

# The Women's Library

N E W S L E T T E R

THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY INC. PO BOX 271 NEWTOWN NSW 2042

Vol. 2 No. 2 MAY 1993

## Since the last newsletter...

On April 21, The Women's Library met with South Sydney Council's Mayor, Director of Health and Community Services and Director of Public Works and Services. After receiving our submission requesting accommodation, the Mayor, Vic Smith, has agreed to support the library, and the search for an appropriate venue has begun.

Apart from receiving this news, we have had a very busy three months. The committee has been organising for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, our upcoming AGM, and our bookfair in July. We have been continually processing donations and constantly updating our membership files.

The committee hopes to meet with many members of The Women's Library at our AGM. If you are not yet a member, it is easy to join before the AGM - please read page two for more AGM information.

Vicki Harding, Convenor

## *The Women's Library* **B O O K F A I R**

Sunday 25 July 10 am - 4 pm  
Derwent Street (Behind Glebe Markets)  
Entry: 50¢ Donation

Hundreds of second hand books of all types for sale, proceeds to The Women's Library.

All books welcome - bring donations to Glebe Public School Hall on Saturday 24 July (10 am - 2 pm) or to the Fair. Donations for the Library's collection also desirable! See you there!

Fair enquiries - Ph: Gina 550 2725  
The Women's Library Inc. PO Box 271 Newtown 2042

## The Women's Library at Mardi Gras

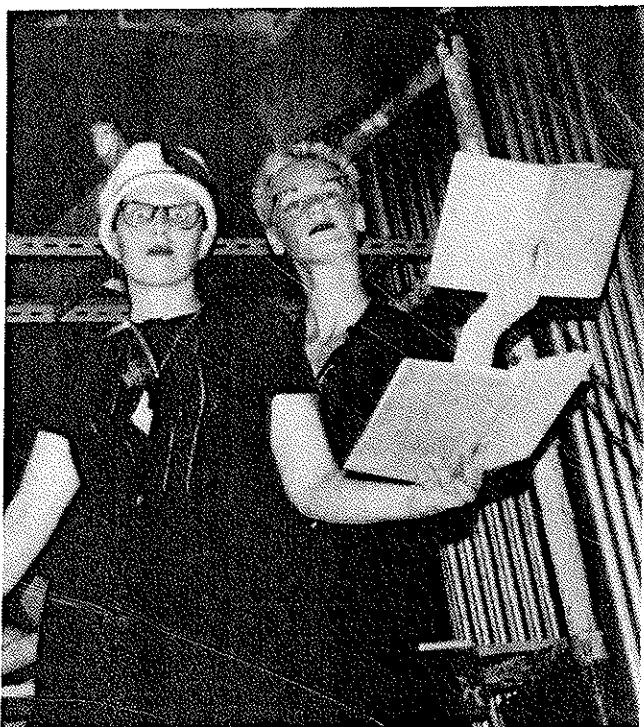


Photo: C. Moore Hardy

First came the idea - on a rainy day walk - librarians on a Mardi Gras float who get carried away with what they read in books. Then came the agonising planning meetings - weeks spent on design (a "deconstructed stylised library"), the logistics of an eight tonne truck and a big set, finding women truck drivers, ideas for choreography and lining up performers. Then four weeks of rehearsals and set construction.

February 27 was a big day and night for everyone involved. The set had to be moved out of the Buckland Street Warehouse and secured onto the truck. We had to organise generators and light and sound. The performing gals had to don their lippy, glasses, black skirts and docs, and perform for almost two hours. The crowd was daunting, but we were received with much enthusiasm - we were something interesting for the women in the crowd to watch.

Pulling the set apart, when all we wanted to do was party, and the next few days of feeling anti-climaxed were not pleasant for some of us. Neither was the discovery that eight sets of costumes loaned to us by Siren Vintage Clothing of Paddington had disappeared from the back of the truck. (Everyone can look forward to a Bingo fundraiser in August to recover the cost.)

But the big news was that The Women's Library float was nominated for 'Best New Parade Entry'.

What was most satisfying about this project was following something through from start to finish that began as an unknown. Also satisfying is the fact that a group of women produced a Mardi Gras Float that was entertaining, effective, relevant and looked great. Thanks to everyone involved. **Vicki Harding**

**The Women's Library Food Stall** at the Mardi Gras Fair Day on February 7 proved to be a great success. Despite gloomy predictions of rain, the day turned out to be glorious, causing crowds at Jubilee Park that would rival

a Cecil B. De Mille production.

Approximately \$700 was raised on the day - which, for the moment at least, has saved The Women's Library from penury! The success of the stall would not have been possible without the support of the committee and the generous efforts of volunteers. In particular, The Women's Library would like to thank Bev Rogers, Nicola O'Shea, Robyn Moloney, Mary O'Brien, Simon Duffy and Brandon Cavallari.

Although it was an exhausting day for all those involved, the Mardi Gras Fair Day stall showed that fundraising can also be fun!  
**Natalya Lusty**

## Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given to the membership of The Women's Library Inc. of the First Annual General Meeting (AGM). It will be held at 7.30pm on June 22 at Heffron Hall, cnr. Burton and Palmer Streets, Darlinghurst.

The AGM is necessary to elect committee members and office bearers who will organise the day to day running of The Women's Library Inc. for the coming year. Committee members should be nominated by two members of The Women's Library (please see note below for clarification of membership qualification) on the form below and returned to The Women's Library seven days prior to the AGM. If there are insufficient nominations by post to fill the committee, nominations in person will be accepted on the night.

The agenda of the AGM is as follows:

1. Report by the Convenor of the committee's activities for the past year.
2. Financial report by the Treasurer.
3. Appointment of a returning officer.
4. Election of committee members.
5. Update on the activities of the Jesse Street Library.
6. Endorsement for general direction for activities for the coming year.
7. Any other business.

(If you have an issue which you wish to raise at The Women's Library AGM, you may do so under item 6. If you wish to do this, please ring Jenni on 519 4540 a couple of days beforehand, or send us a letter outlining your concerns. This way we will have an idea of what issues we will have to cover, and how many there will be.)

### NOMINATION FORM:

I nominate .....of.....

to fill the position of .....

Her qualifications/expertise include:.....

Name of first nominator (active member):.....

Address:.....

Signature: .....

Name of Second nominator (member): .....

Address:.....

Signature: .....

### MEMBERSHIP DETAILS:

You are a member of The Women's Library if you receive the newsletter in the mail addressed to you personally whether or not you have actually filled out a membership form. You are an active member if you have participated in the organisation of any fundraising event or helped with any aspect of the newsletter production for The Women's Library.

Only active members can be nominated to the committee. Any nominations must be made by an active member and seconded by one other member of The Women's Library.

To become a member before (or after) the AGM simply fill out the form on the back of this newsletter. As a member you are eligible to vote at the AGM, and you will receive the quarterly newsletter in the mail. Membership is free at this stage.

Your organisation has membership if someone has filled out a membership form on behalf of the organisation.

# The Committee



The Women's Library Committee from left to right: Jenni Millbank, Tessie, Mary O'Brien (rear), Natalya Lusty (Secretary), Heidi Key (Treasurer), Julia Hancock, Victoria Hunt, Vicki Harding (Convenor). Inset: Gina Laurie. Thanks to Beylouse for the photo.

**Vicki Harding** was so inspired after hearing about The Feminist Library in London several years ago, that she decided Sydney needed a similar library. She has been involved with The Women's Library since its inception, believing that if women want something badly enough they can make it happen.

Vicki has primary responsibility for the production of The Women's Library newsletter, the co-ordination of many fundraising/publicity events and the fun job of finding places to store books. She has been a Women's Studies student, has been part of many lesbian feminist organisations and works as a printer.

**Natalya Lusty** is currently doing a PhD on Surrealist Women Writers in the Women's Studies Department at the University of Sydney. She also writes fiction and poetry. Her involvement with the library stems from a passionate commitment to women's writing and the desire for a space in which this passion can be shared and indulged.

**Heidi Key** has been on The Women's Library committee for a year. Heidi is a computer professional and hopes to use these skills within the library. She is currently working on an interim database of the library books.

Heidi believes that in the best of all possible worlds there would not be a need for The Women's Library, but even a brief look at both libraries and "mainstream" bookshops shows that, in fact, there is an obvious need for services that the library will provide. She sees it as essential that books reflect and be available for more than just the dominant sector of society. Being a member of The Women's Library committee allows Heidi to indulge her two main passions in life – women and books.

**Julia Hancock** fled the weather and politics of Thatcher's Britain in 1980 and has been enjoying the joys of Sydney life ever since. After dabbling in a variety of careers from real estate agent to chef to forklift operator to horticulturalist, Julia fell into a job at publishing, an industry she finds both stimulating and rewarding. Currently enrolled part-time in a communications degree at the University of Technology, Sydney majoring in journalism and textual studies,

Julia's involvement with The Women's Library focuses on her commitment to encourage feminist writing, share knowledge and promote the pleasures of reading women's words.

**Jenni Millbank** is a lawyer and works in the area of legal policy. She is also the current film reviewer for *Lesbians on the Loose* and is in the process of writing a short film guide for lesbians. As a bookish kind of girl, she finds the idea of a women's library appealing and inspirational. She is a Cancer, has no pets, no husband and no children and has never lived in Devon.

**Gina Laurie** finished a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1992, majoring in English Literature, Government and Women's Studies. She intends to continue her studies in 1994, and would like to write her honours thesis on some area of women's writing.

Gina's involvement in The Women's Library is a continuation of her interest in both women's issues and literature. She was Women's Officer at Sydney University in 1991 and, her involvement with both the Student's Union and the Student's Representative's Council gave her experience working within structures such as committees. As a Women's Studies student, Gina appreciates the goals of The Women's Library to make feminist and lesbian texts more easily available.

**Mary O' Brien** is one of the newer members of The Women's Library committee. She has worked in libraries for the past sixteen years. Mary looks forward to the challenge of establishing The Women's Library, and believes it will become a dynamic part of our community.

**Victoria Hunt** (communications student) is a new member of the committee.

We would also like to thank our public officer, Lisa George and all past committee members: – Jude Fiander, Roz Hanratty, Suzi McConaghy, Jo Morgan, Julieanne Reilly, Bev Rogers and Robbie Wilde.

## Reviews

Here is a sample of the kind of books you will be able to find in *The Women's Library*. All of the following titles have been donated by the publishers. Thank you to the following publishers and reviewers for your support.

### Life On The Edge Cartoons by Judy Horacek Spinifex, Melbourne, 1992

The essence of what I want to say about *Life On The Edge* is this: that it is a totally engaging book of cartoons that speaks to left, feminist and lesbian sensibilities. That the cartoons are both political and funny, and that they will make you laugh even as the reality of them reaches out to kick you in the teeth. It's a great book. Read it.

The review taken care of, it now seems possible to ponder why this was such a difficult book to write about when it was such an easy one to read. The reasons seem entirely to do with it being a book that is comic and has to do with humour. This is because humour is such a personal and particular thing. By that I mean: What makes something funny? Why do we laugh? As I read through *Life On The Edge* I decided it had to do with the linkage and surprise, and was pleased to find these thoughts affirmed in the excellent introduction by Dale Spender (which I read last - book introductions always seem more appropriate once the book is read, that way they don't interfere with the reader's own thought process). Ms Spender is far more specific than me in her ponderings on Judy Horacek's cartoons and humour in general, writing not only about what makes things funny, but also about how that may differ between women and men, and about relationships to humour that are traditionally different dependent on gender - i.e. that men make jokes and women get to laugh at them.

Her conclusion is that it is both radical and challenging when women are funny, when they choose to both comment on and laugh at institutions and the institutionalised everyday. And this is what Judy Horacek does so well.

Read *Life On The Edge* because it speaks to women and it's funny, and if you have the time and inclination, have a ponder as to why.

Victoria Hunt

### The Journey Anne Cameron Spinsters/Aunt Lute, California, 1986.

*This is a book for all the little girls who ever wanted to be cowboys! For "those of us tied for too long to trees and stereotypes." (Anne Cameron).*

Flight from tyranny is the main aim of the two women in this story. Persecution is the vine that entwines their lives together. But it is the courage with which they live that conquers the violence of their past.

Set in the 1800s in the Canadian West, Anne, aged fourteen, runs away from the drunken uncle who beats her, enslaves her and precipitates the death of her mother. Left orphaned with the "raw, naked hatred" in her heart, she flees one night, setting fire to the whole farm - her uncle, in it.

Sarah, a saloon girl in love with a gambler who pimps from her earnings, falls victim to the new sheriff's "clean-up" crusade. The sheriff and his group of "self-appointed guardians of morality" beat them both and hang her lover. She is tarred, feathered and tied to a semi-wild horse who tears into the forest, where they expect her to be eaten by wolves or bears.

To write a story about the "wild west" in 1986, seemed a peculiar choice, one certain to be remote from women's experiences today. However, contemporary issues relating to the socialisation of women AND men, are prominent in the book. The author stresses the inconsequentiality of 200 years, in comparison to the history of social conditioning and its effects on all of us. Cameron's interest does not lie in historical veracity but in the re-invention of it. Her descriptive style is hyper-realistic, even laborious and emotive.

Cameron deals with the notion of feminine identity by presenting a stark personality contrast between the two women, highlighting the dynamics of their relationship and the precariousness of their situation. Anne is hunter, protector, builder; demanding loyalty and indignant of the weak. Rigid, frigid, easily offended and quick to judge, she seems ready to desert anyone who burdens her. Sarah is the antithesis of this lioness. Socialised into dependency, her compliance and need for "beautiful things", contrasts with Anne. Sarah is the product of a society where women are sluts or virgins and the measure of their worth is their servility to men: as wives or whores. It is through Anne that she questions her life and direction. Emotionally, Sarah understands the risks of loving people, yet, she is willing to love, be loved and be hurt. It is Sarah who teaches Anne love and opens the doors to sexuality.

The story follows the two women travelling alone, warring against prejudice, chauvinism and bigotry. The journey takes them to a brothel, on a wagon train, through forests and mountains, meeting Creoles and Indians, past the enslaved Chinese rail workers and finally to the coast. The mobility is motivated by the persecution of the sadistic uncle who did not burn and the crazed sheriff who discovers Sarah's survival.

Aroused by the anticipation of causing the women pain, the men chase them around the country. The smell of fear is nauseating as the hunt advances.

Nevertheless, the women establish a farm, and shelter a few homeless children. Sarah gives birth to a baby and Anne and Sarah become lovers. Their happiness and idyllic surroundings are interrupted only by the visits of the Indians whom they befriend, until the hunters track them down. The terror begins and ends in tragedy. The events which follow and the courage with which they proceed are heart-wrenching.

Sylvia MacRitchie

### Stranded

Camarin Grae

The Naiad Press, 1991

One of the advantages of being a disembodied mind, it seems is the ability to sample life from the perspective of others. We are given a taste of this as we view Western culture through the eyes of the alien Jenna, and share her experiences as she discovers some of the beauties and evils of our world. As our heroine and her lesbian friends struggle to defeat the alien invader who is attempting a theocratically-based political takeover of America, Camarin Grae clearly names those aspects of our society which she finds repugnant and, alternatively, celebrates the shared positive traits of her protagonists. Unfortunately, Grae's analysis of human nature and the ethical dilemmas of her characters is extremely simplistic. Throughout the story, the reader is consistently exposed to the concept of equating men with selfishness and evil intent, while it falls to the women to care about creating a safer and more harmonious world for us all. Given her probable readership, however, Grae may be delivering this message to already like-minded women, and therefore seems to be unnecessarily repetitive and fervent in her approach. While populating the tale with such delightful, well-adjusted female characters offers affirmation to young lesbian readers, this is somewhat undermined by the stilted interactions which occur between a few of the characters and a certain hesitancy in the storyline development during the latter part of the novel. Though a fun, light-hearted read, *Stranded* left me wanting something more.

Kathie Rasmussen

### Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and the Critique of Knowledge.

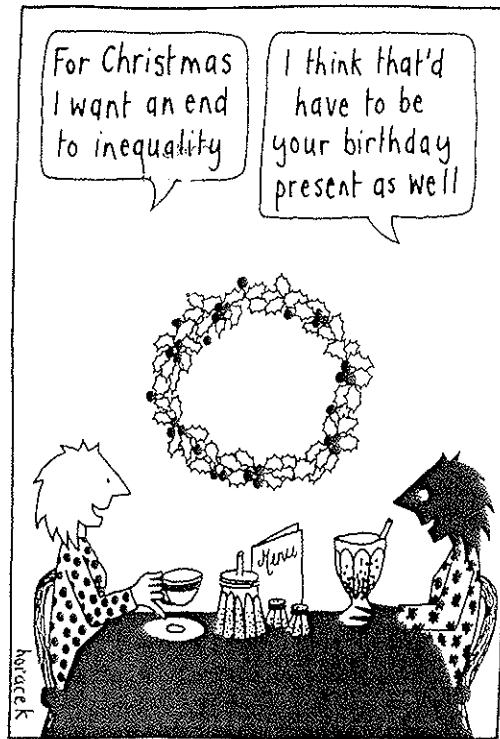
Edited by Barbara Caine, E.A. Grosz, Marie de Lepervanche Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

This collection of essays grew out of the Women's Studies Conference at the University of Sydney in 1985, and reflects the increasing diversity of feminist scholarship carried out across a variety of academic disciplines. These essays explicitly challenge existing areas of study (including mathematics, literary criticism, biology, philosophy and history), questioning their assumptions and crossing their boundaries. Also important to many of the scholars in this text is the ongoing evaluation of feminist history and theory, stressing the need for new strategies and approaches. In particular, Grosz's essay "In(ter)vention of feminist knowledges", provides a clear overview of feminist theory, its past strategies and present alternatives. She writes: "feminist theory is now intellectually mature enough to effect radical ruptures and displacements in socially dominant knowledges,

making them more amenable to the interests and perspectives of women, and not as feminists in the past have done, limiting feminism to struggles around women's inclusion."

*Crossing Boundaries* is a valuable text for all Women's Studies students and those interested in gaining a broad overview of feminist contributions to the social and natural sciences and the humanities.

Natalya Lusty



Reproduced with permission from Life on the Edge by Judy Horacek, published by Spinix Press.

### The Natural Remedy Book for Women.

Diane Stein.

The Crossing Press, California, 1992.

*The Natural Remedy Book for Women* offers an overview of a variety of healing methods available as an alternative to a medical system which can often be perceived as unsympathetic to the needs of women. Stein has structured the book in two sections. The first is an explanation of ten healing methods and their preparations and uses: vitamins and minerals, herbs, homeopathy and cell salts, amino acids, acupressure, aromatherapy, flower essences, gemstones and gem essences and emotional healing. Each method is described in a concise easy-to-read style, and Stein both informs the reader of where the necessary 'ingredients' may be bought and, alternatively provides recipes for concocting her own medicines at home.

The second section of the text focuses on remedies for particular illnesses, including from headaches to cancer to colds and flu or back-ache. Here, the reader is invited to put into practice the treatments outlined in the first chapter, and each illness is counteracted with a wide variety of choice of remedy. For example, lift a bout of depression with a dose of B-complex vitamins, a tea made of myrrh, by relaxing in a lavender or rose bath, or by taking Bach Flower Remedies such as Blackberry or Sweet Chestnut. Stein warns that some methods may not be suitable for some women, and that one treatment may cancel out another if taken simultaneously, but such dangers are clearly pointed out within the text. The stress

here is on the individual's responsibility to choose sensibly and intuitively for herself – to choose a treatment that she feels is right for her illness and is most suitable for her specific needs.

*The Natural Remedy Book for Women* is a practical, informative guide to natural healing recommended to all women interested in reassuming "control and empowerment over their bodies and wellness".

Nicola O'Shea

### **This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour**

**Editors Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldua  
Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press, 1983**

When modern literature traces the journey of the Women's Movement, it often tends to follow the white, middle-class women's movement. This anthology is about the Wimmin's Movement.

It tells the story, or indeed stories, of our Third World sisters – coloured women, poor women, whose bodies have been "thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap", walked over time and time again.

The tale is a similar one but the plot thickens. In a society where sexism, racism and homophobia seem intrinsically bound, these women dwell upon a number of fringes and their journey towards liberation is much more difficult.

The bridge metaphor is a unifying motif for the storytellers of this book. It can symbolise the joining of two sides, a reconciliation of difference; it allows the voyager a passage to greener pastures; it rises above the deadly currents of intolerance with a determination not to be carried to its murky bottom.

*This Bridge Called My Back* provides something concrete for those travellers who thought they were alone on their journey or have become at times, disillusioned by the many obstacles encountered on their way. It serves as a supportive backbone, a source of strength for coloured feminists. My only concern is that the book was actually compiled as a reaction against white feminists. This means that, while some bridges are being formed others are being burnt down. We have so many binary oppositions to deal with already – male and female, power and subordination, heterosexuality and homosexuality. In trying to make itself more visible, and justifiably so, this polemic simply adds another – black feminism and white feminism. I hope that the final moral to the story will be remembered. I hope that we are not left stranded on opposite sides of the river.

Rachael Turk

Sitt Marie Rose

Etal Adnan

**Translated from the French by Georgina Kleege  
The Post Apollo Press, California, 1982.**

Etal Adnan is primarily a poet. Seven of her eight other works are poetry and *Sitt Marie Rose* is itself in many ways a narrative poem. It is a poem of the agony of the Lebanon at war with itself.

The book was first published in French in 1978, three years after the outbreak of the fighting between the Muslims and the Phalangists. It is set in what was known since the 1920s as the Paris of the East, Beirut.

Against the background of a changed and changing Beirut, a Beirut divided between Muslims and Christians, between the industrial newness and the old commercial area and with its no-man's-land of tourism and prostitution, the short tale of war unfolds.

The story begins with gun shots, hunters' gun shots, and continues with the gun shots of war. In fact the story reads like a series of staccato shots itself, "a body seems to fall every second."

There is a sharp and terrible awareness of the connection between masculinity and militarism in this work. Women, she writes, "consider war like an evening of scores between men". A mortar shell fell in Hammana near the public garden, killing a little girl. The men comment that the death of civilians represents only wasted bullets.

The heart of the story revolves around the kidnapping of a young woman, a school teacher who crossed the lines to be with her deaf-mute class. She has been a woman of causes, including the liberation of women, and she is a member of the Palestinian Resistance.

One of her captors is a former boyfriend, and he wrestles with the problem of what to do with her. He persuades himself that she is a whore. The men who are her other captors are described as "moved by a kind of sick sexuality...where images of crushing and cries dominate".

The inevitability of her death, the hatred and the war itself are only partially relieved by her visions, her knowledge that "the sea is always beautiful."

This is a compelling book.

Sabine Erika

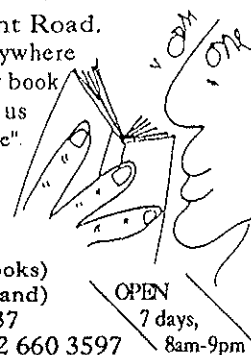
The views and opinions expressed in these reviews are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of The Women's Library committee or individual committee members.

# gleebooks

After 17 years at 191, Gleebooks expanded in December 1992. Our 30,000 new book titles are in the generous space of 49 Glebe Point Road, two minutes walk from Sydney University; children's and second-hand books remain at 191 Glebe Point Road.

Gleebooks will mail-order anywhere and take special orders for any book in print. Boris Frankel called us "influential", we prefer "responsive". Not just your old post-modernism; try us for literature, children's books, women's studies.

All the books that fit.  
49 Glebe Point Road (new books)  
191 Glebe Point Road (2nd-hand)  
PO Box 486 Glebe NSW 2037  
Phone: 02 660 2333 Fax: 02 660 3597



Thanks to Gleebooks for generously sponsoring the mailout costs of this newsletter.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **MEMBERSHIP FORM** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Shortly The Women's Library Newsletter will be available only to members and organisations that are on the mailing list. To become a member of The Women's Library (and have your name added to our mailing list), please fill out and return this form. Membership fees are not compulsory at this stage, but donations are always welcome. Please enclose a couple of stamps to help with the cost of postage. PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about The Women's Library? \_\_\_\_\_

Donation enclosed? \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to the women's Library PO Box 271 Newtown NSW 2042.

THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY  
 PO BOX 271  
 NEWTOWN NSW 2042  
 AUSTRALIA

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **VOLUNTEER FORM** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Women's Library constantly needs volunteers, both to set up the library, and keep it running smoothly once it is established. If you can offer help in any of the following areas, please fill out and return this form. We will contact you when we need to.

- |                                      |                                                   |                                                               |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> fundraising | <input type="checkbox"/> reviewing books (specify | <input type="checkbox"/> publicity/distribution of newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cataloguing | preferred topics)                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> mailouts                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> renovating  | <input type="checkbox"/> staffing the library     | <input type="checkbox"/> desktop publishing                   |

Other skills you would like to offer: \_\_\_\_\_

Time available: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to The Women's Library PO Box 271 Newtown NSW 2042.