

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0613

Thornton, Merle Estelle

(1930 - 2024)

Born 1 January, 1930

Died 16 August, 2024

Occupation Academic, Author, Feminist

Summary

On 31 March 1965 Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bogner chained themselves to the Regatta Hotel bar rail to protest for women's rights. They wanted to liberate public bars from being men-only. The two protestors were both mothers of two and married to university lecturers. They were refused service, the publican faced a fine of £10-£20 if he served them with liquor, but were bought a beer by sympathetic male patrons. Their action became the starting point for women's liberation in Brisbane in the late twentieth century. It is now recognised as one of the defining moments of second wave feminism in Australia.

A post-graduate student in Philosophy at the University of Queensland, Thornton went on to establish the Equal Opportunities for Women Association in April 1965. She also introduced the teaching of Women's Studies in Australia in 1973 and was the special guest of the Queensland Government and speaker at the 70th celebration of International Women's Day in 1999. Besides her academic writing Thornton also wrote episodes for the television drama series *Prisoner* and wrote and produced documentaries. Her stage play *Playing Mothers and Fathers* had a successful season at the Carlton Courthouse Theatre (Victoria) in 1990. Merle Thornton, the mother of actor Sigrid, returned to the Regatta Hotel, that now has a room named after her, for the launch of her first novel *After Moonlight* in 2004.

Events

2015 - 2015

Appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) 'for significant service to the community as an advocate for women, and Indigenous rights, and to the arts as a writer and director'

Published resources

Newspaper Article

Forty Years Later, No Bar to Women?, Mathewson, Catriona

Here's to pub's history of brave women, Wilson, Ashleigh

Book Section

Sex equality is not enough for feminism, Thornton, Merle, 1986

Book

After moonlight, Thornton, Merle, 1930-, 2004

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Merle Thornton, academic, writer and playwright, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

Author Details

Anne Heywood

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