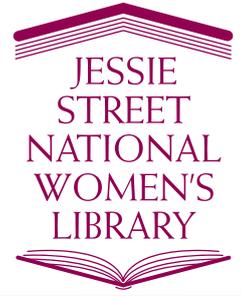


NEWSLETTER

To keep women's words. women's works, alive and powerful —Ursula LeGuin



EMPOWER INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Professor Larissa Behrendt's address to the 2012 Annual Luncheon emphasised the point that women are the main change agents in cohesive Aboriginal communities. Professor of Law at Sydney's University of Technology and Director of the UTS Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, she expressly spoke to the many schoolgirls present, praising Jessie Street as a marvellous role model. Contrasting their opportunities with the persistence of Aboriginal disadvantage — despite generations of professed white determination to wipe it out — she shared her reflections on attacking this problem.

Professor Behrendt used a 2009 Jumbunna pilot study of Aboriginal communities, and especially Wilcannia and Menindie in western New South Wales, as evidence for her argument. Wilcannia's much higher crime rates than Menindie's conform with the towns' images: one the 'basket case', labelled dysfunctional, the other the successful, achieving community. School attendance, for example, illustrates the divide. In Wilcannia, the high level of truancy gets the response, 'Why bother? It's no use. We don't get any help from the Parents and Citizens Association or the principal. There's never been an Aboriginal principal'. All is despondency; nothing works. Whereas in Menindie, if children are absent, Auntie Beryl or Auntie Pat gets on a bus, goes down to the local waterhole and brings them back to school. In other words, the community makes it work, with or without a government program. Menindie actually questioned why the school shed offered them under the recent federal Building the Education Revolution program should be accepted. An empowered community, they declared, 'government should work with what we want'.

In Australia, Indigenous affairs management always seems to be in crisis: knee-jerk reactions, no consideration of which policies and programs work. Wilcannia showed how knee-jerk response (short term programs, duplicated services, funding running out, people withdrawn) is more disruptive than doing nothing. Menindie fared better because as a healthy community (thus under the radar) it escaped short term fixes.

Problem child Wilcannia, on the other hand, had community services duplicated and defeatism reigned.

The research has shown what leads to improved outcomes. And it's not rocket science. Firstly, Aboriginal people must

be involved in policy and the rollout of services. 'One size fits all' does not work. Secondly, innovative ideas come from involving the community to find solutions, for example how to have kids staying in school. Often the view taken is that truancy reflects poor parenting, but research shows this is not true. Significant contributing factors are curriculum, health issues like ear infections, a school culture without warmth, too few teachers and inadequate classrooms. Solutions include bilingual education, parental and 'safe person' involvement, reading in the first language, breakfast and lunch programs and partnerships between the school and the community. Regarding one issue very controversial in relation to intervention in the Northern Territory, that of 'dry' communities,

it is clear that those already 'dry' show the effectiveness of alcohol control measures; the reverse with no community 'buy in'.

The capacity for community 'buy in' is critically important. It is governed by the presence of Auntie Beryls and Pats, so prominent in Menindie but not in Wilcannia. Building this capacity is best done with women, but always respecting individual community culture. The large Aboriginal community in Redfern, Sydney, historically dysfunctional, has recently produced good results, with men being elected but empowered women keeping them accountable. Education at all levels is transformative, but the difficulties in delivering it at tertiary level to the whole Aboriginal community is apparent in Australia's largest Aboriginal community — western Sydney. Despite 'Close the Gap' policies, the Aboriginal student cohort is much older than the general student population, in their mid-30s, with 75% women. For higher degrees, women make up 90% despite often being carers as well.

Overall, it is women who see education as an agent of change for their families and the community. And change agents in a cohesive community, almost always women, are few. We should do as much as possible to empower them.



The Hon Elizabeth Evatt AO and Professor Larissa Behrendt

Christmas Closure

The Library will close on Friday 14 Dec 2012, reopening Monday 14 Jan 2013. Our best wishes for the festive season.

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Jessie Street National Women's Library

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

Aims

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

Patrons

Elizabeth Evatt AC; Sir Laurence Street AC KCMG;
Dr Evelyn Scott AO; Clover Moore Lord Mayor of Sydney

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Kris Clarke and Margot Simington, Co-editors
Katharine Stevenson, graphic design advice

Capital Investment Fund

Since its launch in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has now reached approximately \$95,500. Our target is \$500,000, the interest from which will provide essential support for Library operations. If you would like to contribute, please indicate on the membership/renewal/donation form on page 11.

CIF donations since July 2012:

Sophie Cotsis Barbara Henery

General Donations since July 2012

Donations of money help meet day-to-day running costs:

E Cohen	M Duckworth	E Fitzgerald
M Ginswick	M Keay	P Kendall
M Knowlden	M McCrae	C Moncur
F Ratcliffe		

Donations of material expand our collection:

D Dengate	M Knowlden	P McGrath
S Peries	J Roberts	M Sawyer
S Wills	Allen & Unwin	Big Sky Publishing
Penguin Group	Simon & Schuster	Text Publishing

Annual Luncheon 2012: Raffle

The Library expresses its warm appreciation to the individuals and organisations who so generously donated prizes. Students from the 16 schools attending the Luncheon drew raffle tickets: Abbotsleigh, Campbelltown High, Canterbury Girls High, Cheltenham Girls High, The Forest High, Meriden, Methodist Ladies College, Mosman High, Northmead High, Queenwood, Randwick Girls High, Riverside Girls High, St Vincents College, Strathfield Girls High, Sydney Girls High and Wenona. Congratulations to the winners!

1st Prize: Jennifer Furness – Ticket No. 1887 Two nights for two at The Observatory Hotel, Sydney. Value: \$1000

2nd Prize: Ann Gorman – Ticket No. 2346 Accommodation for two at The Mantra Resort, Ettalong NSW. Value: \$500

3rd Prize: Robin Porter – Ticket No. 0166 David Jones Voucher, donated by Marie Muir. Value: \$200

4th Prize: Kate Reid – Ticket No. 0495 High Tea for Two at the Sofitel Wentworth Sydney. Value: \$118

5th Prize: Bernice Lee – Ticket No. 1053 ABC gift voucher, donated by Gail Hewison. Value: \$100

6th Prize: Helen Westwood MLC – Ticket No. 1578 Middle Harbour Coffee Cruise, Captain Cook Cruises, Sydney. Value: \$98

7th – 10th prizes: Two bottles of wine each, produced by Mt View High School, Cessnock, donated by the NSW Teachers Federation:

Neal Read – Ticket No. 2124

Kay Clark – Ticket No. 0345

Matilda Piprath – Ticket No. 1298

Ruth Shatford – Ticket No. 1215

Kay Clark, who now lives in Western Australia, was thrilled to win 8th prize but unable to collect it. She was quite happy to donate the prize to the volunteers at Jessie Street Library. Kay received the ticket from her daughter, a Jessie Street member, Vanessa Varis, who lives in Houston, Texas with her Australian husband. Vanessa was working at a Houston art gallery until her

first baby was born on 8 June. She lived in Sydney some time ago and has always remained a member of the Library.



A warm welcome to our new members:

Linda Burney MP	June Edmunds
Deirdre Freyberg	Vivi Germanos-Koutsounadis
Hazel Hogarth	Christine Jennett
Jill McGillivray	Lynley McGrath
Catherine Moncur	Gwen Nicholls
Ngaire O'Connell	The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Fiona Ratcliffe	Roslyn Slattery
Janice Tamba	Mary Turner

Launched: Chinese Australian Women's Stories

The Hon. Tanya Plibersek, the federal Member for Sydney and Minister for Health, launched *Chinese Australian Women's Stories* at a festive dinner in Sydney on 25 October. The dignitaries included state Member for Parramatta, Dr Geoff Lee and Deputy Mayor of the City of Sydney, Robyn Kemmis. Several Library members attended the event.

Minister Plibersek praised the resilience of the women whose stories appear in the book. She commented on recurring themes: having to take on responsibility early in life – in parents' businesses, caring for siblings, interpreting; of joyful public service; of fierce tough women as role models for their children; the importance of education and teachers. She paid special tribute to storyteller Daphne Lowe Kelly for her many leadership roles including development of the book.

The Chair of the Board of Jessie Street National Women's Library, Jozefa Sobski, congratulated the editorial committee for bringing the joint Library and Chinese Heritage Association of Australia project to fruition. The project, originated by Emeritus Professor Sybil Jack and CHAA's Emeritus Professor Henry Chan, was many years in the making, and interrupted by Henry's unexpected death. Jozefa said the women storytellers



Tanya Plibersek MP (l) and Sybil Jack

demonstrated great generosity in sharing their lives – so full of entrepreneurial spirit, hardwork, determination to succeed, desire to maintain their Chinese language or learn it, and the drive to honour forebears in promoting their cultural heritage to family and friends. She noted the very



The eight storytellers and Sybil. Photo by Michael Quan

story titles: *Modern China Café*, *A Richly Embroidered Tapestry of Life*, *A Great Life*, *My Joyride*, *No Regrets*, *My Story*, *A Life of Community Service* and *The 'Chinese Hurricane'*. The different lives depicted show many common themes. Most of the women went into business; many became mature age students (university, TAFE); family loyalty was strong; dealing with experience of hardship, sadness and disappointment was always practical, the outlook always positive.

Jozefa spoke of her own experience of racism as a child growing up in a migrant hostel. She noted that the storytellers also experienced racism but never permitted it to taint their life or sour their attitudes to the country they had embraced. Pride in their Chinese heritage gave them strength and resilience in dealing with the consequences of hurt. The stories recount how the women prospered, satisfying their need to be highly educated, to succeed in fulfilling work, to diversify by seizing opportunities, to serve their community selflessly and with purpose. This pioneering work, she said, may be the first in a series of publications about immigrant women's lives.

Sybil Jack, Chair of the editorial committee gave heartfelt thanks to her committee which she said did most of the work with such skill and a wonderfully cooperative spirit – the Library's Michelle Cavanagh, and CHAA's Kathie Blunt, Daphne Lowe Kelly and especially Karla Whitmore who worked tirelessly to see the stories through to publication with all the last minute crises. Daphne also organised the excellent dinner and the speakers for the launch of this book which Sybil in conclusion described as a 'an excellent and brilliant presentation'.

Jozefa Sobski

LUNCH HOUR TALKS – third Thursday of the month

15 November – Judy Turner *Grandparents and grandchildren*

Judy Turner and her husband Geoff, mid-60s and married for 42 years, suddenly found they needed to take over care of their five year old granddaughter whom they'd met only once before. Drawing on her book, *Grand Love* (2011), Judy will discuss the challenges and rewards of bringing up the next generation.

21 February – Pamela Bradley *The Blood, Sweat and Tears of Writing Memoirs*

Pamela Bradley's controversial *Nefertiti Street* (2010) examined themes of the strength needed to follow your inner voice to lead a life independent of the opinions of others. Pam will talk about her forthcoming book, also biographical, and the risk taking and courage needed to write such personal histories.

21 March – Dr Jan Roberts *Maybanke Anderson: A Woman for all Times*

Dr Jan Roberts, historian and publisher, has uncovered the many layers of Maybanke's long, complex life. On 13 November 2011, the Maybanke Fund of the Sydney Community Foundation was launched, focused on reducing social inequality in Sydney, honouring the work of Maybanke Anderson.

18 April – Robin de Crespigny *The People Smuggler: The True Story of Ali Jenabi*

Robin speaks from the Iraqi refugees' point of view and tells the story of Ali Jenabi, a 'unique individual ... with high moral standards and a great sense of humour', following his remarkable and horrifying journey in bringing his family and 500 other Iraqis to safety.

Venue/Time: 12.00-1.30pm. Southern Function Room, 4th Floor, Town Hall House, 456 Kent Street Sydney.

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

CREATING OZHARVEST

Ronni Kahn, Australia's Local Hero in 2010 and proud founder of OzHarvest, was born in South Africa during the Apartheid era. After working as a florist and later in her own business organising corporate events, she found a way to use her skills and make a difference by starting up an organisation that collects leftover food and delivers it to those in need.

'Eat your food, because there's someone starving, somewhere.' This I've discovered is a universal truth. Although I came from a very ordinary family there were a couple of special things in my upbringing. One, in South Africa in the 50s and 60s, my family taught me the value of equality and social justice. I'm also Jewish and one of the tenets of the Jewish religion is to 'Repair the world – tikkun olam'. When I finished school I went to live in Israel, spending ten years on a kibbutz, where everybody is equal, working according to ability and receiving according to need. I realised after ten years that I couldn't give the max to that lifestyle, but I don't regret one minute of living there.

When we left the kibbutz with our two children we had qualifications but not jobs. Quite by chance, I was given the opportunity to work in my sister's florist shop. I'd never touched a flower and I'd never been in business, but it turned out to be a wonderful medium for me, being creative, dealing with people and building a successful florist business. After many years an opportunity arose to leave Israel and join members of my family who had by then come to live in Australia. I migrated to Australia in 1988, without much money but lots of energy and a desire to succeed and took the first job I could get using my previous experience in a flower shop.

What I didn't know was that there were festivals in Australia that we didn't celebrate in Israel. Starting the job at the beginning of February, I was fired on 15 February because all they wanted was extra hands for Valentine's Day. But I did end up owning three florist shops and then I established my own business as an events producer, starting out from my garage. One day I got a phone call asking if I would tender for the opening of the Star City Casino. Winning the tender took my business to a completely different level, producing both corporate and private events.

One of the things common to all my events was providing quality food. When we celebrate something special it generally revolves around food, a beautiful way to share and show generosity. I provided abundant food and noticed abundant food left over. So when I could, I took the food to a charitable organisation. There could be 300 men of various ages sitting on the sidewalk, waiting to go in and it was quite a confronting place to visit late at night to drop off food. I reached a point eight years ago when I thought I could do something significant and meaningful in my life. The trigger

for action was a visit to South Africa where I caught up with a close friend, a woman now in her eighties – an extraordinary change maker, activist and fighter against Apartheid. She was responsible for getting electricity into Soweto. I wondered what it must feel like to know that you have had a significant impact on over a million people. I knew that I wanted to feel that and I knew that my life would never be the same again: I would come back to Australia to start the food rescue organisation I had been thinking about.

I realised that I could set up a professional way of rescuing food and delivering it to people in need. By chance I discovered a food rescue organisation in the USA, so I went over to check out how and what they were doing.

I thought it would take a month to set up. It took a year, and in November 2004 I raised enough money to buy our first vehicle, hire a driver, and pick up our first food collection. In that first month we collected the equivalent of 13,000 meals and delivered them to eight different organisations. In May 2012 our organisation delivered 380,000 meals to 450 different organisations across Australia.

We have 14 vehicles (with four more ordered), on the road rescuing food in Sydney, Newcastle, Adelaide, Brisbane and soon in Victoria. Our concern about liability for serving unsafe food meant that we lobbied to have the *Civil Liabilities Amendment Act* passed in Parliament in 2005 which allowed good food to be given away free without fear of liability (also passed in the ACT in 2008, Queensland and South Australia 2009),

thus opening the way for major organisations to give away their food. We have collections from Town Hall, Government House, Woolworths, Aldi and the MasterChef kitchens.

It isn't just about nutrition or providing variety. It's not just about reaching people who would never have an opportunity to have the kind of food that some of us take for granted. The work that we do is also about education, dignity, sharing, caring and community. When we deliver food to an organisation and they know when we're coming, they don't have to provide food for their people that day. They can redirect that day's food budget to other projects. It costs OzHarvest less than a dollar to deliver a meal. It costs an agency the equivalent of three to six dollars to provide a meal. The other impact is on the environment, saving over four million kilos of food from going to landfill. Every time we save a kilo of food, we save 143 kilos of water and two kilos of methane gas emissions from polluting the environment.

We have the support of a wonderful volunteer program. We raise money to pay the drivers, providing employment for people. In seven years we have created a brand not usually associated with a charity. We are rolling out nutrition education programs, teaching people how to eat better and buy better.

Continued on page 11



THE SIX SEASONS OF SYDNEY

Her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, storytellers, passed on knowledge to Frances, now a senior knowledgeholder in the D'harawal Community of the Bidjigal People of Sydney's environs. A botanist with a doctorate in indigenous medicinal plants, Frances compiled Encyclopaedia Botanica (1986) covering over 11,000 Australian native and exotic plants. She is now Indigenous Education Officer at Mount Annan Australian Botanic Garden west of Sydney.

Aboriginal people recognise an annual climate cycle of not four but six seasons and larger cycles of 12 to 20,000 years, each having stories told in *D'harawal Seasons and climatic cycles** with Lorraine Robertson's beautiful watercolour illustrations. Our annual seasons begin not on a precise date but when specific activity of certain animals and plants occurs. Now it's Burrugin, the echidna season when females scuttle through woodlands. I love sitting under a full moon, watching males lining up behind a female and running, about ten of them jostling each other out of the way; finally, after running almost the whole night, she mates with the one male left. Also in Burrugin, the forest Red Gum flowers. We collect its nectar in a 'burl' (a sliced-off bump of eucalypt upended on a termite nest for hollowing out), ready for ceremonies in October. Termites, reputedly nasty, are the echidna's main food. Mounds, up to 100 metres deep, are always within 100 metres of ground-level water used to air-condition nests at 30C internally. Our people, lost and cold, would scrape off the outer layer of a termite nest and curl around it – early white accounts record surprise when Aboriginals burst up through snow. Nest warmth incubates reptile eggs laid in nest walls, and termites keep nests clean by feeding hatchlings dead termites – remarkable symbiosis. Termites eat dead wood of a few native tree species, but dislike others which therefore are more suited to housing than the exotics like pine that termites love. Why don't we use termite air-conditioning 'technology' as does one Saudi Arabian building?

Following Burrugin it is the time of Wiritjiribin, the lyre bird. Known as a mimic, it 'speaks' all languages, even rifle shots, cameras, chainsaws. When I first met my husband, I owned 30 acres of heaven west of Sydney. We were picnicking there when a chainsaw started up. My husband angrily chased 'that fellow with the chainsaw' around the whole property: the lyre bird was welcoming him! The Wiritjiribin partnership is with Boo'gul, the marsupial mouse Antechinus: males chase females and after mating die from exhaustion.

The next season is Ngoonungi, the time of the Grey-Headed flying fox. Civilisation gives creatures nasty names because we want to get rid of them: the flying fox, hated especially in Sydney Botanic Gardens (it damages trees), is often confused with bats; both bats and foxes have unpleasant associations. The flying fox, really a flying possum, has two roles marking changes of climate and sea levels: 'guardians' stay in the roost to pollinate flowers, giving us fruit; 'travellers' migrate slowly south over thousands of years while sea levels rise, but gradually roost northwards as sea levels fall. The Gadigal people ('gadi': from below, 'gal': people) lived in valleys now under Sydney Harbour; when sea levels rose, they moved to where Sydney now is, returning when sea levels fell. Also in Ngoonungi, the waratah blooms. This 'mother of warriors' hears our troubles and sends messages to creative

spirits. Legend has it that warrior spirit enters the baby of a pregnant mother standing beside a waratah as the pod breaks open, that children doing poorly given waratah nectar become healthy and grow into warriors. Waratah sap heals burns, and baskets woven from dried stems don't burn when carrying fire.

During Parra'dowee, Parra eels

swim down creeks out to sea to spawn (in the Coral Sea). At university I pieced together the ecology: sharks arrive in Sydney Harbour to feed on eels, at the same time shedding four-year-old sucker fish (lampreys) which continue into river headwaters to spawn, where 13-year-old eels eat dying sucker fish, then tear down the rivers through sharks to the ocean. Acacia binervia blooms at this time indicating river fish running. The time of Burrugin, the Eastern Grey kangaroo, roughly January-February, is hot and dry but violent storms blow up quickly making it unwise to camp near creeks or canoe in shallow Botany Bay. Also, you do not eat kangaroo meat: firstly, it's mating season for the Eastern Grey which if upset does not 'perform' so hunting would endanger future food supply; secondly, without refrigeration carcasses go off quickly, wasting food. Acacia implexa flowers during Parra'dowee showing snapper running in Botany Bay; other plants indicate different fish elsewhere. The sixth season, Bana'marraiyung, usually begins around Easter. Mating quolls, Marra'gang, scream, making a terrible racket, and ripe lilly pillly fruit fall heralding cold weather. Your own gardens show seasonal signs. When big ants leave the nest, massive bushfires are coming. When meat ants (which build mounds) put black stones on the nest, bad, cold weather is coming; white stones mean fire coming, pale stones – hot weather. Sugar ants build walls around their hole: the higher, the heavier the rain.

We managed land using the Mudong cycle. Related to the solar flares cycle, it runs 11 to 12 years having eight seasons of the intense droughts and floods we've just experienced. If farmers used the Mudong (not an annual) cycle, drought and flood planning would be improved. A personal Mudong cycle enables you if dissatisfied with the preceding 12 years to change your name and ways. I have three names: child, teenage, married. My husband's forebear, Bundle, having six names appears as six different people in white history – useful given blanket issue by name: six blankets! Bundle, aged 11 in 1788, had just lost his mother to a shark when Governor Arthur Phillip, took him under his wing. One of Phillip's captains trained Bundle who was the first Aboriginal to sail and later guided early explorers – Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth, Hume and Hovell, and colonial magistrate, Throsby – yet was not allowed to keep property Hume and Throsby gave him. My mum talked





The Library's 18th Annual Luncheon was one of our most successful ever. There were more bookings than we could take, even though we squeezed in a few over the Parliament House limit of 300. There were girls from 16 secondary schools, helping to ensure the continuation of the Library's work and of Jessie Street's feminist message into the younger generation. Professor Larissa Behrendt's address (see page 1) was moving and passionate, and its research focus reinforced her key message about the importance of Aboriginal women in their communities.

Sydney University student Julia Readett was MC for the luncheon, bringing a younger face and a fresh approach to the role. She acknowledged the traditional owners of the land, and welcomed the guest speaker, the Members of the Legislative Council who were present, other important guests and the girls and teachers from 16 schools. She noted with sadness the passing of Joan Bielski AO, long-time Library supporter and feminist activist, and thanked Joan's brother Frank Ward for his presence, adding that all are welcome to attend Joan's memorial service in the Parliament on 28 November.

In 2012, she said, the Library has polished its image with a modified logo, new publicity material and revamped *Newsletter*. A promotional DVD featuring a message from Governor-General Quentin Bryce AC CVO, a former chair of



18th ANNUAL LUNCHEON

the Library, is a tribute to the film-maker Bronwyn Thorncraft and girls from Riverside Girls High, Sydney.

Julia recalled Virginia Woolf writing in 1938: 'you have a library, and a good one. A working library, a living library; a library where nothing is chained down and nothing is locked up; a library where the songs of the singers rise naturally from the lives of the lovers'. Recognising this comment related to male-dominated libraries, Julia affirmed that in 2012 it could comfortably describe Jessie Street National Women's Library. 'An invaluable national resource, it holds stunning copies of Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Miles Franklin, and also an extensive collection of books on women's history, sociology, sexuality, and psychology and other disciplines. It is essential to educate ourselves on women's history. Men and women alike must understand the history of women's oppression and struggle, as well as recognise women's contributions in other fields – science, education, literature. An English/History major, aspiring teacher and a woman, I hope to live in a society offering women's history and gender studies at both primary and high school levels.'

The report on the Library, its collections and its activities during the past year was given by Beverley Sodbinow, archivist and Board member. She reminded us that the idea of an Australian women's library, first mooted in 1989 during centenary celebrations of Jessie Street's birth, materialised that same year. The Library's name honours Jessie Street as a feminist, internationalist and peace activist who worked tirelessly to improve women's condition and status.





LUNCHEON 2012

The Library's book collection – non-fiction and fiction focussing on Australian women writers – is acquired through donations by individuals, organisations and publishers. Sometimes when a women's organisation closes we receive part or entire libraries, as we did recently with rare legal reports relating to women. Another 200 posters have been added this year to the Library's superb collection. Accessibility of the posters has been improved through digitisation of most of them, cataloguing and work on a copyright and access policy.

Completion of the time-consuming work of cataloguing and enabling on-line access to the listings of over 200 separate archive collections is now in sight. In 2012 accessions ranged from a 1972 International Women's Day banner retrieved from a rubbish bin and lovingly stored by Beverley Kingston to seven boxes of papers from the Older Women's Network Canberra branch. Val Wakefield donated papers, tapes, posters, newsletters, minute books and ephemera from the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, and we have recently done an oral history interview with Megan Rutledge to add to this collection. The serials collection, dating from 1944 and mainly comprising publications by associations, includes material held by no other library. It includes *The Australian Women's Digest*, set up by Jessie Street as 'an open forum for the expression of opinion on matters of interest to women and the community'. The current review of our serials is identifying some of the rare material for featuring on our website.

As a women's cultural and research centre, the Library continued its stimulating monthly Lunch Hour Talks program. We welcome specialist researchers and school group visits – students can significantly enhance their work through browsing our rare material. In May, because of its iconic status, the Library was the venue for a federal government initiative: over 60 invited representatives of leading women's organisations heard the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Julie Collins MP, launch the *Women's Statement 2012 – Achievements and Budget Measures*. The statement highlights federal budget areas of special interest to women, with strong focus on women's workforce participation and economic security. In September, the Library contributed to the designated theme of NSW History Week: 'Threads'. A talk by Board member, Associate Professor (rtd) Beverley Kingston

Clockwise from main: Julia Readett and students; Larissa Behrendt (r) and her mother, Raema Behrendt; Lyn Eggins and students on the podium; Maryellen Galbally (l) and Dr Lesley Johnson AM; Beverley Sodbinow; Riverside Girls High School table; Lenore Coltheart (l) and Katharine Stevenson; Students, teachers and other guests

on 'Feminism and Fashion', together with an exhibition of clothing, patterns and books, highlighted interaction between fashion and feminism over the decades.

The precious resource without which the Library would be unable to function – our volunteers – this year saw an influx of trained librarians and two women with expertise in promotions and publicity. You will have noticed changed formats and colour – in the *Newsletter*, on the website and in other publicity material. Notably, the promotional DVD mentioned by Julia Readett, and available at the Library, encapsulates our work and focus in eight entertaining minutes.



Concluding the Library's 18th Luncheon, Julia Readett thanked everyone for coming and making the Luncheon such an enjoyable event, and also thanked those who had bought raffle tickets in advance and on the day. The Library could not exist without the generosity of our members and supporters. She particularly thanked Michele Ginswick and Lyn Eggins and all the other volunteers who had worked so tirelessly.



BRAVE WOMEN OF EAST TIMOR

The Timor activism of Jude Conway, daughter of former life-long Newcastle NSW activist Josephine Conway, began in 1991, growing into wholehearted commitment firstly to the achievement of East Timor's independence in 2002 and then to the country's future. Graphic experiences and personal fears fed her realisation that within patriarchal Timorese society the voices of strong women could help build a nation.

My involvement with East Timor began when as a sole parent in Newcastle, inspired by Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980), I dreamt of escape. In mid-1991 I took leave from my son (nearly 22) and my job, drove northwest, arrived in the Northern Territory, found Darwin and stayed. In November news came of a massacre in East Timor, ruled by Indonesia since invasion in 1975. Some pro-Timor activists (several thousand Timorese escaped to Darwin in 1975) invited me to a protest rally. I joined other volunteers lying on the ground to represent the dead; a Timorese woman sang a funeral dirge; we marched to the Indonesian Consulate. I turned activist overnight and with others founded Australians For a Free East Timor.

I didn't visit East Timor until 1995, fearing military atrocities and deportation. With a friend I flew to West Timor (Indonesia). Foreigners weren't allowed into East Timor. But eventually we caught a bus which wound along narrow roads perched on steep cliffs, relieved to make Dili by dusk but disconcerted that there were lots of Indonesian soldiers driving past in open-backed trucks, guns pointed outwards. No Timorese went out after dark. Our losmen (inn) had to report to Indonesian Intelligence on foreigners. So a meeting for passing over the money and medicines I'd brought for the resistance had to be at night with lookouts and guard dogs. I was paranoid. Once, I thought the contact was driving so badly the aim was to kill me. But the people he drove me to see had been glued to shortwave radio reporting on an AFFET protest.

On return to Darwin I became more active, running AFFET's headquarters in a Darwin house, and in 1997 beginning three intense years as officer manager for Darwin's East Timor International Support Centre established by Ceu Lopes Federer and husband Juan. ETISC project work took me to East and West Timor, Bali, Java and Thailand. An ETISC skills development project involved six months battling Australian red tape (Australia opposed independence) to bring over six Timorese activists selected by Xenana Gusmao, East Timor's independence leader imprisoned in Jakarta. The one woman trainee, charismatic Laura Soares Abrantes, could sing and talk passionately, evoking the horror of occupation. Working in ETISC, I realised most people knew of Gusmao, diplomat Jose Ramos-Horta, Bishop Belo and Gusmao's Australian wife Kirsty Sword-Gusmao, but many impressive Timorese women were unknown in Australia. I decided to interview Ceu Lopes Federer for ETISC's website. Further,



I would collect other women's stories, a campaign tool for the period of greater freedom engendered by Indonesia's President B. J. Habibie, and Ramos-Horta's personal link with UN head, Kofi Annan.

My project evolved slowly. I compiled *Indonesia's Death Squads: Getting Away with Murder* about militia atrocities, and contributed to another similar collection by an activist friend, titled *Buibere: Voice of Timorese Women*, editor Rebecca Winters (pseudonym), both published by ETISC in 1999. My *Step by Step Women of East Timor, Stories of Resistance and Survival* (2010)* includes much about the horror but also has a broader focus for women world-wide fighting for their rights: 13 role models speak about their lives, beliefs and the everyday, about family, religious ties and education during and after the bloody struggle for independence in which 275,000 died, a third of the pre-1975 population.

Ceu grew up near Dili on Atauro Island, which Indonesia used from 1980 for political prisoners – mainly women and children (the men were still in the mountains). Ceu 'learnt the tragedy of war ... the scars and the signs of torture and rape ... [prisoners] burned with cigarette butts, ... fingernails ripped out, electric shocks ... four or five children a day dying [from cholera] ... had to be buried quickly ... mothers didn't want to let their dead babies go and I had to gently prise the bodies from their arms.' Dulce Vitor, 14 in 1975, whose family supported Fretilin, the pro-independence political party, recalled, 'the majority of the population fled to the mountains. Soon we didn't have anything to eat ... In 1978 we were still in the jungle ... As my father was dying he said to me ... "Keep resisting strongly, eat tree roots, eat wild taro. But if you have to, go back to your village so you can live and get self-determination"'.

Domingas 'Micato' Alves in 1975, aged 16, became a local secretary of The People's Organisation of Timorese Women, Fretilin's main women's organisation. 'We provided for Falintil [guerillas], ourselves and everyone else ... We organised old women to produce ... baskets and bags ... [delivery of] milk to the children ... creches so women could work in the fields. We used traditional ... [and] conventional medicines ... we taught women to write'. Micato is one of East Timor's best organisers, but she was rejected as minister for defence from the recently-elected new East Timor government: Timor culture is very patriarchal.

Mica Barreto Soares, a member of Renetil, an underground Timorese student movement in Indonesia, identified three fronts in East Timor's resistance: Falantil guerilla fighting; diplomacy – the Timorese diaspora headed by Ramos-Horta; and 'clandestine' – students and East Timor townspeople. Mica said that by 1999 Renetil had around 3,000 militant members who had each sworn to continue resistance, their oaths sealed by prayer and drinking wine symbolic of martyrs' blood. Importantly, Renetil helped publicise the struggle globally by passing East Timor news to contacts like Amnesty.

Continued on page 11

FEMINISM AND FASHION

Associate Professor (rtd) Beverley Kingston has published many books, including a history of New South Wales, books on women and work and shopping and a history of Pearl Beach. She is currently writing a history of the Australian girl. A Library Board member, she is on the editorial board of the Australian Dictionary of Biography and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia.

Feminism and fashion starts in America with Amelia Bloomer (1818–1894), editor of the temperance journal, *The Lily*. When



Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leader of the early women's movement, wore Turkish pantaloons under a skirt in 1848, Amelia defended her in *The Lily*, and was deluged with requests for 'bloomer' patterns. The bloomer became a fashion item, often worn under the huge bustles of the day. They were useful for swimming and riding bicycles. As feminism developed in the late nineteenth century,

it coincided with more work-a-day clothing for women. Vida Goldstein running for the Senate in 1903 usually wore a long dark skirt and white blouse – often with a tie and straw boater, adopting masculine-styled clothing in the search for equality and practicality. In office work, such female attire became almost standard.

Work circumstances during WW1 rather than feminism probably led women to adopt more utilitarian clothes, but shorter skirts and simpler hairstyles continued into 'flapper' styles after the war. Flat chests, slim hips, short straight dresses and pointy shoes with little Louis heels and bobbed hair continued the sense of ease. Bloomers morphed into trousers in the shape of loose pyjama suits. During WWII women wore utilitarian trousers and overalls for their jobs in factories or on farms.

After WWII women's fashions abandoned austerity and utility. The fashion houses of Paris re-exerted control over how women looked by introducing a 'real' female hourglass shape and 'new look' dresses requiring yards of fabric, though women designers like Coco Chanel maintained simple, practical styles. There was almost a sense of tyranny in 'the look' in those postwar years. I recall my mother studying drawings of the latest Paris fashions in the *Women's Weekly*, adapting them to something she could wear to church. Discussion raged about the length of hemlines. The tyranny of the hemline carried through to school uniforms and basketball teams kneeling for a photo with hems in a neat row.

Trousers were worn only at home, or casually, and were forbidden for women at the University of Queensland when I was a student in the 1960s. Women teachers in Queensland were not permitted to wear trousers to work even in the 70s. The cost and fragility of the obligatory nylon stockings was greatly resented, especially as women did not even then receive equal pay.

In the 1960s women revolted against stockings with straight seams, matching gloves, hats, shoes and bags. In 1963 I earned my mother's disapproval when I dressed for church in a pretty blue and white dress and sandals. But where were my stockings, gloves, and hat? They seemed a terrible waste of money. So I was allowed to stay home rather than disgrace my parents in the family pew at church semi-naked! Shifting attitudes towards the tyrannies of fashion formed a basis for feminism in the 70s.

Technology also brought change – with underwear for example. Early corsets used boning, lacing (then elastic) for a firm shape and ghastly armour-like bras. Strapless evening gowns, often well-boned, were layered onto an impenetrable 'merry widow' or girdle. Lycra revolutionised underwear. Stretch nylon stockings and then pantyhose did away with girdles and suspenders, giving way to bare legs. Satin-finished cotton and synthetic drip-dry fabrics meant more natural wearable clothes and saved washing and ironing. Miniskirts could be made from remnants. Prices for ready-made clothes went down as styles were simplified. Women ceased making all their own clothes as serviceable clothing became cheaper.

During WW11 women wearing work clothes tried to retain their femininity with long hairstyles and elaborate curling. To balance bouffant skirts and rope petticoats, backcombed hair and beehives later reached ridiculous heights. In the 60s they all came tumbling down with Vidal Sassoon and his short, sharp, sensible cut. In the 1950s and 60s unisex clothing again became popular. After girls took to wearing boys' jeans with a fly front, jeans more suited to the female shape began to appear and the zip shifted from the back or the side to the front. Divided skirts or culottes, pedal pushers or playsuits, and shorts of varying lengths appeared in the wardrobe.

The 1970s saw three distinct developments. Firstly, opportunities were taken for more obviously feminist fashion statements (seen in the Library's Pine Gap and slogan T shirt collections), including boiler suits and excessively short hair. Secondly, feminism provided a rationale for avoiding trends that didn't suit or were inconvenient – discarding uncomfortable bras and expensive makeup, ceasing to shave underarm and leg hair. Finally, feminism encouraged designers and manufacturers to cater to another 'new wave'. Fashion ceased to be seen as a way of dressing to please men's tastes; it became okay to dress for one's own pleasure or purposes.

Feminism grew out of liberal ideas about the rights of the individual in society – to be significant as yourself. Fashion came to mean dressing to suit yourself, your needs, your personality and aspirations. We've come so far now that 'anything goes', even if sometimes it seems most unattractive.

Transcription by Helen Ruby,
edited by Kris Clarke



TIMELINES

Joan Bielski



Joan Bielski AO was an inspiration across generations of feminists, attracting admirers, supporters, friends. With intellectual energy, passion and good humour, she fought for social justice and sexual equality, often targeting uncaring institutions and indifferent services. She was a founding member of the Council for Civil Liberties and of the Women's Electoral Lobby in 1972.

Joan Margaret Ward was born in Narrabri, NSW in 1923. Her family moved to Armidale, then Gunnedah where she completed her Intermediate Certificate. She was an Air Force telegraphist 1942–45, matriculated at Sydney Technical College, did a History/Economics degree at New England University College, Armidale, then a Diploma of Education (Sydney University). She became an advocate in migrant welfare and joined the Immigration Reform Group in the 1950s. In 1953 she married Jerzy (George) Stefan Bielski, a socialist migrant from Poland and Auschwitz survivor.

Her ambition had been to practise law, but she found the profession did not employ women. The barriers to entry to these professions became a focus for her later struggles to change school, university and technical college culture.

In 23 years of high school teaching, Joan left her mark, remembered for her progressive teaching approach, sharp wit and deft dealing with bullies and malingerers. An active NSW Teachers Federation member, she was also a great letter writer, her first letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1953 supporting equal pay for women, her last in July 2012 supporting the proposed National Disability Insurance Scheme.

In 1974, Joan was appointed Principal Research Officer with the Royal Commission on Human Relationships whose report provided the first analysis of systemic and indirect discrimination against women in Australian society, shaping policy, practice and reform. Her research work provided fodder for collaborative and collective action by the very influential Women's Electoral Lobby. She wrote numerous submissions to government, and organised conferences, forums, media liaison, public debates and protests. She joined the NSW Women in Education group in 1973, harnessing support for eliminating sexism in education. This lobby group forced Ministers and departments to address girls' disadvantage in schools and under-representation of women teachers in promotions.

From 1977 to 1984, Joan headed the Social Development Unit in the NSW Ministry of Education, her task to eliminate discrimination in education. She was there to re-educate, renew and reinvigorate a complacent and conservative administration unresponsive to social change. During those years, anti-discrimination law was passed, girls' apprenticeship programs were started, issues around girls and mathematics and the sciences were explored. Women in sport and

engineering, computer and technical education, the status of women in universities, child care in technical colleges, all received attention through the work of the Unit. There were many successes.

In 1988, she published *Women Engineers* because she saw too few girls aspiring to this profession vital for the built environment. Joan formed a coalition of women's organisations in 1992 to encourage women to aspire to political office. 'Women into Politics' was non-party political with the primary goal of promoting female political candidates, its Charter relevant to this day. Her continuing good-humoured activism earned her the EDNA Grand Stirrer Award in 1999.

Joan's abiding qualities were compassion and commonsense. She was a mentor and role model for many women, giving them courage and self-confidence. She believed in women's capacity to be equal contributors to shaping society and encouraged them to seek re-education or training. She saw these as keys to economic independence. Her prodigious wit and good humour, her infectious and rousing laughter, her generosity with friends, her energetic pursuit of political indolence and indifference to inequality or unfairness, will be enduring memories for all who knew and loved her. Her legacy is the social and educational change to which she devoted her life.

She was a member of the Library from the 1990s, promoting it to her vast network of women activists.

Jozefa Sobski

Elizabeth Mooney

Elizabeth Mooney, who passed away on 24 September, was a stalwart Library supporter and volunteer. The stories abound – a cheery presence always on the scene, always proactive whatever the occasion. She rarely missed a Lunch Hour Talk, and in 2010 averted crisis when a speaker was unable to attend: at half an hour's



notice she stepped in to give her own engaging talk – the first female certificated NSW real estate agent, she had various colourful incidents to relate from her long and successful business career.

After many years battling Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens administration, in 2011 she finally achieved her vision to have a plaque and carving by Aboriginal artists Vic Simms and Glen Timbery of a forest Red Gum stump in the Gardens (*Newsletter* July 2011). Perhaps as much of a thrill for Elizabeth – it being so completely unexpected – at the 17 July Lunch Hour Talk Frances Bodkin recognised her from the Gardens ceremony and presented an inscribed copy of *D'harawal Seasons and climatic cycles* (2010). A celebration of Elizabeth's life was held in the Botanic Gardens on 28 October.

Ronni Kahn *continued from page 4*

We launched a program called REAP (Rescuing Excess with A Passion) which provides an online toolkit teaching interested people anywhere, with their own vehicle, how to rescue food wherever there is food left over in their own community. Our latest project involves compiling *The OzHarvest Cookbook* (soon to be published), with recipes of how to use leftovers provided by 44 of Australia’s celebrity chefs – from Maggie Beer to Neil Perry to the MasterChef stars. When you buy that book, we can deliver 60 more meals with the proceeds.

I have found what it is that has made my life meaningful. Giving is a thousand times more valuable than getting. I hope that you find whatever it is that makes your life worthwhile.

Transcription by Helen Ruby, edited by Kris Clarke

Frances Bodkin *continued from page 5*

about Bundle, my hero even before I was aware of my husband’s connection. It is sad we cannot add stories about discovery, friendship and co-operation in the early days to stories recorded then: the world’s oldest living culture, but our stories are frozen as at 200 years ago. It’s sad we’re not allowed to renew rock paintings either: we’re told, ‘That’s not traditional’, although in the ‘dark’ days every generation did this.

Nevertheless, we can tell the stories. As well, the careful observation underpinning our climate cycles is being recognised: the NSW Bureau of Meteorology uses it in Sydney basin forecasting and an Indigenous Science course is proposed at the University of Western Sydney in 2013.

Transcription by Helen Ruby, edited by Margot Simington

* Frances donated to the Library copies of F.Bodkin, L.Robertson, *D’harawal Seasons and climatic cycles* (2008), and F.Bodkin, L.Robertson, *D’harawal Natural Resource Management Practices* (2012).

Jude Conway *continued from page 8*

The large Sequeira family actively supported Falantil. Each one was gaoled at some point during the occupation. Beba Sequeira survived fearful encounters with Indonesian military including torture: ‘they had to admit I was brave’. Now, with Laura Soares Abrantes, she runs a Dili women’s NGO that we Hunter East Timor Sisters in Newcastle liaise with about support projects focussed particularly on girls’ education.

Deep poverty is still the norm for East Timor: 80% are subsistence farmers; malaria, tuberculosis and worms are endemic. Much work is needed on infrastructure. Schools, nearly all burnt out, are a high priority. Certainly, literacy rates are improving, Timorese are back studying in Indonesia, some oil money is flowing. But no-one should forget what the East Timorese have endured. They need our help.

Transcription by Helen Ruby, edited by Margot Simington

* Jude Conway has donated a copy of her book to the Library.

Euphemia Bostock

Euphemia, well-known Aboriginal artist whose story is the subject of an oral history project by Jenny Reeves (*Newsletter* Feb 2012), is a founding member of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative. Boomalli is an important venue for promoting and showcasing Aboriginal art. Members may be interested to visit the gallery’s Founding Members Exhibition marking its 25th anniversary: 23 Nov–23 Dec at 55–57 Flood Street, Leichhardt Sydney. See: <http://www.boomalli.com.au>

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