

JULIA



WOMEN'S LIBERATION

INSIDE THE MOVEMENT

JULIA RYAN



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Three weeks before she died, Julia asked me to ensure that her memoir was published. She'd been working on what she called 'my writing', a memoir about her experience of Canberra Women's Liberation (CWL), for over twenty years.

Her memoir is based on the notes she kept of nearly every meeting she ever attended and also her personal journals of reflection. It begins with the first meeting in 1970 and traverses events she was involved in until the mid-90s. The topics she covers range from How should we live? to intellectual wrangling with The Dialectic of Patriarchy.

I asked some key people to help me and we quickly agreed that the first principle of our editing would be to stick as closely and as possible to Julia's own words and cadences and structures. This we have done.

She used first names only for the people in her life and the wider movement, adding an identifying initial where more than one person had the same name, eg., Susan M. For people in the public realm, such as politicians and authors, she used the normal full name.

She originally wrote the story as fiction, with eight characters who were amalgams of real people. After she abandoned that approach and moved to the non-fictional style she used thereafter, some of the fictional names leached through the years of re-writing to pose a problem for us. 'Gerda' it turned out was a mash-up of three people – our attributions were correct about half the time but sometimes we had to guess. At the end of the book, you can find a Glossary of Names which we have created to help the reader. We cannot, however, guarantee complete accuracy. If any reader can discern a more likely name attribution, please accept our apology.

We have sought permissions from most people named in any significant way in the text. We have done our best but were not able to find everyone.

Her text includes diary type entries and we have kept her indicators of where and when she was writing a particular piece. We believe these indicators give a sense of the structure of her life in the writing years, the places that were important to her and the fact that her struggle to find space and time to write is a key theme.

We have also appended a list of acronym explanations in case some may not be familiar to all readers.

Biff Ward, Editor.

Dedicated to
my female relatives
and my
feminist sisters

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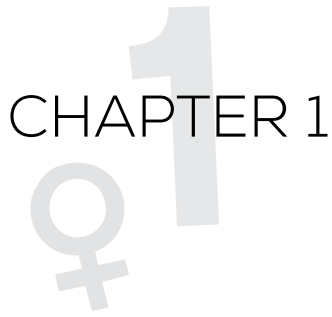
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"Women should always band together. Whenever you have a chance, band together, because collectively, we can be very strong and help each other."

Martha Ansara

Brazen Hussies documentary, 2022



CHAPTER 1

CANNING STREET

It was April 1970. I ran to answer the phone before Bruce. It would be Biff. That night, at the anti-Vietnam war group at Canning St, Biff mentioned the separate meeting of women anti-war activists during the national conference in Sydney. Disapproving murmurs from some of the men: *bourgeois separatism*. Afterwards, to me rushing away with Bruce to relieve the babysitter, Biff had muttered, Let's organise something ourselves. I'll ring you later.

We discussed the Sydney women over our after-school brandy and dries in Biff's living room. Biff went to the women's meeting intending to denounce them for diversionary tactics in the midst of the vital political struggle over Vietnam, but their words hooked into her.

Look, she said, it's our Sydney women friends, and they pointed out we just play a secondary, supporting role to the men in the movement. Everything we say about the effects of colonialism on the Vietnamese, also applies to us as women in this society.

Biff had downed the last of her brandy and dry and moved to the kitchen to prepare dinner for Ian and the kids.

I reflected on my own situation: I felt no desire to play a primary role in the anti-war movement, happy to leave that to Bruce and Ian. On the other hand, I admired Biff's commitment, her political energy, her openness to new ideas and I could see the men's lack of appreciation.

On the phone that autumn evening Biff was saying, I knew it'd be hopeless trying to explain to the men. Let's invite a couple of the Sydney women down one weekend, call a women's meeting at Canning St.

Who was I at this juncture? A secondary school teacher, mother, wife, postgrad student, political activist, living in O'Connor, Canberra, the Fabian paradise. And... daughter of first wave feminist, Edna Ryan. My life was full, busy, stressful.

I said we were very busy for the next couple of months with Vietnam Moratorium activities.

We'll meet in June then. Who should be there?

I hesitated. Daphne, Liese obviously...but shouldn't we ask every woman in the anti-war meetings?

No, I think we should be careful in the first instance. Give it a bit of a think and just ask those who may be on side. I'll get on to the Sydney women and ask Liese to arrange Canning St.

Who was that? Bruce disapproved of phone-callers after 9pm.

Only Biff.

Oh, that Women's Liberation stuff. Krupskaya not Lenin, Qiang Qing not Mao. Causing havoc in the Sydney movement, all your friends.

I felt combative: We're calling a meeting in Canberra.

Bruce snorted, Good luck!

6 June 1970

Eight women came to that first meeting. We were all tertiary educated: schoolteachers, academics or budding academics, women in our twenties and thirties, except for Daphne in her fifties, Thelma in her forties and Louise in her teens. On that Saturday afternoon we sat in the lounge at Canning St listening to the two women from Sydney talking about Women's Liberation for the first time in Canberra.

Apostles, I thought, these Sydney women. Cooney Sandford and my sister Lyndall arrived at Biff's house the night before. They described how the Sydney Women's Liberation group met regularly in Glebe, how it had taken over their lives, how they were called on to speak to the media, to groups around the state. These two postgraduate students planned to run an adult education course for women only, about women's history.

The large, sparsely furnished but carpeted Canning St living room overlooked the winter street through picture windows. Liese shared this group house, which was a centre of radical activities, a lone woman among three male students.

We sat on cushions or beanbags in the warm sunshine trapped in the front corner, with the oil heater against the back wall turned low. I knitted, watching the others from behind the complex Aran Island pattern: Daphne, a veteran political activist, a middle ranking academic despite her age and experience, an authority figure among us; Alyce, returnee from teaching in China, Catholic follower of Liberation theology, anti-Vietnam war activist; Hazel, psychologist from American anti-war movement, Thelma, part-time academic sociologist.

Biff suggested we begin.

Cooney spoke first: For me a breakthrough came when I realised I felt superior to most women I knew. Although I preferred women, men were the important people. I felt shocked to discover that this implied contempt for women. Yet I'm a woman – so this means self-contempt.

Biff nodded. I remembered her revelation last January, after she attended the separate women's meeting as a critic. When she came back to the conference

floor, she noticed how few women spoke, although they made up nearly half the participants. When a woman did speak, she saw the male reaction: what she said was not important, even if she belonged to your faction in the movement.

I wondered about Liese's position in the Canning St group house. Did her male fellow householders help her tidy the room for this meeting? How often was she expected to clean for this house of comrades? Was there a 'male Left' and a 'female Left'?

Lyndall spoke about the social status of Australian women. We've had the vote and legal emancipation in this country for generations but how many of us are in powerful positions? I used to think this was just a matter of time. Gradually more women would be entering politics and so on, but I've discovered that in some spheres women are actually less represented than they were forty or fifty years ago. We're either standing still or going backwards. Why? Something happens inside the women themselves as well as the exterior barriers they encounter.

I lay down my knitting, bent my head, spread my fingers over my eyes. I, who argued loudly for women's equality, was secretly puzzled by my own and other women's failure to push forward when legally the opportunity was there. I began to distinguish between emancipation and liberation. Emancipation was legal equality, the vote, entry to all spheres; liberation was acceptance as a social equal by the culture.

Women were embarking on a struggle for liberation, like the blacks in America and the Vietnamese. They could have told us about the personal vulnerability, damage and exposure of fighting for liberation. Fleetinglly, I thought of Margaret Mead when she warned the American women's movement that men will kill you - who listened then?

Thelma broke in. How has this involvement with Women's Liberation affected your relationships with men?

Cooney smiled, Enormously, of course. My husband and I talk a lot about it and he has some difficulty in accepting me in a different role, but it's all very positive and I feel our relationship's been strengthened.

Daphne looked uneasy. How do you fit your women's meetings into your movement commitments?

Lyndall answered carefully, It's difficult, but we now see our weekly meetings as a priority. How can we help to liberate others if we ourselves are not liberated? In Women's Liberation, it's very important for us to abandon hierarchies and the appearance of hierarchies. We have no formal structures, no executives or standing committees and we always sit in a circle. No one woman is more important than another. We give our particular talents to the group and help each other develop. Meeting without men, we come without their status and the importance that connection often gives us.

The Sydney women sat back. We Canberra women looked at each other. What were we going to do? How to proceed? Who would join us? How could we afford yet another meeting in the midst of the anti-war struggle? Not Tuesdays because Daphne, Alyce and I were watching the ABC TV series on China. We decided on Wednesday nights, weekly. For the time being we would talk about female oppression. We would stay as a small group until we'd worked out the details of our oppression.

Over thirty years later we discovered that ASIO snapped us that day, from a vantage point across the street. Were they in a van, or a compliant neighbour's house? They continued to watch us until the end of 1972, when the new Whitlam Labor government changed ASIO's orientation. When Biff and I collected our files in the early 2000s we found no evidence of an ASIO informer inside Canberra Women's Liberation. Our files provide a useful history of the early days. The ASIO operatives carefully checked names and back stories.

My photo shows me carrying my ubiquitous knitting bag. I was a McFarlane then.

At our next meeting, three more women joined: Deirdre, Susan M and Tamsin. Thelma didn't return, but kept in touch. I think the Women's Electoral Lobby, formed in 1972, was more her cup of tea.

When I began this memoir in 1979, the school holidays provided my writing time. I tried to get away to a quiet place. When I sank into my writing, I began with



Womens Liberation Movement meeting - Mount Ainslie, Canberra 6 June 1970 - HG2882/14
Connie Sandford



Womens Liberation Movement meeting - Mount Ainslie, Canberra 6 June 1970 - David Keir BISSETT - HG2882/7



Womens Liberation Movement meeting - Mount Ainslie, Canberra 6 June 1970 - 1. UNKNOWN, 2. Daphne Eileen GOLLAN, 3. Hazel Eleanor STEIGER - HG2882/24
Louise King



Womens Liberation Movement meeting - Mount Ainslie, Canberra 6 June 1970 - 1. Elizabeth Russell MACDOUGALL, 2. Evelyn Julia McFARLANE - HG2882/19 ✓

The ASIO files, clockwise from top left

Coonie Sandford from Sydney, arriving to speak to the gathering of Canberra women.

Male residents leaving the building before the meeting of women.

Louise King, Daphne Gollan and Hazel Steiger (back view) arriving at Canning St for the first meeting of Women's Liberation, ASIO photo, 6 June 1970.

Biff and Julia arriving at Canning St for the first meeting of Women's Liberation, ASIO photo, 6 June 1970.

descriptions of my surroundings. These descriptions verged on the voluminous, diverting from the main text. These environments are part of my women's movement experience. I shall leave in the descriptions, much edited.

The end of a decade: for me the women's decade. Liz O is putting together a radio program on that theme. Both Liz O's 2XX job and my involvement in Tarlina came from the women's movement, which began for us in that Canning St room nearly ten years ago. I'm struggling with the form: how to present those ten years so that people will feel with me, understand what it was like? Essentially, I am a diarist. No sooner did I begin to write that opening section than I was writing a diary about the experience.

The contemporary women's movement, 'second-wave feminism', began for us in Canberra on that June day in 1970 when the Sydney women ignited us. From the original group of six or seven or eight women (Biff and I can't exactly remember), we grew slowly as we met weekly until the end of the year, delivering discussion papers to each other. Our samizdat phase. As yet no books, apart from Betty Friedan, which we considered too bourgeois. Before photocopiers were in general use we reproduced our papers on Gestetners at our workplaces, or typed carbon copies of articles in emerging US and UK journals. I remember Hazel's paper, *The Penis-less People*, on foolscap sheets, in which she investigated psychological theory from a woman's perspective.

I contributed my thoughts on 'women and education', focusing on the role of women teachers. No copies of this paper remain but I remember saying that women didn't have far to go in achieving equality in education: this at a time when every ACT public high school principal was a white middle-aged male! There was a long way to go in raising my consciousness.

Those Wednesday nights of 1970. Rushing to meetings. Bruce told me years later, he quaked in bed at home, dreading my return. I was excited by new ideas, feelings, attitudes, could not understand his fear, wanted to include him in the new consciousness. But he refused, felt he was already 'conscious', claimed we had 'gone too far'. Later, US theorist Robin Morgan wrote that none of us had gone far enough.

Now Bruce and I understand more, but our relationship did not survive those heady years. I used to weep with regret; now I'm glad to be free.

There was no formal membership, no administrative structure, no hierarchies. Biff found herself the contact person for the group, the media and other organisations, as well as unofficial organiser and facilitator, until one meeting she asked for a sharing of responsibilities. In October I began compiling a newsletter and we constructed a distribution list.

By the end of the 1970 we had about 20 regular meeting attendees. We were seeing the world through different lenses. Susan M drafted a Women's Liberation manifesto.

Sara, then known as Dale, recognised me when she first walked in to the Canning St lounge from an encounter at Sydney University in the mid 1950s. She married her Australian Rugby player in California during the McCarthy era and had then migrated to Sydney. She was amazed to see openly radical students with propaganda stalls in the university quadrangle. Minding the ALP club stall, I sat knitting and she struck up a conversation. She remembers I commented that knitting was a substitute for masturbation. I don't remember the encounter, but it feels right: Edna's Freudian psychiatrist friend, Freidl Fink, had made this observation to her.

In November 1970, we called a public meeting at the Griffin Centre to explain ourselves and to recruit. We'd already been asked to talk at the Humanist Society one Sunday evening; Biff had spoken about Women's Liberation philosophy, and I spoke about the difference between emancipation and liberation. Beryl Henderson, aged 68, leapt from her seat as we finished and said, I've been waiting all my life for you girls!

Beryl at that time was a striking, straight-backed Englishwoman with glossy white upswept hair. As a child she had attended a suffragette meeting with her mother, then trained to be a teacher after losing her fiancé in World War I. Active in the 1930s birth control and abortion movements, elected to her borough council, Beryl remained single, lamenting that married women would not share their husbands with women who lost men in the war. After retirement from primary teaching in

her sixties she spent two years teaching on an Israeli kibbutz before migrating to Victoria. There she worked as a farm housekeeper before settling in Canberra, living in a bedsit, working part time teaching English to migrants.

Bessie Guthrie, a 1920s Bohemian, said the same to the Sydney group. How lonely the years between must have been for those remnants of first wave feminism.

For the Griffin Centre meeting we rotated our speakers, in accordance with our newly learned mode. Lyn was to give my paper on liberation and emancipation with her own annotations, Deirdre to take the chair, Hazel to speak on women's conditioning and Biff again, because she was blossoming as a convincing speaker and was not so anxious about performing while the rest of us felt nervous and tentative, gave an account of suburban neurosis. Most of us sat out front for the questions.

Elizabeth Reid saw our ad in the *Canberra Times* and came to what was her first Women's Liberation meeting. The room was full, perhaps sixty people, men and women. We thought we were doing well: earnest questions, calm reasoned answers. Then from the back row a short, spectacled man asked if Deirdre as chairperson would instruct us all to stand on our chairs. Why? Deirdre asked. But he refused to say, reiterated that he wanted to prove a point. Cries of protest from some of the women in the audience. The man then leapt up and shouted his question: Is Women's Liberation founded by and for ugly women?

Turned out he was the *Canberra Times* satirist. In the general outrage he fled the meeting. Our first group experience of the trivialising, sex-objectifying media attitude. Next day he wrote up the meeting in that vein and we were left apparently powerless. But Beryl wrote a stern, more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger letter to the editor:

It may be...that you have unwittingly done the movement a service; for the inability of an important paper like the *Canberra Times* to be objective in this matter is an additional illustration of the strength of the women's claims that because they are women, it is taken for granted that they and their doings need not be taken seriously.

The Canberra Times, 17 November 1970

We felt energised. Women's oppression was as shocking, even worse, than we thought.

The Canning St days were over. After Liese moved to Sydney then later to Chile, we found our precious box of articles and documents on the back veranda, covered with cat's piss. Careless men, or deliberate sabotage? We decided to meet in our living rooms.

Our numbers kept growing as we moved into 1971 with a big agenda.



Julia in Sweden in 1971. Photo: Ryan family collection.



CHAPTER 2

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

1971

Throughout 1971, our weekly meetings in Sylvia's and Helen S's living rooms grew crowded with women. Some new members came from the public meeting, but more came from word of mouth and the newsletter list. Meetings usually focussed on particular issues like abortion or childcare or else we considered material from US like 'The Personal is Political', and 'Notes from the Second Year', and there was always room for the latest news from interstate groups, the US and UK. Tamsin had a direct link to Juliet Mitchell. The first issue of *Mejane*, a women's liberation newspaper, published by a Glebe collective, came out that March.

Schools and organisations asked us to speak about Women's Liberation (WL). Like nuns, we always went in pairs or threes. WL spoke to Lions, Rotary, VIEW clubs, and high schools: Telopea Park, Lyneham, Watson, Dickson and the then all-male Daramalan College. When Susan M spoke to Braidwood Lions, she was presented

with a women's old whalebone corset. She was unamused. The media loved depicting us as 'bra burners', but sympathetic coverage came from an article about us in the *Canberra Times* women's section on 2 December 1971.

We were later dubbed 'humourless feminists' but we didn't use the feminist word until much later. We saw ourselves as Women's Liberationists, newly sprung into the late 20th century world, unaware of the great feminist history which came before. Consciousness raising groups began that year: in some ways similar to therapy groups, but without formal leadership. Women examined their lives, their histories, their relationships through new eyes. Some of us thought that consciousness raising (CR) was our most important change agent: women who joined the movement later, without the CR experience, seemed to lack an important dimension. In the mid 1970s a small Women's Electoral Lobby group asked me to facilitate consciousness raising with them at Lobelia St. I attended their first meeting, gave them a 'how to proceed with CR' from one of the American publications, then withdrew.

With my family on Bruce's sabbatical leave, I missed 1971 in CWL. We travelled widely across North Asia, Europe and Israel. To Bruce's dismay, I sorely missed my CWL comrades. On the ship to Hong Kong, I argued so fiercely about women's equality with an elderly American doctor that his wife pleaded me to stop, as his heart was compromised.

On the Trans-Siberian railway two Russian men visited our compartment to present me an International Women's Day card. In Sweden I tried to contact Grupp 8, the original Women's Liberationists there, but only succeeded in collecting some propaganda pamphlets. When bus-touring with Edna through Switzerland I was shocked to discover that women there had achieved the vote only that year, 1971! On an Israeli kibbutz I gathered information about collective living and childcare. On my return I told *Canberra Times* columnist Gay Davidson about the Swedish pamphlet, 'Stop "helping mother" with the housework', aiming at men taking responsibility. I felt annoyed, hurt by her mocking tone in the column item, speculating about how my husband felt about this. To his credit, Bruce was a sympathetic, if untrained, joint houseworker.



Top: International Women's Day, Petrie Plaza, Canberra, March 1972.

Above: Bremer St clothes line after a screenprinting workshop.

Right: Carol Ambrus designed posters which were printed in the Bremer St garage, reconfigured as our screenprinting workshop.



The year 1972 proved even bigger for CWL. I arrived back in time for our first conference, held at the YMCA ski lodge at Guthega, January 1972. I met the new members from 1971, and Suzanne from the *Mejane* collective. We discussed the material we had to hand, but we were never a policy group, despite Susan M's urge for a manifesto. We focussed on investigating issues, consciousness raising, 'building the movement'. We happily accepted the six demands formulated by the Glebe group, published in a pamphlet for International Women's Day, 8 March 1972:

1. The right to work
2. Equal pay – one rate for the job
3. Equal opportunity for work and education
4. Free childcare and pre-school activities
5. Free contraceptives
6. Safe legal abortion on request

Then we moved our meetings to 12 Bremer St, a three-bedroom brick house rented to us by Judy, a sympathiser. Eileen, then a postgraduate student, lived there and the house was a hive of activity. At the beginning we cleaned and painted the house thoroughly; Beryl scrubbed the woodwork so effectively there was no need for paint. So many working bees, rehearsals for Jo G's street theatre on International Women's Day, poster-making workshops. In 1981 I wrote that the Bremer St period was the heyday of Canberra Women's Liberation.

At every Wednesday evening meeting new women arrived so we organised briefing sessions to explain our philosophy. What did we say? Probably an updated version of what Cooney and Lyndall said to us in June 1970.

Biff later reminisced to Sara in an oral history interview for the National Library,

'...we had these big screenprinting working bees once we'd got to Bremer St and we turned the garage there into a screenprinting workshop, which Eileen... knew a lot about. We'd have these working bees, working really hard, printing, printing, printing. We'd print posters for meetings and public meetings and maybe demonstrations. Often on Friday nights we set up a stall in Garema Place

in Civic and gave out literature about Women's Liberation. We also sold cotton underpants with women's symbols screenprinted on the crutch. We sold tea towels that had pictures of little women saying 'Shitworkers of the world unite.'

Among many others Jo A, Liz O and Jo G joined us that year. Jo G invited some of us for a weekend at her family's coast house at McKenzie's beach. Beryl showed me how to wash and oil my long 70s hair.

In Sydney Edna held back from Women's Liberation, partly because she then lived in Canley Heights, a far west suburb, with a full life campaigning for equal pay in her workplace through her union, and partly because she was suspicious of the communist women in the Glebe group, despite the enthusiasm of her two daughters. Late in 1972, Edna retired, moved to Park St in the city, and joined the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), much more to her reformist taste. She came to Canberra for the WEL national conference in January 1973, where she took the lead in women's work issues and met Beryl. The two old feminist campaigners became close friends.

We began to use new language. Now more aware of the feminist past, we were 'second-wave feminists'. 'Male chauvinism' was popular, but 'patriarchy' came a little later, as did the term 'sexism'. The first time I used the word 'sexism' in the Social Science staffroom at Woden Valley High, my colleagues froze, uncertain: a new swear word? Something about sex?

Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) emerged in 1972, convened in Canberra by Gail, who had become active in the women's movement in the US while on posting with her husband and rushed to our group upon her return.

WEL joined CWL at Bremer St, focussing on confronting candidates with women's issues for the late 1972 elections. Some CWLers – Beryl, Elizabeth, Sara – joined Gail in WEL, retaining membership of both groups, but most women's libbers thought WEL 'not radical enough', Biff reflected later. Sara said WL was not about reform, but about attitude. We approved of WEL but preferred to focus on what Biff called 'the nitty gritty of oppression'. Through WEL the women's movement began to use the term 'feminist'. With the victory of the Whitlam government in December 1972, WEL women had great expectations for the promotion of feminist issues and



Edna and Beryl 1980s. Photo: Ryan family collection.

called a national conference in Canberra for early January 1973 to work on policy and strategies.

Gay Liberation also began in Australia in the early 1970s. None in the first CWL group identified as lesbian, though some did later. Women who identified as lesbian began to join us and big discussions about lesbianism occurred at meetings during 1971-72. Lesbians found some acceptability and a forum at CWL meetings. The media often conflated women's liberation with lesbianism. Some heterosexuals decided that for political correctness they should identify as lesbians: political lesbians. Radical feminism emerged, often confused with separatism. I'll discuss these issues in later chapters.

CWL grew bolder. We decided to call a national Women's Liberation conference on 'theory'. Biff and Eileen, supported by Daphne and Susan M, nicknamed themselves 'the Hevvies'. They threw themselves into the organisation, hired a guesthouse at Mt Beauty in Victoria for late January 1973, advertised in *Mejane* and other WL journals. Women came from all over the country. The 'Mt Beauty Conference', a watershed, went into the collective memory of the 20th century Australian Women's Liberation Movement.

Bruce applied for a Readership at the University of Adelaide, partly, he admitted later, to lure me away from my CWL friends. Reluctantly I agreed to accompany him with the boys and we set off in January 1973. Within two weeks I had contacted Jill, Sue, Margi and Deborah in Adelaide WL, arranging to join Jill and Margi for the drive to Mt Beauty. We arrived a day early and I remember sitting on a sunny hillside starting a diary. I continued to write diaries until mid 2021 when, in my mid-eighties, I decided to switch to memoir.

The shape of the Mt Beauty Conference looked like the following table, though this is not a complete list.

Themes

The Historical Origin of Female Oppression – Biology, Private property, Is the Matriarchy a Myth?

Sisterhood – How can women unite?

The Patriarchy – The nature of Authority, the Family

Feminism – liberal, radical, socialist feminism

Australian Sexism – do you wake in fright?

Papers

The Problems of Political Participation of women in Australia – Barbara Wishart

The history and culture of women – Barbara Alyson

Radical Lesbianism – Hobart WL

How, where and with whom does a radical feminist work? – Martha Kay

Australian Sexism – Greenborough, Vic WL

Juliet Mitchell – Canberra WL

Women and Work – Canberra WL

How Women's Liberation can be Revolutionary despite the Middle Class Base – Louise King

The Organisation of Women's Liberation – Maggie Wilson

Women's Liberation and Western Society – Bronwyn Dyson

Themes and papers tell only part of the story of Mt Beauty. For most of the participants it was our first extended get-together: we were women who had read about each other in the emergent newsletters and journals across Australia and now we met for the first time. Conflicts and misinterpretations were rife. The Hobart women, a largely black-clad quadrumvirate, were convinced that Biff and Eileen had deliberately lost their paper on Radical Lesbianism because of homophobia, whereas the Hevvies had mislaid it during the last-minute rush to Gestetner the conference

papers (we found out later that someone had picked it up to read but then put it in a bookcase instead of the pile of other Mt Beauty papers).

Conversations continued far into the night. The final night, before my departure for Adelaide, Ros from Canberra revealed her affair with Bruce in the 1960s. I felt shocked, stunned, betrayed, ashamed: all those emotions familiar in that situation. Turned out that many of my CWL friends had known of the affair but, as it was long over, spared me the pain. As I left Mt Beauty, I determined to leave Bruce but on my arrival in Adelaide late that night he made a full confession about Ros and another, and pledged future devotion to our marriage. So, I stayed in Adelaide for another nine months.

Eileen also moved to Adelaide after Mt Beauty, to a junior academic position. She lived in North Adelaide with Jill and Margi. My circle of women's liberationists grew: I attended meetings and a feminist education conference. Edna came at Easter, Biff in September, then a pregnant Lyndsay visited, and Deborah introduced us to pregnant Denise. I remember sitting on Glenelg beach with the two pregnant women and Deborah, watching the sun sink.

My teaching career felt stalled. I had climbed to the first rung of the ladder at my Canberra school but started at the bottom in SA. Woodville High, a large school in a working-class area, ran on strict disciplinarian lines for both students and staff. In third term I reduced my hours to give myself more space. I even considered applying for a job at the local Catholic high school but as a non-Catholic I wasn't eligible.

Edna and Lyndall arrived in the August holidays and with my sons, Neil and Keir, we travelled to Alice Springs in a tour bus, delayed by unseasonal rains, which prevented us reaching Uluru.

As she left Adelaide, Edna warned me: my marriage wasn't going well.

Eileen, moving in academic circles, had become aware of Bruce developing a relationship with one of his postgraduate students. In sisterhood, she informed me. When I confronted him, Bruce would not give up the relationship. I stuck it out for a week, then, when Bruce disappeared with his lover for three days, telephoned Edna for help. She was busy with preparation for her landmark presentation on behalf

of WEL at the Minimum Wage case before the Industrial Court, so she sent Lyndall, who flew in, an angel of deliverance. We set off for Canberra in the VW station wagon with Neil. Keir, at Norwood High with his first girlfriend, elected to stay in Adelaide. Bruce's colleagues were shocked that I left him car-less.

While I lived in Adelaide, CWL had set up a tent embassy at Parliament House in support of the McKenzie-Lamb private members' abortion bill. In her National Library of Australia oral history interview, Biff recalled, 'We maintained that tent embassy outside Parliament House for, I think, about three months...people stayed overnight. The night before the final vote in parliament, it was looking like no-one would be there because a huge Catholic contingent had come into town. The fear was that our tent would get attacked in the night. Drusilla and I volunteered because we were less fearful for some reason... We didn't get attacked, but it was very cold.'

The bill failed to pass. Alyce, Deirdre, Helen R, Anne-Marie – radical Catholics, all stayed members of CWL. They decided abortion is a personal choice for women, not for them, but they respected all women's right to choose.

Later, when Right to Life MPs first introduced an anti-abortion bill, Ros organised an undercover demonstration at Parliament House. We planned to pose as pregnant women, with helium balloons under our dresses, and release the balloons in the public gallery of the House of Representatives during the debate. We assembled in Kings Hall, but the helium balloons proved uncontrollable and began escaping. Suspicions aroused, parliament guards tried to usher us out and, in the confusion, all the balloons rose to the high ceiling. As we left, we saw guards frantically trying to capture the balloons with long boathooks.

In 1973, Prime Minister Whitlam decided he needed a formal Women's Adviser, the first such appointment in the world. Lyndall, Elizabeth, Deborah, Anne S applied and on the short list with thirteen others, came to Canberra for the selection deliberations. CWL member Carol designed Superwoman T-shirts, which CWL presented to the seventeen finalists. Most wore them to the informal party which the PM and Margaret Whitlam attended at Gordon and Margaret Bilney's house in Hughes. Elizabeth wore Bremer St screenprinted underpants with the WL symbol on the crotch to her interview. Whitlam appointed Elizabeth: I suspect he valued



1977 cycling trip, Julia in UK. Photo: Marian May.

her quiet, intellectual demeanour, in contrast to the more vociferous women. Little did he realise Elizabeth was more radical than most of the applicants. CWL sold the T-shirts at the Friday evening stalls. I still have mine somewhere.

After my return, I continued to attend the weekly CWL meetings at Bremer St. Thanks to Elizabeth and WL lobbyists, the Whitlam government's policies created new opportunities for women's involvement. Over the next two years, grants became available for community child-care centres, women's health centres and the first women's refuges, and women often dropped out of CWL meetings as they volunteered for these new activities. Jobs suitable for feminist women appeared in the public service and some CWLers, like Gail and Sara, became 'femocrats'.

Lyndall, as convenor of the grant application for the Leichhardt Women's Health Centre in Sydney, received a personal cheque for \$33,000 to start the clinic! In 1974 she came to Canberra to join the Special Ministry of State and then the Women's Affairs Branch in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

In 1975, International Women's Year (IWY) began the UN Decade of Women. CWL and Canberra WEL collaborated on several projects. Mary F from WEL, and I convened a committee in 1974 to set up a Canberra women's refuge. We felt no need to squat in an empty house so, after a series of meetings with the government, managed to persuade the authorities to provide us with a three-bedroom government house in Watson. Beryl opened the refuge on International Women's Day (IWD) in 1975. We ran a roster of volunteers to staff the refuge and several women like Harriet and Jen found their way into the movement via this work. Pamela met with Sybille from Lifeline who was then joined by Lizi B to run the first training course for volunteers – training which focused on reflective listening.

Edna angrily dismissed the refuge work as wasting women's energy on charities which should be undertaken by government. 'We have to make a start before persuading governments to take over,' I said, but later I burnt out. Today Beryl Women's Refuge is run entirely on government grants.

Judy, our generous landlady, needed Bremer St for her family, so we reverted to meeting in our living rooms. We had some enthusiastic new members: the two

Pamelas and Jenny ran a women's film festival. The garage workshops ceased. The Abortion Counselling Service, which Beryl had helped set up, was thrown out of the Beauchamp House Family Planning accommodation as a result of Right to Life machinations. Together with Abortion Counselling and WEL, we pressured the government for access to a rented government house. Skilled at submission writing after three years of Labor government, we put our case to the Minister. The result was Lobelia St in O'Connor, a three-bedroomed monocrete house for which we paid rent.

We set about painting and furnishing with enthusiasm. Someone supplied some cast-off carpeting and we had fun fitting the multi-colour patchwork together. Ginny painted wondrous murals celebrating the moon.

For a while Ginny lived there but soon the rooms were needed for the telephone information service, abortion counselling and rape crisis. Penny ran a small feminist bookshop and library out of a suitcase. Horticulturalist women established a low maintenance Japanese garden. CWL continued to meet at Lobelia St with smaller numbers into 1976.

IWY pervaded our lives. Elizabeth, Gail, Sara and Edna attended the UN Conference in Mexico, reporting back on Australia's leading role. Edna cut her long blonded hair, adopting a frizzy perm for the journey. A hostile media scrutinised Elizabeth as Whitlam's Women's Adviser, labelling the Mexico trip a 'junket', mocking her work. Undaunted, she organised the national Women and Politics Conference, with enough budget to bring women from all over Australia plus international speakers, to the ANU venue in September. The Conference lasted a week. I remember women from remote areas on a continual high of excitement, the conference daily newspaper, the huge attendance at every session. Elizabeth asked WL and WEL for papers and nominated us for media interviews: I appeared on daytime TV. Biff gave a paper on Why Women's Liberation? expecting a handful of devotees, but 200 attendees swamped the lecture theatre.

The mainstream media was appalled by 'the cost and irrelevance of women's issues', especially as the Whitlam government had run into economic trouble. Enraged by the particularly scathing response of the *Canberra Times*, a group of us occupied

their Mort St offices. A photo of me sitting on a desk wearing a black beret, flashed across the nation. The conference forged on: a bubble of energy, animated discussion and enlightenment.

Ground down by media attacks, anxious for the survival of the Whitlam government, Elizabeth's standing with Whitlam could not survive the multi-focused activist eruption at the closing gathering. She felt obliged to resign in October. She fled the country and did not return to live in Canberra until the next century. Sara took up the banner, continued Elizabeth's work into the succeeding Fraser government. Through Elizabeth, WL and WEL had sown seeds that changed Australian women's lives over the coming decades. Later, Sara fictionalised Elizabeth's experience in her novel, *West Block*.

CWL's last burst of activity came with our Anarchist Feminist Conference in October 1975. At the Feminism and Socialism Conference in Melbourne in 1974, Biff, Daphne, Susan M and I identified a gap in feminist political discussion. Daphne's admiration of the early 20th century Russian anarchist women had washed through us, so we chose to investigate that perspective at another national conference that we organised. We were concerned to identify the primary oppression of women: was it economic? cultural? biological? We organised a dance with an emerging women's rock band. I remember someone saying: these are the hero icons of the women's movement.

While CWL meetings petered out in 1976, our enthusiasm charged on into the many new directions we had generated from our small beginnings in 1970. We had changed our worlds – and so very much more.



CHAPTER 3

SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

December 1980 O'Connor

In past weeks I've read *The Wanderground* by Sally Miller Gearheart and *Benefits* by Zoë Fairbairns. Two very different futures for the women's movement, yet these kinds of speculation were also part of the first wave of feminism. *The Wanderground* is fabulously spiritual while *Benefits* exudes the bitterness of women's struggle against poverty. I wonder if the US environment, as for *The Wanderground*, produces spiritual optimism as a contrast to the decline of the British welfare state depicted in *Benefits*? I would like to believe in the future of women's communities, the contemporary version of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* of 1915, but find Fairbairns's vision more convincing, though offended by her contemptuous treatment of the spiritual side of the women's movement. The spiritual character, Judy, is a mother who regularly abandons her son, lacks commitment to the struggle and ends her life by leaping from the women's tower block during a police attack.

I follow the British feminist struggle in *Spare Rib*, seems joyless, so grim. I want to reject it, yet class consciousness allied to an insistence on an autonomous women's struggle is intellectually attractive to me. It points up a gap in the impressions coming from the United States, where joy springs from new rituals and positive imaginings. Even the horrors that Mary Daly depicts imply movement to a creative and powerful future.

Here I go, wishing for a synthesis again. I have spent so much time trying to integrate Marxism and feminism, and now materialism and spirituality.

In our Canberra movement we began with a strictly materialist base. Our papers and discussions clung to notions of relationship to the means of production. Gradually, through our discussions of sexuality, our grip shifted and we continued for whole weeks without reference to the economic base. Materialism didn't seem to answer all our questions.

This morning I listened to Liz O's program on Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, in which Suzanne talked about the writer and the book. Suzanne recounted the debate between Daly and Juliet Mitchell in which Juliet, a true representative of the British women's movement, said, You can't ignore Marx and Freud. Mary replied, But I have.

I can deal with Freud in a women's movement context, but Marx is another case.

My thoughts on Freud were delivered at a Women's Studies lecture this year where I said:

The scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries laid the basis of modern science and industrialism. Having denied the irrational, the industrial culture was left with an uneasy awareness of its existence, and it seems to me that there was a need to rationalise the irrational, to acknowledge it in patriarchal capitalist terms. I see people like Freud as coming out of that need of patriarchal capitalism. Having triumphed in the 18th century, it was now necessary to admit that certain irrationalities existed, but not in the way that witches, or the pagans, or the Church thought they existed. They required a new mode of description, fitting in with science and capitalism. And so came the whole Freudian analysis, the 'discovery' of the unconscious by Freud, who made it perfectly respectable

to write enormous books about the irrational, using the scientific method. The very act of bringing all this material back into respectability in a greatly modified form, unrecognisable for a 15th century witch, nevertheless led to the upsurge of the feminist/spiritualist counter: the kind of thing Mary Daly writes about as 'spinning', taking women's consciousness into the next stage.

That idea came to me during the Marxist Feminist Conference in Sydney, June 1977. Fourteen Marxist feminists were eating at the Tai-Yuan restaurant in Haymarket and I, sitting next to Liz O, tried to explain why I skipped one of the theory sessions to consult Suzanne about numerology. Liz O, still a committed Marxist, was shocked by my apparent defection to the non-material. Last year I heard Liz O explain my Freud theory in much better words. A few months ago, she 'went over the edge', abandoned Marx and became a radical feminist. Daphne and Susan M are watching us, disapproving. Liz O's defection, my teetering, Mary Daly and various personal difficulties account for the recent demise of the *Redfems*. But more about the *Survivors* and the *Redfems* later.

July 1981 O'Connor

Some of the first wave feminists became spiritualists. They attended seances, contacted spirits through mediums. What were they doing?

Our Feminist Spirituality Group in 1978 didn't work for me. We set it up at a time when personal difficulties made us impatient with each other, and new women entering the group didn't understand our interactions. We tried moon consciousness and some meditation, but the unspoken hostilities and differing levels of commitment dwindled the group. I wrote only once about the spirituality group, in my personal journal. Why did I not take it more seriously? Here is my entry:

4.2.78 Our Spirituality group met at my place on Thursday night. I put much energy into keeping the circle together, then felt uneasy because J talked a lot. Liz O and I fell asleep. Not happy with the evening - more doing and less talking required. I could understand what J was saying but couldn't relate to much of it. I find to my surprise that all this is much more complicated than I thought and that my particular feelings/powers don't seem to be general or shared. What are

my powers? Hard to identify but something to do with the ability to sometimes bring peace, tranquillity, reconciliation.

Jo G must have been talking about the spiritual consciousness of women in a manner too close to biological determinism. I maintain that our women's consciousness comes from our common experience of patriarchy rather than our particular reproductive powers. To that extent I remain a materialist. So, my search has been for a materialist explanation of what is termed 'spirituality'. I began it with that statement on Freud and the scientific investigation of the irrational unconscious. I shy away from occultism as well as biological determinism.

Glimmerings of a new perspective are part explanation of my present difficulties. I began an intense personal investigation seven years ago, an attempt to be open to new ideas after the strong materialist bias of my younger days. Explorations included healing circles, meditation, studies of Buddhism, Taoism, I Ching and occasional attendances at Anglican church services in Australia and England. I remain attracted both to the harmony of the Tao and a dialectical explanation of society but the need for investigation is passing. I found much to reject: the exclusivity and patriarchy of Christianity, the misogyny in Eastern religions. I believe in the personal power of meditation, whilst rejecting the institutions erected around that power. I need to develop my own meditative practices. To that end I am attending a Buddhist meditation retreat this weekend with Pamela.

A further insight into the collapse of our Spirituality Group: such an investigation needs as much commitment and hard work as any of our other enterprises. I depended on 'things coming right', smothering my unease. To work together in the right spirit required an honesty about our feelings for each other I was not able to admit.

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Shy about sexuality, I listened on the sidelines when the topic came up at the early Women's Liberation meetings. Hazel gave her famous paper entitled *The Penis-less People*. Very structured and academically referenced, it was one of our early roneoed publications, sold or given away at our Friday evening/Saturday morning trestle stalls in Civic. Those were our 'samizdat' days when papers were

typed, passed from hand to hand and I kept all my women's stuff in one manilla folder. *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* was another smudged treasure. In those pre-photocopier days, someone had retyped the original American paper on a waxed stencil for Gestetner printing.

I took Merle, visiting from Brisbane, to Hazel's Canning St discussion. Afterwards we rushed home to share some of the excitement with our husbands. But Bruce couldn't overcome his feelings of exclusion and the evening ended with a violent outburst: he punched and shattered a glass door.

Eileen delivered a much-discussed paper, *Sex and the Single Girl*, in 1971. That was the time that she and Sara grew closer. Sara, still married, mother of four and would-be writer, envied Eileen her freedom, her research grant, her youth and seeming clarity. Eileen envied Sara's clear role, her apparent emotional and economic security. Then one day they got stoned together and shared their insecurities.

Eileen gained a reputation for expertise on sexuality and Women's Liberation. I made notes on her *New Thoughts on Sexuality* at the Bremer St Women's House in November 1972. I started my women's movement notebook that year with these notes among the first entries:

Eileen: Does the Women's Liberation Movement have a coherent view on sexuality? 'Good sexuality'?

We present contrasting faces: the puritanical – against 'Playboy' images and the licentious – braless, brazen, public airing of abortion.

This apparent contradiction does have a coherent view. If people who think women should be chaste are against us, and Playboy readers are against us as wowsers this shows more about them than us. Both ideologies rule out women's independent will, share a common viewpoint that woman is the object of man's pursuit, and differ only in their notions of how women should receive this role.

The value of the debate over orgasms, clit versus cunt, has opened up a frank discussion for women (and men) to confront their own sexuality. So far Women's Liberation has affirmed women's active sexual role and demanded the right to orgasm.

Is the 'right to orgasm' a demand only within the present terms of reference, which equate sexuality with genitalia?

There are two camps in the movement: sex doesn't matter much, e.g. Daphne Dinsmore in *Notes from the Third Year*. There is too much sex around, with bombardments from admass. Women have always been regarded in sexual terms; sexual freedom is basically a male idea. Women have been denied access to the realms of intellect and will. Sex is the 'opiate of the people'. Compare this with Freud on culture. Sexual energy has to be repressed in order to transform (rechannel?) it to cultural energy (Reich's notion). Socialist feminist Juliet Mitchell says that 'sexual freedom' could lead to new forms of neo-capitalism, becoming a commodity. Anti-establishment people may have the illusion they are getting somewhere but they are perhaps mistaken by repressive tolerance. The state is seen as more liberal these days, but sexual freedom may be contained in an upper class, with lower class women remaining sex objects. Sexual freedom is a luxury.

Sex matters a lot, according to Greer in *The Female Eunuch*. All energy is libidinous and generates other creative energy, hence 'female eunuch' refers to a lack of sexual energy. If women want to regain energy, they must start with the sexual. Such people are anti economic determinist and believe in psycho-sexual bases of living patterns. Anyone concerned with freedom has to start with sexual relationships and patterns. Firestone says much the same. Another variant is that wars are caused by repressed sexuality.

What is to be done? Greer says stop making the penis a weapon. Mitchell says post-revolutionary behaviour is not appropriate to pre-revolutionary society and may even hinder the revolution.

From a Bremer St discussion:

Susan M: I'm troubled by Dinsmore's idea that people have a set amount of sexual energy to be carefully husbanded.

Eileen: We have to differentiate between sexual acts and a life of sexuality. Sexuality may be tied to certain ways of life.

Daphne: I'm intrigued by the two schools of thought on feminist analysis of sexuality. It's like the classic argument between the anarchists and the organised Marxists. Greer is the anarchist and Dinsmore the organised Marxist.

But the others were more interested in the nature of sexuality.

Sara: How can we define it? Where does sensuality fit? Is sexuality part of sensuality?



Sara in the 1970s. Photo: Sara Dowse.

The meeting ended like most at Bremer St that year, with chat over tea, not yet herbal, and fully caffeinated coffee in the sparse kitchen, trying to work out where we individually fitted in this schema. I quietly decided I was with the Dinsmore position but could see that Susan M and Sara were excited by Greer.

Back to Eileen's question, those contrasting faces remain, both now developed with more complexity. On the Germaine Greer side we have had the explosion of lesbian sexuality and the unionisation of sex workers, while on the Dinsmore side came the feminist attack on pornography, the creation of rape crisis centres and the campaign against sexual harassment in the workplace.

Keeping a clear view has been hard. I am involved in working out how to deal with sexual harassment in schools. Ideally the women, students and teachers, should have their consciousness raised sufficiently to deal with situations as they arise. I talked about this with Rosemary R, the Counter-Sexism Coordinator in the Schools Office. The problem is to expose cases of male abuse of power while protecting homosexuals from homophobia. We decided on three tactics:

- franker discussions of sexuality in the teacher workshops already held in some schools
- discussion of sexual harassment in the Equal Opportunity Conference organised for 1981
- bringing sexual harassment up as an issue at the Teachers' Federation Council, where after years of hard work there is some sympathy for feminist issues.

We felt nervous.

I adopt a serious, clinical approach to sexuality, which can be crippling and inhibited. And while I was writing this, three Tarlina women were down at the pub having a real conversation about sexuality. They talked about the difficulty of 'smashing monogamy' when their deepest feelings prevented them from involvement in more than one sexual relationship at a time. Russian feminist Kollontai, grappling with the problem in the early days of the Bolshevik revolution, opted for serial monogamy. The Tarlina women agreed that the realistic way of undermining monogamy was to

develop, extend, deepen the other, non-sexual relationships in their lives. This may be an effective tactic, but I doubt whether it achieves their object: freedom from emotional damage. In making our non-sexual relationships more important, we open ourselves to more pain. I was unconsciously following that path in the early days of Women's Liberation.

'Emotional adultery', Bruce called it. He resented the loss of my attention, my energy turned to women friends. I no longer noticed when he stayed out nights, came home drunk. No more fights to assuage his guilt. He began drinking less, spending more time with our sons, but still, I didn't notice. With Australian troops out of Vietnam, his anti-war movement faded away while my women's movement grew to absorb my whole life. His envy grew.

I can't talk further with Eileen about sexuality since she left for Mexico. Biff visited Eileen in Mexico and they still correspond. Biff says that Eileen now makes socialism her priority, finding Western feminism embarrassing in that environment. Someone wrote on a door in the ANU dunnies, 'Eileen, where are you now that we need you?' But it seems that we will never have that Eileen back.

In the early days I felt disturbed by the accusations that Women's Liberation was lesbian. We seemed so much more than our sexuality; I thought that the issue was trivial and diversionary. When our first openly lesbian couple joined the group, we tried to show how accepting we were. They behaved in most ways as a heterosexual couple, and this bothered some of us. Biff began talking about 'coupleism', which joined 'sexism' and 'ageism' in our vocabulary that year.

In 1972 Claire led a discussion at Bremer St on lesbian sexuality, reflections after reading *Women Identified Women* in *Notes from the Third Year*. We were then in our third year, while the American movement was in its fourth.

Claire began: When I first joined the movement I used to react with horror when people said, Oh, they're just a mob of lesbians. Now I admit I'm a lesbian. The *Women Identified Women* article says homosexuals are by their position revolutionary because they are outside society. A person can't become a homosexual overnight, nor can it be a political decision, like some Sydney

women who decided men are no good and made the decision to be lesbian: this is a cop out. Homosexual is used as a label, by both society and homosexual, when person should be the label. By becoming feminists, we are stepping out of roles like wife, mother and thus we are accused of the most extreme form of this: lesbianism. We don't seem to be getting very far in stepping out of roles.

Eileen interrupted: Is lesbianism 'the one road to freedom' from man's oppression?

Claire: No. This is not true because lesbians still live in the male-dominated society. Not every feminist should become lesbian but should learn to relate to women in the way they relate to men.

Sara: I have never really learned to relate to men as I do to women.

Beryl: What does 'lesbian' mean? What does 'relate' mean?

Sara: A feeling of rapport. I can't play flirting games with men.

Beryl: Are you talking about friendship?

Daphne: Our lesbian couple say lesbianism is a sexual preference for women, and that only.

Eileen: What happened to those Sydney women who made a political decision to be lesbian?

Claire didn't know.

Eileen: I can see that theoretically it can be a neat decision, but I can't see the emotion suddenly developing for those reasons.

Daphne: In the article we were advised to go round considering which women were sexually attractive to us. I find this horrible, using women as sex objects. My early life was a disaster, totally alienated from men. I've always found it easier to relate to women, but men find it easy to relate to me. I'm fascinated by relationships and so men think I get on well with them. I've no difficulty in finding a way of talking.

Beryl: I regard *passion* as the relationship we were to discuss. Do all lesbians feel passion for women? Passion has nothing to do with politics, or conscious decisions. The lesbian couples I have known were really in love and I simply can't discuss it in your terms.

Claire: Lesbians are much more likely to have long-term relationships than male homosexuals.

Daphne: Is sex innately related to personality or is it a thing in itself? I have been horrified by reading Oscar Wilde's obsession with short relationships with male criminals, yet he was a sensitive artistic person.

But no one picked up Daphne's question. Everyone was looking inward.

Lyn: I can't remember ever being terribly keen on men, I was so relieved to hear a definition of *male chauvinist* because something clicked, and I could explain my dislike of some men I have known.

Eileen: I once had a close woman friend who told me she loved me, and I withdrew.

Claire: Most of my Gay Liberation friends now think that most people are bisexual, obviously unconsciously.

Eileen: Claire, I think that you began by making a call on us, but I don't think we've responded.

Claire: Why, with all of you saying you get on better with women, do you draw the line at sexual experience?

Lyn: Are women more sexually repressed than men? So fewer lesbians declare themselves?

Julia: Have we considered the idea of low sexuality? Some people may not feel particularly hetero, homo or bi?

No response. I wondered if they were all highly sexed.

You can see the confusion at that stage. I recorded, but obviously didn't hear, what Beryl was saying about passion. That was the clue.

At the first Women and Labour Conference, Sydney 1978, Lesley described herself as a 'heterosexual lesbian'. I was intrigued at the time but have since decided that the label fits me. My closest relationships are with women, but I am sexually attracted only to men, and very few of them. That could describe most of the women at Claire's discussion.

April 1981, Tarlina

Our sexuality continues to shift about. Biff returned from the US saying she wanted to be exclusive in sexual relations. Last week Susan M said casually she was choosing to be celibate for a while. The phrase 'radical celibacy' has been around for some time. What does this mean? Were women really able to tailor their sexual response to a political climate? Liz O announced that she wanted to discuss sexuality at the next Tarlina women's 'together time'.

Early in 1978 I decided to find out more about people's sexuality, and thus my own. 'Ask people how they feel about their sexuality,' advised Paddy.

News of the investigation flew about. How was it progressing? What had I discovered? Liz O and Daphne demanded to be interviewed. I tired of the project long before my enthusiastic respondents.

Biff said that one's sexuality was one's core, one's central self, but others were less certain. Susan M counted her number of sexual encounters, said they were part of her quest for affection, and was surprised by the total. So was I. Daphne was comfortable with her sexuality.

Conclusions? After three years of desultory investigation there are no generalisations. I can still say what I said at Bremer St in 1972. Talking should have helped, but it has only assisted in talking more openly. The central mystery remains. I don't understand the differences between women's sexual responses. Childhood repression seems to have inhibited some, triggered others. The same is true for peak experience, first experience and rape.

Thinking about sexuality made me thoroughly miserable. I wrote a poem,

On Sexuality:

Once I drew my sexuality
Flamelike, small, steady, burning yellow
Growing when shared, leaping upward, outward
Reds and oranges surrounding the yellow.
Others drew lines which curved and looped
Or many-faced objects or diagrams
No two alike. I am bothered
How can we share our dissimilarities?

Pamela wrote in the Tarlina journal:

This morning in the kitchen we had a long talk about how we relate to people, especially friends compared with lovers, and how we fill our needs. One idea was that we should be prepared to enter into deep encounters (not necessarily fucking though often sexual) for brief periods. Our expectations close us off and our desire to prolong positive relationships causes us to hang on. Both of these are related to fear and trying to define things. If we 'parcel off' or complete an encounter at the time we flow more freely to the next, not left jagged. Within a major relationship this kind of completing of cycles is necessary to allow us to live in the present. I think this is all about openness and risk-taking in relationships, what I see as leaping over our fears. It's all related to what we do with pain and how we become more expressive/spontaneous beings. It is a process of life as I see it, not an end in itself, a dimension of growth.

'Parcel off' endings: I once saw a book entitled *Chess Endings for Beginners*. We need a book about relationship endings.

November 1987 O'Connor

Sexuality is now even more complex. At the Socialist Feminist Conference in Sydney this month, I attended Rosemary P's session:

4.05pm Here for the Sexuality workshop after a little nap in the garden. In an old-fashioned classroom so we have rearranged the desks in a rough circle.

'Sexuality in the 80s.' Rosemary felt press-ganged into this workshop because the organisers thought there should be one on the topic. In Elizabeth Wilson's novel *Prisons of Glass*, the screaming anxieties of feminists talking about sexuality are captured. Rosemary reads some extracts from a conference where there are strange alliances round issues, for example between lesbian sado-masochists and heterosexual sado-masochists. Rosemary calls herself a 'critical libertarian'. In the late 60s a certain libertarianism prevailed, a concern with sexual pleasure. By the late 70s a lot of the optimism had gone, and they were concerned with violence, pornography and rape. Lesbian separatism came to be seen as the ideologically sound position. The cultural feminist position has been seen as popular feminism (no power in women's relationships) with more emphasis on sensuality rather than sexuality.

The debate has been about where to draw the lines, with not much to say about the larger fabric of sexuality. Some people, e.g. Friedan, argue that we were side-tracked by sexuality and should get back to economic realities. Lynne Segal also argues in *Is the Future Female?* for the removal of sexuality from the central agenda. Segal says we mustn't moralise, we can't have an ideologically sound sexuality while men dominate. Rosemary finds the idea that what we do sexually doesn't affect the rest of our lives, hard to accept.

Sexuality in the twentieth century is a major site of male power and we mustn't leave this to the radical feminists. Gayle Rubin, sado-masochist advocate and substantial theorist, wants, like Foucault, to challenge hierarchies in sexuality. We must form coalitions of groups who are 'outside', to destroy the notion of a single ethic, to promote the plurality of sexualities. We should always talk of sexualities. We don't have to think of sexuality and gender in the same terms. Incidentally Rubin draws the line at consent, so rape is unacceptable.

The theorists of difference, Rich, Daly, Irigaray, see a female body outside patriarchal discourse, a multiplicity of pleasures. Rosemary finds this position waffly and metaphorical. She needs a politics which starts with what concretely is.

The women's movement has come to be seen as anti-pleasure. We should accept that what gives us pleasure now is the basis of transformation.

When newspapers wrote up Rosemary's study on secretaries, they misquoted her as saying that secretaries love being harassed! She was trying to argue that we should not be getting rid of sexuality from the workplace but turn it around on our terms. If secretaries like flirting with the boss, then OK, but they should be able to flirt on their own terms, not the boss's. In Mills and Boon romances men are the objects of female gaze, the basis of transformation. This does not mean women should stop being concerned about danger. We must acknowledge the tensions between pleasure and danger.

The paper is not finished, and the chair has just announced a bomb threat to this Conference. We propose to ignore it.

A question about love. Why has Rosemary not mentioned love in this talk?

Rosemary thinks love and sexuality can be separated and was concentrating on sexuality.

Someone raises the question of morality. The Right has a monopoly on morality but some of us have dilemmas every day: some things *are* good or bad. Rosemary refers to a therapy situation, an acceptance of where people are. We should get on with what is central to us and not let the Right set the agenda.

The difference between moralism and moral distinctions is raised. Problems with pluralism and essentialism... This session is petering out...

So this is where my recording on this discussion ends...



CHAPTER 4

WAR ON ANZAC DAY

April 1981 Tarlina

I have spent several months clearing the obstacles between me and this book: changed my job to one less emotionally demanding, made time to be alone in the country, talked to a few people like Daphne and Susan M about the form and the idea. Process is one of the central themes of the women's movement. When I began this writing over three years ago, I was looking back, validating what had happened, explaining to myself why I had changed my life, exploring my loneliness. The euphoric days over: I felt akin to Marilyn French's Mira at the end of *The Women's Room*, lonely, bereft on the beach with her awakened consciousness.

A new spirit is abroad. Younger women are joining the movement and we have changed our environment as well as our lives. No longer alone, the survivors may learn to work with each other again, draw in those who moved away, together

with these young women. *It's all right, Mira, there is a personal future for us and our suffering helped create it.*

Where did this new euphoria begin? For me, in September 1980 when Susan M asked me to give the Women's Studies lecture on 'Women's Traditions of Resistance' because I had spoken enthusiastically about Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*. Susan M said the students needed cheering up because the course exposed them to so much women's oppression that they staggered with gloom. Confronted with this task, a long dormant part of me emerged. My training in dialectical analysis swung into operation and I began to make sense of our struggle. In the lecture I said:

Women haven't suffered mindlessly over the centuries, they don't just behave like victims; they fight back in a variety of ways which actually change the situation. They don't fight back without success; they fight back in ways that change the nature of the oppressor and the oppressing system.

After the lecture one of the students, Susie, stayed to talk with me about fighting back now. She was involved with the Rape Crisis Centre and was very involved with Women Against Rape (WAR). On Anzac Day 1980, WAR were going to commemorate women raped in war by joining the traditional Anzac Day march. Susie asked if I would join.

'I should be there but haven't the guts,' I confessed to Liz O. In the event, all fourteen WAR marchers were arrested.

A year later, the group had grown larger in response to those arrests and I wondered if I would get out there with WAR on 25 April 1981.

We'll all join in, Harriet decided when we discussed it at Tarlina, that should minimise the danger. She went to the WAR collective meetings, with instructions from us more cautious sisters to find answers for our fear. My own fear grew from confronting the likely retaliatory violence of police and the Returned Services League (RSL) but buried beneath that lay my deeper fear of challenging the cultural myths of this society, fear of what the RSL called 'social mutiny'. At heart I was reluctant to relinquish my sense of cultural identity even though I knew it was patriarchal, conservative and oppressive.



Above: WAR Badges

Arrests at the WAR march on Anzac Day 1981. Photos: Courtesy ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.



The Anzacs were just ordinary blokes, Ian commented, conned into an imperialist war by their concepts of mateship, and when Anzac Day began it was a simple commemoration of their mates. We can't blame them for the takeover of Anzac Day by the establishment.

Probably not, Ian, I replied, but what does it mean when that establishment denies women the right to commemorate women raped in war, denies their right to join the march and lay a wreath along with the ex-servicemen?

Some Canberra feminists were against the WAR march because they felt it gave too much credence to militarism. Others thought WAR should let the men have their day and stage our commemoration on another occasion. It seemed that perhaps one hundred women would march.

Then the government panicked and rushed through, by executive order, an amendment to the Traffic Ordinance (1937): now it would be an offence to join an Anzac Day march without invitation. Media uproar. Enraged civil libertarians. Feminists with reservations threw them aside. More than three hundred women turned up for the march, with many more supporters and bystanders.

A sunshiny, mellow autumn day. We assembled in a small park, rustling our feet among the red, brown and yellow leaves, three hundred metres from the official march route. Some women decided to simply be there, some to sit down in case of trouble, some to push through, risk arrest.

Biff addressed us, then read a poem; Di M from the Rape Crisis Centre spoke about women raped in war. We set off, and found the police confronting us, strung across the entry road to Anzac Parade. Led by Di and Susie, we sat on the road to consider our options, using consensus. We decided some would sit on, some move away and some push forward. Two World War II women veterans surged to the front, wearing their medals. I decided to stay near the front but melt away if arrest seemed imminent.

Impasse: the women marchers couldn't get through. So, we dispersed towards the pavements, mingling with spectators, taking the police by surprise. Vaguely,

individually, we wandered around the cordon and regrouped in clumps on the other side and on Anzac Parade.

Then the arrests began. Within five minutes the whole organising collective, including Susie, Di M, Harriet and Biff, were picked off.

But the inchoate movement towards the official march continued, some of us wandering inconspicuously in twos and threes. The confused police swooped on women at random and arrested several bystanders. In all, the police arrested sixty-one women, including one early critic of WAR, plus a few journalists and three men. But individuals kept moving forward. The RSL marchers had their ceremony and as they dispersed, one hundred and fifty women assembled at the cenotaph and laid the WAR wreath.

You write up Anzac Day, Susan M encouraged me. Is she expecting a proper history of the Canberra Women's Movement? Susan M has written articles about our political debates for *Refractory Girl*. A formal history would not express what I am trying to say. The forms emerging from contemporary women writers comfort me. The tradition is established: Virginia Woolf struggling with 'the sentence' for a woman writer, Doris Lessing jumping about in *The Golden Notebook*, Dorothy Dinnerstein's boxes interpolated in *The Rocking of the Cradle, and the Ruling of the World*.

It's partly about fragmentation: how women live in this world. My child-rearing years conditioned me to fragmented time; I work best in snatches, a few hours crammed between meetings, classes, housework. When confronted by longer stretches of time since my sons grew to self-sufficiency, I don't know how to use it.

I don't write this happened, and then that happened in a chronological way because experience is not linear. Things happened all over the place, in fragments, and sometimes we could pause for a few moments, like at the opening of the women's refuge on International Women's Day 1975 or on Anzac night 1981 and say, 'Yes, that's what's been going on, and here we achieved something.' But moments like that are few. Projects, personal lives, struggles, all happen at once. While establishing the women's refuge, we were also trying to find a permanent WL meeting place,

Biff's marriage was breaking up, the Women's Studies course was being organised, questions of individual action and the bureaucracy were confronting us, and I was thinking about re-establishing my marriage one day.

Last week a history student writing a thesis on CWL interviewed Liz O and me. The theses are being written before I finish this primary source.

The student gave us 29 written questions. We explained that many of them, such as What are the objectives of Women's Liberation? How have they changed over the years? What specific issues are of particular interest to WL? assumed a political structure which was not relevant to our experience, and, if answered separately would give the impression that WL had faded away. We said that our unstructured, flexible organisation had changed as the movement grew and that where once we had weekly meetings and an identifiable group, now we had a network of groups forming temporarily for a specific action or a particular intellectual inquiry. We talked about consciousness being at the base of action, and devising structures to deal with exponential growth.

Retrospective wisdom: we gave the impression of two aware women in control of political processes. We didn't talk about the pain and personal difficulty of adjusting to new realities; nor that we were hiding these aspects. If the student came to see us many times, she could watch for the multi-faceted story to emerge in pieces.

So easy to say the weekly meetings were no longer relevant to our needs, so they became monthly, then gradually ceased altogether. We didn't add that several women's spirits were crushed, while others died along the way.

I *needed* that weekly meeting, probably more than most women involved. Gradually my view of the world was changing, supported by the sisterhood of the group undergoing similar change. I suffered during the break from the group when I was overseas in 1971. The other members of the original group had longer unbroken experience before they dropped out. My absence came from my feudal duties as wife and mother, my experience of the conflict between feminism and patriarchy. Despite this daily drama I was unable to identify what was happening until much

later. Large parts of me were still committed to my place in the patriarchy, the wife-mother existence. The weekly meetings allowed the feminist parts to grow and without that space I felt stunted, isolated.

When I returned in 1972, I found the meetings enlarged to 16 or so women. After leaving Canning St the group had been meeting at Helen S's but I was surprised to note that Helen herself was often too busy to attend. What was that about?

December 1981 Tarlina

Late winter cold but I am sitting in the noon sunshine at my makeshift desk of two apple cases, bricks and a yellow painted formboard top with a batik cloth cover.

Tarlina, our women's country retreat, is comprised of three near-derelict houses in Major's Creek, a semi-abandoned gold mining village on the edge of the Monaro. My room looks across the dirt road to the hillside rising above the creek. Faded batik cloth covers my table, a board set on fruit boxes. The oldest house, built of wood more than a century ago, was once the village bakery, butchery and grocery. The big kitchen features two cavernous fireplaces, one the remains of the bakery oven, and a wooden hip-roof ceiling. This room is the heart of Tarlina. Here we gather in the evenings before the great hearth, boiling the kettle hanging from the fire crane, which we swing out away from the flames when it is time to make tea.

Most of the women who bought into Tarlina met on the women's refuge collective. We use the other two houses as bedrooms. We call the fibro house 'Miles Franklin' and the classic late 19th century Australian wooden cottage with verandah fronting the road, 'Jessie on the Street'.

The few inhabitants remaining in the village live in a straggle along the creek, with the pub, the Elrington, still going strong at one end. The old stone St Andrews Anglican church – built when three thousand diggers, shopkeepers, police and their families lived here – stands at the other end on the way to Braidwood.

A cool rainy Christmas and Paddy and I drove here yesterday to escape Canberra. Liz O followed with two friends. Fewer people than in the previous two years. Changes again. Is that what I am attempting here: to pin down and explain change?

The WAR Anzac Day cases have halted, pending appeals by the Crown. Of the three magistrates who heard the four completed cases, only one has found against us. I suspect the appeals are a delaying tactic by the government while more liberal members wait for a change in the political climate. WAR will begin meeting again in the new year to plan tactics for Anzac Day 1982, but already many of the women involved in 1981 have moved on to other issues, so 1982 will be different. Once I would have agonised over this change, wondered why people lost their commitment, investigated structures and policies, engaged in rigorous self-criticism. Now I try to go with the changes, giving such energy as I can summon to the positive aspects.

Our most successful fundraiser for WAR legal costs proved to be preparing health-food lunches for conferences such as the Women's Education Coalition and the Energy and Socialism Conference. I enjoyed the exhausting evenings beforehand, preparing large bins full of Lebanese salads. At the conferences I helped distribute the lunch at what seemed very much a male left gathering, except that Mary Owen from the Working Women's Centre was there from Melbourne to tell them that socialism starts at home. I felt uncomfortably like one of the Women's Auxiliary, but with no desire to join in discussions.

Later I attended the annual ACT Labor Party conference and watched from another table while a group of feminists spent much time plotting to change the proceedings, sending messages around other tables with plans of action. They felt the songs were neglectful of women, then changed tack after a performer sang several women's songs. I felt disturbed by the impotence of the activity: overtones of that false sense of power, which comes from getting drunk together, like army cadets or forestry students.

At Bremer St in 1972 I first became aware of dissension, a mysterious dissatisfaction within the group. Margot and others wrote *The Invisible Manifesto* and I read it feeling confused. It was 'discussed openly', lip service to our women's movement process. We took it to the Mt Beauty Women's Conference in January 1973 and pinned it to the wall where delighted interstate feminists added their own points. But nobody said what it was really about until someone wrote *Is Momma*

Your Sister? in 1976 and by then there were few CWL meetings where we could talk about it.

The *Invisible Manifesto* was included in a paper called *Goodbye to all that – or I never go to meetings anymore* and seemed to be about alienation. Here is the manifesto:

thou shalt be articulate

thou shalt not get pregnant

thou shalt love thy sister before thy brother

thou shalt be ideologically sound even in bed

thou shalt not be a fulltime housewife

thou shalt be angry but not aggressive

thou shalt not be an emancipated woman

thou shalt not be sexually attracted to or live with a male chauvinist pig or a woman

thou shalt cope

thou shalt not be a glamorous lady

thou shalt not be immature

thy children shall be well-adjusted

thou shalt not be too obtuse

thou shalt not be materialistic

thou shalt be ashamed of being selfish

thou shalt not be a reformist

thou shalt love spontaneity

thou shalt not be over-emotional

THOU SHALT JUDGE THY SISTER?

I puzzled over the manifesto, confused by the contradictions, and then set it aside. Why didn't they come to meetings? and then work on this alienation?

I don't have a record of the meeting at which it was discussed, and the minutes seem to be lost, but I remember the occasion and the feeling of unresolved dissatisfaction. Underneath I knew that the *Invisible Manifesto* was about power, particularly Biff's personal power, bolstered by me and others. Since I saw that power positively, advancing the women's movement, I was not to be swayed by what I considered negativity that would hold us back.

'Power' was a dirty word in those early days: no one admitted to possessing it. From the US, Joreen's [Jo Freeman] *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* struck chords and we allocated several meetings to discussing its relevance to us. I suppose everyone knew it was really about how amazing Biff was at speaking, keeping abreast of new ideas, maintaining networks, interpreting events and initiating action. Those around her reinforced her skills at leading and those who were dissatisfied dropped away. The game was: there are no leaders but really, Biff is it. I played second-in-command under these rules. Much later I realised that this was a role I adopted in all groups.

But what could have been done to preserve our unity? Had Biff and I been directly confronted, our personal agonies may have ripped the group apart, and our skills lost to the movement at that stage. There seem to be no structural solutions to these questions of power, leadership and dominance, but I have learned to recognise the games surrounding them. I am now so fearful of repetition that I am often politically inactive.

This year, 1982, the rooms of the Women's Studies Program, which I joined as a temporary tutor last year, have regrouped with the three staff adjoining. My office is grand, far above my tutor station, so grand that I have draped a full-size red Indian bedspread on one wall to draw in the spaces. Classes begin in two weeks.

Suzanne has been visiting this past week, so I showed her the manuscript so far. I felt nervous awaiting her pronouncement and probably blocked most of her critique. Suzanne saw it very much as a draft, a beginning of getting things down, but she liked the journal form. Suzanne encourages creativity from everyone.

She talked with Paddy about her drawing. Biff gave Suzanne a horse's pelvic bone to stimulate her sculpture and Suzanne wrapped it in a T shirt and plastic to shroud it from idle curiosity in the bus back to Sydney. Today she is attending the Press Club lunch for Vanessa Redgrave. Liz O had a radio interview with Vanessa this morning and arranged for Suzanne to go to the lunch on a media pass.

Suzanne has been reading the CWL minutes. Yes, they turned up, in a box of records lying around the Lobelia St Women's Centre, which were brought to me for safekeeping. In sorting through I found the old Abortion Counselling Service appointment diaries, Women's Information Service notes, WEL telephone tree and there, suddenly, in two shabby exercise books, the CWL minutes, a primary source from June 1970 to September 1973.

We had taken turns at writing minutes, usually straight into the book and sometimes scrappily, though I noticed that Daphne, very seriously, took hers home to type up and paste in afterwards. Suzanne laughs at our formality, none such in Sydney she said. We considered ourselves deliciously unstructured though I notice our unreconstructed language: we had a 'chairman' for months.

Suzanne and I talked with Liz O on radio about the history of WL, an interview focusing on the forthcoming IWD program. We used the rediscovery of the minutes as our focal point and chatted on for twenty minutes about then and now.

Suzanne is wonderfully articulate and clear about directions, but I found myself diverging from her judgments about the 'now'. She is sad, no longer drawing creative energy from her feminism, seeing a disappointing contrast between the heady old days and today. She fears women who have found their feminism in books rather than consciousness-raising groups, yet her own sorrow comes from the pain and anger about betrayal by sisters who learned about each other's vulnerabilities in those very groups. Sisterhood is powerful – it can kill you, says Anja Meulenbelt in *The Shame is Over*.

My optimism, regained eighteen months before, endures. Perhaps the Anzac Day struggles have given us an impetus the Sydney women lack. Suzanne joined me at the first WAR collective meeting for the year. Twenty-five women crowded into the Lobelia St Women's Centre sitting room in good spirits. Similar plans to last year

were developed, so we await the government's proposed amendment to last year's hasty ordinance. Suzanne enjoyed the meeting and urged WAR to become the locus of a national struggle. I am learning not to take responsibility for these young, active, and enthusiastic women. Yet, with Suzanne, I found it hard to let go of responsibility, to risk the collapse of all.

I am reading Verna Coleman's *Her (Unknown) Brilliant Career*, an account of Miles Franklin's feminist activities in Chicago from 1906 to 1915. I am struck by the contrast between Miles's apparent pleasant 'busyness' and the miseries recorded in her two-lines-a-day diary. Hard not to see Miles's repressed sexuality as a cause of the misery, though Coleman deflects us with Franklin's heterosexual courtships. The hectic, energetic nature of Miles's Chicago experience reminds me of the early WL days. How many of us were secretly recording despair in our 1970s diaries? Not me.

March 1982 O'Connor

Before I write about the significant past, I need to consider my present. Right now, I'm working through the impact of the Women and Food Conference in Sydney and Neil has finished school and is leaving home. When I clear time for writing, these other issues take over. The present is exploding and obscuring the past: not a time for writing history. Or is it *the* time?

A letter from WAR in the *Canberra Times* this morning, deploring the failure of the Returned Services League (RSL) and other authorities to consult WAR before planning next Anzac Day. And there it is, *Shulamith Wollstonecraft* in the letters column. Shulamith was a compilation of Shulamith Firestone and Mary Wollstonecraft. We created her as a counter to the media practice of creating 'stars'. She first surfaced at Bremer St in 1972 and for a while busily signed letters and communicated with the public. Those were the years that Germaine Greer and Kate Millett became international personalities and were used by the media to dump on the rest of us. They have suffered since. We carefully avoided the star system here, giving no authentic names to the media. This morning's letter is a signal to women's liberationists from the 1970s that WAR is operating in that tradition.

The local RSL secretary rang WAR with an invitation to speak at the RSL meeting tonight. I am scared but reckon that at least four women ought to go.

Suzanne rang to report that her creativity has surged since her return to Sydney. She has written a paper on creativity for the Third Women and Labour Conference to be held in Adelaide this coming June.

I read that at Writers' Week in Adelaide, Helen Garner ruefully described some of the effects, her first book, *Monkey Grip*, had on the household of people she had lived with, some of whom saw themselves presented in an unfavourable light in her novel. At the height of a domestic disagreement sometime after *Monkey Grip* had been published, one of her friends had shouted, 'I don't want to end up in one of your books! and had burst into tears'.

Women writers are often battered with this charge, such as Miles Franklin's long retreat following the personal affronts her family felt after *My Brilliant Career* was published. To my knowledge no one charged George Johnson with insensitivity or selfish creativity for *Clean Straw for Nothing*, which so exposed Charmian Clift and may have contributed to her suicide.

After the WAR meeting with the RSL I wrote to Suzanne:

It was every bit as scary and horrible as I expected but we did splendidly. There were four of us: Bluse, Biff, Annie V and me. Our demeanour was 'more in sorrow than in anger', civil but not friendly. The RSL would not let us tape proceedings, so Bluse took copious notes. Twenty-two RSL members at tables pulled together in a square, with us required to sit away to one side.

Biff spoke for seven minutes outlining our position. She talked about what rape meant to us, the nature of rape in war, some of the cases from the Sydney Rape Crisis Centre phone-in after last Anzac Day. At first unaware of the RSL response, Biff then realised their hostility but never lost her cool.

Three-quarters of an hour of questions followed and our responses, although they had planned a segment of only ten minutes for us. What kind of an organisation were we? What about their private grief? The word 'rape' must have been

mentioned two hundred times in this discussion yet in the RSL submission they didn't use it once, referring only to 'a particular crime'. The RSL secretary grumbled about our access to public institutions, a backhanded compliment to our political sagacity.

The enemy's lair! Only once did one of them crack, saying to Annie, Which war were you raped in, love? to which she replied, I shall treat that remark with the contempt it deserves, and stared him out. When we left half of them stood, whereas none had done so on our arrival.

Afterwards we took hours to debrief and come down. We felt like screaming and shaking: so much adrenalin.

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More excitement with WAR. The RSL have issued a press release. A *Canberra Times* journalist (Jack Waterford) rang WAR, pressuring to know *what our intentions were*. We then issued our own press release. Suddenly on Di's suggestion, we decided to march *before* the official march. To steal the limelight?

Our press release read.

WAR sees no point in having further discussions with the RSL who recently described us as *foe...just as real as that on the battlefields of Flanders...* Secondly, as we do not intend to march between 10am and 2.30pm on 25 April, we will not attend the meeting called at the House of Assembly on Thursday.

The RSL overreacted splendidly, lashing out at everyone, including Ex-servicemen for Peace who have been given police permission to march.

At home on Anzac eve, Liz O and I found it hard to settle. Earlier I had dropped \$600 bail money at Di E's. Bluse and Susie called by. Edna rang from Sydney asking what we were wearing to the march. Respectable skirt, I said, but Liz O said, Jeans as usual.

It was like the night before Agincourt, I pulled the big Shakespeare from the shelf and found the Crispin's day speech. Liz O read aloud, with some changes:

This day is call'd the feast of Anzac:
She that outlives this day, and comes safe home
Will stand a tiptoe when this day is named,
And rouse her at the name of Anzac
She that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast her neighbours,
And say 'Tomorrow is Anzac Day'
Then will she strip her sleeve and show her scars,
And say 'These wounds I had on Anzac Day'.
Old women forget; yet all shall be forgot
But she'll remember with advantages
What feats she did that day. Then shall our names
Familiar in her mouth as household words
Susie the convenor, Biff and Daphne
Bluse and Di, Liz O and Harriet
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
This story shall the good woman teach her daughter;
And WAR on Anzac Day shall ne'er go by
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered;
We few, we happy few, we band of sisters;
For she today that shed her blood with me
Shall be my sister; be she ne'er so vile
This day shall gentle her condition
And women in Canberra now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here
And hold their feminism cheap, whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon this Anzac Day.

Lest They Recall. The day was bright, sunshiny as in 1981. After another reading of Crispin's day, Liz O, Susan M and I drove to Anzac Park. The tactic of marching before the official march proved brilliant.

So many there, over five hundred of us, and only about 800 ex-servicemen in the official march. Unimpeded progress up the Parade after Biff and Susie addressed the gathering, and a singing of 'It could have been me'. With Christine and Frances, I shot 8mm movie film for WAR, ducking in and out of the march.

The ceremony at the cenotaph was addresses by Di and Jill, the latter outrageously clad in black undertaker-like coat and hat, but somehow 'correct'. We sang Judy Small's 'Lest They Recall' and laid wreaths. Then moving up on to the grassy slope, we were unexpectedly unimpeded. A large concourse of official march spectators in between our two banners. Low singing of 'Lest They Recall' as the various contingents marched by, some with angry faces. But total decorum during the two minutes' silence.

A bit of adventurism from Biff, who wanted to confront afterwards by marching down Anzac Parade in front of the officials and within the sacred time. After a hasty meeting, we decided to march down the side of the Parade and disperse in an orderly fashion.

Very together, and a wonderful feeling. I liked doing the filming. Good TV coverage, carefully separated from the main Anzac story. I wondered if the lack of violence would lose media attention the next year? Would the RSL overreact and demand the whole morning? Would they want an ordinance against singing?

I picked some red geraniums and cotoneaster berries and laid them on the cenotaph after everyone else, feeling splendid.

The older women joining in. Daphne and I dressed in navy coats and skirts, sensible shoes and stockings. Liz O and I sporting sprigs of rosemary from our herb garden.

Next morning, the *Canberra Times* dealt with us carefully. The main Anzac Day stories held oblique references only, then Jack Waterford's wonderfully ideologically sound account on page six, with the photos, and including a verse of 'Lest they recall'.



Below: Walking away, Bluse in the foreground. *The Canberra Times*, Anzac Day 1982.



Anzac Day 1982.

Lest they recall, WAR Badge.



Below: Members of WAR carry a wreath to be laid at the Stone of Remembrance. Photos: Courtesy ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.



But what next? Did we really want to be incorporated in the Anzac Day observance? Of course not. Repressive tolerance works. Some over-reaction by RSL crazies would be useful.

December 1982 O'Connor

My academic job is finished. For seven weeks my time is my own. I feel nervous. Will this time be used creatively, productively? The house needs maintenance. The garden is overgrown. The drought is awesome.

Rumour has it that a new ordinance is planned for Anzac Day 1983, an ordinance which declares the day 'sacred' from 4am to 4pm.

So few women turned up to the organising meetings that the collective decided that the Canberra action had run its course. They issued a press release saying that the RSL had not understood the reason for marching and now the reason for not marching. The Sydney WAR march drew national media focus, with many arrests at the Pool of Remembrance.

In 1984, April 28 was the seventieth anniversary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and some forty women gathered at the Friends Meeting House to reminisce about those years. Elderly women spoke about their mothers' involvement in the founding years of the World War I era. The woman asked to recall WAR on Anzac Day was delayed, rescuing an injured sulphur-crested cockatoo on Mt Majura, so I read from this manuscript. I recounted the meeting with the RSL and the 1981 march with the 64 arrests. Feeling nervous, but supported by Suzanne sitting nearby, I was surprised by the empathetic reception and understood why writers like public readings: they add another dimension and bring out meaning.

Suzanne came in for morning tea and we discussed that WILPF meeting.

There's a danger, Suzanne said, that we won't draw the important lessons from our experience by simply reminiscing. That's why I spoke out at the meeting about Cockburn Sound, with a reference to 'lesbian bedsheets', to underline the importance of working without men and creating our own mythology.

Anzac Day 1986 and again WAR does not march. Such a relief to wake up with a holiday stretching ahead, rather than a stomach-knotting confrontation with patriarchy. Yet there are twinges of regret: I miss the drama and excitement.

January 2022 Fox Place

In 2019 the Canberra Museum asked Gail, archivist for WEL, for material on the WAR actions on Anzac Day in the 1980s for their exhibition on Canberra Protests. At Tilley's, the preferred feminist café of Canberra, Gail asked for help at the WL get-togethers which had started after a reunion in 2014. She tracked down Christine's film, transferred it to video at the Jessie St Library in NSW, and on my suggestion contacted Bluse and Di L. Di L had kept a file and Bluse a scrapbook, so WAR occupied a large section of the exhibition. At the launch Gail gave a paper and Di a short speech, including her recollection that I had criticised the organizing group at a WAR collective meeting for making a unilateral decision. Apparently I said, You have set the women's movement back 50 years.



Part of the exhibition at Canberra Museum & Gallery 2019. Photo: Julia Ryan.

There was much laughter. I have no recollection of it, surprised that Di remembered for nearly 40 years. I do admit my obsession with collective process – it was a fact that they didn't check with the group first.

Gail made digital copies of the film which I was able to use in a talk I gave to my U3A Australian History group. Bluse, Di and Gail came to add to my presentation. I prepared a PowerPoint and showed part of the film. The U3A audience seemed stunned and remained quiet. The Canberra & District Historical Society have not yet taken up my offer of a repeat performance.



CHAPTER 5

CONFLICT AND PERSONAL GROWTH

After *The Invisible Manifesto* came out in 1982, another blow to our group sisterhood. Margot wrote and circulated an article about her resentment and frustration after several years in CWL. When it came out, Liz O and I sat with Biff on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, watching the spring melt flow down from the Snowies, and explained that we saw the article as an attack on her, trashing her. We thought Margot was writing to avoid face-to-face confrontation with Biff.

Margot argued that our failure to accept and analyse our individual power lay at the base of her frustrations. We feared power, she wrote, and were most comfortable with our experiences as victims. She constructed a Big Momma figure that manipulated others through endless forgiveness, nurturance and guilt. Liz O and I were outraged on Biff's behalf, seeing her as Margot's 'Big Momma'. But Biff couldn't see it, said the article raised some interesting questions. Is she motherlike? Endlessly forgiving?

Margot, then influenced by Transactional Analysis, wanted a conflict model for relationships within the women's movement. In future she was only going to listen to another sister's problems if she contracted to work out a strategy to overcome them once and for all.

The growth movement affected us in different ways. I pursued Gestalt and then Reichian therapy. Biff did Reichian too and then explored Co-Counselling. Alternative therapies influenced early training workshops for women's refuge volunteers, and we incorporated them into Fat Group meetings. Women like Daphne, Susan M and Liz O stayed away from therapies, concentrating on political and intellectual issues.

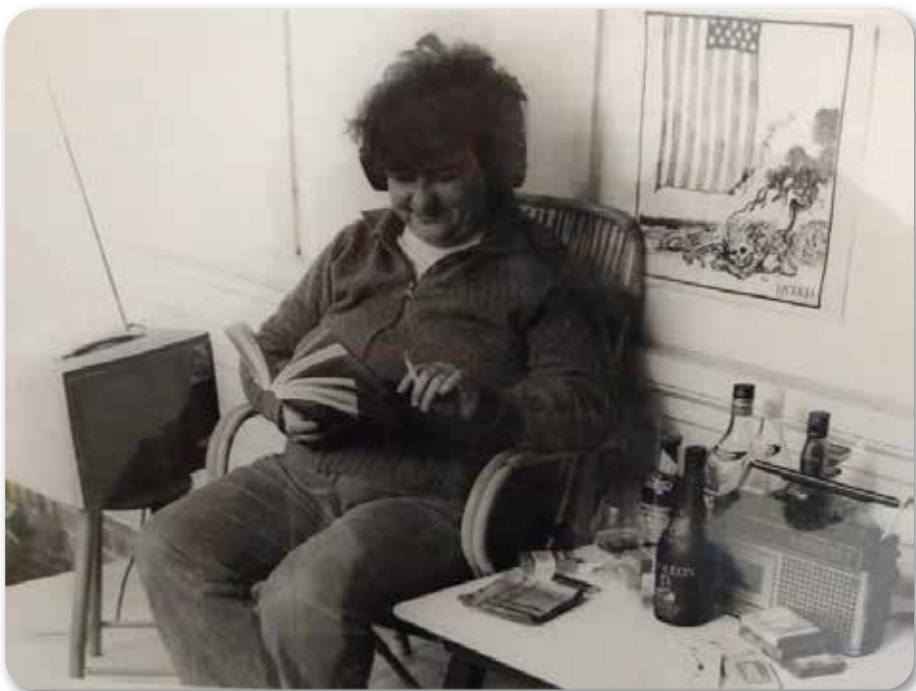
Margot's strong line seemed hard to me then, but confrontational therapy was becoming popular. Lizi B, our first women's refuge coordinator, was enraged when some refuge residents were confronted by Health Department counsellors, asking why they kept putting themselves in violent situations. Later she herself embraced a personal growth philosophy which maintains that we create all our own problems.

Now I understand how Margot felt but her outcry had no positive effect at the time. I was bound in the work ethic: commitment to a cause meant hard slog at meetings, workshops, and rallies. Now I understand more about the group processes required to maintain an effective level of activity. Our Women's Liberation group fell apart when undermined by unexamined anger and repressed hostility.

In intervening years, I studied group process. I attended a residential workshop on teamwork, conducted by the wondrous Mary B. Mary used family therapy concepts, particularly the work of Virginia Satir; to show how we repeat patterns formed in our families of origin. Through a powerful simulation game, I learned that I choose to be at the centre of a group, bolstering the apparent leader, but exercising much of the real power myself, and feeling burdened by responsibility.

Read novels, said Mary, when requested for reference books. She spent much of the workshop time on the sidelines: knitting...watching.

Since then, I practise a two-fold strategy, either moving to the periphery of groups or naming the power structure and openly assuming responsibility. I watch from



Liz O at MacPherson St O'Connor. Photo: Ryan family collection.

the sidelines in WAR, but at the price of deep feelings of responsibility. In other women's movement contexts, I argue for short-term commitment, specific purpose groups formed for a few months then disbanded. That approach caused trouble in the Redfems.

Suzanne stayed for a week to visit the new National Gallery. She agreed on my star of the collection: Grace Cossington Smith's four-panelled screen. How much we have rediscovered about those Australian women artists and writers of the 1920s and 30s – enough to give us a sense of tradition. And how angry we are that the tradition was ignored in our formal education. Although I do remember how the *Australian Women's Weekly* promoted Margaret Preston's work.

I'm at my window again, looking out on rare greenery in this drought-stricken time, swivelling on my new chair and smoking the first cigarette of the day, having

shopped, washed up and vacuumed. I snapped a photograph of the view from this desk, with the hanging crystal and the dharma-seal in the window and placed it in the album next to the view from my Tarlina window. I plan to leave domestic chores till later in the day in future, to bring me closer to writing. Bron's daughter is staying so Liz O and I have sent the television up to her room at the end of the garden. Such joy to be free of it for a while.

Reflecting upon the interactions of the growth movement and CWL, I thought Margot had a point about victimhood: having identified oppression, it is easy to stay there, lamenting. Those who became involved with feminist alternative social welfare, particularly the women's refuge, were most at risk.

The women's refuge drains emotions; requiring energy and support beyond many women's endurance. Lizi B, our first paid worker was on duty all day and on call at night for the first six months. Then she asked for help, and we divided the job into two. She lasted another six months, then collapsed. She spent a year at Tarlina, recovering.

After Lizi B's collapse, the refuge collective decided that paid refuge jobs must be limited to six months' duration, for our own and the residents' protection. Later the paid workers formed their own support groups, but these sometimes became so absorbing that refuge residents' needs took second place.

In Sydney, Anne Summers argued that we must always stay conscious of our political work with the refuges. We opened them to publicise the issue of domestic violence and to raise consciousness of battered women, not to do welfare work that the state should provide. Older politicians like Edna and Daphne were shocked by our willingness to provide social services.

When Lyndall, temporarily based in the Canberra public service, visited, I asked her, When are you going on the refuge roster? I was in charge of the volunteer lists.

Never! she replied, then told me about her experience as volunteer for the first Women's Health Centre in Sydney and how her emotional and physical wellbeing suffered. But in 1975 I plunged in, excited by the idea of a meaningful contribution.

Our first location was a government house in the quiet suburb of Watson, 4 Adams Place. We battled to keep the refuge location secret, to protect the women from violent partners. Nevertheless, several men turned up to harass the residents. When a gunshot disturbed Watson residents, the government agreed to move us to another secret location, a large duplex house at Kingston near the railway station. As community awareness grew, the numbers of women seeking refuge increased. My nights on roster in the first months at the refuge were relatively peaceful but I found it hard to teach next day after the hours of tense alertness and the stress of maintaining calm among residents.

Statistics proved a powerful weapon. I devised a system of data collection and released the monthly figures to the government and the media. But by 1977 my stomach churned and my hands shook when I compiled the numbers. I could endure no longer. I wept when explaining my resignation to the collective meeting. My one consolation was that the refuge collective kept growing, with women keen to help.

Pamela O endured longer. She joined the refuge collective in 1975 and organised the first volunteer training program. Many women came to feminism through refuge volunteer training. In her public service job, Pamela was commissioned to write a national report on the housing needs of homeless women. On the collective, she organised furniture for the refuge, wrote submissions, performed roster duty, poured energy into the personal difficulties within the group. Then paralysis set in; her report was overdue for months. In 1979 she escaped, went overseas.

Mary F, the WEL representative on the collective, dealt with the refuge problem another way. She flung herself into the initial organisation, proving a whiz at liaison with community organisations and government agencies. After a year of effort, she suddenly stopped coming to collective meetings. Later she sent a message that she was on sabbatical from the women's movement. She left her husband and became known as Cascade de Twitches, lead singer in a women's rock band.

We must learn more ways to protect our individual selves from burnout, without guilt or blame.

The refuge is as crowded as ever. A big breakthrough came when an ex-resident joined the volunteer collective, then became a paid worker. There are now 10 paid workers: counsellors, administrators and childcarers. Money is tight and staff cuts loom. A struggle just to survive. But Canberra knows much more about domestic violence and incest: *Father-Daughter Rape*, as Biff named it in the title of her book.

The women's refuge illustrated the dangers of victimhood. By fighting for the rights of the super-victims, battered wives, we connected with the victim in ourselves and most of us eventually ran away. Margot's argument was that we must confront and contract with each other to overcome this problem. There is a kind of brutality in this approach which may reinforce the self-deprecation women have as part of their gender construction. But collapsing and running aren't any better.

I searched for ways to overcome my internal victim.

I'll go anywhere to learn something, Suzanne declared at the Adelaide Women and Labour Conference when explaining the strange company in which she learned mind-dynamics. But even she drew the line at the place I went to learn about transcending victimhood.

I had been fighting against the kind of thinking, both in the women's movement and in the Left, which opposes capitalism so fiercely that feudalism appears romantic, brimming with human values. Capitalism, I believe, has brought western women closer to freedom. The contradictions within its liberal ideology have enabled women to claim the rights of individual citizenship, separate from their reproductive biology. This major contradiction between individual enlightened self-interest and the needs of the corporate state can sometimes be used by the relatively powerless, such as women. So, it was not surprising that I found some use in an outgrowth of advanced capitalism like Werner Erhard's Control Your Life.

Control Your Life (CYL) was one of the human potential courses operating in Sydney. I heard of it through Lizi B who sold it to me. 'Sold' is the right word, for the CYL owners insist that if one believes in the process, one will sell it hard, a capitalist way of bearing witness. I was delighted by this outrageousness and mindful of the positive changes in Lizi B.

I also felt in personal need. Neil had finished school and left for Sydney to stay with mates and look for work. Since Keir's birth, I had been preparing for the final separation, looking forward to freedom and confident that my life was full of compensatory work and friendship.

A few months after Neil's departure, Harriet brought her new baby to Tarlina. Driving in with Liz O, I noticed that the blue gum seedling I planted the previous Easter had not survived the dry autumn. As Harriet and I unpacked in the kitchen, a tension grew in the back of my chest. I withdrew to my room, but the tension turned to knifing pain. So, I returned to the then quiet kitchen, made coffee, laid the fire under the crane in the fireplace, but when Paddy, Liz O, Sybille and Harriet came in with baby Tilly, the pain intensified. I walked onto the verandah, surveying the bare autumn landscape, but the pain wouldn't go, so I retreated again to my room and lay on the bed, writhing. Liz O came looking for me.

Help, I moaned. Liz O rushed for Paddy.

How does it feel?

A huge hole in my heart...iron bands pressing in..

'A heart attack! Call a doctor!' Liz O was a mite anxious.

No, no, not a heart attack...I was turning from side to side.

Breathe into it, advised Paddy, what is the pain saying?

Deep breathing and sobbing, while the two women held me.

I'm not a mother any more...heart's torn out...given to Neil.

The blue gum seedling...meant new growth after my boys...and it's dead. Great sobs, deep breathing.

New growth can't come until you have dealt with this, Paddy was matter of fact. Breathe into it, like in childbirth.

It took time. I am a reluctant labourer. With the breathing I felt the pain moving down to my womb. I rubbed my head, then Liz O also rubbed. Finally, the pain

expelled in a rush, and I lay back, raw, exhausted. Liz O brought a hot water bottle for the shaky body, Paddy a cup of tea.

Paddy and I talked for a long time about motherhood, Paddy apprehensive about her own youngest, planning to leave home that year. Then I asked that Harriet come in. I explained that she and baby Tilly were not responsible. Then I slept soundly all night.

After that weekend I abandoned my plan to travel alone in India and spent the money on the CYL course.

Much of the CYL impact relies on a number of factors: the personality of the leader, submitting to the experience of sensory deprivation and the participant's willingness to let go and give to herself. I endured the gruelling three days and came out determined to change my life for positive ends. I watched other women in the course stand up for themselves and was delighted to hear the phrase 'enlightened self-interest' used many times, along with a stress on the importance of support for others in order to give to oneself. I felt confirmed in my feminism but saw other people confirmed in their beliefs: what if they were fascists? Further ambivalence emerges from the letters I wrote about the training:

28.7.82 (to Pamela) From time to time I have serious doubts about the ethics and efficacy of the whole outfit, but at the same time very conscious of the positive results for me. I have shaken my tendency to melancholia at its roots and in general feel more positive than ever before.

19.8.82 (to a friend) ...since the training significant changes have occurred. On the physical level a weight loss of 11 pounds and more expected to come off. This has been combined with more clarity and a general feeling of power and strength. In many ways the course is outrageous and commercial, but it hits at a deep level and brings out the positive aspects of being.

19.9.82 (to an ex-student at an ashram in India) My spiritual journeying took an unexpected turn this year. Friends came in contact with a three-day intensive course run with the object of 'Controlling Your Life'. They were transformed and enthusiastic, so encouraged their friends to enrol. I had much resistance,

particularly to the high cost and the heavy sales pitch but I found myself there in July and came through feeling stronger and clearer in myself than ever before. None of the processes were particularly new to me but somehow I learned to build my optimistic life-enhancing side. The basic philosophy will be familiar to you as it is about choosing who you are and what you do and accepting one's previous existence as freely chosen. I had partially accepted this idea before doing the training but was not happy about it. Now I understand the joy in life.

I felt pleased with the practical outcome of my theoretical construct of turning the contradictions between liberal ideology and gender reality to our advantage. Most of my friends thought otherwise.

Those who accepted my invitation to the CYL 'graduation' at a Sydney hotel included Liz O, Jill, Suzanne, Edna, Keir and Neil. All were appalled. Keir left before entering the hall: Neil sat with his head in his hands, groaning. My guests hated the hierarchy, the automaton-behaviour of the supporters and the hard-sell atmosphere. Cunning Edna participated enthusiastically with the proceedings, saving her hostility till later. Liz O thought the graduation resembled a Hitler Youth assembly, but I felt it more akin to my experience in China during the Cultural Revolution. Afterwards Suzanne lay awake all night, fearful of a world in which the CYL leader existed.

Brainwashing! said Keir.

So, where do you get a chance to be counter-brainwashed in this society? I knew it was brainwashing, or Chinese style 're-education', but it seemed to break the moulds necessary for me to escape victimhood and negative attitudes.

I wanted some way for feminists to incorporate all this for the movement. Inside CYL I found a few other feminists. We held a meeting in Sydney to work through some CYL processes and consider our situation. I spoke of my problem with the male guru CYL leader figure, anathema to feminist philosophy. Some of the women there were training as leaders and perhaps they will work out ways to use the techniques for us. Still uncertain, yet I feel conscious of the positive changes in myself.

Another philosophical difficulty lies with the conflict between choosing one's life and the forces shaping whole societies. I can play a game, easier in the developed world, of choosing my life and shaping my destiny, but cannot accept that one chooses to be a beggar-child in Bangladesh. Personal choice philosophy can lead to political quietism.

Incorporating the useful, positive aspects of this late-stage capitalist philosophy into my life has been a struggle. Sometimes I slip into negative attitudes. Hard work.

Bron's daughter has left, and the television is back in the living room. Jill, whose research grant has expired, is moving her gear into the flat at the back of the garage where Keir, then Neil, used to live. She will stay for six months before taking up an academic post interstate. Until then she is unemployed, so cheap accommodation is essential. I'm glad to provide this kind of help, which comes from salvaging the deposit for this house from the wreck of my marriage.



CHAPTER 6

THE PROBLEM OF MEN

December 1982 O'Connor

Why did you have sons? Suzanne demanded, meaning why not a daughter?

I have been hesitating about writing of men and the women's movement. The act of writing gives them precious energy we need for ourselves.

Why do we bother about men? asked Liz O.

I replied quickly. Because they're here.

And so they are. Some do not go away.

I think more energy is used in maintaining a strictly separatist existence than in dealing with men. I also resent the necessity for celibacy among heterosexual feminists if men are to be avoided. No other issue arouses such anger in me.

I am surprised by my naïvete about men in the early days of CWL. While we were still meeting at Canning St in 1970 Jean, a French radical man, visited from

Paris. Full of enthusiasm for the women's movement, he placed it in a 'minority consciousness' context, since elaborated by the philosopher Deleuze. Jean wanted all the 'minorite' movements, such as the greens, the gays and now the women's movement to unite against the capitalist establishment.

Trusting his support, I called a special meeting of our small group to give a brief resume of our discussions so far to him and a couple of our partners from the male Left, Bruce and Ian. We ran through our paces, Biff on 'femininity', Hazel on Freudian psychology, I on education, then sat back. The men leapt in, dominating the rest of the meeting with friendly critiques and advice. Our first conscious experience of men taking over.

How could they I wondered, when we spoke so much about our difficulties with internalised oppression?

Never again, said Biff.

After that meeting Ian became an enthusiastic self-appointed spokesman for our ideas. Bruce wavered angrily between his new consciousness of women's oppression (I see it everywhere, he complained) and fears for his own position.

Two years later Bruce decided to confront CWL. Bypassing Biff and me, he asked Daphne to organise a Bremer St meeting for men and women to 'talk out' the problems.

Appears honest enough, I thought, still hopeful for a resolution. Biff was more wary. Daphne agreed to the agenda: Ian was to speak, play and sing a song he had composed about feminism, then Bruce would speak, and general discussion would follow. The notice went into the WL monthly newsletter.

The largest meeting I remember ever at Bremer St. Over fifty men and women crowded into the L shaped suburban living room. Foolishly pleased by the large attendance, I sat on the floor somewhere near the middle, but Biff found a spot out of sight under a table.

Ian's speech was predictable: supportive, full of analysis fitting us into his sectarian left world view. This was before the Trotskyists expelled him, largely for these self-same views.

I didn't know whether Bruce had already planned his speech when he spoke to Daphne or whether what he described as 'Ian's sycophantic bullshit' sparked his hostility, but he exploded into bitter rhetoric. He accused us of destructiveness, said that we imagined our oppression within the Left, and were committing 'emotional adultery' with our 'sisters'. Uproar. I remember Jack Waterford giving Bruce enthusiastic support and Daphne trying to smooth things over. But mostly I remember thinking that Biff was right: no room for dialogue with men.

That was the year before Bruce and I tried life in Adelaide. His idea was that without the support of Canberra Women's Liberation, our old relationship would re-establish. But I found Adelaide women's liberationists fighting the same battles. Bruce began another relationship and we split.

In Canberra, Ian organised a men's group which met throughout 1972 and 1973. From the beginning Paul dominated. The men did not provide women's group type support for each other. The venture collapsed when Paul played a cruel practical joke on Ian, using the intimate knowledge he had gained from the sharing in the group.

The men of our generation didn't seem to be able to change their lives as oppressors. Some younger men have the advantage of exposure to feminism in their formative years. My friend Rob has been looking for solutions for some years: several younger men's groups, here and overseas, made efforts to create supportive male households. When Rob enrolled in Women's Studies, it roused the anger of Liz O and Suzanne who thought Women's Studies should exclude men and that male sympathisers should have more sensitivity. Liz O confronted Rob but he held fast to his need to understand more.

Rob joined one of my classes and wrote a paper about gender treason. He drew a distinction between men's groups who were concerned with liberating themselves, 'masculinists', and those who sought to counter sexism in society. He wrote that he was sadly aware that counter-sexism is against the interests of men:

Men who do not join the movement are not misguided, unconscious of their oppression; counter sexism is not in their interests, at least in the short-term. A man needs an intellectual/moral justification to become counter-sexist.



Left: Bruce McFarlane 1967.

Below: Pamela and Rob 1980s. Photo: Ryan family collection.



Hardly the basis for a mass movement, I thought.

He concluded:

Men can respond positively to feminism: most usefully, after attaining a certain level of consciousness, by working with other men, both like-minded and otherwise. There are many pitfalls and dangers, as men are all agents of patriarchy; hopefully we can become double agents instead.

I am not opposed to men enrolling in university Women's Studies courses, though I would not like the current proportions of about six women to one man to alter.

I don't mind being the target of anti-male hostility, said one student when I told him of feminist doubts about men in class.

That's not the problem, I replied, the fear is that you will absorb our energies, especially those of us who are conditioned into channelling our energies towards men.

Sobered, he offered to withdraw. No, I said, the problem has been identified and we must watch for our reactions.

He and the other two men in that tutorial group sat like mice most of the semester, speaking only when asked. Susan and I had decided to put all the men in one tutorial, so women could decide which group to join.

One Sydney academic is worried because males outnumber females in her feminist philosophy classes. I can't imagine functioning effectively as teacher or student in that situation.

None of the men I know who came into close contact with feminism have experienced that joyful sense of liberation which so affects women when they encounter feminism.

The motivation cannot be one of joyous struggle against the oppressor, wrote Rob gloomily.

Marx tells us that no class gives up power voluntarily, though individual members like himself, Engels and the men I am discussing may be traitors to their class or

gender interests. Class boundaries seem easier to cross than gender boundaries. The analogy doesn't quite work.

After Biff left Ian, he lost his fervour for feminism.

Recently I visited Bruce and mentioned the workshop that the Patriarchy group ran at the Women and Labour Conference. In the 1970s, along with other Left men, he had reacted violently to the use of the term.

I won't say the word, I laughed.

Oh, he replied wearily, I understand patriarchy now. How could I not?

December 1982 Tarlina

The annual Christmas-New Year week assembly. Despite efforts to be low key and supportive to each other, the full Tarlina collective is drifting apart.

Tonight is New Year's Eve and we'll go to the pub at 10pm to see in the New Year. Paddy has arranged for the locals to 'bring a plate' to the pub in opposition to the squire's champagne and chicken party for the nobs at the big house.

Jen is here with Ross and baby Louis. Ross has stayed home all this year, on leave to look after Louis while Jen worked. Some hard times, particularly without a support system for men in the home, but the family are pretty happy together here. Louis, now fourteen months, will go into a creche this year and Jen will cut her working week back to four days. Harriet is also here with her baby, Tilly, being brought up in an all-woman household. These two babies are delightful, happy to go to anyone.

I've been thinking about feminism, men and childcare. There are now two clear and opposed lines. One line, like Dinnerstein in *The Rocking of the Cradle, and the Ruling of the World*, looks favourably on Ross for taking primary responsibility for the baby, thus redressing the imbalance of the love-hate dependency of infants for women. The other position does not tolerate men anywhere near children, claims that women must not surrender their power in this sphere, supporting Harriet's practice. I have no strong opinion, enjoying these robust products of both practices.

Lyndsay's son, Matthew, loves children, felt distress when his three months' childcare work came to an end. He brought Neil to an appreciation of babies. In my

neighbourhood we see young men with their children in a way unknown in my youth, but I feel comfortable only about the ones I know well. These others may be a part of the erosion of women's primal power.

A quiet time on New Year's Day. The others are at the annual village picnic sports, and I have withdrawn to my dreaming space.

We talked last night about child-rearing and I found how tentative and vulnerable these new parents feel. Harriet wept as she expressed her confusion about the involvement men should have in Tilly's upbringing. A fraught discussion, but we all attended the pub celebrations afterwards and tried to forget.

I thought about how angry Neil felt about Suzanne's exclusion of men from her exhibition and his uncertainty about what feminism meant to him. Then there's Ross's hurt at the implications of male exclusions from child-rearing, Rob's mystification about the expenditure of women's energy. I approved of Kenneth Pitchford's description of his involvement with feminism as a constant struggle with fear of impotence, but Rob thought he was a wimp, and so did Jen.

I asked Rob what he got out of the Women's Studies course. He talked about developing feelings of 'minorite' and more confidence in his own position, leading to a personal evangelism rather than trying to be 'feminist'. Sounds OK to me, but I don't have to make the choices.

January 1983 O'Connor

Strong emotion recollected in turbulence. Today I'm angry and despairing about the present and future with men. At the beginning of this chapter, I felt strong, distanced, but now feel hurt and torn. Rob commented that we women seem to be developing a harder line about men in the past year or so. At times I know I'd be more effective away from men but fear the separation. This contradiction paralyses me.

For comfort I re-read parts of *On Loving Men*, in which Jane Lazarre exposes her own contradictions, with no clear answers except a commitment to process and understanding. At no stage does she consider abandoning men, yet in her final chapter she says:



Rob and Julia in Bangkok 1977. Photo: Ryan family collection.

Lyndall, brother Patrick and Julia with Edna on the occasion of her honorary doctorate from Sydney University in 1985. Photo: Ryan family collection.



Like Lily Briscoe I have to admit, with a great sense of loss, that up to now strong connection to a man has undermined me, dissipated my energy, left me confused as to the validity of the most personal aspects of my vision of the world.

Suzanne says she does not have a male aesthetic. Today this angers me. Her sexual preference leads her to a separatist solution where I am confused by my feelings for my dead father, my brother, sons, ex-husband and intimate friend.

I talked about some of that anger at the Bisexuality Forum organised by Susie and other Women's Studies students after the Adelaide Women and Labour Conference.

Why is a whole feminist political system erected on a particular sexual preference, condemning the rest of us to celibacy? I asked. The statements and questions listed for discussion in that workshop included:

1. Bisexuality is non-revolutionary and offers no challenge to male power. How is the revolution being defined? How does male power operate?
2. Bisexuality is an extension of heterosexuality and represents a confused, wishy-washy, naïve, indecisive and uncommitted stage of feminism. Bisexuals give their 'primary energies' to men while experimenting with their lesbian lovers. How does this image sit with individual realities? What has been the effect of the women's movement on our consciousness? How useful is static imagery?
3. Since men have access to institutional support, bisexuals run the risk of oppression through patriarchal structures. Considering the all-pervasive nature of patriarchy, how dangerous is a calculated risk?

Why do you feel so intensely about this? Liz O asked after an argument about my giving energy to Rob when I had committed time to her.

Because I feel the justice of the separatist argument, I mumbled.

I tried to deal with my torn-apart feeling relating to men. Rob lent me *Outside In, Inside Out* by Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach and it is the best short statement of women's psychological development I've encountered. Feminist and

neo-Freudian, they account for dependency and usefully promote nurturance in a therapeutic situation.

Last night Liz O and Paddy were discussing feminism and therapy. Liz O had been reading the latest *Scarlet Woman* which included an attack on the growth movement for its promotion of individualism and capitalist ideology. I said that yet again there was no accounting for a dialectical interaction within capitalism. I should write a reply.

Keir, holiday-visiting, came home, saw a feminist discussion in progress, and cleared out for the evening.

Liz O made passing reference to the struggle over men at the Lobelia St Women's Centre in 1978.

The 'Women's Centre Inc' has stayed at Lobelia St for seven years now, despite the reaction from members of the present government and harassment from Right to Life, Pregnancy Support and most recently Women who Want to be Women. Liz O calls this last group 'Women who don't quite know who they are'. We may yet lose the struggle to keep Lobelia St.

Once the Canberra women's movement was established at Lobelia St, other projects blossomed. Women's Health and Information began with a Health Commission grant and included a telephone answering service which operated most of the week, staffed by voluntary and paid workers. These women kept the place going during the decline of WL meetings, making sure it was heated in winter and cleaned throughout the year. The Abortion Counselling Service operated from the back bedroom, on their usual shoestring and with a committed body of volunteer counsellors. For a while we had a branch of the Sydney Feminist Bookshop, operated by Penny, as well as a collection of feminist periodicals and pamphlets.

By 1978 the Women's Centre was well established, although WL had stopped meeting and WEL was struggling. Some of the Information Service volunteers wanted men banned from the centre, even from accompanying women to abortion counselling or for using the bookshop and pamphlet collection.

The Women's Information Service was in danger of losing their government grant if discriminatory practices could be proved. The House Collective, which included all users past and present, called a meeting. Fifty or so women crowded in.

I thought that no men should attend meetings or participate in any way with decision making, but I accepted the Abortion Counselling argument that a woman should feel free to bring whomsoever she wanted to support her in a counselling session. I could see no harm in male students, some of whom attended my classes, seeking information.

Some of the women I was accustomed to support, notably Biff and Jo A, opposed men at the centre in any way. Susan, Daphne and Pamela agreed with me that limited access for men was expedient and politic.

Tension pervaded that first meeting. A large group of women wanted to preserve the centre as a male-free haven in a patriarchal world. They argued with powerful emotion. Those of us who pointed out the difficulties of an inflexible rule sounded uncaring. Accusation and counter-accusation. That meeting finally decided by a narrow margin to keep with the status quo, allowing men limited access, until another meeting was held the following month.

Once again arguments over men were absorbing women's energy. In that month, between meetings, I talked amongst friends and relations. I consulted Edna. Women envied me for my feminist mother, a 1920s revolutionary activist, a long-term campaigner for equal pay who in her seventieth year had intervened on behalf of the WEL at the 1974 National Wage Case and argued successfully for the extension of the minimum wage to women. She preferred pragmatic solutions to dogmatic stances.

The conflict over men dotted my diary entries for April 1978:

9.4.78 Edna thought of a compromise for the Women's Centre problem: offer to ban men when the separatists are there. It might work. Susan has organised a dinner for Jenny N, Biff and me on Tuesday. Might try Edna's idea there.

12.4.78 Feeling low. A feeling of Biff being on the other side has thrown me into gloom. Susan pushed hard, Jenny N hardly let me finish a sentence, but I managed to put my view which is in favour of an autonomous women's movement, seeing this conflict as a dispute over tactics. Biff sees it as a disagreement over principle. I hoped for a consensus based on compromise but I'm not confident. Much of my past loyalty is bound up in this and I feel very sad. I feel closer to so many more people now than to Biff, ridiculous now to pretend otherwise. But I'm stunned with sadness.

13.4.78 1am. Back from the meeting. Went badly at first, then things came together. Sara was good, Pamela incisive. I said a few careful things. All quite good, people started leaving, then Jessica began a long speech and Sara engaged in a boring dialogue with her and then Biff began a monologue. I lay down on the lounge and Pamela brought me home. I've done everything I can and I'm fed up. Don't want any more to do with it. Lots of old faces: Lorna M, Barbara M, Frances L. For about two hours I was proud of the way Sara, Pamela and I brought it together. But the selfishness depresses me. Divisions looming. At one time we even seemed on the verge of creating a core again, but it dissipated.

13.4.78 Women's Centre trouble looming large. Rob told me that Di R reported Biff said I had split the first meeting (wow!).

15.4.78 Woke yesterday in a fury about the Women's Centre and Biff. This intense emotion must be part of my development... Spoke too grimly to Liz O about separatist politics. Feeling strangely strong and clear about the whole mess.

20.4.78. It's over. The Women's Centre conflict did not come to a vote. Consensus worked. Hooray! Energy not wasted.

I thought reason had won but some supporters of male exclusion had dropped out, tired of the meetings, and one lot came late rather drunk from the university bar, losing the support of the uncommitted. The proposal just fizzled. But Jo A left the meeting, saying she'd never return to Lobelia St. I have hardly seen her since.

—

I am feeling excited because the young Canberra feminists who went to the anti-Franklin dam struggle in south-west Tasmania as an affinity group changed the tactics of the protest and obstructed the building of a wharf at Warner's Landing. Calling themselves the 'Red Emmas', they are pictured on the front page of *The Age* after eight of them were arrested: Susie is very recognisable. All the Red Emmas are WAR on Anzac Day veterans. Liz O and I rushed for a suitable quote from Emma Goldman and sent a congratulatory telegram:

DIRECT ACTION HAVING PROVEN EFFECTIVE ALONG ACADEMIC LINES IS
EQUALLY POTENT IN THE ENVIRONMENT. WELL DONE - EMMA GOLDMAN

We had only to change one word 'economic' to 'academic', from Emma G's article on anarchism.

Part of me now regrets having decided not to go with the Red Emmas to Tasmania – in favour of this writing time. The Red Emmas look cheerful, but very wet; they are twenty years younger than I.

When the Red Emmas first met to plan their expedition, they went around the circle to hear individual reasons for participating in what is essentially an environmental struggle. I said I wanted to be part of ordinary people's struggle against state power on questions of survival. The Greenham Common women were on my mind.

The *Guardian Weekly* refers to some of the complaints by men who were excluded from the Greenham Common protest, apart from sandwich-making and child-minding: another example of male envy of our joy in the struggle. Rob went to the Franklin Dam protest by himself, since he did not have an affinity group.

Last Christmas night, Susie bubbled with the Red Emmas' plans while the young men sat in glum silence: the young women going off to fight, the young men feeling alienated. Neil can't bear to hear or see the news from Tasmania. I repress my joy when he is around. If I did not love these men, there would be no problem.

January 1983 Tomakin

I have set up a writing table in a corner of the big living room of this house, rented for a fortnight at the coast. Next to the picture windows the table overlooks the

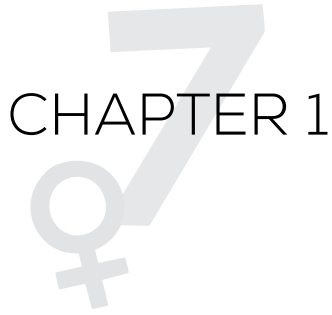
lagoon and surrounding trees now swept by a stiff north-westerly. Neil and Susan drove down with me yesterday. They will leave after a day or so. I feel nervous and excited about the prospect of solitude.

This consideration of *The Problem of Men* is coming to an end with a reflection about the difference between individual and group responses. Last summer Harriet initiated one of her games with women at her dinner party. She asked us to sketch out where each would be in five years' time: how living, working, loving. Living and working proved easy to reveal, but the guests spoke vaguely about their loving, except for affirming woman-centredness. I did not speak of my deepest desires, for fear of disapproval, my own as much as the others. I wondered if the others were also hiding their desires. Harriet displayed a cavalier attitude to men: there to be used. I envied her apparent independence. Liz O spoke of a Sydney friend who daily abuses her son for being male. We received this information with acute discomfort.

If lecturing on this subject, I would sum up thus:

The differing, often polarised, attitudes to men now prevalent in the women's movement are a valuable expression of the dialectic of struggle. We need these conflicts in order to transcend and progress towards the society where gender is not a source of oppression.

All that love and energy, says Liz O. We're taking it back from men and giving it to the women's movement, and ourselves.



CHAPTER 1

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?

January 1983 South Coast

The familiar fear of the space made for this writing confronts me. Reading Vera Brittain's *Testament of Friendship*, I feel humbled by the energy and political activism of her friend Winifred Holtby, yet Winifred's early death was surely a commentary on that frenetic output, that sense of service which can deny the self.

What does the voice in your head sound like? Susan asked last night. What's it saying? To whom?

I listened awhile. A kind of storyteller, I thought... popular historian even... commenting on my life, fitting it in to a bigger context. I seem to have lost something. A long time ago I had a childlike voice, a joyful voice.

Susan worries about hers. It's either a scolding parent or a polished lecturer. I could offer no comfort to Susan. Mine's turning into a propagandist, an image-maker. Keir refused to enter this discussion.

Susan and Keir have departed. This morning I plan to reply to the article in *Scarlet Woman* attacking the human growth movement. I cleaned the window so that my view of the river, the mangrove-like swamp trees, the coastal forest and hazy mountains, is clearer. Took a photo. In *Testament of Friendship* Vera describes the rented cottage on the Yorkshire coast, where Winifred began writing *South Riding* in earnest. Only three rooms, but a light and sunny living/working space with books for review in the window niche, visible to passers-by. Winifred was dying from kidney disease and hired a daily cleaning woman. She needed as much time as she could buy.

The first draft of the *Scarlet Woman* reply is finished: needs revision, very short. I argue for a feminist human-potential pathway.

The problems of individual unhappiness among women are the problems of the movement and the various attempts of feminists to learn and use the ideas and techniques from the Human Growth courses are ways of turning the outgrowths from late-stage capitalism to our advantage.

This is not to say that the only thing that held women back was a 'negative mental set' but that we must learn ways to overcome negativities which develop from internalisation of social forces. Enough has been done by feminist theorists like Mitchell and Dinnerstein to show that the internalisation of infant experiences arising from the material arrangements of gender oppression is more than sufficient to perpetuate the system of oppression. The answer lies in a two pronged attack: on the material base of the oppression and on the consciousness which perpetuates it. Late-stage capitalism is providing us with some of the seeds for the destruction of false consciousness.

Solitude brings inertia. I have had little experience of solitude, having never lived alone nor travelled by myself. When immersed in work, surrounded by friends and family, I long for cleared time and space. Now I've created it and paralysis sets in. Many women of my generation went straight from home into marriage and children; and although they were sometimes lonely, solitude was not a problem.

'Living alone is the greatest luxury on earth,' Edna declares, but she still fantasises about having a family around her in her old age. I would like to lead a kind of

solitary life with one or two people in the background: probably better than living alone, providing company when required with no demands at other times. Susan chooses to live alone, maintaining late hours but luxuriates in a house to herself.

Until the women's movement, I had not lived with anyone outside my nuclear family, first my birth family, then a husband and sons, then as a single parent. In the early Women's Liberation days, I dreamed of collective lifestyles. We held a meeting in 1971 to discuss possibilities. At that stage we sometimes advertised meetings in *The Canberra Times* and several strangers came to that meeting, including a priest. I dreamed of structural arrangements and a work roster. I envisaged small houses or flats around central courtyards, with communal living areas and shared facilities, not very different from the housing cooperatives now incorporated on some new estates. We would live in our nuclear or single units with arrangements for collective childcare. The priest looked disappointed, and sardonic.

The following year I, with my nuclear family, stayed on an Israeli kibbutz where Hazel had settled awhile. Hazel criticised the gender division of labour there as well as the restrictions on individual freedom but I wallowed in release from the role of nursery-governessing while Keir and Neil filled their days with peer activities. We hardly saw them. I still admire kibbutz child-rearing practices.

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Some members of Canberra Women's Liberation spent joyous collective weekends at the coast, mostly at Jo G's brown wooden house crouched on a hill amid 40 acres of bush running down to McKenzie's Beach. In July 1972 I wrote a chronology of the first weekend in my notebook:

Friday evening: Beryl and Daphne waiting before the log fire when Biff and I arrived after difficulty finding the location. Drinks, preparation of supper. Discussion about oysters.

9.30pm. Arrival of Lyn, Susan and Ros complaining about hysterical atmosphere of journey. Supper eaten before fire (cold chicken and salad). Problems with opening oysters.



At Jo G's coast house, McKenzie's beach. Top row: Lyn, Beryl, Middle row: Lorraine, Biff, Jo G, Julia, Bottom row: Barbara. Susan M probably took the photo.

11pm. Beryl departs for bed, in a small room off the verandah shared with me. Discussion about school by tired, unwinding teachers, grog consumed.

Midnight. Decision to walk to the beach, escorted by Daphne. Lyn's sudden decision to swim (note midwinter season with usual temperature). Others gradually follow, after hesitation, except Jo G who returns to house. Races on beach, warming up after second swim.

1am. Return to the house. My watch missing. Ros and I return to beach with

torch, find watch half-buried in sand. Lyn passes out, then vomits, Susan ministers aid. Lyn sleeps beside fire. Daphne and Susan sleep on verandah. Biff and Ros sleep in another room off verandah.

Saturday: 10am. Lyn cooks breakfast: eggs and sausages. Ros sweeps. Beryl and I wash up. Some take turns on tyre swinging from tall tree. Susan pumps shower water. Beautiful dunny in bush, overlooking large burrawang. Beryl brushes Ros's hair, then mine, decides my hair needs oiling, olive oil applied.

Others sit on beach, chatter, read Juliet Mitchell, walk on rocks.

'Surfies' pass in wetsuits. Lunch late, talk about medical experiences and VD. Many siestas. Evening walk to headland. Sitting before fire, Jo G sleeps. Steaks cooked by me. Oysters prised open at last, and eaten. Ros sleeps. Jo G rises. Beryl off to bed. I sleep before fire, then to bed. Jo G, Biff, Lyn, Susan and Ros talk till 4am.

A photograph from that weekend, a treasured relic snapped by an old box camera, illustrated the 1976 article on Canberra Women's Liberation in *Refractory Girl*. All over the western world groups of women experienced that joy in each other's company. Later that year I tried harder to recapture the experience at another coastal weekend.

Next day, 6.30pm. Lyn and Ros have been playing bridge all afternoon, with Biff and Eileen and others alternating. I lay on Lyn's inside bed reading Colette and now have just returned from rock walking. Cool and blustery weather but Ros suddenly stripped off, rushing into the water. Biff filmed the episode. She is regretting leaving the Mahjong at home.

The next time we spent a weekend there, the temperature soared as Biff and I drove down. Then, as we passed Malua, a cool southerly change began.

When we arrived Jo G, Beryl and Susan were here and we all lay for an hour on the verandah. Then sat up and chatted. Beryl wore her red and white checked Arab headgear.

Others arrived at 10pm. Jo A had slight migraine while Lorraine and Barbara collapsed with exhaustion. All drifted to bed by 11pm, to Susan's disgust. She wanted another all-nighter.

Jo G is a pagan. Steeped in Greek pre-patriarchal mythology she worries about a Christian revival, talking about it all day. Others dismiss the possibility.

17.12.72 Dead mutton birds along the tideline yesterday. Jo G said they were migrating from Canada to Tasmania, or vice versa, and some didn't make it.

Last night we sat round chatting, drinking and singing, except for the bridge players. We made up a song to the tune of 'O Come All Ye Faithful'.

At midnight, oppressed by the fog in the house, some walked down to the beach. Lyn, Susan, Biff and I stripped for a swim. The wind had died down, the water felt warm, a bright moon emerged from the clouds. The shrieks of joy, gambolling and singing disturbed the occupants of two cars parked at the north end of the beach. Headlights switched on and two young men emerged to sit near Beryl, Eileen and Jo A on the beach. Beryl rushed to the water's edge to warn the skinny dippers: but no incidents. One lad came and asked for a light while we dressed and Jo A told him to piss off.

Today, perfect weather. I rose from my verandah bed at 9am. After egg and mango breakfast (Biff had been sent a box of mangoes from N. Queensland) we lay on the beach for the traditional sunbake. I felt so healthy and active I bodysurfed the waves, staying in a long while.

Jo A hasn't any bathers, an excuse for not swimming, but her migraine has gone. She disappeared to fish this morning, returned, then off again, missing lunch. She brought a stew and a fantastic coffee cake as an unsolicited contribution to this weekend.

We are tanning various shades. Eileen's skin has a startling 19th century English white quality but she braved the surf this morning.

Smooth green tinge on the spotted gums at this season. Forest floor thick with leaves and twigs. Burrawangs clumped all over the land. The best burrawang grows outside the doorless dunny allowing for proper contemplation. This wet sclerophyll

forest is more satisfying than our dry Monaro variety in Canberra. Some purple hardenbergia near the hot water tower, where Lorraine, Ros and I were pumping this morning.

No shower for me so far. Swims cleaned me: I haven't bothered to wash off the salt. What is happening? I used to have such a fetish about washing off the salt. Here I could be a child of nature for long periods. However, after the final swim this evening I shall shower, wash hair in the soft rainwater in preparation for the journey home.

We pee in the bush to keep the dunny from filling too fast. I am sitting on the verandah. Susan is asleep nearby and a fresh breeze rustles through the bush. I overlook the beach which has no name. Through the trees over the gully I can just see the only other house in the bay. A honeyeater pipes. Completely at peace. Cleansed body from the surf, tingling from toasting in the sun but lotions protected skin from burning. All the ravages of the school year gone.

In 1970 I asked my senior high students how they would like to live: most dreamed of living with their peers, some with other people's parents but none with their own parents. One young woman wanted to live entirely alone. None wanted to live in their own nuclear families.

Biff and I decided to work towards our ideal collective life. We approached nine adults who would be collectively responsible for eight children. Three heterosexual couples with six children between them, a lesbian couple, one single mother with two children and Roger, a single teacher who thought he'd like to live with children. The children ranged in age from one to eleven years. Eight of the adults drew professional salaries. At the early meetings we had great fun designing living space and listing possible consumer durables.

After a series of meetings in Bruce's and my living room we decided to begin by renting accommodation. Biff and I inspected a large house in Forrest, which had housed senior staff from the Danish embassy, rather haute bourgeois for lower middle-class socialists like us.

We called in on Jo G to confide our plans. Aren't there some very high-voltage members of your group? she asked. She was doubtful.

I now wonder about Bruce's motives, but he dutifully attended meetings, played his part in the deliberations. The group decided against the embassy residence, on the grounds of insufficient rooms.

In search of feminist collective living models, Biff and I visited a Sydney household organised by Mavis and Joyce. The North Shore dwelling housed nine people, including Joyce and her daughter, two heterosexual couples, one with a teenage son and two single men: seven adults and two teenage children. The rented house, of a higher standard than any of them had previously experienced, included a swimming pool and a dishwasher, both rare in those days. Biff and I arrived in the early evening when only Joyce and Mavis were home. Although appearing somewhat harassed, they generously gave us their time, discussing their financial arrangements and the housework roster. Joyce described the first bathroom cleaning by a man who had never before attempted the task: a foaming mass of Ajax.

We asked about the problems. People forgot to unload the dishwasher; cleaning and filtering the pool was a drag. They paused, then explained that they set up the collective on feminist principles, but everyone else in the house referred directly to them, related to each other through them.

We are still the centre, bearing the responsibility, said Joyce, only it's two of us instead of the usual one woman in a nuclear household.

On our way back Biff and I discussed this problem of women's responsibility for household management and interaction, so uncomfortably close to our own situation.

Let's not call another meeting, Biff suggested, as a test, wait until one of the others does.

So we didn't. The prospective living-together collective never met again.

Roger went on to join Helen S's household with small children, and after a few months decided he no longer wanted to live with children. Within two years, Biff and I left our nuclear households and the third couple split, while the single mum formed another nuclear family. The whole experience was really about transitions.

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A hot shower at 5pm is the peak experience of my day in this coast house after a late afternoon swim and followed by a glass of wine and a cigarette, although I am smoking and drinking less. So pleasant not to have to wait for someone else, or to hurry along because someone is waiting. Days are slow: a pre-breakfast swim this morning, the clear water moving and turning with me in an empty green South Pacific, then a morning of reading and writing followed by a walk to the shop for necessities, lunch, sometimes a rest, more reading, writing and the second swim. I drift easily from space to space, often catnapping while reading. Learning to love solitude.

In literature dealing with single women...authors seem to be clearing out a new space that is in actuality an old, or archetypal, landscape of the psyche, a place that, essentially a-patriarchal, contains once-forgotten possibilities of personal development. Rekindling old images, buried archetypes, and discarded choices, such fiction brings its heroes through quests towards personal transformation or rebirth.

Reading Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, Brighton, 1982.

In spite of all this, I would appreciate a visit from a close friend.

I remember my child-self as a writer: first published poem at 7, a novel at 8, a long novel at 12, a diary at 14.

I bet you were one those scribbling kids, always clutching a notebook, Helen P once said, watching me writing in the Tarlina journal. And I was. But that self was thoroughly buried by adolescence and formal education, not surfacing again until I began travelling in my early thirties. Since then I've always written a travel journal, then took up everyday diary writing. Neil looked at the diary volumes nervously, asked what is to become of them in the event of my death.

I shall bequeath them to a committee of my friends and you, since you show so much interest, I said.

When I split from Bruce, my concern for my sons' stability drove thoughts of collective living away. Yet so many women in that situation now turn to group housing arrangements. I took fifteen months to arrange permanent accommodation, a little Tocumwal wood and fibro house in O'Connor with a converted garage room

in the garden for young adolescent Keir. We continued as a single parent family.

I dreamed of collective living, but others put it into practice. Susan moved in with Daphne for six months before going off alone. Pamela and Sybille formed and reformed several group households. Biff took the most adventurous course, creating her collective.

Chris V, with whom I reconnected at Own Your Own Life group, arrived to relieve my solitude very late last night and is still sleeping. It's good having someone, him, in the background, but I feel glum this morning. A cool wind chills me.

I finished Annis Pratt's book and was struck by the contrast between Pratt's deep archetypal meanings and my superficiality. Pratt's thesis knocks my reply to *Scarlet Woman* on the Marxist concept of the progress of human existence. So many feminist writers are convinced that women's lives were better in pre-capitalist societies that I am re-examining my position.

Di E arrived. She, Chris V and I have been talking, with a few pauses for reading, ever since. A postscript on the problem of men: Di E and I feel jagged, angry and unresolved, while Chris V strives for attention and batters us with words.

Writing became impossible for two days as Susan and Sue S arrived today and the self that was meandering on my internal plains was swamped. Of course I enjoyed the company. Suzanne once drew attention to Virginia Woolf's complaint that she had spent the 'cream of my mind' one morning chatting on the telephone. But Woolf needed the support of those friends.

All but Chris V have left and he drives off today so I have more solitude till the weekend, when Rob comes. Chris V demands much of my energy in listening to him but he sleeps till midday so I have this precious morning time. Problems of living with people and maintaining a core of self.

When Biff first left Ian she rented a house in Owen Crescent with her elder daughter Genna, the twins alternating weekly. I joined them with Neil, sharing a bedroom for three months, while waiting to move into my MacPherson St house. Keir stayed with my brother Patrick and family. Biff had various people sharing



Julia in MacPherson St garden. Photo: Marian May.

before deciding to settle with Genna in Don's recently acquired house, a double brick triple fronted edifice in Condamine St. Neither she nor Don had a partner at that time and the first few months proved pleasantly supportive. Eventually Biff suggested they extend the house to enlarge the household. She would provide the bulk of the funds from a settlement she'd reached with Ian about the house he still lived in. They invited Rob to join them.

I began to feel agitated and excluded so I consulted the I Ching about the project: hexagram 20: the Abyss.

Biff welcomed Don's new relationship with Anne. Don began to spend long periods at Anne's place in the country while Biff's twins staying every other week raised issues of group responsibility for childcare and space problems, with small bodies sleeping on mattresses.

Rob then began a new relationship outside the household, raising questions of commitment and participation. Rob's lover, Rose, was invited into the household and

became indispensable to the busy schedule, especially the childcare. Great evenings of food, alcohol, grass and chat round the living room fire held them together that winter with the promise of better times when they would be more organised.

The Condamine St extensions were just growing beyond the foundations but I felt uneasy that Don did not have a space in his own house.

Rob and Rose were breaking up but Rose wanted to stay in the household, supported by Biff, so Rob rented a room for sleeping and spent less time in Condamine St. The childless adults were finding the children a drag. Biff felt responsible for everyone, with the result that the other adults put her at the centre of their growing unease. Everyone had difficulty admitting failure, hanging on to the memory of the good times. When Biff went on leave to the US, Genna fell sick, to be neglected by the household.

The collective fractured on Biff's return. Rose moved away and Don, the house owner, only visited occasionally with Anne. It took months to admit that the enterprise had failed and should be sold when the extensions, by then in full swing, were completed. Biff stayed as caretaker and Liz O moved in. Biff felt she had been divorced from six people. The house took two years to sell.

I thought the carelessness with personal space and the inexperience of caring for children were the main causes. Biff thought there was a hex on the house. When it sold, she bought a Tocumwal house in Way St to live in with her children. Liz O moved in with me and Neil, who had taken over Keir's backyard flat when he finished school and moved to Sydney.

The rupture of the ten-year intimacy between Biff and me is an important thread in my Canberra Women's Liberation story. There were other causes of the rift between us but the collapse of the Condamine St collective, and my support for Rob, provided the catalyst. The breach was partially healed for me after I did the Own Your Life training.

Alone again, but this time I am clearer, less apprehensive, knowing I can make good use of the solitude. Ian H, a former SWOW colleague, also on holiday, called late yesterday. Comforting to have someone in the neighbourhood.

Re-reading yesterday's account of the Condamine St experience leaves me uneasy. Even at this distance feelings are raw.

Once Rob, who lived in a variety of group households, gave his criteria for choosing people with whom to live:

- i. must have a low tolerance of mess, particularly in the kitchen,
- ii. must respect a person's need to withdraw from time to time, and
- iii. must tolerate, not be judgemental about, fellow householders' friends.

Like the Condamine St household, I clung to the idea that collective living was better, less agonising than conflicts within a nuclear family. After Condamine St was sold, I thought about group living and Rob's criteria for a while, but came up with no guidelines so fell back on fatalism, deciding that, since Liz O had asked, she should come. It was, as I expected, much like living in an Irish pub, but Liz O is an old hand at group living, and Neil and I found we enjoyed living in an Irish pub. We could always retreat to our rooms.

My MacPherson St house has been rearranged several times in the past three years. A north-facing 'family room' was built out from the kitchen, the old sitting room converted to a study bedroom for me and Liz moved into my former bedroom. A year later I decided to separate work and sleep and shifted my bed to Liz O's old small room.

We have been an all-woman household since Neil finished school and moved to live with Keir in Sydney. Susie moved into the garden room, which she converted into a self-contained flat. Liz O and I have overcome several crises: as the situation continues it will be hard not to see it as permanent, but the expectation of impermanence seems an important criterion in group or collective living. The difficult times come when energies and commitments flow away from the household, particularly to lovers. As yet I have no answers.

After fifteen years of marriage in a nuclear household I was convinced that the answer to personal relations lay in collective living. Since then I have lived as a single parent and in a group household. I find there's something to be said for all

three. Wherever I've lived there's been intimacy, and it's always been like Central Station with people dropping in and a continuing debate about the meaning of life, so I suppose I've chosen what I need at the time, including this temporary solitude. I have learned to view structural solutions to personal problems with suspicion.

This time at the Coast has three days to run and I am reflecting on how it has been used. This is a holiday, so I have not forced the writing but I'm pleased to find how central writing has become and how days flow around it.

Ian H lent me Hesse's *Autobiographical Writings*: I have been rivetted by the style and reflections, despite the whiff of misogyny in *Rosshalde*. Hesse's 'A Guest at the Spa' is not unlike my ruminations here, cut off from my household and usual rounds, rediscovering and identifying patterns in my life. In solitude one is more vulnerable to what one reads. Yesterday I was affected by RW Connell et al's *Making the Difference*, surely the best book on Australian schooling yet written. I was moved to hope for a post at a working-class school.

On my first day here at I realised I was tired of living in an Irish pub. What plans would I make for my household? Nothing has come. Instead, I am seeing how I've created a separation for myself inside that dynamic household: my tiny bedroom of retreat and the study for writing and special visitors. I needed this solitude to appreciate how I nurture myself with spatial arrangements. I have the power to do so because I own the house, or rather the mortgage. The power of ownership seems important and the lack of it a cause of unease at the Condamine St collective household. Since Rob left, he has placed himself in the position of primary tenant in two households, with others moving in and out. Other Condamine St members now control their own households: a disturbing discovering for my ideological commitment to collectives.

I was surprised to see Daphne at the Women's Liberation meeting on collective living.

But you have just landed the best type of government flat and can control your own space! I said.

I can always give away personal comfort for the cause, Daphne replied.

Perhaps the Cause would not benefit from such sacrifice. We may need to creep along, gradually changing those parts of ourselves which equate power with control, experimenting with more egalitarian situations in small parts of our lives.

Tarlina began as a bold attempt by eleven young men and women, including Pamela and Lizi B, 1970s people, to establish a collective household in the country. The idea was that some would live there full time while others came on weekends. There were individual bedrooms and large spaces for being together. The wooden ceilinged kitchen provided an atmosphere of country cosiness.

After three years, the collective malaise came upon them. Divisions developed between those who lived there and those who visited. There was never enough money to maintain the rickety structures. Some members developed raging hostilities while others fell into depression whenever they spent time at Tarlina. Several organisational changes were tried: commitment to only one full group weekend per month, an effort to produce poultry and vegetables on the land, but most members were relieved when they admitted defeat and decided to sell out. Pamela and Lizi B loved Tarlina and suspected the problem lay with the mixed gender membership. They suggested that an all-woman group take over. Paddy, Harriet, Jen, Pat, Sybille, Helen P and I joined Pamela and Lizi B as collective members.

From the outset we resolved to limit expectations. None of us was able to live at Tarlina full time so we decided to keep one weekend per month for members only. We tried to foresee changes in, and differing levels of, commitment. During the closed weekend we organised a 'together time', a couple of hours when we held healing circles and group meditations, played Harriet's 'games', have guided fantasies and 'where am I now?' circular discussions.

This Tarlina collective has been going for four years now. We have two categories of member: those who have the money to invest are full members, and those who have not, can be 'long term visitors' who contribute to running costs. All members have the right to vote at meetings and to bring guests at any time, except to the closed weekends.

Despite these efforts I feel the collective malaise creeping upon Tarlina. Pamela's long absence overseas, Lizi B's move to Northern NSW and a departure after feeling 'left out' of decisions shook us and we don't seem to have much of the old togetherness. SWOW has a regular winter fortnight for study groups and country living skills. Visitors and residents still have to bury the contents of the dunny, gather wood and cook on the wood stove or the open fire. Harriet has brought her women's trade union caucus while Susan and I organised some Women's Studies weekends.

Visitors fall in love with Tarlina, especially the kitchen. The garden is slowly transforming with our plantings, mostly seedlings from Canberra gardens. I would like more use to be made of the place and feel impatient when other members fail to organise their networks to spend time there.

Movements grow from the energies nurtured by short-term togetherness. Those early Women's Liberation weekends at the coast sowed seeds we are still reaping. How we would have appreciated Tarlina in those days.

The weather improves as my departure from the Coast nears. Still reading Hesse, delighting in his attitude to the call of writing, his insistence on free space around him, doing nothing while waiting for the muse to come, and therefore too busy to undertake social engagements. His intimate friends lived at distances, some in other countries, and he chose when to visit, avoiding daily contacts.

If I organised more of my life around writing, I might find group living impossible. Can one move in and out, abandon notions of permanence, or erect an abiding structure round alternating periods of isolation and sociability? Have I lost social skills in these days of isolation?

I dream about living structures: my 'pursuit of happiness', or at least contentment. I know happiness and contentment come from the inside, not from structures, yet I scheme and plan for 'something better'. Last April I suggested to Harriet and Paddy that we plan for declining years by pooling resources in a large house in inner North Canberra, a house which would cater for all our offspring, boarders and visitors, as well as ourselves. They responded enthusiastically but have made no mention since. Tarlina may be enough for us, especially as the difficulties grow.



Above: The Tarlina kitchen fireplace, with hob. Photo: Harry Oldmeadow.

Below: The bucolic scene outside Julia's window at Tarlina. Photo: Harry Oldmeadow.



Susie and three others set up a student feminist household in 1980. Susan admiringly cited their roster, their cleanliness and their group devotion to political and academic work. Later Susie told me that the heyday lasted a year, then one member left and her replacement did not meld as well. The household broke up when Susie departed overseas. She said she could never hope to have such a positive household again. Is such an experience ephemeral by nature, a blooming of attitudes and practices which does not endure beyond the first frost?

Another household has a reputation as a feminist hotel, with its six bedrooms and steady turnover of residents. They seem to plug along rather than try to follow the high ideals of Susie's group. Some women's studies students try a series of households and one said she could only find feminist principles with older women. Keir refused to experiment and lives with one friend in a Sydney flat.

A consumer living cooperative should be the easiest thing in the world to organise! the treasurer of Hazel's Israeli kibbutz told me. I think that the production needs of the kibbutz, the economic survival imperative, kept them together. Kibbutzniks with an alternative usually left. Hazel was one.

The women's refuge collective successfully lobbied for group tenancy of welfare housing, to enable women coming out of the refuge to set up collective households with their children. But often those women prefer to 'go it alone'.

Marriage breakups, and group living, has long been a feature of Western lifestyles. Are women's movement experiences merely examples, with feminism providing the ideology to explain actions that have a material determination? All we ever said we wanted was multiplicity of real choice and that has begun to happen for western women since 1970. As yet, we may not have developed the personal skills necessary for long time survival in collectives.

Is feminism part of the ideology of late-stage capitalism, promoted to create the social dislocation required for passage to new forms of marketing, of exploitation? Every time a household reorganises, new purchases are made: a larger washing machine, a deck, or additional rooms constructed. We are hastening the process of the breakup

of nuclear families, just as people moving to work hastened the decay of extended families last century.

These gloomy thoughts often take hold of me and other socialists experiencing social transformation. However, we hold to a vision of ourselves beyond our gender constraints, or those of the economic system. We know we can struggle for a more just way of living. It may be in the interests of the more progressive elements of capitalism to assist in some measure, but this does not mean we stop striving.

These considerations also underlie my misgivings about socialist-feminist romanticisation of women's lives under feudalism, on the grounds they were closer to the means of production. Those women were constrained and warped by the demands of the extended family and by the universal system of reproduction from which long struggles by our foremothers of the past two centuries have freed us. I hate to see those struggles denied by false nostalgia. As a gender we have never been helpless victims of any system. I can sit at the coast writing this in solitude or company because my foremothers fought for my right to education, to paid employment, to choose to limit my childbearing. I know I'm privileged and that the vast majority of women on this planet do not yet possess those rights, but I am grateful and hope that my activities can assist them in their struggles.

I am finding that walking on wide empty beaches is conducive to cosmic reflection and statements of faith.



CHAPTER 8

THE DIALECTIC OF PATRIARCHY

May 1983 O'Connor

Taking stock of a term's work back in a junior high, I enjoyed feeling engaged in important work. The days were hard, my mind crowded with the needs of 120 adolescents.

In the first week of this break, I concentrated on input. Read Dale Spender's *Man Made Language*, which considers the question of women writers in its last chapter. Now reading Fanny Trollope's biography: she rose at 4am to complete a day's writing before the family breakfast. These books helped me return to this writing.

Dale Spender's chapter set me thinking about the project I intended completing between Easter and this May vacation, an academic article on the dialectic of patriarchy, which remains half written and may be out of date soon. When I sat

down in April I could not recall the laborious mental processes which produced my talk at the Women and Labour Conference workshop or my Women's Studies lecture on the theme. Fearing mental decline, I typed up a draft, read Marx on the concept of species-being, and two recent articles loaned by Susan, which seem abstruse, then put the whole thing aside. But Dale Spender's chapter has encouraged me to write my story of capitalism, patriarchy and the dialectic.

In 1972 I heard Shlomo Avineri, a visiting Israeli academic at the ANU, give a paper on Hegel, the 19th century German philosopher, and I saw the significance of Hegel's dialectic for the women's movement. Avineri drew my attention to the conflict between the idea of the home as a haven from civil society and the attempt by feminists to bring some of the egoism of civil society into the altruism of the home. I thought his exposition calm and non-pejorative, but later Eugene Kamenka, his ANU host, delivered a public lecture in which he used Avineri's observation to attack Women's Liberation. Furious with Kamenka, intellectually excited by Avineri, I decided to work on the schema to illuminate the significance of the contemporary women's movement.

My first attempt was delivered at a Bremer St meeting. The wages for housework debate was beginning so I linked my schema with payment for housework as a stage in breaking down the barriers between the home and civil society, between the private and the public spheres. In this draft, 'Thoughts on Capitalism and the Family', published in *Canberra Women's Liberation Newsletter* No. 30, April 1973, I argued that Women's Liberation was a response, rather than a stimulant, to the invasion of the family haven by the marketplace:

In this century, the area occupied by civil society has expanded and become complex while the family has contracted to the nuclear unit... Within the family, women see men increasingly motivated by the demands of civil society. Families have been split, contracted and uprooted to serve the needs of civil society yet women are expected to continue with the notions of 'service' and 'devotion' to the needs of the family. No wonder that some women, seeing that men respect only the material gains from civil society, demand payment for housework and childminding in order to regain status and respect for their roles.

I wrote that paper during a January heatwave, taking refuge in the air-conditioned National Library.

My tentative support of payment for housework was fiercely attacked at the Mt Beauty Women's Liberation Conference in January 1973 and later that month Edna demolished the wages for housework case at the WEL national conference in Canberra by arguing that industrially it was a disaster for women, trapping them at the bottom of the wage scale. After such a barrage, wages for housework gained little support in Australian second-wave feminism, although it has been taken up by some of the New Right. I did not maintain my tentative argument in the face of such weighty opposition but when I looked again at the issue while teaching Women's Studies at the ANU, I fetched up somewhere near my original position. The struggle for wages for housework is an excellent consciousness raiser, drawing attention to free labour service by women. But it is a struggle, rather than a battle to be won in our Australian wages system. No economy could pay the true value of housework, but we should draw attention to that value.

August 1983 Tarlina

My first time alone at Tarlina since May 1981 when I began giving more time to this writing. On that occasion I felt afraid of internal gremlins but now feel more daring. These fears are not of rape and assault, which accompany every solitary woman, but are part of blocks to creativity. The kaleidoscope has shifted again and here I am, taking the risk. The car is here, I can escape.

This is the early spring vacation and I came here after two days at the coast with Jen, Ross and the two boys, a nuclear family with whom I like spending time. Jen and Ross work so companionably as a team to manage the children and make a welcome space for a friend. There at the coast we enjoyed spring weather with warm sunshiny days but here at Tarlina winter prevails. I am sitting by the kitchen fire on a damp chilly night.

Jen read this manuscript and commented on the feeling of the time: if she were to write about the refuge now, she said, her recollections would be overlaid by

her subsequent experience. Jen, like Susan, feels there's a special quality to the sisterhood which we generated in Canberra.

Suzanne also feels that the Canberra sisterhood has a particular essence and was part of the reason she moved to the Monaro. Feminism is powerful in the national capital, surely a result of the concentration of highly educated middle class women, with an environment small enough for effective networking. Feeling alienated from the sisterhood in Sydney, Suzanne was still visiting at the time of the *Survivors*, a small group that had formed in 1976, and had attended a meeting of the group at Tarlina.

Suzanne read this manuscript earlier in the year, was mystified by the section on men and hurt by my anger towards her.

I see heterosexual women as heroic front-liners in the struggle with patriarchy, she said.

She also pointed out that I had given scant consideration to the sufferings of lesbian women. Several of the women whose discussion I recorded years ago at Claire's paper on sexuality have since identified as lesbian. Harriet currently describes herself as a 'celibate bisexual'. That describes me just as accurately.

Harriet read this manuscript in May and was surprised by the self-doubt I expressed. Although she enjoyed the reading, she also felt vaguely self-indulgent reading about herself and all of us.

This morning I set up on the Tarlina front verandah because the day decided to be early spring with bright sunshine and a breeze occasionally gusting into the barely tolerable. The verandah overlooks Majors Creek village with its rickety wooden houses straggling along the creek, ending with the Elrington pub fronting the dirt road, which then winds across the bridge and up the hill.

So far, no gremlins have emerged to disturb me, so I read late into the night, Olivia Manning's *Levant Trilogy*. Not as powerful as her *Balkan Trilogy*, I suspect because some of the relationships may be more imagined, not based on Manning's experience and she takes an omniscient stance with her characters, rather than seeing them

from the protagonist's point of view. The portrayal of the marriage is an insight into patriarchal relations.

General, an old ginger cat, has joined me. A relic of the first collective, he moved over the creek to a neighbour when Tarlina was often empty: he sometimes returns when people are here without dogs or children. General is thinner now and suffers from hairball but I hope he is some deterrent to rodents, and he is good company.

Lucille has joined the Tarlina collective as a six-months member in a category devised to introduce new women to the experience and overcome fears of collective decline. When people are away for long periods, temporary members will be introduced to swell the numbers and provide a pool of potential permanent members. Paddy feels uneasy about this. She dislikes change, wants to retain the collective as we began. Lucille has been at two closed weekends now and we have so enjoyed this injection of new spirit that I'm already lamenting her departure in four months.

Refocus, refocus. When I delivered a short paper on 'Capitalism and the Family' at the Socialism and Feminism Conference in Melbourne, 1974, I dropped the reference to wages for housework and concentrated on capitalism as a progressive force for women, compared with feudalism. In that environment this idea was not well received. Presenters with short papers were crowded into one session at the end: I had a maximum of five minutes to present my ideas to a huge tiered audience in a Melbourne University lecture theatre.

Warring factions marred that conference. The Spartacists, a political cult which Suzanne claims the US State Department invented as agents provocateurs to destroy the Left, struggled for control of the microphone. At one plenary I sat behind and above the row of Spartacists and saw a note passed to the youngest recruit from their head honcho. I read over her shoulder: 'Defend the Soviet Union!' Poor creature.

I had not yet learned to make my own space in a conference by skipping destructive sessions and holding informal discussions with friends. Daphne, Susan, Biff and I stuck together in Melbourne, sleeping on a group house floor in Carlton and travelling in the same car.



Biff and Julia arriving in Melbourne for the Socialism and Feminism conference in 1974.
Photo: Pamela Oldmeadow.

Why are Melbourne politicians so grim? demanded Susan when we were eating in a trucking café outside Albury on the return journey.

Anathema! we felt. It's the opposite to what a feminist conference should be. I was still smarting. Let's organise our own political feminist conference, Biff suggested.

Anarchism and feminism?' said Daphne, always carrying her interest in anarchism and analysis of CWL political thought. Then, all talking at once, we began planning the Anarchist Feminist Conference for Canberra in the following year, 1975.

I can still see that roadside café on the old Hume Highway, the greasy brown wooden counter, the green laminex tables and the multi-coloured plastic fly strips in the doorway. Four excited feminists, occupying more than the usual social space for women. My recollections of the Anarchist Feminist Conference, which did eventuate, are vaguer. Biff did most of the organising, a feminist rock band proved a hit, lots of women came, although not as many as to the Socialist Feminists... It was shortly before the Dismissal of the Whitlam government – a general sense of chaos pervaded all around.

Back to the dialectic of patriarchy...

I thought my Melbourne presentation a disaster, met by disbelief or hostile rejection from that tiered concourse. Later *Refractory Girl* published my notes, neither requesting permission nor giving me the chance of revision. Thus, my *Refractory Girl* article, intended as a discussion opener at a conference, reads oddly but my main thesis stands. Even then I was groping towards a dialectical analysis of the question of women's energy when I wrote:

My generation, born in the 1930s, and subjected to the full onslaught of male and female role conditioning in the 1950s is increasingly aware of being the victims of some transitional phase. We formed permanent monogamous relationships, had children and were then hit by the realisation of the contradictions between the altruism of the women's role in the family and the egoism of the marketplace. Undoing the conditioning of the late 1940s and 1950s is a slow and painful process and many of us may not be ready for living with men without assuming modified 1950s roles for some time.

Refractory Girl, Summer 1974-1975.

Although I had not asked for his opinion, Bruce told me he felt emotionally unable to judge my ideas and had asked a sociologist colleague who said that I seemed to be arguing from a subjective position. Still raw from our marriage breakup, I felt furious. Now I regard this 'subjectivity' as a strength, a direct application of 'the personal is political', what academic patriarchs fear most.

Merle once talked about 'sinking in' to writing, allowing time to pause and cogitate. She urged me to take a year off from teaching. These times I allow for writing are often more 'sinking in' than taking up the pen. I think about what has been, what the people around me are doing and whether I have made the right life choices.

This evening I walked down to the public telephone booth across the road from the Elrington to check how Liz O was (she has been ill), to see if Neil had arrived in Canberra (he hadn't), and to tell Suzanne that she can collect her bookcases from the side verandah. On the way I called at the pub. Nothing more conducive to snapping out of it, rather than sinking in, than this hotel in rural Australia. Eight men at the bar, no women, though later a wife may come to drive a husband home. I chatted to Tom, Bill and Hector, Where have you been? How long are you down? Thought you'd given us away. Are you alone? What do you think of the rain? The shire elections? Where's Liz O? Reckon Hawke'd win another election? When are you calling to see us? Do you know Glad's in hospital? I counter with: How's the shearing? Haven't seen your car around. How's the building on the hill? How's Iris?

Paddy, who grew up on a Gippsland farm, is marvellous at networking here, but I find the two distinctly clear cultures, male and female, not so easy. I meet the women on the odd occasions I attend church, but my increasing disenchantment with patriarchal religion means I haven't been for a year, not even to meet the new district rector.

Two years ago, looking for an academic topic, I thought of writing a history of the village as seen by the women but now I hesitate about this kind of intrusion and anyway my life has swung away from academe. This village deserves a sympathetic historian/sociologist: it is an enclave of the rural proletariat, a Labor stronghold in a conservative electorate. The men work for the shire, or have in the past, a surprising number invalidated out through injury, or else they run small farms with

strips scattered round the village as in feudal England. The women work the farms and the houses, and only four have been in the public sphere in my time here: one who runs the shop, another who ran the telephone exchange but was retrenched by automation, one who ran the pub but broke down in health and spirits, and the fourth who experimented with a restaurant.

The district now has a smattering of hippie 'new settlers', the Northern NSW term, not used here. They do some craft work, grow their own vegetables and some have been busted for smoking dope. Most of them have some long connection with the district and are therefore accepted. Tarlina women are very different but there has been no overt hostility of the kind Suzanne experienced in central NSW when locals threw stones on her roof. Locals used to call us 'the commune' but now 'Tarlina women' is a general name. We have carefully followed a policy of non-confrontation. But we have gained acceptance only as individuals, always seen as outsiders, and not for our ideas about women. The village women are shy with us, and, except for Paddy, we are shy with them. Tomorrow when I visit Hector's orchard, I'll be anxious about the conversation. We'll talk about the old days when the schoolhouse was full with seventy children and the annual picnic races attracted hundreds of people. Now the school has been sold as a residence and the few children bus in to Braidwood for school.

I don't know how feminist change will come here, but material shifts, like the availability of contraceptives and higher education are affecting the 'new settler' women. Meanwhile Tarlina is not a separatist enclave and when we need help with the pump, the gully trap, leaking roofs, the hot water system or a top-up of our wood supply, we ask the village men, and the village women know this.

In the Tarlina journal ten days ago one of the Women's Studies students wrote 'this place is special and has healing powers, breathing out of the wood, smiling through the windows with the sunshine, filling me up with strength'. I read and think 'yes - but...', remembering the Studies in Sexism residential school.

Biff and I devised the 'Studies in Sexism' course at SWOW, Canberra's small alternative school for senior secondary students, in 1976. We decided against 'Women's Studies' as a name in an attempt to avoid gender exclusivity and rejected



School Without Walls (SWOW). Above: Julia at Studies in Sexism class, Biff with back to camera, students from L to R Stevie Wertheim, Chrissie Spurgeon, Michelle Denton, Neal Baudinette, Katherine Wertheim and Nick Henry.



Left: Julia and Jane Connors in the art room.

Photos: Marian May.

'gender studies' to avoid blandness. We started from the premise that *sexism* (what a mild term it now seems) existed and that we would investigate why and how with a mixture of theory and consciousness-raising. This was the first full secondary course of this type, a five unit major suitable for inclusion in matriculation packages in the ACT.

By 1980, Paddy and I had established the practice of bringing students to Tarlina in July for a fortnight's activities. Previously filmmaking and other arts were offered but this time Studies in Sexism featured. Twelve students came, including a few of Paddy's wool-spinners and sketchers who drifted in and out of the discussions. Harriet, having taken a year out from paid work, joined us for the reading course as an adult student.

I chose three books for study: Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Sheila Rowbotham's *Beyond the Fragments* and Alix Kates Shulman's *Burning Questions*, the first two because the Redfems were reading them and the third for light relief. As it happened Rowbotham was set aside, Shulman faded into the background and Daly became the main focus. We set a section to be discussed each day, morning and afternoon in two-hour sessions. Evenings were for group and centering exercises.

The students ranged widely in experience of, and attitudes to, feminism, from committed daughters of active feminists to uncertain young intellectual males. Trish lurked in the background. She had enrolled at the last moment without committing herself to the course and I, knowing she was in a difficult emotional space and having faith in the healing environment of Tarlina, encouraged her to come.

Mary Daly was the wrong choice for everyone except the feminists. The young men writhed at Daly's powerful indictment of patriarchy.

'It has hit me deeper than I imagined,' wrote one, a clergyman's son, in the journal. 'Has my gentle Jesus Christ-like father engulfed my mother in his undefeatable goodness?'

They were shocked to find that their sympathetic interest and understanding could be merely new strategies in an ancient power game. One of them, disturbed by experiencing powerful women in a domestic environment for six unrelenting days,

decided to leave with a visiting parent at the weekend. Liz O, a weekend visitor, launched an attack on patriarchal religion after our Sunday church attendance, altogether too much for the clergyman's son, already affected by the religiosity of Daly's style.

The reading party ploughed on, uneasily aware that Trish was not healing. She held back from the supportive environment of the evening group activities. One night she fled into the dark, followed by Paddy, who persuaded her to rest. Next day Trish burst forth about the effect of Daly on her perceptions. She claimed that Daly had provided an explanation of her miseries. None of us could understand how this was so, nor had we seen that Trish, who had not taken part in the formal discussions, had been absorbing the material. Furthermore, Trish's discovery plunged her deeper into depression. The best we could do was calm her a little.

I limped home, succumbing to enervation and flu, bitterly aware that Daly and Tarlina had fuelled Trish's distress. Soon after Trish broke down completely, spent time in a psych ward, went on to mood controlling drugs and has dipped in and out of mental illness ever since. I lacked the confidence to go into Trish's misery.

Later, rereading the Tarlina journal entries for the 'Studies in Sexism' reading group I note that only Harriet hints at the difficulties we met.

We've had some hard times, she wrote, But never so bad that some solution/
facing can't be attempted. I am filled with admiration at the clear-seeing,
responsible and courageous way the school people live. The reading group has
been difficult for some but very rewarding for me.

The students wrote about the magic of Tarlina while I recorded they were growing tired, enervated: a sideways hint at the problems. There is no mention of Trish.

So, yes, Tarlina can be a magic healing place, but much depends on what one brings here. As with everything.

Mary Daly was a ridiculous choice for the inexperienced. Later that year the Redfems split over that powerful treatise.

'How do you think feminism has affected you most?' Harriet asked me at the last Tarlina closed weekend. 'Much less definite, more uncertain,' I said.

September 1983 O'Connor

From my desk I look out at the spring prunus blossoms and potted anemones in flower. The day is overcast, so dark that I resort to the desk lamp.

Yvonne Preston wrote the lead article in the *National Times* this week, an interview with Germaine Greer. The *National Times* has been running articles on the 'feminism is dead' theme: if this is so, why need to harp on it? When Women's Liberation was new, the weeklies hounded us for copy: now that we are more powerful and subversive, they want us dead. Greer provides an easy weapon with which to beat us but much of what she says is of interest:

The love of women, mothers, daughters, sisters, nuns, was only really love of women when it didn't have a very pronounced genital element.

and

The real right wingers are clinging desperately to an ideal of dignity and frugality that's gone, and we may have more in common with (them) in the long run that we're prepared to say now...

National Times, 2-8 September 1983.

After that section in *The Female Eunuch* about giving away her hypothetical children to be reared by Italian peasants, she now desperately wants a baby. This smacks of those men who avoid or desert wives and children, only to discover and value family life later. Biologically men can change direction late in life, while women, unfortunately for Greer, cannot.

This morning I read how Blanche d'Alpuget writes daily from 9am to 6.30pm and from 9pm until midnight. We inhabit different worlds. Now that I am home, the documents to continue the story of the dialectic of patriarchy are at hand.

In 1978 Susan asked me to deliver a Women's Studies lecture on Rosaldo's public/domestic dichotomy. I laboured over the anthropological readings which supported Rosaldo's thesis, outlined in her lecture on Michelle Rosalie's public/domestic dichotomy, that the divisions between the domestic and public spheres are sharpest

in those societies where women have least connection with measurable economic production, and those divisions are a dichotomy. Applying this idea to our own society I saw the division not as a dichotomy, but, Hegel again, as a dialectical opposition. That is, Rosaldo's thesis implied a static situation while Hegel showed how changes came. My ideas now have an anthropological dimension which could lead to a wider application, across cultures.

In the 1978 lecture notes I mention technological innovation, control over reproduction, as a major force for change. Daphne nudged me in that direction in a pre-lecture discussion in her kitchen. I had outlined the major contradiction in the realm of ideas: between the individualism, egoism and competition necessary for survival in the public sphere under capitalism and the cooperation and altruism necessary for survival in the private sphere. After the discussion with Daphne, I injected a material element:

Technology has made individualism and egoism possible within the domestic sphere by freeing women from continual childbirth and by lightening domestic chores. The demands of the public sphere for labour, particularly cheap, unskilled but reliable labour, have made further inroads in the domestic sphere. Thus, in a rapidly changing society the traditional dichotomy between the two spheres has become a contradiction which means struggle between opposites of a dialectical nature has developed. The contemporary women's movement has emerged to vocalise the struggle.

I typed the lecture notes for a Redfems discussion in 1980 but received no help with my dialectic from that discussion, nor from the post-lecture discussion.

Women's Studies had difficulty with the term 'patriarchy'. Susan followed the British socialist feminists, like Rowbotham, Barrett and Mackintosh, who vetoed the term on the grounds it was universal and ahistorical. I wanted to use it for political reasons, noting the power of the word and the fury of opposition it aroused. I felt that 'women's oppression', the term preferred by Barrett, was weaker and could prove just as ahistorical and universal as the socialist feminists considered the term 'patriarchy'.



ANU Women's Studies. Cheryl, at top, knitted vests with women's symbols across the chest, developing RSI in the process. Celebrating the vests at the Tu Do restaurant in O'Connor, Julia at far left next to Susie C, Harriet on far right, Heather mid-right, Michelle D at bottom. Photo: Ryan family collection.

When some women's studies students formed a discussion group, Susan, Daphne and I joined, suggesting we investigate the patriarchy concept, with a view to presentation at the Adelaide Women and Labour Conference in 1982. The Patriarchy Group included Susie, Nancy with other graduate and post graduate students. Nervous after the Redfems experience, I demanded a limited life for the group as well as commitment to joint paper writing. We met for eight months in 1981-2, with a big gap for the summer. We never reached consensus but I made two breakthroughs for my dialectic.

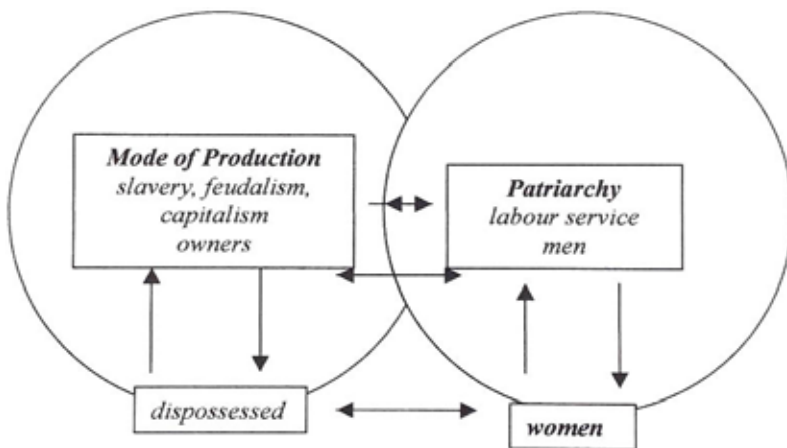
I read French feminist Christine Delphy's argument for a materialist feminism, in *The Main Enemy* and latched on to her idea of male control of women's labour as the material base of patriarchy. Jen had previously incorporated this idea in her economic explanations for the Redfems of the material benefits men gained from women.

It seemed to me that Juliet Mitchell, by firmly placing women's oppression in the superstructure, rather than the economic base of society, landed herself in a convoluted neo-Freudian explanation of consciousness which relied on cultural revolution as an agent of change. The bitterness of the British socialist feminist attack on Delphy's thesis also struck me as significant. If the truth lay in Delphy's analysis, then all those complicated superstructural investigations were of marginal importance.

Intellectually Delphy appealed to me, not least because her explanation was straightforward. Delphy isolates the exploitation of domestic work as the basis of all women's economic exploitation. She sees marriage as a labour relationship which operates both inside capitalism and in other economic systems: through marriage men control the labour power of women. It is not the nature of the work but the fact that it is unpaid which constitutes exploitation. Whatever the nature of wives' tasks, their relations of production are the same.

Women do not escape this exploitation by avoiding marriage, Delphy argues, for so long as some women's labour service is appropriated by men as a right, then all women are subject to oppression and discrimination in both public and private spheres. So, within capitalism, there are two modes of production: the industrial mode of capitalist exploitation and the family mode of patriarchal exploitation. Delphy was charged with the heresy of dualism. I thought dualism might give some answers.

For the Patriarchy discussion group, I drew up a diagram that incorporated my idea of how Delphy's thesis worked in with the dialectic for an analysis of patriarchy and the prevailing economic system:



Susie then asked the question which illuminated so much for me: what is the motive force behind this dialectic, that is, why is it not static? So I reread some early Marx, and came up with the dynamic that he gave for the oppressed proletariat in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The proletariat have a concept of themselves as 'species-being' which transcends their role as workers and fuels their resistance to capitalism.

The more I examined 'species-being' the more I appreciated its application to the struggles of women over time. Women have a concept of themselves which transcends their gender position and which fuels their resistance to patriarchal oppression. A further answer to Susie's question is that interaction between the two systems, capitalism and patriarchy, in that changes in one affect the other. For example, some changes in technology which arose in capitalist production affected women's struggle for species-being by giving them more control over reproduction, and speeding up domestic chores. Thus, material changes in technology, like contraception and domestic appliances, made women's resistance to patriarchy more effective.

I knew that this description could be attacked as simplistic and reductionist but was not at that stage prepared to go further.

When we met for the final preparation for the Adelaide conference, the Patriarchy Group had not reached consensus. We decided to present a workshop in which each gave a brief position outline – Susan was to introduce the whole enterprise and to criticise the notion of ‘essence’, Susie was to expound on French feminist Luce Irigaray, then I to speak about my dialectic of patriarchy.

The Patriarchy Group requested limited numbers at the workshop and we sat with our audience at a round table, so different from the format of the Melbourne Socialist Feminist Conference. I spoke to a series of points jotted down the previous night in the YMCA dormitory where our group was billeted. I felt high throughout the workshop. Beginning with the power of naming and the concept of ‘patriarchy’, I moved on to ‘letting go’ of Marxism, considered the feudal nature of domestic relations, Delphy’s material base, then an explanation of my diagram, drawn on cardboard.

The conference organisers asked us to repeat the workshop, but in a traditional classroom. With us at the front, the audience in rows of seats bolted to the floor and the emotional disturbance of Suzanne’s paper on ‘form’ preceding us, I could not capture my earlier elan and grew uncomfortably aware of the holes in my argument. A Sydney academic accused us of ‘reifying patriarchy’.

Later in 1982, at my last lecture in the Women’s Studies Course I looked at other dialectics, in Zillah Eisenstein’s *Capitalist patriarchy and the case for socialist feminism*, Renate Bridenthal’s *Towards a feminist Marxism: the dialectics of production and reproduction* and Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*. I felt closest to Bridenthal, who links production and reproduction and notes the contradictions between work and family which women experience in advanced capitalism, but she keeps her gender schema firmly within a larger class base, grounded in women’s reproductive function, thus implying that the class division is primary while gender differentiation is biologically determined.

I decided to write up my model as an academic exercise but since May this year my energies have flowed into junior secondary teaching, with a brief diversion into Women’s Studies for a lecture on ‘Motherhood’ in early August. For this I read

O'Brien's *The Politics of Reproduction* and realised that here was a seminal (ovular) work, with which I had to match my ideas.

For starters, Mary O'Brien has no problems with the term 'patriarchy', which she sees as 'the power to transcend natural realities with historical man-made realities', with reproduction as the material base of patriarchal relations. Her dialectic is complex, firmly based on an impressive critique of Hegel, and involving several oppositions: of man and child, men who do not labour in reproduction and women who do (with men appropriating the products of women's labour), and men separated from biological continuity and women integrated with natural process, individual men and men in general. In O'Brien's dialectic over time there have been two important historical changes: the discoveries, firstly of paternity and secondly of reliable contraception, the latter having changed the process of reproduction and therefore demanding a change in the social relations of production.

O'Brien puts much effort into critiques of Firestone and de Beauvoir, but I don't see these theorists as O'Brien's real critics, as they are in another tradition. The real opponents are the British socialist feminists. O'Brien's book is a 'tour de force', using Marxist method and placing women in the primary contradictions. Women, she says, are now historically *the* progressive force.

O'Brien is not concerned with a unitary theory of dualism, but wants to explain patriarchy, coming up with control of the means of production as a source of power, and discovery of paternity as the original motive. At first, I was troubled to fit this with my dialectic of patriarchy but now think that it may. I had included reproductive service as part of the labour service of women in patriarchy and O'Brien's analysis spells out the precise nature of the relationship between reproduction and patriarchy. Possibly O'Brien would classify other women's services to men as flowing on from reproductive service. I am inclined to support Delphy on the centrality of all labour services, including reproductive labour. Delphy includes young males in, for example, extended peasant families, as similar to women with their unpaid labour service.

For the purposes of political action, placing women's unpaid labour service, including reproduction, at the centre of the exploitation, is sufficient to work out political

strategies. O'Brien says the strategies include struggling for safer contraceptives, demolishing barriers between the private and public realms, abolishing the male appropriation of women and children, and reintegrating men in the harmony of people and nature.

By implication O'Brien eschews separatist solutions, which she compares with utopian socialism. Thus, her theory equates with Marx's scientific socialist theory. And her materialist feminism must relegate all psychosexual theorising to the social and economic superstructure.

O'Brien's theory thus insists that women hold on to the reproductive function, using technology to control, rather than alienate it. Very neat, and emotionally satisfying, even if controlling the technology raises a whole series of new questions.

So there it is. The story so far of my gradual working out of a dialectic of patriarchy. Of course, other women are having similar thoughts. I may never feel the need to argue my thesis academically since I don't need an academic meal ticket. It is pleasant to sit down from time to time and prepare a Women's Studies lecture, tinker with ideas. For the time being I'll leave it quietly bubbling.

All this moved me to write a poem about 'Life':

It has to be a spiral, upward,
Events and experience interacting
A dialectical relationship
With syntheses emerging from struggles

Otherwise the circular impression
Would overwhelm
And extinguish.



CHAPTER 9

PRAXIS

September 1983 Tarlina

Sunday morning and I am sitting on the verandah drying my rainwater-and-rosemary-washed hair in the warmish spring sunshine. Four women here today: Liz O, Harriet, Pamela and me. We have had one of those 'closed weekends' of prolonged conversation, pushing our lives around. Paddy was here yesterday to begin Together Time at 11am.

I once recorded the closed weekend pattern in the Tarlina journal:

Saturday evening. We (Jen, Harriet, Pamela, me) are sitting or working in the kitchen. Dinner is being prepared: chicken curry and fruit salad. This is our first anniversary weekend, so we decided to write down our flexible weekend timetable.

Friday: We drive down from Canberra. Paddy and I usually arrive first, 6pm straight from school, with Harriet and the others straggling in up to 11pm. The

early ones go to the pub, getting back in time to welcome the others, and we sit up chatting by the kitchen open fire until midnight or later.

Saturday: We sleep in, exhausted after a hard week. Some read, others meditate. Breakfast is independent. Some tasks are begun before lunch. Today we erected plant guards, mowed the grass in the orchard, painted the back wall of the Miles Franklin house, fixed windowpanes (including glass cutting), shopped in Braidwood, sawed wood, began tidying the tool shed. Lunch is important. We sit together and eat salads, cheese, salami, eggs, and drink Paddy's miruvar. After lunch we rest, then continue with our tasks. At fiveish we hold Together Time. We sit in the lounge in a circle and decide the theme. Today we had a meditation fantasy and a group hug. Other times we have had healing circles, foot massages, hand and foot games, 'where am I up to' going around the circle. Then we begin dinner preparations and drop down to the pub to say 'hello' to the locals. Dinner is late and we shamle off to bed at midnight or later.

Sunday: We sleep in, but not as late as Saturday. If it is the first weekend of the month I go to church (Jen doesn't approve) and rush back with the gossip. We have another lunch and rest, then complete some tasks, bury the dunny contents, read, and write. Jen usually brings tasks from her work to do. Then preparations to leave, generally before dinner. Some women do not leave until early Monday morning.

There have been changes. In the last three months some have eaten Friday night dinner at Braidwood at one of the new restaurants there, current favourite the 'Linea Rossa' at the old Albion Hotel. Some women do not come down until Saturday, and we no longer do quite so much work around the place.

The wide-ranging talk this weekend included relationships, particularly the protection and vulnerability of self within them. We have reached agreement on separating 'enlightened self-interest' from 'unenlightened self-interest', or uncaring-for-others. This is a useful distinction for when I come up against people whose ruthless pursuit of their needs seems destructive of others, yet in agreement with progressive growth movement philosophy.

My reply to the attack on the human potential movement came out this week in *Scarlet Woman*. Nervously reading it, thinking I may have swung away from that person who wrote it nine months ago, I found still agreed with the sentiments, though with less passion. 'Less passion' describes my present state in general, feels quite comfortable.

Only ten minutes remain before Harriet and I bury the dunny contents and leave Tarlina for another month. I had intended writing about the Feminist Caucus in the ACT Branch of the ALP, which has been at the forefront of my recent feminist praxis.

Suddenly a crisis: a dog among the chooks: writing time is over.

September 1983 MacPherson St

This morning Liz O and I visited a plant nursery and bought petunia and viola seedlings, jasmine, hardenbergia, brown boronia and a Japanese stone lantern: the last now crouches in the tangled ground cover I survey while writing. Today's writing time has been usurped by planting, potting and pottering in soft spring sunshine.

Susan Ryan rang this morning about the current preselection crisis locally in the ALP, a crisis in which the Feminist Caucus lurks – a new and unpredictable factor. The Left has succeeded in having preselection dates moved and there is a general fear that Susan may be challenged by a Left candidate.

When a Left grouping in the Branch was formally organised and linked to the Federal Left faction, ACT members outside the faction felt aggrieved, as most consider themselves 'Left'. Many have denied this faction's Left credentials. I maintain that it is the Left because they are organised to promote Left policies however unpleasant some personalities may be. I attended their inaugural meetings but did not want to continue sacrificing my Sunday afternoons. Several feminists are enrolled in the Left faction; women like me who want to synthesise socialism and feminism.

The Left faction now controls the ACT Party. Susan Ryan is not a member of the faction, and her position could be shaky, despite her ministerial status. I think she is unassailable but feel nervous about anti-Left members asserting that the Left would work against Susan. This seemed to be raising feminist alarm to serve anti-Left ends. Last July several ALP women, including the MP, called a small private meeting to discuss the situation, inviting me.

In two small meetings I worked to form a 'Feminist Caucus', opening membership to any woman in the party who identified as a feminist. Twenty women agreed to join.

I delivered a paper at the first formal meeting at the Labor Club in September this year. I intended to write a theoretical piece, but it came out as polemic. Individuals, I argued, could be simultaneously a member of a faction and the Feminist Caucus, depending on their assessment of the intersection between capitalism and patriarchy. A Feminist Caucus aims to place feminist policies at the top of the agenda and to combat misogyny in the party. Some examples illustrated the need:

- The lack of an abortion clinic in the ACT, a fundamental feminist policy requirement given only lipservice in the Party with the 'conscience vote' trundled out as excuse. ACT women still have to travel to Sydney for this basic service.
- The rampant misogyny in the Party. The outrageous misogynist backlash to House of Assembly preselections in 1982 received support from men within the party.
- Sexual harassment has hardly been raised as an issue, let alone combatted. MP Ros Kelly's recent verbal harassment in the House of Representatives is the tip of the iceberg. Why was her dignified response not given the Party backing it deserved? Where was the Party statement?
- Minister Susan Ryan put forward her original anti-discrimination legislation as a private member's bill, despite her position on the Opposition front bench at the time. Where was the parliamentary caucus backing?
- I outlined the strategy thus:

- meeting as a Feminist Caucus to discuss issues, plan policies, inform members and allow the blossoming of sisterhood;
- encourage the recruitment of feminists to the ALP;
- promote those party candidates who support feminist policies;
- ally with groups and factions in the Party who pledge support for feminist policies, always preserving the autonomy of the Feminist Caucus.

An enthusiastic meeting, at which the thirty women present decided to write straight away to appropriate ministers about the abortion clinic. Further meetings were planned. Elated, I felt that the Caucus, the first of its kind in the ALP was a significant step in feminist praxis.

And then, crisis. The ACT Branch Council called a snap preselection for the Federal seats. Were the Left faction afraid of the Feminist Caucus, moving early pre-selection to prevent further organisation? The anti-Left group thought so and appealed to the Federal Executive. While agreeing with the grounds for appeal, I doubted the strategy: better to fight through the local branches and use grass roots processes to overturn the Branch Council, but the Federal Executive intervened, and the Feminist Caucus must make the best of the situation. I realise that very few in the party share my vision of a feminism which transcends traditional divisions. Years of work ahead.

The late afternoon sun is now singling out the little stone lantern amongst the dark shrubs while the scent of brown boronia overpowers all others.

January 1984 O'Connor

The beginning of the summer writing. Edna visited for the Christmas festivities. Sara rang to ask about Edna's response to her recently published book about femocrats, *West Block*. Edna was critical, disappointed that the book doesn't reveal as much as she'd hoped.

Everyone is watching the cricket. I used to cultivate a mild interest but now feel impatience, alienation and a kind of loneliness. Even Suzanne watches the cricket on the Monaro, thanks to her new tall aerial.

The cheerful spirit I cultivated to survive the first semester crumbled under the onslaught of a long-term winter virus, with sporadic outbursts until the end of the year. The curse of teaching in a new post, among new infections. When school finished Neil and I drove to the coast for a couple of days to stay with Jen and Ross, but I felt wrung out and lumpish.

A kind of healing began at the Summer Solstice celebrations on the Monaro. Suzanne created a magic environment with ferrelitos and feasting as we watched the moonrise over Mermaid Mountain.

I am struggling with the vestiges of 'Own your Life'. Looking about for a dramatic shakeup, I enrolled in 'Find your Bizarreness' in Sydney the last weekend of term. But the old magic wasn't working. I was staying with Keir. He delayed me on the Sunday by opening a discussion about some emotional problems he was having so naturally I stayed. When I finally arrived at the course I, with another two, was confronted for lateness. The others excused themselves, pleaded for forgiveness, but I stood my ground, saying Keir was more important. During the day I watched myself withdraw, developing a raging headache. The group confronted me again at 2am Monday after I refused to commit to post-course meetings. I felt distant, uncaring, so decided to leave. Energised, I drove straight back to Canberra and went to school without sleeping. Keir later admitted that he had deliberately chosen that breakfast time discussion to make me late, creating trouble with Own Your Life. Very clever.

Reading, gardening and mild socialising fill my days. Neil and I drove to Tarlina to join the Xmas-New Year contingent and I felt surprisingly comfortable among the ten adults and two children. Neil won the annual Braidwood to Majors Creek run. We returned to Canberra for New Year and I enjoyed an evening with a feminist band.

My friends are on holiday while Neil and his friends occupy the house and I feel alienated from their bantering, negative, chiaccking male style. How are the sons of feminists supposed to be? Not like this. Yet when I complained, Neil insisted that our relationship had a basis of equality lacking in other parent/child interactions he observed. I retired, mollified.

Last winter I quit smoking. Hard to sit down at this work without lighting a cigarette.

I am reading Colin Roderick's bad-tempered, anti-feminist biography of Miles Franklin. How twisted, inadequate and unaccepting he portrays her. Hardly the labour of love he avows. Suzanne, Biff and Liz O struggled up the mountains to Talbingo for Miles' centenary in 1979, an adventurous journey with car breakdowns and mysterious yokels, a journey which Suzanne regales in the Franklin manner. I share Miles' passion for the Monaro, though unlike her I was not born there. I love the high treeless plains backed by dark forested mountains.

For a short while I am alone, while Neil is on temporary expeditions and Liz O is in Queensland. I luxuriate in the solitude but arrange lunches and movies with those friends still in town.

I planted some jasmine to creep past this window. So far summer is coolish and wet, so everything has thrived. I garden with shears, cutting back luxurious growth.

Susan comes to lunch today. After the struggles spearheaded by students like Susie M and Nancy in 1982, there is to be another full-time permanent appointment in Women's Studies at the university.

In 1982 the university moved to freeze the projected temporary lecturer. Late in the process I realised what was happening and informed the students. Susie M, then working for the Students' Association, mobilised students for a series of letter-writings, deputations and sit-ins at university Council and Faculty Board meetings. I alerted Susan Ryan, the WEL and the Office of Women's Affairs: they all wrote to the Vice-Chancellor. The case was impeccable: the growing Women's Studies course was under-resourced while small declining courses with powerful departmental heads held on to their funding. The University caved in, not admitting that either the strength of the student protest nor the change in government and Minister affected them.

Nevertheless, Women's Studies took some heavy blows. One semester course was amalgamated with an anthropology unit on gender: fine for anthropology students but some Women's Studies students dropped out. I told the Vice-Chancellor of this problem in 1983 when I attended a seminar called by Susan Ryan, then the newly

appointed Education Minister following the election of a Hawke government. As I suspected, the information about the amalgamated course was fed to the Vice Chancellor as a fall in student numbers. The second permanent staff appointment came up soon after that encounter. Having a Minister on side is useful. Susan and her new offsider now have the task of building up the program and extending the courses so that a future change in government may not be disastrous.

Today I await the delivery of the old piano, bought years ago by Lyndall for Keir, sent to my nieces for their education and now on its way back so I can reteach myself to play. This morning I swam ten lengths of the Civic pool, aiming for sixteen by the end of the holidays. Last night Harriet and I saw the film *Personal Best* and, transported by its celebration of physical fitness, felt like jogging home.

Reflecting further on Women's Studies, I remember Susan Ryan, before being elected to parliament, arguing at a Feminist Education Conference against Women's Studies courses in universities. She said that feminism would be corrupted in male institutions. She was right of course, but the same can be said for her sex discrimination legislation now being fought through parliament, and even for her very presence in the Federal cabinet. 'Reforms with a revolutionary perspective', was how Ann Curthoys wrote about the way forward in the 1970s. Women's Studies has proved a splendid recruiting ground, and no doubt also infected some academic women along the way.

The Adelaide Women in Education Conference of 1973 was organised to clarify issues surrounding the establishment of Women's Studies at a university in South Australia. Eileen was working there. I remember Susan Ryan's outburst and the presence of the male professor overseeing the course. Upset by his dominant mien, I took refuge in the loo to steady myself. Other women, more outspoken, demanded his withdrawal. Eileen said we Women's Liberationists should have learned how to handle men by then. I retain the image of the professor with his long boots and super-confidence. His very presence disrupted those delicate nuances developed by a group of women. Fortunately, he attended few sessions.

No surprise to me when that South Australian Women's Studies course lost its resourcing in 1982, despite the efforts of the women involved. Staffing was

temporary, tenuous and the academic establishment hated the free entry of mature students from the community and the group assessment according to needs.

Liz O, a leader of the ANU student uprising of 1974, was the main mover behind the establishment of our Women's Studies university course, the fourth demand in the student democratisation manifesto. From the beginning, Liz O pressed for course autonomy and a permanent lectureship. Women's Studies became a program in Arts, autonomous but attached to History, with a tenured lecturer. Every year has seen a crisis, a campaign, a struggle for survival. While it has survived so far and January 1984 finds it in a strong position, we know that can change overnight.

Daphne is leaving Canberra, returning to Sydney after her thirty-year exile. 'Nothing worse than hanging about after retirement' she said when I walked to her flat for a farewell drink. I stayed only half an hour because Daphne was busy cleaning out. Not much to say. I felt dumb, miserable. Surely there was a final

Daphne in the 1980s. Photo: Susan Magarey.



acknowledgment to be made? Daphne's students organised a splendid farewell dinner last November. There were some speeches, then Daphne captivated everyone, with one of her magnificent, rambling, amusing orations, filled with stories and descriptions.

Flashes of Daphne, sitting in the WL group at Canning St, already in her fifties. Susan and Ros desperately in love with her. Daphne's insistence on anarchism as the dominant ideology of WL. Daphne's migraine, encouraged by red wine, impeding the delivery of her paper at the Guthega Conference in 1972. Daphne saying when our marriages were crumbling, 'We did it alone. You have each other, you can't imagine how important that is.'

Going to Daphne for comfort and support when Bruce and I split and Daphne refusing to supply me with a formula for recovery. Rushing to Sydney with the overdue manuscript of Daphne's famous *The Memoirs of Cleopatra Sweatfigure* for the first Women and Labour Conference in 1978. I felt proud to have suggested the title, the false name Daphne used in 1939-41 when the Communist Party was banned. Daphne in the Redfems, refusing to appear on telly at the Melbourne Women and Labour Conference in 1980. Daphne marching in respectable navy coat and skirt with WAR on Anzac Day. Daphne comfortably there in the History corridor below, during my time in Women's Studies. Going to Daphne only a few weeks ago to lament divesting myself of friends and Daphne saying that this was a sign of change and growth.

I planned to say all that last Friday evening but somehow it was not appropriate. Sensing my distress, Daphne walked me home to inspect my changes in the garden. Then Daphne walked back ... Rituals... we need more rituals...

Daphne will stay a while with friends in Sydney while looking for permanent accommodation on her superannuation pension. I fear for her financial security with high Sydney rents.

So many changes. Jill is returning after six months in Wollongong. Liz O and I still share a household. Neil has returned from Europe and plans to stay while he establishes himself as a university student.

A year since the coast writing. I have chosen not to repeat the experience this year, partly because of Keir's lack of enthusiasm for calling in and partly because, in retrospect, the mixture of solitude and my vulnerability to those who did visit is disconcerting. On the other side the long exposure to writing was useful. I was trying to simulate the coast writing conditions here, with long stretches of time and no other commitments. The lunches, films and visits cut into the space. I have been a long time 'sinking in' and my solitude is now over with the return of Liz O from holiday.

The Women for Survival camp at the Pine Gap US base in Central Australia is the main action in the Women's Movement at the moment. Biff moved there last year and is very involved. Pine Gap was inspired by the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in England. At first remote Pine Gap appeared geographically impossible. Greenham Common is a bus-ride from London while Pine Gap is thousands of kilometres from main population centres, and in the desert.

The action was planned for 11 November, the beginning of summer with 40C+ heat expected. During planning stages, rumours circulated several times that the whole scheme was off, but the women at Alice Springs, the town nearby, plugged on. Then hundreds of women travelled all that distance, in a variety of conveyances, to be there for the vital week. Unlike the permanent Greenham camp, Women for Survival planned to be at Pine Gap for a maximum of two weeks.

I decided against going: early November, the middle of final assessments, is a hopeless time for teachers or students to take leave, but Lucille and Noel went. Most of the Red Emmas, who had made a great effort at the Roxby Downs anti-uranium action in South Australia earlier in the year, decided Pine Gap was too far, so instead they joined the Women for Survival support group here in Canberra. I gave money but did not attend meetings until the trouble began here in the Canberra support group.

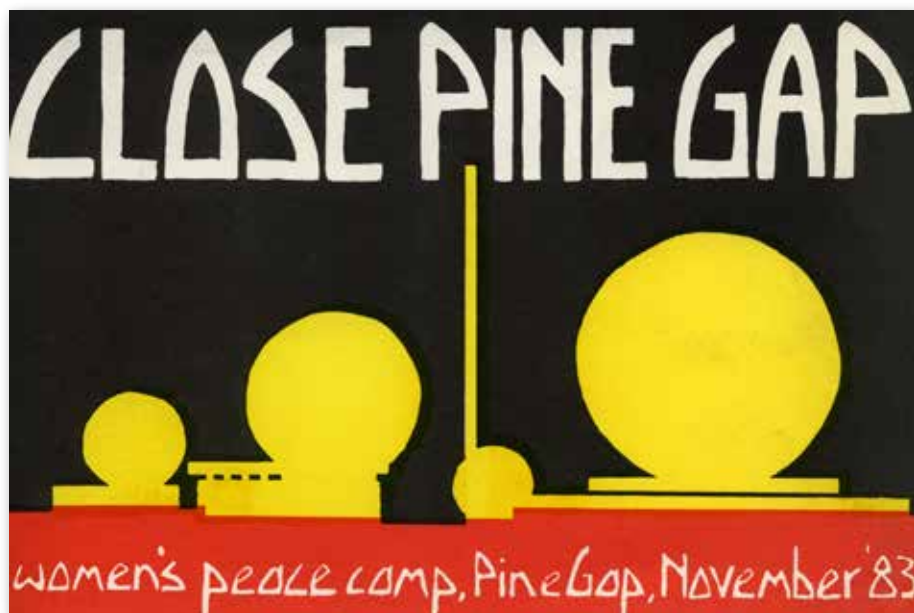
It was all about the Mode. The Red Emmas and other younger veterans of WAR on Anzac Day had worked out a feminist mode of operation. They felt they knew how to organise and take responsibility as a collective. At the Women for Survival Canberra support group, they ran into older, bureaucratically-experienced



Biff at Women for Survival camp at Pine Gap, November 1983.

Temporary gate at Pine Gap after women peacefully removed the gate and a section of fence on 13 November 1983. Women wrote: Congrats Boys on a Hasty Erection on the new gate.

Photo Lu Sexton.



WEL women whose main focus was to 'get things done', not pay attention to the philosophical implications of the process.

At the beginning, before sixty or so Canberra women left for Pine Gap, the two disparate groups rubbed along. The WEL group ran the fund-raising sub-collective, organising the letter drive through which I contributed. They also arranged for a telex to be available during the vital week, via a connection run by a male sympathiser. The Red Emmas observed what they considered the WEL women's failure to consult, to listen to others and their tendency to take unilateral decisions. When the meeting numbers dwindled after the Pine Gap contingent left, the few WEL women felt isolated, aware they had little support. Some came to see Liz O and me to complain about the Red Emma's inefficiency and their perceived carelessness with money. The WEL women were worried that the Red Emmas were using resources to widen the action, for example to support the protest camp outside the Defence Department offices at Russell Hill here in Canberra. I tried to allay fears by recounting the successful WAR organisation, but understood the WEL women's distress and incomprehension.

On Sunday 13 November the two groups clashed, at the very moment when the support network was most needed for the 111 women arrested at Pine Gap that day. Fearful of the cost of what they saw as Red Emma extravagance, the WEL women closed off the telex. In response, the Red Emmas moved headquarters to the Lobelia St Women's Centre and for that vital 24 hours Canberra was incommunicado for the Pine Gap women.

The Red Emmas were incensed. They wanted to sort out the impasse in a feminist way. Liz O and I attended the next meeting to help facilitate. We met at Lobelia St at 5pm on Tuesday 15 November 1983. I wrote notes:

Liz O and I have been asked here to facilitate in a breakdown of communication within the collective. We have not been members so far. WEL women saw us on Sunday, feeling very fragile and upset about organisation, finances and the collective mode. The Red Emmas are very angry about WEL's lack of understanding about collectives, their unilateral actions and misuse of power.

We are late starting of course. WEL women have just come in. Susie M informs me that most women here will be hostile to them. Liz O and I are nervous. Time to put energy in. I know only six women here, six or so I don't know...

There was a lull in proceedings while we heard what happened at Pine Gap on Sunday. So far there have been reports, tense exchanges with double entendre so I asked for 'collectivity' to be brought forward on the agenda. There was agreement until Noel, back from Pine Gap, broke in with her accounts.

I feel very tense – this isn't going to work well. WEL women don't listen so well, break in and comment on everything and everyone. Noel's voice is full of shock, very dramatic, yet nearly everyone here is bound up in the intragroup tension. Perhaps Noel's account will give people a new vision.

Noel spoke of how they split into affinity groups as a way of coming up with suggestions of what actions to take. Their group decided they would breach the gate the next day to have a 'morning tea party' in honour of Karen Silkwood's death day on 13 November 1974. The whole camp moved in to support this plan, another group devising and putting on some street theatre as a distraction while others broke open the gate and then the fence, having morning tea on the lawn in front of the guard-house with cups and pots of tea. Then they made a decision that those who wished, would walk together up the road towards the base. Eventually 111 were arrested and nearly everyone gave their name as Karen Silkwood and opted to refuse bail, meaning they filled the cells of the Alice Springs police station that night.

Noel said the NT police in the Alice Spring gaol were not as nice as the Federal police who arrested them. Noel was pulled out of the cell, where she had been with her Canberra affinity group and put in a cell by herself. All using the same name made communication difficult. Police seemed to have watched and knew who was together in affinity groups. Some cells had blocked toilets, no water. Women who refused fingerprinting and co-operation were treated quite roughly, one had her thumb broken. Rude, aggressive behaviour by police. Noel said that they confiscated her tape recorder and when she went back after processing to enquire after it, she

was pushed against the wall. She went back again and was pushed out. Lawyers and doctors outside the gaol, who waited all night, were not allowed in.

Others from Pine Gap arrived. Seventeen women had been arrested this morning. Some had made a mock missile out of papier mache and it collapsed over the gate.

Photos were passed around. The tension began to dissipate.

The women reported the incredible feeling at Pine Gap. A number of women decided to stay, need financial support. Susie M thinks \$100 went there today. The Canberra women were the most together affinity group at the camp.

Frances thanked the Canberra group so much for their help. The Pine Gap returnees stayed for discussion of items such as human rights violations. This was a chance for the WEL women to give background. The human rights complaints passed on to Justice Roma Mitchell. A Human Rights Commission worker has been arrested up there and feels outraged.

At 6.30pm Liz. O and I left with a tearful Susie M, guilty about the lack of support going from Canberra at the crucial time. Hopefully the others have similar feelings and transcend the bitterness of the weekend to go on with the necessary work.

So the meeting did not resolve the tension. The WEL women would not continue with Women for Survival, a short-term organisation centred round this one action. The long-term work should be done by one of the regular groupings, like Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Later that week I attended another meeting.

18.11.83 Women for Survival meeting, at Lobelia St and there I was again – at a Friday evening (!) meeting. Women for Survival have been meeting twice weekly while the Pine Gap action is on. A woman just returned from Pine Gap talked about the Wednesday action. She is expecting more actions. The women who return seem shell-shocked: they shake and tremble, their voices waver.

In prison no one pushed toilet rolls down the toilet despite police allegations. Have the police the upper hand in the media? Letter to be written to *Canberra Times*.

After I left on Tuesday the feeling grew tense again and the events that occurred here on the previous weekend were 'dealt' with, unfortunately without resolution and with much ill-feeling.

WEL is still worried that the money collected for Pine Gap is to be deflected to the protest camp action at the Russell Hill Defence offices. I heard that WEL would be here in strength to oppose this. But only one, the fundraising committee member, is here.

The Russell Hill camp is still going on, about eight women with one camping out. Poster prepared. The fund-raising collective has been reformed into the finance collective. WEL holds the cheque books. Petty cash required for postage. Much calmer feeling than the last meeting. Finances discussed without tension. No suggestion that the Pine Gap money be deflected to Russell Hill.

That was the last meeting of Women for Survival that I attended. Little could be achieved by direct confrontation. Complete the business and fold up, I advised. But the Red Emmas wanted open resolution and they called two meetings to thrash it out. I refused to attend because I thought any changes would come slowly: were the Red Emmas expecting WEL women to 'see the light', crumble and concede guilt? At the first meeting, Susie M told me, the returnees from Pine Gap continued to dominate proceedings, expressing their profound experiences. I felt impatient: couldn't Susie M see that these women were the important ones? That problems of Mode would be subsumed? Much the same happened at the second meeting.

7 December 1983 8.15pm Eureka Day Address

My last connection with Women for Survival came when the Canberra Eureka Day committee included the democratic implications of Pine Gap in their annual commemoration of the 1854 Eureka Rebellion on the Ballarat goldfields. A group of Pine Gap activists attended.

Steve led us in song. Neil join in the choruses.

The women arrived at 9pm which made about twenty all up.

Lucille spoke about the politics behind Pine Gap. Why a women's action?

Empowering for the women involved, the way to overcome patriarchy. Why November 11? – the traditional day for war remembrance, plus the 'Kerr coup' against Whitlam and the coup against Allende in Chile in 1973.

The ranks then swelled by about fifteen young hippie-like men and women. I was surprised, didn't know such groups still existed. Are they the 'feral nomads', who came out of the Franklin River and Roxby Downs actions? They must be.

Mention of a Women's Peace Cavalcade. The processes and organisations behind the Pine Gap actions: 500 women, 60 of them from Canberra. Prior negotiations with traditional Aboriginal owners by Alice Springs women, links with land rights struggle. Pine Gap is not the end, only one of several actions. For example: February 1985 conference of Women for Survival, simultaneous actions at Greenham Common.

The specially constructed banner at Pine Gap stretched for a kilometre, made up of two-metre high images. Visually very splendid. The kilometre long banner was made up of sewings and paintings from all over Australia. Pictorial representations, statements about the past, lots of energy. Intricate and collectively powerful.

For years feminists have been working towards change. At Pine Gap the process was a consensus mode with general meetings for the sharing of information but not for dealing with differences. At first affinity groups were used for that purpose but this only partly worked so the process changed to include the women who were not in affinity groups. Sub-collectives, eg for toilets, security, were formed for running the camp. Much trust and collective responsibility. Meetings with Aboriginal women. Most of Women for Survival members are white and middle class..

The flavour of the camp process allowed creativity to burst forth. It grew every day. The police were running along behind, never knowing what was coming next. 500 women on November 11, numbers declining after that date, but audible and visible space grew all the time. Living out feminism is strong and powerful.

The camping site was ugly, part of the man-made environment of Pine Gap, really harsh. The women gradually reclaimed it by covering, decorating, contorting. Signs were changed from 'No Trespass' to 'CIA trespass on Aboriginal land'. Reflectors

on the road changed to women's symbols. 111 women were joined together on the road after the Sunday 13th arrests and there was nothing the police could do. Gradually the space became beautiful. Constant music, singing, harmonising, playing instruments. Many women became louder. Some lost their voices. A lot of humour in songs and pictures.

(What a contrast all this is with the earlier reading from the Eureka Rebellion.)

The Karen Silkwood action was designed as a Boston Tea Party, a picnic on the 'lawns' inside the Pine Gap fence. Women were creating a way of being which didn't fit into the police system. 109 Karen Silkwoods to be processed after arrest. No one, even we, knew what was coming next.

The power of us together is limitless and terribly exciting, really reinforced by national and international support systems and networks. They said that the Aboriginal women were quite shy about joining us but gave us lots of dances. They found our practice of deliberately getting arrested incomprehensible. Two groups giving to each other. This was about finding power, completely opposite to the kind of power on the other side of the fence, which was anti-life.

A Eureka Day committee woman is now thanking the Pine Gap women, with a comment on the exclusion of women from the Eureka story.

This is an odd occasion, a meeting of different worlds. What can come of it?

Another story was about the Pine Gap gates. Women took off the gates and laid them at the feet of the police. New gates were installed – steel girders interspersed with barbed wire, too heavy for hinges so had to be lifted by hand. Women graffitied the gate:

Congratulations boys on a hasty erection.

And on the road:

When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty.

Neil asked a question about the media. I didn't recognise his newly deep voice and had to turn around to identify the speaker!

Answer: women designated to particular media, newspapers, TV, etc. Actions were designed to a) deal with the heat of the day, b) be early enough to get back to cities for reporting, usually 8am.

Afterwards, Liz O and I discussed the problems of praxis. Is it just a generational thing, this conflict between the Red Emmas and the WEL women? I wondered.

No, snorted Liz O, you're as old as the WEL women, older than most. WEL is reformist feminist. Never went through the WL process of consciousness-raising. And the Red Emmas are Women's Studies graduates, trained by you and Susan as Women's Liberationists. They were bound to clash over modes of operation.'

The Emmas are so ideologically sound, I sighed, I felt for the WEL women over the money. And they're so good at submission writing and legal reforms.

There you go, synthesising again', said Liz. Come the women's revolution, WEL will be sidelined.

The irony is that the Women's Studies course survived by using WEL tactics.

Women for Survival at Pine Gap went well too. Despite the difficulties.



CHAPTER 10

SURVIVORS AND REDFEMS

January 1984 O'Connor

Invited to the ALP Women's Conference in Adelaide I said, No, too far away and too close to new school year.

But if I am taking the Feminist Caucus seriously, the Conference is a significant event and I should go. I've also been invited to join the ACT abortion clinic collective, since this is the year of the big effort to get the clinic established.

Each time I run out of energy I think, this is the end of all commitment, the end of the Women's Movement for me. Rest and restoration of spirits brings me back into new activity. Edna, now 79, does the same. Every so often she announces her retirement from activity, then suddenly I hear she is giving a speech, writing a paper, lobbying the government, publishing another book.

I was feeling low at the time of the beginning of the Survivors. From my notebook:

11.7.76 Small group at Biff's house, Lyneham. 2pm. Nearly a year gone since I wrote in this women's movement notebook. Why? I've ground to a halt in the Women's Movement. Apart from the Refuge, which meets monthly with special rap groups for roster women, I rarely attend meetings. At the beginning of this year I thought of calling a meeting of women who had been involved with the movement during 1975 and discussing my feelings with them. I had noticed:

The women close to me had dropped out,

I no longer received emotional support from the movement, and

I felt attacked by some women, and lost my enthusiasm.

But that meeting never happened, and now Sara has called this small meeting, not sure what about. Here at the moment are Daphne, Sara and Susan, with Lyn H to come. These are from the original Women's Liberation group, not the women who are active now.

Sara is talking about political action. We've explored the personal, she says, and run into a dead end there. How can we act politically and keep our personal integrity? The only way she can justify her femocrat job is by concocting a double strategy theory for feminists. We've ignored the missing link, the women's movement, which is now demoralised by being thrown into activity. The committed people are having their energies subsumed. We need a good Left women's organisation – a Stalinist thought.

Me: I'm worried about sectarianism, as with the Refuge and the Health Collective.

Susan: Sectarianism is a reflection of growth. Pessimism is not necessarily justified.

Sara: We haven't created a women's movement strong enough to withstand the attacks coming to us.

Lyn H has arrived and we have been discussing our need for personal support systems.



Susan Magarey in the late 70s. Photo: Susan Magarey.

Susan: This underlines the need for personal support in order to get things into perspective – so we can carry on.

Sara: It's like exercise. The more you need it the less you do it.

Later. I didn't report half of this discussion but we did decide to form a personal support plus current issues discussion group, meeting fortnightly. And the Women's Movement as a whole? Perhaps clarification will come.

And then, nearly a year later...

Notes on the Women's Movement in Canberra

In Sydney this weekend for the national Marxist-Feminist Conference, together with others from the group which began meeting in July last year. We called ourselves 'the Survivors', with half an eye to the reality of the women's movement in 1976 and the other half a salute to Doris Lessing and her novel *Memoirs of a Survivor* which had a huge impact on several of us.

In 1976 we talked mainly about the political issues raised in the discussion recorded previously. Biff was dissatisfied with this direction and I, while enjoying it sometimes, was aware of serious imbalance. The group seemed most important to Susan and Sara at this stage. Other members included Pamela, Daphne and Liz O.

After the long vacation we regrouped in March and consciously tried to talk about more personal issues. For me, an exciting evening talking about sexuality but Susan and Lyndall seemed uneasy. We've gone on, talking much about the function of the group. It seems much harder than in the old days but important to keep on trying.

Biff has prepared a paper for this Conference, based on one of our discussions: trashing and sectarianism in the movement. Daphne has prepared another, which we also talked about, on the three demands of an autonomous women's movement in the current economic climate.

We have been meeting in each other's houses, avoiding the Women's Centre. It must be something about a need to retire to a corner and renew ourselves.

There are other women's groups in Canberra: a Freudian-feminist discussion group, the groups connected with the Women's Centre (Rape Crisis, Abortion Counselling and Women's Information Service), a newly-formed Lesbian group, the 2XX Radio women's collective, the university group and the Refuge collective.

Two months ago I resigned from the Refuge collective, feeling I'd run out of steam. So now I'm even less involved in women's movement activities than a year ago. The Survivors are my main contact. Even considered giving that away but feel more positive right now. I have few expectations about this Conference: some

sectarianism from Spartacists, unpleasant plenaries. I would not have come but for the Survivors and the need to be out of Canberra this weekend.

That last entry was the year I began this manuscript, thinking that the whole movement was run down, needing reappraisal. The Survivors was important at that time. We had conceived it as a support group for those in bureaucratic, later dubbed femocrat, positions connected with the working out of feminist policy. Sara and Lyndall were in Women's Affairs and Pamela was advising the Department of Urban and Regional Development on the needs of homeless women. The group listened many times to their struggles and difficulties. Within two years, all three had fled the femocracy.

We felt we were just surviving, hanging on against difficulties. The group ran through two phases, the first highly theoretical with papers and formal set discussion topics. Then at the end of one meeting Biff suggested a 'go around' and we found that most of us felt in painful emotional states, requiring support. So we vowed to check each other's emotional spaces regularly. But the Survivors didn't survive past 1977. Liz O moved to Sydney, I travelled in England for a while and Sara had left her job. The group died quietly, no soul-searching, no angst. Susan mourned, saying such groups were important for her survival. We were meeting all through the breakup of her marriage.

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Two years later, in 1979, the 'Redfems' formed. After the breakup of the Turner collective household I wanted to exclude Biff, so Liz O would not join. Susan, Harriet, Jen, Daphne, Sara and I formed the core of the group and we invited Dorothy and Margaret P, then new in Canberra. Susan wanted the group to be 'proper', with reading programs, directed discussions and, ultimately, written papers. We were to determine the intersection between feminism and socialism, patriarchy and capitalism. The name Redfems came from Harriet's mishearing of 'Radfems'. Concerned that we didn't make the mistake of the 'Survivors', about which she had heard from Jen, Harriet asked for the personal survival check every so often. Daphne took copious and entertaining minutes.

Although I took no notes I have clearer memories of the Redfems than of other groups, probably because of the structured reading and how the group dissolved.

We began with Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, at Jen's suggestion, because she wanted to investigate the deskilling thesis. The meetings, in each other's homes, always began with 'news and information'. I was learning T'ai Chi and anxious to know if I could get away with not wearing a bra, since Susan always wore a bra for squash. Everyone said, 'Of course, whatever feels comfortable.' Deciding to keep on without a bra, I demonstrated the first few T'ai Chi positions in Daphne's sitting room. Daphne kept us informed about the struggles of her students to change University assessment practices to a more collective approach. The students lost that struggle but continued with their radical education collective. That was the first I heard of Susie M, then a student leader.

Susan talked us into developing a semi-public image and presenting a paper on the feminist implications of the Braverman thesis at the second Women and Labour Conference in Melbourne, 1980. We investigated three case studies from Canberra: Harriet examined the de-skilling involved in introducing computers to the Health Department, Sara drew on her femocrat experience to look at the effects of advanced photocopy technology on job overviews and I drew on Margaret's connections to assess the application of the computer program, *Autodraft*, on draughtsmen in the public service.

'The pen craft of the draughtsman will not be required,' the salesman casually admitted. Pursuing *Autodraft*, I had slipped into a gathering of public service middle managers, draughtsmen who had risen through the ranks, being addressed by the software salesman.

Glad I'm close to retirement, muttered one.

I looked about me: a group of monks from a medieval scriptorium watching Caxton demonstrate his press. Draughtsmen trained for four years to acquire those pen skills. Women had only recently been admitted to the training. Two years after that demonstration, Neil learned to operate the software in a week. To me, Luddism seemed a rational response. *Autodraft* was set to ruin a whole craft.

As the conference approached, we rushed for the submission deadline. Harriet, Sara and I passed over our notes and Jen undertook to construct an economic explanation of the whole, assisted by Sara and Harriet. There were daylong and nightlong sessions at Sara's house putting the paper together. Susan wrote an introduction, based on Daphne's minutes, explaining the Redfems.

Pre-conference bulletins came from the Melbourne organising collective. The Redfems sent reports of our collective effort: and thus a mystique began. The only collective (as opposed to an individual) to submit a paper, our topic *The implications of technological change for women workers in the public sector* was central to contemporary debates. Unaware of our growing notoriety, we set off for Melbourne in May 1980. Harriet and I added to the group's reputation by cycling part of the way. On Mary Grant Bicycle and Henry Handel Bars we pedalled to Yass, caught the train to Northern Victoria, then cycled, with an overnight stay and detours to Chiltern, the Strathbogie Ranges, and then Violet Town where we showered before joining the train for Melbourne.

We found ourselves celebrities. Our paper headed the program and the media releases. In the lecture hall, crowded to bursting, Susan made the introductions and Jen delivered the paper. The rest of us sat scattered through the audience, half carried away by the excitement, half apprehensive about the merit of our work.

The excitement continued throughout the conference. Feminists planning to move to Canberra asked to join the group. Pleased but embarrassed, we Redfems felt a little shamed by stardom. The media demanded interviews but the public servants among us held back, so I agreed to speak on ABCTV. Odd feedback trickled in.

I agree with your analysis of cottage industries, Bruce wrote. What on earth did I say? Something distorted by that adulatory atmosphere, tempered by anti-star consciousness and my recent conversion to Luddism. I remember speaking out against engineers and pointing out the sinister dominance of engineers on the Soviet Politburo. Jen's father, an engineer in the Conference audience, decided to make a joke of it.

Reassembling in Canberra, we took stock and decided to continue for a limited time with restricted membership, playing down our reputation as a dedicated feminist group engaged in important theoretical work.

We decided to look at *Beyond the Fragments* by Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, with the aim of transmitting the feminist mode to the Left. Susan suggested a paper for the Political Economy Conference in Melbourne for August 1980. Meanwhile Liz O joined us and Jen moved to Melbourne to be with Ross.

I can't remember much about the *Beyond the Fragments* discussions, except that for me Lynne Segal's approach was most useful. From the minutes, it seems that the Redfems disagreed with me. Susan did most of the writing and only she and I journeyed to Melbourne for the delivery. Jen met us at the conference.

The atmosphere differed sharply from the Women and Labour triumph. Jen and I sat, two women in a pile of men, with Susan alone down the front facing multi-tiered male faces. We had been scheduled to clash with another paper on what I thought was a related theme, so I had negotiated an amalgamation in one session. This proved a mistake, as a large proportion of the audience was there for the other paper and grew impatient with the Redfems' use of time. Susan summoned all her considerable powers to keep their attention. I could hardly listen, so great was my discomfort. In discussion Albert Langer supported us with an enthusiasm I mistook for hostility.

I had had enough of interpreting the messages of the women's movement for the male Left. Later I reviewed *Beyond the Fragments* for the *Politics* journal and concluded:

Beyond the Fragments is a useful critique of socialist organisational mode; the authors' hope for a working synthesis with feminist organisational mode is yet to be proved possible.

The feminist house is not yet in order. We do have a mode that rejects central organisation, hierarchical structures, and individual leadership, in favour of loose networking, consensus, emphasis on consciousness raising and the need for a protective culture, but we Redfems, and more recently the Canberra Women for

Survival group, illustrate how the old modes lurk and how tenuously we hold to the new.

We set time limits on the Redfems from the beginning: first until the Women and Labour Conference, and then another six months. After the Political Economy Conference we decided, on Liz O's and my prompting, to read Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, but with no formal presentation in mind.

Relationships within the group grew strained. Susan's post marriage relationship was in crisis and she often arrived late to our meetings, not having done the reading. I felt resentful. Susan and Liz O clashed, old hostilities resurfacing, about Sheila Rowbotham's lifestyle. Liz O thought Rowbotham far too oriented towards the male Left.

Gyn/Ecology is a confrontatory text for a socialist feminist group. For Liz O and me, on our way to radical feminism, Mary Daly's *tour de force* was our book of the year. The others, excepting Harriet, were less impressed. Sara rejected the religiosity of the treatment while Daphne mocked Daly's solemn tone. Susan, who I felt sure hadn't read beyond the first section, sneered at Daly's linguistic flights. Sara read the book through in two days, gaining the strength to fight a battle in the femocracy about the Federal budget.

Extracts from the Redfems' minutes for the last meeting gives the flavour. Long after Daphne's abdication, the minute taker is unidentified:

Redfems 18.11.80 Daphne's place. Started late, forgot to note time.

Present: Liz O, Julia, Daphne, Harriet, Sara, and later, Susan.

News and information: Harriet has two new chooks, Rose and Buttercup.

Choosing between Freud and Plato, Julia would choose Freud. Susan takes Plato. Liz O and Harriet refuse to play this game. Sara for Freud, Daphne for Plato. Susan and Daphne say dialectical change is possible with Plato, Freud is too bossy. Julia says (repeatedly) that's not the point. Socrates now gets sucked into the discussion.

Liz O: Rename the chooks Rose Plato and Buttercup Freud.

Susan: 'Vita' is now the name of her car.

Daphne: Problem with new magnetic way of attaching false teeth, swallowed them, very expensive so now investigating her shit. Her students have subsided in their struggle for assessment reform.

Refractory Girl is looking for book reviews. Susan may do *Gyn/Ecology*

Discussion on Bea Faust/Susan Brownmiller saga. General support for latter.

Sara: Gestalt this afternoon. Writing a lot except when prostrate from heat. Reading paper by Merle Thornton about Juliet Mitchell and Nancy Chodorow on psychoanalysis. Merle accuses them of vicious universality. Sara worried about profound despair of 'the personal is political'. She is very happy but the world is a total mess. Essence of humanity is learning, like desire for mastery over nature. We are seeking our own end. Sara is moving to Buddhism: power/profit to multinationals reflects this need to control in some absolute sense. How does sex/gender fit in? Harriet almost over the edge towards radical feminism. Discussion on what Harriet shouldn't read. Merle Thornton's paper to be distributed next time. *Wanderground* turned out to be nearly enough for Liz O to climb back up the cliff.

Sara: Invitation to do a paper on *Gyn/Ecology* for the Marxist summer school. Are we interested? Sara willing but not alone. Susan and Daphne only under extreme pressure. Looks like not enough energy.

Should we self-destruct? Daphne and Julia say yes. Liz O worried about institutionalised Redfems. General yes feeling. But we will persevere with the adult education course run by Harriet and Julia.

Discussion on *Gyn/Ecology* – third passage:

Sara: Great stuff but where do we go? Are we stuck on need for reaction against universality? Are we ignoring theoretical timeless phenomena? Is feminist scholarship (sigh/yuk), how I suffered on an Afghan dairy farm?

Liz O: Third passage fails badly. Romantic and heroic. Falls back on religious, not spiritual solution. Sets up alternative theism. Says important isolated things.

Julia: Can't remember anything coming out of it.

Sara: Incantation. Spinning all you like. Basic failure of radical feminism? Have we a desperate need for a Marxist imprimatur?

Liz O: Value Marxism for what it does, not what it doesn't.

Susan: Do we know enough about what Marx does do?

Daphne: It's a method of analysis. Daly's bloody third section. Gigantic look at how much men hate us. Compelling, but why do they hate us? Squashing our essence is not sufficient explanation. Her solution has to be withdrawal. God-botherers hate humanity. ... Would Daly save rainforests? Perhaps only the female plants. Daly is left baffled, but forced to withdrawal as solution. Her language hides what she says from the male world. Good thing at the moment. Pure poison because it suggests passive/withdrawal solution. ...Why do men hate us? People want freedom, control over their lives. Men feel sexually inadequate. Morgan, in *Descent of Woman*, says bums moved around so fucking from back was more difficult, so men get a bright idea and whip women over and cover them from the front, but hatred remains.

Harriet: The same analysis as a male friend put to me, ie men marry because they feel so sexually inadequate. They need to escape from the sexual rat race.

Liz O: We have to deal with patriarchal capitalism. Daly only seeks to deal with the patriarchy.

Julia: Daly doesn't talk about lesbian separatism. She is critical of separatism. Daly works in a very male world at Boston College.

Liz O agrees.

Sara: Feels heterosexuals were second class citizens too. But not withdrawal based on hatred. More like being at a women's conference.

Julia: The book is about, by using the spinning image, women together. It's about women taking back their power. A celebration of the strength gained from women's meetings or whatever.

Susan: Radical feminism versus lesbian separatism?

Julia: They're not the same.

Liz O: Radical feminism encompasses more than lesbian separatism. For radical feminism the primary oppression is sex-based.

Harriet: At the beginning she understood spinning but at the end of the book she'd lost sight of spinning.

Daphne: Spinning a worry, gets dizzy easily.

Sara: Language great. Resonance and use of words. But it won't change the world. A condition of liberation but not essential.

Liz O: This is a negative reading of the book, reading in order to compile comprehensive criticism, not giving it a go.

Daphne: Questions Daly's love and her anger.

Liz O: The book is a massive contribution to consciousness-raising and therefore will change the world.

Sara: Can't hand the book to beginner feminists, or non-feminists. It's a reinforcement for women already in the struggle. Sara exits.

Susan: Thinks Daly is bossy, trendy, patronising, profoundly irritating.

In retrospect, I see a crisis in my relationship with groups. Something similar was happening at school so I enrolled in the *Teams* workshop for the following January. Meanwhile I felt distressed by the Redfems' collective failure to appreciate the importance of Mary Daly. The group stopped meeting at the end of 1980. Only Susan felt keen enough to continue.

One hot moonlit night that December, Liz O and I were sitting on the side verandah enjoying the silvered dark when Susan arrived, bursting with anger.

'Why did you kill the Redfems?' she demanded. Resolving on brutal truth, I replied that there had been too many tensions, most particularly between her and Liz O, and too little commitment from Susan.

Susan, outraged and deeply hurt, lashed out, not at me, but at Liz O.

In the past I wanted to kill you, but why should that matter now? Susan asked Liz O. I slipped away, leaving a stunned Liz O unsupported.

The following January at the Teams workshop I discovered that I felt oppressed by the central responsibility I chose to take for group cohesion, yet consistently took that responsibility. My new behaviour, killing groups, was a way of rejecting that part of myself.

The breakdown of my friendships with Biff and Susan has led me to some understanding of what was happening. Before the women's movement (BWM as Eileen used to say) my friendships with women were smooth, broken only by moving from city to city. Now I see that the BWM friendships were not as deep as those I developed in the women's movement: emotional adultery indeed. In addition, I felt a powerful commitment to the Cause, expecting sacrifice and near-perfection from the sisterhood. As I drew closer to my feminist sisters I was upset by what I saw as their weaknesses of character, undermining the Cause. The idea that we have to be better than anyone else. As judgmental and fervid as an early Christian, or old Bolshevik. Now, aware of my own weaknesses, I have lower expectations, but the damage to key relationships remains. Much of the drama and excitement has also gone from my life.

Traces of the Redfems remain. Our technology paper, revised by Susan, appeared in *Worth her Salt*, the proceedings of the Melbourne Women and Labour Conference. Jen still has Melbourne women exclaim, aren't you one of the Redfems?

Later, in 1981, when Susan formed the Patriarchy group, again with the aim of producing papers, I stipulated that we must have a limited life, meet in hours unlikely to be clouded by alcohol and stick strictly to intellectual topics. Consequently we didn't develop the same kind of intimacy but I felt safer. I now feel I was fortunate to be invited to join.

I did not sufficiently enjoy the past. Always found something to worry about, as though sheer pleasure in the excitement was too dangerous. Perhaps it was.

I am reading Diana Trilling's account of Mrs Harris, who shot the Scarsdale Diet Doctor. Trilling creates a picture of a woman outwardly successful, a school principal whose self-denigration led to her shooting the doctor. Trilling presents it partly as a dilemma of our time and I'm cogitating a feminist response. One less man in the world, Liz O says. Power: it's all about personal power and belief in power. The idea that women feel compelled to destroy the power within may explain this case. How can women overcome the enemy within?

The 'stars' of the women's movement have not yet conquered the enemy within. Germaine Greer's 'joy in the struggle' has turned to bitterness, Kate Millett's exuberance to madness and now Dale Spender.

Spender visited Canberra again in November 1983, giving two lectures under the auspices of the Counter Sexism Coordinator of the ACT Schools Authority. Spender commands a strong following from Australian women teachers. Her advocacy of single sex schools, in *Learning to Lose*, is popular and many teachers lament the impossibility of establishing such institutions in the ACT public education system. I argued against Spender's thesis, partly on the grounds of the enormous expenditure of energy required for a result which would only tinker with patriarchy. However, as in wages for housework, I retreated to the position that the struggle, however unrealisable, could raise anti-patriarchal consciousness.

Spender gave her first lecture on *Women of Ideas*, which I regard as her best work to date, and essential for understanding the history of feminist thought. Considering the lost corpus of women's philosophy, Spender is impressed by the power of patriarchy in obliterating ideas. She has become depressed by the inevitable fate of the contemporary women's movement. Her message that evening was to keep struggling, despite the probability of ultimate defeat.

Spender retained her old ease and jocularly with an audience, and held the teachers for the most part. Questioned about her earlier advocacy of separate schools for girls, Spender shrugged and replied that within five years such institutions would be starved of funds and resources in comparison with boys' schools. Unease rippled through the audience. A feminist academic asked upon which theory of patriarchy

Spender was operating. But Spender seemed not to have a clearly defined theory of patriarchy, except that it exists, and is universal. She sometimes nods in the direction of labour service, sometimes towards a biological base for patriarchal oppression. She is now lodged in a cyclical theory of history: women acquire consciousness which is lost for some generations; new generations come along and have to reinvent the Cause.

Spender's cyclical thesis is depressing for teachers: it seems all their efforts to raise gender consciousness have been in vain. Probably it's asking too much of people like Spender to shut up when they are in a trough of despond.

Afterwards I raved for several hours with friends. On *Women of Ideas* tonight, Spender left me with a mixture of anger and exhilaration. She's a great propagandist but a rotten theoretician, eclectic, picking up stuff from all kinds of theories but not arguing points through: contradictions abound. My fear is that Spender's current cyclical pessimistic stance will paralyse the faithful among the educationists since they relied so much on her segregationist proposals as a solution: a position she has now abandoned. She's good to bounce off, but not to be taken seriously. I've had good debriefings...

Spender made an early assertion that men relied on the total labour service of women, and then later she said that women would become redundant if reproductive technology advanced to make women unnecessary. But reproduction is only one of women's services to men. Spender is a first-rate polemicist but dangerously simplistic in her current pessimism. Why couldn't she be just as powerfully optimistically polemical, constructing an upward spiral instead of a gloomy circle? Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.

At a dinner Spender was asked about the idea of creating separate girls' classes within coeducational high schools, particularly for maths and science. She thought the policy had problems when girls were reintegrated, acting more assertively and causing riots by demanding equal attention with boys from their teachers. Noel exploded, declaiming that until there was a riot in every classroom feminism would make no progress.

This question of 'what to do' has arisen in my school. Jenny, a senior teacher applied for a grant under the national Participation and Equity Program (PEP) which aimed for gender equity and included separate girls' science classes. I quailed at the thought of implementing a feminist program in a large high school. I felt like Rosa Luxemburg knowing the Spartacist uprising was doomed but that she was committed to participate. I decided on my usual strategy: lending support in the struggle for this program in the interest of consciousness raising. I gave Jenny recent pessimistic *Bluestocking* articles in hopes of lowering her expectations.

When I chaired a staff meeting to support the submission I was energised by the debate, shamed to realise that my doubts led nowhere. How was I differing from my criticisms of Dale Spender?

The PEP submission received funding. Jenny was promoted to another school. I am left in charge and now must summon the enthusiasm for the program to begin this year. Fortunately, Noel has been transferred to my school so I can call on her energy.

Time closes in. Pre-planning for the school term, ALP meetings, a sewing bee at Harriet's for new curtains and doona cover, a dinner or lunch to forge links for the high school feminists, then a Peace Education workshop and the Labor Women's conference.

Then Jill telephoned. Did I want to join her at the coast for a birthday? I decided to go with Liz O.

The gathering was a proper women's event, much catch-up talk, laughter, gossip about relationships, beach swims and a walk to identify the house where DH Lawrence wrote *Kangaroo* in 1922. In Jill's rented house I slept in the girls' dorm with Suzanne and Liz O. So I had no time for the Labor Women's conference.



CHAPTER 11

CONFERENCE AT NAIROBI

May 1985 On the Monaro

Suzanne is working in her shed, hand-building and carving in porcelain, while I sit at the kitchen table with this manuscript, occasionally tending the fire. We are travelling to Africa for the United Nations End of the Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi this coming July. Suzanne is creating giraffe and elephant women, women with bones and votive objects in outstretched hands, and boats full of voyaging women, as well as smaller bones, beads and teapots. This sustained effort gives her repetition strain injury so she must pace herself.

A group of Canberra women plan to fly to Nairobi via Mumbai but there are difficulties: booking accommodation in Kenya and negotiating leave from teaching for Noel and me. This is my Chinese Year, the Year of the Buffalo, and I feel energised, ready for a Grand Adventure.

This will be my last writing time before departure. My hand is somewhat healed, though without full use and so I may continue to compose on my trusty typewriter Juki Sierra.

June 1985 O'Connor

I am reverting to handwriting, my fingers partially straightened by physiotherapy. Queen's Birthday weekend and I find some writing space, interspersed with reading the second volume of Storm Jameson's autobiography *Journey from the North*. As president of PEN in the war years, Jameson exhausted herself with her struggles on behalf of refugee European writers. Hating domestic responsibilities, her ideal writing mode in pre-war years was to stay in a Continental hotel, preferably in provincial France, where she could write unmolested all day and socialise as she chose. She lamented the system which forced published novels from writers prematurely: manuscripts, she said, should sit in drawers and cupboards for years if they are to be mature works. But she did not keep her own rules and felt dogged by domestic responsibility. My own choice of income earned from other work feels sensible and protective of my writing. My writing space has changed with a new open fireplace liberated by the removal of an old oil heater, but the fire is for sitting by, not writing. Liz O calls it a 'cosmetic fire' since I light it only when there is time to sit, usually on Sundays.

January 1986 O'Connor

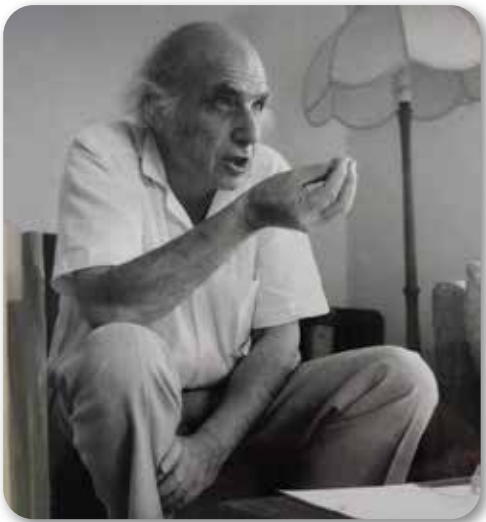
Once again summer writing time, with only two weeks of the holidays to go and, on the last weekend, the national ALP women's conference in Victoria, where I shall present on the ACT ALP Feminist Caucus.

Chesnaux stayed for the first ten days of this year, on the initial leg of a South Pacific tour to promote a nuclear-free and independent Pacific, representing a minority French view. This sternly rationalist member of the Left was shocked by Liz O's Moon Calendar in the kitchen, only for planting vegetables, she assured him. He lamented the loss of the likes of Lessing and Shirley Maclaine to the irrational, as in the spiritual mode. Lamely I put my view of Marx and Freud and the sad dominance of the rational mode and although he paused to agree on some points, he was

reinforced in his stance by an encounter with Jim Cairns, a former Left militant deputy Prime Minister, who now refuses all contact with Left politics, claims the Old and New Left indistinguishable, shocking Chesnaux with his apparent quietism.

I thought about how much my enquiries into the irrational have marred my political effectiveness and decided, very little. Chesnaux operates in a version of the older mode: interviews with media and 'leading people', public lectures interspersed with his views on dropping out from academe, preparation of an anecdotal book on his current political travels. Something in his political energy attracted Suzanne who invited him to her Monaro property for a day, where they talked of country life and climbed Mermaid Mountain: a women's enclave where Chesnaux and Neil were the first men to be invited. I wish we had spoken further about the irrational, but felt disheartened by Chesnaux's guarded response to my article on Nairobi, which he saw as simply a description of the problems of large conferences.

I had transcribed my Nairobi diary into 50 pages of typescript, sending 20 pages to *Australian Feminist Studies* when asked for a short report. What a magnificent editing job by Susan Sheridan! Back came a clever version of a letter I wrote to Pamela, then in India, with extracts from the journal. Sobered by what good editing can do, I abandoned my plan to include the discursive 50 pages here and chose the edited report.



Jean Chesnaux at MacPherson St, 1980s.
Photo: Julia Ryan.

29.7.85 Mombasa

From a letter to Pamela in India:

...On my last few days in Kenya I am resting, reflecting and recuperating in a resort hotel on the palm-fringed shores of the Indian Ocean. Right now it is raining and this suits my mood and need but a disappointment to European holidaymakers on package tours who have come to fry in the tropical sun. I came down from Nairobi by the Saturday night train, comfortable second-class sleeper accommodation, with two women I met at the Conference, who stayed for the day, when we visited the old Portuguese/Arab fort, now museum, and wandered around the Arab city before coming to this tropical beach for lunch and an afternoon in the sun. Then I stayed on alone. I'll go back on the night train tomorrow for my last day in Nairobi, before leaving at midnight for home.

Journal 8.7.85

But to begin and the beginning:

Registration proved a wonderful experience: among the first there, we mingled in our queues exchanging information. I met women from Irian Jaya and Northern Ireland, both the only women from their sections and the latter knew Inez, who gave such a wonderful talk on Belfast at the Marxism Today conference last year in London. I talked with an Israeli woman who knows Beryl. I also spoke with women from Surinam, Jamaica and the US. The American woman had helped set up the conference operation for the Women's International News Gathering Service, operating from the New Stanley Hotel with computer connections worldwide.

There is a proposal that the NGO Forum continue as an entity without the UN, since this is the end of the UN Decade. The Forum would need funding from independent organisations to run another world conference in five years. Political shapes are emerging. The Israeli women are nervous about anti-Zionist denunciations.

Journal 11.7.85

The official UN Conference was held at the same time so Nairobi was crowded with about 17000 visiting women. Accommodation was expensive: we paid \$A25

per night for university halls of residence and hotel rates were doubled, with the Kenyan government collecting the extra money. Security forces were omnipresent for fear of terrorism and 'incidents', particularly with the Israeli and Arab participants. They were searched every time we entered the university grounds where the forum workshops were held.

In a lull during the workshop on the role of women in US/USSR relations I suddenly brought up the intolerable security check this morning. Differing responses: 'there is a need', 'there are threats', 'Israel and the PLO', 'perhaps we can suggest alternative methods of security'. I felt like an anarchist.

A huge variety of workshops offered for every session, so difficulty lay in choosing which four sessions in the day. I rarely attended more than two because of all that input, and my desire to see the exhibitions and displays. I began with a 'peace dialogue' between US and USSR women but it was strangely unreal with so much goodwill, and talks of reciprocal visits (which are happening) and children's get-togethers, and so little dealing with militarism and the arms build-up, that I felt sad and despairing. So then I went to a session on 'empowerment' run by some Californian women but it seemed to centre on writing submissions for pre-schools and endless conciliation and accommodation to the male authorities so I, bored and impatient, egged Rhonda, who was also there, to take over. We made the simulation part of the workshop exciting by drawing out the experiences of a Filipina aid worker, who had been dealing with drought and famine among nomadic herders in North Kenya. This was a different story from pre-schools in California and we suggested confrontatory strategies for the nomads, including occupying the game-parks, from which they are excluded for the benefit of tourists.

After these two disappointing attempts, I retreated to my professional areas and attended the Women's Studies International Network (WSIN) workshops. These proved stimulating and well organised. At first reluctant to attend what I thought would be a western-dominated series, I was pleasantly surprised by the involvement of women from developing countries. They ran sessions on Research Methodology, Teaching Methods and a very exciting one on Women's 'New' Writing: diaries, journals and the like. Each session began with a panel of four or five women, strictly

limited to ten minutes each to allow maximum discussion, and every panel included a non-western majority – Latin America, the Caribbean, India, various African countries and South East Asia – but none from the socialist countries. The Network was established at the Copenhagen UN NGO Forum of 1980 and I have applied to be part of it.

Journal 16.7.85

Now I am at the Women's Studies workshop on *The 'New' Women's Literature: autobiography, diaries, letters*, with Marjorie Thorpe, from Trinidad, in the chair. A Kenyan woman writer for children says that women are the best storytellers for oral history. Florence Howe talks about the Feminist Press in the US which began fifteen years ago and republished Tillie Olsen, Agnes Smedley and many others, and from these has come the creation of a new aesthetic. A woman reports on how she wrote a poem to express Mary Daly's ideas in a final Political Theory class. A Bangladeshi tells us about education for women at the turn of the century, forbidden to Muslim women, one of whom learnt secretly by candlelight and wrote a story about a women's land, with men subordinate, in 1905. She spoke out on women's issues and wrote *Inside Seclusion: Robya Sakawa Hussein*.

We hear about Grace Ogot, one of the three Kenyan women members of parliament, a novelist and short story writer who began as a nurse and then wrote about her own urban experience. There are 49 Kenyan women writers, with an Association of Kenyan Women Writers, but the president is now in exile so the association is dormant. Mrs Ikimani has published stories from the Mau Mau period with Macmillans. Virago is publishing a book about an Egyptian woman who grew up in a 19th century harem and began the women's movement there. We hear a statement from the women writers and publishers workshop urging a change from the pattern of neglect. Nglara, from Nigeria, reports on experience in her country. Before the 19th century there was no writing in the South but in the North the Hausa wrote in their own language. Several Nigerian women are writing novels but they are not yet aware of diaries or letters. Perhaps there are closet manuscripts.

I went to a session on Women and Technical Education because a Melbourne friend presented and another on Women and Trade Union Participation, given by two women from the NSW and Queensland teachers' unions. I carried a letter of accreditation from the Australian Teachers' Federation for the Forum: all honour and no money.

In questions and discussion at this session a woman from Belgium asks about self-esteem programs going hand in hand with technology and a primary teacher from Nigeria asks about the appropriate age to introduce computer training. A Palestinian woman says that 600,000 Palestinians have no access to equal opportunity in Israel. (This kind of intervention comes up at many workshops but this is my first experience.) The meeting is thrown into confusion but the chair is firm in saying she does not know the answer to these questions.

I am the next questioner and feel a bit shaky in just riding over the top and continuing, but I reject the idea of taking up the Palestinian issue and stick to my themes, namely the experience of occupational health and safety and repetition strain injury in Australia; and the gender equity program at my high school and the need for multiplicity of projects as one area leads to another.

The Palestinian woman has left. A woman from Botswana asks for simple books to encourage girls into non-traditional areas. The Belgian woman points out that we give less time to girls in the home and a Swede draws attention to a Frederika Brema pamphlet called *Stand up for your daughter!*

Later we decide that the Palestinian women mistook that workshop for the following one, *Equal Opportunities for Women Executives*, run by Israeli women. Her contribution makes more sense in that context.

With stifling heat and some disorganisation at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre, there were no plenaries apart from the opening ceremony. It is difficult to know what usefully could have been done at a plenary, so I think the decision a proper one. However, the Feminist International for Peace and Food (FIPF) set up a huge blue and white Peace Tent (the Nairobi Peace Tent) where controversial issues arose.

The Women's International Democratic Federation and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) helped staff the tent and provided leaflets and speakers. An attempt was made at a Middle East peace dialogue but sadly neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian women, who seemed to have male minders, were in a listening or exchange frame of mind.

I became involved in the Pacific women's activities, partly because I spent some time with two friendly Solomon Islanders who travelled with us from Australia. Pacific women were concerned to get several issues on the UN Conference agenda, namely a nuclear-free Pacific (a very hot issue), freedom from colonialism, particularly for New Caledonia, Irian Jaya/West Papua and East Timor, and freedom from economic imperialism. They ran a good session in the Peace Tent and managed to persuade the Australian delegates to the official UN Women's conference to support them, particularly on the nuclear issue. They also ran a 'Pacific Night' with songs and dances. We Australians had to perform, so came up with a scratch 'Kookaburra sits on an old gumtree' and a highly successful 'Don't be too polite, girls'.

Journal 18.7.85

Pacific Women's Dialogue in Peace Tent . The Kanak woman has spoken and now a woman from West Papua is speaking. She is showing the West Papuan independence flag: blue and white stripe with white star on red background. Cathy, an Aboriginal woman, speaks about 40,000 years of culture smashed by 200 years of white occupation. She demands land rights, saying the land already held is inadequate. Maoris speak about Waitangi and land rights. After childbirth, the burying of the placenta bonded the child to the land.

Flo Kennedy on behalf of Torres Strait Islanders says:

We own our land and are fighting for it. We are a conquered race, conquered by guns. We are taking them to court despite the Queensland Premier's attempt to disallow the case. We hope to win because we are fighting for what is ours, and they are fighting for what is ours.

On the theme of Equality and Development, Shaistra from Fiji says their problem is not just colonisation but capitalism and imperialism. Fiji is politically independent

but they do not have control over their own resources and are exploited by overseas companies. Kanaky does not want that kind of independence. Women are the most dominated group in the Pacific. Maria, a Filipina, talks about the problem of foreign intervention and asks for support in the fight against nuclear pollution.

Freda Brown, president of WIDF, speaks in response to the Fijian call for solidarity. Too little is known about their heroic struggle, she says. Andree, from France and the International Resistance of Women to War, condemns the French tests in the Pacific and the provision of harbours for nuclear ships in Kanaky. Margo, from the American Women for Racial and Political Equality, says that more than 1000 of the US women at Nairobi do not support the policies of the Reagan administration.

The Peace Tent was also the scene for a dramatic incident concerning the censorship of a Lebanese woman's film by Kenyan authorities. A protest march was proposed but Dame Nita Barrow, the powerful Forum convenor, threw the weight of her personality against the march and into a non-confrontationist solution, which worked.

Something I must include concerns the question of female genital mutilation, which caused such divisions at Copenhagen. It was hidden behind such an obscure title I did not recognise the workshops but Noel and Suzanne had asked around and were fortunate enough to attend.

Suzanne told us it was called *Cultural Practices Harmful to Women's Health*, a euphemism for genital mutilation and that it was an extraordinary workshop. A Pan African organisation of women medicos now organise against these practices. They held a conference in Dakar eighteen months ago and this Nairobi workshop was held to hear reports and spread the word. They displayed plastic models to show the various practices, ranging from clitoridectomy to infibulation, emphasising all the time how harmful to fetuses these practices were. To open the workshop, they had an elderly imam from Egypt explain how such practices had no support from the Koran, were not part of Islam. The women medicos are funded from Geneva where a Swedish woman collects money internationally. What heroes! Noel thinks she saw a Kenyan official at the door turning Kenyan women away.

At the Marino restaurant on Friday night Suzanne and Noel reported on the second genital mutilation workshop they attended. At this one some of the splits and confusions were aired, rather like the rape issue in Australia. Some wanted to make genital mutilation a single issue to combat, while others argued for its incorporation in a general campaign against patriarchy. The Francophones are to the fore in the whole struggle.

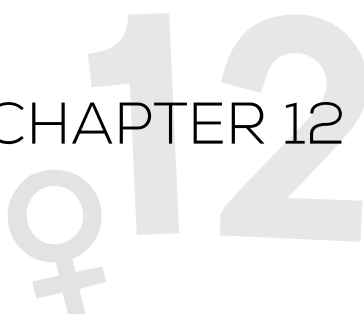
So after ten amazing days it was a relief to leave crowded, polluted Nairobi for the bush on a six day safari with a collection of Dutch and Australian Forum participants and English and American tourists. Gail and I shared a tent. We drove north to see two million Greater and Lesser Flamingoes on Rift Valley lakes, then south west to the Masai Mara game reserve on the Tanzanian border, where we struck the annual northward migration of wildebeest (White Bearded Gnu) from the Serengeti. Attended by zebra, the gnu wandered in great herds, but once we came across a determined galloping stream, all pushing onwards. Of course we also saw elephants, lions and cheetahs, many gazelles and antelopes, about 40 species in all. Our camping, occasionally marred by rain, included three particularly fine and comfortable nights. With a feeling of survival from a heart-expanding experience, we staggered back to Nairobi to collapse into baths and proper beds.

While on safari I tried to get a focus on the Forum as a whole. The Mexico International Women's Tribune of 1975 was later described as a 'giant consciousness-raising exercise', Copenhagen in 1980 as an 'international networking enterprise' but when I asked various Forum participants how they would encapsulate Nairobi, Virginia Blain suddenly suggested that the Forum resembled the gnu migration, a great unstoppable movement, wandering and uncertain in some sections, determined and fast-moving in others. I thought it a most apt description.

In Karen, a Nairobi suburb named for Karen Blixen, I spent twenty-four hours in an old colonial house with Virginia and Sydney friends. The owner was in England so we had the run of the place, with four servants. We walked to the old farmhouse of Karen Blixen, Isak Dinesen of *Out of Africa*, whose books and biography I have been reading here.

On the train to Mombasa we shared our compartment with a young Kenyan woman who complained of the male domination of the country. A graduate on her way to her first teaching post, she told stories of rape and looting by the army during the periods of student rebellion. She was strong and determined, for me the spirit of the new African woman, as she talked of domestic violence and institutional misogyny.

I arrived in Nairobi three and a half weeks ago for the UN non-government organisations (NGOs) Forum to mark the end of the UN Decade of Women and here I am at the end, with much to process and a feeling of having participated in highly significant events.



CHAPTER 12

A TALE OF TWO CATS

January 1986 O'Connor

Biff passed through Canberra just before Christmas and telephoned ahead to arrange a meeting. I asked her to Sunday night dinner, usually a family affair with Liz O and Neil, but I invited Rob and Marian specifically for Biff. Perhaps it was much bigger than Biff wanted for she stayed quiet throughout the meal. After the others left Biff seemed surprised that they had come to see her. She talked about her EEO job in Adelaide, all-engaging but frustrating. I am against old-time Women's Liberationists taking such jobs, bad both for us and the Cause. WEL and the reformists developed those posts, believe in them and can give them positive energy. Tortured WL radicals see mostly the pitfalls, the dangers of co-option through success, the mountain of misogyny, helping the patriarchy to adjust without really changing. But Biff needs a well-paid job to build capital and buy her freedom to write. She seemed tired and dispirited.

I wondered about my contribution to Biff's malaise, remembering how cross I used to feel about her self-confidence.

'Don't you ever suffer self-doubt?' I once asked her. We were lying under a table at a drunken party in the early 1970s.

'No, never!' Biff gaily rejoined but later, 'Of course I do sometimes'. Now she seems on the other side, utterly lacking that confidence. I speculate about my withdrawal of support and if it began the undermining process and wonder what else could have been done. Withdrawal felt essential for my survival. I was not strong enough to continue the friendship, yet now I have survived and grown stronger, Biff is fading. Do I have power in this situation? Do we have a responsibility for each other?

I hesitate, the example of Qing and Sung before me.

Qing is a lithe black and white cat, named after Mao's widow, the chief of the Gang of Four in post-Mao China. Keir found Qing, half grown at the end of 1979, up the tree on the nature strip and we kept her. A fiercely self-sufficient creature she kept the animal residents of the street at a respectful distance, pursuing her hunting vocation with awesome success, laying her offerings of birds, mice and other animals all over the house. There can't be a rodent in the whole neighbourhood. "She'll bring elephants next" I said to Liz O as we surveyed rabbit remains on the front verandah.

At Tarlina I boasted about Qing's proficiency. At times it seemed that Tarlina was overrun by small creatures, 'small possums' we said, in deference to Sybille's rat phobia. Harriet claimed she lay in bed listening to the 'picnic races' held nightly in the roof. Paddy and Harriet suggested we bring Qing to deal with the problem and I rang Liz O, who was coming down, to bring the cat.

Liz O made the mistake of putting an apparently compliant Qing loose in the car. The cat was terrified by the drive. On arrival I tried to hold her but she leapt from my arms to hide behind the kitchen refrigerator, refusing to emerge. Unable to entice her out we left her there overnight. Next morning Qing was still hiding behind the refrigerator, but five dead rats lay neatly in a row in the courtyard. So I learned that Qing, the great hunter, did not wish to travel.

Liz O calls her my familiar. Qing declines, refuses to eat, when I go away. Disturbed by this dependence I thought Qing should have a feline companion to divert her emotional energy.

Sung was one of four kittens born to a starving tabby who took refuge under the Tarlina verandah. The litter had to go because no one lived there to feed them. From the beginning I singled out a delicately featured but fierce creature as Qing's future companion. Like Qing, she had black and white markings they looked like kin. The kitten led her siblings on exploratory expeditions through holes in the crumbling verandah planks. Spitting and hissing they ran from all human contact.

We decided to take all four feral kittens back to Canberra. They evaded capture over several weekends. After one determined attempt Harriet's hands were deeply scratched. Finally, Neil trapped them in a garbage can and drove all four back to Canberra where we deposited them in my laundry, awaiting distribution to their new homes.

Breakfast in MacPherson St garden with Sung. Photo: Ryan family collection.



I kept them in the laundry isolated from Qing who prowled suspiciously outside the door. We tried to win their confidence with food. They would not be won. They clung together in a pathetic bundle or, when disturbed, sprang on the high shelves among soap powders and hardware junk, spitting and hissing. They were still feral when I decided to send three to their new owners, Harriet, Susie and Jane. We caught them separately on three occasions, after chasing them over laundry floors, shelves and walls, with much collateral damage. They left rolled in towels, firmly clutched to immobilise their claws.

I had hoped all four would have herb names, and had chosen 'Fennel', to go with Harriet's 'Parsley', Susie's 'Borage' and Jane's 'Tansy'. Liz O, however, insisted on a match for Qing so, to placate her after bringing bundles of trouble into the household, I settled on 'Sung Chingling' after Madame Sun Yatsen. Neil suggested 'Frank'.

Bereft of her siblings Sung rejected me. Released from the laundry she tried to attach herself to the outraged, affronted Qing, who snarlingly rebuffed every lonely, kittenish advance. A country cat, Sung felt safer outdoors, even in that midwinter, and spent most of her time unhappily crouched under the woodpile, coming out for food only when no-one was about. Qing stalked around indignantly, ignoring the hated presence.

Worried that Sung would remain unhappily semi-feral, while freezing in the cold I watched her, plotting to break her defences. Occasionally Neil or I trapped her while eating, bringing her inside wrapped in a towel for compulsory cuddles. Once, with Neil, she tried a little purr, the first we'd heard, but Sung grew no easier to catch.

Then one Sunday morning I caught her at the milk saucer and let her loose in the sunroom. I lay on the carpet in late winter sunshine, reading the papers. Sung sat quite close, poised to spring away, then put a tentative paw towards my hair. Pretending indifference, I watched sideways as she cautiously advanced, grew bolder, then began a little game with the hair ends. Gradually she edged closer, then suddenly snuggled right in, purring in the warm sun. With fingertips I stroked her and Sung stretched in acceptance. Contentedly she permitted me to move her along the floor, providing I stayed at her level. As soon as I rose she sprang away. After

that morning whenever I lay on the carpet Sung came for cuddling and stroking, eventually extending her favour when I lay on the couch. By spring Sung was thus domesticated. Once she abandoned her feral state she rapidly developed into an inside cat, spending more time in the house than Qing. Sung never became a hunter.

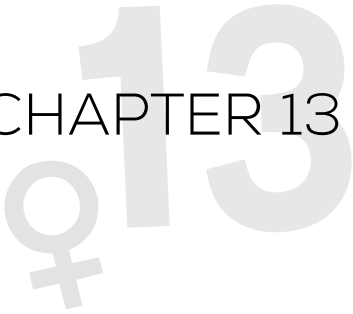
Qing watched with jealous eyes. As Sung grew bolder, transferring her needs for physical contact to human beings, Qing occasionally reached out to her, only to be rebuffed in the manner Sung had learned from the older cat. Sung grew into a handsome young animal with silky fur and appealing ways. She began stalking Qing, creeping up and jumping on her. Qing responded with snarls and spits. My plan of a companion for Qing's declining years had gone sadly awry.

Qing's health deteriorated. A once great fighter, she no longer held the neighbourhood at bay. She lost fur on her back, developed sores on her face. I took her to the family vet. He examined her carefully apparently mystified. Finally he looked at me, 'Is there another animal involved?' I told him about Sung's coming to the household. Shaking his head he explained that adult cats are solitary creatures who do not like their habits disturbed. He decided that Qing had a psychogenic condition, brought on by acute stress. He gave her two injections: cortisone for her skin and a tranquilliser. He said the tranquilliser should calm her, give her time to renegotiate her surroundings before it wore off in six months.

Qing lay about for days, looking relaxed, only occasionally snarling at Sung who continued, half-heartedly, to provoke. Sometimes they tentatively sniffed each other's faces. The six months will soon elapse. Two days ago I found them on the verandah lying side by side, almost touching. I still hope for some kind of amicable relationship between them.

Liz O and Neil were critical. How could I be so cruel as to bring another cat and destroy Qing's equilibrium? They point out that Qing still declines when I go away. I note uneasily that Sung is attaching herself to me in much the same way as Qing. Yet the whole plan was kindly meant, springing from good motives.

I suspect an attempt on my part to intervene in Biff's life might go similarly awry.



CHAPTER 13

GENDER EQUITY AT CANBERRA HIGH

January 1986 O'Connor

A lovely Sunday and I have an hour or so before cycling to lunch with Harriet at Tilley's. Thoughts of school obtrude: the gender equity log I brought home to rationalise during these holidays; and the film about the program which Lyn and Dale plan to make at the school. It was the Participation and Equity Program, now renamed the Gender Equity Program.

Funding finally came in June 1984. Before then I struggled to create the space in my timetable to set up the program. Jenny, the proposer, was gone, leaving a submission focusing on moving girls' attention from 'traditional' girls' subject areas into science, maths and technology. In my humanities teaching I began a subtle shift of emphasis towards revaluing the despised 'traditional' girls' areas.

From the beginning we strove to operate in the feminist mode, setting up a five teacher committee to work in co-operation. With pre-planning funds, we organised a day for the five teachers to run focus groups to gather opinions from staff, students and parents. A mass of material accumulated, much of it critical of the operation of the school: with funding for the time of one fifth of a teacher, were we expected to change the whole school? After plodding through the mass, in which we failed to find any clear directions, we decided to just start – Term II 1984.

By then I had applied for leave to fly to England, so passed on the task of co-ordination to Pauline, who had experience interstate with gender equity programs. Before I left we spent much time talking to the students, and then the parents, but many were alarmed, projecting from one class to a whole school reorganised on the basis of gender. Vociferous attacks came from the highest-achieving girls and their parents, who wanted competition from high-achieving boys. We assured them that class membership was entirely voluntary. In the middle of this furore, I thankfully departed. Before leaving, I wrote *Love and Romance*, a unit which catered for the interests of girls without excluding the boys in the Year 9 English course.

Pauline plunged enthusiastically into the co-ordination. She applied for a grant to travel interstate for ideas, returning with sheaves of documented projects. She planned an ambitious longitudinal survey of student attitudes to science, maths, technology, home science and to school in general, beginning with the whole Year 7 cohort of 1985 and following them through to Years 11 and 12. The Schools Office was roped in to prepare the surveys, then tabulate them through computers. Anne applied for more teacher time plus funds for the expanded program, and the grant came through to cover 1985.

When I left this writing and cycled to lunch at Tilley's with Harriet, we talked for three hours about repetition strain injury, our children, emotional commitments and promoting gender equity in schools. Judy is working on a national structure to assist Canberra High, in which she hopes to give teachers release from class time to promote projects, the most effective strategy for change.

'Don't lose sight of the importance of what you're doing,' she reassured me, 'just because you're at the centre of it.'

When I returned from England, Pauline had been promoted into the Schools Office so I took over the program again. I split the teacher release time among three, and then five, staff: marvellous for the dissemination of the program but difficult to manage. By May the program had twelve segments. I spent much time explaining each segment to the others and talking about the program to parents and groups outside school.

The all-girls science class continued into Year 10 after success in Year 9. Our gender equity maths teacher set up a laboratory focusing on visual spatial needs of girls. We combed library lists and ordered non-sexist books. The Schools Office produced the questionnaires and we surveyed all Years 7 and 9 students. *Love and Romance* proved popular for Year 9. We re-organised computer access to suit girls. We planned a futures program emphasising non-traditional careers for girls. University science laboratories provided twenty work experience places for Year 10 girls. Noel monitored classroom interactions between teachers and students and among students, and confirmed that the major part of teacher attention, both positive and negative, goes to boys. I set playground mapping as a geography exercise in Years 8 and 10. But we felt we had barely begun.

When the *Love and Romance* class first assembled, a relief teacher had the task of running the first session. Afterwards I asked her about the gender breakdown of students. 'About fifty-fifty', she reported. Surprised, I popped in during the next session and found only six boys, all in the front rows. Shamefacedly the teacher realised she had focused her attention on these boys, not noticing the preponderance of girls, over twenty of them.

By the middle of the year, I felt oppressed by the multiplicity of activities, the failing energy of the stressed teachers and a consciousness of the gaps in the program, particularly in technology, physical education, communication with parents and student awareness. My need to assess, to stocktake, grew. I knew much was happening, but how effectively? The surveys took heaps of time to administer and process: were they worthwhile?

Pauline had felt anxious about the technology gap but I was reluctant to alienate an already anxious technology staff, all male, before the program had established. The problem lay in the girls' refusal to choose technology courses after their compulsory unit in Year 7. I decided to wait, mull over the survey results, and put some resource time into physical education (PE). Selecting Nicki as the most likely PE teacher, I persuaded her to take a resource line in which she gathered data and opinions about the desegregated PE program which had been operating in the school since 1983 as a response to earlier ideas about equal opportunity.

Meanwhile we heard that some parents were grumbling, particularly about the all-girls science class, but when I called a special Parents and Citizens meeting to discuss the issue only ten, mostly supportive, attended. As a result, we five core gender equity teachers shifted our attention to students. Pauline pushed the Schools Office into giving resources to run a special day for staff and students to talk about and begin evaluating the program. Sixteen consultants from the Curriculum Section volunteered to facilitate discussion among small groups of students: not enough for the whole school, so we selected Year 9. Pauline and I worked out a program for the Year 9 teachers to run on a morning in October. Room changes for this minor disruption took three days to organise.

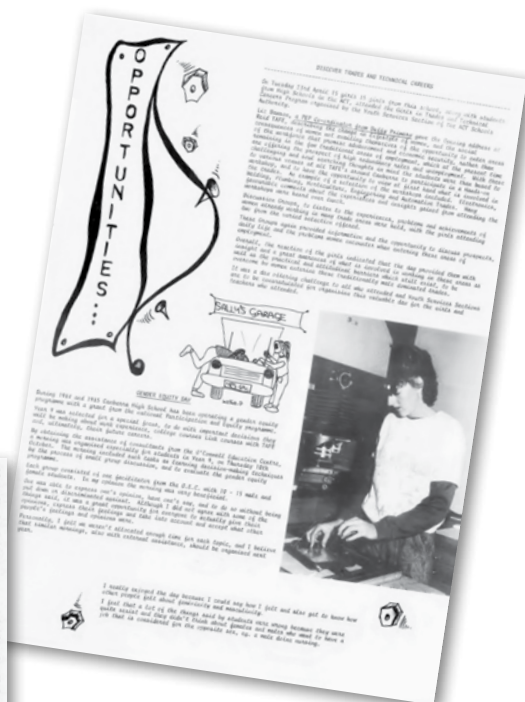
The Year 9 Gender Equity Day appeared to be a great success. Most students admitted enthusiasm. I suspect they were happier with the mode of discussion and interaction rather than with the gender equity theme. Nevertheless it seemed that some breakthrough had occurred in student awareness.

During the August holiday I talked frankly about the program at one of Tilley's lunch hour gatherings. Feeling relaxed and open in that supportive environment, I spoke freely about problems and then agreed to an interview along those lines to a *Canberra Times* journalist who made much of the criticisms of segregated classes by some of the high-achieving girls in science. Mortified by this publicity, which was followed by a satirical editorial on the topic on Sunday, I feared for the whole program but my colleagues seemed to have forgotten about it by the time school resumed in September. An unexpected spin-off came when Lyn, a recent media graduate, asked to make her film about minority students, funded by the NSW



Above: Students working with shapes and solids in the Maths Lab and scenes from the Gender Equity Day. Images from The Canberra High Yearbook and PEP Equals Report.

Right: Julia in classroom, 1980s.



government grant, at Canberra High because the students would know something about the issues and take well to acting.

I'm thinking about how to evaluate the program. Experience in an alternative school gave me little faith in a direct, confrontational approach and I worried that too many of the projects took that form. The more subtle *Love and Romance* strategy seemed successful. Some boys had elected the English unit, while two boys selected 'Computer Fun for Girls'. Generally, these boys were quieter, more reflective, than their peers. Perhaps they were choosing an alternative mode.

By Term III, I had accumulated 120 student maps of the gender breakdown of playground use. I wondered how to proceed. Most maps agreed with my observation that boys took 90% of the active playground space. Should this be discussed with classes, with the student council, with small groups? While I wavered, a subtle change began. One day while on playground duty I noticed a mixed group of boys and girls playing handball in the inner quadrangle, hitherto a male preserve. Gradually the change extended. By the end of term two, three permanent groups played handball in the quadrangle, two mixed and one all girls, while itinerant mixed groups played other games there. At the same time junior girls claimed a grassed area near the Science block, previously used by junior boys. Could it be that the mapping exercise had stirred action, without follow-up from me, and with no fuss? Felt like magic. I wait to see what happens this year but I'll give all incoming Year 7s the mapping exercise.

Nicki, the Physical Education teacher, moved enthusiastically into her tasks, albeit uncertain about procedures. Many girls were not choosing the Physical Education electives after the compulsory Year 7 course. The teacher reported reasons such as embarrassment with boys, sexual harassment and complaints that girls' sports, like netball, were not offered. Contrariwise, the girls rejected the idea of segregation for PE classes, so the teacher devised a scheme for 1986 which would incorporate dance, netball and lacrosse in the general program.

I often feel despair that nothing is happening. One piece of positive feedback came from a senior teacher who spent six months in another school and reported that the gender atmosphere there was quite different and that Canberra High felt more equal

and clearer about gender issues. And yet, I think of Biff and the EEO job. Am I not engaged in the same kind of activity? Reforming the system without fundamental change? Only part of me believes in the efficacy of what we are doing. I try to focus on first principles: consciousness-raising and the feminist mode of operation.

I have to submit a final report on the gender equity program by the end of this year, though funding has been cut by four-fifths and typing and photocopying services have been withdrawn. Instead of a written report I speculate about a video...

March 1986 O'Connor

The gender equity film-making is in progress which has resulted in advances for student-communication, and even parent-communication, both identified gaps in the program. A mixed group of Years 9 and 10 students, fourteen and fifteen year olds from Media and Drama groups, have enthusiastically tackled scripting workshops for scenes in Mathematics, Home Science and Technology classes. I run about liaising, devising schedules to fit in with student and teacher timetables. The school computers are at our disposal for drafting scripts. Parents will come in for some scenes. A Year 10 student is the star, replacing the outside actress who could not spare the time. The plot concerns a non-English-speaking background girl coming into Year 10 towards the end of the school year, encountering sexist and racist prejudices and partially triumphing over both. The Canberra High students in the film have to wear strict uniform and pretend to be in a more restrictive interstate system. This pretence allows us to experiment, with much psychodrama, on the grounds that 'it doesn't happen here'.

I had planned to spend Easter at one of two national political conferences in Sydney, the *Broad Left* and *Getting Together*. The *Broad Left* is an attempt to bring Left elements together and is supported by Left stars, while *Getting Together* hopes to forge a national alliance of ecological and peace groups. I thought the *Broad Left* would be more comfortable but that *Getting Together* held the seeds of the future.

I decided I had energy for neither but I did attend a pre-Conference meeting of *Getting Together* women and wrote notes:

11.3.86 Reid TAFE J Block theatre. There are only eight of us here, and I don't 'know' anyone, though some faces are familiar. I came because I'm interested in these syntheses. The Getting Together conference will clash with the Broad Left Conference, at the same time and in the same city. This is a problem. So far three of the women here are going to the Broad Left and two to Getting Together. Fears being expressed of the latter being too 'cosmicy'.

Should they get together afterwards? Bring out a newsletter? One woman has suggested they call a general meeting of participants at both conferences, afterwards, for reporting back and future action.

Is the aim of Getting Together the formation of a new party, eg the Greens?

A woman says that the Canberra women's movement is impenetrable. She's been here a year, came from the bush, had read many feminist books, was looking forward to being involved and couldn't find it.

Another is talking about IWD. Are they going through a period of personal development instead? Can they keep going with the links made for the IWD march this year?

I talk briefly about the function of the Women's Centre. Some women here have never heard of Wimminews. Why is there this gap for these women who are newish to Canberra?

The 'impenetrable' woman is saying women have a low profile in the alternative movement. Is the women's movement really separatist? What to do about this? Communication seems to be the problem.

I felt shocked by their ignorance of the Canberra women's movement. Dale Spender is right: women are disappearing from history yet again. I persuaded the meeting to have the post-conference debriefing at the Women's Centre and to advertise it in *Wimminews*. Suddenly both the Centre and the newsletter took on new significance as I watched those women re-inventing the wheel. So many meetings and commitments, not enough women to keep the networks going.

Another example of this failure at the Squatters Union Picnic on March 17, where I dropped by to hear the band and found no-one I knew from either the Left or the women's movement, apart from a couple of those 'new' women at the Reid TAFE meeting.

In expansive moments I interpret the fragmentation of the women's movement in a positive light: the avoidance of bureaucratisation, burn-out and takeover. This was my message in the *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* report but now I'm less certain. Plans for the great women's movement fest, the Women & Labour Conference, to be held in Sydney this year, have collapsed and it probably won't happen. Those women who know are appalled. The huge energy found by the rotating organisers to put the conference together and publish the papers has gone. Spender has been lecturing for years on the dangers of disappearance. Have women been overconfident about flexible and fluctuating structures, over-reliant on constant flow of new energy?

WAR decided on a graceful demise last year and when the University of Wollongong wanted WAR to address their Year of Peace seminar there were no contacts. Eventually the University tracked me down and I arranged for someone to go. I realised how many of the core WAR activists had moved away. The Women's Archive is struggling along. Who keeps the Women's Centre going?

At the government-run Women's Shopfront drinks on the eve of IWD, I ran into the editors of *Wimminews*. Shamed, I realised I'd let my subscription lapse for over a year and hastily gave them a cheque. The editors seemed out of place at that gathering of femocrats and equal-opportunity practitioners. Next day at the IWD rally I saw none of the latter. The thin crowd waiting for the marchers to arrive was made up of students and a few old activists. The march seemed to be composed of the women from the Single Women's Shelter and the Women Against Apartheid. The latter has strong links with the Builders' Labourers Federation and two of those women were at the Reid TAFE meeting and the Squatters Union picnic. They spoke then of the IWD collective, so that may be their path into the women's movement. Is IWD relapsing into a left trade union observance, as in the 1940s and 1950s? Through

2XX Liz O keeps connection with all these events, but the radio can't provide the energy. I am haunted by those women not knowing about either *Wimminews* or the Women's Centre.

I am reading, and thoroughly enjoying, Dale's Spender's *For the Record*. Spender looks at all the main contemporary feminist literature: a splendid idea. As she underlines key points, she relishes each writer's interpretation of the past sixteen years. When I began this manuscript, it was only seven years since we began.

I am impressed by Spender's method of sending the relevant chapters off to the various authors for comment. In the introduction Spender says that this intention made her more careful about accuracy, thoughtful perusal, revision and evaluation. Such a method would certainly have moderated my outburst in this manuscript after her last public lecture in Canberra. From this distance my diatribe seems excessive, more a reflection of my anxieties about classrooms and strategies to overcome inequities

In her chapter on Juliet Mitchell, Spender firmly labels Mitchell a 'socialist feminist' in her analysis of the men problem. Radical feminists hold men, usually personally, responsible for the oppression of women while socialist feminists believe the 'the system is responsible for structuring the tyranny of men and the subordination of women'. I realise I have retained this aspect of socialist feminism whilst moving closer to radical feminism on other issues, hence my confusion. 'What one believes to be the cause will have significant implications for what one sees as the solution...' says Spender.

Anzac Day and again WAR does not march. Such a relief to wake up with a holiday stretching ahead, rather than a stomach-knotting confrontation with patriarchy. Yet there are twinges of regret: I miss the drama and excitement.

May 1986 Tarlina

I have finished reading Dale Spender's *For the Record* with further insights about the problem of men and illumination on the struggle for gender equity in education. The book helped so much with my school problems that I wrote a fan letter:

Dear Dale Spender

This letter is to thank you for writing *For the Record* which I recently read. The idea is splendid and the incorporation of the responses from the various writers is an exemplar for a feminist mode of criticism.

Of particular illumination were your remarks on education in Chapter 14, 'Necessary Diversity: Variety and Omission.' As a secondary school teacher, I have been involved in a struggle at two levels, for gender inclusive curriculum for students and for gender equity in the staff hierarchy of schools. As an early Women's Liberationist, rather than a member of Women's Electoral Lobby, I adhere to the idea of 'reform with a revolutionary perspective' but in the day-to-day struggles have often lost the perspective of an alternative system.

Right now in the ACT education system we feminists are in a mess. The gender equity program at my school aims to push girls into higher levels of Maths and Science, keep up their involvement in Physical Education, nudge them into Technology, give them more teacher attention in the classroom, drag them into computer awareness, present English courses focused on their interests and encourage them to take more space in the playground. We have achieved some success but at the cost of polarisation and repressed hostility. At the same time the teaching profession, system-wide, is engaged in the EEO struggle where feelings have become so bitter than male opponents organised an effective opposition which seems to be capturing the middle ground of those women who bow to male supremacy. I know that conflict can be healthy but I see around me the despair of 'burnt out' feminist colleagues, not least myself.

Your remarks have given me cause to pause and reflect on the main aims and plan a change of strategy. For the students we can focus on those aspects of the program which allow the girls to develop their own strengths, without precisely mapping their paths, which we cannot now know. In the profession we need to divert our energies away from the battles for top jobs and towards plans for restructuring so as to weaken the hierarchies. Both these strategies are possible.

By seizing on one aspect of your multifaceted book I wanted to show you how your words can come across the world to embattled pockets of feminists and help us to take stock.

Having already recommended your book to feminist friends, I can foresee its great value for future stocktakings, both of ourselves and those who follow on. Right now, I am refusing to believe that this time will pass into oblivion.

Once again thanking you...

October 1986 O'Connor

This is a scheduled Tarlina 'closed' weekend but only Jen and I could go and we decided to stay in town so Jen could write a briefing and I could finalise the draft of the *Equity for Girls at Braddon High* booklet.

At the same time, Susan Ryan faces a preselection challenge within the Labor Party, a challenge from the ACT Left faction, furious over the government's betrayal of party policy on uranium mining and the resumption of uranium sales to France. Both the minister and the Left candidate belong to the Feminist Caucus so, ironically, their work for feminist perspectives within the party is bearing fruit. Poor minister, caught in Cabinet solidarity, and her opponent knows she opposed the uranium decision from within.

Torn between personal loyalty and support for the Left position, I decided to campaign openly for Susan, who opposed the controversial policies from within Cabinet and was faced with a choice between Cabinet solidarity and resignation. I am unhappy about placing anyone in that position and can see no point in singling her out from other more culpable ministers. The national ALP Left agrees: they tried to talk the ACT Left out of opposing Susan Ryan, partly because the Left is allying with the Centre Left faction, to which she belongs, to keep another Right candidate out of cabinet.

At lunch last week with Susan, some supporters came up with tactics. The longer the campaign, the better her position. I proposed that we maintain sympathetic understanding of the Left candidate's position while explaining the difficulties the minister faces and her achievements for women. The minister reports that more

of the Parliamentary Labor Caucus women, including the Speaker, are adopting feminist perspectives as the misogyny in the Party and the Parliament grows more blatant.

While drafting *Equity for Girls* last week, I realised how useful it would be both for the school and the preselection campaign if Minister Susan, who began the national program, could come and launch it. So that is now organised for December 4, less than four weeks away and I haven't finished the draft. How many book launchings are arranged before the writing is finished and the printing done? The department has sprung into action with the printing, provided the school can key the draft onto a disc by the end of next week. With this kind of pressure, how can I be suffering a writing block?

The project received a boost this week when local television came to make a segment for their weekly *Behind the News* documentary. The school felt nervous about possible media distortion, although the producer was a sympathiser. All kinds of extraneous considerations: the Principal wanted all on-camera students to be in strict school uniform, an impossible requirement; would the bars on the computer rooms appear penitentiary-like? what if some students misbehaved in front of the camera? Poor bewildered producer: wasn't she giving us useful publicity? Yes, but did she realise that airing of feminist issues brought irrational responses from some people?

For an hour before the program was broadcast Suzanne, who was visiting, endured my room-pacing tension. Then, relief: the message came across, simplified and distorted but appearing reasoned, respectable, with visual appeal from the school and students. The Principal expressed relief, although the Maths faculty, rightly, thought their activities went unexplained and many boys felt slighted. The girls who spoke bravely of 'put downs' by boys were put down the following day. At least many students are now fully engaged in the project.

January 1987 O'Connor

The feminist minister won her preselection convincingly, by 384 to 209 and the *Equity for Girls* booklet was written, printed and launched on time. I completed the

school year exhausted, as usual, but buoyed by the news of a transfer to a senior secondary college for this coming year.

In March 88, there was a conference in Sydney to launch Curriculum Perspectives on the Education of Girls. The video made during the gender equity program at Canberra High was included as part of the launch, so I was asked to speak about it. Lyndsay arranged for my invitation, convinced that these researchers and administrators need input from the coalface, from the classroom teacher.

I arrived late on the first night, having not wanted to leave my classes for too long. At breakfast the second day, I found I knew only a few of the women. I didn't quite get my bearings, so I sat apart from the others at a small table with croissants and coffee and a harbour view. I felt uneasy.

Clothes at these events pose a problem. The professional and administrative women often dress 'up', but sometimes the convention seems to be to dress 'down'. I don't know the rules so I brought three outfits. Last night I wore the acetate dress from K-Mart as it looks classier than the \$17 I paid for it. Today I am wearing my most expensive outfit, a loose cotton suit from Physical Clothing which cost \$300 three years ago, plain and serviceable. At school I generally wear trousers or flowing skirts, cloth shoes or runners. Strange to be thinking so much about clothes but it is a concern for us old Women's Liberationists. Refractory Girl ran an article about bureaucratic clothes. On the way here in the plane I was wedged in between men in managerial suits.

Having been excluded from the afternoon session discussing draft responses to the Policy for Girls because I'm not an official government representative and therefore bound to secrecy, I've been wandering around the Cremorne streets. Looked in an African shop where one of the bureaucrats told me goods were 'really cheap' and was shocked by the high prices compared with Nairobi. My malachite necklace, purchased for \$14 from the Nairobi Museum, is worth \$86 here.

The session on the video brought back all the old difficulties. It had a mixed reception. Some thought it good, appreciated the subtleties, a useful tool for teachers and students. Others worried about stereotypes (the Aboriginal role), teacher-bashing, shouldn't it be more aesthetic?

The Home Science problem resurfaced and they discussed the negative image of home science teachers. During the scripting of the video, I was uneasy about the Home Science segment and dropped a few hints to Lyn, so it was tempered a little. During editing I would have cut the Home Science segment, especially since my perception of home science was reconstructed at the Women and Food Conference of 1982. Should I have been more assertive?

Today I defended the segment, arguing that the students created most of it. But I did not tell them that only yesterday two boys involved in making the video complained again about the 'message'. Of course the boys don't like the light in which they are portrayed, yet they entered into the drama with enthusiasm.

I'm left feeling uneasy, aware of the burden of responsibility for those teachers who trusted me enough to expose them in the film. And then I think of Pauline's enthusiasm and her insistence on showing the video at staff development programs.

Not long after, I saw that Joyce Stephens, a Women's Liberationist still with the Communist Party, had been advertised sensationally by the university Left Forum to speak on Men of the Macho Left. I rushed in from school at lunch time, skipping a curriculum meeting, to be there. Joyce was reporting on her work with women in non-traditional jobs. She said, in an accepting way, that some Left women think that no party caters for their needs, no party is diverse enough to let go of outmoded sectarian ideas. She also mentioned education, so I raised my doubts about pushing girls into non-traditional areas, and Joyce recommended that I see the video – the one we had made! Embarrassing for both of us.

Afterwards I explained my experience in making the video but with her New South Wales perspective, she was so far removed from our ACT curriculum, that we made no headway.

So many of us trying to effect change but hard to see the results clearly. What will our efforts look like in years to come?



CHAPTER 14

TROUBLE AT TARLINA

May 1986 Tarlina

The autumn holidays, so I brought this manuscript to Tarlina, but will also use the time to wind down, knit, read, chat and reflect with the others.

Tarlina women have been talking again about their distant futures: should we be moving towards a modified collective living situation in Canberra to support our old age? If we pooled resources we could buy a couple of adjoining houses, then use the new dual occupancy regulations to build units in the yard, still leaving lots of garden space. A long-term dream but I am nervous about inter-personal relations in the collective. There have been splits and divisions in Tarlina for years, although most members hold together. I dread my own capacity to develop intense hostility, as with Biff. Paddy says I have passed through that phase, since the intensity of the hostility was connected to the size of my expectations and subsequent disappointment. In the interim, at Tarlina we continue to practise living together and I am saving to free myself from mortgages.

We spoke of Pam G who was very active, organising the women's film festival and many meetings, in CWL in 1974-5. After she dropped out of the movement, she spoke bitterly about how feminism had ruined her chances of finding a husband and mothering children. Pamela O said her interaction with feminism had changed her consciousness about husband and children but, although she would dearly love to have a child in a supportive environment, she cannot blame feminism for this lack. I said that I had found a Great Truth in feminism and, despite the pain involved in changing my life, I cannot imagine denying that truth. How sad for Pam to feel so bitter.

June 1986 O'Connor

Spent much of this week attending the Feminist Criticism and Cultural Production Conference run by the ANU's Humanities Research Centre. The academic women who are anti-semiotic plus many non-academic women feel excluded and angry, having attended because of the lure of 'women's culture' in the title. Small gems, including entertaining literary criticisms and some readings by Canberra women writers, rewarded those who stayed.

Suzanne, Biff and I temporarily re-forged our old alliance, meeting to debrief between sessions. We decided that angry outbursts had no value in this word-war so Suzanne kept her comment for the final session, where she light-heartedly described her situation, watching from 'outside the fish bowl'. I used my knitting as a protective wall, while observing proceedings. This conference, we decided, evoked the debates of late medieval schoolmen: fragmented angels on a deconstructed pin. We wondered about the content, lost or non-existent beneath the dazzling, incomprehensible form.

I attended the launch of Janice Raymond's *A Passion for Friends*. This marvellous volume illuminates the problem of my intense rejection of once-close friends. In her final chapter Raymond writes of 'A Vision of Female Friendship' in which 'female friendship creates a network of meaning that transcends women's past, our ordinary lives and our present' (p213) and, 'Hope works for female friendship in spite of past failures of friendship' (p214). Hope and friendship were easy, she says, when things are going well.

Biff and I were facing Susan who was framed by the dark wood panelling. The air prickled. After we ordered food, Biff announced that she wanted the evening to be memorable, so I suggested a game of Harriet's in which each one gets to ask a question of each of the others, a question one previously didn't dare ask.

We sat awhile thinking of the questions. I drew the short straw.

How would you describe what happened between us three? I asked Susan M

I've one cameo, she replied slowly. Do you remember us three driving back from the coast when Biff and I told you about our sexual relationship? After you broke with Biff, I felt that you scripted a repeat with me.

Surprised, I had no answer, but it was Susan's turn to ask a question.

Do you think early Canberra Women's Liberation was a product of time or space?

Typical, I thought, Susan wanting a political analysis.

Both, I replied. All over the Western world, as I saw in Stockholm in 1971, small groups of women were meeting in life-changing circumstances. Whatever women's group you happened to be in at that time would be significant.

Biff's turn. She asked me, Why don't you identify sexually as a lesbian?

A hard one. I tried to be honest.

My only lesbian sexual experience aroused such intense heterosexual desires that I was left feeling distraught and miserable.

Biff had also attended the Janice Raymond launch. Afterwards, she said, Our expectations of each other were beyond the realms of human possibility.

There we were, calm and matter-of-fact, all passion spent. Biff and Susan M didn't want to ask questions of each other.

They're further apart from each other than I am from either of them, I thought.

Susan M, however, did want to continue a discussion, raising the old topic: whither the women's movement? But Biff and I had had enough. I asked to be driven home.

Next day, I settled on Janice Raymond's gentle call to arms:

Hope is hard to hold, but is no less called for, when things are not as good as they expected them to be, when sisterhood does not seem as powerful as it once was or as once they felt it to be.' (Janice Raymond, *op cit* p211).

The future living plans discussed at Tarlina are now more urgent for me. Liz O has decided to move into a house with a partner: Neil, who returned after two years away, has foreshadowed his departure from the garden flat at the end of his university year. Real change is now possible but I don't know what I want. Remembering the Chiltern cottage, I play with the idea of living alone for a while: I have never lived alone. The occupant of the garden flat may be all the company I need. An ideologically sound house collective, with shared ownership, feels too hard to organise.

October 1986 Tarlina

Such a spring at Tarlina. Much rain interspersed with warm sun has greened the whole valley and I sit at the window looking across the creek to the broom flowering yellow on the hillside, a few white sheep, and emerald grass where livestock are fenced out. So far Harriet, Sybille, Liz O and Pamela have come, with Paddy and Jen yet to arrive. I have prepared, with garlic and garden rosemary, a leg of lamb which is baking in the slow combustion oven. We set off from Canberra in bright warm sunshine, but now it rains heavily with a wild wind which bends the foliage as if to say: this is why you have such trouble establishing trees here.

A quick trip to the kitchen to check the baking, a word to Pamela setting the sitting room pot belly stove in preparation for 'Together Time' after dinner, and a glimpse of Sybille writing at her window overlooking the courtyard, illuminated by the soft electric light within. Relative tranquillity, after a winter of emotional disturbance in the Tarlina collective. I am still shocked by the violence of my anger. Like an infection, my anger spread to Harriet and then on to Pamela, Sybille and Jen. Liz O avoided involvement.

And the cause? Sometime in June Paddy and her brother Terry dug up, without consultation, six young pine trees growing along the eastern boundary. Harriet,



Di E, Harriet, Pamela, Jen on courtyard verandah at Tarlina. Photo: Sybille Kovacs.

Pamela and I planted those trees, with sixty others, about five years ago. All but these six perished in the drought, or by the wind, or by livestock depredation. I knew that Paddy hates *pinus radiata* because it destroys Australian flora but in these sparse paddocks no other trees would grow.

Paddy's explanation was that the Council feared for the electric wires. In the full grip of anger, I refused to believe it. Paddy's growing difficulties with the collective seemed to me to be finding expression in an act of contemptuous destruction.

Another trip to the kitchen, this time to prepare the onions. Harriet and Pamela are immersed in an analysis of their lovers and ex-lovers, Liz O is munching a bread and humus snack, Sybille is still writing in her room. The others have not yet arrived though from my window I can see, Paddy's car outside the pub.

In the interest of the Tarlina collective I repressed my anger for years – about members' different levels of commitment, about their different priorities and different ideologies. I repressed my resentment by thinking we could cope by talking, by reaching out, by endeavouring to understand each other's difficulties. All the more violent the explosion when my reserves of understanding and tolerance were depleted. I felt shocked, not only by the intensity and bitterness of my response but by how much I enjoyed the outburst of anger. I bounded and plunged, raved for hours, slammed down the telephone receiver on Paddy. I found it easier to be angry on behalf of the collective than directly for myself. I also knew that during this period of wild emotion, no resolution could be pursued. Other collective members, infected by the outbreak, withdrew energy from Paddy. Only Liz O persevered and organised a meeting between Paddy and me which enabled the patching up to begin. Even now no full resolution seems possible.

What have I learned about women's collectives from this experience? That tolerant, civilised behaviour can mask a desire to control others. That deep schisms and rifts must be admitted as soon as possible. That expectation of long-term survival of a collective is unrealistic and demise should be admitted as a possibility. That it is dangerous for one or two women to take responsibility for the whole. Many of these lessons I already knew. I had not expected to have to relearn them.

'Together Time' began late after dinner and went until 1am on the first night of Eastern Summer Time. Much work to be done on Harriet's domestic problems. Then Sybille needed clarification on a possible move interstate and Liz O wanted a Mother Peace Tarot reading on the segments of her current life. Early this afternoon Pamela began talking about her difficulties at work. All this was interspersed with mowing the long spring grass, which had dried suddenly in the constant fierce wind, and planting out seedlings from Harriet's garden in Canberra. Paddy made no appearance, probably staying with other friends. I must deal directly with my anger with Paddy, not kid myself it's on behalf of the collective.

On the way home from Tarlina Liz O and I called in at the Women for Survival camp, established outside Parliament House to urge the government to refuse the renewal of the Pine Gap base treaty with the United States. There we found Suzanne who told us about the spiral dance round parliament and rituals devised to bring peace and harmony. Central to the ceremonies was Suzanne's creation, the Earth Brain, a large ceramic ball fashioned from New Zealand brown clay, into whose surface Suzanne had carved intricate brain cells in a pattern of continents and oceans. When visiting her studio in September, I helped Suzanne remove the Earth Brain from the kiln and saw it had a special magic. So I offered to buy the Earth Brain after Suzanne returned from the Women's Crafting in South Australia, where it featured in several rituals. Suzanne and I have decided that Earth Brain shall reside in a sheltered spot in my garden, and then Suzanne can accompany it to ritual gatherings.

January 1987 O'Connor

Noel has broken down. She refused to eat, could not sleep, became dehydrated. While I was in Tasmania a roster of Noel's friends tried to keep her out of hospital. But Noel spiralled further into depression and they feared for her life. So she was sent to hospital where she is drugged, but eating and sleeping. Will Noel choose to die? I visit her in the psychiatric ward, brush her hair, talk about swimming, try to think of ways to bring her out of the depression, but so far she doesn't respond. I feel guilty that I cannot give her more.

I prepare new courses, plan an expedition with Marian's children to the model English village and organise a visit to the Monaro where Suzanne and I will perform magic rituals.

Suzanne was deeply affected by the Crafting Camp in South Australia last September where over a week participants shared their skills and knowledge in Wicca. Suzanne had never felt so accepted, even acclaimed, for her skills, both in art and the creation of ritual. A host of activities: healings, a sweat lodge, complex rituals surrounding the Earth Brain, meditations and long-term commitments to building the Crafting network. But many of the women involved have undergone severe testing since the Crafting. Some developed cancer, others' households broke apart, while Noel goes through mental illness and the breakdown of her relationship with Suzanne. I admire from a distance, thankful to avoid this aftermath. Were negative forces unleashed? Was everything done properly: 'for the good of all, according to the free will of all?'

January 1989 Tarlina

Pamela and I drove here yesterday and mowed metre high grass in the courtyard before torrents of rain swept in. Everything is still mushy underfoot but I hope to mow more in today's sunshine before a forecast storm blows across the valley.

Last October I told Harriet I felt jaded with Tarlina. My responsibility as public officer, our difficulty finding reliable and cheap auditors, my need to take emotional responsibility for the connection of the collective, together with responsibility for my students on excursion weekends have all combined to undermine Tarlina as my haven.

At our November 'closed' weekend we were sitting around the refectory table by the kitchen fire after dinner when Harriet asked each of us to answer the question: what are we each feeling about Tarlina?

Sybille answered first, For me, the collective is the main thing. So if Tarlina went, I assume we'll find another place to do all this.



Julia mowing grass at Tarlina after good rains, January 1989. Photo: Sybille Kovacs.

I can't even contemplate losing Tarlina, said Pamela, I feel so connected to the earth, the countryside.

No, it's just the company for me, Harriet spoke slowly, I would much prefer a place with permanent water, like a river or the sea.

My connection is deep and physical, said Pamela. I love this place. If our collective collapsed, I'd try to form another to take it over and if Tarlina went I'd try to find another place in the highlands. I must say that I do feel pressured by my job as Tarlina secretary.

I reported my anxieties and added, I'd feel some relief if Tarlina disappeared from my life. The physical place is important to me, especially my room, but I've run into my old problems with groups, the burden of the 'centre-holder'. I'm also upset by the emotional defection of Paddy.

The collective responded to my revelations.

I can play more of an administrative role, and help Harriet with the accounts, offered Sybille.

I'll catch up on the minutes in preparation for the audit, Pamela offered. Then to me she said, Why don't you stop bringing students here for a while, and re-establish Tarlina as a haven for yourself?

I'm also considering a sabbatical from Tarlina for six to twelve months, I replied. All of you have had long breaks. My trouble is when everyone's coming down, I can't resist joining in.

Yesterday I began reading Orbach and Eichenbaum's *Bitter Sweet* – a book about Love, Envy and Competition in Women's Friendships. So far I'm disappointed that no insights have come. The pivot of the analysis lies in mother-daughter relations, the family experience overlaid by changing roles for women in the late twentieth century. Now two thirds of the way through I don't think the answers provided will help me with Tarlina.

Meanwhile four young men, my students, have arrived to stay a few days. I feel pleased by their acceptance of and trust in me, but I also feel guilt for disturbing

the Tarlina women's country retreat. I had told the students before Christmas that I was coming and that they would be welcome. I was trying to re-create the old New Year time at Tarlina when friends and relatives came by and we were sometimes twenty at dinner, but when the students did not confirm the invitation, I retreated to Pamela's idea of the closed haven for this period.

Tried to ring you in Canberra, one student said, but we had the wrong number.

So two groups are co-existing: Pamela, Harriet and I pottering about our haven and the students on holiday. Fortunately, the boys are making videos which keeps them busy and away from the houses. We come together in the evenings and this morning I included a pack of cards on the Braidwood shopping list so we can play Rickety Kate, renamed Unstable Norman by Paddy's son, Andrew. Harriet bravely says she is gaining insights into her adolescent child by observing these four older ones, while Marian, cheerful and accepting as ever, lurks in her room buried in Lisa Alther's *Other Women* and writing in her diary about her difficult family Christmas. This dichotomy is sent for me to work out my contradictions.

Tarlina has two functions for me: the women's collective haven and the country space where my students can discover themselves. Most Tarlina members see only the first function, although they have used the place for other groups, like Harriet's trade union women, Paddy's craft students, and Pamela's ESL students. The Fabian educator in me insists that a treasure like Tarlina should be shared. But until now I have not mixed the two functions at the same time.

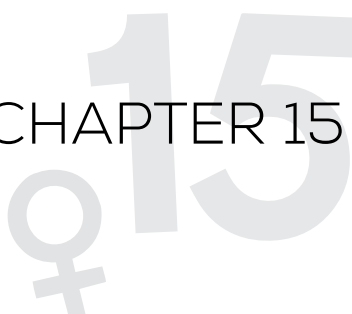
Am I trying to recreate my departed family? I find it easy to relate to adolescent boys.

We women plan to leave this afternoon, leaving the students in charge for an extra day. The Women's Refuge holiday group of five women and eleven children arrives the next day so I am anxious that the place is left tidy. One of the young men is a responsible chap, and last year Harriet wrote out detailed instructions for departing Tarlina guests, so all should be well.

Completed *Bitter Sweet* with no flashes of insight but an affirmation of useful procedures we already pursue. The authors recommend what we call 'the power of naming' – identifying the feelings and speaking about them whilst accepting that

people grow and change. We've managed to keep this Tarlina collective going for ten years now, with a few departures balanced by new members. We have some skills in group dynamics and these have sustained us. My Tarlina problem feels easier now I have unburdened myself. Pamela has updated the minutes, Harriet and I have completed the accounts so now I can find a new auditor. My student excursion weekends have been cut back to two for this year.

I may skip the occasional closed weekend in the way other members do.



CHAPTER 15

FALLOW TIMES

January 1987 O'Connor

Towards the end of the summer holidays and I have been organising the laying of new carpet through the house, shopping, seeing friends. The hottest part of the season is here, along with north-westerly winds, bushfires and smoky haze. Days are lazy. Evenings spent on the veranda, with the hose spraying nearby on the garden.

Travelling back from a family gathering in Tasmania at Christmas, Edna and I fiercely debated the child-support proposals going before Federal Parliament this year. We were riding on a bus across the Fingal Valley, soft green edged by fierce tors.

Garnisheeing men's wages is wrong, she argued. It simply props up the conservative idea of the family. Support for children is a community responsibility.

That's all very well as an ideal, I snorted. Meanwhile many custodial parents, the vast majority of them women, are below the poverty line and their numbers are growing.

Look, the men will take off, be untraceable, and the women still be in poverty.

Lots of these non-custodial males evading child support are middle-class, men in respectable employment. My voice rose above the noise of the bus engine. They can be traced. They can't take off. Many of them won't pay unless there's a garnishee on their wages.

Working class men far outnumber the middle class, she too began to shout.

I can't stand those rich men getting off. As a taxpayer I'm sick of it. I lose a third of my income in tax. I hoped to shame her, a pensioner.

Edna brushed that aside. The concept of the nuclear family shackles women to lifelong servitude. The wider community, the state, must take responsibility for children if women are to be free.

We were drawing the attention of rural Tasmanians passengers.

WEL's in favour of child support. I lowered my voice. How are you going to oppose it?

She sighed. I'll have to run dead. But I wish they could see how dangerous it is.

Anyway, it'll never go through Parliament, the men will gang up against it, I soothed her.

Good thing then. But I reckon it'll go through. The men are not smart enough to see the long-term implications.

Edna is now dubbed 'Australia's second oldest feminist' by *The National Times*, leaving Irene Greenwood in Western Australia the mantle of the oldest.

For Christmas Edna was given the Jean Devaney autobiography edited by Carole Ferrier, which we both read and discussed before leaving the Apple Isle. Devaney was a New Zealand writer and active trade unionist who migrated to Australia with her nuclear family at the onset of the Great Depression, joined the Communist Party, spent ten years speaking on Party platforms throughout Australia without remuneration, had an affair with a CPA leader, exhausted herself, broke down and was expelled from the Party. For the remainder of her life she licked her wounds, tried to resuscitate her writing self. She was grudgingly re-admitted to the

Party, resigned over cultural policy, reunited with her husband, retired to North Queensland, rejoined the party after de-Stalinisation and died in her sixties, worn out and in relative obscurity. Carole Ferrier has pieced the autobiography together from sections written at different times, with most of the text written by Devaney in the early 1950s.

Imprisoned by rain in a small caravan at Scamander, Edna and I speculated about Jean's choices, particularly her decision to put her writing second to her party activities. She later regretted this decision. Katharine Susannah Prichard made the opposite choice. Unlike Prichard, Devaney was an excellent public speaker, but over-use of her abilities by the Party led to her collapse. Seduced by Leninism, Devaney never lost her faith in the concept of the vanguard party, only in the leaders, later reviled as Stalinists. She experienced extraordinary inter-personal difficulties and lost rapport with her own family. Edna remembered that in her own crisis with the Communist Party she always retained the support of family and a few friends. Jean seemed to lose everybody except her daughter, who was far away. I thought of Joyce's lament that the CPA's failure to deal with interpersonal relationships through the lens of understanding and compassion proved its biggest weakness.

Jean's later stages are not documented in this book. Her accounts of early life in New Zealand and her first years in the Party are beautifully written and lucid, but the breakdown phase is confused, with elliptical references and omission of crucial information. As her daughter comments at the end, the full biography is yet to be written.

Edna said, I reckon Jean's problem, and the reason for her collapse, was her faith in the vanguard party.

She didn't live long enough to experience movement politics. It might have saved her, I commented.

Edna and I re-affirmed our commitment to movement politics and the grand alliance of the minorities against the capitalist, imperialist, racist patriarchy.

We have reached critical mass! announced the convenor of the Women in Science Education Network (WISENET). By 'critical mass' she meant that we now have sufficient women with feminist consciousness to forge ahead to our goals. Such a cheerful, positive woman. We seem to be in a third stage. We women who began in the late 1960s and early 70s are tired, more cautious with our energy, the women who joined in the mid to late 1970s are going through first stage exhaustion, but new women, organising new struggles, keep coming on. Those who organised particular triumphs may be demoralised by subsequent developments but the newer women are seeing different areas and ways in which to work. Every so often we get together.

Along with many feminists of my generation I am trying to pace myself, learning when to hold back from involvement because of potential exhaustion. I am also dealing with the guilt of withdrawal.

May 1987 Coast

The May school holidays, the last ones ever because next year ACT schools move to a four-term year, in line with NSW and Victorian schools. Here in this coastal caravan park, these arrangements are a blessing because the park is sparsely populated. A friend of Helen P's owns this caravan which is permanently on site with an aluminium-clad annexe and a small veranda out front. I like the space-economy of caravans.

Arriving yesterday afternoon, straight from a Tarlina 'closed' weekend, I tussled with the electricity connection and the dual system refrigerator and now feel at home. This is a superior caravan in a refined caravan park, twenty metres from two near-deserted beaches. Interiors of both caravan and annex are plastic wood panelled, with carpeted and vinyl tiled floors, pelmetted windows curtained in netted and braided insulated drops, seats upholstered in brown striped wool-blend fabric, both beds covered with doonas. There's a gas stove, a microwave oven, a radio-cassette player and a colour television at my disposal. Fortunately, the TV suffers from the coast malaise of poor reception.

I set up my writing in the van dining area, on a large square pine table. From this table I have a three-sided view of sky, eucalypts, casuarinas and neatly clipped grass, which is even now being mown by a man on a ride-on machine. Glimpses of other caravans add human interest. In rest time, I read Gordon Haight's biography of George Eliot.

Lake Ginninderra College is demanding but satisfying. In a writing class I kept an open access journal as a model, in which I speculated about the teaching process and the students' progress. With an extract from the journal, I showed them how to workshop a piece: those sixteen and seventeen year-olds are savage critics. Few appreciated the discursive style, the descriptions of the view outside my window interspersed with my ruminations. Red marker comments covered the overhead transparency. All part of their learning experience, I rationalised, and noted an improvement in the writing of the work-shoppers.

Some students presented outstanding portfolios at the end of term. My favourite was a beautifully presented collection of poems and prose pieces from the young graphic artist who illustrated the Gender Equity booklet last year and moved on with me from Canberra High to the college. Her portfolio was handwritten in copperplate, each page decorated and encased in a plastic sleeve. Earlier in the term she brought her recently deceased grandfather's diaries and I took them home when Suzanne was visiting. Suzanne pored over them and wrote an enthusiastic letter about their sadness and significance. He had been part of the Down to Earth movement, an architect-inventor who attended American conferences on alternative technology and who died of emphysema before he reached sixty. The student included an appreciation of him, a valedictory essay, as part of her portfolio. One of the moderating teachers cried a little when she read it, but the final judgment in our fiercely competitive, 'J curve' system was that her work merited a high 'B' rather than an 'A'.

She's an Edwardian gentlewoman, commented a moderating teacher. I suspect that on these criteria I also merit only a 'B', but the student is not bad company.

At Tarlina, I scribbled a poem about my lack of creative space:

Fear of Fallow Time

A fallow time

of waiting

The muse sleeps

Nothing comes.

Creatures may nibble

at the stubble of past harvest

Perhaps their droppings

will fertilise

future abundance

Breezes, faint thoughts

move over bare earth

Behind them comes the colder wind

of writer's block.

Now, as the space is available, the writing comes.

I found another good writing place on the north-west side of the van, a brown, wooden table with matching benches. I can sit here out of the sea breeze, my back to the late autumn afternoon sun. Here I may also have a cigarette, for the caravan rules forbid smoking inside. Crimson rosellas observe from high in the casuarinas while galahs swoop low to the grass. George Eliot, having done her duty by her father, has hired a room in a Geneva pensione to read, study and write. She is thirty years old.

The lives of these earlier women are so important for second wave feminists. At the beginning we thought we sprang, fully grown from the 1960s, but now we know we inherit a long tradition. At the Feminism and Humanities seminars in 1986, Virginia Blain said that connections to women's writing were passed on, not in a mother-daughter fashion but in an aunt-niece mode. Aunts, she said, occupied a variety of places in people's lives, particularly in the nineteenth century. Some aunts could encourage their nieces away from the traditional role and into

independent lives, by example and exhortation. Some literary women, such as Jane Austen, had real nieces whose writing they encouraged. The aunt-niece relationship also explains breaks in tradition, for it will usually not be as powerful as mother-daughter or husband-wife relationships and often subsides when confronted by more primary obligations.

The listeners, charmed by this thesis, contributed many examples. At this year's Word Festival, Virginia Blain appeared on a panel with writers and editors to discuss women's literary traditions. She pointed out that a truly separate tradition was not possible under patriarchy but an 'aunt tradition' was a useful metaphor for the interrupted nature of female engagement in literature.

Stephanie Dowrick, a founder of Women's Press, was angry that this panel was held in a small over-crowded venue, unlike the 'general interest' sessions, yet had attracted a larger audience. She then asked twenty people to stand and name the woman writer who had most influenced them: an uplift of female tradition filled the packed University House Common Room.

I stayed for the next session on whether there was now a conspiracy to publish and review mainly women's books, a view first put forward by men at the Adelaide Writers' Week. The men on the panel refused to stick to their time limits. I was reminded of the male teacher who complained early this year that as a result of the Gender Equity program the girls were now too assertive and the boys had become pathetic wimps.

In England in 1984 I experimented with calling myself a 'writer', as well as teacher, but withdrew when asked what I'd published. There are replies about not publishing, along the lines of Jane Austen's manuscripts in drawers for years and Storm Jameson's lament about over-hasty publishing, but I felt too insecure to offer them. Teaching is easier to explain. When did Jane Austen 'become' a writer? In the late 1790s when she began her drafts, or twenty years later when she was first published? George Eliot, in her Geneva pensione, still has ten years to go till the publication of her first novel. I could have described myself as 'aspiring writer'.



Julia at Chawton, Jane Austen's home, in the 1980s. Photo: Marian May.

I visited Harriet at her beach house further south for dinner.

Harriet's daughter, Tilly, has a friend to stay so Harriet has time to read while they amuse each other. They all came for lunch today to inspect the caravan park. Today is Tilly's fifth birthday so I bought a frozen cream and jam sponge cake to defrost and decorate with candles. Now nearly six years since Harriet decided to have a child alone. She often feels the need for a father for Tilly but she has no great opinion of the performance of fathers she knows. She fears the death of herself or Tilly, potential disaster. Tilly began school last month and Harriet agonised over her integration into a class that had been formed four months earlier. Tilly seems fine to me, full of confident interest in the world.

Harriet is a well-paid professional who shares her suburban house. After a succession of women lodgers in her household she decided to experiment with a male. Already the situation grows complex. The boarder's lover has been diagnosed

with a rare terminal illness and Harriet invited her into the household, away from student accommodation. So now Harriet may be intimately involved with death; perhaps she'll overcome her fears for herself and Tilly.

Neil finally left my garden bedsit at the end of February and established himself in a group house with two women students. I offered the room to Pamela, who was moving out of a relationship. She has decorated the bedsit beautifully, a well-ordered space. I very much enjoy her company but feel nervous about the long term because experience with Biff and Liz O has shown the danger of living with close friends. Pamela, however, is not living 'with' but 'near' and our paths need not cross for days. Perhaps this is a first step towards the Beijing-compound ideal.

Ten months now since Liz O moved out and I have not wanted to share my house. Occasional visitors occupy the small spare bedroom, which Pamela also uses for her visitors and extra storage. I envisage this living alone continuing indefinitely. My life has gradually unwound and I am able to give proper energy to the new job. The house is only slightly too large for one person and the arrangement with Pamela overcomes the guilt I feel in this International Year of the Homeless. Thoughts of old age loom and I may improve the garden bedsit and live there after retirement, renting the house to students or other low-income earners.

Pamela has a long-term plan to build a dwelling in Sybille's garden, under the new dual occupancy legislation. The infilling of these old gardens in inner Canberra seems ideal, much preferable to a new cheap house and garden in the outer suburbs. Talk in the Tarlina kitchen these days often centres on retirement and, under Harriet's tutelage, we discuss superannuation, retirement funds and supplementary incomes. It seems one needs a little income in addition to the superannuation pension.

Harriet says women of our generation are ill-informed about retirement and they need to be more conscious of the possibilities. Many of those who threw up their jobs in the 1970s in search of freedom and meaning, are in difficult financial positions. Last Easter a gathering named the 10/40 Conference was held for in Mildura for women who had been ten years in the movement and are now over forty, to discuss problems of ageing. Money loomed large, along with sexuality. I thought of attending



Pamela O. Photo: Harry Oldmeadow.

but found it difficult to contemplate a large gathering, even of like-minded women. I felt awkward about my relatively secure position. My parents' stories of their destitution in the Great Depression guide my financial decisions. I never considered abandoning a paid profession, placing my children at risk. I see my teaching job, which I enjoy, as a way of paying for freedom, now and in the future. I feared the resentment of the grasshopper women.

Harriet and the children have left after a successful visit, within the limitations of five-year-olds. I am once again outside where the sounds of the birds and the surf are drowned by a motorised lawn-edge cutter operating close by, maintaining the investment of the caravan owners. The perfection of this place bothers me: here I am hiring for three days a caravan into which its owner, who now feels the pinch of the overhead costs, has put so much energy. Then I think of Tarlina, into which I put heaps of energy and to which others come for solace and respite. Somewhere there may be a ledger for this kind of trading.

Much of my writing for the past year has been about events that I avoided. Perhaps this book is about a journey, from the centre of the Cause to the periphery.

Raining today, so it won't be difficult to leave this afternoon. I have retreated inside, feeling holed up, snug and secure. I have mastered the art of coffee-making in the microwave oven. The jumper I am knitting for Jill, with a Klee design back and front, progresses well. George Eliot is well established in her supportive relationship with Lewes, finishing *The Mill on the Floss* and discussing difficulties with Blackwoods, her publishers.

In the Tarlina kitchen we talked about publication of this book, my book. A feminist friend is establishing a desk-top publishing business in Sydney. Perhaps I can talk to her about private publication, for friends only. What about photographs? And of course there could be maps, of O'Connor and environs, Canberra and the Monaro, the South Coast. At my present rate of progress, publication will not be for at least five years, and by then the friend may be finished with desk-top publishing.

George Eliot's financial success as a novelist brought extra burdens. She and Lewes leased a house instead of living in lodgings, and Eliot found herself back to housekeeping as in the days of living with her father.

Haight finds only one reference to Eliot's sewing in her journals, and that was of the mending and maintenance variety. What Edna calls 'handwork' is important for self-esteem and creativity. Edna likes to crochet and makes multi-coloured rugs, one of which was raffled for WEL. She also produces embroidered potholders for deserving recipients. One, saying Hail, Women of Tarlina, resided for years on the Tarlina kitchen wall until it fell down to be gnawed by rats. Long Live the Red Fems, spent years in my linen press until I gave it to Harriet as a memento. She also made an intricate potholder based on the Greenham Common designs I sent her from England in 1984. These items are too valuable to burn with hot pots.

Cheryl knitted her series of rainbow vests, under commission for her friends, with women's symbols across the chest. We wore them at her birthday dinner in 1983. Then Cheryl developed repetition strain injury and her production slowed down.

The women's movement legitimised and extolled women's hand-working traditions. The Australian Women's D'ogley show was a milestone in honouring the traditions of women's culture. The proposed Museum of Australia is collecting examples and has issued a postcard of a multi-embroidered child's dress, advertising the 1930s meetings of the Coburg Unemployed Ladies' Guild.

Biff used to embroider pillowslips and singlets for her friends, using motifs and symbols from their lives and interests. She made me a pale green pillowslip with the fantasy city which symbolised my creative writing self, and a maroon vest with the yin-yang symbol surrounded by webs.

My knitting career began before the Movement, as I travelled forty miles each day by train to study at University. A few years ago I began incorporating women's symbols in my productions. For Liz O I knitted a green cardigan, with a white yoke reminiscent of the Queen Mother's robes, circled with small green women's symbols. I made a red and white jumper with women's symbols patterned all over for Tilly. The jumper I am knitting for Jill uses a Klee design chosen by her as symbolic of the Women's League of Health and Beauty of the 1920s and 1930s, the subject of her current research.

Harriet had a badge, Knitting is a revolutionary activity, which has proved a useful signal to those who might complain about knitters at meetings. Harriet and I feel militant about our hand-working rights at meetings and initiate discussions on the theme. Women's meetings are not a problem but occasionally, at other meetings, men look askance. Once in a photograph on the front page of the Canberra Times, I appeared knitting at a teachers' stop-work meeting. I delighted in writing a short letter to the paper extolling the virtues of handwork as an aid to concentration on such occasions. These days people only comment in encouragement and there are whole tables of knitters at teachers' union council meetings. As yet I am too timid to knit at University Council meetings. One of the administrators shrieked, Good heavens, don't start! when I raised the idea with her. The hand-workers have not yet won.

When the rain cleared to sunshine I jogged along the big beach, not a soul in sight, collecting the sea-smoothed stones for my sacred grove at home. My side garden is small and overgrown with cotoneaster, honeysuckle, peach and prunus. Gaiia, the Earth Brain, sits deep in this grove. My writing table overlooks it. Here Suzanne and I occasionally perform simple rituals. Last full moon Pamela joined us to sit around Gaiia with a lit candle, invoking the spirits of the four cardinal points and asking for help in our lives. The beach stones will form part of a circle around Gaiia.

Fine enough to sit outside, where I write this. Soon I must pack, clean and leave.

Needing companionship surprises me since I so valued solitary writing spaces. I wanted to come here but felt reluctant to be alone. Perhaps my need for solitude is now satisfied at home. Suzanne is glad to come here after a hard winter high on the Monaro, appreciating the softer coastal air.



I am established in the annex, writing on the round redwood table I used outside during the May break. The wind has abated, but still too strong for writing outside. Suzanne and Thelma have left on a long 'explore' south along the coast. Earlier this morning, in a calm period, Suzanne and I jogged along the northern beach, watching students from a university camp measuring the dunes.

Resuscitatory moods in the Movement. In ten days, an old-style Socialist Feminist Conference is being held in Sydney, while Rosemary and others plan to revive the Women and Labour Conference and hold it in Canberra in 1989. I'm still nervous about attending such events.

Reading Janet Frame's autobiography: finished volume 1 and now in volume 2. Janet Frame always strove to be a poet, even in her 'madness', which she first perceived as an impetus rather than a hardship. If she were mad, she could not be a teacher. This need to escape from teaching is a worry, but I think of Thea Astley who rose before dawn to write then set off to teach Latin, and of Geoff Page who continues to write while working as a Senior English teacher, taking occasional times away as writer-in-residence or on literary grants. I haven't the headspace to write during the teaching term but I can take these term breaks, not available to those in the non-teaching workforce.

Three from the original Canberra Women's Liberation Group have published books since I began this manuscript. They are Sara's novel, *West Block*, Biff's investigation into child sexual abuse, *Father-Daughter Rape* and Susan's biography, *Catherine Helen Spence*.

Suzanne hopes to come to some clarity about her work while on this holiday. She has recently designed and linocut some cards, consciously evoking the Omega Workshops style of Vanessa Bell and Roger Fry. She strives to be self-sufficient in income and negotiated several local outlets for her work in book and craft shops but these are only satisfactory for smaller pieces. She worries that the pressure for steady income will hinder the creation of her major works.

A chilling sentence from Janet Frame embarking on a literary lifestyle:

There was also the frightening knowledge that the desire to write, the enjoyment of writing has little correlation with talent...

Frame has realised that schizophrenia is not useful for a writer and that incarceration in an institution has prevented her engagement with life, halted her development as a writer and a person. She was rescued, as a result of a previous literary success, by a sympathetic doctor. There is no worry about Frame's talent: mine is unproven.

Do I have the courage to show Suzanne the typescript of the last twelve pages of this writing? She is now sorting the shells collected for her mobiles. How much will we impinge on each other's creative space in this small situation? While the weather holds fair, Suzanne and her dog Thelma prefer the outdoors.

Loose ends from the winter: Minister Susan retained her inner Cabinet status, but without a major portfolio. She assists the Prime Minister with the Status of Women and takes responsibility for the proposed Australia Card. This seems like a demotion, or at best a poison chalice, which she denies. I wonder again about Affirmative Action and token women. Minister Susan is reported to be cheerful and immersed in her Australia Card campaign, in which she fervently believes.

A fine warm spring day with only the lightest of breezes. I write inside on the redwood table, making little excursions to enjoy the soft sunshine. The park proprietors have hired noisy, chain-sawing tree-loppers to work here today. The idyll is punctured by the screaming machinery 'tidying' the trees.

Three caravans away a family arrived yesterday to spring clean. They sweep, cobweb and weed in teams, six people ranging from mid-teens to mid-sixties.

Suzanne and Thelma have headed north today, away from noise and activity, to seek out Raylee in the next caravan park. Janet Frame has sailed for England on a literary grant, having spent months in a writer's place at last: an old army hut in the grounds of a senior New Zealand writer who encouraged her. *Owls Do Cry* is in the hands of her publisher.

Harriet came from further south for dinner last night. We three walked to the North beach at sunset, linking arms and pausing to add to Suzanne's shell

collection. For dinner we ate leatherjacket purchased at Bateman's Bay. Harriet has been undergoing an exciting midlife crisis and is now working through hitherto unexplored parts of herself under the guidance of our favourite therapist, who has been helping three other Tarlina women. Journal writing, dream recall, deep breathing and flute playing are part of her homework between sessions. A new lover provided the catalyst for Harriet's inner exploration; so far the message is 'focus on yourself, let go, detach'.

Suzanne and I talked about this message. I spoke of experience with Keir on a beach holiday a few years ago when we were locked into parent/child expectations and made ourselves thoroughly miserable until I let go and decided to enjoy the holiday as a separate person, and presto! our interaction calmed into relative harmony. So hard for women to accept that putting energy into themselves and letting go of others is an allowable productive path.

The Dark of the Moon came at 9.59 the previous night so Suzanne set off to meditate on the south beach while I farewelled Harriet. Later I wandered down, gazing at the blazing stars, sitting on the grassy dune above the beach. Suzanne has ritually observed every dark of the moon since the Crafting.

On Sunday 16 August we celebrated the Harmonic Convergence of the Planets and the dawning of the New Age. We were alerted to the exact time, 10pm for the region, by a mocking article in the *Canberra Times*. Pamela, Liz O, Jen and I held hands in a circle round Gaiia, marked with incense and candles and hummed 'oms' for ten minutes or so. Up on the Monaro, Suzanne lit a fire outside, leapt it twice and meditated on peace and harmony. Next day we read another cynical article about people who stood on the top of Mt Ainslie, and Yoko Ono who climbed Mt Fuji.

Canberra Times accounts can be useful, despite the tone. Yesterday we read of Shirley Maclaine's spiritual workshops in the United States, and her desire to set up a centre for all kinds of holistic therapies. For how long will the mainstream newspapers maintain their nervous mockery?

A feminist bookshop opened in June at the O'Connor shops. I bought one of their goddess images, Ishtar, and taped it on the bedroom wall so I can contemplate the

goddess while jumping on a mini-trampoline as part of my Biogenic regime. The bookshop is a private venture and it is exciting to realise that the market for feminist literature and craft is so strong that a specialist shop can operate profitably in a suburb. Suzanne sells some of her small pieces there.

How much do you write in your book about the intimate details of people's lives? Are there rules? Suzanne asked.

There's a kind of taboo operating, I replied, I don't write everything I know about people and situations.

For example?

The Condamine St collective. The whole story is much more complicated and people's lives more interconnected.

I read it when you wrote it. Thought you hadn't told the whole story.

But you knew the story. Harriet, who didn't, found it illuminating.

So why not reveal all?

Intimate details without full explanations seem ... dishonest. The Condamine collective provides material for a whole novel exploring the lives of ten people. I'm writing an account, however impressionistic, of a larger endeavour.

A full account would certainly be sensational.

I'm scared of doing that.

That's because women writers aren't forgiven for using their own lives as material. Men are.

Yes. I heard Janet Frame on the radio responding angrily when her mental hospital experiences, transmogrified for *Faces in the Water*, were assumed to be totally autobiographical with herself as the protagonist.

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My legs feel leaden from jogging on the beach these last three mornings, so I'm pleased to sit in the comfortable director's chair. Perfect early spring weather and we decided to stay another day. Suzanne and Thelma have set off to where they found a small pebbly beach with a variety of shells.

Raylee came to dinner and enquired about this writing. I asked Suzanne to explain because an observer can be more succinct.

She's writing a book about the experience of the Women's Liberation Movement.

From a Canberra perspective, I interrupted.

In a variety of styles...

Forms rather than styles...

She might never publish it...

Perhaps circulate among friends?

Raylee politely hoped to be one among those circulated. I felt a bit like a writer.

Raylee is now an incest worker. Her main task is to set up support systems for incest survivors. We think she is a brilliant counsellor.

Is incest the last taboo? I find it hard to listen to survivors' stories. Does this mean I have repressed memories or does the taboo make it extra hard to uncover the high incidence of father-daughter rape?

Raylee has outlined the symptoms of an incest survivor and says that when the time comes the survivor learns how to deal with the memories, and until that time memory is suppressed. Several explanations of my 'blocking' behaviour occurred to me. Feelings of being powerless to help: child sexual abuse seems so huge and unhealable. Perhaps I can learn to listen more.

Father-daughter rape is politically significant. Some feminists now think that this kind of sexual control underlies all patriarchal relations and provides the key to the overthrow of patriarchy. Incidents seep out, under various euphemisms like 'child sexual abuse' and 'physical abuse'. More adult women and a few men are revealing

their scars. Documentaries are televised. Can the impact be contained by patriarchy? If institutions are established to deal with it, can the vast majority of cases continue to go unreported? More is being done in primary schools to teach girls to have the courage to say no.

Rob found the US Library of Congress classifies 'incest' under 'victimless crimes'. Puzzled, it took some minutes to realise they were thinking of consenting siblings or 'deceased wife's sister'. He is writing a letter of protest to the Library.

I still don't know what to do about father-daughter rape, and consequently do little. I talk about it more, drag it into the open. A teacher asked for advice in a case at school and my main concern was to give the student sufficient strength to tell her mother. From reading case studies, I deduced that the strongest survivors are those whose mothers name the crime and remove them from the situation. The harm is compounded if the mother refuses to acknowledge the crime.

Meanwhile Janet Frame has spent seven years in Europe, officially cleared herself of the 'schizophrenic' label, experienced a first love affair, struggled with poverty, rediscovered herself as a writer and returned to New Zealand to find high status as an author with an international reputation. She completes Volume 3 with her move back to Dunedin and the University of Otago as a respected writer.

I have moved on to *North West by North* by Dora Birtles, which has been reissued by Virago. It is an account of her emotionally intense voyage from Sydney to Singapore in 1932 with five others on a small yacht.

Our last day. I nursed sore leg muscles by curtailing the beach jogging this morning. Suzanne and Thelma have set off on a final visit to the Aboriginal midden Raylee showed them two days ago.

Yesterday Suzanne and I visited Raylee in a nearby caravan park. There the vans are unobtrusively set in thickets of banksia and acacia, dune grass grows wild and unmown and Raylee's old caravan is close to the beach, surrounded by the vans of friends. She has been holidaying there annually for years but the park fees are steep and petty restrictions grow as new owners try for a more upmarket clientele.

Raylee drove us further up the coast to a tidal cave crouching at the foot of a sandstone headland. We waded through a clear pool to sit in the cave, surrounded by thousands of multi-coloured pebbles, looking through the low entrance to the rocks, surf and sky beyond. In the mornings, Raylee said, the sun picks up the colours, especially the pinks in the rocks, creating a magic glow. 'Aladdin's cave' she named it but Suzanne preferred 'Crystal Cave'.

Raylee went to the 10/40 Conference at Mildura. She deliberately broke the 'rules' by taking a twenty-two-year-old woman as driver/companion. This question of rules is vexatious. Suzanne did not go because she is only 38. One woman was closely questioned about her women's movement credentials and was only admitted, she said, because she could claim Suzanne's friendship and had once, many years ago, slept on my floor. Raylee, Suzanne and I decided that 'rules' were foolish and that the Older Women's Conference, held in South Australia earlier that year, was probably a better approach, with each participant deciding for herself if she was an 'older woman'.

Raylee enjoyed the 10/40 conference, especially the theatricals. She also spoke about a women's credit union planned for Canberra. I felt apprehensive: one Canberra credit union verged on bankruptcy this year. Surely this is not a good time to begin small para-banking ventures? Am I growing more timid or is this the voice of reason?

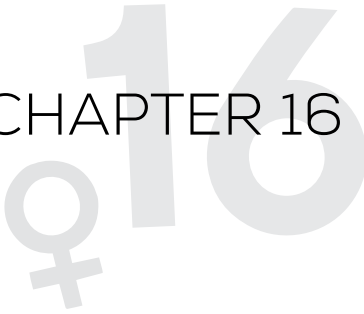
Suzanne telephoned her local craft shop, to ask if they could feed her cats, and was asked to hurry back because her works are selling and they need more supplies. She can now pay her telephone bill.

We read in the paper that at the General Synod the Anglican women have temporarily lost their struggle for ordination. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reports Barbara Thiering's view that believing God is male idolatry. The Canberra Times thinks the exclusion of women may be a good thing since ordination of women would preclude the union of the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches: Christian unity a higher object than justice for women. Suzanne is scathing, saying, The boys always prefer to bond with enemy men than their own women.

Dora Birtles now sails through the Barrier Reef, her difficulties with fellow mariners abated by idyllic island-hopping. They stay a few days on Green Island with Nettie and Vance Palmer, who are camped there for the winter of 1932, writing in the mornings and fishing in the afternoons. Under Nettie's influence Dora writes a poem. I worry about Dora's publication difficulties and the laws of libel, with her frank outbursts and details of the foibles of her companions.

More people arrive at this caravan park. Next door a noisy group of shouting men and little children are setting up. The day is overcast, cooler, with rain threatened for tomorrow. Time for us to eat lunch, pack up and go.

I reflect on the experience of inviting a companion into my writing space. I see that in four days I have written about the same amount as when I spent three days here in May. But what about the quality? The themes? I sank deeper into myself in May. In this August time I explored themes suggested by conversations with Suzanne, Raylee and Harriet. I conclude that the experiment has not inhibited writing, but solitary writing will be necessary at times.



CHAPTER 16

MEMORIAL AND DEPARTURE

August 1987 O'Connor

Susan M and I are finding space in this term break to begin the incorporation of the Beryl Henderson Foundation. Beryl left over \$10,000 in Australia when she moved to Jerusalem and wanted to give half of it to Edna and half to a women's cause. Edna decided that all the money would be better used to fund an annual essay prize for undergraduates, in Beryl's name, on a women's studies theme. Beryl eagerly agreed. Edna then set up a committee, consulting with Beryl on membership, to form the Beryl Henderson Trust and the Beryl Henderson Foundation.

An unusual group assembled in a university seminar room on a Friday evening last May. From Beryl's connections in her abortion law reform days, we had a male philosopher and a retired family planning nurse, then Susan M from women's studies, Biff who maintains correspondence with Beryl, Judy from the federal bureaucracy, Harriet, Edna and me. Judy took photos to send to Beryl, now in her 91st year and becoming feebler.

Edna, Susan M and I provided snack food, wine and orange juice because we were to begin at 6.30pm and hoped to clear the business by 8.30pm. To hurry things, I took the chair, but we ran into complexities. Edna assumed everyone shared her understanding and began her account in the middle. To the horror of the historians present, the ex-nurse said she was tired of women's history and wanted it explicitly excluded from the competition. How were we to separate the administration of the fund from the judging of the prize? Did we want all tertiary students, not just university students, to be eligible? Did we wish to discriminate in favour of young and against mature-age students?

By 10.30pm we were exhausted, but with sufficient decisions to proceed. Biff and Susan M would draw up the rules of the essay competition. Susan M, Biff and I would judge the first year's entries. Harriet would work out the financial transfers and Susan M and I undertook responsibility for incorporation. The first prize would be worth \$500, all tertiary undergraduates would be eligible and the winning essay would be considered for publication in *Australian Feminist Studies*.

We felt bewildered by the difficulty of the process but later realised we had attempted to achieve in four hours what often took months of meetings and discussions – and had achieved much of it.

The Beryl Henderson Trust is now operating. The notices went out in the late May issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* and Susan M received one entry before the rules had been finalised.

December 1987 O'Connor

Summer writing time begins. Holidays started a week ago and I have cleaned my desk, typed a paper for the Anti-Bicentenary Fightback Conference, tied loose ends from school, visited friends and wound down.

Minister Susan's saga ended abruptly this week when she announced her resignation from Cabinet, from Parliament, and her intention of taking a managerial position with Penguin publications. Such a flurry, such confusion in the media, so different from a bloke's resignation. Male ministers are sacked, or moved into special government appointments. Our ex-minister doesn't fit. The media can't decide

whether she's defeated or making an intelligent career choice. One journalist noted that 'the boys' had never really accepted her, another wrote that her struggle to minimise cuts to education made her unpopular with other ministers and today came *The Canberra Times* Literary Editor's interview with her, in an attempt to solve the mystery. The ALP Status of Women Committee is anxious that a woman replace her in the preselection plebiscite to be held in February. The Prime Minister says he won't replace her in Cabinet with a woman. Has it all been an aberration? Should we reactivate the Feminist Caucus?

Minister Susan must feel the changes in her worldview since she entered Parliament. Yesterday she told Donelle she felt let down by the women's movement, felt unsupported at critical moments. Yet, from inside that movement, many of us worked hard to maintain support, even when these 'tall poppies' seemed to



Susan Ryan in 1980s. Photo: Jane Connors

move away from their roots. However, it was always critical, not unconditional, support, and women in those lonely peaks of the male world seem to hunger for unconditional support of the kind men expect from loyal wives. The women's advisers to Prime Ministers Whitlam and Fraser also said, after their resignations, that they felt let down by the movement.

Susan wanted the Feminist Caucus to be loyal to her and felt uneasy when we expanded the group to include women from factions other than hers, left-wing women who espoused feminist ideals but opposed the right-wing tendencies of the Labor government, to which the minister was bound in order to achieve her WEL agenda.

Many contradictions here. I wonder if Susan knew the extent to which some of those women crossed factional boundaries to support her at the two preselections when she was opposed? Does she know how often we met to consider tactics to build support for her at the grass roots of the party and the teaching profession? These tactics included the informal Friday afternoon sessions at Tilley's where she could drop in and meet the rank and file. This work culminated in the convincing 1986 preselection victory but we felt pessimistic about chancing a repeat performance in the light of the growing unpopularity of the government within the ACT Labor Party.

As Minister she grows impressive in retrospect. The Participation and Equity Program which provided funds for the intervention at Canberra High was her initiative. She also held out, opposed by the rest of cabinet, against the introduction of full tertiary fees, but radical students like Neil could only see her compromise in the \$250 administration fee, forced upon her by a formidable Finance Minister. Women's Studies courses flourished at universities, confident of her support. She dragged Women's Affairs from the previous government's doldrums and gave it high priority. After great struggles she pushed through legislation on anti-discrimination, affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. She certainly achieved much of the WEL agenda and I can see why she thinks it a good time to go, and to be a private person again.

6.9.87 Socialist Feminist Conference – University of NSW

I attended the Socialist Feminist Conference in Sydney for one day, and enjoyed two sessions in particular.

Koori Plenary. After a short opening address drawing on the threads of white Australian history as seen by the Kooris, the video *Barbequaria* is being shown on three screens simultaneously, but one has broken down, another is too low for us to see and the third is too far over the other side. Life under socialism, says Rosemary. Fortunately I have seen this video twice so caught up on gossip instead.

I am in Sydney for Edna's celebratory life membership of the ALP to be presented by Gough and Margaret Whitlam at a big fundraising dinner at the South Sydney League's club tonight.

This morning Rosemary and I jogged along Bondi Beach, then ran in for a quick dip in the very cold surf before returning for a fruit breakfast on the roof of her flat. We are attending a workshop this afternoon in which Rosemary plans to talk about the demise of joy in sexuality, caused by feminist concern with the underside, as in rape and incest.

The atmosphere here is very much '70's revisited' with many women from that time attending. I ran into Suzanne and two of the Red Emmas on the way to this plenary.

We are listening to Joy from Cowra on *The Stolen Generations*, the Aboriginal kids who were taken away. Her full name is Joy Wanaka Wiradjuri Williams, a Wiradjuri woman, and she is demanding a constitution for the Kooris, not a compact with the white government.

The Stolen Children policy operated from 1888 to 1971 and was designed to break up families who were not living like whites. Children of black women/white men were taken away. Joy's mother was taken for being Aboriginal, Joy herself was taken for being too fair and her daughter was taken for being even fairer. Joy will no longer wear the excuse that white people were doing what they thought best. Sometimes children were even taken overseas.

She grew up believing she was an orphan, in a Plymouth Brethren foster family. When she ran away at thirteen, she found she was Aboriginal and that her mother, a graduate of the Cootamundra Girls' Home, was still alive, an alcoholic. Joy had believed that Aboriginals were dirty.

Link Up is the organisation for reuniting Koori parents and children. The children who are now adults need lots of touching because of deprivation. Joy is not sure about feminism because some feminists see her as a victim, which she is not. Her surname, Williams, is a common Aboriginal name, and gives a clue to the area. At Link Up, based in Canberra, these name clues are followed. Joy went home to Cowra for the first time three years ago, made some dreadful 'white mistakes' and had to relearn.

Rose is now talking on Black Deaths in Custody. Rose is from South Australia and is enjoying being in front of a bunch of women. She has been speaking this week before male audiences and felt intimidated. She says Kooris are the most imprisoned race in the world. Rose was conditioned by her grandmother never to marry a black man because 'they're alcoholics, they beat you'. She married two white men and had two children but is now divorced and has found herself more politically aware of black issues and won't give this consciousness away. She says the passing down of the old conditioning is going to stop now. Two years ago she hadn't heard of feminism. Does what she said today make her a feminist?

Marilyn speaks next on Colonisation and Decolonisation. She says the silence is the product of colonisation. Most Aborigines still don't want to hear their story, they have internalised colonisation. She still hears the voice of her grandmother: my children are different colours but remember you are Aboriginal. She says she expects all of us white women to play a part in decolonisation, through a coalition based on the expression of difference.

(These Koori women look as though they are experiencing the same highs of togetherness I felt at the beginning of Women's Liberation. Such a compelling energy.)

Marilyn goes on to say that coalitions formed at gatherings such as this and the Broad Left conferences are important steps.

Later, I am lying on a lawn writing this while Daphne, now an ecological activist, sits on a chair nearby writing her notes. We have decided that the current sessions, panels on topics like 'Rediscovering the family', 'The State and male violence', 'Multiculturalism' and 'Wages for women's work' look a bit old hat and even repressively structured. Earlier I spoke to one acquaintance and said I was thinking of coming to her paper on 'Women working in and around the State' but she said, Oh, don't come. I'm only repeating the eighteen points I've made before. And the other panels are equally boring – there are no new ideas around these days. So I stayed in this warm spring sunshine wearing my 'Left Alive' conference T-shirt.

Daphne thinks this conference in an interesting contrast between the old and the new, as exemplified by the plenaries and the panels and the new KKISS (Kids, Kulture, Independence, Sex and Social Relations) workshops which start later this afternoon. There are several of these I'd like to attend: the Red Emmas on 'Small group organisation', Sarah Gibson's film 'Landslides', Donna on 'Women and the ecology movement', Margo Nash and Pat Fiske on 'Documentary directions' but I'm committed to Rosemary's workshop.

At lunch time in this grassy courtyard we attended the launch of Joyce Stephens' new book, *Taking the Revolution Home*. Meredith Burgmann gave a splendid introduction and Joyce responded with humour. A lovely occasion with lots of very old Lefties present. I found to my surprise, when I was collecting Edna's copy, that there is a whole chapter about her in the book.

There was a flier about the Regent St Sydney Women's House being sold and new premises sought. Suzanne reminisced about the time she and others kept the Spartacists out of Women's House by kicking the doors shut.

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Christmas intervenes with visits, parties, shopping, planning menus. Yesterday I received the annual card from the two Zurich women who shared our day at Sissinghurst: they send pictures of Switzerland in winter and I usually respond with Aboriginal designs, but this year I've sent one of the blue Indian goddess cards from

the feminist bookshop. We exchange information about Bloomsbury publications. This year I hear of the new *Charleston* book by Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett. I have seen the reviews in the English press but it is not yet available here.

Hard to settle with Christmas so close. This evening Harriet, Tilly and I will attend the children's carol service at St John's Reid Anglican church. Pleasant to have a child to take. Harriet says Tilly doesn't believe in God but is quite interested in 'Baby Cheeses'. I like the service because it is all singing and we hold lighted candles.

Edna has arrived for the family Christmas. Her life is busy with many people wanting to interview her about women and industrial issues, past and present. Last week, on her 83rd birthday, she turned off the telephone while an ABC TV team was filming her for a documentary. In January she flies to an unsettled Jerusalem for Beryl's 91st birthday, then returns to set out on a cruise to England via the Pacific, Asia, Suez and the Mediterranean.

Cousin Jeanette will come from Cootamundra for lunch with the extended family on Boxing Day. She and I are of an age, as children closer to each other than with our respective siblings. We exchange Christmas cards, and occasionally telephone each other on the death of one of our many relations. Edna is the sole survivor of her eleven siblings and the size of the extended family overwhelms most of my generation. Edna is engaged in writing a play about her family: nine girls, three boys, heroic mother and shiftless father. The play is being workshopped by a theatre group and Edna will work on revisions while on her P & O cruise.

Life begins at 70, she assured the fascinated media. That was after she retired from her clerical job and diverted her full energies to the newly formed WEL in 1972.

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Christmas is gone and I wonder why I felt so excited and anticipatory. Now dealing with frazzled nerves and physical depletion, grateful for the calm of my writing space. Occasionally I hear the tinkle of the wind chimes – Suzanne's work, inspired by Nairobi.

I celebrated my fiftieth birthday this last year, feeling more diffident about it than when I turned forty, that traditional low point. On my fortieth birthday I was cycling in Wales and celebrated by drinking two glasses of cider instead of one with my ploughman's lunch, consequently wobbling off my bicycle that afternoon and calling an early halt to the day's mileage. After dinner I wrote a letter to myself to be opened on my fiftieth birthday, an idea I copied from my adolescent reading of L M Montgomery's 'Emily' series. Why I waited until my fortieth birthday to write the letter I cannot say, except that in middle age I have become more contemplative.

Suzanne explained that fifty was particularly significant in numerology and should be celebrated. The number is symbolised by an open cup, a hemisphere, a crucible which holds, distils and fills. Fifty, she said, is about the biggest change in one's life, but one has already decided what to shed before the distillation works. One must not take in too much, because the cup can overflow and the contents be thus wasted. It is the alchemists' cup, with the power to transform. This information jogged my memory and I checked the I Ching to find that fifty symbolised Ting, the cauldron.



Julia elated at discovering an Australian destination in the UK countryside, 1977

So on my fiftieth birthday I set off for a solitary lunch of Canadian smoked salmon at Tilley's where I wrote a letter to be opened on my sixtieth. At 5pm my 'at home' began with the Tarlina collective and other special friends. Flowers arrived from our ex-minister. I felt I was being married, rather than turning fifty. Six weeks later I read an article about Gloria Steinem at fifty-three, recalling that she experienced 'reaching fifty was what your fortieth birthday used to be'.

O'Connor 1988

Canberra January weather has broken records: ten days over 35C. Meanwhile I have visited Tarlina, made the expedition to Melbourne for Judy Chicago's Dinner Party and observed the preselection for the replacement of our feminist minister split the ACT ALP Feminist Caucus.

Suzanne was scheduled to drive a carload of ceramics to Melbourne to coincide with the Dinner Party, so I accompanied her in a complicated journey which involved being driven to the Monaro two nights before departure, assisting in the packing up next day and setting out early the following morning. We drove over the top, through the Kosciuszko National Park at Kiandra and Cabramurra and crossed the upper Murray at Corryong. Despite fears, Suzanne's old Toyota performed magnificently and we arrived in Melbourne at 7.30pm to join a garden barbecue at Laurie's collective household. Suzanne drove on to stay with other friends while I settled in the loft studio in the old stable in Laurie's garden.

Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party, brought out by a Melbourne feminist committee, was displayed at the Exhibition Centre, an old Victorian building. I planned half a day for my viewing and arrived at 1pm. Passing by the video, which I had already seen, I came upon the enormous triangular table in a black room, with lights directed on the settings. Stunning. I walked around at a quicker pace than the other viewers, checking the whole effect and noting the settings I knew from the books and video. Then I moved to the next room, which outlined the research and the processes, and sat in a chair to collect myself and read the program. I studied the quilt made as a response to The Dinner Party by groups from three continents, noted to my disappointment no postcards on sale, then returned to The Dinner Party.

I studied each setting with care, particularly the needlework, the designs for which I found more appealing than the ceramics, though everything was extraordinary. By this time I had run into Suzanne, who had been there from an earlier hour and was off to see the video. So I watched the video again and once more enjoyed the 'warts and all' approach to the complex processes and human interactions involved in such a big project. Then Suzanne and I returned to The Dinner Party to discuss our responses. For Suzanne the plates for Boadicea, Isabella d'Este, Trotula, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Theodora worked best and of the runners I was most impressed by Artemisia Gentileschi, Trotula, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth R and Petronilla de Meath. Suzanne felt overwhelmed by many items, keenly aware of the technical problems in making the plates. The whitework millennium embroidery at the angles of the triangular setting, one of which took 22 months to crochet, also impressed me. Finally, hungry, tired and visually bombarded, we staggered out into the late afternoon and back to the collective household.

After a rest and drink we drove with Jen to the celebratory women's dinner party, with Chicago as guest. Such an occasion. The old part of the Exhibition Building was set with tables for 1200 women. Fortunately Jen brought a camera so we spent the early evening snapping friends while they sipped pre-dinner champagne and chatted to the accompaniment of the palm court orchestra. Then on to our tables, in settings of ten, alternately decorated with helium balloons or tall stemmed flowers. The food! How was such food managed for so many people? Avocado, ham, several different salads, cold roast cuts of chicken, beef, turkey, then exotic cheeses and plenty of wine. It was a fundraiser but how could a profit have been made? And the chatter! The noise rose to the high vaulted ceiling, which unfortunately also swallowed some of the speakers' voices. Jen, Suzanne and I moved down the front to sit on the floor when Chicago spoke.

She looked small and fiery but also worn, and spoke of the burden of this work lying on her shoulders for ten years, and how it was not yet permanently housed, not launched into the world. At the end she said she would answer three questions, and only if relevant. Of course the old enquiry about the collective effort versus her individual credit came up and she gave a rather uncomfortable answer about

always being in charge of the creative direction and not wanting the mediocrity of a Chinese collective. Then in response to a question about the avoidance of institutions, she won Jen's approval by asserting that, far from turning their backs on institutions, women must create and manage their own. Suzanne asked the third question, about permanent housing of The Dinner Party and Chicago replied that it must find one soon, as she would not allow it to leave the US again because of its fragility. After that Margaret Roadknight sang, but soon stopped, defeated by the acoustics. The 1200 women hardly noticed, so delighted were we by the occasion and all that company.

As we drove back through Gippsland to the Monaro, Suzanne and I discussed the permanent housing of The Dinner Party. We thought that Anne Summers, new editor of Ms Magazine, should start fundraising through the magazine. We were sure that Australian feminists, having seen the exhibition, would contribute to its permanent home in the USA.

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I was asked to make the valedictory speech at the ALP women's farewell to our Minister Susan. About fifty women gathered in Anne Wentworth's shady garden, early on a warm evening.

Why so nervous? asked Liz O. You're a teacher, speaking all the time to groups.

Deciding on an informal historical approach, I referred to the 1973 WEL conference when delegates decided that the best way to achieve their demands was by joining political parties and directly influencing policies. Our ex-minister was a WEL-backed candidate for ALP preselection for the House of Representatives in 1974 and, although unsuccessful then, amazed us by the strength of her vote. She prepared herself further by participation in local government and then easily won Senate preselection in 1975. Although the Labor government was defeated in the subsequent election her success elated us and within two years she sat on the Opposition Front Bench.

I recalled the 1982 ALP Federal Conference where Hawke first challenged Hayden for leadership and Susan, then opposition front bench, and I met in the ladies' loo



Judy Chicago Dinner Party, Melbourne, February 1988. Photos: Ryan family collection.

Top: Julia and Suzanne.

Above Left: Judy Chicago speaking at the Dinner Party.

Above Right: Julia and Jen.

and decided that neither was a promising candidate for feminists. Her appointment as Education Minister when Hawke led the ALP victory of 1983 was a triumph for us all. She was to become the longest serving Federal Minister for Education.

Our problem was how to use her. We were unaccustomed to feminists in high office and understood the system imperfectly. I emphasised the importance of small achievements, using the story of the Master Teachers. The Minister had intervened successfully because a small group of us informed her that her public service briefings had not been clearly explained and that the Master Teacher category was, unlike other senior positions in the teaching service, occupied largely by women. Hopefully in future, I said, we would understand more about 'using' our Minister, and not sit back expecting the 'big' items of the WEL national agenda to solve all our problems.

Then I referred to the grass roots of the party and the impression she made on even the most vociferous male critics with her first report to my local branch. I recalled the Friday afternoon drinks at Tilley's. Here she interjected that her driver had not yet recovered from the invitation to join us. I talked about the Feminist Caucus and how we hoped that the feminist cause would transcend factionalism in the party.

The main lesson from this whole experience was to reinforce our determination to Change the Goddam Rules. Our Minister went in alone to Cabinet and caucus to fight for the WEL agenda, succeeding only with EEO and Anti-Discrimination legislation. But it was always a Boys' Game, and she has now decided to quit the field, leaving it to the new women coming in. She is going off to a career in literature where she may be in control of her own game. I tried to think of a historical parallel but could not: as always, she is a role model, breaking new ground, now showing a new way to depart. Susan took up the idea of us learning more about using a Minister. Other lobby groups are indefatigable in pursuing 'their' Ministers, whereas we tend to hang back. She spoke about her successors and us learning more about the fruitful use of the system. Others present then spoke of their appreciation and we presented her with a decorated ceramic baking dish for her literary dinners.

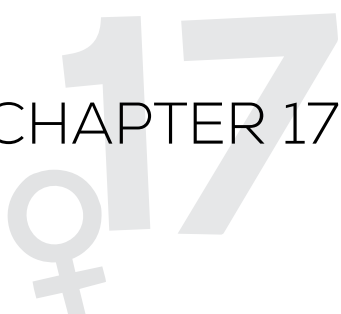
Ten of us went off to dinner at the local Vietnamese restaurant. Suddenly I noticed that several of us were members of our original 1970 Women's Liberation Group. We talked and ate till late then adjourned to someone's house where we sang our ex-minister's favourite Irish dirges and danced to Elvis tapes. The group broke up at 2am and I cycled home. No wonder I'm feeling fragile.

Preselection for our ex-minister's Senate seat proceeds. The Left did put up a woman, in deference to the strength of the feminist vote, but the ALP national secretary decided to stand and is receiving support from the other two factions. While thinking that the Left woman made a mistake in standing against our Minister in the last preselection, I feel that our cause may be weakened if a man takes the seat. The Left candidate attends Feminist Caucus and will strengthen the Left women in the parliamentary party, but our ex-Minister cannot forgive her for the 1986 preselection battle and publicly supports the national secretary.

The Feminist Caucus is in disarray: only one Centre Left woman has crossed to support the Left woman candidate and many are supporting the national secretary on the grounds that he is a powerful figure who can advance the cause of women more effectively than a junior woman in the Left faction. I am appalled by what I see as the abandonment of feminist principles to support a man, even if he agrees with the feminist agenda. If the Left woman were not a feminist I could understand.

Remnants of the Feminist Caucus met over lunch at Tilley's to discuss the situation. I saw how split we were. Our ex-Minister argued strongly for the national secretary's experience and dedication and I felt moved to point out that those same arguments were used in favour of a feminist-sympathising male candidate opposing her in her first preselection ballot. Factional feelings ran strong but we remained courteous and decided to call a Meet the Candidates session. At this stage, because of these feminist defections, I believe the national secretary will win the ballot.

I think of how some Left women were persuaded in the past to transcend their factional allegiance on feminist grounds and now the Centre women refuse to reciprocate.



CHAPTER 17

PASSING THE TORCH

July 1988 Tarlina

The new midwinter holidays created by the ACT school system gave us a new eleven-day Easter break so I drove to Adelaide to visit Lyndall and Biff. Had a marvellous time, with mornings spent jogging on Henley Beach and assessing the twelve entries for the first Beryl Henderson essay prize, with afternoons and evenings for reading and socialising.

In this July break, Pamela, Harriet and I are at Tarlina. Harriet has some precious days while her mother looks after Tilly. I had planned to visit Edna in Sydney as she was very ill after her P&O cruise, but now better, she is coming to Canberra for the Beryl Henderson Prize presentation later this month. Edna is busy writing the new introduction to *The Gentle Invaders*, to be reissued by Penguin.

Heavy rain all day. Neil and Penny W arrived this morning and will drive Harriet and me home later today. Yesterday, Harriet, Pamela and I walked to Long Common,

noting the destruction of many trees in the 'big blow' of a month ago. Pamela, recovering from flu, rested on the Common while Harriet and I inspected the nearly complete rammed-earth house. Walls are more than a foot thick and old multi-coloured glass windows are incorporated in the bathroom. An iron stove is now installed, tiling done and cupboards fitted.

Last night after our roast chicken Harriet suggested a game: Let's imagine our next lives, she said.

We haven't time for a whole life, said Pamela, let's concentrate on aspects, like place and work.

What about time? I asked. Can we can dispense with linear time, and be in the future or the past? I was already developing an image.

OK, but we must also identify our major challenge, said Harriet. Who's going first?

I put a big log on the fire while Pamela filled the kettle.

I'll begin, I offered. I'm in the eighteenth century, England probably, and I'm a wanderer, but not a vagrant, so I must have some income. I'm an observer. My work is to be happy without exploiting others in that inequitable world.

Hard for a woman to be independent in that society, commented Harriet.

Yes, and I'm not sure how I'm managing it. It's fading now...

I know I'm going to have to live a religious life next, said Pamela. I see myself as a Buddhist nun in a Tibetan wasteland. Time is not significant. My work is very clear: meditation for humanity.

I want to be a healer, said Harriet, I'm in a Mediterranean setting, Europe or North Africa. The time isn't clear.

You're not historians, I said, for me time-setting determines everything else. Pamela, your life would be very different in pre or post 1958 Tibet.

Probably, she replied, but this is my creation and I don't seem to be bothered by a Chinese invasion, so maybe it's pre 1958, yet somehow I feel it is to come.

That's the idea of dispensing with linear time, I pointed out. We can have a future life in the past.

By this time, I had made tea by tilting the kettle on the fire-crane and pouring boiling water into the brown ceramic teapot. We were drinking from the blue and white cups from the set Paddy and I had bought at a sale.

My Mediterranean world feels timeless, said Harriet. I know that sounds vague but for me that world stretches beyond time.

We're all in the past, I said. Is it because the future is beyond our imagining?

Pamela was impatient. I thought the idea of this game was to draw out parts of ourselves we don't normally express. I was surprised by how I imagined myself a religious. I'm horrified by the idea of being a Buddhist nun in this life.

Where did your eighteenth-century life come from? Harriet asked me, Your Jane Austen obsession?

Perhaps, but it's earlier in the century than Jane. More like the time of the picaresque novels of Fielding and Smollett. Like Pamela, I'm surprised by the speed of the image. And of myself as a wanderer. In this life I love being at home. Sometimes I think I go away mainly for the pleasure of coming home.

My image is linked to aspirations in this life, said Harriet. I'm thinking of retraining as a counsellor in that course they run at the University. I guess that's why I wanted to play this game.

How would you do it? I asked, Full time? What about Tilly? You can't leave her with your mum all the time.

No, sighed Harriet. I'd have to keep my job, study part time and leave Tilly with friends or pay for childcare.

If it's evenings I can be on a roster, offered Pamela.

Me too, I added.

Thanks, said Harriet, But no real plans as yet. Until tonight I didn't realise how much I wanted to do this.

As we rinsed our cups and prepared for bed I suddenly said 'None of us thought of ourselves as men in our next lives. Why is that?

We haven't resolved our issues as women in this life, Pamela promptly replied.

And none of us had children, husbands or lovers, Harriet noted. No encumbrances.

Back at home, it was raining as well, part of an East Australia inundation. The streets are so waterlogged that I'm planning to wear my blue gumboots into Civic to see the optometrist. Dark too, a desk light needed mid-morning. Looking from the window I remember moving Gaiia, my name for the Earth Brain, from the 'sacred grove' when my neighbour cleared undergrowth from her side of the fence and exposed Gaiia to the elements and the gaze of passers-by. Now, for the winter, she sits on the Chinese dragon carpet in the study.

After some dissension, Susan M, Biff and I decided on a winner for the Beryl Henderson Prize. She lives in Canberra so Susan M arranged the formal presentation by Senator Margaret Reynolds, who took over Susan Ryan's responsibility for the Office of the Status of Women. We are planning a big occasion at the ANU, with media coverage.

I heard Senator Reynolds speak at an IWD seminar and warmed to her. When, in 1984, the Queensland ALP threatened to demote her on the Senate ticket, the ACT Feminist Caucus sent them a telegram of protest, and a letter of support to the Senator, receiving a pleasant acknowledgment from her.

The IWD occasion was difficult this year. Harriet, Pamela and I attended the National Women's Consultative Council's Political Awareness Seminar at Olim's Ainslie Hotel:

This is a tricky occasion in the Bicentennial Year. A banner painted in England in 1908 by an Australian woman to represent the triumphant Australian women's suffrage movement advises 'mother Britain' to 'trust the women, mother, as I have done'. A Bicentennial grant has been used to buy back the banner. Bicentenary money was used because so many Women's Liberationists are supporting the Aboriginal cause, seeing nothing to celebrate about white settlement. The morning tea held at the Prime Minister's Lodge to celebrate the

banner was boycotted by some, including me, but attended by others who had important networks to maintain.

Senator Reynolds, who bid successfully for Beryl's WEL pendant at last year's WEL Feminist Memorabilia auction, is now speaking about the importance of lobbying and grass-roots support.

I had a useful chat at the Shopfront drinks with a Left woman, who supported the national secretary in the recent preselection. We talked about the problems of mode in the male Left, the lack of class analysis among some feminists and the need to judge each issue on its merits. Having been abandoned by the Left for her stance on the preselection, the woman feels a curious sense of liberation from the mode of the unreconstructed male Left.

The banner is to hang in the new Parliament House and I see that it is painted, rather than embroidered as I imagined from the pictures. After supper Dale Spender spoke on the theme of *Knowledge as Power*. She described her job as Hon Sec of the Fawcett Library in London. She discovered the Australian banner, with the others from the 1908 campaign, rolled in a cupboard at the Fawcett Library. Gradually all the banners were being restored, so she asked for this one to be done and when repainted it stood solid, could not be rolled which meant it could no longer be stored in the Fawcett Library. Dale devised the plan to bring it to Australia. British National Heritage had to be talked into letting it go with words like, 'only a painting by a couple of Australians'.

Then three women activists talked about personal experiences.

Margaret Timpson from the Business and Professional Women's Association (BPWA) is talking about the role of her association in divorce law reform. Moving on then to link between child abuse and the low self-esteem of many women, she notes how the BPWA took up the cause and the national organisation which has resulted. Now she mentions the importance of the personal 'fire in the belly'.

Another woman's political consciousness came through childbirth education. Paddy D, who put my name forward for the Prime Minister's morning tea because she knew I would boycott it, is WILPF's representative on the national

Women's Consultative Council. From an English working-class background, she was recruited to Australia as a teacher. She joined the ALP in 1977 'because it had good policies on uranium and nuclear war in those days,' and also became involved in community radio. She stood as an ALP candidate in Toowoomba and much later had the satisfaction of seeing the Liberal winner being harangued on childcare and abortion by Canberra feminists. Paddy D says the defeat of the anti-abortion bill in Queensland was the result of networking, lobbying and leaking.

I collected two sets of documents from this seminar, one for my school library. A student used the second set to report on the early women's movement to my Australian History class.

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I was right about the preselection: the national secretary won convincingly against the Left feminist. Now we have ACT self-government approaching, more candidates to be selected. I have been sounded out by both Left and Centre Left women to consider running, but the prospect appals me after so carefully pruning my life to allow space for reflection and writing. The approaches made me think again about political involvement and I've attended more ALP branch meetings this year. Perhaps self-government may revitalise branches since members feel so alienated from the Hawke government.

I'm listening to an interview with Bill Caldicott, on Rob's 2XX radio program, in which he talks about the Green Labor plan to form groups within the Party, separate from the factions, to support environmental and anti-nuclear policies, but be free to align with different factions on other issues. Bill probably hasn't heard of the Feminist Caucus, but that was how we hoped to operate. He talks enthusiastically about using the democratic process within the party. I'm pleased to hear the plan and will support Green Labor, although many ACT Party members are already environmentalists and anti-nuclear activists.

Membership of the Party is a good way of keeping in touch with political reality. My father used to say 'The ALP is the most democratic institution in Australia –

and it serves us right.' Something has kept me a member for thirty-three years. It's best not to expect great things, just a pushing and prodding for social justice and the possibility of promoting movements like feminism and environmentalism. The ALP also provides an important network of contacts for political and social work outside the party. Many outsiders, who don't understand my membership, do not grasp that the party is a coalition of left forces, not a monolith.

September 1988 O'Connor

Spring holidays. Fine sunshiny days, suitable for sitting outside. A mild winter with much rain so people are speculating about the 'greenhouse effect'. Gaiia is under the casuarina again. I'm writing on the small front veranda, in sunlight dappled by jasmine and grapevines. On the stand near my right shoulder purple pansies bloom, companions to the flowering pot I took Pamela Denoon on my first visit to her in hospital, the day of the Beryl Henderson Prize presentation.

The presentation, a gala occasion in the Arts Common Room of the ANU with a large attendance, was not marred by the absence of the mature age student winner who was incapacitated by flu and sent her young son to collect her prize. Senator Reynolds coaxed him into making an acceptance speech and the vice chancellor, Laurie Nicol, seemed overcome by the sentiment of such a substitution. Edna's account of her memories of Beryl was received enthusiastically by an audience fortified by fried chicken and alcohol. After the occasion the Tarlina women, with Edna and Suzanne, celebrated at a Turkish restaurant. Over-stimulated by these events, but also by my visit to Pamela Denoon, I slept badly, churning over the possibility of a 'Feminist Foundation'.

Pamela Denoon was dying of leukaemia after a two-year remission. She had heard about the Beryl Henderson Foundation and rang me at Canberra High from the cancer ward at Canberra hospital. I went to see her the following day.

Pamela began in the women's movement in Papua New Guinea when she had small children, as outlined in her *Canberra Times* obituary. When she came to Canberra in 1983 she worked as national convenor of WEL and we met when I taught her daughter, Louise, and acted as go-between for Edna's communications to national

WEL. At Pamela's funeral last Tuesday I saw people from her many networks: her cancer support service, her Papua New Guinea and African connections, her meditation group, as well as colleagues from the public service, the university and large numbers from the women's movement.

I felt awkward at that first hospital visit, a vulture-emissary from the after-life, but Pamela and her family put me at ease. At that stage I was envisaging an umbrella organisation with attachments, like this:



Pamela was interested in the organisation of the central body, the Feminist Foundation. Her WEL experience convinced her that the women's movement needed money to pay organisers as campaigners, as much as for specific projects. She was prepared to direct a good proportion of her proposed \$100,000 bequest to help set up the Foundation. Stunned by the amount, I left the oncology ward in a tumble of ideas and anxieties.

Finished reading Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*, a very satisfying book. Claudia, dying alone in hospital, probably by choice, a contrast to Pamela Denoon who died at home surrounded by family and friends. That day I saw her in hospital, she was being fitted with a butterfly-shaped device, the size of a Walkman cassette player, which controlled a constant dose of morphine, allowing her to be at home.

My sleepless night with the fantods after the hospital visit and the Beryl Henderson prize-giving and the celebratory dinner, left me so confused that I stayed home from school the following day, to order my thoughts. Suzanne, in from Mongarlowe for the prize-giving, had stayed over so I asked her to help me contact my Higher Self for advice. In the study I sat on Gaiia, surrounded by crystals and a lighted candle, while Suzanne invoked helpful spirits.

At the suggestion of my Higher Self, I began a special Feminist Foundation notebook. Here is an extract from the entry of 24 July 1988:

My fantods were partly produced by fears of personal inadequacy and, conversely, of this project monopolising my time and energy. The Higher Self was very clear on these points and advised:

This project is part of my mission for the women's movement.

I can set it up and then be more distanced. It need not take over my life.

Start a notebook to keep track.

So I calmed and began work.

Suzanne and I thought about the Foundation idea and came up with heaps of projects including the housing and servicing of women's archives, the funding of campaigns, buying equipment for campaigners, paying for research into feminist issues, publications, special conferences, concerts, exhibitions, funding of individuals to attend significant conferences overseas. We also considered problems like embezzlement, 'governing from the grave', capture by anti-feminists, negative people in the Foundation, injudicious investments and inappropriate projects.

In the following days Jill, Edna and I decided to keep the Feminist Foundation separate for the time being from the Beryl Henderson Foundation which was already established and undergoing incorporation. The Feminist Foundation was a more complex proposal.

Am reading Volume 2 of *The Diary of Beatrice Webb* where she and Sidney are setting up the London School of Economics. That too began with a bequest of ten thousand pounds, and subsequent fundraising. There were difficulties with other Fabians who thought the money should be used for campaigns and pamphlets, but the Webbs wanted to promote research in the social sciences, something more enduring. They solicited London County Council funding whereas our Foundation is avoiding government involvement, to build our own support base. In a letter to Pamela D on 29 July I wrote my early thoughts, including:

If you go ahead with the Foundation the best way would probably be for you to nominate two people, part of a group of about six, to oversee the setting up. They would need access to expenses involved, particularly for legal advice. Upon

reflection I can't see that a paid position would help much at this stage because the person would have to be particularly experienced in this field and such people usually work in legal firms. However this could be left to the discretion of the establishing group of six. Jill and I are prepared to work in this group, bringing our recent experience into play.

I rang Pamela's home for the second time this week. Earlier her son answered and reported that she was at the theatre. Today her cheerful and composed husband, Donald, answered and asked me round for a drink later this afternoon because Pamela is at the National Gallery today. Meanwhile I hear from her meditation group that the doctors have given her only a fortnight. Part of my anxiety about telephoning is of being seen as the harbinger of death, wanting to clear up the Foundation question before Pamela departs. Yet my rational self argues that Pamela initiated this process in an effort to do some good for the Cause before she goes. I shall personally deliver the letter I wrote last Monday.

Pamela wanted to know the cost of setting up and she decided that one of her nominees would be Jane Holden, a feminist lawyer, working in Treasury. She speculated about the effects of the money, mentioning that Women in Development 'got money too soon', while WEL's government funding came far too late to keep the organisation strong. Pamela was cheerful and composed.

Meanwhile Jill had been meeting with a group of feminists, including femocrats and politicians, in Sydney to discuss the setting up of a feminist research institute, devoted to policy analysis. After the second meeting she felt the concept was close enough to the Feminist Foundation to mention our plans. They responded with enthusiasm, thinking we could link up. There were now three of us from Canberra: Jill Matthews, Marie Coleman, and me. The Sydney group included Eva Cox, Marie Tulip, Georgina Carnegie, Anne Simons, Julie Rigg, Helen l'Orange. Wendy Fatin, MHR from Western Australia, was also in the group. I felt cautious, though relieved that some of our burden might be lifted.

At a small meeting in the Cellar Bar at University House, I talked with Jill, Marie C and one of the Sydney group. I was dismayed to learn that the term 'Feminist' for the Foundation was regarded as too threatening and possibly too 'political' for tax

deductibility and that 'National Foundation for Australian Women' (NFAW) was favoured. Apart from this setback, I felt encouraged by the energy and enthusiasm of this sub-group and agreed to work with them for a while. I contacted a lawyer, skilled in corporations, to set up a consultation about possible structures. Edna agreed to be a sponsor of the Foundation.

Jill and I went to Pamela's on 14 August to talk about this new development. Pamela had endured a total blood transfusion since my last visit. Nursing a mild cold, I sat at the far side of the room for fear of infecting her overloaded system. We told her of our enthusiasm for this national project and she, cautiously interested, asked again how much it would cost to set up. We went away promising to investigate costs and I agreed to attend the next meeting of the whole group in Sydney on 3 September. Next day Pamela D rang me with doubts: what about roles for young women and Aboriginals in the scheme? She was also anxious that I stay involved in the whole project because she trusted my principles. I contracted to do so. That was the last time I spoke to her.

After a briefing on 22 August the lawyer agreed to get a structure on paper in time for the Sydney 3 September meeting.

Attended an ALP Feminist Caucus where I tentatively advanced the Feminist Foundation idea only to run into alarm from those who think there is a definite overlap with the newly forming Sistertrust.

I can see that we possibly overlap in the area of funding scholarships, etc, and also soliciting donations (how many resources have we in the women's movement?).

We don't overlap in relation to government funding – we have none and Sistertrust [a Victorian organisation] solicits partial government funding – and Sistertrust's goal is to fund women's small business enterprises.

One Sistertrust woman said she thought the Foundation was only interested in a 'think tank'.

Oh dear... well I'm glad this has arisen before the 3 September meeting

Yesterday I experienced some anxiety when listening to a Women's Investment Network adviser at the Teachers' Federation Women's Conference. She was so capitalist-market oriented that I wondered about the financial side of our Foundation. The Beryl Henderson funds are kept in the Commonwealth Bank Investment Trust, so no fears of undue involvement with the underside of capitalism.

While visiting Floriade this month, Edna and I discussed the Foundation. She raised doubts about some of the members, one with political loyalties which did not give priority to feminism, and others without clear direction. I replied that nowhere could one find a perfect organising collective and that we had sufficient clear-minded and energetic members to carry us through. I felt unease, not so much about recalcitrant members but more about the direction and scope of the enterprise.

A difficult Sydney meeting on 3 September. My initial meetings with the Canberra sub-group led me to expect the same clarity and directed energy from the whole group and I thought that by the end of the day we would have an agreed structure. Apprehensive about intruding upon an established group, I knitted my complex Aran pattern as a defence and calming agent. Proceedings were slowed by the sparks and animated discussion that such volatile and committed women draw from each other. I wanted less talk and more action. Several women ignored basic women's movement modes and hogged the airspace.

We disagreed about draft aims, about the draft prospectus. After a whole day I left feeling so exhausted and confused that when Edna asked me to report I pleaded for time to rest and shower.

When my mind sorted, I realised that some clarity had resulted due to heroic efforts from the chair. The decisions were to hold a telephone conference to finalise aims in two weeks and to leave the structure for decision at the next meeting, in Canberra in October.

The chair also suggested that we would not step on Sistertrust's toes if we avoided 'good works' and concentrated instead on setting up and policy formation. I could see the wisdom but felt sad about setting aside many of those ideas from talking

with Suzanne. The proposed body will:

Constitute itself as the Interim Committee for the National Foundation for Australian Women; a body to be registered in the ACT as a non-profit limited liability company under the provisions of the Uniform Companies Act; with the intention of creating a structure to be active through the balance of this century and beyond, which is independent of government (while willing to work co-operatively with governments); and which will seek to promote the best interests of women, consistent with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, through means including:

- carrying out or funding policy studies at the national level on issues affecting women including mainstream issues
- resourcing special interest groups
- promoting and funding communication and information flow between special interest groups and other bodies (including women's services)
- encouraging and assisting women's education
- organising, funding or promoting seminars, conferences and other meetings
- such other activities as is consistent with the Foundation's objects
- to receive, administer and disburse monies pursuant to the above objectives.

All of which is fine. When I talked to Jill about my feelings she said that this had been the third meeting of the group and that in group dynamics all third meetings go sticky. I decided that it was close enough to Pamela's original ideas, so wrote her a note on 7 September:

Dear Pamela

I heard that you have been at the coast, and then in hospital, so I hope that you are comfortable now.

This is to report on the meeting I attended in Sydney last Saturday to work towards the setting up of a National Foundation for Women (a Feminist Foundation?)...

There was much energy and enthusiasm and it was decided that the primary functions of the proposed National Foundation would be research, policy formation and communication for feminist issues. I felt that this was very close to the ideas we discussed.

Meanwhile we have received recommendations from the lawyer about the setting up and structure of such an organisation. As you suspected much work needs to be done and we are meeting again in October in Canberra to further the project. A prospectus is being drafted and a mailing list constructed.

This fits very well into our original proposals and I am impressed by the serious purpose of the women involved.

I shall call soon to discuss the situation further and hope to find you in good cheer.

Yours in sisterhood

I am not sure she read it because her strength was failing and she died a week later. Jane Holden, Pamela's nominee on the NFAW, later told me that Pamela had expressed satisfaction with the direction of the Foundation on the Wednesday before she died.

Pamela's funeral, wonderful and satisfying, was held at St John's Church, Reid. A deaconess read the lesson and Amirah Turner delivered the eulogy in which she mentioned the prospect of a feminist foundation. As the family carried the coffin from the church, Papuan women in the choir gallery sang a Motu lament which turned my heart.

January 1989 O'Connor

I feel that setting up this National Foundation for Australian Women is part of an 'ending' process. At that Sydney meeting when we had a 'go around' to hear everyone's motives, I said that the idea of 'passing the torch' appealed to me. The urge to set up something that reaches into the future, in the way that the first wave feminist Fawcett Library survived in England, pushes me on. My involvement with NFAW is an attempt to peer into the future, making a path for feminists who follow.

We've had two full meetings of the Foundation planners. The Canberra meeting was postponed until November and only one woman came from Sydney. Another had already moved to Canberra as a femocrat, while Wendy flew in from the west. We held the meeting in Wendy's parliamentary office and Jane Holden came for the first time. We discussed what I described in my NFAW notebook as 'the vexed question of structure'.

I had pasted in cuttings, including the death and funeral notices, the *Canberra Times* obituary, Amirah's eulogy, reprinted in *Wimminews* and a memorial poem by Lin Shay.

Pamela's death shook me and I thought I'd be writing about that but find the cuttings as much as I can deal with. I felt affirmed when the Foundation was mentioned in the eulogy as well as the obituary. Jane Holden, now recovering from Pamela's death, is involving herself, especially in regard to legal matters. I gave her the copy of our lawyer's thoughts on structure and her questions flummoxed me so I arranged for her to interview him. Jill was at first against this interview on the grounds that we should wait until after the next meeting but my instinct was to make Pamela's lawyer friend Jane privy to our proceedings as quickly as possible. Jane is now talking as though this Foundation is the right choice. The legal meeting went well. I feel we are now on the way, and hope this feeling endures through the next full meeting.

At a November meeting in Parliament House we felt we could not make binding decisions because so many were absent and we limited ourselves to organisational matters. Jane reminded us that the lawyer said we could proceed in stages with setting up the structure and we best begin with the company, seeking exemption from taxation. His advice was a two-tiered structure, a company of limited membership to control the funds and an association of wide membership to promote the Cause. We decided to go ahead and register the company name, brief the lawyer on further ideas for structure, use our contacts to hunt for letterhead and logo designers, edit the mailing list and assemble arguments to present to Federal Cabinet for full tax deductibility for donations.

Jill, Jane and I met to prepare our lawyer's brief. We worked on a model that we hoped was proofed against takeover, by emphasising continuity of membership yet allowing for turnover. Twelve directors with discretionary powers were proposed. Terms of office and other matters would have to be decided by the December meeting in Sydney. Our lawyer promised a draft for that meeting.

Again feeling vulture-like, I wrote a letter to Pamela's husband, Donald, agreeing to his offer of a loan towards the setting up costs of the Foundation. Apart from legal and letterhead/logo costs, we shall pay for secretarial and managerial skills from women, just as Pamela hoped.

The December meeting in Sydney was in hot steamy weather, more like Brisbane. We met at Georgina's 19th century Birchgrove house, with high ceilings and harbour frontages. Jill and I accepted a lift down in Marie C's airconditioned Volvo, suffering discomfort only from the lawyer's draft, where it seemed he had ignored the briefing on aims and objectives. The heat of the day and this setback with the draft caused the meeting some distress. We made some progress in other matters because the humidity stifled the volatile women and everyone was anxious to expedite business.

We decided to launch the Foundation as a concept next 8 March, International Women's Day. A group of Pamela Denoon's friends had decided to hold a commemorative dinner and lecture in Canberra on that day. The legal work won't be completed but an early announcement will broaden the discussion within the women's movement and scotch any rumours about our competition with Sistertrust. Jane H offered the hire of office facilities from the women who run a child protection organisation, especially to help us with the launch.

January 1989 Mongarlowe

Helped Suzanne pack her sculptures for exhibition and sale at the Lesbian Feminist Conference in Adelaide. She has created a new series of middle-sized pieces, women with crystal balls and votive objects in their hands. They combine a superior air with a twist of humour. This firing is glazed in a teal blue, a colour with which she has been working for a year.

Then at North Durras Caravan Park I had private space in the midst of a busy summer village, like a Chinese commune. Today is overcast, drizzly. Children on bicycles, dogs, a cat, buzzing of wood sawing, cries, shouts, yet I feel peaceful, my space inviolate. Whilst jogging on the beach this morning I saw few fellow-campers. They seem to prefer a later time, or avoid the beach on a cloudy day. Dinner with Jen's family and friends last night and Neil who was camping in the garden of Jen's holiday rental. He came here for breakfast this morning and showed me how to work the gas stove.

Biff, Susan M and Daphne are the only members of the original Canberra Women's Liberation Group who appear regularly throughout this text. Others went overseas, interstate or drifted to the edges of my life. Once we became involved in major projects, like childcare or the women's refuge, we saw little of those outside our particular group. The childcare collective, which I did not join, was consumed by submission writing and running their centre. I suppose they saw me similarly obsessed with the women's refuge. Biff, Susan M and Daphne did not join either project group. On the refuge collective I made new younger feminist friends: including Jen, Harriet, Pamela, Sybille and Lizzie B. Through Daphne I met Liz O.

Susan M, a post-graduate student at the Canning St meetings, went on to write a PhD and become an academic in women's studies, leaving her husband in the process. She is a marvellous organiser and wire-puller, with the capacity for deep passionate friendship. Long after the demise of the Redfems, and after moving to Adelaide, she set up the Research Centre for Women's Studies and established *Australian Feminist Studies*, a theory journal to recreate the kind of discussions which she enjoyed in women's groups.

A fine morning with a light cooling breeze. Neil visited again for breakfast on his last day, after my morning jog and swim. Other caravan dwellers not about; blue sky may have lured them further afield.

Sara Dowse came into Canberra Women's Liberation with a focus on childcare but sharing her own four children with their father. She worked as a femocrat for the

Whitlam and Fraser governments, before setting herself up as a full-time writer. Now with several novels published, she has a strong local reputation. Women's Liberation gave Sara the strength to change her original choices and create the writer's life she craved.

Another brilliant, sunshiny day, and consequent peace in the caravan park. Varied my exercise routine this morning by swimming across the sea entrance to the lake, following the incoming tide which drew me up the lake. Last night Harriet, who arrived with Tilly yesterday, cooked us dinner at her coast house.

Daphne was older than the rest of us, with a marriage already finished and children grown and left home. She lived alone in a government flat, taught at the university and organised for us to borrow a coast house for WL weekends. It was she who brought a political perspective to our wild speculations, who drew the connection between women's protest and classical anarchism. We saw her as 'one of us' but she must have felt that generation gap at our meetings.

Daphne was overseas on sabbatical leave when we formed the *Survivors* but the devoted Susan M kept her fully informed and she joined on her return. She became a founding member of the Redfems, a consistent attendee, minute-taker, a sharp and witty contributor. Although she had drifted away from party organisation she retained her loyalty to left politics. A scathing critic of Leninist party modes and general male Left behaviour, she emphasised that we must at all costs hold to an autonomous women's movement, in order to survive in history.

It's five years since I wrote about my distress when Daphne left Canberra. In Sydney 'retirement' she joined the Greens, standing as a candidate for election, with a poster modelled on Delacroix's *Liberty at the Barricades*. Daphne's slogan was Liberty, Sorority, Ecology. Women's Liberation provided her with a critique of the male Left and a new political synthesis with which to operate.

—

Shifted between caravans yesterday. This one is less swish but has a canvas annexe with room to spread. My writing space at the inner table is more comfortable. Here I stay for the final week of my summer holiday.

This morning Jen, Ross and I swam across the lake entrance at high tide, with Louis holding on to Ross. Later the children went fishing while I stayed with Jen to discuss her job options. Harriet soon joined us and we three had a couple of precious hours of Tarlina style Together Time'. Chatted about this writing. Both want to read it so I'll take the typescript around this evening.

Suzanne. I heard about her before we met, described as a brilliant, volatile young woman working as a university tutor in Sydney, running an adult extension course in women's history with Lyndall. Suzanne came to our Guthega conference in January 1972 and I remember her as a powerful, mostly silent, onlooker. Even then she was saying she felt like a fringe-dweller, as if the events of 1969-70 were already far away.

Biff had kept in touch with Suzanne, so it was she who inveigled me into asking Suzanne for a numerological reading, instead of attending a session at the Marxist Feminist Conference in 1977. Suzanne was taken with my serious approach when I took notes from her insightful reading, and she joined us for a memorable Chinese restaurant dinner where I sat between her and Liz O, explaining my theory of the non-materialist world. After that dinner Suzanne began visiting us in Canberra, staying at the Turner collective.

Suzanne was deeply influenced by Bessie Guthrie, a long-term underground feminist of Beryl's and Edna's generation. When Bessie died at the end of 1977, Suzanne organised a wondrous funeral with carloads of women flying streamers of suffragette colours through Sydney streets. A creator of women's events, Suzanne went on to conceptualise and organise the first Women and Labour Conference in 1978.

Suzanne yearned for a life in the creative arts and began teaching herself ceramics. She developed a clientele and began making ambitious ceramic sculptures. One leading potter exclaimed, It can't be done! when Suzanne explained her experiments with hand-building in porcelain. She dreamed of a life in the country so she left her job, sold her Sydney house and bought a property first near Bredbo and then at Mongarlowe.



The 'brain' pottery made by Suzanne Bellamy in early 1980s.

Julia with siblings Lyndall and Patrick in background.



Our friendship has not been smooth. Suzanne decided, when I drew away from Biff, that Biff needed more support, and so she drew away from me. I felt hurt but within a year Suzanne recultivated my friendship. She is a committed political lesbian, labelling my reluctance to elevate sexual preference to an overriding political concern, as 'homophobic'. While I cannot embrace all her visions, I maintain this precious connection. Suzanne works in a variety of media, including powerful and evocative writing. I admire the depth and breadth of her talents: a creative artist.

Jen is reading my typescript and thinking about the past. She sometimes finds my authorial interventions too distracting, except where there is a link to the material. Yesterday she felt depressed about the chapter on *How Should we Live?* because she is making decisions about changing her own household.

I began a letter to Pamela, again in India, and realised how much I miss her in the garden flat. How we should live is no longer a problem for me. Since Liz O left my household, I relish living alone, with a friend close by in the garden flat. Having more garden flats at the disposal of my friends, the old Beijing compound arrangement, would be ideal.

Liz O began attending Women's Liberation meetings at Bremer St in 1971 when she left Sydney for Canberra after encountering the ideas of WL at a Sydney Vietnam moratorium. She was an undergraduate student of Daphne's. Her clear mind and commitment impressed us. With her political activism, need to work and devotion to drinking with friends, Liz O took many years to complete her degree. On graduation she tried to live in Sydney but eventually returned to Canberra to manage Community Radio Station 2XX.

Liz O lived in a variety of group households, including Biff's, always giving them the flavour of an Irish pub. She inspired the devotion of any children with whom she lived, approaching them with an easy, non-judgemental attitude.

For six years Liz O and I racketed along as a household, and she taught teenage Neil how to cook along the way. My feelings towards her ebbed and flowed, along with

my energy. Several times on the point of demanding her departure, I realised I would miss her if she left.

We went through ideological changes together. With the help of Mary Daly, we moved from socialist feminism to radical feminism. Part of Liz O was attracted to separatism but she felt too attached to her male drinking companions. We fought over Israel and the PLO but we secretly admired Indira Gandhi. After all, she sterilised the men, said Liz.

Liz O scorned my scribbling, calling it the 'Ryan school of falsification'.

She'll make great copy, Suzanne laughed when I complained.

In an attempt to introduce Liz O to a healthy country life, I brought her into the Tarlina collective, but she formed a drinking coterie with Paddy and the locals at the pub.

Liz O's life changed. She began wearing shoes, opened a credit union account and bought a car. She, who could barely pay her rent in her previous households, moved into a house and shared the mortgage with a lover. I felt shaken, but relieved of that direct involvement with life at the edge. Liz O has spoiled me for other housemates. I need more distance now.

Jen continues to read the typescript. She finds a depressive mood pervades – to her surprise because she sees me as a cheerful person. I acknowledge the element of sadness that comes from reflection on things past. There seems a sense of loss, even though one chooses the present. She enjoyed reading about the books I'd read. She liked my questioning of issues and the way my groups widen. She suggested I ask an editor to work on the finished typescript.

October 1989 Kioloa

Suzanne and I have two days here to recoup energy for my return to school. Our caravan which we began using two years ago is just behind the first dune from the beach in a secluded corner shaded by coastal banksia. Suzanne is off visiting the Aboriginal midden, leaving me to sit in the spring sunshine dappled through the banksia leaves, at the new blue card table I bought for writing. It doubles for outdoor dining.

The NFAW grows apace. The Interim Board postponed the grand launching until July this year when we realised the size of the task. And what a response we received to that event, held at the National Press Club. We catered for three hundred but hundreds more turned up. Our program was far too long but our audience listened good-humouredly. Marie had arranged for a women's string quartet to play but fortunately they didn't turn up; they would never have been heard above the hubbub.

We held mini-launches in other centres. Jill and I ran one in Adelaide during the Women's Studies Conference. Other Board members launched at Armidale, Townsville and Alice Springs. Sydney was a huge affair at the Belvoir St Theatre. Jill launches in Melbourne next Monday with the assistance of Edna, when they will be presenting the second Beryl Henderson Essay Prize to the winner from Monash University. The Perth, Hobart and Darwin launches remain to be done because the current national pilots' strike makes difficulties but by the end of the year we should be launched nationwide. We have attracted over 800 members and some \$30,000 in subscriptions and donations.

NFAW, despite early problems, has proved successful as an idea. The women's movement seems to have been waiting for just such an organisation, and Edna keeps reminding us how wonderful it is to be reaching out to the future in this way. Nevertheless the Interim Board meetings remain long and difficult, full of complex, tedious legal arrangements and as yet we have not persuaded the Tax Office to grant tax deductibility. We Canberra Board members are over-loaded, bearing the burden of a national structure.

At one of our hot day meetings in Sydney, someone proposed that we run a national conference as a celebration of the Women's Movement, a conference modelled on the lapsed Women and Labour. This conference is the centrepiece of our 1990 activities. Sydney members wanted it in that city but the Board reluctantly decided that a national body must hold its first conference in the capital; more work for us Canberra members. At this stage I feel anxious, with much of the burden on my shoulders.

Suzanne set off southwards today, hoping to collect materials for her ceramics. Yesterday at the midden she met an Aboriginal custodian who told her that some of the plants used to control the dunes were exotics, from South Africa and Israel, threatening to take over. He and Suzanne spent two hours weeding out the exotics, so she returned with blistered hands. The custodian said that the Aborigines of this region were all connected to one old woman. He added that this whole coast is due for inundation by great seas coming in the 1990s. I see that this caravan park, lying just behind the first dune, is vulnerable.

No wind last night so we lit a fire and cooked our whole meal there, fish wrapped in foil, baked potatoes, cauliflower and broccoli steamed in a Dutch oven. Then we walked to the beach where Suzanne constructed a ritual on the sand with tapers marking the centre of a great oval in which she placed her crystals. We invoked the spirits of this place and completed the ritual just as the new moon set behind the coastal range.

Today I feel calmer about the big NFAW conference. In Canberra we have gathered a group of enthusiastic women who want to work on it and I have booked the University of Canberra campus, for \$13000! Jill and Suzanne say I should have no worries about the finances because we can count on 2000 women coming. Suzanne has ideas about creating a women's movement oral history project through story telling. Hopefully my leave for three months in the US will not be a problem for pre-conference organisation.

Brought Marge Piercy's *Gone to Soldiers* with me. The book came out six years ago but I avoided reading it, despite my usual rush to read Piercy's books, because of its subject. Seemed just another blockbusting war book. But at the Feminist Book Fortnight Readers' Seminar last month the virtues of the book were extolled as a feminist alternative to the patriarchal view of war. So I snapped it up for \$6.99 at a second-hand bookshop and am now immersed and thoroughly appreciative. I am planning to finish this writing early today so I can read in the sand dunes before Suzanne returns for lunch.

South Durras January 1990

Harriet invited me to her beach house when I said I'd like to camp somewhere on the coast. Tilly and friends are here. So we are an all-woman household and I'm enjoying the three little girls as they busy themselves with activities ranging from make-believe games to blowing bubbles. Every so often Harriet decides they should do something healthy and outdoor so she takes them to the lagoon to swim or the rocks to walk. They accompany her with an occasional moan, much preferring their own pursuits. Early this morning they were covertly inspecting each other's vaginas. Harriet says that part of the excitement lies in the shut door and the apprehension that she might suddenly walk in.

I brought NFAW Conference Bulletins to be prepared for postage. Harriet and I folded some last night, making our job look adult and attractive while the girls played Junior Trivial Pursuit. This morning before breakfast they began folding with enthusiasm. At this rate we should complete the lot before I leave.

Despite my brave words in October, the NFAW Conference overshadowed the rest of the year. My enthusiastic little group kept changing and the new women had to be taken back to taws every time we met. I felt nothing would be achieved, but by December I could identify a hard core of four women. Additionally, we decided to hire some organisational help to draw up a budget and bring things together. Our first bulletin is late, partly because of confusions with new postal regulations.

Sitting now on the back deck in the shade overlooking the garden with the faint blue coastal range in the western distance. Harriet has nurtured a West Australian gum which is now in full orange-red blossom against the neighbour's white wall.

Harriet and I felt sluggish this morning, from too much activity in yesterday's sun. We all walked to the rocky outcrops in the sea near the mouth of the lagoon and waded across the narrow channel at low tide to investigate the rock pools and sea creatures. The ocean wet the little girls' shorts and shirts in the crossing, so they swam happily fully clothed in the lagoon on our way back. I jogged on the beach for thirty minutes both evenings so my body feels weary. The girls continue their games but began bickering this morning.

I visited Biff yesterday at Guerella Bay. I found her in the midst of her extended, blended family, planning a twenty-first birthday celebration for her twins with a feast, speeches and a concert. The twins asked me what I could remember of their birth time. Biff and I sat on the beach while I told her some of the NFAW difficulties. We agreed that some women in the movement don't seem to have learned the first lessons of personal interaction we hammered out in WL.

The difficulties encountered by the interim Board of the NFAW continue. Suzanne says that a goddess sends these obstacles at the beginning of a long-term project, to test us. I see them as a consequence of our failure to adhere to the women's movement Mode.

After our Canberra launch we asked two young women, in their twenties, to come on to the Board. At that stage we thought incorporation and the setting up of the Association would proceed quickly. One younger woman, coming from a Left political sect, found us bourgeois and over-cautious. She was bitterly disappointed about holding the conference in Canberra and felt that the Board did not listen to her. Eva felt increasingly alienated because others resented her tendency to speak to the media without consultation. We still feared treading on the toes of established women's organisations.

Monthly Board meetings continued to be rushed and, although time was set aside for social interaction and clarifying goals, the real problems were glossed over. The young Left woman was concerned about what she saw as a lack of democracy, particularly in the relation between the Association and the Board of the Company, and reported these concerns to Association members. At the first meeting of the Association in Sydney a delegate was selected to attend the October Board meeting in Canberra and represent their difficulties. Our complex arrangements to protect the money from takeover rebounded against us.

This new element on the Board increased our difficulties in completing business. Canberra Board members felt alienated from events in Sydney, worried that Association members there would influence the future regional structure. Tensions increased, especially in November and December, when several Association

members attended as observers at the Board meetings in Sydney. One time Marie turned bright red and I feared apoplexy. I knitted furiously while Jill made pomanders, viciously sticking cloves into oranges.

Meanwhile, feeling alienated, Eva resigned from the Board, but stayed as a sponsor. The difficulties around her now seemed minor compared with our new problems.

Suddenly we were granted tax deductibility. Wendy Fatin MHR lobbied the Federal treasurer, Paul Keating. His eye ranged the list of sponsors, paused on Edna's name. 'She's all right', he said, and recommended deductibility. It's an important breakthrough for donations.

On summer holiday I gave the NFAW problems more consideration. We held a caucus of Canberra members to discuss the situation and speculated on the mode of the Sydney members, which seemed to be the left sectarian confrontation mode, a kind of personal dialectic. We decided I should try and talk to some of them in Sydney during Christmas week.

I telephoned two and we agreed to meet at a Glebe Point Rd coffee house. I walked there from Edna's flat, mentally rehearsing my speech. We talked for an hour and a half. Back in Edna's flat I wrote in my NFAW notebook:

27.12.89 As planned at the Parliament House caucus I arranged to meet M and T while in Sydney. We met this morning at a Glebe Pt Rd coffee shop. I had eccocino and a croissant while they drank iced coffee. My plan was to focus on the Mode... and I found several things:

- When we talked with the Mode as the central idea, we did not use confrontatory styles.
- M said she shouted *back* at Jill, that is, Jill began it.
- I grew to understand how things had happened and began to like them.
- They said they may walk away and give up.
- I don't want them to do this - we must be able to resolve our difficulties.
- I am not wedded to the structure, just tired of dealing with it.

- They understand our feelings of resentment, having done all the preliminary work.
- We agreed to talk to the others about Mode in Canberra in January.
- They say they are moderates in the Sydney group.

On return to Canberra I told Jill and Marie C about the meeting but feared they would not suspend their hostility to make the process work. However they did make an appointment to see M and T with me last week.

I drove M and T, and while waiting for Marie, delayed at a high-level meeting, I heard about their families and personal problems. Then Marie and Jill arrived and we went over the old ground, without losing the respectful Mode, although once Marie turned brick red and admitted she felt her blood pressure rising. We on the Board still disagree with the Sydney Association's analysis but we five were able to discuss this calmly. I came away feeling we had to do something about giving more of a democratic impression and M, T and I agreed that we didn't know what would happen but that it was better to talk. Later Marie said that she hadn't given ground, but for me that was not the point. The next Board meeting is to be in February, and we'll see what happens.



CHAPTER 18

MOVING ON

October 1997 Fox Place

I moved to Fox Place after Edna came here from Sydney in her late eighties. She and Pamela took up the offer of self-contained units on Helen P's battle-axe block. Harriet had already established herself in this cul-de-sac and dreamed of a group of friends taking up the houses.

You've shifted Tarlina to Fox Place! snorted Neil.

Two years later I moved from my school to a position in the education bureaucracy.

Home recovering from a feverish cold, I picked up this manuscript. I no longer relish handwriting, now depend on keyboarding. Remembered that time my hand injury compelled me to struggle with creative composition on the typewriter and how slow that was. Now bureaucratic prose flows from my work Pentium and my home PC with the result that my Smith Corona word processor, the successor to Juki Sierra, is now in the cupboard.

Edna wrote on her electric typewriter and, in her mid-eighties on the P & O cruise, developed writer's cramp when she reverted to pen and notebook. Edna died in February this year, at 92. I thought she'd live longer but the previous November she grew listless. She left us a note, found after her death, which began: Not able to work anymore, I prefer to leave.

Two weeks before her death, after she signed her revised will leaving bequests to the NFAW, the Beryl Henderson Foundation, Emily's List and Trade Union Education Foundation, we discussed her funeral plans, a public feminist funeral. She wanted the equal pay song by Glen Tomasetti, Don't Be Too Polite Girls and the old union anthem Solidarity for Ever. She had left a list of classical music along with that farewell note. Liz O recorded the incidental music at the funeral from that list.

Edna had insisted on women funeral attendants, and we found that is not uncommon these days. Liz O, Pamela and I developed some skills in secular feminist funeral arrangements when Paddy died of deep vein thrombosis after returning from the US. We considered painting a pine coffin, as Suzanne did for Raylee's funeral, but settled on draping appropriate banners: the NFAW, WEL, and the ALP. The essentials included: women attendants, sing-a-longs, tributes from feminists as well as family, lots of music.

We booked the Great Hall at the ANU. The family worried about so large a venue, in case few people came, but the media stepped in. The news was on the Ausfem Polnet internet site a few hours after Edna died and email tributes flowed in. ABC radio announced Edna's death at 11am and at 6pm the ABC PM program led with a tribute. Even Neil was impressed. All those media women Edna had inspired showed how powerful their networks had become. Television followed and then she made the front page of the next day's newspapers. Helen P was travelling in Tasmania and, although I had phoned several contacts, could not find her. She saw the news on the front page of the Hobart Mercury.

At the funeral Jen, now a parliamentarian, presided. Edna had been a keen follower of Jen's preselection and election campaigns and we had all attended her first speech in the national parliament. We selected Susan Ryan and Elizabeth Evatt as funeral speakers, with my brother to open. He rejected my demand to see his speech notes.

The Trade Union Choir led the singing. The words of the songs were on the program so people could join in. Remembering the problems Pamela and I had printing up Paddy's funeral program so that it opened like a booklet I had prepared Edna's program on a single sheet printed on white, lilac or green paper. At the top of the sheet near her photograph, I placed Edna's farewell note.

Women gathered at my place the night before. I organised a viewing of Edna's body especially for interstate women. I know it is important, though Helen P walked out of the viewing of Harriet, saying that her spirit was gone, nothing of her left. Helen P didn't come to see Edna. Two carloads went to the viewing but many other women stayed round the house just to be with us.

Next morning Suzanne drove Biff and me to the funeral, picking up the ALP banner on the way. By the time we began the ceremony the Great Hall was packed, standing room only at the back with people spilling out into the foyer and beyond. These included many leading women, along with Labor politicians from national and local parliaments. The WEL banner turned up at the last moment, a new silk one sewn the night before by Julie McLauren Benson. Then Laurie and Liz O'Keefe brought in the banner of Edna's old union, the Municipal Employees.

Liz O managed the sound and the Great Hall provided an impressive backdrop for the banner-draped coffin. People sang loudly to accompany the Trade Union Choir. We had decided that pallbearing was 'boys' work' so, led by Keir, the six grandsons and partners of granddaughters made the long walk down the aisle at the end of the proceedings to the accompaniment of 'Morning' from Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite.

I didn't speak at the Great Hall, deciding it was my place to preside at the Crematorium afterwards where only family and close friends attended. I talked about having a feminist for a mother, pointing out that I knew no other and that my grandchildren thought all this media attention was normal for the passing of a great-grandmother. I recalled that Edna was always campaigning, whether it was for the local swimming pool or the minimum wage for women. I spoke of Edna's extraordinary energy and her capacity for living in the here and now, her friends growing younger as she wore out her own and the next generations. I mentioned her determination to do things properly, right up to the end, including dying properly.

Finally I speculated on the size of the hole Edna would be leaving in our lives; now we were tiptoeing around it, wondering. Goodbye Edna, well done. And some of the listeners echoed, 'Well done, Edna.'

Afterwards there was a big wake at my brother's house, properly done with caterers and fine wine. It was a warm day and the great-grandchildren swam in the backyard pool. All seven of them had been at the Great Hall ceremony. There were people everywhere.

The following week hundreds of people gathered at the Leichhardt Town Hall in Sydney for another memorial ceremony at which Gough Whitlam spoke, followed by Eva and others. None of our immediate family felt up to it, though some cousins attended. Helen P made the special trip and reported in glowing terms.

The tributes kept coming. It seemed for months that we could not open a newspaper or, later, the periodicals, without coming across another obituary. The Sydney branch of the Labour History Society held a special conference in her honour.

This month, my siblings and I met two of Edna's friends under the old bridge, on the Pyrmont side of Darling Harbour to cast her ashes into the water on a Sunday at 8am. Pyrmont Bridge had a special significance in Edna's life: the men in the family worked on the waterfront nearby, she walked across it to Fort St School. Every morning at 3am her mother left her many children and trudged over the bridge to clean offices in Castlereagh St, work for which she received less than half a man's wage. It was this meagre wage, as Jen said at the funeral, that led to Edna's lifelong struggle to achieve pay equity for women.

Next month, on the eve of the now revived sixth Women and Labour Conference, a collection of the internet tributes to Edna will be launched. Susan Ryan put her funeral speech on the internet so the publishers decided to add Jen's and Elizabeth Evatt's contributions. The commemorations keep on. Lyndall is writing a biography.

I still don't know how big that hole is going to be. After the funeral I tried to get a sense of it by going alone to the bush. I camped in Namadgi National Park and walked nineteen kilometres round the Orroral Valley. I washed my feet every time I crossed a stream just as Edna used to do on family bushwalks in my childhood.

But the closest I could get to the loss was numbness. Her departure had become too public an event. I hadn't lost a mother; the nation had lost a hero-feminist.

Last Saturday ACTWEL organised a 25th anniversary dinner and Lyndsay persuaded me to attend with her, on a special trip from Sydney. Many early Women's Liberationists came including Biff, Sara and Eileen, back at last from Latin America. At first I hadn't recognised the white-haired Eileen, whom I had not seen for twenty years, and when she smiled at me I thought she might be a former student. Biff said that of all of us she was the least changed.

Eileen, persuaded to speak about Canberra Women's Liberation before WEL was formed, talked about the Canning St days and the move to Bremer St in the same way I recollect events. She had made the journey from Sydney especially for the dinner.

January 1998 Fox Place

Saw Biff at the Dickson Pool this morning and she asked if I had continued the tradition of meeting with a small group of friends on New Year's Eve to identify the past and coming years with a single word each for ourselves. No, I haven't, but she has, for 21 years.

Spent Christmas by the Great Southern Ocean in South Australia.

I suppose you miss Edna terribly, Susan M said.

Difficult to explain the feeling that the public Edna lives on while I find it hard to believe that she has gone. Sometimes I drive into her laneway on my way home, thinking to visit her. My brother still finds himself winding down the windows of his air-conditioned car, because she insisted on fresh air.

The night before I set out for South Australia, Tarlina women gathered for the annual meeting. We're finally letting go of the property. Pamela led the charge for selling Tarlina. Helen P and I, who resisted such suggestions in the past, now feel it is time. We expect the sale may take some years. Helen P and I will supervise the finances so that it is all wound up properly. I feel little regret. Our lives have shifted

so much since the death of Paddy in 1993 and then Harriet in a car accident in 1994. Tarlina is rarely used, though some of us still stay overnight occasionally, as do my ex-students. And, as Neil says, some of us now have Fox Place.

Daphne, whose retirement to Sydney has not been easy, with the deaths of friends and her own illness, visited me last month. She is a frail 80 years old and spends much time sitting. But her hearing is acute and she likes to chat. In retrospect she has developed a fondness for Canberra which she used to perceive as a place of exile. She hankers after the irretrievable early 1970s.

Pamela gave me Alix Kates Shulman's *Drinking the Rain* for Xmas. I read it quickly, noting that Shulman's women's movement history is similar to mine. She gave up her women's group meetings in the 1980s because she had become addicted to solitude and needed more space in her life. I am moving to this space now with the expiry of my NFAW director's term and my holding back from other involvements.

You can join the Older Women's Network now you are a senior citizen, a member told me but I won't, at least not right now.

This year I am once again planning retirement from the paid workforce. I was to have gone at the end of last year, but took up another position which will run till at least midyear. I hope that writing projects, Edna's kind of 'work', will be the main focus of the next stage of my life.

Jen stays with me when parliament is sitting. I'm appalled by her working hours. She comes in mostly after midnight, then we manage a few words at breakfast before she leaves early next morning. Her children miss her. The youngest, Serge, was hoping she'd lose the election and complains loudly when her schedule is changed for extra parliamentary sittings. She couldn't manage without Ross holding the house while she is in Canberra. Being on the front bench in her early forties, we have a shy hope that she may be our first woman prime minister. Suzanne says the spirits are with her but my runes say it is unknowable at this stage.

April 1998 Fox Place

I began this writing in November 1977, soon after returning from that cycling tour of the UK with Marian. After we celebrated my fortieth birthday on our way to

Llangollen, I wrote the letter to myself to be opened at age fifty. The gist of it was that I wanted to be a writer and would set aside time each week.

This writing began then, but I had to abandon the weekly timeslot because of school demands. It has continued in snatches. There have been long gaps, when I have despaired of the project or made other writing a priority. Now, over twenty years later, I'm nearly finished. I plan to complete the first draft before I retire later this year and then write a second draft. How many writing plans have I made?

As my retirement date approaches, I feel uncertain. Helen P and I went through my finances and decided I would be moderately comfortable. Freedom from wage slavery is within my grasp but I am afraid of the unstructured time stretching ahead. What if I fritter it away? Retired ex-colleagues enjoy mixed existences. Some live busy lives with much socialising while others put themselves forward for the difficult task of relief teaching. Do they need the structure? Long before Tilly was born Harriet dropped out of the paid workforce for a year, and said that unstructured time, and the lure of social interactions in the workplace, drove her back. I'm afraid I may take on too much voluntary work just to structure my days.

Judging from Edna's life I am hoping for twenty years of good health, but I also carry my father's genes, and he died in middle age.

And what about capitalism? This writing began in the fervour of the 60s and 70s, pervaded by talk of revolution. In 1977, I visited China with a school tour and then England, with its Labour government challenged from the Left. But already, I reported to Chesnaux, Thermidor was beginning in China with the fall of the Gang of Four. The 1980s continued the trend. Now, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, finance capitalism dominates our lives. The intersection between socialism and feminism seems irrelevant. Survival in a finance capitalist world is our major concern. A few women have entered the ruling elites, putting aside the feminist ideology which made their rise possible.

These are gloomy thoughts. Yet finance capital needs productive bases, and already in Asia the bottlenecks and weaknesses in production have engendered a financial crisis which now sweeps us up. So what happens when finance capital collapses?

Perhaps we will develop into societies like the successor states to the Soviet Union where the collapse of the system caused the loss of feminist gains so that feminism seemed a luxury?

The destruction of the Western welfare systems denies subsistence to the independent woman-child relationship. I thought the contraceptive pill, along with abortion on demand, provided a technological base to second wave feminism, while equal pay, along with welfare support for the single mother, provided an economic base. I've just heard Barbara Ehrenreich speaking on radio about the thrust from right wing US think tanks which re-stigmatise 'illegitimacy'.

We still have much of our technological support, though the abortion struggle is fierce. The term 'Women's Liberation' implied liberation from servitude to men. We've achieved much raising of consciousness but our economic and technological bases are vulnerable. I'm aware that my superannuation fund may suffer from the Asian financial meltdown.

I remain a social democrat at heart. Democratic processes are still our only hope for sustainable change. Norway seems the main society following social democracy aligned with Keynesian economics, the best hope for women. Norwegian feminists are hosting the International Interdisciplinary Conference on Feminism next year in Tromsø, where Edna's father grew up. Lyndall and I would like to go but it's very expensive.

It's a long time since I've sat down to think about these issues. Perhaps I can organise a small discussion group with women like Suzanne, Biff, Liz O, Pamela and Jen to work ideas through further. On Daphne's last visit several of them came to dinner and we talked about collectives well into the night after Daphne went to bed.

February 1999 Central Coast

Two years since Edna's death and day 17 of my long anticipated retirement. After the first week of euphoria, accompanied by frenetic voluntary work for my professional association (History Teachers) I escaped here, to Lyndall's seaside house. Seven days of near-perfect weather, swimming twice daily and jogging on the beach, have restored me.

I had planned to finish the first draft of this manuscript before retirement but as the day approached, I grew even busier at work. Now the rest of my life opens before me, free from the pressure of income earning and mortgage debt. I'm incredulous, and apprehensive.

Shall I continue to live as I do, in Fox Place and alone, apart from Jen's sojourns when parliament is sitting? A caravan at the coast seems attractive as an occasional retreat. I've ordered a laptop computer to accompany me on any travels.

There are some loose ends to be tied. I wrote recent thoughts on collectives at Tarlina in November 1999.

It's sad to be here. Last night I re-read some of the Tarlina journal. During the night I felt surges of anger and anxiety. I felt the 'ghosts' I often mention in relation to Tarlina, not only Paddy, but my feelings of loss about the death of my collective, which began happening well before she died.

The big house holds together surprisingly well but Miles Franklin, the small house at the back of the courtyard, is semi-derelict and painful to enter.

Last night these distressing feelings kept me awake until I asked for grace, then calm and acceptance came and I slept.

Can I visit Tarlina again?

My devotion to the ideal of collectives has disappeared. Now I value a few friendships and avoid commitments to group process. When I left paid work that signalled the end of groups, apart from occasional NFAW, Beryl Henderson Foundation and Pamela Denoon Trust meetings.

The derelict Tarlina is a metaphor for the collapse of my collective hopes. Being here is painful: has been for nearly ten years.

I do live in a neighbourhood collective, with Pamela and Helen P in Fox Place. We keep in close contact but live separate lives, like my old Beijing courtyard house ideal.

And what about the women's movement? *The Oxford Companion to Australian Feminism*, gingerly retitled *Australian Feminism, A Companion*, was launched late last

year in both Sydney and Canberra. Anne Summers, in the Sydney Morning Herald 16 January 1999, lamented the omissions, as the editors knew feminists would. She also commented that:

... the young feminists of 25 years ago were determined that we were not, like their predecessors, going to be hidden from history yet until now there have been only a couple of, mostly meagre, accounts of second-wave feminism. There's been nothing that captured the energy and the passion of the women's movement and the way it cascaded round this country after 1975...

I hoped to capture that energy and passion back in 1977: what has happened to this account illustrates the fate of such endeavours. We were swamped by the story we were writing even as the movement pounded over that cascade.

I am directly involved with the NFAW precisely because it is my attempt to keep the visibility of women and the light of feminism alive in the century ahead. We have not yet built sufficient funds, though we have maintained the value of Pamela D's original bequest. I still hope for bequests from feminists who feel they have benefited from the Cause.

I remain a member of the Pamela Denoon Trust, which is now contributing to the women's movement by funding Pamela's List, an internet communication between national women's organisations. The Trust now communicates by email and short gatherings at Tilley's.

The Beryl Henderson Foundation continues. Beryl died in Israel in 1990 aged nearly 94. This month I am organising a prize-giving ceremony for the 1998 essay winner, who lives in Sydney. The Foundation is negotiating with the Women's Studies Association to run the essay competition from 2000 onwards.

Suzanne keeps working as an independent artist at Northanger Rd, Mongarlowe. Her beloved dog, Thelma, died in the fullness of time. As did Q'ing, my cat, who fully recovered from her breakdown, especially after Pamela took Sung to live with her. Sung then died from diabetes in middle age.

Biff now lives interstate and continues to write.

Daphne, in her 80s, continues her retirement in a Sydney flat. After a stroke she suffers from short-term memory loss but still manages an independent life

Susan M moved to Adelaide where she continues with her university and research work in Women's Studies.

Pamela is on leave in India again.

We achieved an abortion clinic in Canberra once we moved past the split in our own ranks over the right kind of facility. The clinic is vulnerable to a minority local government desperate to woo favour with anti-abortion independent politicians, so clinic supporters demonstrated in large numbers. The right to free access to abortion was then preserved by a 'compromise' which gives doctors more say than we want, and they have to show pictures of fetuses to hapless women seeking terminations.

I find the current debates such as 'is feminism dead?', 'post feminism' and 'younger versus older feminists' tiresome. Our WL movement began before the term 'feminist' was revived in Australia by WEL and I don't feel the need to be hooked on the word. I see the fruits of our struggles all around me. Although the socialist feminists didn't overthrow capitalism and we are now caught in global finance capitalism, many goals of liberal and radical feminism seem within reach, particularly the six demands of the early 1970s. I am heartened when I read newspaper columnists' attacks on feminism: it shows we still get up their noses.

I hope socialist feminism, along with other socialisms, is regrouping for another battle in the new century. Dialectical materialism says it must. What is the feminist contradiction to global finance capitalism? Internationalists promote struggles for third world women and progressive agencies believe that aid to developing countries is most effective through local women's groups. Optimistically, I send money to Community Aid Abroad to further these schemes.

The young/old debate seems silly to me. I have found the younger women involved in feminist projects just as enthusiastic and committed as we were, and much better at understanding their feminism in the context of contemporary male philosophies.

Edna's doily exhibition perished in a storage fire. I'm glad I retain some of the mental images of the show. An exhibition of Edna's potholders has been mooted but nothing

has transpired. Helen P has a pristine collection, unused in a drawer. Except for the Greenham Common one on display in my kitchen, my potholders sport burn marks. Edna was cross if her potholders were not used.

The problem of working and living with men assumes new forms and doesn't get easier. Recently we Canberra women discovered that one of the men in our close circle had been grooming one of our young daughters for many years, which was revealed once she reached adulthood and could name and understand what had been happening. Right under our noses, in our own households.

February 1999 Fox Place

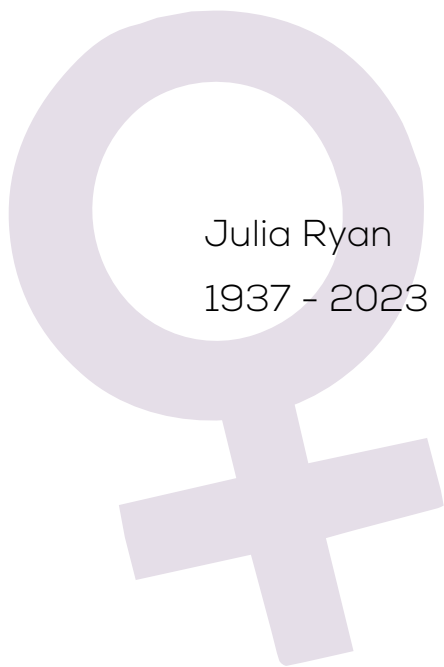
The Beryl Henderson essay prize will be presented by Susan Ryan at her Sydney house this coming Saturday so I shall drive down with Helen P. Tomorrow I attend a working bee for the NFAW Parliament House dinner to be held in late March. Next week I draft a flyer for the Pamela Denoon Trust to be distributed at the Pamela Denoon lecture in March.

Now that I'm retired, I am still immersed in my part of the women's movement, despite intentions to the contrary. Most of my commitments are related to the movement and the social networks which grew from it. I can also see that it is time to rethink our socialist feminism and go on to confront global capitalism. Today the financial experts are claiming that our Australian economy has recovered from the Asian crisis, is booming along with an Asian recovery.

The publication of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Feminism* marks the end our establishment phase. Now we have a tome to say who we are, to consult, to disagree with and react against.

People ask, Was second wave feminism worth the struggle? Absolutely Yes. We had no choice. Once our awareness was heightened and our consciousness raised, we had to change.

And, with all that love and energy, our new lives proved so much more interesting, so much more engaging, than the old.





Julia at her MacPherson St writing desk, 1980s.

GLOSSARY OF PEOPLE'S NAMES

Most of the people mentioned in this manuscript are referred to by their first name or first name and initial only. This guide attempts to identify people by their full names.

In her first draft (long ago) Julia used fictional names but as the document progressed into its current form, she used real names. A few of the earlier fictional names leached through and in some cases were an amalgam of several real characters. We have tried as far as possible to discern the real names in our editing of the text. In a very small number of cases, we have used pseudonyms where we considered it appropriate. Where people's full names appear in the text, such as authors and politicians, they do not have entries in this guide.

There are a small number of people who we have been unable to identify no matter how hard we tried. We apologise unreservedly in these cases and where there are any other instances of name confusion.

Alice	Alys Mackerras	Bron	Bronwyn Jewell
Andrew	Andrew Marlton	Bruce	Bruce McFarlane
Anne	Anne (pseudonym)	Carol	Carol Ambrus
Anne Marie	Anne Marie Jordens	Cathy	Cathy Eatock
Anne S	Anne Summers	Cheryl	Cheryl Hannah
Annie V	Annie Vickers	Chris V	Chris Van Oostrom
Barbara G	Barbara Guthrie	Christine	Christine Fernon
Barbara M	(unknown)	Claire	Claire McGrath
Beryl H	Beryl Henderson	Dale	Dale Baker
Biff	Biff Ward	Daphne	Daphne Gollan
Bluse	Sue Waddell-Wood	Deborah	Deborah McCulloch

Deirdre	Deidre Hunter	Ian H	Ian Hendry
Denise	Denise Bradley	Inez	Inez Brusini
Di E	Di Elliott	Jane	Jane Holden
Di L	Di Lucas	Jane C	Jane Connors
Di M	Di Mumme	Jean	Jean Chesnaux
Di R	Di Riddell	Jean	Jean Devaney
Don	Don (pseudonym)	Jeanette	Jeanette Gammon
Donelle	Donelle Wheeler	Jen	Jenny Macklin
Donna	Speaker on Women & Ecology	Jen	Jenny Shallcross (possibly)
Dorothy	Dorothy Johnson	Jenny	The service teacher
Drusilla	Drusilla Modjeska	Jenny	Jenny Everett
Edna	Edna Ryan	Jenny	Jenny Owen
Eileen	Eileen Haley	Jenny N	Jenny Neary
Eva	Eva Cox	Jessica	Jessica Aan
Frances	Frances Sutherland	Jill M	Jill Matthews
Frances L	(unknown)	Jo A	Jo Aldridge
Gail	Gail Wilenski/Radford	Jo G	Jo Gibson
Genna	Genna Ward	Joy Williams	Speaker at 1987 Socialist Feminist Conference
Ginny	Virginia Ryan		
Harriet	Harriet Michell	Joyce	Joyce Stevens
Hazel	Hazel Steiger	Judy	McKee
Helen P	Helen Prendergast	Keir	Keir McFarlane
Helen R	Helen Robertson	Laurie	Laurie Bebbington
Helen S	Helen Shepherd/Ester	Lesley	Lesley Lynch
Ian	Ian MacDougall	Liese	Liese Baker

Liz O	Liz O'Brien	Nancy	Nancy Nicholson
Lizi B	Lizi Beadman	Neil	Neil McFarlane
Lorna M	Lorna May	Nicki	Nicki Vance
Lorraine	Lorraine Tilley	Noel	Noel Ridgway
Louise	Louise King	Paddy	Paddy Marlton
Lucille	Lucille Atkins	Paddy D	(unknown)
Lyn	Lyn Rainforest	Pam G	Pam Garrard
Lyn H	Lyn Harasimyw	Pamela O	Pamela Oldmeadow
Lyndall	Lyndall Ryan	Patrick	Patrick Ryan
Lyndsay	Lyndsay Connors	Paul	Paul (pseudonym)
Maggie	Maggie Wilson	Pauline	Pauline McDonough
Margaret	Margaret Ryan	Penny	Penny Lockwood
Margaret P	Margaret Power	Penny W	Penny Williams
Margi	Margi Burns	Raylee	Raylee Wilson
Margot	Schnieder / Collette	Rhonda	Rhonda Parkin
Marian	Marian May	Rob	Rob Crowdy
Marie/Marie C	Marie Coleman	Roger	Roger Feltham
Marilyn	Speaker at 1987 Socialist Feminist Conference	Ros	Ros Fraser
Marjorie	Marjorie Golcich	Rose	Speaker at 1987 Socialist Feminist Conference
Martha	Martha Ansara	Rose	Rose Mazza
Mary B	Mary Bennett	Rosemary	Speaker at 1987 Socialist Feminist Conference
Mary F	Cascade (Mary) Leggett	Rosemary P	Rosemary Pringle
Mary S	Mary Sexton	Rosemary R	Rosemary Richards
Mavis	Mavis Robertson		
Merle	Merle Thornton		

Ross	Ross Turner	Tamsin	Tamsin MacDonald
Sara (Dale)	Sara Dowse	Terry	Terry Palmer
Sue Higgins	Sue Sheridan	Thelma	Suzanne's dog
Susan	Susan Ryan	Thelma	Thelma Hunter
Susan M/Susan	Susan Magarey	Tilly	Tilly Michell
Susie	Susie McGrath	Trish	(unknown)
Suzanne	Suzanne Bellamy	Virginia	Virginia Blain
Sybille	Sybille Kovacs		
Sylvia P	Sylvia Passioura		

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

2XX	A community radio station in Canberra
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACS	Abortion Counselling Service
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTWEL	ACT Women's Electoral Lobby
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANU	Australian National University
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CWL	Canberra Women's Liberation
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
IWD	International Women's Day
IWY	International Women's Year
MHR	Member of the House of Representatives
MP	Member of Parliament
NFAW	National Foundation for Australian Women
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NLA	National Library of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PC	Personal Computer

PE	Physical Education
PEP	Participation and Equity Program
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PM	Prime Minister
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RSI	Repetitive Strain Injury
RSL	Returned and Services League
SA	South Australia
SWOW	School Without Walls. A public alternative school in Canberra, which operated from 1974 to 1997.
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
U3A	University of the Third Age
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VD	Venereal Disease
VIEW	Voice, Interests and Education of Women
WEL	Women's Electoral Lobby
WIDF	Women's International Democratic Federation
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WISNET	Women in Science Enquiry Network
WL	Women's Liberation
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As editor of this book, I am deeply honoured that Julia entrusted me with the process of bringing her words into book form.

I could not have done it without 'the book group'. The collective consisted of her sister Lyndall Ryan, the historian, to whom she was very close; her daily companion-friend of many decades, Pamela Oldmeadow; IT expert, former student and friend, Graham Anderson; her onetime housemate, and co-conspirator in endless political analyses, Liz O'Brien; her friend and colleague of over forty years, Rob Crowdy; and myself, close friend from 1967 to the present, with a period of estrangement in the middle of those years. Our zoom meetings, our discussions, the ease of our decision-making have all been a delight – a truly collective operation. Given that collectivity and its methods was the central precept of Women's Liberation for Julia, she would have been immensely gratified that a collective formed to continue her work after she died.

We have endeavoured always to honour Julia's words at the same time as making the book accessible to as many readers as possible.

In completing the manuscript, we have used the services of professionals. The wonderful Lu Sexton who knew Julia slightly and whose mother is named in the book, did the proof-reading and some fact-checking. The indefatigable Fiona Edge of Canberra's Inner North who, miraculously, did not know Julia, worked as our graphic designer and book-preparer. She went beyond any reasonable expectations in wrangling photographs, explaining arcane publishing practices, creating the wonderful cover and caring deeply about the finished product. She was also unfailingly cheerful, patient and professional – a true gem.

Thanks also to Sybille Kovacs, Marian May, Genna Ward, Lyn Rainforest, Di Lucas and Susan Magarey who helped variously with reading, provision of photos and in other ways. Also, thanks to Julia's marvellous sons, Keir and Neil McFarlane, who underwrote the production of this book.

Finally, on behalf of Julia, I thank the hundreds – and thousands and millions – of women who were and are part of the movement for the liberation of women. Together we have made the world a better place – and together we continue to strive towards the end of sexism in all its manifestations.

Biff Ward, Editor

Canberra, March 2024.

BACKGROUND

Women's Liberation began in Australia with small groups of women in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. It spread like a grassfire fanned by the strong wind of women speaking their truth into power. In Canberra, Julia was one of eight women who first met in June 1970. From the beginning, Julia kept detailed notes of meetings and events, even specific conversations. She was a historian and perceived that history was being made.

Based on these records, and augmented by her own searching and insightful analyses, this book charts the rise of the global feminist movement through the lens of one woman's involvement in the microcosm of the Canberra Women's Liberation group and the sub-groups she was involved in.

From this position 'inside the movement', Julia brings her unique perspective on the power of the movement to change lives utterly. She was especially affected by 'the Mode', the Women's Liberation method of determining policy and action – collectivism. For her, it was an experience of 'living the revolution'.

Part-memoir, part social history, *Julia @ Women's Liberation* explores a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, the place and nature of Women's Liberation within the wider women's movement.

While her account ends in the 90's, it indicates the creation of language and insights that paved the way for the ongoing feminist activism of today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Ryan BA Dip Ed was born in Sydney in 1937, the first daughter and middle child of labour movement activists, Edna and Jack Ryan. She wrote her first poem at the age of six, completed her first novel at eleven and from that time kept a diary that continued for the rest of her life. An activist in student politics at Sydney University, in 1958 she married economist Bruce McFarlane and bore two sons, Keir and Neil.

In 1963, the family moved to Canberra where Julia resumed her career as a secondary school teacher and union activist and over the next thirty years, became one of the best-known activists in the ACT.

A founding member of Canberra Women's Liberation in 1970, Julia's memoir records the excitement, energy and exhaustion that fulltime engagement in a revolutionary movement brings. When Julia died in May 2023, she was hailed as Canberra's senior feminist of the era.





Deftly crafted, astutely written and piercingly honest, **Julia @ Women's Liberation** is a compelling read. Like a time-capsule, this layered memoir is a must-read for anyone interested in the Women's Liberation movement within the sweeping history of second-wave feminism. From inside the movement, Julia traces how it formed in Australia and what happened for one activist over the first twenty-five years from an up-close, deeply reflective and personal perspective.

The Women's Liberation movement was not just a political project, but a searching examination of intimate life: to devise new ways of thinking and living. Julia Ryan's deeply reflective memoir is an engrossing account of her attempt to remake her world, and the deep and complex relationships she made along the way as a member of Canberra Women's Liberation.

Michelle Arrow, author of *Women and Whitlam*.
Revisiting the revolution.

A journey deep into the heart of a radical movement propelled by unprecedented feminist energy and intellect. Julia's exceptional gift of observation and naked truth telling shines a light on the Canberra Women's Liberation Movement in all its glorious, messy magnificence. An utterly captivating story of a revolution with no end. These trailblazing women lived it every single day. And still do!

This is an historical account like no other. The underbelly of doubt and the raw challenge of personal conflict and change are all laid bare, alongside meticulous attention to the development of feminist theory. This book is testament to the formidable power of sisterhood.

Virginia Haussegger AM



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