

Marian Quartly



100
YEARS OF WOMEN'S
SUFFRAGE
1908-2008



Reflection and Celebration





Marian Quartly



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Printed and Handbound

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& School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning

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Project Partners: Women's Electoral Lobby and League of Women Voters Victoria

Adjunct Professor Judith Smart background material on women's suffrage in Victoria

Shawn Callahan of anecdote for opening question techniques

Meg Minos for background material on bookbinding

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Interviewed by: Cara Jeffery

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Interview of Marian Quartly edited by Cara Jeffery

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I would like to dedicate this to all women fighting for equality

Sarah Costanzo



Introduction

The 24th of November 1908 marks the day when the Legislative Council passed a suffrage bill enabling women for the first time to vote in state elections of Victoria, Australia. For the centenary celebration Liam Fennessy and Soumitri Varadarajan, RMIT Industrial Design Program, Kerry Lovering Women's Electoral Lobby, Sheila Byard Victoria League of Women Voters Victoria and artist Fern Smith worked in partnership; facilitating RMIT students to produce handmade limited edition books of twelve significant women in Victoria.

Four students Emma Brelsford, Sarah Costanzo, Cara Jeffery and Diana White conducted twelve two hour interviews with Gracia Baylor, Elleni Bereded-Samuel, Ellen Chandler, Angela Clarke, Ursula Dutkiewicz, Beatrice Faust, Pat Goble, Professor Patricia Grimshaw, Mary Owen, Marian Quartly, Associate Professor Jenny Strauss and Eleanor Sumner.

The students had never interviewed, edited nor produced handmade books it is a fantastic achievement with in a twelve-week semester. Their background work informed from in-kind assistance of historian Adjunct Professor Judith Smart; expert in narrative techniques and director of Anecdote, Shawn Callahan; writer, artist and bookbinder Meg Minos.

For all of us who have participated in the project it has given us time to reflect on the achievements and persistent struggle toward gender equality in Victoria. What shines through these twelve wonderful interviews is the strength, persuasive insistence for equality within our community and their huge generous hearts.

Fern Smith 2007

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Women in history...

Well when I started writing history it wasn't problematic because when you get into a kind of research mode, in particular a disciplinary mode, you more or less follow along the lines that have been set. I was always interested in what the women were doing but I didn't necessarily assume it should be the central thing that we studied. So when I actually came to do a PhD I wrote about the Australian Natives Association (A.N.A.) but when I started writing about it in the 60's – not that long ago, it was one of the only organisations along with the R.S.L. still supporting the white Australia policy publicly. It was originally for people who were born in Australia; white, young men born in Australia and it was a friendly society, something for them to fall back on if they got sick or whatever. But it turned itself into a nationalist organisation; it was one of the organisations that really backed federation. It was a very interesting story.

It was about that time after I had finished my thesis that I started reading feminist literature, and there was a wonderful article in *Arena*, called 'Why are there no women in history?' or something like that... And I suddenly realised at that point having put the thesis in and having it marked and got it back and had got my PhD, that I hadn't asked the most important question about the A.N.A: why no women? I'd asked the question about their racism because it was very overt and obvious, and everybody was worried about racism in the 1960's anyway, but I hadn't asked the question, what difference



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did it make that they exclude women? I had included the fact that women wanted to join and were knocked back and had set up a women's organisation that then ran in parallel with the A.N.A. I recognised that but I didn't then problematise the issue about what made their nativism and their nationalism gendered. I mean I didn't have any mechanisms or techniques to do it; gender wasn't really a category in historical analysis that anyone was working with... but it became blindingly clear to me that there was no way that I could actually do anything with this research unless I revisited this issue. I didn't revisit it for about 25 years, I had babies, came back and taught around the place and came back here to Monash in 1980. By that stage, I'd gone through the women's history revolution. I was one of the first people to teach Women's History in Western Australia. It was really quite exciting teaching Women's Studies at that point, or teaching Women's History because your students could launch out into anything, they could take any historical problem and add women. Although as somebody said you can't just add women, you have to think of it not like adding sugar rather like adding something more explosive... Like sulphuric acid or something.

On why we should celebrate suffrage...

Because **feminism is just dying now, so we have to understand where it's been.** I'm doing this National Council of Women thing and last week I was in Launceston we were interviewing some women, old ladies is probably the best way of describing them,

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not all that much older than me, anyway, there was a huge split in the Tasmanian National Council of Women in 1999 between Hobart and Launceston, both of them were well and truly in decline in the 1990's but they well and truly got themselves locked in this ridiculous sort of conflict and in 1999 there was a federal intervention which involved the Victorian based federal group coming in to sort them out. Well they tried to do it in the nicest possible way but it proved to be fairly intractable and it was terribly damaging, so we interviewed the Hobart people about a month ago and last week we interviewed the Launceston people and it's just very depressing. I mean, these are lovely women, these -are women who have spent an awful lot of their time volunteering to help other people, they've been feminist in their own way and they've not been able to come to any kind of reasonable agreement and in many ways it seems to me that they typify the kind of last gasp of the Australian feminist movement so yes. So that's why we need to go back and see where we've been and why we went where we did and if there's any way of thinking through something after this, which will not be a straight continuation of what's gone before; it will have to be something very different.

On dwindling feminist movements...

It's the same reason that all voluntary associations of any kind, men's and women's, are in trouble. It has been long said the day of the voluntary association was done for,



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because people no longer related to each other face to face; they didn't feel a need to relate to each other face to face because they could do it by other means. So the need for you to go out on a Friday night and do something that interested all of you together was something that drifted away. It's a different relationship to your local community and it's a different relationship to your state. When people do things in groups, nowadays, they tend to do it on a **one issue basis when they are actually moved by a particular thing.**

I've just started up a local Neighbourhood House in my own little district and that's great. It came out of a very strong reaction locally to the closing of both our primary and our secondary school and we are now battling to try and get some of that land back rather than have it all sold into development, so we have an ongoing issue which has now been to a degree consolidated by the fact that we've got a House. But that's pretty rare. It's the one issue thing that gets people together and it'll be interesting to see whether the House provides a basis for an ongoing sense of togetherness...

So, the women's organisations have suffered a generic kind of shift in how people actually feel themselves to be citizens, I think. People who have that very strong sense of the voluntary kind of commitment, which tends to take you to the Liberal side of politics rather than the Labor side, these people are now really old mostly. It's a modern

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understanding too, in the sense of something that's of the early 20th century really. I won't go into all that, but I think you can identify it as something that comes up in a particular moment in time which is now gone. If we are now in a post modern phase which we are in some sense then the relationship that people have to the state is much more fragmented and individualised and momentary and continually reconstituted and doesn't need to be based in ongoing associations with any particular groups. On top of that the women's groups have had the problem that they thought they could speak for all women and they can't. I'm involved in several women's organisations and none of them can get younger members on any kind of long term basis; They'll come in you know in a fit of enthusiasm, but why should they stick around? They don't have that sense of their lives being shaped by that kind of association.

How far we have come, and where we need to go...

In many ways women's lives are so much freer on the work front; I think there is now an equality at work in all sorts of ways. There is also **a structure of inequality at work but it arises out of reproductive relations, not work relations**, you know, because women are the ones that have the kids. So, that then colours their message not to have kids, which colours your work life meaning you're never ever going to be exactly on the same footing as men, who don't have that kind of double commitment, and I don't see any evidence that the good fathers are emerging in any kind



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of numbers, you know the father's who are there to actually be equal parents. I don't think that it's due to the work force; I'm still enough of a Socialist to see that capital will exploit everybody equally if it possibly can. So I think it really is a reproductively based situation. You can go back to ideas like: if we all had babies in test tubes then we wouldn't have any problems... You know, maybe that's true, but then on the other hand it seems to me that a hell of a lot of women's satisfactions and joys and delights, which men don't get, have come out of that family situation. In that women's sense of self remains much more secure... Men's sense of self is not too good at the moment on the whole because they've been undermined at work, they have women bosses, a lot of them, and they find that really difficult and at home too. They're not sure where they are, hence the retreat to the men's shed.

So I mean feminism has won a whole heap of battles, but the central problem that was really what women's liberation came out of. The women's liberation of the seventies broke deliberately from what it denied was feminism in that earlier period on this issue; that women actually had to be personally liberated and they had to be liberated from child bearing as well as everything else. The thing is just that most people don't want it. It's pretty obvious that there's so much satisfaction in child bearing and family relations and whatever that it's not something most women will actually want to give up. So I think, yes, we are a long way from that equality thing but maybe the **early**

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feminists with their idea of different sorts of citizenship, they had a truth that we lost when we started thinking about everybody being a set of billiard balls: all exactly the same. I think that that 70's idea that yes we could suddenly all be individuals who didn't carry different weights and different needs and whatever, it just doesn't work... It just doesn't work.

Women's choices...

Well, these days I think you just about have to decide that you're not going to have any kids. I mean I've been Dean of Arts here, I could have probably gone on if I'd wanted to, but I did it after my kids were grown. I'd kept my foot well and truly in the profession and I think it was easier to do that in the eighties than it is now. The department was very nice to me and let me have all my teaching between the hours of 9 and 3.30 and I lived really close, you know, I was able to carry both things really well. But I think that with the longer hours that everybody is expected to work, the large pressure on people in universities, but also beyond, I mean I think that workers are being pushed out and out and out now so that it's really, really hard to run work and family. Some of the young women here do. Most of their marriages break up. Mine did too. I think that it's more difficult rather than less to keep all the balls in the air now. So, if Julia Gillard does make it through to Prime Minister, and I think she might well do so, she will be typical in that she doesn't have any kids. That's the only way



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she could do it. There was a book that prophesised that the women who took power would be the ones that decided not to have any children; it was one of those Utopian novels and I think that was an insight which might be accurate. I hope they maintain their womanliness and their dislike for some of the more rampant manifestations of masculinity in those situations and don't get sort of completely swallowed up by the systems they get into.

On shared family responsibility...

It would certainly help but as I said I don't see terribly much evidence. My husband did a hell of a lot of child looking after; he was an academic and so was able to. And I mean I know a lot of younger husbands do that, but the job market makes it really, really hard for that to happen. If you're quite happy to stay at a medium level and you don't want to rule the world, or rule your bit of it, that will work for men and women. They can both share. Our Dean here and her husband had a totally shared academic career, in fact they took jobs they both applied for and did half each; half child care and half work for about 15 years of their lives and they both got through and succeeded and she is now Dean and he's Professor. Maybe the academic world is a place where that can happen because there's more time flexibility, but I think in most areas of life if you do want to really be a leader then you can't do the parenting thing as well whether you're a man or a woman. So perhaps we'll have equality in sharing in the popula-

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tion of those people not ambitious to lead. The leaders can go off and be the neutered ones...Except that the men will find wives but the women will never find husbands that will support them, or it would be a rare occurrence to find a husband that will actually support them in that situation.

I was the only woman Dean, all the other Deans were male and certainly **I had to work, as they say, three times harder to stay in that position.** It's less true now; there are now three or four Deans and they do work together and you know they're a support group. Everywhere there are more women getting in. I mean the glass ceiling is still there and it takes a long time to make enough room for people to get in, but we now have a sufficient sprinkling... Not just in academia but more broadly. There are a lot of people who are role models and an indication that women can get there. So I think that will continue but it seems to me that men are defending their patch pretty hard in work terms and in status terms, but I think that will shift over time. Though at the lower levels in the workforce we are not seeing these shifts so much; a lot of women are actually giving up and going home and preferring to do that because it's too much of a battle in the workforce. I suspect that we will have a pattern in which the high flying achievers may be both male and female and you may not get too much discrimination at that level, but the work force will continue to be divided in the sense that there will be 'male work' and 'female work'.



Final Notes

I would like to express my thanks to Marian Quartly for sharing her stories with Fern and myself. Someone of the academic calibre Quartly belongs to is, at first glance, an intimidating interviewee for a student like myself, but the matter-of-factness with which Quartly speaks has such a calming and reassuring quality to it. It was truly a pleasure to have been able to interview a woman who has been such a trail-blazer in her field.



