



OWN MATTERS

Newsletter of the Older Women's Network New South Wales Inc.

No. 30 June 2004

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Dreaming up a new deal for Wellness

Control over our own health and wellbeing is central to *all* OWN practices, and is especially synthesised in OWN's wellness projects. At a Wellness Planning Day in early May, under the skilful facilitation of Pat Johnson, we talked about OWN's Wellness history, achievements, and problems – one of which is lack of access to secure and recurrent funding.

Bankstown Older Women's Network Wellness Centre, originally funded in 1993 with a one-off grant of \$50,000 under the NSW Health Innovative Projects program, exceeded NSW Health's expectations of success in a multicultural and low income community and in 1994 was awarded recurrent funding through the National Women's Health Program, a 50/50 Commonwealth/State funding program. This program is currently being renegotiated.

Northside and Sutherland Wellness Centres have never had recurrent funding and each year have had to scramble for one-off grants from Area Health Services, local councils and other sources. In recent years, depending largely on volunteers, they have creatively provided a variety of wellness activities and, in the case of Sutherland, outreach projects affordable even to those reliant solely on the pension. A number of OWN groups, including Sydney and Penrith, also offer a range of wellness practices. They too are forced to struggle along with small one-off grants, the willing work of volunteers, and donations. We become virtual conscripts in the fight to maintain wellness programs for older women.

Highly regarded academics, local and state government politicians and bureaucrats, and respected medical practitioners have joined the chorus of praise for OWN's low cost, high benefit wellness programs and support our ongoing bid for expansion funds.

Planning Day participants decided to ask the OWN NSW conference to mount a big pre-election campaign, targeting key figures in the Federal Opposition, seeking specially allocated funds for older women's wellness programs. Specifically, we want a paid Coordinator to work with existing projects and to expand them by involving large numbers of older women in OWN wellness activities throughout regional and metropolitan areas in NSW.

Continued p.2

OWN Matters

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Who Are We?

OWN NSW is the peak body for nineteen OWN groups in NSW.

OWN promotes the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women through a range of activities and resources, and advocates on issues of concern to older women.

Contributions

Members of all OWN groups in NSW are encouraged to contribute to **OWN Matters** with items of interest to older women and letters to the Editor.

They can be sent by mail or email marked 'Attention – Editorial Team'. Please include contact details. Contributions must be received by the second Monday of each month.

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Contact

Older Women's Network NSW
87 Lower Fort Street
Millers Point NSW 2000
Phone: 02 9247 7046
Fax: 02 9247 4202
Email: ownnsw@zip.com.au
Web: www.own.org.au

ABN 36 992 030 904

Point of View

Who's a Third Party?

I was annoyed at not being able to get a copy of a specialist's report from my GP because at the bottom was typed, *Without prejudice, copies of this report are not to be supplied to any third party without permission in writing*. Because the report was about me, and I had paid the specialist's fees, I was incensed to be referred to as a 'third party'. Without me, there would have been no report!

After many phone calls, it became clear that the AMA recommends this practice, although I am not sure why. The nearest I came to getting an explanation was from the manager of an orthopaedic practice who said, "It's because it might fall into the wrong hands – like a lawyer's." When I said I was consulting the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner and the Health Care Complaints Commission, the manager said there was no need to do that, and sent me a form to sign requesting access. A fee is chargeable for a copy of a report.

All this could be avoided if GPs felt free to copy reports when requested and where appropriate.

Legislation now provides that patients are entitled to a copy of a particular report, even if it has been provided 'in confidence', unless access "would pose a serious threat to the life or health of any individual, or would have an unreasonable impact on the privacy of others, or it would prejudice certain law enforcement activities".

Monika Law

Dreaming up a new deal for Wellness

(continued from p.1)

We identified key issues vital to enhanced wellness activities. These include: clarity on the role and responsibilities of the Wellness Coordinating Committee; policy on multiple bids for the same pots of money; communication between wellness groups, the allocation of decision-making, and government policy of competitive submissions which reduce chances of deserving groups obtaining funds. We eventually decided these issues were not solvable in a one-day sitting, and that we need a longer, possibly residential, workshop in the future.

There was such goodwill at the Planning Day. It was so wonderful to have new people present, to feel the enthusiasm and unity of purpose in looking at the big picture. If we can capitalise on that goodwill and purpose, we'll certainly scale even greater heights in the future!

Noreen Hewett

OWN NSW Coordinators' Report

We should be worried!

Our *Older and Bolder* Conference planning committee has been hard at work this month. The main planning issues involved negotiating with Women's College around the conference venue and confirming a guest speaker, both of which have been resolved. To get the conference room we wanted – suitable for both day and evening activities – has meant changing the date of the conference to Wednesday 21 and Thursday 22 July. We are delighted to announce that Magistrate, Pat O'Shane, has agreed to be our keynote speaker and that accomplished comedian and radio personality, Jackie Loeb, will be our after dinner entertainer. Registration forms and a draft program are included in this issue.

You will notice that this year we are asking for a contribution of \$10 for the conference dinner from each of the two delegates, and from all non-delegates. In past years we have received a special conference grant from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), but this year it appears that DADHC is unable to offer financial support. Our budget is therefore very tight. Apart from the \$10 dinner, all delegates' expenses are met by OWN NSW, while daily costs for non-delegates are subsidised.

Members of each OWN group will have received notification of a proposed constitutional change at the conference. This is now invalid, as the Management Team has decided to review our constitution in depth during 2004-2005, to determine if there are other changes that need to be made. These will then be put to next year's conference.

This month, Anne Warren attended the Wellness Planning Day with Kris Ferguson (see report p. 1), and Cate Turner attended a Seniors Week Reference Group and a Planning for Later Life Quarterly Forum at DADHC. Cate also represented OWN NSW at the Southern Highlands OWN 2nd birthday celebration. Lucy Porter attended a Community Adversity and Resilience Forum where guest speaker Tony Vinson spoke about social disadvantage and social cohesion and Kris Ferguson, our office manager, spent a day at an NCOSS Insurance Workshop seeking solutions to some of our insurance issues. Dorothy Cora talked about OWN and what we stand for at the Ryde Area Women's Wellness Group and later at the Ryde Community Luncheon Group.

At our May quarterly meeting, where twelve NSW groups were represented, it was decided that we would not pursue the idea of a fundraising cookbook this year, but would print some of the more traditional recipes we've received in *OWN Matters* in coming months. Many groups are producing their own newsletters these days, as well as recording their activities in *At and Beyond the Rocks*.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge the fine work that Pam Ledden did at OWN during her four years plus as a volunteer. Sadly, Pam died on 24 April 2004 after eighteen months of valiantly battling lymphoma. Thank you to everyone who made a contribution to her obituary, on p. 5.

Lucy Porter, Cate Turner and Anne Warren

The ABC's *Hindsight* program, part of Radio National's Social History Unit, wants to talk to older women about their memories and experiences of life in the 40s. In particular, we're keen to hear what you knew about, and any memories you have of sex education, contraception, and abortion. Please call Lisa McGregor on 0411 315 145 or 9665 2148 (H).

There has been much debate, pro and con, about the recently developed Australia US Free Trade Agreement (USFTA). Did you know that this deal can still be stopped?

Ten Devils in the Detail is a paper published by Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network, (AFTINET) and presents the USFTA in a neatly packaged summary of some major items we should be worried about.

Women's interests stand to be affected by several of these items. For instance, even though the Howard government claims that the PBS won't be affected, AFTINET points out that under the USFTA, drug companies will have more opportunities to influence PBS pricing decisions, leading to higher costs for medicines.

Other devilish details include: extension of copyright which will mean higher costs for libraries and education bodies; less rights for Australia to regulate their health, education and environmental services; US influence on Australia's quarantine and food labelling processes; and restrictions on Australian content rules in new media.

There is still time for you to voice your concerns. The Senate Select Committee and the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties will hold public inquiries over the next three months, leading to the final vote in June. The information in this paper can help you take part in the public debate.

Interested? Contact OWN NSW for a copy of '*Ten Devils*,' or contact AFTINET directly through their website: www.aftinet.org.au or by phone, (02)9299 7833.

Theatre Group Report

We were invited to National Council of Social Services at Merrylands to perform for enthusiastic representatives of indigenous and disabled people. State Rail's directions sent half of us skimming across the rail system on our way to who-knows-where. Having rung 131500 - the rail help line - a few times, we managed to arrive at our destination only twenty minutes late. We explained what had happened and then got huge applause for our transport song.

Friday 2 April saw us performing at the Novotel Hotel at Brighton-le-Sands for middle executives of hospital health services. We had been asked to sing our health songs, as the president had been at one of our other performances and wanted everyone to hear what we thought of the health system. We raised a few eyebrows as well as lots of laughs and got a very good reception. Individual expressions of praise were heard afterwards, to let us know we'd hit a chord somewhere, and we were also given a bag and a pen each!

Joy Ross has worked to the 'strains' from above as we rehearse above her office in Windmill Street. She will probably know the words of all our songs before long – perhaps she'd be willing to stand in occasionally! It's a bit cramped up there for those of us who have generous proportions, but it's good to get so much togetherness.

The past couple of months have been characterised by entrances, exits and a revolving door! Brigid Sen has been welcomed back to the fold after her year in the UK and Jo Allon came back for a while, but is now overseas. A couple more of our group are heading out of OZ in the near future – hope it's nothing we said!

Ceri Ritchie



Lament for Margo

On Saturday, 1 May, our creative dancing friend, Margo Heath, died after a long and painful illness, leaving a loving partner and family.

I first saw Margo on Delwood Beach, near Manly. A slight, very feminine person, she'd appear in a dramatic full-length gown, and I thought to myself, "I'm going to like her." We discussed the merits of such a garment, under which you could whip off your cossie modestly without the risk of being nabbed by the police, because changing on a public beach is *still* against the law.

On hearing about OWN, Margo was most enthusiastic, *especially* about Ellin's Creative Movement class. From then on, we caught the ferry every Thursday. I became more and more interested in this softly-spoken, gentle, generous woman. We swapped life stories and I learned she packed a hefty wallop when angered by life's injustices. I empathised with her marital experiences, and rejoiced with her about her swordplay with a very advanced Tai Chi group. I loved her art work, which covered the walls of her beautiful unit, full of flowing Persian Violets and other plants, wonderful paintings of swirling colours and slightly off-beat, unrealistic Australian birds and landscapes. Despite my urging, she'd never exhibited, except in her art class annual exhibitions.

We'd take champagne and nibbles down to Delwood, and be the envy of other swimmers. She had a long, slow stroke which took her almost to the wharf and back. She made fabulous chocolate cakes for every occasion – she even made one for me two weeks before she died. I will miss her to the end of my days.

Dorothy Cox

The Perils of SKI-ing

After reading Noreen Hewett's article in the May issue of *OWN Matters*, I thought I'd tell you about the perils I encountered when I decided I'd like to go SKI-ing (spending the kid's inheritance).

These Senior Asset Loans are up to \$100,000 and you have the option of not paying back a cent for 20 years. However, if you're still alive then, the bank forces you to sell your home so they can deduct \$500,000 from your assets i.e. \$100,000 X 20 years @ 8.7% compound interest. I thought, what the heck, let's make hay while the sun shines.

The bank told me I was eligible for a loan as I owned my own home and didn't owe money to anyone. They said it would cost me \$804 to set up the loan and a mortgage would be taken out over my property. H'mm, I thought, not too bad. The next step was having a valuation of my house. Still OK: my 40 year-old house was valued at \$80,000 with the land at another \$740,000. Fine, with total assets of \$820,000, a loan of \$100,000 should be well covered.

Wrong! Firstly, the house must be insured for \$200,000 to cover the cost of rebuilding. I argued that their valuer had said the house was only worth \$80,000 and besides, the land value already completely covered the loan.

"It doesn't matter, take out the nominated insurance or *no* loan," he threatened.

Then he told me I must see an independent financial adviser to explain the intricacies of a person of my advanced age taking out a loan. What? I wouldn't be taking out a loan if I didn't know what I was doing. And what about younger people, do they have to see a financial adviser?

He said, "If you want the loan, see the adviser." Another charge, this time \$275 for half an hour of informal chat, which I didn't want or think I needed.

Now, after three months, I'm still without a loan and still waiting for the solicitor's bill. Ah, well, maybe I'll go SKI-ing next year.

Lucy Porter

Remembering Pam: A collective voice

Pam Ledden died on Saturday 24 April at the Sacred Heart Hospice following an eighteen-month fight against lymphoma.

If there's a god – male? female? – they better watch out, Pam's coming!

Pam remained strongly committed to and actively engaged in a range of political struggles for many decades. She was greatly admired for her energy and commitment to the things she was passionate about, using her creativity and activism to great effect in promoting and challenging issues related to asylum seekers, justice for Aboriginal people, peace, and rights for older women.

Pam will be remembered as a woman who made a difference. A formidable and fearless feminist, committed and courageous in achieving her goals and ours – a class crusader in life and to death – Pam didn't just *talk* about feminism, she acted on her beliefs! As far back as the early 70s, Pam always turned up to meetings, always made an effort for women. In the mid-eighties, with other like-minded feminists,

'Pam was a great role model for many women who admired her boldness, bravery, passion and politics.'

she formed a group called MediaSwitch to address sexism in the media. Around the same time, she and a couple of friends also dreamed up the idea of a national network of older feminists called Ten Forty, a social and political group that continues to meet regularly in Sydney to this day.

When she retired from the paid workforce in 1999, Pam joined the Older Women's Network and threw herself into her various volunteering roles, questioning and challenging some of our most sacred cows! Pam's vitality and energy in doing whatever needed to be done, from assembling a computer desk to setting up a new organisation, or simply offering some sensible medical advice, was never too much trouble. She was also a great cleaner-outer of rubbish – of all kinds! There were no half measures for Pam – she was full-on with her motivations and her achievements. An energetic mover and shaker, shortly after she joined OWN Pam began worked tirelessly for the successful establishment in 2001 of OWN NSW as our peak body.

Pam's great sense of fun and wonderful humour will be greatly missed at OWN. She was an extremely kind, generous and compassionate woman. Her wicked laugh and broad smile often meant that she could get away with saying quite outrageous things, especially at meetings, where she was always direct and forthright in expressing her point of view. Pam listened, challenged and clashed, but she didn't bear grudges. She was an intelligent woman with many interests, including a deep love of art, good books and a passionate love of the Outback.

Crikey, what a loss! Pam was a great role model for many women who admired her boldness, bravery, passion and politics. We need more women like her.

Compiled by Dorothy Cora

Judith Mustard

Two Seniors Cards: do you know the difference?

Older people have access to two cards – the NSW State Seniors Card and the National Seniors Association Card.

The NSW State Seniors Card is available to people over 60 years of age who work less than 20 hours a week. A Seniors Card has many benefits, including travel concessions, and discounts on entertainment, clothing, food, gifts and housing. While most businesses display window stickers and signs advertising discounts, always ask if there is a Seniors Card discount. Some professional services offer a discount to senior card holders, and don't forget to take your Seniors Card with you when you travel overseas and interstate for tourist attractions and accommodation.

The National Seniors Association, however, is a lobby group for seniors, available to people 50 years and older, and costs \$28 a year to join. The National Seniors Card offers concessions on some consumable items. For more information about this card, phone 02 9286 3858.

For more information, please contact Seniors Information Service on 13 12 44.



Little Cats

*The little cats are aerialists
They perform with such panache,
Treading the narrow girders of the
garden roof,
Leaping lightly from point to point,
Unconscious of their own lithe
grace.
A harmony of bone and flesh.
Poetry in movement.
The little cats will touch the earth
But never be anchored.*

Food for thought

While writing out some old recipes of my mother's – I still make my egg and bacon pies to her old recipe – for the proposed OWN Greek/Australian Cookbook, I found my mind straying back to how things once were.

My mother was very frugal, and during the Second World War this trait served us in good stead. She often went without food so that we could have more, saying the smell of the cooking had taken her appetite away. Finicky eaters we were not! I remember the multicoloured socks made of odd scraps of unpicked wool, and a coat fashioned from a grey blanket. All our clothes were homemade, war or no war.

We lived on the outskirts of Bristol, which had an aircraft production facility, a thriving port on the River Avon and the Docks at Avonmouth, all of them prime targets for bombing. My granddad, who was a bus driver, had an allotment (as did almost everyone) to grow vegetables to keep ourselves fed. One day he came to our house – two streets from the depot, having come off night driving – in a most indignant rage. A bomb had dropped in the allotment overnight, and while it had not exploded (lucky for us), it had dispersed his rhubarb into the ether! How we loved his rhubarb, sweetened with saccharin.

How ludicrously optimistic we were in our attempts to avoid the bombs. We slept in a cupboard under the stairs, or in our neighbour's Anderson Shelter, which was half submerged underground, covered with corrugated iron and further strengthened with turf on top where the veggies were planted! Sing songs, hot drinks, and mothers knitting, while we all held our breath and counted, to guess how far away the bomb had landed before it exploded. And our fathers

were out on air-raid patrol! In the early days, we all stood outside 'oohing' and 'aahing' at the searchlights and explosions in the night sky. The school bomb shelters were a series of underground tunnels with plank seats lining the sides. We walked there, about a half a mile away, in crocodile lines, wearing our gas masks – a welcome break from lessons! All these measures were, of course, useless in the event of a direct hit, but we didn't know that at the time.

I remember quite vividly the VE (Victory in Europe) Day and VJ (Victory in Japan) Day street celebrations: the singing, dancing, flag-waving, cheers and hymns. But where did all that food come from?

Anne Warren

The freedom to fib!

Here's a new game for OWNers: owners of themselves, that is.

"You've put it on inside out," the busybodies grin, catching me out. "It's lucky," is the right answer for this one.

And there is nothing wrong with safety pins when buttons take it upon themselves to drop off. The right answer here is, "I've got better things to do with my time."

They smile at me but seem to know that I don't have a clue who they are. To solve this one, smile back at everyone who smiles at you! Not too warmly though, as they may look a little surprised. If they look surprised, I say, "You look very much like someone I used to know." If they start chatting away, I ask, "What are you up to these days?" and then I get some clues about who they might be. It's a bit tricky if they are former boyfriends, though, as they could take umbrage, thinking

you are suggesting that they were womanisers, which they probably were.

If you forget appointments, say, "I had a feverish cold that day. I was so ill, I wasn't sure whether I was Arthur or Martha."

If people take to looking at me as though I am losing the plot, I tell them that my mother always said I was an inveterate day-dreamer and that (she skited) I was the creative type, of the absent-minded professor variety.

Go on, be shameless, tell fibs! It's a perfectly normal defence mechanism. Who knows, they may be better at it than you are. You smirk to yourself, thinking these tactics adds to my charm and reputation as a delightfully eccentric older woman."

I joke that I am in possession of 99.9% of my marbles! The nice ones, especially my excellent female doctor, will protest that I have more marbles than most. Then I have to answer; "The rest of them must be dills."

It should be emphasised that most older women suffer memory loss. This is benign, does not get much worse, and is not Alzheimer's or dementia.

Enid Harrison

Banana Benefits

Did you know that bananas are good for people with heart trouble because they are low in fats, sodium and cholesterol? Bananas also have a natural antacid effect in the body so if you suffer from heartburn. And before reaching for the insect bite cream, try rubbing the affected area with the inside of a banana skin. Many people find it amazingly successful at reducing swelling and irritation.

Extracted from
www.geocities.com/mutainaa/food/banana_cure.html

Confound that itch!

Over the past two years, I have been on an incredible journey of discovery. Without knowing it, I have travelled through all the stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Finally, I have come out of the long, dark tunnel of despair to a very different life. Now I live each day as if it really matters – with meaning and purpose. I have come to appreciate each day, aware that life is not a dress rehearsal.

In January 2002, I started to literally itch all over my body. It has nearly driven me mad. In the early stages I simply wanted to put an end to my agony. During that first year I cried every day, wishing that the itch would subside – but it has still not disappeared.

The problem followed revision foot surgery and a hospital-acquired golden staph infection in the bone – osteomyelitis. I required a massive dose of antibiotics for seven months and my gastrointestinal system has still not recovered.

As intractable itch can indicate cancer, I was sent for a battery of tests: X-rays, CT scan, MRI, Gallium Nuclear scan, colonoscopy, endoscopy and ultrasounds, plus many blood tests. Fortunately, nothing

significant showed up, so that was some relief. My dermatologist recommended Ultra Violet Light therapy involving fifteen-minute sessions in an enclosed capsule at very high temperature. After many treatments at extreme heat, I gained no relief.

The drug roller coaster and severe side effects have been part of daily life. I started out on a cocktail of drugs, and I had great difficulty getting through each day. My immunologist has prescribed steroids, histamines, various antidepressants and anticonvulsants, which are all designed to dampen down the overactive immune response. Some drugs worked for a time, then simply stopped working. This proved very depressing, and it took all my emotional strength learning how to cope again when I had lived with temporary relief.

More recently, I was prescribed an opiate drug used for heroin addicts trying to kick their habit. I then made a brave decision to go drug-free, to see if I could survive both physically and mentally. While I accept that pain is an inevitable part of life, suffering is optional, and it is how you deal with it that matters.

The quality of my life has diminished considerably. Itch is part of the hypersensitive immune response, and connected with the

central nervous system. I not only itch all over, I sweat profusely, my eyes water constantly, my sleep patterns are erratic, and I live with severe exhaustion.

Extreme food intolerance plays a major role in my life, so I am confined to a Stone Age Diet. Very depressing, but I have no alternative, because if I stray to other foods, the itch becomes profound. A trip to the doctor or dentist requiring an anaesthetic with a preservative can set off a bout of intense itching.

On a more positive note, research is under way, and an international conference on 'itch' was held in 2003. As yet, I have no way of making contact with other people in Australia who suffer from chronic systemic itch. People with other diseases have the benefit of support groups and a network for communication.

Fortunately, I have been able to make a paradigm shift in my thinking and awareness about how to cope. I have been forced to challenge old ways of thinking and maintain a more flexible approach to life. The support of family, friends and caring doctors has enabled me to come to terms with this debilitating condition.

My journey of discovery has inspired me to develop coping strategies, and to focus on the more important priorities in life that are pleasurable. My metamorphosis has helped me appreciate the beauty of nature – listening to the birds sing, watching the sunset. I enjoy yoga and meditation, music, poetry, creative interests, writing, my dog, a ride on the ferry. I have learned to pace myself, take more risks, and to say, "No".

According to an old legend, if you want a special wish to come true, whisper it to a butterfly! Yes, the butterflies came back to my garden this spring and summer, so I remain optimistic.

Society of equals?

Our politicians bark constantly about honouring The Australian Way. The Fair Go. Mateship.

Consider these stats: in our population of 20 million, there are 2.4 families whose incomes are half the average wage. Three-and-a-half million survive on incomes below the minimum weekly wage. One million are known as the working poor.

And, the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling reports that, by 2030, the richest 20 per cent of our population will own 70 per cent of our combined wealth. The proportion of wealth owned by the poorest 50 per cent will drop from 7 per cent to just 4.9 per cent.

What a treat if we could define ourselves as the society of equals. Now there's a novel identity for our politicians to pursue.

Reprinted from the Sun Herald, 25 April 2004

Anne Collins

Letters to the Editor

A question of balance

Bravo Muriel! I agree with you 100 percent! Feeling guilty about doing nothing not only stems from the work ethic we were raised in, but also has to do with being 'good', as expressed in Isabel MacCallum's article, *Being 'good' is not so good*.

We are entitled to have fun and do the things we enjoy, after a lifetime of work and responsibility. I suppose it's a question of balance. We are much too hard on ourselves and that's where guilt creeps in. We are never too old to learn how to be kind to ourselves.

Daydreaming, smelling the flowers and watching the birds are all part of meditating, and the fact that we are sending those happy 'vibes' into the atmosphere is probably the best thing we can do.

Pat Zinn

Do Nothing Days

Last *OWN Matters* had a beautiful and touching article written by Muriel Hortin, which immediately struck a chord in my memory.

Many years ago, my grandmother told me about a day in her middle years when she went upstairs to make the boys' beds and found a paperback book about bushrangers hidden under a pillow. Grandma was barely literate and a very slow reader, so she took the book downstairs, locked herself in the pantry and read the entire book, beginning to end. Back went the book under the pillow, with Grandma filled with guilt for wasting an entire day reading. She had kept this a secret for over forty years, so I was solemnly sworn to secrecy.

Please carry on with your 'Do Nothing' days, dear Muriel.

Eunice Flynn

Access to Centrelink

I represent OWN Australia on the Centrelink Older Persons Reference Group. Although we only meet twice a year, we are encouraged to raise at any time with senior staff the type of issues raised in the article, *Centrelink-style*, in last month's *OWN Matters*.

It is obviously better if I can have such issues documented, but I don't necessarily need to have names and addresses. I have asked through the OWN Australia newsletter, *Keeping In Touch*, that OWN members contact me if they would like things raised, but have had very little response. Having said that, I have already raised a couple of problems with Centrelink and they have been most helpful.

The senior managers from Centrelink, with whom we meet, sincerely seem to want to iron out problems, but obviously cannot do so if they are unaware of what's happening. Our next meeting is in mid-June, so if there are any general issues that you'd like me to bring up, please let me know.

Barbara Silverstone

New resources

I have received a flyer from the Jean Hailes Foundation, regarding new resources for consumers and health professionals on osteoporosis. The Foundation has developed an innovative, evidence-based website or CD-ROM on this problem which explores causes and diagnosis, identifies at-risk groups, considers women at all stages of life and highlights new prevention and management options. The CD-ROM is free for a limited time only on 1800 151 441 or go to their website www.bonehealthforlife.org.au

Barbara Silverstone

Things can change

I feel I want to respond to Josie Jackson's letter last month, in which she expresses concern that I don't have hope for Aboriginal people. It really showed me how hard it is to write about something as complicated as Aboriginal disadvantage and its effects.

What I hoped I was doing in my poem, *Weep for Wilcannia*, was to show that the Aboriginal people I spoke to in Wilcannia feel hopeless, and so do many white people living in that community. That's why I wept for them. I don't share their feelings of hopelessness. I believe that things can and will change.

However, change is not easy, especially changing our deeply entrenched attitudes. For instance, some years ago I was staying with my daughter, Susanna, in an Aboriginal community, 250Ks from Uluru, where she was a teacher.

One morning, we arrived at school to find a large group of women and children gathered quietly in the playground. What was going on, I wondered? One of the elders told us that there was a ceremony about to take place, so we joined the group of mothers, babies, grandmas, aunts and dogs, and settled ourselves under some magnificent old river gums. What will happen now? Something exciting, as on the day I had my breasts painted, and danced with the women and children? Nothing happened. We sat and we sat. Even the dogs were still, except for an occasional scratch. This is a waiting ceremony, we are told. Waiting for what, I wondered, in my busy 'whitey' way? Then I looked at those calm faces and relaxed bodies sitting cross-legged on the warm, red earth, and I relaxed and waited too.

Joan Johns

Letters to the Editor

So basic

How disappointing it is to find that many in our workforce today are holding positions that demand the most basic of skills yet our education system is such that, at school leaving, good grammar and spelling has managed to elude them.

Recently I was delving into a bit of family history and decided that I would apply to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages for birth and death certificates and, for my nearest and dearest, I would ask for the special Commemorative Certificates.

Eventually, in dribs and drabs, they arrived. One was for my aunt, for whom I cared until she passed away almost a year and a half ago. She was a dressmaker for all of her working life and here, on this \$29 Commemorative Certificate, her occupation is shown as 'TAYLORESS'.

I will of course return it and ask for a correct one to be issued, but it is just one glaring example of something that has become a sad everyday occurrence.

Helen Craig

Crushed by Credit

I have had an account with David Jones for over 30 years with a credit limit of \$5000. I have never had a late payment during that time.

Usually my account is completely paid up each month, but recently I went overseas and inadvertently forgot to pay the account which was \$200. The minimum payment due was \$10! Returning from overseas, I immediately paid a quarter of the account, but was hit with a \$30 late fee. I wrote to DJ's explaining the circumstances and they told me they would waive the fee.

However, they also told me my credit limit had to be lowered to \$1000 "to protect my interests because I was a pensioner". I became very angry and told the person that their attitude was extremely ageist, and that I had an excellent credit rating. I also made the point that many younger people had huge debts whereas I had none, and didn't need protecting.

The absurd point here is that I have never used, and don't intend to use, the \$5000 credit. When I was in the workforce it was practically forced on me. I have never taken advantage of it. I strongly resent the presumption by one of our leading stores that now that I'm an older person I am financially irresponsible and (possibly) senile.

Lucy Porter

More, please

At last I had the courage to cancel longtime commitments on Friday for a sojourn to Fab Fridays at Windmill Street, where I experienced a wonderful demonstration of OZECRAFT Craft Dye, given by its founder Catherine Ross.

Such a simple, non-messy method of dyeing laces and other items achieved an 'antique look' for various craft and heirloom sewing, all done in seconds in a microwave. A necklace pendant 'to dye for' was so enthusiastically acclaimed that I wonder if it would be possible for *Fab Friday* to have a class for us to make our own heirloom necklace from a purchased kit?

Congratulations and thanks to Cherie Thompson for organising an inspiring day!

Mary Whitton

Simplifying

Because I have lost much of my sight and have double vision now, I find it hard to read too many journals these days. I have therefore arranged for my Jessie Street Women's Library membership to be transferred to the Older Women's Network.

I've also been a member of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) since 1972, but feel I have to resign from that organisation too and just concentrate on the three groups that I now belong to.

OWN Matters is the best newsletter I receive!

Josephine Conway

Home Exchange

I have recently joined Fremantle OWN and think that it is one of the best things I have done lately. I have been feeling down since hearing that my only son (and only family, now) will be moving to Richmond RAAF Base in July. I have made friends with other women who have to cope with family interstate.

I wonder whether anyone would be interested in a home exchange or hospitality group within OWN? Through *OWN Matters*, we could contact others interested in swapping homes or staying with a member for a holiday, in exchange for the same. I have a beautiful unit by the Swan River in Fremantle but limited cash to spend on accommodation in Sydney.

I would prefer to swap or stay with a woman who understands the difficulties of travelling alone. Getting to know someone in Sydney by letter or email would make a big difference.

Thank you for your work with OWN.

Karen Clulow

1 Pier Street East Fremantle WA 6158

At and Beyond the Rocks

OWN Sydney

Our brains are buzzing with all the international, national and local issues. The international scene disturbs us greatly; the national scene, with the recent Federal Budget such a blatant vote-catcher on many fronts, with scarcely a crumb for older people, makes us angry; and among the many local issues of concern is the recent closure of the NSW Department of Women.

With the prospect of an early federal election, the OWN Sydney Working Group will call on OWN NSW to arrange a forum for older women to put forward their issues and their views about the shortcomings of the Federal Budget for older women; in particular, the increase in daily rates of nursing homes which will go to the owners. The concentration of tax relief for higher income people and nothing for those on low incomes is indicative of the mentality of this government! And as for breeding, there are many of us who remember the days of 'populate or perish'!

We have learned that the highly valuable Women's Information and Referral Service (attached to the Department for Women) was closed several months ago without any public announcement of which we are aware. This is a great disappointment, not just because it was an initiative of the Older Women's Network, but because its database met the information needs of women of all ages.

A lively OWN NSW quarterly meeting, with representatives from twelve OWN groups, augurs well for a stimulating State Conference in July. OWN Sydney members are generally well represented at state conferences, and as in previous years, we expect many of you will be there to meet and greet delegates from other groups.

Fab Fridays are just that! Cherie

Thompson finds great speakers on a variety of interests and each Friday is a pleasant and informative occasion. We also enjoy also a chat over lunch.

Those who go to *Wellness on Wednesdays* say it is absolutely great; that they get so much enjoyment, not just from the physical activities, but also the companionship and sharing. We're still waiting for the Mott Hall floor to be repaired – hopefully by early June. We are very thankful to the Millers Point Activity Centre and Gym staff for their support.

It was a great pleasure to learn that Edith Morgan, previously of the Older People's Action Group in Melbourne, a long time member of OWN, and a tremendous activist for social justice, has now had a Chair of Nursing named after her at a Melbourne university. Edith, with her passion and love for humour, endeared herself to us from the time we first met her at the now historic 1993 Think Tank, which resulted in the inauguration of OWN (Australia).

Louise Anike and Joy Ross

Parramatta

We have been very active over the past few months with social outings and guest speakers. On 10 March a group of us attended the public forum at Blacktown to explore the formation of a Blacktown OWN.

Congratulations, Blacktown, we wish you every success! Our members look forward to future collaborations with both Blacktown and Penrith OWN groups. Another stunning event in March was attending *Women Centre Stage* at Campbelltown.

We have also enjoyed fish and chips at Watsons Bay, visited the Art Gallery for see the Archibald Art Exhibition, and had lunch in the Botanic Gardens. Lorna

Parker was our guest speaker in March, talking about *The Upside of Being an Older Woman*.

I gave an interactive talk on *Speaking in Public* at one of our meetings and judging by the eloquent and impromptu short speeches by members on varied topics, speaking in public does not present many problems to our members.

In May, Barry Illingsworth spoke about wills, power of attorney and other matters related to dying.

Members are looking forward to celebrating our first anniversary on 28 June, at a special lunch to mark the occasion. Unfortunately, we have to restrict numbers because of the limited room at the Harris Park Community Centre, our regular meeting place. We feel very much at home there and wanted to celebrate with the Manager and the Coordinator who are so helpful to our group.

Our AGM and election of the Working Party will be held on 23 August. With our membership now at 49, we look forward to progress and growth in our second year.

Mollie Smith

Penrith

Our group is delighted to announce that we have been successful in obtaining the use of a large room in the Penrith CBD – air conditioned and free – for our Gentle Exercise class, which will commence in June. We have also had a meeting with the Mayor, Property Manager and Community Developer from Penrith Council, about some free office space in the Penrith CBD, and they are currently looking into two possible options for us. With our drop-in centre open every day, Penrith OWN has quite a presence in the community!

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At and Beyond the Rocks

Funding has run out for our Gentle Exercise class, so a charge of \$5 is being paid by participants at present. An application for funding has been submitted to the Department of Sport and Recreation and we should know soon if we have been successful.

Our Jumble Stall fundraiser, held on the day of the Council elections, in the grounds of the home of one of our members, was a great success. We are also planning to hold a special afternoon tea (in lieu of a Biggest Morning Tea) with entertainment and raffles, to raise funds for the Cancer Council.

Penrith OWN is represented on the Women's Health Centre Committee and we also attend the Women's Steering Committee, now called Women's Health Forward Planning, where we meet with members of various sections of Wentworth Area Health.

In June, we have twenty-one members going to the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre to see *Chicago*.

Our AGM will also be held in June, with the Mayor, our local MP and Councillor attending. A belly dancer will entertain us!

Thelma Anderson

Macarthur

It's hard to believe that June is already upon us – the time of solstice, of new beginning. At Macarthur OWN, we are hoping that the new initiatives we have devised to entertain, stimulate and educate, will meet with the approval of our members.

On the second week of each month we hold birthday 'days' for all our members with birthdays in that month. They are very popular, as many of our members don't have close family to celebrate their

special day. We recently celebrated our 7th birthday with a special lunch at a local restaurant *and* two special birthday cakes! We were enjoying ourselves so much, the lights were turned off – I suppose to tell us it was time to get up and go!

Around fifteen of our members enjoyed an Easter bus trip to Phillip Island and Ballarat. The time passed at a frantic pace, jam packed with action, great scenery, interesting stops, and led by a great team – Trevor, Fiona and Billy, who looked after our welfare.

Monthly bus trips to Nutcote Cottage and the Mary McKillop Museum were well supported, and the postponed trips to Careflight Centre and Westmead Children's Hospital will be rescheduled soon.

As always, our guest speakers have been many and varied, and included a speaker from the Arthritis Foundation and another from the Macular Degeneration Foundation. As our group has several members with these problems, the need for informed discussion is important and leads to a greater understanding of our sisters' health needs. With these thoughts in mind, a Health Expo is being planned for 9 June, with seven subjects up for discussion, interspersed with fun, lunch and comedy.

Max Prescott, from the Make a Wish Foundation, gave a riveting and informative address about how his organisation tries to fulfil the wishes of children with a terminal disease.

Michael Crewes, from the Exodus Foundation in Ashfield, gave such a dynamic and interesting talk in April that members decided, for the first time ever, not to break for morning tea! As a result, we are donating cans of food which are ring-pull cans, as many homeless

people don't have can openers. Our group is also mindful of our sisters suffering in faraway places like Zimbabwe, and we have joined an appeal to send feminine hygiene and medical supplies to them through our local hospital.

We now include in our program a bi-monthly visit to the Catholic Club's *Morning Melodies* which features artists such as Kamahl, Warren Williams and his son, Darren, who sing everything from rock-and-roll to opera. These shows are wonderful for women who are socially isolated and also provide food for thought for our budding stage stars, *The Macarthur Melody Makers*, whose next performance is at the Benevolent Society's Solstice Fair on 24 June. The group is very excited that a Starters' Kit is being developed by OWN NSW for groups such as ours. We also look forward to holding another Theatre Skills workshop soon!

Helen Standing

Wollondilly

Our group is only small, but really dedicated. During the past few months we have formed a coordination team of six members who will set some goals and help us all to achieve them. The team meets on the second Tuesday of each month and in two months already have some achievements to report. Firstly, they have arranged bus outings for the group on the third Tuesday of each month, which has been warmly welcomed by the group – and secondly, they have arranged future speakers, selected from suggestions put forward at our monthly meetings.

Aqua aerobics have commenced in the area and this too was welcomed by the group, some of

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At and Beyond the Rocks

whom had suggested to council that older members of the community needed this activity. Our members take part in many district activities, mostly started by and for the group, but not exclusively. These include gentle exercise, Scottish country dancing, drumming, and weights and aerobics at the local gym.

Members attended a concert at Thirlmere recently which raised funds for one of the girls in our area, who had won a scholarship to further her flute studies in London. Our drummers were well received at the Thirlmere Steam Festival. We took part in International Women's Day celebrations, where we raised \$570 to go towards conference expenses for non-delegates. We plan to have a strong presence at the State conference and AGM in July with some members attending for the first time.

Barbara Malcolm

Blacktown

On 10 March, a very successful forum was held in Blacktown to ascertain the interest in an OWN group being formed at Blacktown. Around two hundred older women attended this forum, and from that, Blacktown OWN was formed.

Our group is fortunate to have the support of council, in particular, Pam Hawkins, the Aged Services worker. I'd just like to say a big thank you to Dorothy Cora, and to Penrith and Parramatta OWN groups, especially Mollie Smith, for their help.

Our first meeting on 23 March was fairly informal, and since then we have held regular monthly meetings with around twenty-two members present.

Fairly soon, we hope to take over the Senior Citizens' Centre at Rooty Hill. All the indications are good! We also hope to 'inherit' around \$1200 which was left over when the Centre closed. It's a huge place with a great kitchen, so it will be a good place to hold workshops and other activities.

We have applied for a grant through Council's community development program and, if we are successful, we'll be able to set up at the Rooty Hill premises and perhaps employ a part-time worker for a year. We have also applied for a grant to celebrate Harmony Day next year. This grant was available to encourage the integration of other nationalities into the community. If we get this grant, we propose to write the stories of about thirty older women from different countries and have them printed. Also, we would like to have OWN's Theatre Group perform some of the stories.

One of our aims is to get older women who are at home on their own into our group, so that they can socialise. Recently, an isolated woman of seventy-two who had been on her own for four years rang me to find out about our group. She was not interested in Bingo or similar activities, so I hope to encourage her to attend our group.

I think we are already becoming well-known. A paper from St. Mary's invited some of our group to Rooty Hill to do a photo shoot, and tell them about OWN. Then, the following week, a student from UWS Community Radio rang saying he will do a phone interview with one of our members.

Penny Hilton

Wagga Wagga

We've accomplished a lot in the last few months. Our Theatre Group, always in demand, performed for two great audiences during Seniors Week, one in Wagga Wagga, and the other a hundred kilometres away in Gundagai. Audiences in both locations were enthusiastic. We recently lodged a submission for funding to purchase much-needed lightweight and portable sound equipment for our Theatre Group. Our other Seniors Week activity was an information stand at Wagga Market Place, which always attracts new members.

We are pleased to report that the Schofield Centre will be our new, and larger, venue for future meetings. We held our first meeting there in early May, which was a *Biggest Morning Tea* fundraiser for the Cancer Council and raised around \$130.

Even though we had to use other venues during April, our Gentle Exercise program continued, thanks to the availability of a VCR. We exercised to the *Keep the Bounce in Your Step - Fun and Fitness Program for the Over 50s* video. Our purchase of a TV/Video combo for our new location will enable us to continue this activity. We've already attracted some new members from women who participated in *Wisemoves*, a program of physical and mental activities for older women. Perhaps there'll be more!

Several of our members are enjoying weekly Aqua Exercises at the Council hydrotherapy pool. Unfortunately, funding for this activity has run out, so we're busy developing submissions for a couple of future projects in our new and larger venue.

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At and Beyond the Rocks

To keep our eyes in shape as well as our bodies, we listened with interest to an optometrist who was a guest speaker at a recent meeting. We learned about eye health and how various eye problems that can occur in our advancing years might be prevented or delayed. This good advice was much appreciated.

At one of our April meetings, a member of OWN Mackay in Queensland spoke to us about her groups' activities. She was most impressed with our accomplishments, ideas and newsletters – both *OWN Matters* and our *Wagga OWN Newsletter*.

One of the big issues in Wagga is public transport. Our management committee has been working with various local and state officials, as well as other community organisations, to improve bus services on evenings and weekends so that people who don't drive can attend social and cultural events.

Judith Constable

Not a Dry Eye in the House

A few years ago I was diagnosed with a fairly rare autoimmune disease called Sjögren's Syndrome whose main feature is a lack of mucus (the oil of the body) in the eyes, mouth, gut, etc. Since then, because I am forever smearing stuff on my eyes, I have been amazed at the number of women who mention having chronically dry eyes.

Why do we get dry eyes? For some people it seems to come after using drugs which have a drying effect – anti-histamines, some anti-depressants, and anti-acne drugs. Personally, I used large amounts of anti-histamines over thirty years and, following a bout of Epstein-Barr virus (the glandular fever virus), I was catapulted into Sjögren's – often associated with other fun diseases such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and Reynaud's syndrome. If you have severe symptoms, it is sensible to get a proper diagnosis – mainly by blood tests. And use a good eye specialist who specialises in dry eyes.

In the process of managing Sjögren's Syndrome, I learned some useful things which may help others. (Please note that I have no

medical training and what works for me may not work for you.)

EYES – Apart from the comfort factor, it is important to keep your eyes lubricated as much as possible to avoid ulceration. There are many drops, gels and ointments on the market. I initially worked my way through them, but after three months on each, my eyes became red and sore. I started using Lucas' pawpaw ointment for my lips and nose and discovered that if I smeared it on my eyelids it leached into my eyes, providing lubrication. And I haven't become allergic to it.

NIGHT EYES – One symptom of dry eye is difficulty opening your eye (or eyes) during the night. They seem to be stuck, but you don't have conjunctivitis. I put on extra ointment at night when heavier protection is needed – and wear an eyemask (they aren't just for film stars!); which keeps my eyes moist.

EYE PROTECTION – Because the mucus over your eyeball is thinner, the sharpness of your vision may be reduced. Your eyes will need more drops or cream if you spend a lot of time staring at books, TV, computer screens and sewing. The

less your eyes move, the less they lubricate. Wearing glasses with good eye coverage – not the tiny skinny modern ones – is a very necessary protection.

I also suffer from a lack of mucus in my mouth and my gut, but the treatments I've found for these can wait for another day. I'd be very interested in how other older women have coped with some of the things I've mentioned.

Jan Aitkin

City a sanctuary

Bankstown Council has officially committed to welcoming refugees to the city with the signing of the Refugee Welcome Zone declaration on in February 2004. The Refugee Welcome Zone, an initiative of the Refugee Council of Australia, is a commitment a community makes to welcome refugees; to uphold the human rights of refugees and to demonstrate compassion for refugees.

Bankstown Mayor Helen Westwood said the Bankstown community had always supported and welcomed new families and individuals into the area.

"Many people around the world live in poverty and fear, under unjust military regimes and dictators", she said. "These people often have to watch friends and family being tortured or killed because of their political and religious beliefs. Out of desperation these people are forced to flee their countries, claim refugee status and begin the overwhelming task of finding a new home."

Councillor Westwood said she could not imagine how hard it would be for people to have to flee their home in fear of their life and then settle in a new country without friends, family, money or support.

Extracted from the *Canterbury-Bankstown Express*, Tuesday February 17, 2004

What took you so long?

My mother was a fanatic about public toilets. As a little girl, she'd bring me into the cubicle and teach me how to wad up toilet paper to wipe the seat. Then, she'd carefully lay strips of toilet paper to cover the seat and, finally, she'd instruct me to, "Never, never sit on a public toilet seat." Then she'd demonstrate 'The Stance', which consisted of balancing over the toilet in a sitting position without actually letting any of one's flesh make contact with the seat.

That was a long time ago. Even now in my more mature years, 'The Stance' is excruciatingly difficult to maintain when my bladder is especially full. When I have to 'go' in a public bathroom, there's usually a line of women also crossing their legs and smiling politely, so I smile politely at them, and wait my turn. And finally I get closer. I check for feet under the stall doors – every one is occupied – but finally, a stall door opens and I dash in, nearly knocking down the woman leaving. I get in to find the door won't latch. I hang my purse on the door hook, yank down my pants and assume 'The Stance'. Relief. More relief.

Then my thighs begin to shake. I'd love to sit down, but I hadn't taken time to wipe the seat or lay toilet paper on it, so I hold 'The Stance' as my thighs experience a quake that would register an eight on the Richter scale. To take my mind off it, I reach for the toilet paper, but the dispenser is empty. My thighs shake more. I remember the tiny tissue I blew my nose on, but it's in my purse. It will have to do. I crumble it in the puffiest way possible, but it's still smaller than my thumbnail. Someone pushes open my cubicle door because the catch doesn't work, and my bag swings out and whacks me on the head. "Occupied!" I scream as I reach out for the door, dropping the tissue in a puddle and falling backward, directly onto the toilet seat. I get up quickly, but it's too late – my bare bottom has made contact with all the bugs living on that seat because I never laid down toilet paper! Not that there *was* any, even if I had had enough time to put it down. My mother would be utterly ashamed of me if she knew, because *her* bare bottom never touched a public toilet seat.

And now the automatic sensor on the back of the toilet is so confused that it flushes, sending up a stream of water akin to a fountain, and then suddenly sucks everything down with such force that I grab onto the toilet paper dispenser. At this point, I give up. I'm soaked by the splashing water and exhausted. I slink out inconspicuously to the washbasin. I can't figure out how to operate the sinks with the automatic sensors, so I wipe my hands with spit and a dry paper towel and walk past a line of women, still waiting cross-legged. I'm unable to smile politely at this point. One kind soul at the very end of the line points out that I am trailing a piece of toilet paper on my shoe!

Then I see my man, who has entered, used and exited his toilet and then read a copy of *War and Peace* while waiting for me. "What took you so long?" he asks, annoyed. This is when I kick him sharply in the shin.

This is dedicated to all women everywhere who have ever had to deal with a public toilet. And it finally explains to all you men what takes us so long. The answer to the other question, why women go in pairs, is so the other woman can hold the door closed and hand you tissues.

Contributed by Gabrielle Snedden

Older women love the net

Adults aged over 65 are the fastest growing age group taking to the Internet, according to Nielsen/NetRatings – www.nielsen-netratings.com – with older women showing the most significant growth, jumping 30% over the past year.

Over the next few months we will be publishing web addresses with a brief description of their potential interest to older women.

Here are two that may be of interest:

www.getupandgo.net.au

Written specifically for the mature traveller, *Get up & Go* includes the latest in seniors discounts, tours, hotels, airlines, self-drive itineraries, rail, cruise, Australian short breaks and overseas trips.

www.feministagenda.org.au

We are a coalition of feminist women committed to working with like-minded others to create a new and fairer global agenda, with women's voices at its centre. We believe that a feminist analysis is essential to developing an agenda which can deliver justice and human rights for all.

Why not share your favourite sites too?

Dorothy Cora

Better to be alert!

Recently, a rare kind of breast cancer was found in a woman who developed a rash on her breast, similar to that of young mothers who are nursing. The rash was on the outside of the breast, on the nipple and aureola. Her nipple developed a crusty outer edge, and the rash was itchy and sore which bothered her, so she went to the doctor. It didn't clear up with creams prescribed by the doctor and the dermatologist – she'd had dermatitis in her eyes just prior to

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the rash – and although they seemed a little concerned, they did not warn her it could be cancerous.

Because her mammogram had been clear, she was treated with antibiotics for an infection. After two rounds of treatment, her condition continued to get worse, so her doctor sent her for another mammogram. This time it showed a mass and, through a biopsy, a fast growing malignancy was found. Chemotherapy was started in order to shrink the growth; then a mastectomy; then a full round of chemo; then finally, radiation treatment. After about nine months of this intense treatment, she was given a clean bill of health.

But the cancer returned, this time to the liver area. She underwent four treatments and then decided that she wanted quality of life, not the after-effects of chemotherapy. She had five great months, and planned each detail of her final days. After just a few days on morphine, she slipped away.

Now, I suspect there are not many women who know that a lesion or rash on the nipple or aureola can be breast cancer. One of the biggest problems with this form of breast cancer, called 'Paget's disease of the breast' is that the symptoms appear to be harmless. It is frequently thought to be a skin inflammation or infection, leading to unfortunate delays in detection and care.

The symptoms of Paget's disease of the breast include:

A persistent redness, oozing, and crusting of the nipple causing it to itch and burn.

A sore on the nipple that will not heal.

A sore on one breast only.

For more information, go to

[www.cancerbacup.org.uk/
Cancertype/Breast/
Typesofbreastcancer/
Pagetsdisease](http://www.cancerbacup.org.uk/Cancertype/Breast/Typesofbreastcancer/Pagetsdisease)

Contributed Maureen King

Boys Compare Toys

At a recent computer expo, Bill Gates reportedly compared the computer industry with the auto industry, stating: "If General Motors had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would all be driving \$25 cars that got 1,000 miles to the gallon."

In response to Bill's comments, General Motors issued a press release which included the following – "If GM had developed technology like Microsoft, we would all be driving cars with the following characteristics" –

For no reason whatsoever, your car would crash twice a day.

Occasionally, executing a manoeuvre such as left turn would cause your car to shut down and refuse to restart, in which case you would have to reinstall the engine.

The oil, water temperature and alternator warning lights would all be replaced by a single *This Car Has Performed an Illegal Operation* warning light.

The airbag system would ask, "Are you sure?" before being activated.

Occasionally, for no reason whatsoever, your car would lock you out and refuse to let you in until you simultaneously lifted the door handle, turned the key and grabbed hold of the radio antenna.

Every time a new car was introduced, car buyers would have to learn how to drive all over again because none of the controls would operate in the same manner as the old car.

You'd have to press the *Start* button to turn the engine off.

**Extract from an article originally published in March/April 2004
ERA.**

Contributed by Norma Anet

TECHNOLOGICAL TEETH

A visit to the dentist ain't what it used to be. This week, by prior arrangement, I had a two-hour appointment to have an old crown replaced. This high-tech practice in the CBD is a revelation. It offers the best of technology, is meticulously run and all the staff are highly trained professionals. And the office staff is always kind and courteous.

Well, the anaesthetic was administered directly to the affected tooth by a computer driven wand – no hideous numbing of the jaw or the face, no thick lip, no half a nose. The old crown was photographed and the image came up on screen. It was then drilled loose and tapped off. Then the tooth underneath was photographed and that image also came up. Any necessary cleaning up was done and the gum treated with laser. The two images were married together and the dentist made adjustments to the picture that he felt appropriate. The computer then gave him an image of what the new crown would look like and told him that it would take thirteen minutes and twenty seconds to produce. A block of porcelain was put into another machine that was equipped with a couple of diamond drills and other apparatus that would roll and pare away at the porcelain. The two machines were linked, a few buttons activated and the action started.

In precisely thirteen minutes and twenty seconds I had a new crown. It was installed on the prepared tooth and I was ready to go and have a ten-course meal! No pain, no numbness, no after effects. A truly amazing experience.



Helen Craig

Please hold, and hold, and hold...

I am sure we all experience the frustration of trying to transact some business over the telephone with major institutions. The recorded voice answers and asks a series of questions that require the caller to select one of several options and then press the appropriate button. Another recorded voice offers a further choice, and another button has to be selected. Then, if you're 'lucky', you might be told that "we are sorry. No one is available to take your call at present but please hold on, your call is important to us – one of our highly trained officers will be with you shortly".

Your wait could be anything from five to thirty minutes, or longer if you have the patience and then it is doubtful that your answer would be satisfactory or your dilemma resolved.

A financial institution that I sometimes have the misfortune to have to contact is enough to send me 'spare'. I go through the above routine and eventually I'm instructed to wait and "one of our financial officers will attend to your request". Said officer asks me my name, how I am today, what is my date of birth, what is my grandmother's maiden name and then, "How can we help you, Helen?" All this from someone whom I've never met, never spoken to before and who is probably all of twenty years old. Perhaps it seems petty that I'm offended by this, but then I'm one of those people who respond to a bit of old-fashioned courtesy.

When we get through all this I'm told that I need to put it in writing. I do so and I fax it, stating that I am choosing the fax option in order to expedite my request and that the original will follow in the mail. It does, and in large black letters across the top I print,

"CONFIRMATION ONLY.
INSTRUCTIONS FAXED ON —/—/—".

A week later I find to my dismay that my instructions have been acted upon *twice* – the first time on the fax, the second on the confirmation.

Oh, I forgot to mention that at the beginning of the call the recorded voice tells me that "for training purposes, your call could be recorded". Training for what, might I ask? Someone programming yet another recorded message into a phone on an empty desk?

Please...bring back the days of telephonists and human contact. It makes for much more efficient operation and courteous exchange with a satisfactory conclusion.

Helen Craig

Disturbing figures

Older women make up 11 percent of all AIDS diagnoses in the USA today. Divorce, Viagra and longer life spans have meant more sexual activity for older people, but older women may still have difficulty broaching sexuality in conversation with prospective partners, and tend to tiptoe around the topic of condom use.

Not surprisingly, when it comes to older people and HIV, the medical community has blinkers on, with a majority of doctors overwhelmingly subscribing to the stereotype of the abstinent, asexual older woman and not screening them by asking them about their sexual behaviour.

Weight loss and fatigue associated, with the early onset of HIV, can be wrongly interpreted in women over 50 as depression, thyroid,

metabolic disorders, or simply signs of ageing. AIDS-related dementia may also be mistaken for Alzheimer's disease. After months and sometimes years of being sick, older women are tested for HIV as a last resort.

According to specialists, the older you are when initially infected, the more rapid the disease progresses. According to 1997 figures, 86 percent of people under age 15 lived at least 10 years after getting AIDS, compared with only 12 percent of people over 55.

Extract from an article by Cindra Feuer at www.aidsinfonyc.org

Oh, sweet revenge

A married couple in their early 60s were out celebrating their 35th wedding anniversary in a quiet, romantic little restaurant.

Suddenly, a beautiful fairy appeared on their table (she was very tiny) and said, "For being such an exemplary married couple and for being faithful to each other for all this time, I will give you each a wish."

"Oh, I want to travel around the world with my dearest husband," said the wife. The fairy moved her magic stick and – abracadabra! – two tickets for the QM2 luxury liner appeared in her hands.

Now it was the husband's turn. He thought for a moment and said: "Well, this is all very romantic – but an opportunity like this only occurs once in a lifetime, so I'm sorry, my love, but my wish is to have a wife 30 years younger than me."

The wife and the fairy were deeply disappointed, but a wish is a wish...

So the fairy made a circle with her magic stick and – abracadabra! – the husband became 92 years old!

Contributed by Cate Turner

More Adventure Holidays...

Deliverance!

Between 1971 and the mid-eighties, Mary's and my adventure holidays were in outback areas of South Australia in a station wagon or on camels. In 1986, Mary, aged 60, purchased 'Nellie', a brand new 4WD Nissan Dual Cab with a back canopy, and did an extensive 4WD course. She fitted 'Nellie' out with emergency spare parts and recovery gear and hired a high frequency radio to contact the Royal Flying Doctor Service if need be. Then we headed north.

Our first destination was the western edge of Carnarvon National Park in Central Queensland; an isolated section called Salvatore Rosa. In 1846 the explorer Major Mitchell had camped there, taking advantage of the permanent water, lush grass and a natural stockyard for his horses. For us, too, the grasses, the bushwalking and the birds were especially good. The first week passed quickly.

As we broke camp, dark clouds came in from the north-east and it started to drizzle. This was black soil country renowned for becoming impassable after rain. Alarm bells rang for us both! Our remoteness now became not idyllic but precarious. We drove off as the rain came down in earnest. In an instant, Mary could not handle the skidding tyres, even at low speed. They had become caked hard with mud that grew thicker and thicker with each turn. The lack of control was frightening. Before long, 'Nellie' slithered slowly and gracefully to the side of the track. Bogged in the middle of a vast plain with no sign of life, we had no choice but to sit it out until the road dried out again – maybe a week or two, or even longer!

Then an amazing thing happened – a utility drove up alongside! Two farm hands were escaping to Springsure because the rain would make it impossible to work for a couple of weeks. And one of them offered to drive our vehicle! How could he do it? How could he steer? Wouldn't the creeks be flooded by now?

Billy taught us a valuable lesson that city folk cannot learn except while driving outback in the wet. He drove safely, skilfully, correcting each skid – left to right, right to left, on and on, through the rising creeks using our 'bow wave' to protect the engine, on and on, for 120 kilometres, to the bitumen! And all the while he smoked and talked flat out about his life following the rodeos around Queensland and about his Mum back in Mt Morgan. It was a rollicking, exhilarating deliverance, though one that left me with a migraine!

Judith Hammond

Eating the 'right' breakfast

Some recent US research has shown that people who regularly had either cereal, bread or fruits and vegetables for breakfast were more like to be leaner than those who skipped the meal entirely, or indulged in the 'bacon and eggs'

fry up. So give yourself the best chance to maintain a healthy weight by feasting on fibre-rich fruits and cereals rather than the protein and fat options.

**Extract from *Health Reader*,
October 2003**

THE WEDDING

I had set the VCR to record a program about Flamenco Dancing the previous night. I was looking forward to seeing it. But when I put it on, to my bewilderment, there was a recording of the Danish wedding. Lovely, to be sure, but not what I expected. Maybe I'd set the time wrong, or maybe SBS had changed the program. (Yes, I really can program my VCR!)

I watched, fascinated. How lovely Princess Mary looked, so beautiful, so regal, perfect for the part. Such a wonderful dress. And what a handsome husband. I do believe they are actually truly in love. The speeches were good, too – it sounded as though the speakers really meant what they were saying, especially Mary's father. And, of course, the Prince's speech sounded so sincere – I think he meant every word he said. So romantic.

I couldn't help wondering what it would have been like if he'd chosen someone like me to marry. Under five feet, very shortsighted, shapeless and skinny (well, I was in my youth...), and not at all pretty. It wouldn't have mattered what I wore, I still wouldn't have looked regal. (I recall a spiteful aunt telling me that when I walked down the aisle, I strode along like a footballer.)



I was very uninteresting. But somebody loved me – our marriage lasted forty-four years. Come to think of it, my husband didn't look princely at all. (Maybe a uniform would have helped?) No matter – I liked him. A lot.

Renee Simons

NOTICES

Bequests to the Older Women's Network

If you would like to include a bequest to OWN in your Will, the following options will guide you in its wording.

Please specify which Older Women's Network you wish to be the recipient of your gift:

Older Women's Network NSW

or the

*Older Women's Network,
Sydney.*

Option No. 1

I devise the sum of \$
to the Older Women Network
for the general purpose of the
Older Women's Network OR
the specific purpose of
.....
such purpose being consistent
with the aims and objectives of
the Older Women's Network, to
be administered by the Older
Women's Network.

Option No 2

(for a proportional bequest)
I give to the Older Women's
Network for its general
purpose or the specific
purpose of
...% of my estate (or ...% of
the rest of my estate).

**The gift you make to the
Older Women's Network
will be an enduring record
of your generosity.**

Women's Electoral Lobby

The Women's Electoral Lobby invites you to a national conference on 12 and 13 June at Sydney Mechanics School of Arts. The focus of the conference will be whether or not our democratic processes are improving women's lives or hanging women out to dry. The conference will consider the important themes of democracy, protecting women's rights, measuring quality of life and how to achieve culture change to improve the quality of women's lives rapidly, rather than through incremental change.
Cost: \$75 or \$65 concession.
Please visit our website www.wel.org.au for further information or contact 9144 1353.

More fame?

OWN WA will be featured on the ABC George Negus show on 1 June 2004.
Please spread the word!

A community service turned off!

Channel 31 was turned off some weeks ago. Many people want to know why a television service that has been operating for 10 years, with hundreds of people involved on a weekly basis in producing programs, and a monthly audience of 1.3 million viewers, primarily people from ethnic communities, is forced to close down with barely 24 hours notice.

How can the ABA justify giving a community television licence to *TV Sydney*, a largely educational consortium that has no real community base attached to it? For more information, please contact CTS on 9436 1531 or visit www.channel31.org

Breast Cancer

More than 30 women each day are diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia. The Breast Cancer Network Australia has produced a comprehensive kit for women diagnosed with breast cancer within the last twelve months. It is available free of charge by calling 1 300 785 562.

Called *My Journey Kit*, it is a fabulous resource developed by women who have had breast cancer. It includes information about breast cancer and its treatment, useful contacts and resources and practical advice from other women who have had breast cancer.

The Breast Cancer Network wants women to know about this kit as soon as possible after diagnosis, so please pass on this message.

Policy Discussion Group Ageing Carers

Family and friends caring for someone at home should be valued and supported. What do we need to make this happen?

Join a Discussion Group and help COTA NSW form their position on carers who are growing older.

You don't need to be a carer to learn about this issue!

Wednesday, June 9, 1.30-3.00pm
Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney
Book: 9286 3860 or
info@cotansw.com.au

A One-off Woman -

Recollections of a Life

Lived Full, written by Dorothy Cox, is an amazing story of achievement, service and adventure over the span of her 82 years.

Available from OWN Sydney-\$15

OWN Sydney Notices

Fab Fridays

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11am 4 June at '75'

Occupational therapist, Christie Brown, from the Independent Living Centre NSW, will present equipment and products to make daily tasks easier when life becomes more difficult due to age or illness. Great ideas for ourselves or our loved ones.

11am 11 June at '75'

Discussion with Linda Ralston from the Macular Degeneration Foundation. Imagine being told that you can no longer read, drive or see the faces of family and friends...Linda will outline the risks, symptoms and what can be done. Women over 50 are the most at risk of this disease.

11.30am, 18 June , at '87'

Winter Solstice Lunch

Please bring lunch to share. There will be a raffle and we are asking for donations which will go to Médecins Sans Frontières as we want to do something constructive, however small, in the midst of appalling daily violence throughout the world.

11am, 25 June at '75'

Constable Andrew Jones, Domestic Violence Liaison Officer from The Rocks police station, will talk about personal safety of women at home or when they are out.

Watch your mail in June !

**SUBSCRIPTION AND MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL
REMINDERS FOR 2004-2005
ARE COMING YOUR WAY**

Sunday Sketch Club?

Money's run out for our art classes with artist, Jane Caveney.

We are sad, but to continue to satisfy our creative urges, some of us thought we would like to start a Sunday Sketch Club with pencil sketching, pen and ink, colour wash drawings ... whatever.

If meeting on a Sunday morning interests you, please come along to 75 Windmill Street on 6 June at 10.30 and we'll take it from there.

I'm sure coffee and croissants will get our ideas flowing!

Muriel Hortin

Life-writing Course with Pearlle McNeill

Mondays 21 and 28 June and 5 July, 10.30-4.30pm, at 75 (please see May newsletter for details).

There are still four places available, so if you interested, this is too good an opportunity to miss.

Film group discussion

1.30pm, Tuesday 15 June, at 75, (please note change of day)

The films to be discussed are *To Be and To Have*, *Actors*, *Company* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in ***OWN Matters*** are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Older Women's Network.

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Dorothy Cora, Caroline Davis, Phyllis Gorman, Polly Gow, Muriel Hortin, Joan Johns, Mary McCusker, Jacqueline Schofer, Renee Simons, Ermes Solari, Wilhelmina van Dorp and June West.

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**