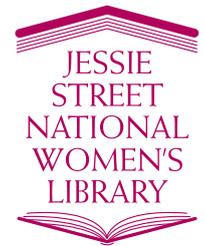


NEWSLETTER

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



Curiosity, scepticism and the desire to uncover the truth

At the 2018 Jessie Street Annual Luncheon, guest speaker and five times Walkley Award winner Kate McClymont mused on the character traits that sustained her in her career as an investigative journalist. An attribute which she did not raise but was noted by Library board member Suzanne Marks in her introduction, was courage.

Appearances have never been more deceiving – smaller than expected, with her round glasses and a chic brown bob – she seemed not fearsome at all. Kate described herself as the accidental journalist, her first love being English literature. She spent her days at the University of Sydney looking towards a career in publishing. It must madden the hardened factional leaders and criminals about whom she writes. Perhaps this unobtrusiveness, an ability to (seemingly) withdraw – when what she is doing is observing and silently taking note – is another character trait for getting the inside stories.

It was curiosity and scepticism that led her to ask why were there so many fires in Obeid's buildings. She recounted the moment when, sitting in court, she was able to join the dots on the testimony. She ran back to the office, saying, 'I've got it!' She had caught the Obeid family, worth millions, brazenly cheating. Nailing those moments, she told us, makes it all worthwhile.

The very fragility of democracy becomes apparent when the vested interests of big business and corrupt politics mesh. She told us that what drives her is the knowledge that she can make a difference: 'corrupt businessmen can be held to account. Those politicians that look you right in the eye and tell you a barefaced lie – they can be exposed. And when I go to sleep at night, I sometimes remind myself that some of those people I have written about are now in small confined spaces where sleeping peacefully at night might not be so easy.'

Targeted with threats and intimidation on a regular basis, she told us that the best way to deal with them is to stand firm – not giving in is core to her modus operandi. She recounted a recent incident. When an underworld figure ('100 kilograms of muscle, a bullet head, leather jacket and dark glasses') buttonholed a Fairfax photographer and told him he would hunt him down and shoot him if his picture

was published, Kate chased after him and gave him a public dressing down: 'How dare you threaten our photographer!' And Fairfax published it (without the photographer's byline) bigger than usual.

Kate told us that she owes it to her readers not to give in. It can be difficult in a world where the rapid relentlessly obscures the complex. Recently, the ABC rang her but, rather than her stories on money laundering, alleged fraud and the millions missing from the Australian Tax Office, stories she had worked on for weeks, they wanted some more information on her tweet about a cat stuck up a tree.

Her address drew laughter, a light-hearted ramble about

life with the underworld, and when she got to the part about how hard the job is, the toll it takes, perhaps her words did not resonate with us as deeply as they should have. She makes it easy for us to think that her brand of journalism is like any other. But amidst the humour, we need to remember the personal cost. She said that it does get her down at times.

'But it is our job to bring to light the things that those in power don't want the public to see ... Whether we like it or not,

investigative journalism creates enemies and they are often very powerful enemies. Sometimes this comes at a price. Due to those ne'er do wells I write about I have had to move out of my home; we have had to hire security guards. Only recently I was informed that an underworld figure I had been writing about was trying to find out where I lived. That very same day I was sent a text with a photo of my car and its number plate. I have continued to write about that person.'

Investigative reporting does not come free, in monetary terms, or lives. In a world where journalists are killed on a regular basis – recently, Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, and over 40 journalists worldwide this year (Committee to Protect Journalists, www.cpj.org), we need to support Kate and her colleagues. Subscribe if you can. Support their publishers.

One of Kate's favourite quotes is from Ben Bradlee, the legendary editor of the *Washington Post* during the Watergate days who said, 'Our business is not to be loved but to go after the truth.' Long may she continue to do so.

Jessica Stewart



CHRISTMAS CLOSURE

The Library will close on Friday 14 December 2018, and reopen on Monday 14 January 2019.

Best wishes for the festive season!

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

Quentin Bryce AD CVO; Elizabeth Evatt AC; Clover Moore Lord Mayor of Sydney; Professor Emerita Elizabeth Anne Webby AM

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Jozefa Sobski, Chair; Suzanne Marks, Vice Chair; Jean Burns, Treasurer; Sherri Hilario, Secretary; Michele Ginswick, Diane Hague, Robyn Harriott, Barbara Henery, Beverley Kingston, Susan Price, Valda Rigg, Marion Shaw, Beverley Sodbinow

Editorial Team

Kris Clarke, Editor; Katharine Stevenson, Graphic Designer; Jessica Stewart

Congratulations to our Annual Luncheon raffle prize winners

1st Two nights' accommodation for two in a Luxury King Corner Darling Harbour View Room at the Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour Hotel, inclusive of breakfast for two, value \$1360, donated by Teachers Mutual Bank – Lyndsay Connors

2nd Bespoke sterling silver necklace with etched image and semi-precious stones, designed and made by Connie Dimas Jewellery, value \$550 – Judy Nichols

3rd David Jones gift voucher value \$350, in memory of Marie Muir – Robin Low

4th Kinokinya Books voucher value \$100, donated by Gail Hewison – Joanna Quinn

5th Harbour Cruise for two value \$90, donated by Captain Cook Cruises – A Hanley

6th Signed copy *Second prize winner Judy with Connie of An Accidental Aid Worker* by Sue Liu donated by the author, plus bottle of wine – Jennifer Marshall

7th Signed copy of *Daring to Drive: a Saudi woman's awakening* by Manal al-Sharif, donated by the author plus bottle of wine – Myra Keay

8th Signed copy of *Staying: a Memoir* by Jessie Cole plus bottle of wine – Jane Campbell

9th Two bottles of wine – Elizabeth Lonergan

10th Two bottles of wine – Mavis Clements



... and thanks to all our wonderful donors!

All wine produced by Kurri Kurri TAFE, and donated by the NSW Teachers Federation.



Wentworth women

Congratulations to Kerryn Phelps on her victory in the Wentworth by-election. Dr Phelps, the first woman president of the Australian Medical Association, was the guest speaker at the Library's Annual Luncheon in 2011.

Kerryn Phelps is the first female Member for Wentworth, but not the first prominent woman to contest the seat. In 1943 Jessie Street ran in Wentworth as the Labor candidate, and she ran again as an independent in 1946. The badge in the Library's collection is very rare, and is one of the earliest election campaign badges in Australia.

Jan Burnswoods

A warm welcome to our new members

Larissa Andelman Dr Anna Banning Connie Dimas
Gina Dolphin Charlotte van Ewyk
Karen Girling Bridget Goodwin Anne McNabb
Jan O'Reilly Maxwell Prince Joanna Quinn
Dianne Quinn Prof Shirley Randell AO Holly Rebiro
Marc Smith Mary Stewart Barbara Thompson
Pamela Lindsay Williamson
Hunter Women's Centre Hyo-Jin Shim Platform Tech

General donations since November 2013

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

K Banfield Lyn Eggins Dianne Fruin
Roslyn Gibb Margaret Knowlden
Kathleen Lamoureux Robin Low Deborah Nance
Hanne Marks Rosemary Pynor Shirley Randell
Timothy Warden Balmain Institute

Note: Rosa Needham's donation in June was made in memory of Vilma Smith

Donations of material expand our collection:

Jude Conway Leslie Kilmartin Robert Lehane
Margaret Mackie Robyn Mathison Lesley Richman
Robyn Rowland Mary Stewart Christine Wells
Cecile Yazbek
Allen & Unwin Bridget Williams Books Currency
Press Fremantle Arts Centre National Museum of
Australia NSW Parliament
Spinifex Press

First 100 years for women in law

On 27 September, the Library, in partnership with the Women Lawyers Association of New South Wales, held an event at the Union, University and Schools Club, Sydney to celebrate 100 years since the passing of the *Women's Legal Status Act 1918* (NSW).

This Act expressly recognised that 'a person shall not by reason of sex be under any disability or subject to any disqualification from being elected to act as a member of the Legislative Assembly, or as an elected member of a local council, or to be appointed a judge or magistrate, or to be admitted to practice as barrister or solicitor.'

The Honourable Justice Virginia Bell AC, current member of the High Court, gave an entertaining speech on the history of the Act and the events that led to its passage. A speech on the same topic can be found in full under Speeches on the High Court's website: <http://www.hcourt.gov.au>.

Ada Evans had qualified in law from the University of Sydney in 1902, but was not permitted to practise as a lawyer because it was thought that a woman was not a person for the purposes of the *Legal Practitioners Act*, notwithstanding that the *Acts Interpretation Act 1897* (NSW) provided that words importing the masculine gender shall include females. The legal gymnastics required to justify that women could not be lawyers was set out in some detail in Her Honour's speech. Their analysis has not aged well, nor improved with time.

Professor Pitt Cobbett, Dean of the Law School at the University of Sydney, took great displeasure at having women study law, and as Her Honour noted in her speech this did not lessen with time and acquaintance.

When preparing for this event, the writer contacted the current Dean, a woman, Professor Joellen Riley, and was put in touch with Professor Anne Twomey, also a woman, who is the current Professor of Constitutional Law, who replied as follows:

'Our friend Professor Pitt Cobbett was not terribly keen on women. A "confirmed bachelor", he did his best to keep them out of the Law School. He would be horrified to know that a woman not only holds his office of Professor of Constitutional Law (not to mention another woman as Dean), but also that she is shortly to edit and publish his great work on the Constitution of Australia for the centenary of his death. I take great satisfaction in provoking such horror.'

Another speaker, Anne McLeod, biographer of Marie Byles, the first female solicitor admitted in NSW, notes in her book *The Summit of Her Ambition* that the campaign to allow women to practise law was supported by some men, with one noting:

'... both branches of the law appear as excellent an opening for the same type of celibate women with exceptional talent as any other profession. The truth

is that the differences between the sexes has been grossly exaggerated by priests, journalists and fools generally, and there can be no doubt that at least one percent of women are quite as intelligent as any man.'

That commentator would probably turn in

his grave

if he knew that women now make up 51 percent of the legal profession here in NSW, and I suspect not all are celibate.

Turning then to the extraordinary woman who was the first female lawyer in NSW, attendees were treated to a slideshow and talk about Marie's life from Anne McLeod. Keen readers may remember a lunch hour talk Anne gave for the Library a while back about the remarkable life of Marie Byles. She was

admitted as a solicitor in 1924. After a short stint as an employee, she set up her own practice in Eastwood. She also obtained a degree in economics, was instrumental in the conservation and bushwalking movement, and the establishment and protection of National Parks, and in her later life also played a large part in introducing Buddhist teaching to Australia. She was also a very keen mountaineer and adventurous traveller.

As Anne notes in her book: 'Few women in the twentieth century displayed such a diverse range of interests and commitments as Marie Byles. Her versatility was staggering: she made lasting contributions as an activist and publicist in many fields: as the first female lawyer of NSW she fought for equal rights in an era with women had few.'

Susan Price



Above: Jozefa Sobski with Larissa Andelman and the Hon Jenny Aitchison MP;

Top: Anne McLeod;

Centre: The Honourable Justice Virginia Bell AC

CULTURAL PRISON: A DAUGHTER'S WORTH

Vindu's talk focused on the inferior status of women in some parts of the world, an articulate rendering of the plight of Fijian Indian women living in the rural villages. A daughter is groomed from childhood into the roles of wife and mother, to live in her husband's home with an inferior status for the rest of her life. From birth, when the mother is told 'Never mind, you'll have a boy next time,' throughout her lifetime, her 'worth' will be bound up in a dowry.

Vindu told us how when she was born, her grandmother refused to even look at her for several weeks blaming her mother for this second girl - the first, her elder sister, only just accepted. The hurt and pain caused a rupture with her mother, a bond was never allowed to form, from which she is only just healing. This story is about a woman's life in rural Fiji.

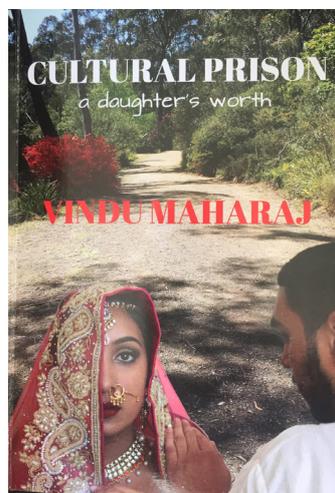
Her book, *Cultural Prison: A Daughter's Worth* (2017), tells the story of a young woman working in a bank, a regular 'city girl', who finds herself enmeshed in the old culture mentality when she marries and goes to live with her husband's family. This is the recent past, her story set in the 1970s; while laws have changed to ban dowries and try to combat domestic violence, it is a tale of how the culture is still a long way behind. The book is a passionate appeal to change this culture. Vindu found that once she started, the characters just took off, and she kept writing to find out what was going to happen as the story twisted and turned.

Women in the villages are not allowed opinions, trained into silence, always taking the blame for any ills that befall the family. She says, once a girl is born, it is understood that she will be getting married. There is no choice, no education, no independence. A woman is taught to believe that this was how life is meant to be when handed over to a husband. If he turns out to be abusive, well, that is her 'fate'. Domestic violence happens behind closed doors and



she cites some staggering statistics that are emerging as more women are now reporting these crimes: over two thirds of women and girls are physically abused by their husbands, sometimes killed if they do not have children or have too many girls, and half of all women in the villages are sexually abused. Boys learn very early on that they are superior to girls and they have a right to control the females in their lives.

But people say, look at the divorce rate among Fijian Indians. It is the lowest ever! The shame felt by these women who are conditioned to believe that they must have done something wrong means they never tell. The silence is compounded by the sense of duty a daughter feels to her parents for her dowry: her 'worth'. Isolated, at home, and invisible, they are powerless. And just as we



are still finding those who ask, 'Why didn't she just leave?' this silence and shaming sweeps the abuse under the carpet. Women who stand up to this culture put themselves in danger, although she tells us that today, a 'very few brave girls' have reported illegal dowries to the police.

Vindu wants her book to show women how to recognise the signs, to stop excusing the abuse, and stand up for themselves and each other. She also wanted us, in Australia, to see it too, and help where we can. Though a work of fiction, she told us that every story in the book is based on truth and needs to be told. She was lucky she says, protected by her father who never let his daughters live with their husbands' families, and lucky in

having a good relationship with her mother-in-law. Now a grandmother herself, Vindu laughed that as a fighter for women's rights in Fiji, she has only sons and grandsons!

While Vindu self-published to release the story to the world, she ended her talk with the good news that she had just been offered a contract to republish *Cultural Prison: A Daughter's Worth* through a UK publishing house, giving the book a new audience.

Jessica Stewart

LUNCH HOUR TALKS — THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY AND 21 MARCH 2019 AT CUSTOMS HOUSE



21 February: Nadia Wheatley

Her Mother's Daughter

Growing up in 1950s Australia, Nadia had a sense of the great divide between her parents. She was to become a player in a deadly contest, dating back to their lives in Germany on the frontline of the Cold War. *Her Mother's Daughter* is a social history, told through the lives of a mother and her daughter. Nadia has been a full-time writer for more than forty years and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters in 2014, in recognition of 'her exceptional creative achievements'.

21 March: Anne Benjamin

Saffron and Silk: An Australian in India

Anne Benjamin's book opens with a wedding between unlikely lovers: an Indian-born development worker and a Catholic academic from Sydney who left the predictability of life in Australia to live in the South Indian city of Chennai. Anne will share some of her experiences living and working in India during a tumultuous period in its history. Anne Benjamin is a Sydney-based writer, poet and educator. Her work in India included programs focused on women and their development.

Venue/Time: 12.00-1.30pm. Customs House Library, 31 Alfred St, Sydney — on Circular Quay, enter via front of Customs House
Cost: \$16 (members) \$22 (non-members) including light lunch. Pay at the door. **Book by noon Monday before the talk.** Ph (02) 9571 5359

Dilemmas of Australian women crime writers

When I started to write this article I was not expecting to encounter so many dilemmas that Australian women face when writing a crime novel. Should a book be fun, or have a female lead, or include women's issues, or be set in Australia at all? These issues show up in three very different novels, and are dealt with in very different ways.

April in Paris, 1921 by Tessa Lunney (2018) is a very well researched tribute to bohemian Paris. Protagonist Kiki Button is a party loving, easy going girl, but it is clear that she has not really figured out what she wants. All the characters are still living as if they are going to be shot by a German, and this creates a lot of interesting tension.

The book is not dark or serious: reviews describe it as 'charming'. A lot of women authors are criticised for writing lighter, funnier books even when serious issues are intertwined, and also for enjoying them. The author obviously wanted to write against a background of the European modernist movement, raising an issue about many Australian writers - they are not writing about Australia at all.

This is starkly counterpointed by *The Dry* by Jane Harper (2017). The book is not just set in Australia, it draws on the history of Australian writers idealising the Bush and subverts it. It shows the darkness that lies in small rural communities. I would recommend all these books, but this book in particular deserves all the awards it has received.

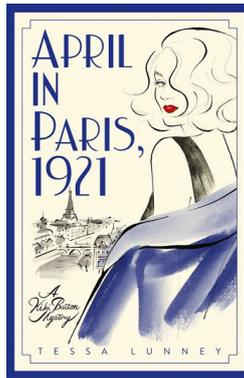
The Dry highlights another dilemma for women writers. The protagonist is male. Aaron Falk is the voice that explains this small town and the victim of its snap judgements. Many women writers have made their leads male, mostly because it is easier. You do not have to include a sexism subplot or a romance. The downside is that we have fewer female protagonists in mainstream, critically acclaimed books.

The third book deals with the choice of having a female protagonist head on. *The Golden Child* by Wendy James (2017) is the darkest of these books. The author has created a lead character who is a stay at home mother. The central theme of this novel is our fears about our children being bullies (or something worse), along with the hard choice of whether to put your life on hold to support them.

Discussion of motherhood in literature seems to be another important issue often disregarded because it is 'a women's issue'. The author here skilfully makes motherhood reflect the darker side of human nature. It might give you nightmares.

All these books reflect problems faced by Australian women authors. There is no easy solution to these issues, or for sexism and literary pretentiousness. However I do recommend all three books, and suggest you keep an eye out for and support Australian female genre writers, because in this literary world they need all the help they can get.

Charlotte van Ewyk



Vale Marie Muir 1930–2018

Marie joined the Board of Jessie Street National Women's Library as Treasurer in 1995 and remained on the Board until 2014. Her support for the Library dates back to its founding in 1989. She was drawn by the concept and had long admired Jessie Street for her political work as a feminist, internationalist and Aboriginal rights activist.

Marie was born in 1930, the youngest of five children. Her mother's family was descended from a convict transported to Australia and her father migrated from Montenegro in 1903. She attended Sydney Girls High School and Sydney Teachers College. Her first teaching appointment was to Auburn West Primary School in 1950.

Her non-Anglo surname – Jovanovich – exposed her to some unpleasant experiences as a young student. The lesson she took from this was to reject negative discrimination in all its forms throughout her life.

She was transferred to Scone District Rural School in 1952 and eventually married Ken Muir, who taught Industrial Arts at the

school. She described this as a good partnership and friendship that endured for her lifetime. They campaigned together and they inspired each other. Above all, they cared deeply for each other.

Marie brought to the Library a broad range of exceptional professional and personal qualities and vast networks. She insisted on democratic decision-making and due process in her distinctive and commanding voice. She had the welcoming warmth of a woman who affirmed the skills and talents of others. She embraced volunteers and made them feel their contribution would be invaluable, however small.

Her most public and extensive role with the Library was as convenor of the Annual Luncheon Committee. She excelled as MC at each function, playing the role with vibrancy and ease, encouraging guests to acts of generous giving over many years. This built the support base of the Library and ensured its financial stability.

She had an instinct for working well with people and around them. Everyone felt valued. Marie was humane, inclusive and respectful. She was a fighter for better public education, equality in the teaching service and many social justice causes.

She will be missed, but her legacy will be preserved through the Library's work and the many women (and men) inspired by her passion for fairer societies and a better world. (Marie was a noted union activist and there is a comprehensive entry on her in the NSW Teachers Federation centenary publication on the history of women's involvement in and contribution to the union, entitled *On the Voices*.)

Jozefa Sobski



2018 ANNUAL

A sense of expectation, and over 330 guests, filled the Strangers Dining Room at Parliament House for the Library's 24th Annual Luncheon, as old friends reconnected and new acquaintances were forged. Sadly, we missed the presence of long-time volunteer at the Library and Teachers Federation stalwart Marie Muir, who recently passed away

Proceedings commenced with the rousing Welcome to Country by Margaret Campbell, followed by Chair Jozefa Sobski's welcome to guests – including our Parliamentary hosts Felicity Wilson MP and Penny Sharpe MLC, Members of Parliament, our patron Elizabeth Evatt AC, volunteers and members of the public. The many students who swelled our numbers came from Canley Vale, Cheltenham Girls, Fairvale, Riverside Girls, Rooty Hill, St Johns Park, Sydney Girls High Schools and Wenona School.

As guests enjoyed lunch, Board Secretary Sherri Hilario summarised the year's achievements in the Library. Sherri proudly wore the Passionately Connected t-shirt she had designed at the Sydney Biennale event held in conjunction with the Library earlier this year (May issue).

All were eager to hear our guest speaker journalist Kate McClymont, introduced by Vice Chair Suzanne Marks, who quoted, 'It has been said that if a journalist's job is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, you can judge their success by the virulence of her victims. Champion jockey Jim Cassidy, after Kate linked him to a massive race-fixing scandal known as the Jockey Tapes, once spat on her legs and said: "You f..... bitch, you've ruined my life."'

Kate entertained and appalled the audience with behind the scenes stories of corruption in our society and the abuse she has suffered in researching these stories. Grace Bowen from St Johns Park High School thanked the guest speaker, the raffle was drawn and delighted winners claimed their tantalising prizes.

In Jozefa's concluding address, she acknowledged the dedication of the Annual Luncheon Committee and thanked supporters for their attendance. We are also grateful to Yael Einstein-MacBeth (pictured right), a student of JMC Academy Film and Television School, for recording the event, a generous gesture by Yael to volunteer, and to JMC Academy for providing the recording equipment. Finally a huge thank you to Rowena Henery for taking the photographs.

Kris Clarke



LUNCHEON



Library report

As we approach our 30th year, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight how far the Library has come since its founding in 1989, particularly with information technology and our growing engagement with other cultural institutions in the GLAM sector (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums).

Twenty years ago, our bibliographic records were created using pencil and index cards. The next transition was to an

electronic cataloguing system. Then, just a few years ago, we moved to the OPAC, an Online Public Access Catalogue. We are continuing to enrich and augment catalogue records: digitising the poster and ephemera collections, incorporating relevant links, scanned book covers, reviews, letters and images. So easily said. However, we all know adapting to new technologies and learning new systems can be disruptive and overwhelming. It takes vision, dedication and trust. Not to mention a lot of hard work!

As a member of Libraries Australia, our holdings are included in the Australian National Bibliographic Database, also accessible online through TROVE. Indeed, this acknowledges the rigour of our archivists and librarians.

Utilising a variety of digital technologies and strategies is allowing us to make connections across the range of our collections to reveal their depth and richness. This in turn is inspiring us to create stories and engage with wider audiences.

Just to give a few examples of that wider engagement:

We have an established relationship with TAFE for their Library and Information Studies Industry Placement Program, as well as continuing to receive Charles Sturt University School of Information Studies student visits.

The serials collection is undergoing a comprehensive review. Those that do not fall within our Collection Development Policy are being offered to relevant libraries to fill their gaps. So far this includes the National Library of Australia and the State Library of Tasmania.

We recently provided research assistance and materials to property managers Brookfields for an exhibition about Jessie Street for the Jessie Street Centre in Parramatta.

Finally, a highlight this year was being asked by Glasgow-based printmaker Ciara Philips to collaborate with her for *Workshop 2010-ongoing* at the Museum of Contemporary Art as part of the 2018 Biennale of Sydney. We were one of four groups. Meeting and working in the printing studio, complete with printing press installed by Phillips in the gallery space of the MCA, we made a series of posters incorporating Ursula Le Guin's 'to keep women's words,

women's works alive and powerful'. We also made the t-shirt I am wearing [*Passionately Connected*]. It was a profound insight into the process of hand screen printing, of which we have so many fine examples in our poster collection. This workshop led to art historian Dr Louise Mayhew's talk on the history of feminist poster making, drawing on over 30 posters from the collection.

The Library has strong foundations thanks to the many women over many years with their bold vision, hard work and persistence. And passionately connected, we will continue in the years ahead.

Sherri Hilario



L-R: Photographs of Margaret Campbell, guest speaker Kate McClymont, Library members, volunteers, school groups, teachers, and guests.

New projects in 2018

After completing an MA in Information and Knowledge Management, I have been building my professional portfolio. I had walked past Jessie Street National Women's Library and always thought I would like to visit, so I was excited to discover the volunteering program through the Library website. When I was welcomed by the knowledgeable and kind staff at the Library I was even more aware of how lucky I am to have the opportunity to do some work there.

Browsing the Library's YouTube channel, I became interested in the Lunch Hour Talks program, which is an outstanding expression of the Library's dedication to preserving Australian women's work and words. I thought that if future speakers could record their slides as a video, then people who cannot attend the events could discover more talks online. Staff at the Library



hoped for greater access to the existing collection, so I offered to create a video combining the audio recording of a previous talk with images of collection materials.

The video was intended to be published for NSW History Week 2018, with the theme 'Life and Death', so I chose Kate Gleeson's 2014 talk on the politics of abortion. I was thrilled with Dr Gleeson's permission to work with the recording of her talk. Although I could not finish my work in time for History Week, the Library staff were happy for me to complete the video.

The helpfulness of the librarians and the usability of the catalogue made research easy and I immediately became absorbed in the Library's extensive resources. I focused on selecting materials that would complement Dr Gleeson's brilliant scholarship. The materials in the Library are endlessly fascinating and inspiring in their representation of the hard work and passion of activists and lobbyists for women's rights, and I hope that by watching the video, other people will become as drawn to the collections as I am.

It is not just the dazzling collections that make volunteering at the Library so wonderful, it is also the collegiate dynamic and the shared passion and values of the people working there. The more time I spend there, the more I feel aware of the presence of Jessie Street herself, and the power of her determination in inspiring the continuing work towards equality for women. I am grateful for all the time I spend in this awesome institution that is so valuable to a fair society.

Marc Smith

Preterm Clinic Archives

This year the Library's archives section was very pleased to acquire the records of the Preterm Clinic. The non-profit clinic in Sydney's Surry Hills (later Camperdown) operated from 1974 to 2015 to address the lack of safe, accessible and affordable abortions. The records are non-medical and do not contain any patient information. The Clinic, the first in the state, was licensed by the NSW Department of Health. Its establishment was funded by a one-off government grant and individual backers.

The clinic was based on the successful Preterm clinic in Boston, USA which provided guidance to the Sydney founders and agreed to their use of the title 'Preterm' provided it would be 'genuinely, truly non-profit and operate in the public interest'. The twentieth anniversary issue (1994) of the clinic's *Preterm News* shows this condition was maintained. Its mission was 'to provide medically safe abortions, contraceptive advice and other reproductive health services to all women in the community regardless of financial status, ethnicity or religion'. Except for a grant in 1975 and Medibank rebates, the clinic received no government funding to avoid the problem of changing government positions.

Over its 41 year existence its mission expanded to address broader women's health issues such as pregnancy tests, supply of the morning-after pill, and advice on contraception, menopause and sexually transmitted diseases. There was an interpreter service for women from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Clinic records, newspaper articles and ephemera reveal the extent of the backlash against the clinic and other abortion providers. Religious groups and serial agitators staged regular protests outside the clinic. In 1975 the building was destroyed by suspected arsonists, and in 1981 there was \$3000 worth of damage due to arson. In other incidents the building was paint-bombed and plate glass windows smashed.

Newspaper articles report on political protests mounted at state and federal level. In 1979 National Party member Stephen Lusher moved a motion in the House of Representatives to curtail Medibank benefits for abortion unless the mother's life was endangered by the pregnancy. The Bill was defeated 65-47. In 1988 NSW Legislative Council member Fred Nile introduced the *Unborn Child Protection Bill*, calling for jail terms and large fines for doctors who performed terminations. This Bill was also defeated.

The Library is grateful to Margaret Mackie for facilitating the acquisition of this valuable collection. It illuminates the early struggle for women to access safe, reliable and expedient action for their reproductive options and choices, rights that are yet to be legalised in New South Wales.

Valli Rigg



The tribute to Marie Muir reached the most people – 3,255. There were 22 comments including from people who knew her as a teacher, a principal and an advocate for public education. See Vale Marie Muir page 5.

Book Club 2018 wrap-up

Since May, Book Clubbers have enjoyed the following book selections: *The Memory Code*, Lynne Kelly (2018); *The Death of Noah Glass*, Gail Jones (2018); *Tracker*, Alexis Wright (2017); *Museum of Modern Love*, Heather Rose (2016); and *Questions of Travel* by Michelle de Kretser (2012).

Our choices reflect a wide range of genres and subjects, fiction and non-fiction, and we continue to broaden our reading experience into uncharted territory. We are learning more about our history and culture by reading Australian literature which increasingly alludes to our indigenous heritage. The first three of these books examined aspects of Aboriginal history and culture, of which most of us had been unaware.

Lynne Kelly's *The Memory Code* explores her theory that ancient monuments (such as Stonehenge) were part of the memory devices used by many pre-literate cultures around the world. These devices employ landscape features, story, song, dance and repetition to memorise cultural lore and practices. Australian Aborigines, she says, used these devices to memorise vast amounts of information and rules for living. Most significantly, Kelly argues that hunter-gatherer societies were every bit as complex as those that succeeded them because their survival depended on the preservation of knowledge orally without the physical representation of the spoken word. A fascinating and illuminating read!

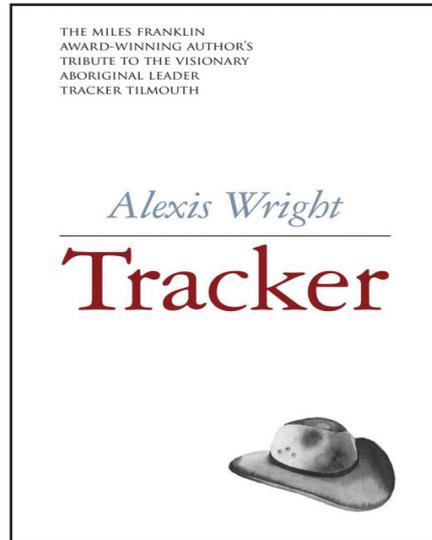
In *The Death of Noah Glass*, Gail Jones (*Guide to Berlin, Five Bells*) has written a page-turning whodunnit: art historian Noah Glass is found dead in a swimming pool. His family discover from the police that he is implicated in an art theft in Palermo, Sicily. The story moves between Australia and Italy and explores eternal themes of family love and loss backgrounded by the violence and criminality of the mafia. There is also reference to the sad history of illness introduced to Aborigines by colonisation: the father of Noah Glass worked in a leper colony in Western Australia. The character of young Noah is shaped by the experiences of his lonely childhood in the remote Aboriginal community.

In the collective memoir *Tracker: stories of Tracker Tilmouth*, indigenous writer Alexis Wright departs from the writing that made her Miles Franklin award-winning novel *Carpentaria* (2006) so successful. *Tracker* is completely different in form: there is very little told in Wright's own voice. It is a story told in the words of others. Reflecting an important aspect of Aboriginal culture, that of oral storytelling, which Lynne Kelly highlighted in *The Memory Code*, *Tracker* never wrote anything down. His extraordinary memory – he could read something once, memorise it, and discuss it in great detail immediately – meant there was little in the way of written archival sources for a biographer. Instead, Alexis Wright's story of this remarkable man who overcame the deprivation of his mission upbringing, achieved a BA degree and became an activist for his people, relied on the reminiscences of others. Wright produced this monumental work (700 pages) barely three years after Tilmouth's death and State funeral in 2015.

Tilmouth, a member of the Stolen Generation, was an Aboriginal activist involved in the Central Land Council and other Aboriginal-focused organisations in the Northern Territory and Queensland. His goal was to achieve economic

success by cleverly acquiring pastoral properties for Aboriginal communities and founding agri-businesses, thus enabling Aborigines to overcome welfare dependence. Any possibility of a treaty, he felt was impossible without making an economic contribution. *Tracker* defined a treaty as an economic exchange between two peoples 'You have the argument that your protection of your land is the contribution you make to the economy. It is as simple as that.'

His drive, charisma and ability to tailor his message to



his audience, be they tribal elders, mining magnates, prime ministers or bureaucrats, made such an impression that many of his contacts had contributions to share. A colleague Bob Cole recalled, 'He just had that personality. He had no shame w h a t s o e v e r . Whereas most Aboriginal people

would be a little bit circumspect, I suppose. He would walk up to anyone and talk to them. Engage in conversation and throw ideas around, walk into any meeting and take it over.'

That Wright marshalled such a vast collection of oral tributes and compiled them into a readable text is a truly remarkable achievement given the time frame. More Australians should read positive indigenous stories such as *Tracker* – a wonderful Stella prize winning book!

The October book selection, *Miss Muriel Matters* by Robert Wainwright left us in disbelief that so few Australians had heard of one of our most eminent suffragists. Muriel had travelled to London to pursue an acting career and became caught up in the burgeoning cause of British women's suffrage. British women did not gain the franchise until 1928, years after their colonial cousins in Muriel's home state, South Australia, who had won the right to vote in 1894. The intervening years in Britain consisted of hard-fought protest, including prosecution and imprisonment. Muriel's oratory skills, a lack of social ties, and her colonial girl pluck put her at the forefront of incredible public stunts, including dropping leaflets over Westminster whilst aloft in an airship and chaining herself to a grille in order to address the British House of Commons, the first woman to do so. South Australia is planning a 125th Anniversary of Woman Suffrage, part of which will be a Muriel Matters Week in November 2019.

The following books were selected to read for our next meetings.

Wed 28 November: *The Enlightenment of the Greengate Tree* by Shokoofeh Azar

Wed 23 January 2019: *Extinctions* by Josephine Wilson

Wed 27 February: *Blue Ribbons, Bitter Bread* by Susanna de Vries

-Barbara Henery

Jill Ker Conway: author, historian and feminist pioneer (1934–2018)



Growing up on a rural property near Hillston, on the Western Plains of New South Wales, Jill Ker was the third child of sheep grazer and World War I veteran, William Ker, and Evelyn A'Dames, formerly a hospital matron in outback Queensland. After taking a soldier's settlement, William Ker bought Coorain, 30,000 hectares on the vast

isolated plain between Ivanhoe and Hay, where Jill was born. Schooled at correspondence school (her brothers were sent to boarding school) she spent her days riding around the property on horseback.

Jill's acclaimed memoirs *The Road from Coorain*, *True North* and *A Woman's Education* vividly describe the challenges of living in the outback, the effects of drought, her grief-stricken mother's disintegration, her coming of age and finding her identity.

After her father drowned in a farm accident when she was 10, her mother eventually took the family to Sydney, where Jill was introduced to more formal schooling, eventually enrolling at Abbotsleigh on Sydney's North Shore. Excelling in intellectual pursuits she graduated with honours from the University of Sydney.

Gender discrimination and the difficult relationship with her mother drove her to leave Australia. Her employment application had been rejected by the Federal Department of External Affairs, our then Foreign Affairs, despite graduating first in her class. After a year travelling she returned to Sydney to enrol in graduate courses in history. At the age of 25, she became interested in American History and travelled to Harvard to undertake doctoral studies.

At Harvard she met a Canadian history professor and college administrator, John Conway, nearly twenty years her senior. They married in 1962. When he accepted a teaching position in Canada in 1964 they moved to Toronto where Jill rose from lecturer to become vice president for internal affairs at the University of Toronto. Returning to the USA in 1975, she became the first woman to serve as president at the prestigious Smith College, Massachusetts and continued in the role until 1985.

At Smith College, she met with inevitable resistance from the male establishment on introducing many changes to support women in their careers. Chief among these was the Ada Comstock Scholars Program for women returning to college past the traditional undergraduate age. Jill also helped launch what is now the Smith Executive Education Program and the Project on Women and Social Change. Under her leadership funds available to the College tripled, in no small part due to her success as fundraiser.

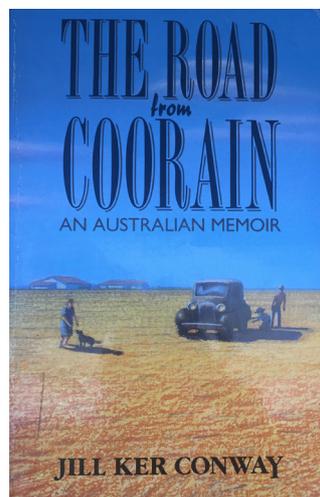
Moving away from academic life, Jill served on the boards of businesses including Merrill Lynch, Nike,

Colgate-Palmolive and Lendlease. She was also a chairman of the American Antiquarian Society. It was reported that she never left a board without it having more women than when she arrived.

In 2000 she was appointed as first female chair of global property group, Lendlease in Australia at a time when the company needed a firm hand. When the focus of the group returned to construction, she resigned and went back to the US to rejoin the academic world.

President Barack Obama awarded her the National Humanities Medal in 2013. In 2013, she was named a Companion of the Order of Australia.

She brought an historian's perspective to her own life writing with a clear vision of people and places, the Australian rural landscape, the battlers and stoic inhabitants, and its boom and bust periods. She wrote evocatively of the terrible drought during World War II which reduced the family to feeding their few remaining animals in burlap bag troughs. The drought eventually drove her father to depression and possible suicide. A recurring theme is her difficult relationship with her mother, a contributing reason to Jill's leaving Australia.



Her prose is easy to read and stylish. *The Road from Coorain* was very well received when published in 1989, and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Praise of the volume included: 'This book will take its place as one of the few heroic stories of girlhood.' Her books are inspiring for women, while also reflecting on the complexities of life as shaped by parents and tragedy, entrenched misogyny, travel and opportunity.

Apart from autobiography, she wrote academic history works on women in American life, women writing memoirs and women's education. Later in her writing career she even tried her hand at collaborative fiction and a children's picture book.

Jill Ker Conway died on 1 June 2018 at her home in Boston, and will be remembered for using her influence to improve opportunities for women.

Rowena Henery

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2018 Barbara Jefferis Award

Five books appeared on the video screen, shortlisted for the Australian Society of Authors' (ASA) Barbara Jefferis Award. One of them was to win the \$50,000 coveted prize, a generous bequest by Barbara Jefferis' husband John Hinde, which the ASA administers. Members and guests gathered on 2 November in the spacious Sibyl Centre in the Women's College at the University of Sydney to share news of the announcement. Jessica Stewart and Kris Clarke attended the ceremony.

This biennial award for 'the best novel written by an Australian author that depicts women and girls in a positive way or otherwise empowers the status of women and girls in society' is named for author and feminist Barbara Jefferis, a founding member and executive director of the ASA. Over 100 entries were submitted by publishers and read by the judging panel comprising Sandra Yates AO, Peggy Frew and Dr Jeremy Fisher OAM. On the shortlist was *The Trapeze Act* by Libby Angel (Text Publishing), *Troppo* by Madelaine Dickie (Fremantle Press), *Storyland* by Catherine McKinnon, *From the Wreck* by Jane Rawson (Transit Lounge) and *Goodwood* by Holly Throsby (Allen & Unwin). Each of the shortlisted received a \$1,000 prize.

Juliet Roger, CEO of the ASA introduced Sandra Yates, who spoke on behalf of the judges. She emphasised that much of what is written about women and how they are portrayed in the media and in fiction often involves women being victimised and murdered. The books that the judges read showed women who were positive, empowered, courageous and humorous.

In past years the prize has been awarded by Rosalind Hinde, Barbara Jefferis' daughter. Sadly Rosalind was recently the victim of an accident. In her place, her son and Barbara's grandson, Michael Little, presented the award. A video created by each of those shortlisted was shown: they spoke of the background and inspiration for the book and also of what character they themselves would have liked to create.

The judges were delighted to announce the winner, Libby Angel for *The Trapeze Act*. They commended the bravery of the protagonist, Leda, an immensely flawed woman, and her willingness to risk everything for herself and those she loves. It tells the story of growing up in a circus in a dysfunctional family, questioning identity and finding acceptance.

They commented that Barbara Jefferis would have loved this book. This rich literary prize is an honour that guarantees success for the book, and is a significant step-up in the author's career.

Members and guests were delighted to take away with them a gift including one of the short-listed books and a bound volume of the ASA's collection of reflections on the achievements and seminal points in the history of the organisation, commemorating 50 years of support and advocacy for writers in Australia.

Kris Clarke



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