

# What have we been up to?

**OPSO** is a resource for the whole community; we work for the young, we work for the old, the healthy, people with disabilities, English and non-English speaking, the rich and the poor. Our task is to identify needs and issues... and then do something about them.

So what have we done in the last 12 months?

We took the RACQ Years Ahead program to the far west for the Year of the Outback, around Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, Mary Valley, Darling Downs and the Gold Coast, helping older drivers upgrade their knowledge of road rules and road safety, and taking their suggestions on road safety to the Ministerial Road Safety Committee of which our president, Val French, is a member.

We have presented a version of the RACQ Years Ahead program to 125 non-English speaking Chinese as a pilot project for other non-English speaking people and are expanding this to other groups.

We worked closely with the Department of

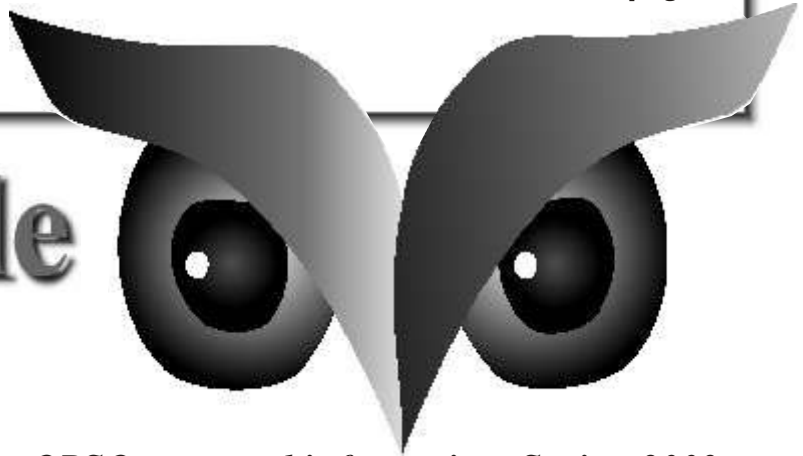
Transport and Main Roads through Val's membership on the Ministerial Transport Advisory Committee and through departmental personnel, giving them the concerns on roads and transport expressed at Speakouts across Queensland. We approached the Transport Department about rewriting their letter to 75-year-old drivers, and that is now being processed.

We continued to teach at the universities and at the Police Academy, and are linking university students into our Media Awards, as well as giving individual assistance to social work and community development students. We have also made contact with youth workers in disadvantaged suburbs and have offered OPSO's assistance in marketing and public relations.

We are working with Neighbourhood Watch groups, offering our assistance and including them in our network.

**continued page 4**

## Older People Speak Out



*OPSO news and information, Spring 2003*

**I had** a couple of phone calls from two young uni students looking for a story about Seniors' Week.

"Why have it?" they asked. "Is it really relevant?"

I explained about older people enjoying life and having fun. Silence at the other end. Then, "Have you had a look at the program?"

I looked, and they had a point.

Why DO we have Seniors' Week? I initiated Mental Health Week years ago, and we used it effectively to launch each year's campaign to change public attitude to mental illness.

So we used the same technique



*By Val French*

with Carers' Week, illustrating the needs of carers, and the wonderful role they play.

Both weeks helped to change public attitude, and with that the political system started to take notice.

Seniors' Week and the

## Let's make Seniors' Week work for us

International Day of Older Persons began with a similar motive – to draw attention to older people, to help change negative attitudes to ageing. Negative attitudes are the cause of most of the issues facing us today – poverty, elder abuse, suicide, social isolation, inadequate health and caring services, housing, even transport.

Older people are not seen as a popular social issue; they are seen as a problem.

**continued next page**



Medal pool, by Karen Kindt – winner, regional weekly and bi-weekly newspaper photography, Commonwealth Media and Advertising Awards 2000.

# Calling all media

*Nominate your articles, photos and current affairs items for the OPSO Media Awards. See the nomination form included with this news sheet.*

Proudly sponsored by:



## from previous page

Why not a Seniors' Week that not only helps to present us with new and exciting challenges, but by doing so gives the community a positive view of ageing?

Remember the first International Day of Older Persons? We took over Friday's Night Club, some arrived on Harley Davidsons, all of us danced to the late hours.

The whole Australian media showed us having fun, fun that was in itself a challenge. We did it our way. Not an old-time dance in the late afternoon, but something to really enjoy, and really remember.

We are not too old for that. It is a matter of attitude. It is so easy to be convinced by well-meaning middle generation people that we

can't... when in fact we can. And if we really can't dance, then we can still be there and join in the fun, the music and the chatter and laughter.

It beats being DONE TO!

Follow the lead of Mt Isa with its Grey Bachelors' and Spinsters' Ball, but have them a few times a year, and a special one in Seniors' Week.

Why not have competitions that go all the year, with grand finals in Seniors' Week?

Better still, let's persuade the Department of Recreation to contribute – to help set up inter-generational sporting teams in competitions, and veteran sporting competitions and have the finals in Seniors Week.

Let's have dancing competitions, table games competitions like

chess and Trivial Pursuit, sometimes inter-generational teams, finals in Seniors' Week.

What about fantasy fashion shows, with inter-generational teams, clothes designed by TAFE and high schools and creative grandmothers... and worn by teams of young and old, together walking the catwalk in the shopping centres throughout the year and finals in Senior's Week? Who knows, it might wake up the fashion industry to our existence, our love of fashion...but our need to have clothes adjusted to fit (we all love wearing jeans and slacks... but not beginning below the navel.)

Bring back the Grey Mardi Gras that was just developing into an excellent vehicle of fun... with floats as a tool to draw attention to our issues.

It is time that business sponsors and government woke up to the fact that positive ageing is cost-effective. After all, longitudinal studies show that those who age with a positive attitude live seven years longer.

Let's find what we can really do! ❖



## OPSO

**Phone:** (07) 3219 2572

**Mail:** PO Box 1037

Mt Gravatt QLD 4122

**Web:** [www.opso.com.au](http://www.opso.com.au)

**Email:** [opso@zipworld.com.au](mailto:opso@zipworld.com.au)

# PEOPLE

of all ages in small group meetings and individual interviews and Speakouts have given OPSO their vision for the Queensland of 2020.

And this has occurred during the first two months of our Vision of Wisdom (VOW) project. Family and Community Well-being was the topic for June while Education was the topic for July's Speakout.

OPSO chairperson Val French said that, although consulting from the Government down was needed and appreciated, there was also a need to have the community's voice go to Ministers and political parties, unfettered by departmental gate-keeping.

"I chaired two ministerial advisory committees during the '90s in which I and the other members were given the opportunity to travel the state, speaking to people in their homes and in small groups," she said. "We spoke with people from the grass roots who would never go to forums or consultations, who did not belong to organisations but whose life experiences and ideas needed to be acknowledged by government.

"We also held public forums, the results of which were taken direct to the Ministers of the day with no gate-keeping between the voice and the Minister. This is the process we are using in our VOW project."

OPSO has spoken with people across Queensland at a state-wide conference, and also invited participants from a cross-section of the community and other organisations to the first two Speakouts.

OPSO members spoke with small groups, individuals and political party branches as well, asking for their vision for the future, and what we needed to do to achieve this vision. At right is part of what the community wanted:

# Our VOW: The voice of the community

- \* A society in which the community drives social policy.
- \* A community in which education encourages individual responsibility as well as individual rights.
- \* A business world which limits working hours to a 36-to-40 hour week in order to provide more family time and family support.
- \* A business world where unpaid overtime is banned, to encourage employment and job-sharing.
  - \* A state in which there is no discrimination.
- \* A community which is regarded as an enlarged family which supports its members.
- \* The inclusion and support of people with disabilities of any kind.
- \* A fairer justice system based on prevention and rehabilitation not just punishment.
- \* A state which offers genuine statewide facilities for expression of opinion on policy and practice.
  - \* Free emergency services available to everyone.
  - \* Research and community evaluation built into all public policy-making.
- \* University research made available to the community to assist informed comment on government policy.
  - \* A community where people are not marginalised, where the contribution of everyone is valued.
- \* A community where ongoing education is available to all as a right and is also cost-free.
- \* Ongoing opportunity for people to maintain and improve their own individual skills whether practical or creative.
- \* A community where school curricula are geared to developing individual skills, not exclusively to university entrance.
  - \* A school system which trains students for living, not just for work.
  - \* A school system which plans for a combination of classroom learning and community work experience, and where some subjects are taught in community situations.
- \* School curricula to be flexible to suit the individual child, not vice versa.
  - \* School programs with more opportunities for out-of-school learning.
  - \* Schools to ensure that every child is able to read and comprehend.
- \* A community where legislation makes pre-retirement education compulsory many years before retirement. This must be education for lifestyle as well as for financial well-being.
  - \* Community project officers to be appointed to assist in pre-retirement planning and in the development of community facilities to prevent social isolation and suicide at all ages.
- \* Programs to be established for older people with professional and business skills to assist youth workers in disadvantaged districts.❖

# What have we been up to?

## from page one

At the same time, we continue our close working relationship with the Commission for Children and the Office of the Public Advocate and the Department of Families.

Val French chairs their Ministerial Advisory Council of Older Persons under Minister Judy Spence.

Minister Judy Spence presented our Media Awards for 2002 in October at the Parliamentary Annexe with a record number of entries and a celebration of OPSO's 10th birthday. This year the awards will be held on November 20 and nominations are coming in from all across Australia. We have set up a new award this year for inter-generational journalism and press photography, reflecting OPSO's inter-generational approach to community concerns.

We have catered to the 45+ generation with our Older and Wiser Project with the Department of Employment. Much time has been spent taking the result to both State and Commonwealth Governments and talking to stakeholders on both its findings and recommendations – the key to employment of older workers is the education of employers and education of employees of Job Network on the advantages to the employer on employing older workers.

We continued to help grandparents set up their support groups and showed them how to use the media and approach government.

We held the first State Grandparenting Forum in November, which sought solutions to grandparenting issues from key organisations, professionals and grandparenting groups and government. We auspice the Council of Grandparents (COGs), an outcome of the November forum. Grandparent support groups and peak organisations now work together on COGs to improve the lives of grandparents bringing up grandchildren.

We also participated in the Gold Coast forum organized by COGs and hosted by GAGS at which the Minister for Children, Larry Anthony spoke and received recommendations.

OPSO has developed a close working relationship with the Australasian Centre on Ageing to our mutual benefit. Through Dr Anne Ring (one of our members), our Consultative and Research Forum tackled the problem of the cosmetic industry and the negative images of ageing that it portrays to the detriment of positive ageing.

Together with the Ministerial Advisory Council of Older Persons, our forum held a meeting with marketing professionals from the film industry to promote the older audience.

Other issues worked on by the forum were: Road safety, health, insurance, housing, the future of an ageing society, unemployment, and the media's role in positive ageing.

We supplemented our long-established writers' course with a freelance journalism course. Our students are now writing for our news sheet and already their work has been picked up by other media.

OPSO has had continuous input into the National Accreditation Scheme for retirement villages through two of its principals who are independent assessors in that scheme. Val and Pixie Annat are always available to give advice on the role of retirement villages of the future.

We have devoted a lot of time this year working on behalf of our sponsors, assisting, advising and researching.

We conducted the successful Active and Out There series of professional development workshops for voluntary organisations. These were on funding, volunteers, marketing and the media and issues relating to the development of men's groups. Our resources book covering this series is available to voluntary groups on request.

OPSO has had close contact with all political parties this year, having had much input into the National Party policies on older people, and having spoken at the Liberal Women's State Conference and branch meetings, and we have had direct input into the Labor Government.

We have continued our close contact with the 60 & Better Groups and especially enjoyed holding a Speakout for them at their State Conference at Hervey Bay, with participants coming from all parts of Queensland.

OPSO continually works with the media, providing advice, interviews, media releases and letters to the editor and articles. We also act as a resource for the media, while articles from our OPSO News Sheet continue to be published by other newspapers.

In our VOW (Voice Of Wisdom) project, we have conducted four community Speakouts at which a cross-section of the community was enthusiastically involved, seeking their vision for the future and making recommendations on policy and practice which we are taking to government and all political parties. At the same time, we are also speaking to small groups and individuals at the grassroots level. This project is on-going. We believe that while consultation from government down is to be commended, it must be backed by the voice of the community from the grassroots up, where it is free from gatekeeping, free in its agenda, and where the voice of those who don't attend meetings can be heard individually, face to face.

We continue our working links with Connect the Coast, which was an OPSO initiative. ❖

# The intrepid 7

by Marilyn Smith

**“We would like you to drive us across the Nullarbor!” These few words will stay with me for the rest of my life.**

Fancy asking me, who loves driving, travelling and has her own tour business, Eucalyptus Tours! “No” never even entered my head. Six ladies had this dream to see the Nullarbor before they were too old to enjoy travelling on a bus. I have yet to figure out when too old is.

This small group of ladies, all strong-minded, independent and passionate, belong to Older People Speak Out. I am fortunate to be included as their friend and as their driver and tour planner. I wanted their Nullarbor dream to come true as much as they did. This is what I set out to achieve.

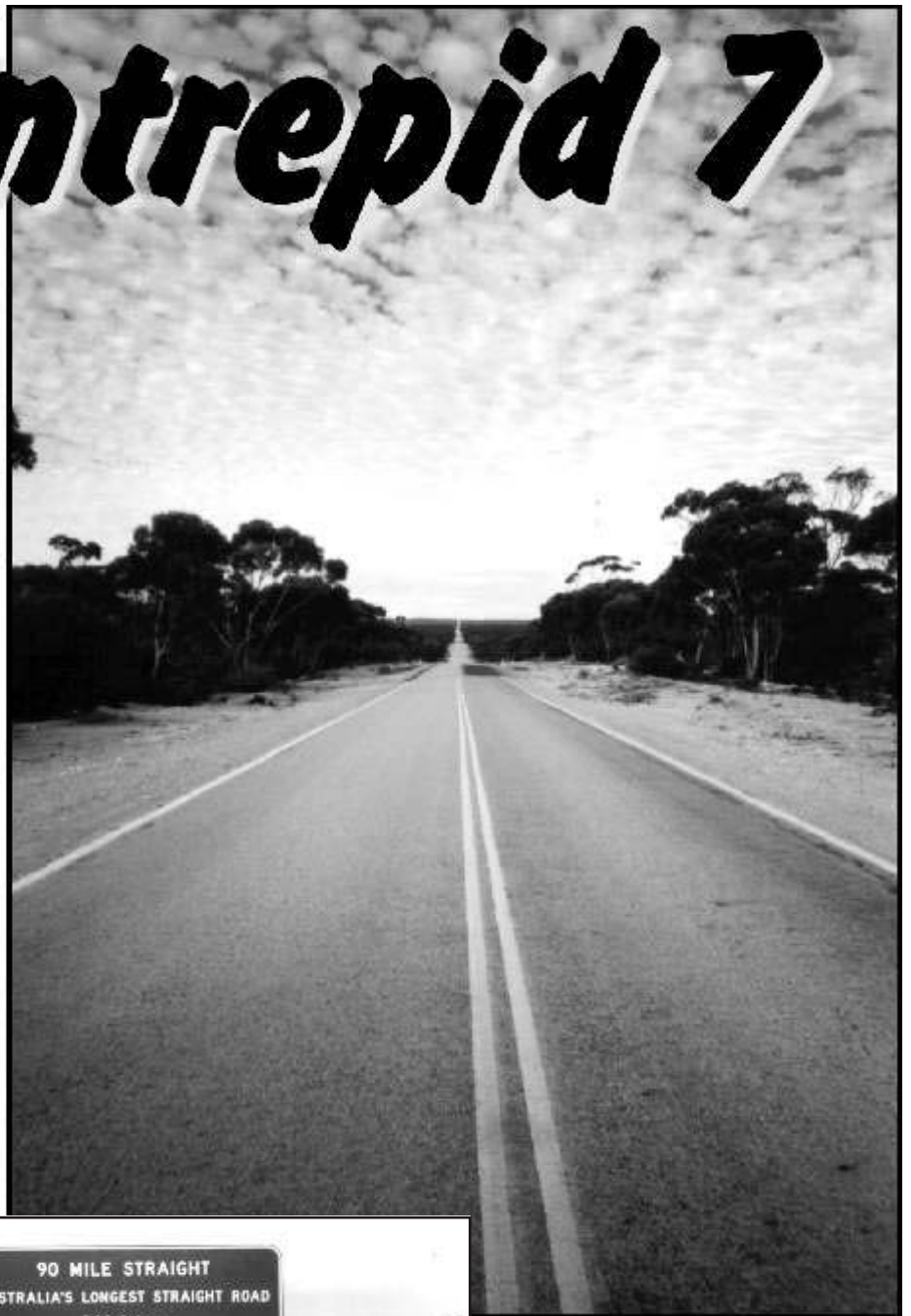
The Nullarbor has special qualities which, as individuals, we saw differently through our green, blue and brown eyes. Val – the poet and saga writer, Betty – hat-maker and storyteller, June – cook and squirrel, Lainy – photo-taker, Mary – the quiet one?! Shirley – guide and cook.

Ceduna is the beginning of the Nullarbor – the Southern Ocean and suddenly the Bunda Cliffs, the southern right whales and the waves, all the attraction for this dream.

Val’s expression at seeing her beloved Bunda Cliffs, these magnificent giant splendours, will remain in my memory bank for always. When you have a lifelong dream and it actually comes true, you, and only you, can experience this gut-wrenching emotion because the excitement is mixed with tears, the joy with reality, and your head has this permanent Cheshire smile fixed on its face.

And no matter what you say to them, this fixture certainly won’t disappear for at least three days. This is orgasmic. The Bunda Cliffs did this to Val.

Betty’s faltering voice saying “Is that a log down



Pictures: Betty Ritchie

there?” had the six of us join her in two seconds flat as that log was a southern right whale. Betty had been

looking at it and wondering, before she yelled out to us. The exhilaration in her voice could not be contained as we all clambered over each other to get a closer view. Betty’s first whale on the Nullarbor, what a brilliant sight!

Lainy’s digital camera captured the dewdrops in the morning, the sunsets at night and the wildflowers but, when it came to toilet stops, the Nullarbor is just a little bit different from the rest of Australia. Especially when you need to go. The Nullarbor does not have a tree, only saltbush and one porcelain loo connected to nothing, in the middle of nowhere – which Lainy soon claimed.

**continued next page**

By Helen Draper

**It is** easy to take things for granted. As an energetic and fit 58-year-old, who loved Scottish country dancing several times a week, I was planning to increase this activity when I eventually retired from my full-time job in the Commonwealth Health Department.

However, early last year I was shocked to be diagnosed with adult-onset normal pressure hydrocephalus (NPH). This derives from the Greek words hydro (meaning water) and cephalus (meaning head) – an abnormal accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) within the ventricles of the brain.

The majority of cases of NPH are idiopathic (unknown causes). Symptoms usually include gait disturbance (difficulty in walking), fatigue, dizziness, problems with balance and, in my case, a weakness on the left side which causes me to veer to the left when walking or driving.

This illness was diagnosed by a neurologist following an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan. Three lumbar punctures were performed to remove some CSF (Cerebrospinal Fluid) and release pressure on the brain. None of these produced the expected improvement to indicate the need to insert a shunt for permanent drainage of the fluid.

As I had been at the peak of my physical fitness, I liked to say I had been “cut down in my prime”. I had a busy active life – work, theatre, dancing, socialising.

# Have you heard of the Balance Clinic?

When people lose their balance, they lose their confidence. I found that I had to concentrate constantly on not falling over. I was very frail, slow moving and slow thinking. I was confused and my hands didn't always respond to my requests.

I was concerned that I would have trouble regaining my fitness and that I might ‘seize up’. It was scary and unsettling to have something go wrong with my brain.

Rehabilitation became my focus and this is when I discovered the Neurological Disorders, Ageing and Balance Clinic in the Physiotherapy Department at the University of Queensland. This is a physiotherapy service for adults aiming to maximise physical independence in the community.

Final-year physiotherapy students work under supervision with the patients. Staff consultations are also available.

While I was struggling around at home feeling helpless, I developed some bad habits and did not know what I could and could not achieve. I walked like a little old lady and shuffled my feet.

A full assessment was made of

my condition and a program designed for my rehabilitation. I attended weekly clinics where we all worked at our own pace and were given exercises to do at home each day. My bad habits were diagnosed and have been rectified.

It was encouraging to meet other people with varying degrees of balance problems and to work in the well-equipped clinic.

While I also attended yoga, aquaerobics and an osteopath, I feel sure that the Balance Clinic played a large part in my recent dramatic improvement in balance.

The clinic benefits people with neurological disorders such as traumatic brain injury, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and stroke. People with movement difficulties associated with muscular dystrophies, dizziness, diabetes, amputation, ageing or late effects of polio also benefit.

The clinic is in the Therapies Building (Building 84) at the St Lucia campus of the University of Queensland. Small fees are charged for the supervised student service.

For inquiries and appointments, phone 3365 2232. ❖

## from previous page

The emotion in the voices of June and Shirley, and Mary lost for words, had my head and heart spinning with pride as I made their dream come true.

This was only the beginning and we still had to cross the Nullarbor.

Dingos, saltbush, salmon gums, flowers, emus, bustards, trapdoor spiders, sunrises and sunsets, as well as these special people who live on the Nullarbor, gave us interesting lively chatter during our morning tea and toilet stops. One rubbish bin is the only indication that a rest stop is ahead.

The Balladonia Roadhouse with freshly brewed cappuccinos, and lavender growing, has this amazing relaxing sensation for everyone who calls in: no one leaving for at least two hours. The best PR on the Nullarbor, and this with a female influence.

There is more to crossing the Nullarbor than I am able to express.

Norseman appears at the crossroads with not one sign to say that this is the end of it.

The satisfaction of having shared this tour with a journalist, artist, photographer, doctor, chemist and confidante with ages from 51 to 74 is hard to beat. ❖

By Florence McBryde

**“Gone** are the days when op shops are dusty and musty and you have to rummage through,” says Karen, a mother of two teenage children in a private school.

“They are so well set out these days and the clothes are all colour-coded. The money I save I can spend on other things.”

There’s a new breed of op shoppers today. Savvy. They come from all walks of life and pursue a common goal – bargains.

Karen, a seasoned op shopper, has an eagle eye for brand names. Although she has made many a good buy, she admits it can take time to look for specific items.

“I don’t want you to get the idea that I op shopped for everything, but I’ll go there first,” she says. “If they don’t have what I want, I’ll buy new.” She disappears into the floral-curtained fitting room to try on a pair of jeans.

Denyse, a working mother of four, has little time for this sort of shopping. While her toddler is engrossed in the book nook, she looks for something for a ’50s rock’n’roll party. “It’s fine for an outfit for a fancy dress and then I’ll put it back in the bin next day,” she says. “But you need to talk to my next-door neighbour. She buys everything, even exquisite jewellery. Looks immaculate every day.”

Mary, a fuller-figured lady, rarely finds “anything nice my size”, but wants baby clothes for her pregnant daughter. Kay points to shelves near the lace-curtained windows. “There’s lots of lovely baby gear. It’s hardly worn. I just throw it in the Napisan.”

Overseeing the ins and outs of this thriving op shop is Kay McCallum, Opp Shop co-ordinator. She has been involved with Silky Oaks for more than 20 years. Her eyes blaze with enthusiasm as she appraises the recently renovated shop.

Pansies in painted tyres, hats and bags displayed on purple lattice panels, decorated wooden boxes, baskets of toys, whirring fans, and a croaking frog to herald each customer. There’s an air of freshness to this shop

# A new view of op shopping



tucked in a cluster of buildings on a hill overlooking Moreton Bay.

“We sell clothes mainly,” says Kay, pointing out the bright new signs for the various departments of carefully selected garments. Only the best clothes are priced for sale. “People know we’ve got a high standard.”

The opportunity shop originally opened to sell a surplus of clothes that had been donated when Silky Oaks was an orphanage.

“Our main objective is to raise funds for the range of programs run by Silky Oaks,” Kay says. “Clothing is also sent to missions in the Philipines and Africa. No one in need is turned away.”

“I never knew this place was here,” trills a young mother who has just dropped her children at Manly West School next door. Delighted with her finds, she presents her basket at the glass counter.

Kay raises her hands in mock defence as the drawer of the old-fashioned cash register whirrs open. Meanwhile, the customer peers into the glass display cabinet, momentarily distracted by an item of bric-a-brac. Kay straightens a thought-for-the-day calendar and pops a leaflet promoting the up-coming Car Boot Sale into the bag. She bids a cheery goodbye to the departing customer.

While Kay wears many hats – she is also relief manager at the nearby Janoah Gardens Retirement Village, and is a salesperson at a news-agency – she says this would be her favourite job. “Just to help people out” is what makes it so fulfilling. “I love it.”

Co-ordinating the activities of more than 60 volunteers (mostly women), aged from mid-40s to 90s, keeps Kay busy. The shop is open on weekdays from nine until four, and on a Saturday morning once a month to accommodate working mums. Two handymen are involved in regular maintenance work at the complex, which includes a child care centre.

They also do odd jobs in the community. A retired local man repairs any wooden toys. He also fixes wooden items, like chairs, that are sold from the furniture shed and ensures that bikes are roadworthy before being presented for sale.

Electrical goods draw the attention of a local sparkie who checks that they are electrically safe. He tests and tags them for sale.

**continued next page**

# Share that secret

**“MY grandfather sexually abused me when I was seven!” For my friend (we’ll call her Anna), it had been an enormous effort, involving deep soul-searching, to share this shame.**

She said that she’d always wanted to tell this awful secret to her mother, but hesitated, thinking she would not be believed.

Knowing her mother well, I encouraged her to do so. This, fortunately proved to be the best course of action. Not only was she believed, but her mother shared with her that she herself as a young child had suffered in the same way at his (her own father’s) hands too. They wept together. The healing had begun.

My experience in this area was, thankfully, minimal. My uncle subjected me to some bad touching when I was around seven or eight years old. The offence went no further as I suddenly developed a distaste for visiting or staying at his and my aunt’s house.

My mother, wisely, did not insist. But she did not question me either, and I would never have been able to express my fear in words anyway. Society at that time did not speak of such things. I simply kept close to my parents whenever my uncle was around.

Two years ago, when visiting my only sister in England, we discussed our childhood and I blurted out my secret. Angry tears escaped as she admitted that this same uncle had offended against her, too. A more serious offence, unfortunately.

There we were, two plump 60-plus sisters, purging our pain through weeping together. Needless to say, both these perpetrators are long dead.

So why do the dark thoughts come back again and again to haunt us? Shakespeare, that keen observer of human nature, had it right when he noted that the evil that men do lives after them.

And Saint Paul declared that “...the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing”. Obviously he, too, puzzled over the depth of degradation within the human psyche.

It is strange, though, that the victims not only suffer mentally for the rest of their lives, but somehow believe that the fault lies with them. Anna certainly felt this way. It took much talking to convince her that she could not possibly shoulder guilt for the offences committed against her when she was only seven.

To offend against young children who trust the adults close to them, seems to me to be the ultimate act of betrayal.

Oprah Winfrey opened up this dark subject with her own self-disclosure a few years ago. We probably have her to thank for being the catalyst in promoting the openness with which the subject is regarded today. There are many programs now in place to help sufferers deal with their negative feelings.

Although much has improved, sexual abuse is alive and well unfortunately, even in religious groups, although some would hotly

dispute this. “It couldn’t happen among God’s people,” one senior pastor stated.

I can’t believe he really thinks that. Has he been living on another planet? ‘There’s none so blind...’

We should remain alert, and train ourselves to be observant, without conducting a witch-hunt or viewing everyone with suspicion.

Informing children about good and bad touching and encouraging them to share thoughts, feelings and ideas within a close parent-child relationship is a good way to go. How much fear Anna, my sister and myself could have been spared if we’d enjoyed a close rapport with our mothers.

Surely offenders, knowing that ‘everyone talks about it’ now, would be far less likely to commit offences. A deterrent? I think so.

Finally:

- be vigilant;
- be prepared to report to the proper authorities if you suspect something irregular;
- assure victims that they are not alone and encourage them to voice their fears in the proper quarters.

Sometimes we might be the only protection a young child has to prevent a happening that could blight their lives forever. Secrets are usually meant to be kept, but this type needs to be aired.

Go ahead, share that secret if you have one, with a trusted friend, family member or counselor, and may God help you. ❖

©2003 Val Smetheram

## from previous page

Kay loves toys, especially soft toys. However, they too must pass the test. “If they survive the washing machine, they go in the shop.”

A mother can bring in a child after visiting the doctor and buy any toy knowing it has been either scrubbed or machine-washed.

The shop has a new look. But how has op shopping changed?

“Years ago it was more the needy and

now it’s anybody and everybody,” Kay says, adding that some people hunt for bargains or a particular item while others may find something they are not really looking for.

Although Kay has never found an exceptional bargain she says, “I’m waiting. You never know what you are going to find.”

She can’t look at curtains without remembering the story of an elderly lady who had pinned her rings in the hem

for safekeeping. This lady was distraught to find that her daughter, in a bout of spring-cleaning, had hung bright new curtains and put the old ones in a collection bin.

Does Kay shop here? “Yeah! You bet I do!” She sashays across the floor, full-figured, in black fitted pants and loose bronze blouse.

“Most of my outfits are Opp Shop. Silky Oaks Boutique. The shoes as well!” ❖