



# PEN PORTRAITS

A  
COLLECTION of **STORIES** and **REMINISCENCES**

CELEBRATING

TEN WONDERFUL YEARS

OF

**SWAN**  
SOUTHERN WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK



NOVEMBER 2006



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**Proposers:** Barbara Rimington and Vivienne Nicholson have been long-term advocates of SWAN women telling their sto-

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# PEN PORTRAITS

The title *Pen Portraits* resulted from attempting to complete the crossword puzzle! 'Female swan' was the clue. It seemed the word was 'pen' — could that be correct? I consulted the dictionary and found that indeed it was so. Here then was the title for SWAN's celebratory collection of stories and reminiscences — 'pen' because the word alluded to both the action of writing and the writers themselves! And, 'portraits' because these stories and reflections are 'snapshots' and are not intended as a history.

My warmest thanks to those who, in a spirit of sharing and caring, contributed to this journal as part of our joyous



Lillian Holt commenced her address to SWAN with the following words:<sup>1</sup>

I'll start by acknowledging the ancestral spirits of the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today.

We'll start by acknowledging the ancestral spirits of the traditional custodians of the land where ever we sit and read today.

---

1. Lillian Holt, *Building a dreaming track for a better Australia*, Address to SWAN , 16 May 2004.

## INTRODUCTION

Women of my age, it seems to me, took to heart what they heard from their mothers throughout their early lives and, indeed, up until they fled the nest. They were told ‘self-praise is no recommendation’; ‘don’t make a show of yourself’; ‘modesty becomes a woman’ and they took it to heart. They became very modest indeed.

When I say ‘of my age’ I refer to those ‘older women’ in the ‘autumn of their lives’ or, as the television series bluntly calls us, ‘those grumpy old women’! Nor is this modesty confined to that particular age-group — it has filtered down to those who have not yet reached their golden years, to such an extent that to get women to write about their lives is nigh on impossible! ‘My life is so ordinary’ and ‘who would want to know about me?’ are common responses. How like a woman; how unlike a man! Women toil in the background while men claim recognition through public acts and records of their deeds.

If you think this is a harsh judgement, just ask yourself what you see when you walk through cities, country towns or even hamlets of a few houses, a store and a school. Mostly you will see parks, amenities, playgrounds and war memorials — monuments to the work and actions of men, especially those in Rotary and Lions clubs. All very worthy, of course, but what were the women doing? Where are the signs that mention the contribution of the mothers at the school, or the women who gave birth to, and reared the soldiers, or those who supported the men of Rotary and Lions in their efforts? We know, within ourselves, that women were there, that they *did* contribute, but there is no public acknowledgement; it’s as if they didn’t exist. By our silence, I believe, we ‘old girls’ deny younger women the opportunity to benefit from our experience. To record the stories of older women is to provide younger ones with example, inspiration and knowledge. Telling of our struggles, fears and triumphs is not self-promotion, it’s sharing and offering encouragement and wisdom to others who think of themselves as ‘ordinary women’.

The most moving aspect of the stories in this, our modest celebratory journal, is the honesty, passion and commitment to life that they radiate. The energy that emanates from the words is the same energy that we feel and comment on at SWAN meetings — it’s almost palpable and so very, very inspiring!

Our thanks to all who generously shared their stories and thoughts with us.

Debbie Roberts  
Compiler, *Pen Portraits*, November 2006.

### **Admin Committee members 2005-2006**

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## SWAN SYMBOL

### As related by Fran Rule



Fran Rule shared her recollections with us on the design of the SWAN logo which she created. At the time of writing Fran does not have access to her detailed notes, but what she shared with us is fascinating and demonstrates a thoughtful and reflective attitude to the task, so typical of SWAN members.

Fran based her design on work she was undertaking at the time towards a Monash Art and Design degree. The key text for Fran's research was Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade: our history, our*

*future.*

Eisler presents a vision of a society based on cooperation instead of competition, developed in part, from archaeological evidence of similar societies. Our civilization, according to Eisler, is founded on domination and hierarchy. And, even though the women's movement has achieved some successes, it has been mostly by proving that women can be like the ideal man: competitive, aggressive, manipulative and so on. These qualities have been traditionally valued in hierarchies where it is assumed that for someone to 'win', someone must 'lose'. Other qualities such as kindness, cooperation and compassion are barely acknowledged and are even ridiculed, especially when they are exhibited by men. In order to show that men and women can live cooperatively together with no 'war of the sexes' Eisler provides examples from the past including Minoan Crete, the ancient town of Catal Huyuk and the Neolithic (the late stone age.)<sup>1</sup>

Fran said that the chalice in which the swan sits Eisler symbolizes as the partnership model of governance as opposed to the dominator model which is currently so prevalent throughout the world and, in Fran's opinion, 'the seed for most of our strife'.

The swan itself, other than representing the acronym for our name, also has symbolic significance. In certain traditions the swan is seen as the bird of life; while in others it represents breath and spirit; benevolence and love. The symbol used to represent the female sex — the hand mirror and comb of the Roman Goddess Venus — forms the base of the chalice.



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We are indebted to Fran for sharing her thoughts with us and for revealing the rich symbolism of the SWAN emblem.

## SWAN ORIGINS

Reflecting on SWAN's earliest days with **Judith Couacaud Graley**

Hopefully, within the not too distant future, the origins and development of ***Southern Women's Action Network*** will be the subject of a researched history. For the purposes of our celebratory journal, suffice to say that the origins of our dynamic group resulted from women meeting around a kitchen table.



Judith Couacaud Graley

Judith Couacaud Graley recalls that the initial meeting, urging women to become involved in social justice issues, resulted from a notice inserted in local papers by Carole Ford, Breda Smythe and Eunice Cain. This gathering effectively became the forerunner of SWAN. On reading the notice Judith contacted some ALP women whom she thought might be interested. Together they attended the meeting one Sunday morning at Mt Martha House at which Denise Hassett spoke, so becoming the first in a long and distinguished list of speakers. It was at this meeting that Judith tentatively raised her hand in response to calls for women to put themselves forward as candidates for local council elections. The support and encouragement given to Judith on this occasion launched her political career.

Following the meeting at Mt Martha House, a group adjourned to Judith's home and sat around her kitchen table to continue the discussion and consider a name for the group as well as details of aims, objectives and ideas for an appropriate logo. After much discussion the name agreed to was Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN). The first speaker to address the newly-named group was Joan Kirner. Included in the earliest discussion meetings were Fran Rule, the late Lindsey Steele, Carole Ford, Breda Smythe, Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate. Briefly, the group wanted to provide Mornington Peninsula women with the opportunity to hear, and meet with, women interested in social justice issues and community activism as many found it difficult to travel to the city where such opportunities were more readily available.

As the current SWAN brochure states, other aims were to:

- provide a forum for discussion of matters and issues of concern to the community.
- promote social justice and equity.
- support women candidates for all levels of government.
- increase women's active involvement in community decision-making processes.

Those gathered around Judith's table that day, and on subsequent occasions, drank good coffee, ate home-made cake and enjoyed each other's company — traditions that remain! The camaraderie of the early days continued and has significantly contributed to SWAN's success: and caring for each other, and and consensual fashion.



women being themselves, supporting working together in a consultative

*A posy in appreciation to our SWAN sisters  
who made momentous decisions!*

## SWAN WOMEN SHARE THEIR STORIES ...

From the time when Adam made the first paltry charge against Eve, men have been ever found ready to indulge in a querulous gerimede against the sex. Eve got the apple, and woman-like, gave Adam a bite, after which Adam went and told, putting all the blame upon her. Eve left Eden and the apples (and went to look for oranges, perhaps) and, like a sensible woman, forgave her mate and let the matter drop. But Adam keeps on telling and telling ...

Louisa Lawson  
*The Dawn*

The above excerpt from an article by Louisa Lawson in Australia's first feminist periodical *The Dawn* (of which she was also founding editor and publisher) exemplifies not only her writing style, but provides a sense of her feisty character and her commitment to the cause of women's equality in all aspects of life. The stories that follow also allow us insights into the lives and characters of some feisty SWANers!



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1. Quoted in *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women's Writing*, edited by Dale Spender, Penguin Books Aust. Ltd.1988,

## **‘TO KNOW, AND NOT TO ACT, IS NOT TO KNOW ...’**

### **Barbara Rimington**

I recently read the above words, attributed to being a Chinese proverb, in a novel and thought how appropriate, not only to my beliefs and life involvements, but also to those of SWAN. It has been interesting, if not depressing, to think about the past forty years in relation to the position of women in Australia, to consider why I have been interested in Social Justice and my involvement in SWAN. Developing ‘herstories’ instead of just *his*-story became important to me when I realised the wealth of experience and knowledge of people like Barbara Lindner<sup>1</sup> were lost without documentation.

It is wonderful that SWAN has risen to the challenge to produce women’s stories, for despite over forty years fighting for equality, lives in the public eye are still very much male — unless the woman is represented flaunting her body or being used to sell something, the product often unrecognisable, like a recent jeans ad. Thank goodness countries like Spain are taking action and banning models below BMI norms.

Because of my interests in people and the environment I have been an active member of many committees, ranging from Peninsula and Frankston Indigenous Action Groups, Sharing the Wisdom, Balnarring Community Reference Group, Balnarring Beach Ratepayers Association, and Peninsula Women’s Fund (responsible for International Women’s Day celebrations).. I have met some inspirational people. Many may not know, for instance of the over 600 Indigenous people who live on the Mornington Peninsula. I have had the privilege to work particularly with Linda Mullett who does amazing work to support her people.

I am saddened by much of what is happening in Australia today. By the racism and elitism, by the position of, and attitudes to, women and children. By the values which have assured a disposable society — from goods to income to the environment to people. There is evidence the glass ceiling still exists. While more and more young women are graduating, the workplace in Australia has not come far in terms of being family friendly. Childcare places are at a premium, depression and suicide rates are high among the young, let alone the social and health issues like anorexia at one end of the scale and obesity at the other. We are still jailing refugees and survivors of domestic assault. As a woman, a mother, a teacher and a psychologist these issues continue to impact on me.

Writing my response comes at an interesting time — when much was being made of two men who had died partly as a result of having chosen dangerous pursuits. State funerals were offered. It made me wonder even more about the [lack of] values under which we operate in Australia in 2006, despite all the political rhetoric of ‘Australian values’, whatever *they* are, at both ends of the political spectrum. I couldn’t help but try to recall, unsuccessfully, the last woman to have been accorded a State funeral!

*Why have I developed my value systems and pursuits?* I am a product, obviously, of my age and the times and events which influenced my parents’ social development. My consciousness was raised as a result of various experiences, by the books I read, and the people with whom I have had contact. Some of the books include *The*

1. Barbara Lindner was a long-time member of SWAN and very active in many aspect of community life including the arts, politics, environmental matters and women’s issues.

Growing up I received mixed messages. For me that meant — like a number of my agetates and sadly, some younger women friends even today — growing up with a mother who, despite being very intelligent and feminist in many ways, has an underlying belief system that ‘men rule’ and who expected far less of my brothers at home than was required of me. My father, however, encouraged learning for its own sake, and who, despite the Nursing Bursaries I had been granted (which had to be repaid), encouraged me to go to University in the lively 1960s, despite fees which he could ill afford. I had attended convent schools and had been taught largely by Presentation Nuns who were among my first female role models for higher education, as two were studying while teaching at the convent. A large group of us, around fourteen of the seventy-two Year 12, or matriculation as it was then known, were expected to go on to further study and careers, even if these were still in the fairly stereotypical areas of teaching, nursing and the like.

I wasn’t consciously aware at the time of the siphoning into courses like the ‘Profession’, ‘Domestic’ and ‘Commercial’ (Secretarial) streams until long after I left school. There were those isolated few who did enter the more male domains of science and also those who left to become nuns themselves. Kinder, Kirche, and Kuche were alive and well in Australia then as I believe they are today. At least in the 1960s and 1970s sexism was overt, now it appears more covert. My parents espoused fairly egalitarian values, amazing really given the views of *their* parents. Dad’s parents refused to attend his wedding as he was marrying a Protestant; Mum’s refused on the grounds she was marrying a Catholic. In the end, Dad’s parents attended, but Mum’s didn’t. Dad’s godmother, dressed in black, put curses on Mum as she walked down the aisle. The story put me off religion altogether!

In 1968, armed with majors in Sociology and Anthropology and a sub-major in Psychology (Arts graduates, mostly women, weren’t considered capable of completing degrees in Psychology in the 1960s at Monash University). I looked forward to working in Human Resources Management. After two interviews (with Kraft and Myer) during which the direct message was ‘but you don’t expect men to work with you, or listen to you, do you?’ — and after seeing several male friends get jobs for which I was not even granted an interview despite my better results, I moved into the Commonwealth Public Service. Here, at least, I began my fulltime working life as a Research Officer in the Department of Veteran Affairs, then known as the Repatriation Department. Despite being male-dominated, women were paid equal wages for equal work or positions in the hierarchy. Unfortunately, my father died just at the time when I was offered a position with ASIO, but like a good Catholic girl, I elected to stay in Melbourne to help support my brothers at school as my mother was now forced back to work.

Eventually, I moved in to Teacher Training ‘in case I ever married and the holidays would be good if I had children!’ Teaching: where my wages dropped by half; where I started on 73% of the male wage merely because I was female; where, in 1970 I was called into the Principal’s office and told I was ‘lowering the tone of the school by wearing my (most expensive and fashionable) slack suit, the jacket of which came down to my calves, much longer than the mini dresses of the time, but still not acceptable! Education: in which girls missed out, and still do, on access to support services; in which girls were punished twice as severely as boys for things like swearing or fighting — after all, we all know that ‘boys will be boys’; in which gender stereotyped curricula shaped by men’s stories and their achievements dominated. Amongst this gloom, one principal stood out, Hyrrell Waten, who was firm but fair and actively encouraged women to enhance their skills and so enabling

Other events that shaped my views included marriage, divorce and the difficulties of getting child support and of raising my son basically on my own. Other factors were trying to offer full psychological support to seven schools at the same time; working within a system that pays only lip service to supporting our valuable young people within a positive mental health program and so entrenched the divide between rich and poor through lack of funding to secondary schools; and where poorer students are forced out of a tertiary system that cripples them with large debts while richer people pay up front and get discounts; and where women in particular still appear to be at a disadvantage. No wonder I proudly call myself a feminist, even though many people confuse its meaning, misuse and abuse it.

I spent many years on the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association Sexism Subcommittee. I met some wonderfully supportive women who thought like I did on a number of issues. We debated and provided input into the *Action Plan for Girls*, *The Equal Employment Opportunity Plan for Women in the Teaching Service* as well as a similar plan for the Public Service. These plans attempted to redress the years of covert and overt discrimination. Women were invisible or significantly marginalised in the school hierarchy, despite being a majority in the Service as a whole. We ran State-wide In-services and Training Opportunities raising awareness of the general situation and suggesting ways to combat sexism in the curricula; workshops for writing CVs and job applications and how to prepare for interviews; and workshops for broadening curricula and special support groups for women. Gradually, the percentage of women in senior positions in education and teaching increased. Girls began choosing a broader range of subjects. Currently, however, there appears to be a swing back to a fairly narrow range of areas, despite the Year 12 achievements of girls.

For nearly twenty years I worked in the Springvale/Dandenong areas, first as a teacher at secondary and tertiary levels and then as a psychologist in schools. I enjoyed the multicultural lifestyle and the wonderful mix of people representing various waves of migration: Italians, Greek and Yugoslavs. The refugees: the South Americans, the Vietnamese and Cambodians — people who had been boat people; people who had been tortured and abused; people who had worked so hard to improve their lives here; people who were, and are, wonderful additions to Australia.

I have lived on the Mornington Peninsula for twenty years. At first I thought I had stepped back into the 1950s. School staffing was predominantly female, but with male principals. When visiting one school the Principal told me he would have sent me home if I had been on his staff because of my hairdo! My son's school held Parent-Teacher interviews during school hours, despite departmental policy requiring access for working parents. When I questioned the Principal he replied that the hours suited the majority of the parents! There appeared few opportunities initially to meet like-minded women. Fortunately, I met women who encouraged me to join the Peninsula Women's Fund Committee responsible for organising the annual celebration for International Women's Day; and then I was invited to attend SWAN where it is okay and safe to be intelligent, to express an idea without being attacked on a personal level and to be emotional and passionate about issues.

Several things continue to reinforce how, in many ways, the position of women has slipped and how far we still have to go towards meaningful equality in Australia.. The performance piece *Difficult Women* by Joe Dolce and Linn Van Loek raises issues of what happens to women who speak up, recently emphasised by the *personal* attacks on Germaine Greer, rather than discussing/analysing her *ideas* when she wrote above

I will assess my conviction that we live in a country based on mutual respect and equality on some simple indicators such as:

- When women's sport takes up a greater percentage of newspaper reporting than horse racing and equals the coverage of men's sport. Reportage of women's sport currently stands at 4%.
- When the public face on TV shows, advertising and the like represents indigenous people and those from other cultures.
- When women take up equal numbers in the Australia Day Honors List.
- When Australia is a signatory to the various UN Conventions that it currently abstains from, such as the Convention on the Rights of Women and Children.
- When domestic violence and child abuse are eliminated.
- When thinkers, artists, writers and intellectuals and those working with our 'human capital' are recognised, paid decent salaries and celebrated in the same way as someone who kicks a piece of leather around.
- When school curricula again recognise and celebrate the achievements of women.
- When women respect themselves and are able to recognise that using their sexuality to get on is not liberation but exploitation.

While many of these indicators may seem trivial, to me their achievement will represent Australia's 'coming of age' as a mature, independent nation of which we can be proud.

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**Barbara Rimington:** has been a regular SWAN attendee for many years. She was an active member of *Sharing the Wisdom* Administrative Committee responsible for organising and staging a community Environmental Forum in April 2001. The keynote speaker was Robyn Williams from the ABC Science Show. Barbara also encouraged and supported SWAN to adopt the Acknowledgement Statement as part of SWAN meetings and has long supported the idea of recording the stories and experiences of SWAN women.

## A PERSONAL PROFILE

### Gwen Wilson

In 1935 I gained my first position with Moses Buchanan Bunting at what is now the Rialto Building at the top of Collins Street, Melbourne — just as the days of the horse and cart deliveries over the cobblestones were coming to an end.

I then moved on to Jolly Bros — a father and son business in the old Cromwell Building, Bourke Street where I remained for eight years. After the commencement of World War II I was disposed to join the WAAAF, working at Air Board (Records) and in spite of unpunctuality, reached the rank of sergeant. Eventually, taking my discharge in Brisbane, and deciding to seek employment there was fortuitous as I secured the position of first paid secretary to the Queensland Country Women's Association, Head Office, Toowoomba, with over four hundred branches and seventeen Divisional Presidents.

During my years with the Queensland Country Women's Association I sent for papers to join the United Nations Secretariat. For this one needed a second language, but my Dutch tutor laboured in vain, as returning to Melbourne I met and married Jack Wilson. With the bliss and demands of three babes in as many years, motherhood became my ideal and other interests fell away.

At the appropriate time I returned to secretarial work (Agency) and had a full experience meeting the demands caused by a chaotic shortage of staff. This proved to be a most interesting time. At one stage I assisted in the forming of three Policies for the Labor Party (head office in Drummond Street, Melbourne). This election was won by John Cain 1983 (I think!)

Later, settling in Mornington and joining SWAN has been a nice pay-off!

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**Gwen Wilson:** since she first attended SWAN the only meeting Gwen has missed was when she was recuperating from surgery. Gwen has been invaluable in providing reports of speakers' presentations for the SWAN newsletter — we didn't know she had all those years of secretarial experience behind her. It goes some way towards explaining her efficient and detailed notes!

## **MARCHING TO A DIFFERENT BEAT**

### **Judy Keighran**

I suppose I've marched to a different beat most of my life, perhaps because I was the only girl in the family, sandwiched between two brothers. I come from a conservative middleclass background. I remember my father, a bank manager in Mornington, saying that the rear end of women who wore trousers looked like 'two pigs in a blanket'. My first memory of discrimination was when I went to the golf club with him and was told to wait outside while he entered the 'holy ground' of the clubhouse. Only men, he told me, could be members; women were associates.

But my parents supported my wish to train as a teacher, though I had to convince my father that higher education would not be wasted on a girl. My mother made a couple of cotton shirt-waister style dresses with calf-length skirts, and bought me a new lambs wool twinset and pleated woollen skirt. At university I met some women who wore trousers. It was the era of black pants, duffel coats and desert boots. I managed to shock my parents on my first trip home, just by wearing green tights and green suede shoes.

One of my greatest joys as a teacher has been persuading students to think for themselves about issues from capital punishment to abortion. In 1991 I was given the task of placing 100 Vietnamese students, the first boat people, into classes at St Albans High School. Their appreciation of being able to attend school and receive an education made teaching them very satisfying. A couple of years later I went to Malaysia to teach English at an Islamic boarding school, where I was warmly welcomed by the majority of students and staff.

In retirement I've been able to pursue my interest in writing, and since joining SWAN I have been trying my hand at writing letters to politicians about issues I care about, such as children in detention centres. This year I graduated as a Master of Creative Writing at Melbourne University. My daughter and two of my sons were there to cheer me on, which made it even more enjoyable. With another of my classmates, I went up to receive my certificate with all the twenty-something Arts graduates, proudly out of step once again. \_\_\_\_\_

**Judy Keighran:** an enthusiastic and regular member of SWAN whose depth of feeling and support for others deserving of justice is expressed in her poem printed on the following page.

## SHIFTING SHORES

The right to seek asylum  
a fair go for all  
enshrined in a treaty  
before islands vanished  
at the stroke of a pen

They seek the words  
that will open our doors—  
*Abacadabra*  
the magician's mantra  
*Open sesame*  
Aladdin's key  
*Speak friend and enter*  
Tolkien's code

Do words have the power  
to open closed minds  
warm cold hearts  
unlock fear's dominion?

**Judy Keighran**



## **DOWN OUR STREET**

### **Debbie Roberts**

Writing about oneself is not an entirely satisfactory experience. It feels egotistical and self indulgent to use time and energy in this way when both could be better spent in practical support for worthy causes. Moreover, didn't our mothers warn us about the pitfalls of 'making a show of yourself'? My justification, however, is a strong commitment to the worth of story-telling, especially women's stories. Through stories, so the sociologists tell us, the norms, values and knowledge of a culture are passed on to the next generation and are internalised. The experiences of 'ordinary' women, then, are a necessary part of this process. Within that context I want to share memories of my formative years lived in Rose Street, Fitzroy – Fitzroy before it became gentrified. Later, there were other streets and experiences. For many of the people who lived in Rose Street, however, the social problems and issues that SWAN speakers have addressed over the past ten years, were the living reality of everyday life.

Rose street was uniquely positioned between Smith and Nicholson Streets, a corridor between two borders: Fitzroy and Collingwood at one end, Fitzroy and Carlton at the other. An economically poor but a culturally rich environment in which to grow up: houses and factories crammed up against each other; tiny front gardens with plants spilling through on to the footpath; the Jewish and Italian populations in Carlton and Fitzroy; Lygon street with its exotic food shops from which emanated the strong smell of cheeses; and other tiny shops which, if you peered through the narrow doorways you saw old men sipping glasses of wine! Then there was the Aboriginal Church Mission, somewhere in Gore street, with its famed Pastor Doug Nicholls, perhaps better known as a Fitzroy footballer and who later became the first Aborigine to be knighted and appointed a state Governor. In Brunswick Street, there was also a tiny contingent of Chinese who were the proprietors of the Chinese Laundries: full of steam, the noise of hissing hot irons and the cleansing smells of soap and starch.

I readily empathised with Morag Loh, Sushi Das, Dur-e Dara, Lillian Holt, and Elleni Bereded-Samuel who, in their SWAN presentations, raised the issue of racism. The kids of Rose Street, who included representatives from most of the cultures mentioned earlier, played together happily enough under the street lamps on summer evenings. But, when squabbles occurred the racist jibe was considered the most effective counter attack or defence mechanism! Moreover, adult use of derogatory racial terms was common — that's how we kids knew them! 'Chows', 'Dagoes', 'Jew-boy' and 'Abbos' were all familiar and commonly used in conversation.

Constantly curious, I availed myself of every opportunity to talk with the women of our street. I once commented to a lovely Jewish lady (who gave me my first taste of Crème Caramel!) how clean her house was. She responded, 'You have to be clean if you're a Jew, otherwise people call you a 'dirty Jew'! 'And' she continued, 'it's very hard for us to rent properties — they don't like Jews'! Precisely the experience of Sushi Das only in her case, it was the people from India who were unacceptable! One day when speaking to Muriel, our next door neighbour, she told me how her former girl friends from the factory didn't have anything to do with her anymore, not since she'd married a 'chow'. When Morag Loh spoke to SWAN she related how tensions between the newly-arrived Vietnamese and Australians in Richmond were eased by organising for both groups to get together and talk! It turned out, she said,

Mostly, Rose Street kids referred to the Italians as 'Eyeties' and the ones we knew were held in high esteem because of their prowess at running and other street sports. When one particular family of Italian stonemasons hit the media headlines, however, the street turned against them. Even the swift-running Italian children became 'Dagoes' and were told they 'should go back to where you came from!' Another Sushi Das experience that made me want to weep!

The Aborigines, who only occasionally wandered away from their little territorial patch in the area of Gore Street to play with us, were readily accepted into games under the light post. With no shoes, raggedy clothes and shy smiles they seemed to enjoy themselves and certainly held their own in races and hitting objects with a stone from a long distance! I desperately sought information about them and their lives — but alas no Aboriginal family lived in our street whose mother I could bombard with questions! Even so, my own cousin was counselled against marrying the man she loved — an Aborigine. 'Think about future children' she was told, 'they could be "throwbacks".' She married him nevertheless! Today her granddaughter is a doctor at the Children's Hospital. And so, all those years later I was entranced, but saddened, when Lillian Holt presented her wonderful paper *Building a Dreaming Track for a Better Australia* to SWAN. In my notes from that day I wrote down these words as Lillian said them ... 'My mother was part of the stolen generation, that is, she was taken away from far north Queensland and put on Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement at a very early age and died in 1987 not knowing her next of kin ... I cannot find any records of her existence or why she was sent to Cherbourg as a small child.' And yet, as Robert Manne claims, our nation remains 'in denial'!<sup>1</sup> Back in Rose Street, however ...

Opposite our house stood two cottages. From each, at various times, came sounds of raised voices, screams, and the thud of thrown objects connecting with walls or shattering glass windows. The women in each of these houses were victims: the one to drink and domestic violence; the other to domestic violence probably at the hands of a control freak.

You just couldn't help feeling sorry for Lizzie as she turned the corner and negotiated the few yards between it and her house. One arm outstretched to steady herself against the wall while balancing her brown paper-wrapped bottles in a string bag on the other, she tottered along towards her front gate. Once inside, noisy arguments erupted — perhaps her husband couldn't cope with his wife's drinking! Whatever the cause, evidence of physical violence in the black and blue patches on Lizzie's face the next day was horrifying. The little woman next door to Lizzie, at about 4.30pm daily, would stand at her gate, her eyes directed towards Nicholson Street from where she knew her husband would appear. When he did, our conversation ended abruptly,

'I must go in and get my Man's tea on the table' she would say, scurrying quickly inside. Sometimes peace would reign; on other occasions the ugly reverberations of violence assaulted our ears. Why did this happen, I wondered?

It was many years before I learnt that among various contributing factors to domestic violence a significant one is the 'control freak' husband or partner. SWAN's action in supporting Heather Osland, the gaoled victim of a control-freak husband, stirred me ~~to the very depths of my being: anger at the cruelty and degradation she had suffered; and anger at the unfairness of her situation.~~ In my mind, the hug of friendship and support to Heather at the SWAN meeting she attended after being released from prison was also meant for the little lady who waited daily (in fear?) at

The thirteen children of another family in our street lived out their childhood as the victims of persistent child abuse and neglect: attacked physically with planks of wood and a hot iron (as verified by written newspaper reports and pictures and our own observations) the youngest girl was eventually taken away; the boys wore no shoes, had flaky skin through lack of washing, and their body odour was so overpowering that the poor boys were ostracised by other children and, I'm sad to say, neglected by teachers who sat them in a corner of the classroom by an open window.

Dr Caroline Taylor's address to SWAN with her open, honest sharing of experiences as a victim of child and sexual abuse sparked stark images in my mind of the abused and neglected children in Rose Street. I could have wept as I thought of their frail, smelly bodies bearing the brunt of such wanton cruelty.

The working conditions under which men and women toiled in the factories in our street were appalling. Sharan Burrow, president of the ACTU, when she spoke to SWAN raised my consciousness about the significance of working conditions and the part played by Unions — how far we've come, but how very far we still have to go! Pamela Curr also addressed SWAN about the working conditions of women who did outwork and the circumstances under which they laboured. The words of both these women activists reminded me of the girls who huddled over their machines in the slipper factory next door to us in Rose Street: they froze in winter and were almost asphyxiated by the heat in summer! As for the men who worked in the furniture factory opposite — the acrid fumes from the boiling pots of furniture glue bubbling away on an open fireplace some six feet wide would have been inhaled into their lungs and brains; while the flames turned their working environment into a veritable Hades. And the thunderous noise from the machines used in producing the furniture surely must have been the cause of deafness in the men whose ears it assaulted eight hours a day for five and a half days a week. It doesn't take much reflection to agree with Sharon Burrow — there still remains much to be done!

Unlike most girls in our street, it seemed to me, I did not have the great dream of marriage, a home and children. Nevertheless, that's eventually what I did, after working as a secretary for some five years. We married in our local Anglican church and moved to Glen Huntly where our three sons were born and raised. I became deeply involved in schooling and educational issues — at about the same time as Joan Kirner was doing remarkable things and being an extraordinary woman in those fields! Perhaps she was my (unknowing) mentor! But it was at this period that the urge to undertake further education suddenly overtook me!

So, when our middle son commenced Year 12 in 1981 I thought I would too! I did one subject in what was then known as adult HSC. The next year I did two more; the next I entered the University of Melbourne and commenced a BA. On its completion I was accepted into the Education Faculty and completed a Diploma in Education. I then taught in Frankston North, first at the Technical School and later in the amalgamation of the Technical and High Schools known as Monterey Secondary College. By 1992 I had completed a Master in Educational Studies degree and was accepted as a PhD student. In 1999 I was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (history of education) at Monash University. It was roughly about this time that a teaching colleague invited me to a SWAN meeting. And, I can honestly say, that my involvement since that date has been overwhelmingly interesting, stimulating and moving. I feel extremely privileged to have been a Facilitator of SWAN.

I suggest it is not difficult to see what propelled me towards SWAN — those formative years in Rose Street Fitzroy, I came to learn, proved to be a living witness to, and part of, many of the difficult and puzzling social issues that continue to challenge us today. Many of these matters have been tackled by SWAN speakers who have pointed the way to actions we might take as individuals or as a group to bring about desired changes. Experience from my formative years, though, has taught me that there are no easy answers; and that things are never black and white but many shades of grey. My SWAN years have been truly inspirational. Even at my vast age it changed my life in ways I could not have foretold: challenged my intellect; my heart and spirit have been warmed; and I have learned that with just a little effort I, too, can help make the world a better place .

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**Debbie Roberts:** although not a founding member, Debbie has been a SWAN member since its earliest years. A member of the SWAN Admin Committee since about 1999 Debbie has also been responsible for the newsletter and has been SWAN facilitator for several years. Debbie also acted as secretary for the Environmental Forum group *Sharing the Wisdom*. Vivienne Nicholson chaired this group and Grace Fraser was Treasurer. Later, Patsy Carpenter took over as secretary.

## HOW I BECAME A TEACHER

### Marjorie Davidson

After serving four years and two months in the WAAAF during World War II I married in 1946 and, in due course, became the mother of two children, first a son, then a daughter. I certainly had no thoughts of becoming a teacher of intellectually handicapped or holding such a position for twenty-four years.

My daughter's developmental milestones were delayed and to this day there has been no 'catch-up'. Her Specialist confirmed that she was mentally retarded and advised institutional placement. I learned, however, that there were training centres for such children and eventually Lorraine was accepted on condition that I remained with her for the time she stayed. Unfortunately, she was unable to cope either there or at home and was finally placed at the Kew Cottages. The Day Centre's Committee of Management invited me to join the staff and eventually, with my experience as a parent, voluntary helper, and play leader I became eligible for a teacher training course run by the Mental Deficiency Training Services.

Following twelve years of working with all age levels and degrees of handicap I gained the position of Teacher Supervisor which I held for an additional twelve plus years. My aim never varied: to continue providing a happy learning environment for those in my charge. It was a privilege working with these people and their families and when I retired it was with much pride in being able, together with a dedicated and exceptional staff who shared my feelings, to foster the potential of each individual for whom we cared. Sadly, some of those in our care, like my daughter, did not respond to our efforts.

The inception of Seven Day Training Centres in Victoria was formed and developed by groups of parents whose children were denied enrolment, because of their intellectual disability, into state schools. The three Rs were not included in our curriculum which focused on social development, self-help skills, physical development and community integration, all of which provided the basic needs of human functioning.

The makeshift halls and venues initially available and affordable over sixty years ago, improved gradually with government financial support, donations and unceasing fund raising by parents and friends. Eventually, more modern, well-facilitated centres were built with sheltered workshops and community houses reasonably close by.

Psychologists, social workers, advisers, visiting doctors and dental services were available. Valuable speech therapists also later joined the staff. Teacher Training courses continued but many changes have occurred since my retirement. Lorraine, now aged fifty-six, and after living at Kew Cottages for forty-seven years, moved to a community house, but still needing twenty-four hour care providers. I love her dearly and wish she could know that her ~~'being' helped many~~ others by sharing her mother with them. She and I continue to share, as always, close contact with each other.

**Marjorie Davidson:** Marjorie's first SWAN meeting was to hear Kali Paxinos speaking about issues facing the mentally disabled and their families. Marjorie, who is eighty-five, so she tells us, has attended all meetings since then!

## **A CASE OF APPLES**

### **Patsy Carpenter**

An early memory of mine is finding a case of apples on the front step of our home. This, it turned out, was payment for services rendered by my Dad — so legal advice for apples which, for a young solicitor just starting out seemed a pretty good swap. Social justice? Well I don't know if that's what you'd call it but it was one way the system worked and sometimes still does when goods are available rather than cash.

The years between then and now are littered with different experiences — school, secretarial training (You're too young to start nursing straight from school, Dear'), followed by the desired nursing training, working as a nurse and then setting off on an 'overseas adventure'. Like many others doing the same sort of thing I did lots of different jobs, some interesting some boring but always with the same goal — saving enough money to travel a bit more.

On one of these trips I met my husband, we married, not immediately, and the following day set off to Sierra Leone, where he had been working for some years. We then spent the next twenty years in various parts of Africa! Alan, as a Rice Breeder meant we were naturally living and working in rural areas most of the time. The exceptions being Conakry, Guinea and Zanzibar Town.

We led a fortunate life (to coin a phrase) during these years. Working for FAO, a United Nations agency, we met many people from all walks of life and made many friends. Our two daughters grew up staying with us, only going away to school when they were twelve and fourteen. Many years later when at home from Uni they said they had been discussing childhood with various friends and when we asked if they had enjoyed their childhood they both said 'absolutely'. We couldn't ask for a better answer — thank heavens for that!

#### **Some images:**

- The people, so friendly, their extended families all encompassing so there was no homelessness (well, not in the villages, the cities were and are a different story). The villages consisted of mainly mud huts with either palm leaf thatch or tin roofs and a few larger houses — for the 'big' men. Always some very simple market stalls, usually a dedicated market place and mostly a quite well-built and stocked shop run by Lebanese who were very astute traders. Naked babies toddling around, bigger (but not very much) sisters carrying a sibling strapped on the back. Little girls head-loading panniers of vegetables or water. The children always looked after small ones and usually there would be a granny or two and probably a man dozing in a hammock
- Kids loving football!
- Women always working — cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, carrying water and, of course, farming!
- The men preparing the farm and the women transplanting, weeding and harvesting the rice, then threshing and winnowing it ready to eat or to be sold.

Readying the farm for planting in a dry farming situation was often a matter of clearing quite large trees and vegetation, burning and then tilling until the land was ready to scatter the rice seeds — that was men's work. Irrigated farms required

Bird scarers are an integral part of rice farming as the birds can destroy a crop very quickly. The bird scarers make themselves a platform to sit on (with some shade) and then rig up an ingenious network of ropes or strings with noisy rattles attached, usually tin cans with stones inside. Shouts, along with vigorous pulling on the strings causes quite a hullabaloo — sufficient to scare off the birds, anyway!

Rice is eaten every day, where possible, and a meal is not considered complete when rice has not been consumed. Coconuts, too, were available nearly everywhere that we lived. Limited vegetables, including leafy greens, yams, beans, bananas, plantains, peanuts and cowpeas were all available.

Waste is a word that I don't think existed in the lexicon of most of the people among whom we lived. The children made the most wonderful toys out of wire, string and old cans and spent hours running around the village with them. Water is NEVER wasted. Just try carrying a bucket of water for several hundred metres, never mind kilometres, and you become very careful! Something worth thinking about in Australia today!

While in Zanzibar we became largely self-sufficient. We had a vegetable garden, bought a cow for her milk and the by-products, raised broiler chickens for meat and ducks for meat and eggs. We were also part of a co-op of expatriates who raised beef occasionally, hung and slaughtered the carcass (the Danish daughter of a butcher showed us how) and then, having spent the night on the floor of our friends air-conditioned bedroom (the coolest place available) a quarter or half carcass was deposited on our dining room table to be cut and packed in the freezer! The alternative source of beef was to buy at the local, absolutely unhygienic, market where the owner of the meat would take his machete and hack off a chunk, gristle and all!

Outbreak of cholera: fortunately we were on an island, Zanzibar, so it was contained. So were we who lived in Zanzibar Town — a cordon was put around the town so nobody except Alan and two other UN workers were allowed to leave town to keep an eye on crops etc.. They used to return each night with huge loads of produce which was then distributed because the markets were closed and the producers were not allowed into town. Because I had, in another life, been a nurse I was allowed to administer injections to the expatriate community. It didn't make me popular with the kids!

Malaria was such a huge problem! There is so much malaria and little is done to treat it. People are so ill and it becomes a chronic disease. Lots of children die. We were fortunate in that we had anti-malarial tablets to take and yet two of our family caught malaria in spite of the medications, probably because the parasite developed a resistance to the drugs. Anti-malarial had to be changed regularly to guard against resistance.

Schooling: Our kids did Victorian Correspondence School lessons until they finally went to 'proper' school. It stood them in good stead. After teaching them myself for a while a friend offered to do the lessons, so they would run off to Salaama's house and do their schoolwork on her dining room table. We found that the 'Corro' work was entirely flexible so if there was something important to do like exploring the reef at a very low tide, or sailing, swimming or just going out with Dad to the rice farms for an expedition it was possible. The only inflexible thing was that the work had to be posted on a Friday afternoon!

printing press and producing all the project documents for publication; giving injections; learning to milk cows; playing with and teaching my kids.

We used to make everything ourselves — the clothes we wore and the sandals on our feet. We cut hair, butchered beef, made butter, yoghurt and some doubtful cheese from our cow's milk. We tried tie dyeing, batik, papermaking, pottery. You name it and we probably tried it and loved it!

How lucky to have had all these opportunities.

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**Patsy Carpenter:** a long-time member of SWAN and a regular at meetings. Patsy contributed greatly to the success of the *Sharing The Wisdom* programs and *Conversations at the Courthouse*, eventually becoming secretary of the Administrative Committee. As her story suggests, she is actively involved in community interests. She has been especially moved by the plight of asylum seekers and has worked for their cause. Patsy has also shared her skills at pottery and ceramics trying to teach us less-gifted mortals!

## **A PEN PORTRAIT**

### **Peggy Kerr**

When I received the notice calling for pen portraits of SWAN members I immediately disqualified myself, as I disqualify myself from school reunions, Probus clubs, and all functions and activities where I might be expected to talk about myself. After all, I'm one of the silent, invisible minority, still basically not shown, mentioned or considered in this society. I used to have a number of cover stories that I trotted out if I had to, and I've spent a lifetime listening politely to other people's lives and preoccupations, but I'm tired of all that!

To ask any homosexual person how they became interested in social justice issues, especially if they were born in 1937, would be like asking that question of our lovely September, 2006 speaker, Sushi Das. She, bless her, has the strength to stand up and talk about racism.

As I believe Sushi Das would agree, it is the daily unthinking flicks and whips from unimaginative people more than the brutal assaults (verbal only, in my case) that do the damage. There are countless things in books and the press, on TV, and in daily life. I'll give a few recent, random examples. I can still hear the contempt in the voice of my nice companion on a coach trip when she mentioned that some celebrity is gay. In the Hastings library they have divided their fiction books into different categories, one of which is 'relationships'. Each category has its own little sticker on the back of the books, and 'relationships' has a little man and woman holding hands. Frequently on TV we see a crowd of people coming home, soldiers from Iraq, men and women, survivors of various disasters in different parts of the world. They fall into the arms of their loved ones, and are often shown exchanging lingering kisses. But ... they are all heterosexual! Until recently, anyway, even on the ABC it was apparently acceptable to make jokes about 'fairies', and remarks about 'poofs'. Pretending I was a group rather than one person I wrote some furious letters, and I hope that has now stopped.

Whether all lesbians are automatically feminists I doubt, although many lesbians have been prominent in the women's movement from the beginning. So, what about my development as a feminist?

It probably started, along with the rest of my emotional education, in 1970/71 when I became one of the first trainee telephone counsellors for Life Line, Melbourne. In those days we had the most wonderful training: groups of all kinds making us aware of feelings and communication. We even had weekend encounter groups. Feminist ideas were certainly around, and verbally espoused by many, although I remember one man saying that he could not imagine learning anything from a woman.

After five and a half years in Life Line, as both a telephone and face-to-face counsellor, I had decided to switch careers from teaching to counselling. Since all the Life Line educators I so admired had been trained in the USA, I set out to get myself into a doctoral program over there.

The USA will radicalise you, and it certainly did me. In fact, now that I'm back in Australia I am shocked by the fierceness of the feminist jokes my American friends

wonderful oases of liberalism, even if they are in the middle of a sea of corn, soy beans, and hog farms. My ex-partner is a professor of Psychology at Southern Illinois University, and so I was connected to universities in a number of ways.

I should probably add some early biographical details. I spent my childhood in Mont Albert, and attempted to grow up in the 1950s. I went to a girls' private school, thank God, so I did not have to cope with the opposite gender until, I suppose, my senior year. I have indelible memories of the Myer Dancing School (in Camberwell). I never knew what to wish for: to continue to be a wallflower, or for some youth to approach, seize me with a pair of sweaty hands and propel me backwards round the room, grinding his crotch into mine in the approved Myer manner while talking about some master at Wesley or the football team. All this time you had to listen entranced, with a pleasant smile on the lips, as though having the most delightful time.

Enough! Life is tough at times. I have to be glad I'm no longer the prissy colonial snob I seemed destined to be. Peace to the past, and to that lost teenager and twenty year-old who, thanks to the women's movement and gay liberation, did manage to survive and grow. From the foregoing, I'm sure it is obvious what an amazing boon it is for me to have, here in conservative 'Retirees' Paradise', the wonderful life-giving, renewing, sustaining SWAN!



**Peggy Kerr:** a regular attendee at SWAN meetings over a number of years, Peggy contributes to meetings with insightful comments and questions and is most helpful with feedback to committee members.

## **A TEN POUND MIGRANT!**

**Susan Blackburn-Mitchell**

It started in the library, my understanding of social justice, many years ago now. A not unkind but unthinking young woman more interested in labelled clothes, trendy shoes and going to discos to be aware of the people who surrounded her, entered the library in Moonee Ponds. *Teaching English as a Second Language* was the session, the invitation was to regularly go into the homes of people with very little or no English, introduce spoken English to the person and help them apply their knowledge outside the home.

I have no idea what propelled me to the library that night, nor do I know how I ended up in the Public Housing flats in Flemington teaching a young Vietnamese woman spoken English. But it spoke to my heart. From this young woman, and in fact from many people from her community (I think we ended up with about eight people in our very informal class) I learnt about the reality of not knowing if family members were alive or dead; if they died peacefully or from torture; about risking your life to save your life and that of your children; of being apart from the dominant society. They opened my eyes!

It was some time later that I remembered an experience of some years previously when I stood in a Parisian metro carriage and looked first one way and then the other and became aware that I was the only person with lilywhite skin. It came to me that this is how most migrants feel, especially if they look different from everyone else. Very alone, very obvious, probably very vulnerable.

I am a migrant, a *Ten Pound* migrant, and I still remember the feeling of vast distance, the isolation, and the unfamiliar smells and sounds, the colors and creatures, no-one understanding what I said, yet finding fun in how I spoke and dressed. Migration was a very hard experience, even when my family was welcomed and encouraged to come to Australia.

These are the feelings and memories I carry with me. I remember also the impact of a marriage breakdown and the sole responsibility of raising children. It is really all a blur of working hard and making do, of finding ways to cope until things got better, easier, fairer. And it was within this period, of things getting better, that I was brought to SWAN.

I was a mature age student, a pigeon pair to being a mature parent, having given birth to the first of my two children at thirty-one years of age. I returned to study initially at Frankston TAFE. It was here I met some of the most important friends and mentors of my life. In Community Development course I had undertaken I met women and men with vast and varied experiences and lives. One day, I was invited to a SWAN meeting; it was a newish group and met in the Mt Martha Primary School hall. Along I went. It was an interesting talk, but my children were reasonably young and I had to leave them unattended to go. So the anxiety of this impacted on my enjoyment. Plus, I was heading towards a university degree and was otherwise focused.

time for myself. I walked into the front room and was struck by the women about me. Women of age, older women, some maturing — like myself and a few women in their twenties and thirties. But what was most palpable was the level of commitment to community and society, understanding, empathy and challenge, acceptance and questioning, passion and action...especially action! There were artists, lobbyists, mothers, daughters, politicians, environmentalists, feminists, friends, academic, wives, students...and there were speakers who spoke from the heart and from their lived experience...I was hooked!

I've now been attending for years. I actually won a raffle once, and I was given the honor of introducing Kate Durham when she spoke. If I miss a session I feel a loss. I learn so much from each SWAN meeting. I've seen the numbers swell so large that we have moved from the front room to a larger one at Mt Martha House and now to Mornington Secondary College. I've seen an increase in younger women attending, including some sixteen year olds, surely the thinking women of our society's future. I've heard a young woman doctor speak about health issues in East Timor; a Greek woman speak of her love for her schizophrenic son and her commitment to people with mental health issues; a newspaper reporter speak of challenging the imposed limitations of her professions; an academic talk about the need for society to acknowledge the societal value of caring for the vulnerable — and all within a year!

What a gift it is to go every two months and share people's lives so intimately. To mingle and meet women with similar values and passions. To see the wonderful and inspirational women in the Administrative Committee creating this opportunity for us all; to hear how SWAN women are supporting those who seek justice; how they march against injustice; write letters of understanding and fury; speak out for refugees and the environment and equity; speak against war and suffering and inequality — in letters, on the radio, in the print media — and out loud! To see southern women taking action!

I am a SWAN woman and I am very proud to be one. I sincerely thank those women who sat around a table many years ago in Mt Martha and said they wanted more. The result is, I'm sure, more than they could have imagined and all we could have ever hoped for. Congratulations on ten SWAN years!

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**Susan Blackburn-Mitchell:** Susan is actively involved in many aspects of community life. A regular attendee at SWAN meetings she contributes meaningful comments and suggestions in response to speakers. Susan has given long-term commitment to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the Women for Women in Africa collections at SWAN meetings. Susan was elected to the Administrative Committee at the 2006 AGM which later appointed her as SWAN Facilitator.

## 26 HOURS FROM LONDON TO ROSEBUD

### Lyn Carpenter

Late 1999: the closing of the century and my life as I knew it! London held everything for me, challenging but rewarding work in one of the largest HIV clinics in the country and a stable, reliable network of unusually close friends (think famous five...and add twenty years!): shared laughter and tears, trysts and traumas, clubs and classes. We lived in each other's pockets for those twenty years; had holidays in exotic places and weekends in the country. Life was enjoyable and exciting in its unpredictability, but also its familiarity. Then the phone rang! My little sister was pregnant and she was nervous. At her suggestion, I took stock of my life, realised a few painful truths about my age and financial position and decided to move to Bristol, a smaller yet far more accessible city for a hard up NHS nurse. But instead of the usual direct route on the M4, I would go via Australia where I would stay in Melbourne with Diane for the duration of my six months visa while she prepared for motherhood and I got my head around my change in direction and decision to become a responsible adult!

Fast forward five months and baby Jess had arrived and her rapidly aging aunt crawled out from the welcome shade of a small Banksia into the throng of young (oh so young!) people by one of the stages at *The Big Day Out*. Determined to make the most of my free ticket (why else would a middle-aged woman, without her usual similar-aged buddies, be anywhere near such a *young* event?) I recognised the sounds of an old punk band from London and the familiar sounds from long ago. I danced and sang along to *London's Calling* while the Australian sun glowed white orange to crimson as it began to sink behind the eucalypts. I drank in those perfect Australian moments and turned to discover I was no longer dancing alone in a sea of indifference, suddenly there he was! Jeff, a guy with mad curly hair and the biggest smile I had ever seen, bouncing towards me through the crowd. Out of 40,000 people I had met my soul mate! Six weeks later we decided to get married. Of course, turning this decision into a reality wasn't quite so simple, but many air miles, tears, confetti and visas later, in the fateful hours of 9/11/01 our plane eventually touched down in Tullamarine. A few hours later I was 'home' on the other side of the world: in Rosebud!

Jeff is the most perfect partner, but no one person can be all things to anyone. Without my gay multicoloured, straight and varied socio economic group, I was more alone than I imagined possible. My similarity with my new neighbours seemed to start and end with the color of our skin and the common language we spoke. Looking back, I was naïve to imagine I could just 'slot in'. It's hard to make friends under any circumstances, to transplant a life and history and customs and expect to 'carry on regardless' is bordering on the stupid! Still, I learnt but not always the easy way. All my previous beliefs, assumptions and habits were questioned and blown part. It was hard, but I'm sure, no more so than for millions of other immigrants before me. I met some lovely people amongst the mass, one of them introduced me to SWAN. The first meeting I attended was a revelation! It was like stumbling across an oasis in a seemingly endless desert. A safe place that I could be myself, without fear of scandal or judgement, a nurturing warm place that would enable me to see another side.

another. Due partly to my experiences emigrating to the other side of the world and experiencing life on a 'foreign planet', I became particularly self-absorbed but being amongst the women of SWAN enabled me to have the courage to start looking outside of myself again. To search for justice and stand up for what is right. I think it is wonderful that 'ordinary' women can meet together and create such enormous energy and strength. I feel grounded and vibrant again. I gain strength of mind and self by being amongst such intelligent inspirational women and my life has become far more complete by becoming part of the group. My heartfelt thanks to all those wonderful women who met around that kitchen table ten years ago and created this special environment for sharing and openness.

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**Lyn Carpenter:** Lyn and her sister Diane are 'regulars' at SWAN meetings and events. They are most supportive in their comments and suggestions and, who knows, perhaps Lyn might even consider nomination to the committee — one day in the not so distant future!

## THE PRICE OF A FINGER

### Julie Beeforth

Growing up in Australia in the 1950s I heard our family stories recounted around the dinner table. In earlier years my grandad worked in the boot trade; a stuff cutter was his title. For cutting out leather pieces to make shoes, a cutting machine was used. The guards were removed to speed the work along! The price of a finger up to one knuckle, five guineas, to the second knuckle ten guineas! Granddad's poor hand was minus three fingers, lopped off in sacrifice to the great god mammon. Granddad and his fellow workers were sacked at Christmas time to queue in the New Year for their jobs once again.

The next generation, my father, Treasurer in a union for over twenty years of his working life, the lessons well-remembered!

During the latter part of the twentieth century the proletariat seemed to be achieving equality in the workplace for men and women alike. Who would have guessed that the tide would turn going into the twenty-first century — our government betraying its people for the benefit of local and foreign corporations? We have forgotten the lessons of the past.

These events were the stepping stones towards my joining a political party, my interest in equality and justice and for my interest in an ever-widening range of issues. SWAN has encouraged my desire to know more about local and international matters. To this end I salute all the women who are part of SWAN.

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**Julie Beeforth:** Julie's contribution is a practical demonstration that SWAN is indeed achieving its aims of encouraging and empowering women to influence community decision-making at various levels by being well-informed. Her story is a stark reminder to us all to safeguard rights and to care about social justice.

## **'PROUD TO BE ONE OF THEM!'**

### **Fran Stubbs**

It's all Christine Nixon's fault! And Ruth Carpenter's! And Gwen Wilson's! How come? About five years ago I heard on the grapevine that Christine Nixon, recently-appointed Chief Commissioner of the Victoria Police was to be a guest speaker at a gathering in Mornington. I was particularly delighted when Christine had been appointed by the Bracks Government as the Chief Commissioner, so ... to have the opportunity to hear her speak here in Mornington would be a special treat!

I recall mentioning this to my dear friend Ruth. To my delight I discovered that Ruth knew all about the date, time and place of Christine's appearance in Mornington. 'She is speaking at a SWAN gathering!'. 'SWAN? What's SWAN'. Ruth invited me to go with her. An invitation I gladly accepted if only for the opportunity to hear Christine speak. But, as it happened, it has been so much more for me; and feeds my spirit in a way I could never have imagined.

Unfortunately, on that particular Sunday morning Ruth was unwell and not able to attend SWAN. She encourage me to go, however, and not exactly being the shy and retiring type I was quite happy and comfortable to go on my own. 'Just front up to the registration desk, apologise for me and tell them your name and address and you will be made to feel welcome!'

I did! I was! And the rest is history!

On that Sunday morning I knew no-one. This was not so surprising as I had not been living in Mornington for long. I had hardly sat down when a very gracious, charming lady sitting two seats away from me began chatting to me as though we were 'old friends'. She was our own dear Gwen Wilson, and she probably told me at the time, but I only realised recently that it was her first SWAN attendance also!

Thank you Christine, Ruth and Gwen!

As the years have rolled on since that memorable Sunday morning I have been a regular, enthusiastic member of SWAN, inviting other women I know to attend. I have appreciated greatly the efforts and the time spend by the members of the SWAN Admin team to seek out and bring to Mornington women of talent, skill and expertise; women in leadership positions; women who have the courage to follow their dreams, their callings; women who generously serve the community in so many and varied ways. I have been inspired by all the women presenters.

All my life I have been influenced, motivated and encouraged, by women. My mother went to work for the first time since her marriage some thirty years prior, in a Catholic Bookshop when she was in her late fifties. She was affectionately known in our family and church community as 'organising Annie'. My older and only sister was, all her life, extremely entrepreneurial in the field of educational practice and administration.

This influence was further deepened and broadened for me when in 1956 at the age of eighteen I joined a Catholic Order of Nuns, the Sisters of St Joseph. There, for over

in education to the 'people of God' with women who nurtured and inspired me by word and example to develop and practise those feminine and womanly qualities which inspire, give life and offer nurture and nourishment.

These women were unique, talented, passionate, independent, energetic and dedicated. It was my privilege to be called 'one of them' for so many years of my life. The blessings and life-giving experiences of these years motivate, encourage and influence me still. As I have reflected on what it was that 'propelled me to be involved in SWAN' I have a very clear insight that the spirit of the SWAN women and their involvement in issues of social justice are the very same motivators that permeate the women of the Sisters of St Joseph. It's really no wonder, therefore, that I feel so at home in the company of SWAN women just as I did for so many years as a Sister of St Joseph.

I am excited by being in the company of women; and especially in the company of women who, in so many different and varied ways and circumstances, strive to make this world a better place.

As I recall some of the phrases and words that describe the sister, I believe they could just as aptly and appropriately apply to SWAN women:

We (Sisters of St Joseph) serve in a variety of ministries:  
Of being and presence;  
Of suffering and healing  
Of educating and caring.

sisters to Mary Mackillop, founder of the Sisters, born in Fitzroy 1842, called her the service of others.

through Mary Mackillop encouraged her sisters to be open to God's actions in and their weakness in a joyful and generous spirit.

God, a As Sister of St Joseph we are called to a radical trust in the providence of readiness to discern the urgent needs of the times; and the faith and courage to risk suffering and failure.

For me, now, in this new phase of my life and in this place where else but in SWAN would I find:

Women of courage  
Women of strong faith  
Women committed to the cause of education  
Women who empower other women  
Women in advocacy roles  
Women who pray  
Women searching for the truth  
Women sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those less fortunate  
Women who make a difference  
Women who acknowledge and respect diversity in unity  
Women who believe in the uniqueness of every person  
Women of intensity  
Women appreciative of, and comfortable with, silence  
Women in pursuit of justice

Women who lead balanced lives  
Women crusading for the marginalised  
Women of action  
Women of peace  
Women of substance  
Women who are home-makers  
Women who appreciate beauty  
Women who love and promote learning and self-awareness  
Women who share  
Women who listen  
Women of vision  
Women who dare to dream  
Women of wisdom  
Women who know the value of gathering around kitchen tables

This 'litany has now become very much part of my praying life; and my response to each phrase is:

Walk with me today!

As I reflect on my life as a Sister of St Joseph and now my life as a 'SWANer' there are many similarities evident to me, especially when we gather to listen, to reflect, to share, to dream, to question, to speak. These similarities are:

- A group of women concerned about issues of justice
- Opportunities to listen to quality speakers of substance
- Flowers, candles, scrummy food
- Laughter, joyful conversations, serious conversation
- Care and concern for the good of our world
- I'm still sitting at the front!!

So ... thank you to that special group of women who gathered around a kitchen table some years ago and dared not only to dream, but to act!

In conclusion I share my SWAN prayer with you:

O great creating spirit  
Breathing and beating in our hearts;  
Breathe into us  
    Wisdom, courage and strength.  
Renew us  
    As caretakers of this land  
    Celebrants and celebrators of the mystery of life.  
Challenge us  
    To continue to be women of action; and to do good.  
Inspire us  
    To be open to the opinions of others;  
    And assertive in expressing our own.  
We pray this in a spirit of gratitude and appreciation for all women.  
Amen

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**Fran Stubbs:** regular attendee who is most supportive and always willing to help.

## IN RECOGNITION...

### Janice Gray

I didn't think I had a story worth telling in this publication. So many women have had to struggle so hard for fairness and equality, things I have always accepted as my right. But I have penned these words in recognition of those who have paved the way for me.

I was a first-born and there was no money, which necessitated our living with one or other set of grandparents. Consequently, I had a lifelong connection with these loving people in whose eyes I could do no wrong.

One of my grandmothers was in the paid workforce and I saw the importance of women having their own income, yet that never prevented her travelling hours from the other side of the city to attend every concert, presentation or special activity her grandchildren were involved in. I also observed the unfairness of her being expected to perform all the household duties. The other grandmother was a wonderful homemaker, cook, seamstress and volunteer worker and I valued her skills and contribution to society, particularly when, in the 80s she cared for my youngest daughter one or two days a week while I returned to work. And what a special bond that was!

I had parents who never questioned that my education was in any way less important than that of my brothers. I learnt about social justice as my father worked tirelessly for the rights of others through his involvement with the union movement. And my mother, while remaining in her profession until seventy, always made time for a range of volunteer activities. At eighty, among other things, she still cooks and delivers delicious meals to the elderly and unwell — what an inspiration!

I have been fortunate to marry a man who sees me as his equal and has been a loving supportive and involved father to our three daughters. It would not occur to him to complain as I drag him out of bed early on a SWAN Sunday morning to lug the sound system and other boxes to our venue and help set up tables and chairs.

So I write this as a tribute to the 'ordinary' women of SWAN who enrich so many lives and also to the women and men who have shaped my life. I try to live up to their ideals and often read the words of the Quaker, Stephen Grellett, that inspired my grandmother:

*I shall pass through this world but once.  
If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show,  
or any good thing I can do,  
let me do it now;  
let me not defer it or neglect it,  
— for I shall not pass this way again.*

**Janice Gray:** has been a regular attendee at SWAN meetings from the very earliest

## **'NOT QUITE TEN POUND POMS'!**

### **Rosemarie Draper**

Although I am not one of the original members of SWAN, I have found myself suddenly, one of its longest serving committee members, since the 2006 AGM committee elections resulted in the retirement of four members who have contributed so much to the development of SWAN over the past ten years. This is one of the many reasons that I am truly sorry that I will not be able to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, due to a family commitment interstate. I hope that all goes wonderfully on the day and that SWAN continues to inspire and motivate women across the Mornington Peninsula and surrounding areas to learn about and hopefully act on the social injustices that exist in our world.

From my first SWAN meeting, I felt that inspiration and motivation. I had only recently moved to live on the Peninsula and had a new born son and a one year old daughter and felt socially and emotionally isolated. I had met other women through playgroups but hadn't found anyone who shared my interests and passions. I had returned to Australia with my partner, two years before, after having backpacked around the world for six and a half years. I had a social work background and had worked in the areas of aged care, child protection, housing and mental health. I also had a non-English speaking background (Burmese) and longed for contact with other women who wanted to discuss issues close to my heart such as the situation in Burma and other global trouble-spots; the political situation in Australia; the worrying racist undertones of recent government policies; and the plethora of other women's and social justice issues relating to government and media policies and actions. Instead, many of the other 'mums' I had contact with seemed to find these topics uncomfortable and/or boring and definitely didn't encourage them. I had begun to despair about having moved down to what seemed to me a very 'insular Peninsula', when I was first told about SWAN and attended my first meeting. Suddenly I was in a room full of welcoming women, not necessarily all with the same views or opinions, but all who were interested in social justice issues and more importantly keen to learn more and to try and work towards change. Since then, the Peninsula has increasingly felt like a place where I want my children to grow and develop and that I can be proud to be a part of.

I have enjoyed listening to all the speakers I have heard since my first meeting. Their stories have been inspiring and often intellectually stimulating and emotionally charged. Some however have impacted on me more than others: Dr. Caroline Taylor's openness about the horrors of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father and then the legal system is something I will never forget; as was Kate Durham's insights into the plight of asylum seekers; Tracee Hutchison's worrying yet often hilarious anecdotes about media repression and disastrous environmental decision-making and Kali Paxinos's moving account of her role as a carer and her love and devotion to her son who has schizophrenia. However, it was Sushi Das's presentation about her personal experiences of racism which had echoes for me in my own life experiences.

One example of what I mean by this relates to my very first experience on arriving in Australia as an immigrant 30 years ago. My family had fled the country of Burma in 1964, following the military coup in 1962, when I was four years old. We had then lived in England for twelve years before making the decision to immigrate to Australia.

We came across as one of the last immigrants from England, to be offered assisted passage to settle in Australia, and while not quite “ten pound Poms”, we had a subsidised trip on a cruise ship called the *Australis*. It took four weeks to get to Australia and the first place we docked was in Fremantle. A lot of the friends we had made on the journey were getting off to start their new lives in Australia in Perth. But even those of us who were going on to Melbourne and Sydney all got up early to catch our first glimpse of Australia.

As well as people getting off at Fremantle, there were also some people getting on, for the opportunity to go by ship from Fremantle to Melbourne or onto Sydney. I will always remember standing on the deck and seeing some older Italian or Greek women dressed in black, boarding the ship. When suddenly one of my fellow passengers, who was a young Aussie guy returning to Australia after a working holiday in England, grabbed me by the elbow and said “ ‘Oh god Rosemarie, look at all those wogs getting on the ship!’ I was completely stunned by this. Back in England they used the word ‘wogs’ to mean something completely different and usually used it towards black people of Afro-Caribbean or Asian descent. Something I had got almost used to being called in the playgrounds in England. Suddenly I was in a country where a young white man thought it was ‘normal’ to call another white person a wog, when talking to me!! Just because I then had an English accent and he had got to know and like me during the trip across, the colour of my skin had become invisible to him and he had no inkling of how ironic I found his comments...

Since that first incident, I have found the same sort of thing happen over and over again. The targets might have changed over time. Instead of Italians, Greeks or the Dutch being the scapegoats of racist type comments made to me; later it became people with Vietnamese or other Indo-Chinese/Chinese heritage and now it is Muslim people.

My personal ‘action’ against this type of racist behaviour has been to try and raise awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity on the Peninsula through voluntary work in the areas of pre, primary and secondary school multicultural education and festivals; multicultural community arts projects and more recently through my paid work with the South Central Region Migrant Resource Centre. So I for one was particularly pleased when SWAN made the decision to put on the Islamic Fashion Parade this year. I look forward to SWAN’s next 10 years and I’m excited to learn that our plans for speakers in 2007 include a speaker on a topic relating to Burmese women. Congratulations to all SWAN members for their participation over the past ten years, I’m just sorry I won’t be there to celebrate the anniversary with all of you.

**Rosemarie Draper:** is a committed and active member of SWAN Administrative Committee. As her story demonstrates, Rosemarie is also committed to a range of social justice issues and causes on the Mornington Peninsula.



## REMINISCING ABOUT SWAN

WITH VAL and MAUREEN

Both **Val McKenna** and **Maureen McPhate** were among those women who sat around that (now proverbial) kitchen table discussing ways to provide opportunities for women of all ages to become better informed about current issues and social justice issues in particular.

Maureen recollected that, although the original meeting had been mooted by ALP women, the proposed group would be non-party political, encouraging women from various backgrounds and political allegiances to become involved, exchange views and perhaps listen to different or alternative viewpoints. Val says that she found the idea of bringing women together for such a purpose an exciting one and enthusiastically took up the challenges of forming such an organisation. In all honesty, though, Val said, she never dreamed that the proposed group would develop into such a successful and highly-regarded organisation.

Both Val and Maureen have been part of the Administrative Committee for the full ten years — Maureen only retiring at the September AGM. Maureen was a most efficient Secretary to the Admin Committee for eight years, an amazing example of commitment! Val focused her efforts mainly on suggesting and contacting speakers, at which she achieved such success that she became the Admin person responsible for organising the SWAN speakers program. This job was later coupled with that of Treasurer. Despite their onerous tasks on the Admin Committee these two women — for years — have been responsible for the more mundane demands of shopping for supplies for catering purposes including food, drink, plates, glasses, serviettes, and everything else required for the delectable repasts that make SWAN meetings such a delight!

And who do you think stores all the equipment and returns glasses to the supermarket? No prizes for guessing! And, just to keep them on their toes, these two intrepid SWANers also advertise their telephone numbers so that we can all RSVP by the given date for the next meeting! Oh, one more thing, the SWAN newsletter reaches members through the untiring efforts of Val and Maureen. **Alleyn Lacy, Jo Diplock** and others have also assisted in this task over the years. It involves checking membership lists, folding letters and placing them in envelopes, affixing address labels, stamping the SWAN PO address on the back of some two hundred envelopes and then off to do the posting!

Looking back, Maureen said that a highlight of the ten years for her has been witnessing the growth in support for SWAN and achieving recognition for the quality of speakers and range of topics they have addressed. Val's efforts in seeking out highly qualified speakers has been untiring and she is expert at convincing them they will find a SWAN audience appreciative and eager to become informed. For her part, Val responded that the highlight vividly etched in her mind was the spontaneous response of the SWAN audience to Irene Bolger. Reflecting on the experience, Val felt that women reacted to Irene's forthright approach and



After more thought Maureen said that a further highlight for her had been gaining an understanding of the many examples of the daily struggle of the underprivileged and disadvantaged people in our society, and of the extraordinary commitment of those delivering assistance and offering support. Maureen concluded she valued the warmth of friendships formed with other SWAN members through shared concerns for those deserving to live in a more just and compassionate community.

As a final comment, Val turned her thoughts to the years ahead. ‘You know’, she said, ‘as women, we really need to look at the past to determine our future; we need to be more **active** in demanding change, just as women did in years gone by. Right from the early days of white settlement in Australia women were active in seeking improvements to social and working conditions— as individuals exemplified by Caroline Chisholm, Vida Goldstein and Louisa Lawson; and in groups such as the Temperance Movement, the Suffrage Movement and much later the Save our Sons movement. Today we might not all agree with their particular aims, but we *can* agree that those women took *action* to achieve change; they didn’t just sit around waiting for it to happen! These are the women we should remember and be inspired by today in working for a better future for women and a fairer and more just society for everyone. Nevertheless, if we’re seeking a shining-light from the present we need look no further than the inspirational Dr Helen Caldicott whom I once had the privilege of meeting. Her great passion, vitality and commitment are positively palpable. This physician, humanist and dedicated advocate for nuclear disarmament also founded and headed *Physicians for Social Responsibility* and *Women’s Action for Nuclear Disarmament*. Today’s women should stretch out their hands, grasp the baton of action and run with it!’

We can understand, perhaps a little better now, why those women who sat around *that* table included the word ‘*action*’ in the name they chose for their proposed women’s group on the Mornington Peninsula.<sup>1</sup>



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1. DR in discussion with Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate.

**WOMEN SPEAKERS**

Imposing, yes that's the word! Nothing less does justice to the diversity, talent and wisdom of the women who have addressed SWAN over the past ten years. Some, with their moving presentations have made us weep; others have made us laugh, even while discussing the most serious of issues; still others have prompted us to immediate *action* — sometimes in the form of a donation or funding, but on other occasions individual members or SWAN as a group have become actively involved in supporting organisations and/or causes. On the following pages some examples can be found. All speakers have been informative; challenged us to think about problems or issues from an alternative or different perspective; and have convinced us that 'the good' exists and that we can all help to make the world a better place for everyone.

Our heartiest thanks and congratulations to **Val McKenna**, not only SWAN Treasurer, but also responsible for organising our brilliant program of speakers!

\* \* \* \* \*



**PICTURED ABOVE IS THE SWAN 2005 GALLERY OF BRILLIANT GUEST SPEAKERS**  
**From left Dr Caroline Taylor, Eleni Bereded-Samuel, Professor Marcia Neave**

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**PICTURED ABOVE IS THE SWAN 2006 GALLERY OF EQUALLY BRILLIANT GUEST SPEAKERS!**  
**From left Tracee Hutchison, Kali Paxinos, Dr Anne Manne, Sushi Das, Professor Marilyn Lake**

## A ROLL-CALL OF SWAN SPEAKERS

(not in chronological order)

Denise Hassett (first speaker)	Sushi Das
Joan Kirner	Dr Anne Manne
Mary Bluett	Professor Marilyn Lake
Christine Campbell	Anne O'Rourke
Judith Couacaud Graley	Glenyys Romanes
Mary Crooks	Sharan Burrow
Susan Feldman	Amanda George
Felicity Hampel, QC	Sian Prior
Susan Davies	Kate Baillieu
Irene Bolger	Dr Lauren Wimetal
Pamela Curr*	Trish Bolton
Sally Mitchell	Lillian Holt
Vivienne Nicholson*	Kate Durham* (with Julian Burnside QC)
Bronwyn Pike	Elleni Bereded-Samuel
Janet Powell	Kali Paxinos*
Dr Lynette Dumble	Dr Caroline Taylor*
Dr June Factor*	Marguerite Ryan*
Morag Fraser	Professor Linda Hancock
Morag Loh	Professor Marcia Neave
Chief Commissioner Victoria Police, Christine Nixon	Dur-e Dara
Sara Coward	Christina Browning*

Asterisks denote details relating to **ACTION** outcomes can be found in the following pages.

IT HAS BEEN A SWAN TRADITION TO PRESENT GUEST SPEAKERS WITH A POSY OF FLOWERS AS A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION. WE EXPRESS OUR THANKS AGAIN — FOR THE SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE AND FOR INSPIRATION!



## SWAN IN ACTION ...



**PAMELA CURR:** spoke to SWAN in her capacity as manager of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

**ACTION:** as individuals and a group, SWAN members took up the cause of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the Asylum Seeker issue in general. Monetary donations have been made and SWAN continues to collect personal necessities and suitable food and clothing for delivery to the Resource Centre.

Susan Blackburn-Mitchell, present SWAN Facilitator, accepted responsibility for seeing to delivery of the gifts. Other SWAN members, including Val McKenna, Alex Hayward, Pasty Carpenter and Maureen McPhate are some examples of SWAN members who have personally supported asylum seekers in a variety of ways. SWAN continues to support the worthy cause of asylum seekers and highly commends the devoted and committed work of **Pamela Curr**.

**VIVIENNE NICHOLSON:** addressed SWAN in the second half of the year 2000 about her concerns to protect the natural, built, historical and cultural environments of the Mornington Peninsula. Vivienne's well-researched paper, the passion with which it was delivered and her obvious detailed knowledge of all aspects of the Mornington Peninsula environment stirred in her SWAN audience the need for action!



Vivienne speaking with Robyn Williams from the ABC Science Show

**ACTION:** in responding to questions as to what individuals and/or SWAN might do to raise awareness about the desperate need to take steps to protect the Peninsula's environments, Vivienne suggested forming a group to work towards achieving those aims. In the way of SWAN's own beginnings, a meeting was called, a committee formed, aims clarified and a name and logo developed. In short time, this small group organised and staged a *Community Environmental Forum* at which the keynote speaker was **Robyn Williams** from the ABC Science Show. The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council supported their efforts and the forum, with twelve workshops conducted by highly-skilled and qualified people in their areas of expertise, was held on 1 April 2001. The group called itself *Sharing The Wisdom* on the basis that if community members shared their environmental knowledge and wisdom we would be well on the way to preserving the rich heritage of the Mornington Peninsula. Congratulations to **Vivienne Nicholson** for her untiring efforts!

## SWAN IN ACTION ...

**Dr JUNE FACTOR:** addressed SWAN when she was president of the *Friends of the ABC*. As June told us, this organisation represents the public's interest in its national public broadcaster. It comprises *Friends of the ABC* groups from every Australian state and territory who work together on national campaigns.

**ACTION:** June's insightful comments, based on years of 'insider' experience and well-documented research, convinced many SWANers of the immediate necessity to become members, enabling the important work of this organisation to continue. Subsequently membership forms have been available on the 'share table' and, when important or controversial decisions are about to be made, current members share the need for action at SWAN meetings. SWAN also became, and remains, a group member of *Friends of the ABC*. SWAN recognises the worth of **June Factor's** efforts and commitment in the years she held the presidency of the *Friends of the ABC*.

**MARGUERITE RYAN:** at the time of her presentation to SWAN worked in public relations for the Irish Chamber of Commerce — but it was in her capacity as the creator and developer of the organisation called *Women for Women in Africa* that she spoke to an enthralled SWAN audience.

**Gwen Wilson's** comments in the October newsletter succinctly describe the SWAN reaction: The entire SWAN gathering hailed Marguerite's work as an outstanding achievement — to think that one woman set out, and continues to make, a difference to over one million people is truly remarkable!



**ACTION:** there have been cash donations to *Women for Women in Africa* from the group. Continuing support through individual donations of urgently needed materials and equipment such as books, pencils, pens, and other learning-related items, however, have demonstrated the depth to which SWAN women were moved by what Marguerite said in her description of the poverty and destitution of the women and children in the slum of Kibera, Nairobi. Marguerite's life is truly extraordinary in terms of what she has achieved: the mother of seven children; spent most of her life working for non-profit organisations; no stranger to poverty herself she was shocked by conditions in Kibera which is a hillside slum and home to more than a million people in Nairobi. **Marguerite Ryan** — a continuing inspiration to us all! May she continue to receive the support for her work that she so richly deserves.

**SWAN IN ACTION ...**



**CHRISTINA BROWNING:** spoke to SWAN as a representative of the *Australia Karen Youth Project*, primarily a social justice organisation which advocates human rights, self-empowerment and self-determination of the Karen and other ethnic groups within a democratic Burma. It focuses mainly on grass-roots education projects for Karen youth. The AKYP

works alongside the Karen community in Australia and local NGOs on the Thai Burma border. AKYP also works towards raising consciousness about the situation in Burma.

**ACTION:** cash donations and continuing contact and rapport with this group. A speaker addressing issues relating to Burmese women is planned for the 2007 SWAN program. We thank **Christina Browning** for her gentle and moving presentation which included music and songs.

**KATE DURHAM:** spoke about Asylum Seeker issues and her attempts to video inside off-shore detention centres. Her talk would have been thrilling had the details been fictitious and not a factual account of her experiences! This renowned artist has been unstinting in using her time, talents and intense sense of commitment to the cause and suffering of asylum seekers.



**ACTION:** Kate's talk confirmed SWANers in their determination to assist and support asylum seekers. One way in which they did this was to buy the booklet written by, and containing art work of, this amazing woman. **Val McKenna** arranged for some 200 of these publications to be delivered, all of which were sold. Not only SWANers, but many Australians would give rousing cheers for **Kate Durham!**



**Dr CAROLINE TAYLOR:** spoke to SWAN as the author of two books dealing with sexual and child abuse and battling the courts in seeking justice. Both publications were based on her personal experiences.

**ACTION:** Caroline's gentle, honest, but emotional address moved us greatly. Cash donations have been given to the *Phoenix Foundation*, established by Caroline to assist and educate girl victims of sexual and child abuse. Thank you **Caroline Taylor**.

**SWAN IN ACTION ...**



**KALI PAXINOS:** was guest speaker at the May meeting this year (2006) and, at the time, she worked as Carer Consultant in the North West Mental Health Service. Kali's topic was *The Trauma of Mental Illness and the Road to Politics*. As **Gwen Wilson** later reported, a record audience (at the time) of ninety SWANers attended to hear Kali's passionate but level-headed address. She told how her experience of coping with, and supporting, her son who was diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young man in 1985, eventually led her to stand for parliament as a member of the *People Power Party* at the next State election in November.

The high attendance at this meeting indicates strong community interest in mental health issues. And, as Kali commented, these matters have significant ramifications for women as they are the major carers in our society. The simple and unaffected way in which Kali presented her story — which included a selection of mood-enhancing and calming music — captured both the attention and the hearts of her SWAN audience. If an alternative term for the word 'inspiration' is required, then it should be 'Kali Paxinos'!

**ACTION:** SWAN made a generous cash donation to the *Peninsula Carer Council* on Kali's recommendation. Kali's talk also resulted in raising awareness of the problems and issues relating to individuals and families affected by mental illness. Relevant reading material has also been available on the share table. We warmly endorse the comments of **Rosy Buchanan, MP** at the conclusion of question time when she thanked **Kali Paxinos** for all her great work and commitment to the cause of working for individuals and families affected by mental illness.



**A PARTICULAR SWAN IN ACTION!**

We can't talk about SWANers in action without mentioning Meg Merton. Meg's *action* is not the result of hearing a certain speaker. She is the maker of delicious marmalades

and chutneys which she sells at SWAN meetings. All proceeds from Meg's sales are handed over to SWAN which, in turn, has donated many hundreds of dollars to deserving groups with Meg's approval.

A great strength of **SWAN** is that it facilitates action. That is, by listening to guest speakers who share their knowledge and expertise in their own fields SWAN women can then act not only in an informed way, but are made aware of *what* action they can take as individuals if they choose to and *how* they can go about it. Often, too, members bring letters and/or petitions to meetings enabling others to become actively involved without too much difficulty.



## SWAN IN ACTION ...

### SPECIAL EVENTS

From time to time over ten crowded years of SWAN we have been provoked to action by issues or problems in the local, national or global communities. Generally, this action has taken the form of a particular special event in which the general public has been invited to participate. These special events include:

- 1999 Conference: *Increasing Women's Participation in Community Settings*.
- 2001 *Sharing The Wisdom (STW)*, Community Environmental Forum.
- 2001 *Mornington Peninsula Community Audit: a blueprint for community consultation*.
- 2002 Public meeting featuring Tahmeena Faryal, leading Afghani woman activist, in protest against bombing and war in general to resolve differences.
- 2003 Public meeting featuring Surma Habid: *Consequences of War in Iraq*.
- 2003 *Women Against Domestic Violence* presentation featuring Chisholm TAFE students.
- 2004 Public meeting introducing **Andrew Wilkie** to the Mornington Peninsula community. *Iraq, Intelligence and the Decline in Australian Democracy*
- 2005 Actively supported the Mornington Peninsula Shire *Domestic*

The following pages provide further details of a selection from these events.

Judith Couacaud Graley    Robyn Williams, ABC



Andrew Wilkie



Tahmeena Faryal

At right, Jenne Hally with models at the Islamic Fashion Parade



A collection of pictures from SWAN special events

**SWAN IN ACTION ...**

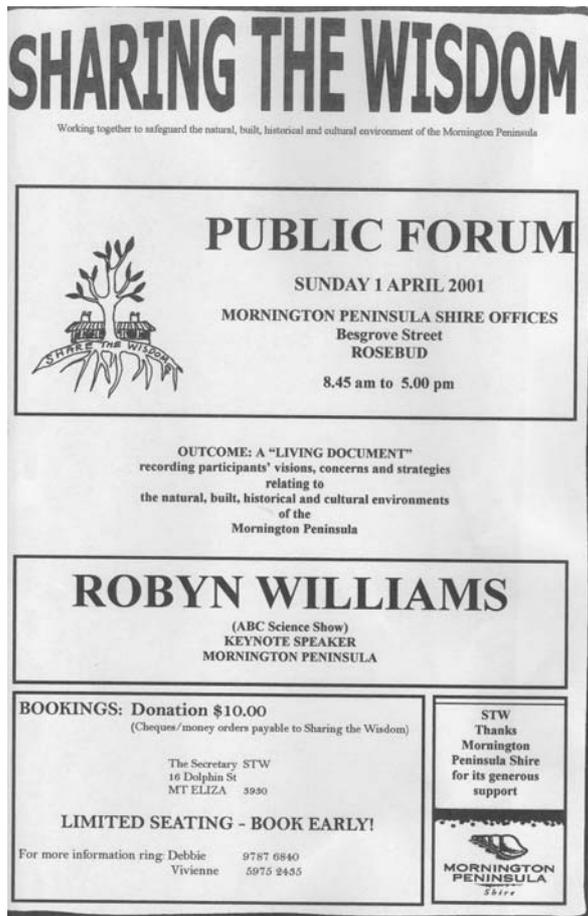
**SPECIAL EVENTS**

**EVENT: STW COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

**RELATED ISSUE:** concerns about finding ways to protect the natural, built, historical and cultural environments of the Mornington Peninsula.

**LOCATION:** Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Offices, Rosebud.

**PLANNERS:** a committee was formed with **Vivienne Nicholson** as chairperson, **Debbie Roberts** secretary, **Grace Fraser** Treasurer. Other committee members included **Patsy Carpenter** who later became secretary, **Barbara Rimington**, **Maureen McPhate** and **Val McKenna**. Others SWANers and community members came along to help from time to time. The Forum was well-attended and the outcomes were recorded in *A Living Document*. The same committee also organised the series *Conversations at the Courthouse*.



AT LEFT  
FLYER FOR STW's  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PUBLIC FORUM  
LOGO DESIGNED  
BY SWAN MEMBER  
PAM HEARN



Judith Couacaud Graley  
chaired the Plenary Session



Robyn Williams  
Keynote speaker

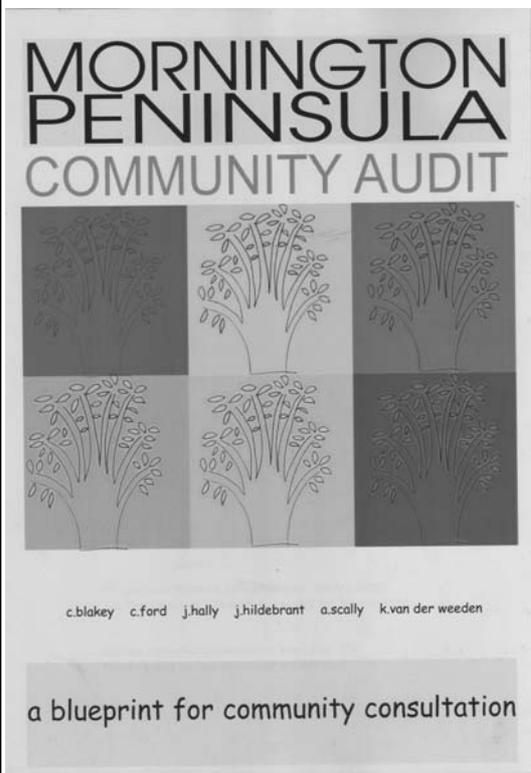
**SWAN IN ACTION ...**

**EVENT: MORNINGTON PENINSULA COMMUNITY AUDIT**

**RELATED ISSUE:** that people of the Mornington Peninsula, by means of a Community Audit, could be encouraged to engage with, and influence, government and organisational policies; develop new ways of looking at their environment and work together to achieve better community cohesion. Briefly, any community audit is about gathering the views, opinions and experiences of local people in relation to their lives within their community.<sup>1</sup>

**LOCATION:** Various locations on the Mornington Peninsula including the use of space at Mt Martha Uniting Church used for meetings.

**PLANNERS:** Jenne Hally and Christine Blakey initiated the project through SWAN. MPSC Councillors Judith Couacaud Graley, Jane Hildebrant (also both SWAN members) and Snez Plunkett were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. Other members of the Community Audit Working Group were Carole Ford, Ann Scally and Kathleen van der Weerden.<sup>2</sup>



Pictured at left is the front cover of the completed report of the Mornington Peninsula Community Audit. The Audit was funded to the extent of \$1500 from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council through SWAN.

As the report comments, the project was an opportunity to further the aims of SWAN which encourages members to share their skills and to be involved in social action and community development.<sup>3</sup> Seven SWAN members gave of their time and energy to undertake and complete this project; Sharon Donnelly was the seventh who helped in the early days.

1. *Mornington Peninsula Community Audit: a blueprint for community consultation*, edited Ann Scally, 2001, p9.  
2. Ibid. pp3,5.  
3. Ibid. p4.

**SWAN IN ACTION ...**

**EVENT: PUBLIC PROTEST MEETING AGAINST THREAT OF WAR**

**RELATED ISSUE:** anxiety and extreme concern about the possibility of war as a consequence of the September 11 attacks on America and the human suffering it would cause for the populations of the countries concerned.

**LOCATION:** Mornington Information Centre, Main Street, Mornington, Wednesday 20 March 2002.

**PLANNERS:** SWAN worked with Dr Lynette Dumble, convenor of the *World Sisterhood of Women*, to bring Tahmeena Faryal to Mornington. Val McKenna led a team from the Admin Committee to organise this event which was attended by some 200 men and women. Carole Ford, SWAN Facilitator at the time, chaired the meeting.



**Tahmeena Faryal**

Dr Lynette Dumble, convenor of the *World Sisterhood of Women*, was the first speaker to address

SWAN after the September 11 attacks on America. SWAN worked with her to bring Tahmeena to Mornington. Tahmeena Faryal had given an acclaimed address to the USA Congress in 2001; she had also addressed the United Nations General Assembly, so the event provided a rare opportunity for people from the Mornington Peninsula to hear at first-hand this world-acclaimed human rights activist. Tahmeena declared bombs and war would not resolve Afghanistan's problems. Rather, international cooperation to bring democracy and stability to her country was the 'road to be travelled.' \$500 was collected at the meeting and donated to RAWA.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Revolutionary Association of Women from Afghanistan*. Established just on 30 years ago it is responsible for setting up schools with a curriculum based on the teaching of democracy, literacy and tolerance.

**EVENT:** PUBLIC MEETING INTRODUCING ANDREW WILKIE, former Lieutenant Colonel and Senior Intelligence Officer in the Office of National Assessments.

**RELATED ISSUES:** Concerns about the deterioration of Australian Governance and the decline of Australian democracy especially in relation to decisions being made about appropriate responses to the September 11 attacks on America.

**LOCATION:** Mornington Information Centre, Main Street, Mornington on Friday 23 April 2003. SWANers also participated in street marches in Melbourne and on the Mornington Peninsula against the war in Iraq.

**PLANNERS:** Lieutenant Colonel and Senior Intelligence Officer from the Office of National Assessments, Andrew Wilkie, resigned from his position in March 2003 in protest over the looming war in Iraq and his claim that the Howard Government lied about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. **Val McKenna** made personal contact with Wilkie and congratulated him on his stand. As part of the conversation Val invited Andrew Wilkie to speak at Mornington. The invitation was accepted and within a month **Val and SWAN Admin Committee members** organised, publicised and prepared for the public meeting which proved highly successful. An overflowing audience warmly applauded Wilkie's talk and also congratulated him on his actions in resigning his position.



The subject of Andrew Wilkie's address was *The Decline of Australian Democracy*. He referred to the dishonesty of the Federal Government, especially in regard to Intelligence matters and claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; the troubling politicisation of Australian Intelligence Services; the role of whistle blowers; and the underperformance of the print and electronic media. Wilkie's resignation was reported around the world.

## SWAN IN ACTION ...

**EVENT:** a performance including dance, movement, verse and music exploring the devastating effects of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Also, in conjunction with Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, a Public Seminar was organised to consider these same problems.

**RELATED ISSUES:** community attitudes to domestic and sexual abuse. Both these issues were represented in SWAN support for the release from goal of Heather Osland who had been convicted of murdering her husband. The degradations, physical and mental abuse which Heather Osland had suffered, together with the actual circumstances of her husband's death, enraged many women (and some men) to such a degree that a support group was formed which, in its turn, SWAN assisted in every way possible to work towards Heather's release.

**LOCATIONS:** Mornington Information Centre and other locations on the Mornington Peninsula.

**PLANNERS:** Dr Carole Ford, former SWAN facilitator, was a key figure in

organising the performance. Some of the performers were students of Carole's from courses she was conducting at Chisholm TAFE. Judith Coucaud Graley gave an opening address at the performance stressing the urgent need for changed community attitudes in dealing with the problems of abuse in its many forms.

Val McKenna and Amy Duncan, as well as other Admin Committee members and SWANers assisted in a range of activities to have Heather Osland released from prison.

Val made supportive visits to Heather in prison taking SWAN good wishes & gifts.

At right Val and Heather on the morning of Heather's release

TAKE ACTION TO  
**RELEASE HEATHER OSLAND**

- Heather Osland has endured 5 years in prison. Her Petition of Mercy asks the government to show COMPASSION to Heather and her family. This avenue of Mercy is a recognised part of our legal system. If granted, it will not judge whether Heather was right or wrong - her conviction will stand. Such a petition recognises exceptional circumstances and allows compassion to be shown.
- Whatever the legalities, Heather has suffered enough: 13 years of brutal domestic violence and 5 years imprisonment. If mercy is denied Heather will suffer at least 4 - 5 more years imprisonment. Heather was:
  - Repeatedly bashed and raped
  - Psychologically & physically demeaned
  - In constant fear of her life and the lives of her children
  - Emotionally scarred for life

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON COMPASSIONATE GROUNDS**

Women have suffered under the Victorian Criminal Justice system - Heather Osland continues to be a victim

**SIGN THIS PETITION OF SUPPORT**

Above, SWAN flyer advertising a petition for Heather's release.



**SWAN IN ACTION ...**

**EVENT: ISLAMIC FASHION PARADE**

**RELATED ISSUES:** concerns about increasing tensions and misinformation relating to Islamic culture in general and to Islamic women in particular.

**LOCATION:** Mornington, Sunday 27 August 2006.

**PLANNERS:** Jenne Hally, Jo Diplock and Rosemarie Draper were responsible for representing SWAN in working with Gail Price from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council in organising and staging this special event. Preparations included an appearance at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to gain an exemption from Victoria's anti-discrimination laws, allowing men to be excluded from attendance. **Judith Couacaud Graley** and **Amy Duncan** also assisted and provided helpful suggestions. As well, SWAN secretary **Janice Gray**, Facilitator at the time **Debbie Roberts**, and Assistant Facilitator **Heather Boundy** were actively involved in the success of this exciting function. SWANers attending on the day were brilliant in their 'hands-on' involvement and are deserving of our profuse thanks.



Pictures  
by  
Janice Gray

## SWAN IN ACTION ...

### EVENT: AWARD OF BURSARIES

**RELATED ISSUES:** a major SWAN concern has been, and continues to be, the encouragement of young women to develop the ability and confidence to speak articulately and publicly about community matters. A practical way of achieving this aim has been to award young women with SWAN Youth Encouragement Bursaries enabling them to undertake a course of their choice, and approved by the SWAN Admin Committee, that might assist them in developing these skills.

**PLANNERS:** The suggestion was first made by Judith Couacaud Graley and enthusiastically taken up by the Admin Committee at the time. When funds from the wind-up of STW were transferred to SWAN, they came with a wise request that the money be used for an open-age bursary with the same aims. Jacqui Holland, a regular attendee at SWAN meetings was the first recipient of the open-age SWAN Bursary.



Above left, Amelia Travers and Chloe Johns, recipients of SWAN Youth Bursaries, 2006-7. At right, Bonnie Einsiedel, inaugural Bursary recipient, who has attended many SWAN meetings over the years when pressures of studies, exams and work allowed her to do so. Bursary funding assisted Bonnie to develop her French language skills which she felt would assist her in gaining insights into that culture during her trip to France in December 2005. At the September 2006 meeting Amelia Travers told of her experiences at the Space Camp with other young people from around the world; and Chloe provided pre-meeting background music on her flute. We will hear from Chloe and Jacqui Holland at SWAN meetings during 2007. Congratulations all!

# SWAN newsletter

**Chris Blakey** — whether she is aware of it or not — prompted my interest in the possibility of a SWAN newsletter! She may not remember, but I do very clearly, that she brought along to an Admin meeting a sheet of paper on which were printed two articles, a heading that said ‘newsletter’ and a picture. She said, very offhandedly ‘I thought someone might like to take up this idea.’ The concept certainly took *my* imagination. I had already been impressed by the personal touch of receiving an envelope with flyer inside advising me of a SWAN meeting. I felt as if I were really needed at that meeting, as if the people who sent it really cared! I wanted to retain and develop that notion of personal contact and care. A newsletter, it seemed to me, was an exciting way of doing that. Moreover, I had become interested in computers and the possibilities they opened up for writing and the sharing of information quite overwhelmed me!

The challenges of the computer have been stimulating and most rewarding. As I often say about them: you don’t know what you need to know until you need to know it! And, the satisfaction you feel when a technical problem is solved or when you find out how to do something that looks complicated but, in fact, is very easy, can be most rewarding indeed! The pitfalls, however, can be equally as devastating as the rewards can be uplifting — and my ‘typos’ and ‘disappearing text’ have made me feel extremely embarrassed at times! Nevertheless, SWANers are always most generous both in their praise of ‘the good bits’ and in their forgiveness of the errors.

The advent of digital photography has, I think, enriched the pages of our modest publication. As I said to Maureen McPhate just recently, digital photography combined with computers allows someone like me, who knows zilch about taking photos, to appear as if one is almost an expert! And, I like to think Maureen is correct when she says that our latest newsletter editions certainly look a little more sophisticated and worldly-wise than our very early numbers.

My warmest thanks to all those who have contributed to the letter over the years I have worked on it — about six, I think. I am most grateful to all those who contributed book reviews, supplied photos or sent me snippets of interesting information.

At a particular meeting I noticed someone sitting in the front row taking notes during the speaker’s presentation. I later approached her, found out her name was **Gwen Wilson** and that, amongst other things, she was an habitual note-taker! She readily accepted my invitation to provide a report for inclusion in our newsletter; and so began ‘*GWEN WILSON REPORTS...*’

Regularly, a few days after SWAN meetings I receive beautifully written and detailed notes from Gwen and, besides

At right, Gwen Wilson, SWAN’s intrepid reporter!



**AUGUST 2003**

## **SHARAN BURROW – inspiring speaker!** Gwen Wilson reports...



On Sunday 20 July, Sharan Burrow, ACTU president gave an inspired and inspiring address to over 70 SWAN members. Articulate, insightful and without notes, Sharan provided an overview of the global situation in the workplace as well as an update on work issues in Australia. In relation to paid maternity leave, Sharan said that Australia still has a long way to go, but praised the work of Prue Goward in this area. In other countries such as the UK and certain Asian nations maternity leave arrangements were much more advanced.

Of particular interest was Sharan's recent visit to Camp 5 on the Burma/Thailand border where the regime is not democratic. She said 'forced labor is very bad and people are forced off their land to feed the army.' In Russia, Sharan claimed, the situation for workers is very bleak.

In talking about the 'changing nature of work in Australia' Sharan commented that less than 50% of the workforce works 9-5 while only 1/3 work a full week. Approximately 1/3 of the workforce is casual, of whom the majority are women. In relation to pay equity, Sharan said that women's

**OCTOBER 2002**

## **ABC not out of the woods yet!** Gwen Wilson reports ...

Former president of Friends of the ABC and author, **Dr June Factor**, said that 'Friends' acted as a 'watchdog' in safeguarding that institution of Australian life: the ABC.

After a change of government in '96 funding was cut by 12% and within 2 years the ABC had lost 20% of its staff. ABC Friends and Australians generally were appalled at the dismantling of Radio Australia which had disseminated news to all points north. The ABC has been in operation for 70 years. The government of the day is significant in the overall functioning of the ABC through funding and the appointment of senior Board positions. Dr Factor said that many positive outcomes had been achieved through the efforts of Friends of the ABC and other activists — most of whom were women. Although things had stabilised she warned 'we are not out of the woods yet!'

**APRIL 2003**

## **DURHAM AND BURNSIDE DRAW BIG AUDIENCE**

Gwen Wilson reports ...

In an emotionally taxing address Kate Durham told over 85 SWANers of her visit to Nauru where she witnessed first hand the appalling conditions experienced by refugees. Detainees have now spent two Christmases in the harsh conditions of this inhospitable country — all food and other items have to be flown in from Brisbane. Kate continues to receive mail from detainees on Nauru which she finds emotionally disturbing — she wonders how these desperate people can be seen as a threat to our country.

Julian Burnside added that the detainees are held unlawfully under Nauru's constitution and that therefore, Australia is transgressing this same constitution. In responding to a question, Burnside postulated that Australia could successfully take 40,000 of the world's displaced people



**JUNE 2003**

## **SWANers appreciate INAAM BARATAK** Gwen Wilson reports ...

Members warmed to gifted Inaam Baratak, speaker at the May meeting. With her parents and siblings, Inaam arrived in Melbourne in 1974, settling at Armadale. Inaam said that multiculturalism in Victoria is considered a worthy model. The 2001 Census shows Victoria had migrants from 208 out of the 275 countries in the world. Climate, political stability and safety are major factors in the choice of Melbourne as a place to start a new life.

Inaam made the point that many migrant professional people such as lawyers and doctors experience great difficulty having their qualifications accepted and, in many cases, had to undertake years of retraining. Nevertheless, she and her colleagues have been able to assist migrants find positions in the fields of engineering, medicine, teaching, art, law and information technology. Migrants are under great pressure from families to succeed.

**JUNE 2004**

## **Lillian Holt – a unique character!**

Gwen Wilson reports ...

Cascades of shared laughter throughout Lillian Holt's address indicate that her PhD in humor will be a complete success!

At the outset, Lillian made it clear that she spoke for herself and not on anyone's behalf and that her focus was 'the human condition'. Although formally well-educated herself and appreciative of how that enriched her life and opened doors, she acknowledged that formal education does not necessarily equate with wisdom.

Her own parents, she said, were illiterate, but full of commonsense, love, and imbued with values that respected others.

There was more to reconciliation than 'walking over a bridge' she stated. It required an 'interior journey' and an honest search for the truth.

Lillian has a unique character full of warmth and charisma. The measure of her ability to get on the same wave length as her audience was reflected in comments from members at the conclusion of Lillian's



**MAY 2006**

## **An Idealist in the Media** Gwen Wilson reports ...



In a wide-ranging and inspiring presentation Tracee Hutchison addressed the subject of *being an idealist and working in the media*. Tracee's comments and analyses are based on extensive and widespread experience in the electronic and print media. In introducing Tracee Val McKenna congratulated her on surviving in an area where women are somewhat marginalized and standing up for what is right rather than what is merely popular is hazardous. Tracee is passionate about environmental concerns and despaired about attitudes and policies relating to state forests/wildlife and on a national level, found Australia's approach to global warming unacceptable and ignorant of the facts. Tracee quoted environmentalist/historian Tim Flannery as claiming that the most significant threat to planet Earth today is global warming! Tracee's insistence on committing herself to the ethos of the ABC which she and others were convinced was threatened caused her to resign but this action has undermined new opportunities of employment. Tracee answered questions about, and commented on, issues as wide-ranging from the war in Iraq to the PM's admission of lack of knowledge/memory about highly significant matters.

**OCTOBER 2005**

**AN INSPIRING ADVOCATE**

**Gwen Wilson reports ...**

When Elleni Bereded-Samuel addressed the September SWAN meeting she proved what a wonderful advocate she is for immigrants from the Horn of Africa countries.

This quietly forceful, but charismatic Ethiopian woman, works to build bridges between people who come from countries that have experienced many forms of unrest: violence, killings and hatred. On arrival in Australia these people are in a state of confusion and shock, but must somehow learn to adjust as they are unable to return to their homelands.

Elleni's work with these people entails setting up a range of group activities — including a small business plan to grow/sell hydroponic lettuce; sewing groups; and outings to various venues that assist these people to learn about Australian expectations such as law and order and other aspects of Australian life. The scope and breadth of her work is enormous but Elleni's undoubted skills in relating to people were soon obvious to her listeners!

Many of these Horn of Africa people are tertiary educated often with multiple degrees, but are unable to find employment appropriate to their skills because of language difficulties. Through her various networks, however, Elleni is often able to solve this problem.

Elleni Bereded-Samuel has just been appointed as a Commissioner to the Victorian Multicultural Commission. The appointment recognizes her work and offers the opportunity for even further positive outcomes! Elleni urges us all to be sensitive



**Elleni Bereded-Samuel with Val McKenna**

**OCTOBER 2004**

**The poverty of Kibera** **Gwen Wilson reports ...**

Marguerite Ryan told the SWAN audience at the September meeting of her efforts to improve the lives and expectations of some million people in Kibera, on the outskirts of Nairobi. There are few resources, even water is scarce and schools and hospitals lack basic necessities. After her initial visit to Kibera Marguerite knew that nothing would change without outside help and so she launched 'Women for Women' an organization that works to support the women of Kibera by assisting them to earn a living to provide for their families and gain self esteem.



**Kiberian women are vulnerable to poverty, HIV infection and violence**

Response from an article in *The Age* highlighting the work of her group was overwhelming ( 95% were women). The group's committee has increased from 3 to 14 with a large membership.

Marguerite related many personal moving experiences such as that of Teresa whose mother had died of AIDS. Teresa desperately wanted to attend school but had no hope of finding the necessary \$10 until Marguerite made the dream a reality. Marguerite also told of the challenge to cope with such poverty even for a short period: the stench from raw sewage; water scarcity; and the abject poverty reflected in lack of basic amenities such as chairs/tables. But the people of Kibera are not

## JUST ONE MORE THING ...

... there is nothing wrong with having ideals and being idealistic, for ideals are like the stars, so the saying goes. And, whilst we may not reach them, we can chart our course by them.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Lillian Holt, address to SWAN 16 May, 2004.