

Archive No. 142

Heather Jean Chapple (11 November 1944 - 5 October 2007)

Heather was born in Richmond and educated at the Bayswater Primary School and Ringwood High School. After a difficult childhood which seriously compromised her health, Heather left school to do office work and bought a house in Carlton. She travelled overseas, married and then divorced, and cared for her ailing parents till they died. Heather found a new lease of life after a kidney transplant in 1983. She enrolled to study fine art and manual crafts at Melbourne Uni, discovered teaching was not for her, attended the Deakin Women's Summer School and subsequently came out as a lesbian.

Heather was a founding member of Spinsters, a support group for survivors of incest. She attended and contributed to the LesboRaves lesbian discussions during the '90s and was a member of the Front of House team for the Performing Older Women's Circus in 1995.

Heather gained many skills over the years. She enjoyed working with wood and put her expertise to good use as a carpenter and handywomyn as well as an artist. Heather was a member of the collective that organised the first three Lesbian Art Exhibitions at the Brunswick Mechanics Institute, 1996 - 1998, and some of her own art work was on display in these exhibitions.

Heather delighted in ballroom dancing and bootscooting, was a member of Dance Cats, travelled to Amsterdam for the Gay Games in 1998 and celebrated her 60th birthday in 2004 with a dance party. She was an accomplished writer and poet and not only read her work at various lesbian gatherings she helped to make a few of those gatherings possible with her generosity and kindness.

In the late '90s, Heather sold her place in Carlton and bought a house in Ocean Grove and a few years later she sold that to buy another house in Melbourne. As a keen gardener Heather grew vegies, specialised in succulents and had a great deal of knowledge about native flora. She enjoyed bushwalking and birdwatching, was fond of animals and had a pet-minding service so her friends were able to go away on holidays.

Over the years Heather's health was further compromised by breast and skin cancers and eventually metastasised melanoma. When she knew she had a limited time to live Heather put all her affairs in order, which included making a will and selling her house, and made the decision to be cared for by her lesbian feminist community in Melbourne. Heather died at the home of friends surrounded by those who loved her.

Heather's body was kept at home while her friends painted her coffin and made all the final arrangements themselves before her funeral at the Metropolitan Community Church in Richmond where lesbian songs were sung and a selection of her poetry was read. Afterwards her coffin was taken in convoy to be buried in the newly established lesbian section of a small country cemetery.

Heather bequeathed a sizeable amount of her estate to the Matrix Guild Victoria to be used to buy rental accommodation for the benefit of lesbians over 40.