

Archive No. 95

National 10/40 Conferences

The first National 10/40 Conference for women over 40 years of age who'd been active in the Women's Liberation Movement for 10 or more years, was held at Lake Cullulleraine, Victoria, on 17 - 20 April, 1987. The first 10/40 was organised by a woman from Adelaide and a woman from Sydney and the venue was chosen because it was equidistant between the three major capitals.

This first 10/40 was organised along specific lines which became a tradition for future 10/40s. The conference was fully catered for by live-in cooks, the participants were accommodated in bunk beds or camped in their own tents and vans and were rostered on to wash dishes. The program was drawn up on large sheets of butcher's paper once the participants arrived and included workshops facilitated by any woman who wanted to bring up a topic that was relevant for discussion (such as menopause, sex, death and dying). There was a dance on the Saturday evening and a concert with various items from the participants, ranging from music and poetry to playback theatre and skits from the women from the Women's Lands in NSW on the Sunday evening. Child-care was not provided.

This was such a successful conference it set the agenda for subsequent 10/40s which were held in a different state each year over the Easter holiday long weekend. The second and third 10/40s were held in Sydney, NSW, 1988, 1989; the fourth one in Adelaide, SA, 1990; then Perth, WA, 1991; Melbourne, Victoria, 1992; Alice Springs, NT, 1993; Hobart, Tasmania, 1994; back to Sydney for the ninth 10/40 in 1995; over to Adelaide for the ten year celebrations in 1996 and the eleventh and final 10/40 was held in Melbourne in 1997. The twelfth 10/40 was to have been held in Perth, WA, in 1998 and was cancelled for lack of interest.

These National 10/40 Conferences never attracted more than approximately forty to eighty registrations. They were always organised by lesbian feminists and had a 99% lesbian participation. Ten years of activism in the WLM was always loosely interpreted and no-one was ever turned away or questioned on this. As discussions in workshops mainly centred round the issue of ageing it was the over-40 aspect that became a major focus of attention at these gatherings and was (fairly) strictly adhered to. After getting (reluctant) permission from the 10/40 in

Perth in 1991, the Melbourne organising collective added the word lesbian to advertise the event so that from then onwards the 10/40s ads stated the conferences were for 'lesbian and heterosexual feminists over 40'.

The 10/40s were a great deal of fun. They helped break down ageist assumptions not only in the broader feminist and lesbian communities but also for the participants themselves. It was significant, given the ageism in society, that there was a gathering specifically for older lesbian and heterosexual feminists. They also gave the younger feminists something to look forward to and went a long way towards lessening the fear of becoming older.