

# alga NEWSLETTER

Australian Lesbian & Gay Archives Inc  
PO Box 124, Parkville, Vic 3052

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## YES, WE'RE STILL HERE!

Although you haven't had a newsletter in nearly a year, and many of you must be wondering where we've gone, we are happy to say that the Archives is still here and – despite some bumpy patches – as active and healthy as ever.

The Archives will be celebrating its twentieth anniversary in August 1998 and we are planning a number of events to mark the occasion. In the meantime, there have been some major changes over the previous months. Many of you will have heard about the accommodation crisis. It's a long story, but the upshot is that, offered a place in the new ALSO community centre, we surrendered the location we had lined up. ALSO then decided against establishing its centre and we became seriously homeless. We are currently looking for a new home and talking to various people about options, but if anyone out there has 60+ square meters of accessible but lockable space, we'd love to hear from you.

At the moment, we are housed in the basement at the Victorian AIDS Council (Claremont St, South Yarra) and operating pretty much as normal, with weekly open nights and full access to most of the collection. In the midst of all the uncertainty, we have managed to keep operating, and large numbers of researchers, students and the just plain interested have been through in the past twelve months.

A new committee was elected at the AGM. There are eight people, including some of the new volunteers who have got involved over the past year. Graham Carbery is enjoying a well-deserved retirement from the committee. The new office-bearers are: President: Graham Willett, Vice-president: Mark Riley, Secretary, Jodie Joyce. Rob Thurling continues as Treasurer. Other Committee members are Kate Doolan, Gary Jaynes, Mary Mavroudis, Wayne Murdoch and Keith Stodden.

We have been keeping busy with more than just the accommodation issue. This year saw the publication of the latest issue of the *Periodicals*

*List*. The Archives has nearly 700 titles and more than 15,000 issues listed, reflecting the extraordinary depth of the periodicals collection. Bound periodicals alone number 229 volumes; other parts of the of the periodicals collection (newsletters and the like) are stored in boxes and filing cabinets. The *Periodicals List* is available for \$10, plus postage of \$2.

Our preoccupation with the accommodation question, and the fact that we were closed for a considerable period, led us to forego membership renewals last year. We are now reminding people that it is time to renew again and a form is enclosed. Donations over and above membership renewals are tax deductible. Membership is \$20 per year, or \$5 for low income people.

Establishing the Archives' profile is an important part of making it accessible. Over the coming months we want to let as many people as possible know of our existence, our resources and our value. We will be at Midsumma, on the Pride March and maintaining – and, we hope, extending – our open hours. Details follow.

### The Archives in Action:

#### Archives' Midsumma Open Day

Saturday February 7, 1-5 pm

Basement, VAC, 6 Claremont St, Sth Yarra

#### Pride March contingent

Sunday February 1, 4:30

Lakeside Drive and Fitzroy St

#### Midsumma Carnival stall

Sunday February 15, midday to dusk

Alexandra Gardens

#### Weekly Open night

Thursdays 7:30 – 9 pm

For details or enquiries ring Graham on 9388 2141.

# DONATING TO THE ARCHIVES

The Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives welcomes donations of material in almost any state. However, in an ideal archival world . . .

You hold on to things. You write dates, places, names and events on the backs of photographs. You avoid sticky photo albums. You write dates on the backs of posters and flyers. You clip articles out of magazines and papers and fully reference them (publication, date, page), being sure to photocopy them (A4) before they turn yellow and start to curl up. You remove staples and invest heavily in plastic coated paperclips. When you download and print from the internet, you include the header message. To your t-shirts and banners you attach details of the related groups, organisations, demonstrations and the relevant year. Everything is safely removed from dust and damp, and stored flat to avoid creases, folds, tears.

Whether you chose to throw things into a box under your bed, or establish an archivally sound collection, it is inevitable that one day it will threaten to take over your room or your house and you'll want to move it on. We welcome donations as small as a flyer and as large as a personal library. Whatever the size, scope or subject, if it contributes to our history, we regard it as an important acquisition.

Some common concerns and questions . . .

***You have a house book, a diary, a personal account of an event. You only want women to read it. You don't want it read for twenty, or one hundred, years.***

Anything donated to the Archives can be placed on restricted access, the terms of which are fully documented and respected.

***You know that the Archives already has something. Should you throw it out?***

Donate it anyway. The Archives will keep one or two complete sets of everything. After this, duplicates can be traded with other archives for material that the Archives doesn't have. For example, we have "traded" with the New South Wales State Library in the past.

***You don't want your collection to be thrown out by someone who has failed to grasp its significance.***

You can bequeath your books, magazines, letters, manuscripts, diaries to the Archives by way of a clause in your Will. The Archives has gained valuable material in this way.

***You have stories to tell, but don't have time to write them down.***

Contact the Archives about contributing to the Oral Histories on audio tape. The Archives does not have video facilities, but would be pleased to add histories in Sign to the collection.

We invite you to contribute to the recovery and preservation of our history by continuing – or beginning – to donate material and encouraging others to do the same. If you have further questions about donating material to the Archives, we would like you to write to us, ring and talk to a volunteer, or arrange a visit.

**Jodie Joyce**

## Speaking of Donating . . . Received

This year's donations to the Archives include:

- collections of books from John Bradbury of Queensland and Walter Hillbrick of Melbourne;
- periodicals, ephemera and correspondence from the Gay Lib and post-Gay Lib era, from Ken Sinclair and Frank Prain;
- records of ACT-UP Melbourne (Michael Connors) and Sydney (Glenn);
- collection of AIDS-related posters from Geoff;
- back issues of *Lesbiana*, donated by the editor, Jan Campbell.

## Wanted

We would like to be able to bind up some journals from the seventies and need the following to complete our sets:

- *Scarlet Woman*, no. 14
- *Refractory Girl*, nos. 24, 25, 26

We'd also like to collect the current magazine *Blue*.

Anyone who has copies of these and would like to pass them on to us, please get in touch with Graham Willett on (03) 9388 2141.

As well as the new edition of the *Periodicals List*, we still have copies of Graham Carbery's *History of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*. Now available for \$10.

# WALTER HILLBRICK

7/4/20 - 11/9/97

Walter was born in Melbourne at the Salvation Army Home for Unmarried Mothers in North Fitzroy in 1920. He became a ward of the state and spent his childhood and adolescence in foster homes and eventually at the Central Mission Training Farm, Tally Ho, run by Edgar Derrick, a humanistic Christian whose beliefs and work were to strongly influence Walter's life. After undertaking psychoanalysis in the 1940s Walter abandoned religion, coming to believe he'd used it as a crutch because of his sexual guilt, but humanism remained a guiding philosophy.

Walter lived most of his life in Melbourne, except for a period from 1938-47 when he lived in Sydney. He was in his early fifties when he became involved in Society Five, Melbourne's first organisation to cater for homosexuals, and was either secretary or president of Five during the years 1972-86. Some of the things that Walter helped create at Society Five reflected important things about his own life. Walter loved reading, and saw books as a means of self-education. Similarly Five's excellent library broadened the horizons of many Melbourne homosexuals at a time when there were no gay bookshops, no gay press to speak of, and you were lucky to find a positive book about homosexuality in most public libraries. The Five library also provided a comfortable place to be for those people who were not much into the social scene.

Five also ran a drop-in centre and telephone advisory service, later called Gayline Support Services. It worked on the self-help principle, that most homosexuals just needed to find others like themselves, and then they would be off and running. Walter wasn't always the epitome of patience in dealing with callers. If he sensed that a caller was being pretentious or long-winded, he could be very gruff. But if someone had a genuine problem – particularly with the law or authorities – Walter's sense of injustice would be pricked and there would be no limit to his generosity. When Five closed its doors, Walter continued running a phone advisory service from his home, virtually until he died.

Walter's political activism was driven by a strong sense of justice, a stubborn streak, and above all, a remarkable moral courage. Walter didn't regard himself as politically radical, yet he took on some

fearfully unpopular causes, and he did so without the benefit of much formal education. This strength no doubt stood Walter in good stead when he became a front person for a gay organisation in the hostile environment of the early 1970s. But it certainly didn't start there, because it would have taken no less courage to be a conscientious objector on pacifist grounds during the Second World War, going to prison rather than taking what he saw as the soft option of a job that still would have helped the war effort. It was this experience of prison that led to Walter's co-founding of the Prison Reform Council in NSW in 1945, and an enduring commitment to prison reform, expressed in prison visits and lobbying. And in his old age, when he could have been expected to be planning a comfortable retirement, Walter's refusal to be quiet about the injustices of age of consent laws put him at odds with the law as well as some in the gay world. Walter believed that genuine consent, not an arbitrary age, should govern laws about sex, his view shaped by a lifetime of having the law regard any homosexual act as criminal, regardless of consent. As a young man in the late 1930s, Walter himself went to prison for having sex with a man only a few years older than himself.

Walter maintained his independence until practically the day he died, and in his 77 years he led an amazingly full life. He travelled widely, had a variety of jobs, and was an active trade unionist in the days before he became self-employed.

Walter scorned the idea of 'gay community', believing that being homosexual didn't mean that you had much else in common. Yet Walter did believe in some sort of solidarity among those who experienced hardship because of their sexuality, and in practical ways devoted a great deal of his life - particularly over the last 25 years - doing what he could to make the lot of his fellow homosexuals more secure, happier, freer.

**Gary Jaynes**

The Committee of the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives would like to express its sadness at the death of Walter and gratefully to acknowledge his bequest of \$5,000 to the Archives. We are currently considering ways of using this money that will appropriately acknowledge Walter's contribution to gay and lesbian life.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIPSTICK LESBIAN

*They don't hate men but they have money and style and are having too much fun on their own. They are glamorous, gorgeous and glad to be gay.*

Penelope DeBelle, 'Wicked Women Age, 29/1/94

In 1993, like a collective Richard Attenborough, the Australian media set about investigating the lipstick lesbian: her haunts, habits, desires, income, attitudes and appearance. The media findings were common, consistent and conclusive: having thrown out her overalls, shaved her armpits, slimmed down, found a decent hairdresser and a matte lipstick, this new-fashioned lesbian was declared fit for public consumption.

Made over, this 'new' lesbian fascinated. She was said to live a life of pleasure: inhabiting the fashion world, frequenting cafes and embracing glamour. Lesbians came to be regarded as trend-setters. Lesbian 'looks' were imported into fashion shows, department store catalogues, shop windows and designer boutiques. Piercing and tattoos proliferated. The phenomenon was dubbed lesbian chic. The new style was (re)produced, commented on, analysed and compared to the anti-style of the 70s and 80s. The lipstick lesbian was said to represent the repudiation of lesbians past and to properly address what *Cleo* magazine termed a 'ghastly image problem'.

While Martina Navratilova and kd lang were famous individuals, globally recognised for their talents and their public claims to lesbian identity, lipstick lesbians were seen as the leaders of a new international lesbian culture which promised collective visibility. The lipstick lesbian held open the closet door, promising safety and an era of acceptance. If Martina and kd were the risk takers, the lipstick lesbian was the risk reducer.

The *Herald Sun* brought us 'Women in Love' with Brunswick Street cafe photos, while the *Age* offered 'Wicked Women'. *Woman's Day* (11/10/93) brought us 'Mum and Dad are Lesbians', about Louey's lovely lesbian mothers. *Cleo* (October 1993) discovered 'The New Lesbians' and revealed the venues where they could be found in each city and overseas. Anna King Murdoch did non-participant observation at a 'lesbian disco' (*Age*, 14/4/94). Feature writers at *HQ*, *New Weekly*, *Elle*, *Vanity Fair* and *New Woman* all increased the visibility and currency of the lipstick lesbian – and no doubt the circulation figures of their respective magazines too.

Meanwhile, *Married With Children's* Amanda Bearse came out under pressure. Roseanne revealed

that she had women lovers. Sandra Bernhard played a lesbian character, Nancy, on the sit-com *Roseanne*. The film *Thelma and Louise* gestured towards, but stopped short of, lesbianism. Madonna kept lesbian company and peddled lesbian images in her book *Sex*. Yet, at the same time, Whitney Houston insisted that she was straight and, in 1994, Cindy Crawford and Richard Gere announced that they were both heterosexual and that their marriage was genuine.

Although the 'new' lesbian was celebrated, she was also a source of cultural anxiety. Questions, such as how to distinguish between a lesbian and a straight woman, were asked. The key means of determining this in the past had been an assessment of appearance. The discovery that all lesbians were not butch, or on the arm of a butch, rendered this 'test' obsolete. There was also concern that straight women might be persuaded by the new image. *Cleo* asked its readers to decide whether Helena Christensen was more sexually attractive than Michael Hutchence. Sixty three percent said yes.

The lipstick lesbian was not only problematic for the general community. Although lesbian chic made femmes more visible, the presumption of heterosexuality commonly adhered to images and expressions of popular femininity. This presumption was evident in both the lesbian and the general communities. In addition, the lipstick lesbian was often defined in opposition to the butch woman. The apparent desertion of the so-called masculine ways of the past was taken by some commentators to mean open season on lesbians who contested, disrupted and otherwise challenged dominant femininity. Not surprisingly, acknowledgment of continuing discrimination, high rates of gay and lesbian youth suicide and positive lesbians had little place in discussions of the allegedly blissful existence of the lipstick lesbian. While the odd sentence provided a momentary qualifier, the erotic, exotic, affluent and predominantly white image prevailed.

Poppy Industries has had good reason to enter floats in the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras: The lipstick lesbian is generally believed to be good for business. Advertisers regard her as both consumer and consumable. She is sold back to us by various companies (such as Elle Bache, Versace, Telstra) who rely on her ability to fascinate, and her interest in consumer goods, to sell clothes, cosmetics, numerous publications and many other items.

Jodie Joyce