

Archive No. 05

Power and Willers

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Judith Power (17 October 1946 -)

I was born in Surrey Hills, started school at age four in Wantirna South, then attended Box Hill Girls Technical School and Boronia High School. I ran away from home at age 13 and was put in the Good Shepherd Convent at Albert Park for six months. Then did one year at Stotts Business College (which my mother had attended); started work as a secretary in a legal office at age 15, moved to other legal offices, became a law clerk (no qualifications). Was regarded as the 'office radical' because I supported equal pay for women. Married at 19.

Opposed Vietnam War; went to Moratorium marches in '71 and at the Moratorium '72 I was pregnant with my daughter Vanessa, who was born when I was 26. I did Adult Matric at night school, started writing poetry.

When Vanessa was about 18 months old I got a part-time job writing for the local Leader newspaper group, got bored with the local news; I'd heard about Women's Liberation and WEL and decided I'd find the local groups and cover them for the newspaper. WEL didn't impress me much but I found the Box Hill Women's Liberation C-R Group (this would have been about May/June '73). They were having a speak-out at Box Hill TH about abortion, then a hot topic, with Dr Bertram Wainer and Kath Gleeson.

Then I went to a couple of C-R Group meetings. These meetings turned my world upside down. So my life really escalated from there. Apart from the weekly meetings which went into the early hours of the morning, I became sexually attracted to a woman in the group (nothing ever happened, she was married too). The group had weekends away every 6 months or so without the husbands and kids and these were amazing.

I went to the general Meetings at the Women's Centre in Little Lonsdale Street, joined Vashti's Voice Collective and finally found somewhere I could write about whatever I wanted in the way I wanted. I also went to the Women's Liberation Halfway House Collective meetings and

although I never joined the collective, the Box Hill Group did roster there one night a week I did roster a few times during the day when the house at Kew opened.

I then got involved in starting Maroondah Halfway House in Croydon and wrote an article for the WL Newsletter, May 1975 about it. I went to every rally, march, meeting and conference I could manage over the next few years.

The marriage was rapidly deteriorating and he was occasionally violent. I finally left in 1977 but at a huge cost: my husband nearly killed me and I lost custody of Vanessa who was five and a half because of my 'lesbian tendencies' and my WL involvement.

The woman I was in a relationship with ended up living with me. To prevent Judy having to move out whenever my daughter came to visit we both had to give an undertaking to the court that we wouldn't advocate lesbianism or homosexual lifestyles and we wouldn't 'commit acts of sexual affection' in her presence.

Judy and I became just about full time activists. We started WACKIT (originally Women in Transition after a US group) and helped re-establish WL Newsletter (which had folded). We were involved in various Women's Centres, Lesbian Action Group, IWD organising collectives and WL Switchboard. We were also very active in middle-of-the-night graffiti and paste-ups.

We moved to the country, broke up, I moved back to Camberwell and after my ex-husband died my daughter came back to live with me in 1984. I tried unsuccessfully to establish Women's land in Victoria. And have also been involved in co-counselling, non-violence training, anti-uranium actions (Roxstop and Jabiluka) and at Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Centre in Balgo, WA.