

Archive No. 141

Christiane (Chris) Edith Sitka (23 April 1952 -)

I was born in Geelong, Victoria, Australia and grew up in Ocean Grove where I lived until 1973.

I attended Ocean Grove Primary School, Queenscliff High School and my tertiary education was at Gordon Institute of Technology (TAFE College) in Geelong 1969-1972. I received a Diploma of General Studies in Vocational Writing. This was the first writing course available in Australia and as I wanted to be writer I attended here rather than going to Melbourne to University. I also studied Ukrainian language and culture at Macquarie University NSW for 2 years in the 1980s.

My mother Gertraud (German) and father Wolodymyr (Ukrainian) migrated to Australia from Germany in 1950. I have one brother Andreas (Andrew) SITKA and his daughter Natalie SITKA are my only other blood relatives in Australia.

I began my political career as a teenager in the 1960s participating wholeheartedly in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I attended many demonstrations and protests, travelling to Melbourne for Moratoriums and meetings against the wishes of my parents.

When I finished my education I moved to Melbourne and immediately, in early 1973, I began my very active involvement in The Women's Liberation Movement and various lesbian activist groups. I spent virtually all my waking hours pursuing feminist and lesbian activism for many years thereafter.

As well as my group activism my main identity has been, and is, as a writer within Women's Liberation and Feminist Lesbian Liberation Movements. I have written hundreds of articles, opinion pieces and essays as well as some research papers and some creative writing on Feminist political issues, theories and concepts. Often my approach has been challenging and creative in concept.

I was an activist in Victoria up until about 1980. Then I lived in NSW (and overseas for a few years) until 1998. Moved back to Melbourne in 1999 – present (2009).

The Mitchell Library in Sydney has a collection of my personal papers which I donated in (I think) 1997.

1973 - 1979

Active member of the Women's Liberation Movement in Melbourne. I attended virtually all meetings and activities. Participated in and helped organise conferences, marches, protests and demonstrations. Volunteer worker on phone and front desk.

1973

Joined Gay Liberation and Gay Women's Group. Active in public protests. I was a pioneer of out lesbian mass media appearance

Part of core group which broke away from Gay Liberation and formed Radicalesbians. Helped organise Australia's first National Lesbian Conference (July 1973). Worked to recruit new members, consciousness raise Women's Liberationists about lesbianism and challenged social prejudices. Helped publish several collections of writings.

Mid 1970s

I was part of the initiating core group which established Victoria's first women's refuge the Women's Liberation Halfway House and I worked in that collective for about one or two years.

I was part of the initiating core group which established Victoria's first Women's Health Centre and Rape Crisis Centre in Collingwood.

I worked in a Migrant Women's Community Resource Centre and was also periferally involved in the Women's Theatre Group

1970s - Wimmin's Lands

I was part of the core group which bought and established Australian Women's Lands. I was involved in the purchase and set up of Amazon Acres (also known as Firestone Mountain or just The Mountain) at Birdwood NSW. The project was initiated in Melbourne amongst the Radicalesbians.

I also supported the purchase and establishment of two further Women's Lands (wimmin's lands) in the Birdwood NSW region called The Valley (or The Vallee) and Herland. These three lands comprised a very active community covering several thousand acres of remote and wild bush where lesbians lived a fairly primitive and isolated lifestyle.

I visited these lands throughout the 1970s but only made it my primary place of residence in approx 1980-1990. During that time I made some overseas and interstate trips. I also returned to live there for shorter periods of a few months at a time in the 1990s. I estimate my total time of actual residence is approx 9-10 yrs.

1980s summary:

Researched and wrote a 20,000 word history of the beginnings of lesbian feminism in Australia which was presented at the 1989 Adelaide National Lesbian Conference.

Researched wrote and presented an extensive study of the biology of parthenogenesis.

During this period I lived on lesbian land in NSW. As well as my research and writing projects I participated in the development of a large, dynamic lesbian community which sought to challenge patriarchal constructs. I also developed many practical skills such as building, fencing, bridge and road repair, flood management, gardening and land care. Hundreds of lesbians lived on and passed through, including many overseas visitors, and the land was a site of constant debate of lesbian feminist principles and ethics.

Went overseas and worked on projects in UK and Germany including community housing, guest lecturing at Berlin Open University and coordinating the English language section of the Women's (Liberation) Archive in Berlin.

Involved in Women's Anti Nuclear Movement (both in Australia and Britain). Especially Women for Survival whose organisation was centred on the wimmin's lands.

Presented papers and workshops at many Lesbian Ovulars (mainly in NSW) and Conferences.

1990s Summary:

In 1991 went on a National speaking tour called Beyond the Boundaries organised for me by Prodyketions to present my current radical lesbian feminist theories. Toured to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Alice Springs, Darwin, Perth.

Worked as community worker/office manager for the Coalition of Activist Lesbians (COAL Australia).

Employed as an associate by the feminist social policy research consultancy Distaff Associates and Women's Economic Think Tank.

Delivered a lectures to the Women's Academy on a feminist analysis*of genetic engineering and reproductive technologies.

Assisted in the Organisation of "Yinkinpayaya Turliku Yawulyu" (Women Singing Law and Culture). A culture tour by representatives of the Balgo Hills, Western Australia Manungka Manungka Women's Association.

Coordinator of Connecting Cultures, a multi-cultural lesbian group involved initiating an action plan and organising publicity, meetings, support groups, workshops and events to educate the lesbian community about racism and cultural difference for the 1991 National Lesbian Festival and Conference. During this conference I also presented my own ovrkshops, performed at several cultural events (dancing, singing talking) including on the stage at the Opera House Concert. Worked on the Editorial Board of the Journal For Australian Lesbian Studies.