

Conclusion: It's déjà vu all over again?

I was bearing witness to my own times and the battles central to my generation.¹

As I write I look out on the bushland campus at the Australian National University in Canberra. It could not be more starkly different from the snow-covered grounds of Smith College, Alice Gorton's alma mater, where this story began. Sparse eucalypts replace firs and birches, the furry creatures in the trees are possums and twig-legged blue wrens take the place of the robins of the New England winter. The sun shines and dry leaves crackle underfoot. But the youthful female students in slim-fitting jeans, swinging hair and cropped tops look much the same as they purposefully go about their business.

I pinch myself that a journey that began with a Bachelor of Arts degree so many years ago could have brought me here a generation later. Where will their twenty-first century journeys take these young women? Like Nancy Miller I feel 'a renewed urgency to add the story of our lives to the public record'.²

'It's a pleasure to share one's memories', writes Susan Sontag. 'Everything remembered is dear, endearing, touching, precious. At least the past is safe – though we didn't know it at the time. We know it now. Because it's in the past; because we have survived.'³

When I talk about my work at a departmental seminar some who have survived recognize themselves within the story; others object that I have it wrong. 'In Sydney we never wore twin sets and pearls', one scoffs. 'That was only for those from the North Shore. We wore

1 Heilbrun, *Hamlet's mother and other women*, p. x.

2 Nancy K. Miller, 'Review essay: Public statements, private lives: academic memoirs for the nineties', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 22(4), 1997, p. 982.

3 Susan Sontag, 'Debriefing', in *A Susan Sontag reader (with an introduction by Elizabeth Hardwick)*, Penguin, London, 1983, p. 293.

sandals and shifts; we obeyed no rules.’ We are safe in our memories of rebellious younger selves. Jill Ker Conway confirms those observations, writing of ‘someone like me in my proper North Shore uniform of cashmere sweater, grey flannel skirt, and English walking shoes’.⁴ Young women are bemused at stories of posture photos or beauty quests. They are scarce in the audience. Young women have other agendas. They are preoccupied with postcolonial studies, with studies of indigenous people and global lives, with pressing issues such as climate change. They are living the life they want and do not want to hear about the long pathway that brought us here.

And maybe they should not. After all, we’ve arrived, haven’t we? I’m not convinced. In common with many of my generation I see a disturbing tendency in early twenty-first-century society to retreat to many of the abandoned aspects of the 1950s. And I do not just mean the towering stilettos we banished for ever. In the United States many well-educated young women have retreated to the home and are ‘embracing the exclusive roles of housewife and mother’, as Carolyn Heilbrun remarks.⁵ Others have graduated and occupy the career paths they want: they are now lawyers, doctors, holders of MBAs – that passport to a business career. To Heilbrun again: ‘Young women, particularly if they are rich and thin and using the latest in hair colours, are at the height of their attractiveness and their imprisonment in romantic illusions’.⁶ Can they adopt and discard a performance of femininity at will, as Boyd argues of those Southern US college girls who regularly enact rituals of southern womanhood?⁷ Have the ‘romantic illusions’ retained their pull in an age of extreme individualism? Certainly many highly educated young women in the 1990s rejected the supposed ‘puritanism’ of their mothers’ feminism, arguing instead for a liberated sexuality, for a ‘new feminism’ that focused on sexual desire, consumerism and an individual pathway.⁸ Sexuality was more compelling than romance.

4 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 172.

5 Heilbrun, *Hamlet’s mother and other women*, p. xi.

6 Ibid.

7 Boyd, ‘Sister act’.

8 E.g. Natasha Walter, *The new feminism*, Little, Brown and Co, London, 1998.

What will happen to these young women as they age? As life in the fast lane palls? As they try to combine their brilliant careers with a partner and children? Heilbrun claimed that ‘the future of feminism does not lie with the young but rather with the grey battalions, whether or not the grey is transformed to a brighter colour’.⁹ This may well be true although second wave feminists now hold a place in the eyes of younger women akin to Leland and others in the 1950s. They are now the ‘continuity’. Some younger women, however, on becoming mothers, are beginning to question the challenges of raising children in the hypersexualized culture they themselves previously advocated. They worry that an exaggerated femininity is idealized amongst young girls, that internet porn is available to all.¹⁰

Elements of the 1950s and early 1960s are also disturbingly present. Some argue that the Cold War never ended¹¹ or that the war on terrorism has become the new Cold War. Certainly the strangely named War on Terror brought back into both US and Australian society a narrowing of discourse, a defensiveness about intellectual debate, a worrying increase in surveillance. Schools and universities were targeted as too left-leaning. In Australia school curricula that made issues such as social justice and ecological sustainability central were deemed ideological by a former federal education minister, who compared them with the time of Chairman Mao.¹² Teachers are publicly derided for teaching feminist, postmodern or social-class-based critiques in English studies. The term ‘politically correct’ has been given a new life – a stick with which to beat progressive teachers. Conservative think tanks flourish. In the US, until the election of

9 Heilbrun, *Hamlet's mother and other women*, p. xii.

10 Natasha Walter, *Living dolls: the return of sexism*, Virago, London, 2010. See also Rosemary Neill, ‘Feminists in anti-raunch-culture revolt’, *The Weekend Australian*, 13–14 March 2010, in section ‘The Nation’, p. 3, on Mia Freedman, formerly Australian editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo* and *Dolly*, who is ‘turning against the 21st century excesses of the “free love” culture [she] once embraced’.

11 Peter Love, ‘Australia’s Cold War’ in Love and Strangio (eds), *Arguing the Cold War*.

12 See ‘The world today’, ABC Radio, 6 October 2006.

President Obama, it took a brave liberal to speak out against the strong neo-con consensus, fuelled by the religious right. If, as Jacqueline Rose argues, there was a Cold War logic that linked the intelligentsia with communism, 'as the joint threats to the free and homespun values of American democracy and the American mind',¹³ a 'War on Terror' logic seeks to implicate liberals (in US parlance), or left-leaning progressives in Australia, in similar threats. For many of those who fought the battles of the 1960s the barbarians seem well and truly at the gate.

Although we have not yet seen a return of the mass signing of loyalty oaths, debate on the need for new citizens to adopt the values of their new countries is rife, even if there is considerable doubt as to what those values might be. Dissent is labelled 'anti-American' or 'un-Australian'. We are no longer urged to 'dob in a pinko' but to report any suspicious activity around us, to see terrorists lurking in our midst. Those who seek a nuanced understanding of Islamic culture or who press for peace risk being viewed as this century's version of fellow travellers. We might well remember the Canoga Park case in both Australia and the US. In such a climate the pursuit of career and family goals, of material security and keeping one's head down makes much sense.

In 1953 Alison Prentice expressed her concerns for college rules – and her boyfriend's disdain for them:

Also relates to the feeling that Tony was telling you about – the complete indifference of boys (in his opinion) to grades, rules, systems, or pressures of society. People seem on the verge of beginning to ignore such impediments – an idea that 'what difference does it make how well I achieve something – I'll spend the next four years in Korea anyway'.¹⁴

The threat of national service hung over the young men of the period. Do we feel an echo of that time as we experience tensions on the Korean peninsula again, war in Afghanistan and unrest in Iran?

13 Jacqueline Rose, *The haunting of Sylvia Plath*, Virago, London, 1991, p. 196.

14 Prentice letters, private collection, February 1953.

Consumer culture lures young women even more. Throughout the western world images of thin women, with gym-sculpted bodies and large accessories await the young woman as she emerges from the chrysalis of her studies. But, importantly, she does not have to await a male purchaser. Glossy magazines suggest she can buy her own diamond, manage her own credit card and phone account. She has come a long way, baby. She is an equal consumer.

What has changed?

It would be wrong to claim that little has changed. The sheer numbers of women who enrol in university courses, win prestigious prizes, enter highly esteemed professions and engage in the political system indicate the success of those alumnae of the 1950s and early 60s who fought for broader fields of action for women. We look sympathetically now at women who confess in interviews: ‘I would have begged, borrowed or stolen to go to medical school’; ‘I would like to have had a law degree for my own personal betterment, [for] the feeling of accomplishment, of achievement, of doing something and getting it done. For personal satisfaction.’ ‘It’s probably superficial’, one woman reflected of her past, ‘but I think I’d prepare myself for a real career’.¹⁵ Then we know that times have changed. Feminism allied with civil rights movements and sustained economic growth – for all but the poor, or the socially excluded as they are now called – has changed the face of the English-speaking world. Developments in reproductive technology, the birth control pill, IVF, and child care offer educated women vast choices as to whether and when they will have a baby – and with whom. Sexual liberation (a still contested concept) enables them to reclaim their full sexuality, to experiment: to defer that leap into marriage that was once the only sanctioned pathway to

15 Interviews for ‘Graduating in the fifties’ project.

sex. Gay and lesbian couples live openly and adopt or produce children, although they are often excluded from reproductive technologies. Some mourn the loss of altruism, that virtue born of time on their hands for middle-class women.¹⁶

Young women are supremely confident: two young college alumnae looked forward with hope, one stating that if dating does not work out, then standing on her own feet was a good option thanks to her excellent education. Another claimed: 'Today's Smithies are not presidents' wives; we are presidents of our own companies'.¹⁷

Hard-won legislation has secured critical gains in education and the workplace. Landmark acts such as the *Equal Employment Opportunity Act* of 1972 and the *Educational Amendments Act* in the US, the 1984 *Sex Discrimination Act* and the *Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act* of 1986 in Australia, ushered in a legal revolution. Half the battle has been won and if we can avoid it being challenged by a resurgent religious right, who would like above all to see *Roe v Wade* overturned and women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen, it should stand young women in good stead for the years ahead.

What has not changed

But there is the other part of the battle to be fought. In both Australia and the United States the combination of career and child rearing presents insurmountable barriers for women. It is these barriers, in part, that send highly educated middle-class women back to the role of housewife, exhausted by the struggle to be both workers and mothers. Workplaces have not adapted to 'working mothers'. They demand impossibly long hours of both parents; they frequently offer little job security, making decisions to bring children into the world contingent at best. They do not look favourably on interrupted careers. Work is everything, sociologist Ulrich Beck believes:

16 Alison Wolf, 'Working girls', *Prospect Magazine*, 121, April 2006, online.

17 Alexandra Bregman, 'Reconciling the gap between Smith alumnae and alum now', *The Sophian*, 2 April 2010, online.

having lost their faith in God, [people] believe instead in the godlike powers of work to provide everything sacred to them: prosperity, social position, personality, meaning in life, democracy, political cohesion. Just name any value of modernity and I will show that it assumes the very thing about which it is silent: participation in paid work.¹⁸

For this reason many young women defer child bearing until there is a measure of job security – or at least a salary sufficient to allow for household help. Others are so captivated by the cultural power of the workplace, the ‘religion of capitalism’¹⁹ that they cannot disengage. Yet in spite of that attraction women are still scarce in corporate board rooms and senior academic posts.

How does this compare with the life course of those who completed their degrees in the 1950s and early ’60s? As we have seen many married straight out of college and produced children while still in their twenties. They were young enough, when the call from feminism came – or when suburban *ennui* set in – to begin again, to undertake further study, to reinvent themselves, to take part-time work and begin to build a career. Many formed partnerships at a time when the new birth control pill gave them unprecedented control over the timing of child bearing, indeed over whether they would have children at all. Their identities, caught between the romance plot and the quest plot, were negotiable. Not all made that negotiation to their satisfaction: Alice Gorton Hart regretted the lost opportunities. Their life patterns meshed with the expanding workplace, the growing need for teachers, social workers, psychologists. Consumerism had not yet become the ‘religion of capitalism’, although it was on the way. Did they really have the best of all possible worlds? Looking back I realize the luxury of having spent several years at home with my three young children – although it felt far from luxurious at the time. How many young women now can take six or seven years from their careers and

18 Ulrich Beck, *The brave new world of work*, Polity Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 63.

19 Arlie Hochschild, *The commercialization of intimate life, notes from home and work*, quoted in Barbara Pocock, *The labour market ate my babies*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2006, p. 48.

then choose to return? But then we did not see ourselves as having a 'career' to step out of.

Not to win freedom but how to use it

'There is', wrote Edna Rostow, 'an inherent if rarely acknowledged contradiction between the traditional idea of marriage and "the emancipation" of women'.²⁰ Writing in 1964, she imagined a time when the freedom of women would be a threat to marriage 'as we now know it'. Looking at the young women of her time Rostow saw them as willing to compromise, to make accommodation for the obvious conflict. Much of that was achieved by women choosing jobs not careers. Jobs could be abandoned at will: careers, on the other hand, required persistence and nurturing. The challenge for these young women was not to win freedom but how to use it. Too many were 'intellectually underemployed' in an Australian journalist's view.²¹ Have we arrived at that time Rostow envisaged – forty six years later? Has the 'emancipation' [sic] of women threatened marriage and the bearing of children? Certainly the marriage rate has dropped in both Australia and the US and the age at marriage has risen. Highly educated women, then as now, marry later than their sisters and are therefore likely to have fewer children as a group. The bearing of children, however, remains a compelling imperative. While we no longer use the terms 'conflict' and 'accommodation', which framed Rostow's essay, we recognize the issues all too well. Rostow believed that the young women who graduated from 'a first class college' of her time were a feminine elite, the wives of a male elite: they were part of

20 Edna Rostow, 'Conflict and accommodation', *Daedalus*, 93(2), 1964, p. 736.

21 Myfanwy Gollan, 'Conversations with my memory' in Jocelynne Scutt (ed.), *Different lives*, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic, 1987, p. 170.

a vanguard, self-conscious and articulate in thought and feeling, purposeful and active, whose behaviour and attitudes are not only intrinsically important, but are of interest to men and women throughout American society, and indeed, throughout the world ... America is still the prototype (to be accepted or rejected) of what life offers – or becomes – under conditions of affluence and social freedom.²²

Was America the prototype? A comparison of American and Australian women throughout this book has revealed some interesting contrasts. While college women in both societies experienced the Cold War, the rise of consumerism and increasing socio-psychological assessment they did so to very different degrees. In Australia the Cold War was never as cold. The affluence that shaped middle-class America, bringing both wealth – and anxiety – was slower in coming to Australia where students rarely owned cars or elaborate wardrobes. It would have been rare indeed for an Australian university woman to undergo psychoanalysis for ‘neuroses’ such as weight gain and career confusion. Australia did not have the elite women-only colleges/universities that were emblematic of both the best and the worst of the times. The best certainly, in relation to a proud tradition, to intellectual rigour and pastoral care: the worst, arguably, in that the women’s colleges frequently taught or conveyed the messages of life adjustment that narrowed women’s options and suffocated their emerging ambitions. No courses such as Education for Marriage: General Studies 210, offered from 1952 to 1970 at the University of Southern California, were taught in Australian universities. The hot-house atmosphere of single-sex institutions could both enhance study and focus attention too much on the weekend parties ahead. It is not surprising then that the rallying cry of Betty Friedan’s *The feminine mystique* emerged from the students of an elite woman’s college.

Women entered the professions of medicine and law through different pathways in Australia and the United States. Australian women entered medical and law courses straight from high school, albeit in very small numbers. Yet they gained those qualifications and fre-

22 Rostow, ‘Conflict and accommodation’, p. 742.

quently went on to internships and careers without having to undertake a second professional degree after a liberal arts course – and possibly marriage. In the US where individualistic competitive achievement was the standard, gender roles may have been more sharply differentiated.

The triggers for social change were not always the same. The civil rights movement in the US was paramount, although peace activism and anti-nuclear movements played a large part. In Australia the issues to which students rallied were anti-apartheid, Aboriginal rights, the White Australia Policy (which they sought to overturn) and nuclear testing. In both countries the Vietnam War stirred many to resist. Students of both countries then confronted similar moral challenges, similar anxieties and urgent calls for major social change. These calls to action led women to political involvement and ultimately to a realization that within those arenas they were still handmaidens to men. This was the prompt for a renewed women's movement, for the crucial change of consciousness.

Within the prototype that Rostow described role conflict has not diminished although we rarely use that term. Indeed it has increased over time to the extent that it is one of the defining issues for highly educated young women today: the famous work–family dilemma, or the mommy wars in the US. Even a few years on from our end point of 1965, as women's place in the workforce became more widely accepted, women of the class of 1967 were reporting more conflict.²³ The University of Michigan Women's Life Paths study noted that the number reporting conflict rose from one fifth of the sample in 1967 to one third in 1970 to a half in 1981. Curiously those women who were deemed 'role innovative' (ie were working in areas in which fewer than 30 per cent of the workers were women) reported the least conflict.²⁴ The types of conflict reported included conflicting time demands, conflicts between a couple's dual careers, conflicts related to the demands of the husband's career on his wife, the husband or part-

23 Tangri and Jenkins, 'The University of Michigan class of 1967', p. 269.

24 Ibid.

ner's support, and the husband's or partner's resistance (that dust on the furniture perhaps?). Welcome to the twenty-first century.

A source of the conflict identified by some was their own perfectionism in attempting to bring high performance standards to both home and work. This is the female version of performance anxiety. Tangri and Jenkins cite a college professor with two children, married to a lawyer for ten years, who wrote: 'A working mother is always in a dilemma: Are you doing enough as a mother and professional? ... I am a perfectionist and very demanding and therefore experience a lot of guilt.'²⁵ She speaks of 'a juggling act' in words that have become a mantra for women today. A Smith College graduate of 1957 wrote in her twenty-fifth reunion survey: 'Another juggler reporting in: wife, mother, career woman, volunteer. Can't stop to write or I might drop something.'²⁶ Jill Ker Conway was not immune from these anxieties as she worked on her PhD dissertation: 'I was not only anxious about whether I could write anything of substance, I also had to grapple with the inner need to perform as a superb housewife to justify my career'.²⁷ Guilt has now been sharpened to a knife edge: young women consume more and more commodities for their children to compensate for not being there – but the guilt remains.

The University of Michigan class of '67 reported more conflict between marriage (or child rearing) and career than they had anticipated as they finished their degrees. But then again, in most areas – marriage, child bearing, occupational choice and tendency to go on to graduate degrees – their lives differed from their expectations. That is what makes a transitional generation, a 'swing bridge' cohort, and attracts the interest of social science researchers.

25 Ibid.

26 Smith College, Class of 57, 25th reunion survey (typescript), 21–23 May 1982.

27 Conway, *True north*, p. 91.

Role conflict: a concept whose time has passed?

Has the idea of role conflict any purchase today? Alice Yohalem questioned the extent of role conflict in her work on very highly educated women, 'women of superior scholastic aptitude who pursued advanced education'.²⁸ Referring to women aged in their late 40s and early 50s in 1974 (the time of the interviews) she finds little evidence of pronounced conflict between demands of career and family. Many of these high-achieving women had developed strategies to maintain their careers, limiting family size, working part-time to keep up with skills and re-entering the labour market as soon as possible. They seem to have advanced, in her view, 'despite male obstructiveness rather than because of male assistance'.²⁹ Furthermore few of them wanted to retire at 65; those whose work patterns had been discontinuous showed a particular desire to enjoy their 'revived careers'.

This suggests that the advanced education these high-achieving women had undertaken had exempted them from the norms of their time. What would exempt women today? In Yohalem's group women with advanced higher education were rare. As more and more young women in Australia and the United States now acquire a PhD, an MBA and higher professional qualifications, what do they have to do to achieve exemption? Due to the hard work of earlier feminists many of the norms have changed. It is no longer mandatory to privilege a partner's career, for example. At this point attitude is as important as qualification. An informed and determined resistance to society's expectations, to its contradictory messages, is the critical element in today's world, a resistance that young women could strengthen through a study of women's recent past.

We now view role conflict as an indictment of both Australian and American society's inability to structure its workplace to fit the realities of educated women's lives. The notion served to displace any difficulties onto the woman concerned, making her responsible

28 Yohalem, *The careers of professional women*, p. 189.

29 p. 194.

through guilt, performance anxiety and sheer overwork for the wider society's inadequacies. What some have called role conflict is the mismatch between a society that pours resources into educating women, but fails to supply the resources to allow her to put that education, those high level skills, to work. Inevitably the solution for women with high 'achievement motivation' now is to restrict family size, sometimes indeed to forgo child bearing completely, a fact that demographers know all too well, and that Rostow predicted.

As people live longer and are likely to be in paid work at even later ages, let us offer them the chance to take several years out – a 'moratorium' – at a time when they wish to put their energies into partnerships and family building. We are, as Barbara Pocock points out, on a 'collision course'.³⁰ As people have fewer children we produce a population slanted to the ageing. We then need more and more of our diminishing cohort of young people to be in the labour market. But if they are there, with the voracious demands of professional careers, how can they have the children to provide the coming cohort of workers? It is a double bind – a bind as perplexing as that which faced the women of the 1950s and 60s. This is the challenge for twenty-first century women.

Because we passed this way ...

'Some things were different because we passed this way', claims Alix Kates Shulman.³¹ But others are depressingly the same. Do we have to think like men to become part of the power structure? How did Jill Ker Conway come to be 'chairman' of a large public company, Lend Lease, in 2000? In a newspaper interview she spelt out her way of

30 Barbara Pocock, *The work/life collision: what work is doing to Australians and what to do about it*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2003.

31 Alix Kates Shulman, *Burning questions: a novel*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1978, p. 358.

beating men at their own game. 'One of the things I encourage women in management to do is to take a course in military history, take a course in corporate strategy, watch those wretched football games every weekend and learn the language', she is quoted as saying to a group of 350 women.³² Margaret Mead claimed that in US culture boys were unsexed by failure, girls by success.³³ The legions of young professional women, confident and aspiring, give the lie to that idea. Those who despaired in the 1950s that women would never be *persons* again – Marine Leland, Alice Rossi and Mary Bunting – can take heart.

We are not walking into the future blindfolded. We know that if we continue with current social arrangements we may well end up with two classes of women. The first will be the highly educated, highly paid professionals who marry late if at all and have one or two children. The second will be an underclass of young prolific mothers akin to the breeders of Margaret Atwood's dystopian imagination.³⁴ We already see signs of this pattern. And, as Heilbrun pointed out, many college women are retreating to the suburbs. There is a curious reversion to women taking their husbands' names on marriage – a sign of greater confidence or of a retreat to tradition?

Do we ever escape the generation into which we are born? The college women of the 1950s and early 60s married early in the main, although later than their non-college sisters. They had children early and returned to part-time work when their children went to school. Grasping the new opportunities in the expanding workforce and the possibility of controlling fertility, many went on to lifelong successful careers. This pattern has much to recommend it, if social arrangements allow women to return at their own pace. Some societies, such as those of the Scandinavian countries, have shown the way. Yet, as we have seen, others exempted themselves from that typical pattern, remaining single, marrying late, remaining childless, allowing themselves time and experience to lead their cohort. Those in lesbian rela-

32 Andrew White, 'Above the glass ceiling', *The Australian*, 20 January 2000, p. 28.

33 Cited in Rostow, 'Conflict and accommodation', p. 743.

34 Margaret Atwood, *The handmaid's tale*, Virago, London, 1987.

tionships escaped the marriage expectations of the day while at the same time risking disapproval and suspicion.

Have we killed off the Freud in our heads? The guilt that burdened so many of the 50s graduates still lurks, as studies (often spurious) of the impact of child care on the growing brain lead young mothers into doubt and guilt. Perhaps the fact that far fewer are studying education and psychology will save them from this fate. Business studies and law do not give much emphasis to early childhood development. College women's insecurities about their appearance and sexuality have not diminished. At the sorority rushes of the 1990s young women fresh from high school sought polished perfection in clothes, hairstyle and make up, in order to attract attention, adhering to the (unspoken) rules of desirability.

Who will become the new feminists for the next phase? Alison Wolf has argued that individualism has led to the death of sisterhood.³⁵ It is each for her own. Yet through the internet and social networking young women form collectives, and build a new politics. How did some women escape the prescriptions of the time? There was always a small group who forged ahead totally unaware, or unmoved by how they were meant to be. It was often the 'outsiders' who led the way in the 1950s and early '60s: the scholarship girls, those whose fathers had urged them on, those who did not marry or have children. Black women in the US frequently outnumbered black men in gaining degrees and led the way in combining work and family. Demographics may well set the scene for the next phase. As the younger generation shrinks and workers are needed for every level of the workforce, the growing legions of educated women will gain a new bargaining power. That is the moment to insist on the conditions they want.

If they are to work until the age of 70, as pundits predict, why not have ten years out from the age of twenty-five to thirty-five – a young adult moratorium for both men and women – to travel, to have babies, to experiment with their lives. Earlier we saw that Jill Ker Conway realized at thirty-three that she was to be a scholar: 'history was what I

35 Wolf, 'Working girls'.

did and would do for the rest of my life'. She believed that 'a woman develops her sense of her working self on a different time trajectory from that of a man'. Conway's argument is persuasive: 'because society defines children as a woman's responsibility, she needs to clarify what her reproductive life will be, and whether she is to be single or a member of a partnership'.³⁶ Let us allow young women that time out. There are many seasons in a woman's life.

So let us set the fifties and early sixties to rest, remembering those who broke free from the expectations of the times, and those who did not quite manage to do so, and looked back with regret. Some have turned back towards the religion they set aside in the frantic '70s. Mary Goldsmith, the inveterate student, is studying theology. Some, like Pam Cleland, have returned to art; others to music. Some, like Gloria Steinem, have turned to spirituality and meditation, echoes, perhaps, of that Indian experience? Alison Prentice practises yoga and advocates for peace and justice on Canada's west coast. Germaine Greer is still waiting for the women's revolution to begin.³⁷ Some, after active and distinguished careers, have returned to the preoccupations of an earlier time. Jill Ker Conway writes about women's lives. Inga Clendinnen enjoys 'the magical arts of History'³⁸ and of fiction and writes magnificently about the struggles and indignities of life-threatening illness. And I, putting behind me thirty-five years of academic life, what shall I do? Where once I dreamed of being the secretary of a famous writer I now aspire to *be* a writer. Because they passed this way ...

36 Conway, *True north*, p. 148.

37 Germaine Greer, 'Better half still battling', *The Australian Literary Review*, 5 May 2010.

38 Inga Clendinnen, transcript of interview for Australian Biography Project.