

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE0149

Leonard, Marjorie (Helen)

(1945 - 2001)

Born 7 March, 1945, Stanmore New South Wales Australia

Died 12 October, 2001

Occupation Feminist, Nurse, Photographer

Summary

Helen Leonard worked with numerous women's organisations including the Nursing Mothers' Association (now the Australian Breastfeeding Association), Women's Electoral Lobby, National Women's Media Centre, CAPOW!, the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the National Foundation for Australian Women and WESNET. As a lobbyist and photographer in the women's movement from the 1970s onward, she recorded the activities of many women's organisations, building an extraordinary library of photographs and recordings.

Details

An only child, Helen was educated at Hornsby Girls High School. Aged 17 she enrolled as a student nurse at Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital, and worked for three years as a nurse or dental nurse in various settings.

Helen's children, Christopher, Robin and Carolyn Inman were born within four years of each other. By 1973 Helen was an active member of the newly created Nursing Mothers Association (NMA), working at the local level in Group Leadership and counselling. Legislation in some States at the time meant that women could be charged with offensive behaviour for breast-feeding in public, and relatively few Australian mothers were encouraged to breast-feed. While running self-esteem and communication groups for the NSW Health department, Helen began representing the NMA at a national level. By 1988 she had been appointed to the National Women's Consultative Council (NWCC) as a representative of NMA; was co-director of Distaff Associates; and co-convenor of WRITES, the umbrella for the Women's Economic Think Tank, Refractory Girl, Women's Radio Network and others.

On behalf of the NWCC, with the Women's Electoral Lobby, Helen organised the Women's Tax Convention in Canberra. She began work as a consultant to the Office of the Status of Women in the Commonwealth Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Working with journalist, writer and friend Anne Deveson she explored the portrayal of women in the media, became an Australian expert, and founded the National Women's Media Centre (www.nwmc.org.au). She also led the project to produce the 1998 National Women's Media Directory, which registered women to provide expert comment to the media on issues of the day.

In the mid 1990s, working for the NSW Department for Women, Helen coordinated state-wide International Women's Day activities, the Women and Media Awards, and the *Out of Line: 25 Years of Women's Posters* exhibition. She also created National Women's History Month; *This Day In History*, which profiles the achievements of women; and The Australian Women's Honour Roll, launched in March 2000. She moved to Canberra in 1998 to become National Executive Officer for the Women's Electoral Lobby (Australia). From early 2000 she worked as National Executive Officer for WESNET (Women's Services Network); as Iraq anti-sanctions Campaign Manager for the Medical Association for the Prevention of War; and as Manager, Government and Community Relations for the National Breast Cancer Foundation. She was Convenor of the Coalition of Australian Participating Organisations of Women (CAPOW!), the peak national women's organisation.

Helen was posthumously awarded a high commendation in the community section of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Human Rights awards, 2001, for her "tireless commitment to the rights of women, and broader issues of social justice." She is survived by her partner, Judy Harrison, and her three children. Helen's family have launched an appeal through the National Foundation for Australian Women (www.nfaw.org or telephone 02 62874422) to raise funds to create an accessible archive of her historic photographic work.

Edited from an Obituary by Marie Coleman

Published resources

Book

Fabulous Fifties: when life really begins. Interviews with Australian women in their fifties., Jan Bowen, 1995

Newspaper Article

Tireless activist for women's movement, Coleman, Marie, 2001

'Real dynamo' on behalf of women, 2001

Web-Savvy and wired into the women's movement, Coleman, Marie, 2001

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

Author Details

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