetting the blobs of trees on the hill. We have had many memorable campsites like that in our Campervan, choosing to avoid caravan parks and nosing our home into a quiet spot in the scrub.

An advertisement for Eungalla Platypus Bush Camp near Finch Hatton Grange attracted our attention, and we decided to pay it a visit. It is a unique little camp ground amongst the rain forest with lookouts for morning and evening viewing - and a frog in the lavvie! A large sign above the wash basin featured a very large frog sitting on the wooden seat, skinny legs dangling, a contented smile on his face. Above him, a notice warned, "Close the lid, clogged with frogs." When I pulled the old fashioned wooden handled chain, a long leg briefly appeared and then scabbled up the side of the bowl to settle under the rim.

"He likes it there," said the bearded owner. "It's his own private swimming pool."

No electricity disturbed the peace of this bush setting. Candles lit the three walled showers, and by the glow from the two slim windows of stained glass I looked into the fourth wall of jungle green rainforest. Copper pipes ran up the slab wooden walls, boldly visible, with no offending sight of plastic or shiny chrome, and when I turned on the old fashioned brass tap and the warm water poured over my body, I thought, "This is a perfect bathroom." A noiseless old wood-burning boiler provided the heating.

We pushed on inland to the outback and the plains. A road sign pointed to Nindigully Pub, 2 miles, and of course we had to investigate. Nindigully has a population of seven, and it was made famous when they filmed "Paperback Hero" in soaring outback temperatures. When the locals came from near and far to the preview on a cold winter's night, it was 4 degrees Celsius, and the outdoor screen flapped in the icy wind. The owner of the pub didn't have a chance to view the film, as she was flat out serving warming rum to the audience of four hundred. No one remembered much about the film, but it was a great night!

We joined the check-shirted young men in their elastic-sided boots and Akubra hats, propping up the sturdy wooden Bar. A leisurely conversation in good old outback Queensland fashion gave us some laughs and an insight into the lives of these lads working on huge properties way out there in the Never-Never.

Back home to shiny bathrooms, busy traffic, alarm clocks and diaries. No time to prop my elbow on a bar and talk about wheat, sheep and the weather.

**Joan Johns**

## My Belly

My belly bounces bulges and bumbles before me. I can't decide whether it is a part of me, or whether it has a life of its own. It dominates my thoughts when planning my wardrobe. I spend time imagining what I would look like in a long straight dress and pencil slim skirts. I then think of myself as pencil slim only to be demoralised when catching my profile in reflecting shop windows. Worse still are the cruel lights and the multiple mirrors in the shop's fitting rooms.

I cannot remember a time when it didn't bother me. My belly has different names for different occasions. It's a stomach in polite society. A belly when I revert to my childish mode. My gut when I have intestinal problems and a belly when I'm fed up with it.

It has been with me always both in sickness and in health. It has expanded enormously to accommodate pregnancies. Grown rigid and hard before surgery and cramped and contracted during intestinal attacks. It lies before me in bed and I gather the loose flesh up in both hands while fantasizing about how it would look after plastic surgery.

When being photographed I pull back my shoulders and draw it in tight, as a result I look as if I've had a great fright. When snapped unawares I look quite relaxed, but my belly really looks a sight.

Now what would I talk about if my belly was slim, what would I pull and stroke? It wouldn't be me but who would it be? I've decided my belly is part of me.

**Betty Murphy**

### HAIKU

Pink clouds in the sky  
Sipping my tea I watch them  
New hope for the day

Lone figure in park  
*Chatter of children passing*  
Where has life gone wrong?

*Glowing red sunsets*  
*All the wonders of Nature*  
*Remind me of you*

**Trudy Davis**

# notice

## **ENHANCING SPIRITUALITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

One Day Workshop with  
Dorothy McRae-McMahon and Judy Laws  
Sunday 26 March 2000, from 10.00am to  
4.30pm at the Writers' Centre Rozelle Hospital  
Grounds. Cost: \$125 (includes lunch, morning  
and afternoon teas). A limited number of  
concessions available. For further information  
phone: Judy Laws 9564 1528

**Shih Tzu - little dog,  
needs a home; 8 years old,  
blind, house-trained.**

**Bridget, 9568-5887.**

**Inner West - will deliver.**

## **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BREAKFAST**

**Saturday 11 March, 8am for 8.30am**

**Ballroom, Convention & Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour**

**\$35/\$30**

Proceeds will go to women's projects in the Thai-Burmese border region and Tanzania.

We have booked table/s. Payment must be made by Mar. 1.

Cheques to be made out to OWN.

Breakfast will finish by 10.30am, in time to join the IWD march.

## **2000 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade Saturday March 4**

### **"OLDER LESBIANS ON THE MOVE"**

Wanting a group to walk with? We have booked a place  
in the parade and would welcome older lesbians to join  
us. Last year three older gay and lesbian groups walked  
behind the International Year of Older Persons banner  
and we have arranged to group again this year.

If you would like to join us please call Judy on 9564  
1528 or leave your name for Joy at OWN, on 9247 7046.

## **A CURE?**

**Did you know  
that cranberry  
juice is  
considered by  
many people,  
including  
doctors, to be a  
cure for urinary  
tract  
infection?**

# board

## **TAI CHI CLASSES AND GENTLE EXERCISE FOR WOMEN**

Lilyfield Community Centre

Starting 5 February 2000

Phone Judy Laws 9564 1528

Cost: Tai Chi \$70 or con. \$50 for 10 weeks

G. Exs \$50 or con. \$40 for 10 weeks

## **MEDITATION FOR WOMEN**

Starting Tuesday, 7 March

from 7.30 to 9 pm at

Leichhardt Women's Com-

munity Health Centre –

phone 9560 3011.

## **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY MARCH & RALLY**

**Saturday, 11 March at 12 o'clock.**

**Gather at the Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park  
Circle the city and return to Hyde Park.**

**JOIN US BEHIND THE OWN BANNER**

## **WALKING FOR PLEASURE**

South Sydney Walking Clubs have organised local walks every day of the week. On 1 and 2 March they have organised an Autumn Walk and Overnight Stay at Myuna Bay Lodge on Lake Macquarie – \$48 includes accommodation, meals and walks. Contact Anne 9288 5371

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK IS OPEN TO ALL OLDER WOMEN.**

### **Annual fees:**

Membership, including Newsletter.....\$20.00

Newsletter only (for Gov't Depts.  
institutions and organisations) .....\$25.00

Send your cheque, name, address and phone number to:  
Older Women's Network, 87 Lower Fort Street, Millers Point 2000

Tel: (02) 9247 7046 Fax: (02) 9247 4202 email: ownnsw@zip.com.au  
Web site: <http://www.zip.com.au/~ownnsw>