

## Archive No. 65

### **Katrina Phipps / Katrina Sawyer (19 January 1963 - )**

I was born in Melbourne. I have four younger siblings whom I have always been close to. Although my family home was in Melbourne I spent a lot of time in the country as a child which I loved. I considered myself a tomboy. My parents were middle class.

I attended St. Catherine's, a private school for girls in Toorak until I was about 13 when I went to boarding school at Timbertop (a country campus of Geelong Grammer) while I loved the country I hated the school – the lack of freedom, the cruelty of the boys and the physical challenges which I was not sporty enough to cope well with. I had one year at Timbertop and one at the Corio campus of Geelong Grammer, then I returned to St. Catherine's and my family.

My parents separated during my last year at school and I was happy about the separation even though it left my mother in a difficult financial situation at the time. All of the children and a number of our friends stayed with my mother who worked hard in a small massage business she had established. I worked as a receptionist part time for my mum on and off for years.

I started an Arts degree at Melbourne Uni when I finished HSC and lived for a term at Trinity College which I hated. I left uni and went travelling around Australia, and then worked on a farm in NSW and various other jobs.

I returned to uni the following year and became involved in the feminist collective. I loved it but was confused by the different brands of feminism until I did a CAE course on feminism and then the language used in the collective made sense.

I joined a C-R Group with other students which I enjoyed and attended a big feminist conference at Princes Hill High and one in Sydney where I started to think that I could imagine becoming a lesbian. I became involved in a number of campus-based groups and actions around abortion and other feminist issues as well as the lesbian collective.

We also established FUGM the feminist urban guerrilla movement which basically did graffiti. One of the more controversial actions the feminist collective unofficially undertook was to post the names of academic rapists and sleezes (the lay for an A brigade) all over the campus.

Before I finished my degree I went to Europe with my sister for six months. I returned earlier than I intended because a friend died and I wanted to be home with her other friends.

I got a job with the Women's Liberation Halfway House when I was 20. At that time you could only be employed for 12 months and despite getting pretty severe burnout I learned and did more in that year than in any other year of my life. I thrived on the politics and the friendship / comradeship and on seeing the growth in the kids who came into the refuge with their mums. I was employed as the children's worker but everyone did everything from looking after the kids to trying to convince the minister for community services to change policies or improve funding.

One of the memorable actions I was involved with organizing was the Women Against Incest Vigil in the city. We camped at the cathedral for a few nights which was opposite CSV and also staged a sit-in at CSV demanding the funding of Zelda's Place amongst other things.

I stayed at the Halfway House collective after my tenure finished and helped establish the Zelda's Place collective with Penny Paul. We wrote the submission and did a lot of work before setting up the collective because we both had experience with collectives being more talk than action and we were determined to get this established and not just talk about it. The aim of the collective was to establish a refuge for girls and young women who were escaping incest. Once we received government funding I left the collective, feeling that I needed to let go for the collective to enter its new phase.

I was also part of *Whose Care and Protection?* A group which aimed to close Winlaton and provide better opportunities for young women who were being incarcerated, the vast majority of whom were victims of abuse..

In 1988 I finally finished my BA and was involved in anti-Bicentennial activities and a bit of Aboriginal solidarity work as well as feminist activities.

I did a Dip Ed at Melbourne Uni but there were no jobs for social science teachers so I became a home help and meals on wheels worker with the Melbourne City Council and met lots of wonderful elderly people. I later got a job as a welfare worker with elderly people at Richmond City Council. I went to La Trobe Uni part time to get a Bachelor of Education and I studied video production there.

I was involved in the Lesbian Oral History Group.

I bought a small house in Daylesford and lived there coming to Melbourne to work as a volunteer teacher at Northlands Secondary College after Kennett shut it down. I got a job as a

sessional teacher at VUT in sociology and women's studies. I worked there part time for about five years.

After finishing the education degree I continued with video studies and made a student film about the history of the WLM in the 1970s and have spent years on and off researching and working towards making a film on this subject which I hope will eventually be screened on television. I have been videoing interviews with feminists who were active in the 1970s and making copies of the 1970s footage which can all be placed in the Archives as a resource even if the film does not get funded.

In 1998 I did a grad dip in documentary at the VCA and since then have made a number of short documentaries. These include 'Juggling the Elements' and 'Kim, Harley and the Kids'. A lot of my film work relates to political work I have done in the past and is largely concerned with social justice, survival and celebrating difference.

I had my first son Josh in 1993 when I was 30. His dad was the brother of an old lover and close friend. Norman is also the father of my second son, Robert, who was born in 2001. Having the children was the best thing I have ever done and it has made me very happy, but I have become more home-focussed and much less politically active since having the kids.

In 1996 I went to Alice Springs for 6 months with my son. I worked as a relief teacher in primary and secondary schools and spent some time camping. When I returned to Melbourne I got work at Olympic Adult Education as a tutor and I worked there part time for the next 5 years teaching everything from driver education to a bridging course for single young mothers.

I am currently working as a film maker and I am a member of the Lesbian Parenting group in Fairfield. Feminist politics continue to inform my work and personal life.