



**VICTORIAN
WOMEN'S TRUST**

VICTORIAN WOMEN'S BENEVOLENT TRUST

THE FLEUR SPITZER SUB-FUND ESSAY



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Researched and written by: Susan Feldman
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FOREWORD

When I joined the Victorian Women's Trust as Executive Director in late 1996, Fleur Spitzer was an established donor in Melbourne. I was totally new to the philanthropic sector. Meeting Fleur early in my life at the Trust opened up a whole new world.

Instead of philanthropy with a predilection for conservative, safe and risk averse grant-making, here was Fleur - a proud feminist, family woman, feisty and generous donor, one who was prepared to back edgier and relatively unglamorous causes.

Fleur has understood from the start of her giving, the power of philanthropy to make a difference.

With great foresight she has supported landmark projects which have provided significant community benefit. One of these was the Better Work and Family Balance initiative which ultimately became, under the leadership of Julia Gillard as Minister for Industrial Relations and Employment, a new national program enabling hundreds of small businesses to create family-friendly workplaces.

Fleur has consistently been prepared to fund projects to assist women and girls who were doing it tough in the face of real and prolonged disadvantage. One of these was the remarkable and poignant documentary film, *Anna Lost Anna Found* in 2001 which dealt with emotional abuse within families long before the recent sharpening of community debate around violence towards women.

In close to twenty years of funding projects through our Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust, Fleur has continued this personal tradition of progressive, social change and feminist philanthropy - choosing to support a wide array of projects which have focused on mentoring, women's participation and voice in the community, The recognition of Muslim women's rights in Victoria's legal and health systems, family literacy programs for isolated migrant women, refuge and accommodation for Indigenous women, family relationships support for Indigenous women, community support for asylum seeker women's groups, and older and younger women.

Her recent support of the Dugdale Trust for Women & Girls, our new national harm prevention charity, has further illustrated her commitment to help fund work to reduce violence towards women and children.

We feel privileged to have known Fleur. We feel honoured to have been a part of her philanthropic journey. We have been thrilled to have had the opportunity to collaborate with her daughter Ondine in establishing a sub-fund. We are now excited by the knowledge that the Fleur Spitzer Sub-Fund now carries her name and philanthropic values forward into a future of progressive grant-making. And we thank Susan Feldman for skillfully researching and writing this wonderful tribute essay which rightfully places Fleur's contribution to women and community on the public record.

Mary Crooks AO
Executive Director





INTRODUCTION

I want to thank the Victorian Women's Trust for giving me the honour of writing to you about a woman whom I have known personally and worked with professionally for over 35 years.

While Fleur Spitzer is not a household name, her generosity has had immeasurable impact on the lives of many people in the community. So today we honour Fleur publicly for her contribution and unwavering energy on behalf of all Victorians and most particularly, women and girls.

And I want to pay tribute to Fleur's family and especially her late husband Victor Spitzer and children Ondine and Neil who have always been enthusiastic and supportive of Fleur's unlimited energy, capacity and steadfastness. I know that they are proud that she has always stood up for what she believes is right and her willingness to put in the necessary time and resources needed to bring about positive change.

Preparing a public reflection of Fleur Spitzer's life was a challenge that Mary Crooks of the Trust set for me. I have asked myself many times and in the course of preparing for today, just how would I go about tackling this important task? How could I capture the essence of a woman whose life has encompassed such a complex array of elements in both her private and public worlds?

And as you might expect, I turned for assistance from those people who have known Fleur best - to family members, friends and colleagues. I have asked them to give me

their insights into Fleur's driving force and her substantial contributions to public life. Their generosity in providing me with their time and reflections have been integral to preparing this narrative, to the telling of Fleur Spitzer's story.

It was unanimous. Fleur is a woman of substance. Her personal qualities set her apart as an exceptional daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend and supporter of people who may at times during their life have needed compassion, support, encouragement and opportunity.

Today I know is the right time to reflect on, and thank Fleur, for her incredible achievements in her life, both as a woman and philanthropist or as Fleur would prefer to be known, as a change maker. I also know that by acknowledging Fleur and her endeavours, we provide a unique opportunity for her family, friends and community to thank her for her extra ordinary work, and to wish her well in her current and future life journey.

The Victorian Women's Trust has recognised Fleur Spitzer as a woman of significance, whose support of its grant-making work has always been insightful and strategic. The Trust has written of Fleur and here I quote, that Fleur "shares her wisdom and compassion in championing causes for women and girls, while demonstrating her strong feminist principles with pride and determination".¹ We are honouring Fleur and excited to place her work on the public record. Dur-e Dara OAM, Board member of the Victorian Women's Trust deems that - "Fleur is a leading light and an elder of philanthropy in Victoria".



In Fleur we recognise a woman who has moved well beyond the idea of the power of wealth but rather a person who has always been more concerned with the power of giving and making meaningful change, wherever possible, in people's lives.

Since 1998 Fleur's support of the Trust has not wavered. She has funded projects that assist women and girls "who were doing it tough in the face of real and prolonged disadvantage".² Her financial contribution to the Trust has included projects for Indigenous and asylum seeker women and children, as well as younger and older women living in rural Victoria. In addition, her assistance was often underpinned by her concern about the continuing need to address domestic violence and abuse.

And Fleur's commitment continues. Today is the launch of the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust Fleur Spitzer Sub-Fund. The Sub-Fund is being set up by the Trust because of Fleur's generosity and as such will continue to provide financial assistance

and support to improve the lives of women and children. The establishment of this Sub-Fund will ensure that the legacy of her work through the power of philanthropy will continue to make a difference to people and touch the lives of many individuals in and beyond our community.

The continuing support of the Trust will provide the means for "women and girls to stand equally with men and boys, and take up life's opportunities without fear, harm, discrimination or disadvantage".³

Principles of social change and justice have always been the cornerstone of Fleur's image of a better world. Importantly, the establishment of this Sub-Fund was a family decision and an exemplar of how children, a daughter and son, can continue building on the work and values held by their parents and in this case, particularly, their mothers. So as might be expected Fleur's discussions and collaboration with Ondine and the Trust has resulted in the establishment of this enduring Sub-Fund.



ESSAY

Fleur Spitzer is a unique and wonderful Australian woman. Fleur is a woman of Jewish background and traditions. Although her Jewishness is not fore front in her public life, Fleur's belief in the principles of social justice and making the world right is rooted in her psyche as well as within Jewish philosophy. It is the foundation of religious beliefs and the notion of the Hebrew **Tzedakah** (Charity) in Judaism.

It was written in (Leviticus 25:35) around the year 1446 BC that (read woman):

"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your G-d is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks..."⁴

Fleur Spitzer (nee Joske) was born in Melbourne in 1931 to Myer Harry Joske (Joskowitz) who had migrated from Poland as a young man and Alma Cohen who was born in Carlton. Fleur is the oldest of three children – brother, Bruce Joske and sister, Adrienne Bassar.

Growing up in Melbourne was a long way from the troubles of Europe and the Second World War. Australia had provided Fleur and her family with a safe and secure life in which to grow and prosper. However, as a young woman Fleur was increasingly aware of the racial discrimination experienced by relatives who had migrated to Australia during this dreadful period in European history. Perhaps it is this awareness that would later fuel her philanthropic activities on behalf of refugees and people seeking asylum on our shores.

Although Fleur's mother Alma did not have the opportunity for a much of a formal education, she was an extremely clever

and canny woman. Fleur recalled how her mother was indignant because women of her generation were denied an education. As a consequence, both of Fleur's parents worked hard to ensure that she would have those educational opportunities denied to her mother and not only attend a good school, but complete her high school studies at the very least. Lauriston Girls School was chosen for Fleur. She was a good student and Fleur recalled that her education was "steeped in Anglo-Saxon traditions and values".

Fleur was remembered by a fellow student, friend and colleague - Carmel Benjamin that Fleur was a young girl who walked with a straight back and was imbued with a sense of confidence.

Following Lauriston, Fleur attended the University of Melbourne as a first year medical student before abandoning study to work in the newly established School of Architecture at the University of Melbourne. At this time Fleur was exposed to the radical ideas of architecture and it was an experience which she describes as having a great influence on her life.

But Fleur was a young and curious woman who fought convention and embarked upon something that "nice young ladies" certainly did not do at that time and that was travel on her own overseas. Fleur was eager to learn about how other people outside of Australia experienced life and to explore her own potential and possibilities of life.

During her extensive travels Fleur recalls how she was exposed to many experiences which she said influenced her attitudes for the rest of her life, especially towards women, injustice and disadvantage.

However, after nearly two years of living in England and hitch hiking in Europe, Fleur learnt of her father's illness, and somewhat

reluctantly, she returned home to help her family. Fleur said that once she was back in Australia she remembers being “as determined a rebel as there ever had been”. Upon her return to Australia Fleur worked at the ABC television network in various roles including those of script assistant and assistant producer until her marriage to Victor Spitzer in 1957. Fleur and Victor had two children Neil and Ondine. But the well-travelled and rebellious Fleur realised that she probably would not be content to be a stay at home mother.

In 1958 as a young married woman Fleur was shocked to learn that she would be unable to remain in her job at the ABC, just like so many other young women at that time who were also forced to resign their professional positions whether it be in teaching or the public service. It was this unfair situation which further compounded Fleur’s determination to fight injustice and fueled her drive to work to put things right in the world, especially for women and girls.

Like so many women of her generation she would be inspired by one of the founders of the second-wave feminist movement in the USA, Betty Friedan, and read her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. Fleur decided then and there that she would no longer try to conform to the stereotype of a middle class wife and mother.

“Fleur’s feminist values continued to be fundamental to her and the inspiration for her considerable community and philanthropic involvement.”

Continuing her education in 1969 Fleur undertook a primary teaching diploma at Mercer House teacher training college with interests in remedial education and literacy.

It was the birth of her son Neil that would not only challenge Fleur as a young mother, but also inspire her to take positive action and fight against prejudice and discrimination. Fleur was outraged that children such as her Neil who had specific learning requirements, were so marginalised and this situation really put a fire in her belly. She drew on her teacher training and took up the challenge, joining the organisation Specific Learning Difficulties (SPELD) and working tirelessly to ensure that children such as her son could reach their learning potential. She was determined that her son was given the educational opportunities that were available to all other children.

Once again Fleur exhibited a fierce determination to support others so that they could also thrive and achieve their life goals. This dedication to her son and other children, coupled with her ideals about injustice, were to become the cornerstone of her future political and philanthropic endeavours.

Fleur was unwavering in her belief that grassroots political action is important and her home was a hotbed of just such action. Ondine recalls that when she was a child groups of women met regularly at their home. Although she was not sure at that time what the women were meeting about, it was pretty obvious even to her as a child that these women were plotting and planning and that it was a serious business.

The women of course were members of the Balwyn – Mont Albert group of the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) which was established by feminist Beatrice Faust in 1972. WEL was established as a women’s political lobby which surveyed political candidates and their policies

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affecting women and it quickly grew to over 400 members. Members wrote submissions and developed media skills for women to lobby for the inclusion of women in all areas of government policy and kept both Federal and State governments accountable on a range of issues as they affected the quality of women’s lives. Of particular concern to WEL, and which formed their original campaign, were the demands around equal pay, equal employment opportunity, equal access to education, free contraceptive services, abortion on demand and free 24-hour child care.⁵

She continued to host WEL and other political meetings over the following decade at her North Balwyn home. Fleur made life-long friends in WEL. She was known as a woman who made a realistic assessment of any situation and who used her common sense to examine its potential. As a member of WEL for 22 years Fleur was imbued with a sense of patience and understanding about how substantial political, economic and social change often just takes time and unwavering energy.

Rosalind Smallwood also a member of WEL has known Fleur since those heady days when “they lived through the second-wave of the feminist revolution and were part of it in every way, every day”. Ros told me that Fleur was known as a straight shooter and a very direct person. Ros also remembers Fleur for

her “strong sense of humour which was real and very funny”.

It was also against the backdrop of feminist activism at WEL that Fleur honed her media skills which would later serve her well in her work with Don Chipp who in 1977 was the leader of the newly established minor political party The Australian Democrats. At that time both she and Victor supported the values of this new democratic party after becoming disillusioned with labour politics at that time.

As might be expected, Fleur was also drawn to support the Democrats because it led the way in promoting women to leadership positions and its broad range of policies including reconciliation with Indigenous Australians, homosexual law reform and gender equality. Over the following decades Fleur’s feminist values continued to be fundamental to her and the inspiration for her considerable community and philanthropic involvement.

The image of Fleur as a young school student who walked tall with confidence resonates with me also. Many decades later in 1984 Fleur strode into the Flinders Lane premises of the newly funded Women’s Information & Referral Exchange (WIRE). Fleur was most business like, a woman on a mission, purpose, and wearing a very bright red coat. The occasion, to attend one of the first WIRE collective meetings with her friend and colleague from WEL, Val Blyth. At that time WIRE was a place where women’s organisations from all political persuasions were represented, with each group demanding to be heard.

Over the years Fleur and Val were both regular and commanding presences at many of the drawn out and often adversarial collective meetings. From the outset the

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relatively inexperienced workers were all very impressed with these two women, who obviously had experience of how our often unruly meetings might better proceed.

During these days Fleur was not afraid to express her views and did so in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, her mentoring, guidance and constant support for us as young, active and strident feminists was unwavering as were her insights into how to conduct peaceful but radical political action. For example, it was at Fleur’s insistence and as always, with her support, that women in the WIRE collective were given the opportunity to learn the skills of the 10 second media grab. We were instructed in the craft of getting across the key messages in relation to our concerns of the day which included equal pay, the right to abortion and family violence.

Feminist activities aside, Fleur it seems was not shy when it came to giving other women advice and in particular helpful hints about their makeup application “A little bit of blusher can do wonders. It makes me look healthy” said Fleur to her friend Ros Smallwood, who promptly put blusher on her shopping list and has as she recalled, used it ever since.

Jill Reichstein, Chair of the Reichstein Foundation, also recounts that on one occasion following an important public speech Fleur offered her unsolicited advice with regard to making the maximum impact on her audience by first not reading her speech and more importantly noting that “bright red lipstick would do the trick nicely”.

Beyond politics Fleur and Victor never lost their curiosity about how other people experienced life, this curiosity reflected in their extensive and sometimes challenging travel over many years to all corners of the globe. Fleur kept count and estimates that together they travelled to 62 countries in all. Tales of canoeing down the Amazon, exploring the highlands of New Guinea, camping in the sandy deserts of Egypt and even facing military coups in Africa abound.

At home in Melbourne and in between their travels, Fleur and Victor both took advantage of all that was on offer in the city. Ondine remembers that as she and her brother Neil grew older her parents were out and about most evenings, attending a wide range of cultural, intellectual and political events. They had a substantial social and cultural life, attending theatre, music, opera, and the arts in general.

Not only avid theatre goers, but together they contributed financial support to Melbourne’s cultural institutions including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Festival, The Writers Festival and The Wheeler Centre to name but a few.

In 1988 Fleur turned her energies to the plight of those disadvantaged individuals who found themselves grappling with the legal system in Victoria. She was concerned especially for women coming through the criminal justice system with little or no support from family or community. At first Fleur gave her time as a volunteer to the newly established organisation, the Court Information and Welfare Network (CIWN), and then as President of the Committee of Management 1989-1993. In her Presidential role Fleur brought enthusiasm and experience, these qualities assisting the agency to grow and flourish into the substantial organisation it remains today. Carmel Benjamin AM, founder and Executive

Director of the CIWN relates how through her belief and involvement in the work of the organisation, Fleur supported change and social justice for members of the community who were less able to defend themselves.

Her dedication was such that rumour has it that even when Fleur's chronic back condition was causing her grief she was given to chairing meetings lying flat out on the board room table.

Fleur was lucky to have been able to see her mother Alma, her sisters and their friends get on with life as they aged well into their late 80's and recalled just how inspired she was by their determination in all things. They were smart women who Fleur described as "having their marbles and lived alone, accepting minimal help and who often met socially to play 5 cent solo". Despite various health concerns they did not complain about life, but just got on with it.

Ondine also recalls how as a young woman her grandmother and her friends had provided her with a model for living a good old age. "I presumed I would do what my mother did for hers and that is, drop in regularly, provide practical help around the house and watch her live her life". There was much to be learned from listening and observing these marvelous older women.

Following Alma's death in 1989 Fleur used her inheritance and invested wisely, eventually using the money to chart her own philanthropic direction. Fleur now had a substantial amount of money of her own to work with and this she did, choosing to support women and girls in the community. Her particular interest and concern was

in those areas of social justice. Fleur was committed to what she has called focused giving or progressive philanthropy. During these early days Fleur drew on the valued advice, support and the sharing of ideas with her husband Victor, with her friend and mentor Jill Reichstein at the Reichstein Foundation, and the members of Women in Philanthropy.

As she became more familiar with the ways of the philanthropic world Fleur was increasingly frustrated. As a conservative city, Melbourne is a place where people traditionally thought it impolite and indecent to speak about having money. But Fleur once again showed the determination and courage to go against the established trend and to bring philanthropy out of the shadows.

Fleur has publicly talked about her philanthropic giving in this way: "I would like women to see philanthropy as a way of supporting something that they believe in". She was also keen to encourage other women to introduce their daughters to the value and importance of philanthropy. This she believes can be achieved by acknowledging generational change coupled with providing younger women with the opportunity to build on the great work of the previous generations of women who have seen themselves as change makers.

However, Fleur has always had a realistic view about how money can impact on the quality of opportunity and choice in people's lives. Leading by example is how Fleur conducted all her public activities. She worked tirelessly to encourage her peers and women in her own networks to follow her example and consider how sharing their wealth is much more than getting tax breaks or having a plaque on a building erected in your name.

But as Dur-e Dara of the Victorian Women's Trust sees it, perhaps Fleur's public activities, especially her talking about financial support

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through philanthropic giving, could well have been seen in some community circles as aggrandisement or showing off about not only her wealth, but her well-meaning bleeding heart or do-gooder attitudes.

Fleur however has never abandoned her dream that women philanthropists might facilitate change and opportunity for women and to achieve this dream she has been willing to go public and work for change within the philanthropic establishment.

Not surprisingly, Fleur took up responsibilities as Vice President of the Australian Association of Philanthropy (now Philanthropy Australia) and a member of Women in Philanthropy in conjunction with heading up the Melbourne Community Foundation's Ageing Well theme fund.

To paraphrase The Victorian Women's Trust⁶ "Philanthropy can mean different things to different people...she (Fleur) has shown great foresight in supporting landmark projects that have gone on to provide significant community benefit". And indeed the projects Fleur has supported to date are extensive and range from those specifically for African, rural and indigenous women to refugee and humanitarian programs. Fleur has also supported the establishment of ongoing literacy and mentoring projects.

As a risk taker Fleur has shown her willingness to provide seed funding for

innovative projects. She has supported a number of unique pilot projects which, over time, have been firmly established in their own right, often attracting additional funding from other philanthropic and government sources. One such example is the 2003 project Access to Justice in the Loddon Campaspe Region, which resulted in the establishment of a community legal centre with the support of two other philanthropic foundations and the State Government of Victoria. The Australian Women's Archive Project is another example and is still located at the University of Melbourne and of course The Alma Unit, whose influence continues to this day in academic, teaching and research about women, ageing and gender both in Australia and internationally.

Fleur was just 60 years old when she became acutely aware of how growing older was seen as a problem and most particularly for women. She was concerned about current thinking that has produced a dread of growing old and a denial of it happening. Mostly ageing has been constructed as a time when individuals become a burden to family, community and society.

Drawing on her experiences in the women's movement Fleur understood very well the damage and danger of stereotyping women and she recognised that the negative images of older women in our society were very similar to those of women in general.

She wondered why feminists had not taken up the issue of older women, why they were ignored within the feminist rhetoric, and why gender was absent and did not seem to matter in discussions of, or research about, growing older.

As in all her past endeavours, Fleur was meticulous, did her research, talked to the experts and sought advice before embarking on what would be her largest and certainly the most public philanthropic donations. Very simply, she wanted to know about the lives of older women. She wondered how she might

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play a role in changing this neglect and place older women and the understanding about their quality of life well and truly centre stage.

The timing was perfect. The release of her latest book in 1993 *The Fountain of Age* by Betty Friedan⁷ had once again provided Fleur with the inspiration and impetus to ask the hard questions and challenge popular beliefs and stereotypes about women, only this time around, older women.

Thus Fleur set about talking to policy makers, gerontologists, academics and even tackled Government Ministers about why they had not given thought to the health and wellbeing of older women beyond aged care settings. At every opportunity Fleur asked why had gender been neglected in their discussions about growing older. She challenged the status quo asking whether a gendered view of ageing mattered or not.

In her well-established style Fleur approached her latest project in a practical, business-like and straight forward manner. Her mind was clear and after many months of planning she asked me what kind of qualities should the director of the yet unnamed research unit possess? We discussed, refined and settled on the most important qualifications. First, a committed feminist of course with experience of the community and excellent networking skills. In a flash Fleur said, “Well that is you”. And so our collaboration began and has continued for over 24 years.

The Alma Unit for Women and Ageing, was to be Fleur’s most significant public philanthropic donation, and of course so appropriately named after her mother Alma. Professor Lorraine Dennerstein, Director of the Key Centre for Women’s Health, University of Melbourne appreciated Fleur’s generous financial offer, and the opportunity it provided the Centre to champion the development of a unique and much neglected area of research and study, both in Australia and also on the international stage.

Thus the Unit was established in 1993 at the University of Melbourne.

As her bold letter to Simon and Schuster publishing house in New York in 1993 Fleur explained, “I read *The Fountain of Age* eagerly, because it endorses everything the Alma Research Unit hopes to achieve.”⁸ Indeed, who better than Betty Friedan to launch the Unit in 1994. Fleur said publicly at the launch that in the women’s movement she had “banded and bonded together with other like-minded women”⁹ to understand the reality of women’s lives and to dispel the myths and stereotypes. Now, she would once again be prepared to work actively to promote the reality about all aspects of women’s experiences of growing older.

Fleur is remembered by staff as being very business-like in meetings whether about budgets or day to day organisational matters. She was admired as a trail blazer and innovator, a woman who was flexible in her approach and always let others get on with the job at hand. Always keen to learn, Fleur took an interest in the work and achievements of the Unit consistently giving her unequivocal support to the project which continued to flourish and evolve for 24 years and at a number of different academic institutions.

I have missed working with Fleur. I have missed her keen observations and advice, counsel and encouragement that provided



me with not only unwavering support, but an academic pathway and career that I had never imagined would be possible.

We know that the role of older women in our society has a direct impact on and benefit to the community at large. So, although there still remains so much to be done, we mustn't forget what has been achieved. We must acknowledge how the passion and hard work of Fleur Spitzer has enabled new generations of women within community, government and academia to build on solid ground so that they in turn can advocate, research and write about the health and wellbeing of older women.

I am pleased to announce that the University of Melbourne Library has most recently archived documents from The Alma Unit as a resource for future students and researchers alike. This collection includes Fleur's letters, and relevant papers, publications and newsletters.

As a woman of great integrity Fleur has never been afraid to speak out against unfairness, injustice and discrimination. She has demonstrated an unfailing willingness to contribute her time, energy and intellect in this regard. She devoted her life's work to ensure that other women regardless of education, social or cultural background also had a voice whether it be in public life, in the political arena or within their community and family.

When asked about her work, Fleur said that her endeavours were not about being charitable, but rather facilitating positive change at a grassroots level. This change she hoped, would then flow through to a systemic level involving improved practice and inform the development of relevant and responsive government policy.

Her considerable work has, as so rightly would be expected, not gone unrecognised. In 1990 Fleur was awarded the Australian and New Zealand Bank Trustees Inaugural Community Achievement Award in honour of the court network service to the Victorian community. Fleur was also appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1996 particularly for her services to Women. And she was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women 2004, and received a Senior of the Year Award for services to Victorian women.

So, we end where we began by asking, where did Fleur Spitzer derive her driving force and dogged commitment to address disadvantage and injustice? Perhaps the answer is an unconscious desire that is "in our mother's milk this notion of giving and putting things right in the world".¹⁰

Or that her concern for people has been passed down from her grandmother who would regularly meet ships docking at Station Pier to offer temporary free of charge board to those newly arrived migrants with nowhere to go upon arriving in this city of Melbourne.

Perhaps what is needed in our community are stories about women like Fleur Spitzer who were trailblazers. We need stories about role models so that younger generations of women can be inspired by what is possible. In this way they may be inspired to build on the expertise and knowledge as well as the mistakes of those women who have gone before them.

"As a woman of great integrity Fleur has never been afraid to speak out against unfairness, injustice and discrimination."

REFLECTIONS

When the Victorian Women's Trust approached me about establishing a sub-fund in Mum's name my immediate thought was what a great idea. Mum's activism in philanthropy and her commitment to feminist principles have been a cornerstone of my upbringing. Mum and Dad both believed in contributing to our community in ways that were congruent with their political and moral stance and in a truly altruistic fashion.

Mum's involvement with the Trust has been longstanding. I knew this but was astonished to read of the breadth of projects she supported through the Trust over her lifetime, from services for rural women and support of indigenous women to literacy programs for women and girls, the rights of Muslim women and an educational film about domestic violence. What is striking to me is how astutely Mum targeted her support for pilot projects as a way of giving opportunities for the exploration of some great ideas and initiatives. Some of these projects really took off in a way that has truly made a difference to the lives of women in Victoria, such as the creation of the Rosie Respect website offering web resources for young women as part of a national harm prevention strategy.

Such background support may not have put her name in the headlights but those that know of her fierce determination to provide opportunities for individuals or communities will not be surprised that she has led the way on many fronts.

In later years Mum was especially interested in supporting research into women and ageing as, before establishing the Alma Unit, there had been no gendered analysis of ageing. The work of this research unit has been truly ground-breaking and now issues of quality of life for older women are firmly on the research agenda at conferences on ageing.

While I am sad that in her old age Mum has not been able to simply sit back and bask in her achievements, I am pleased to be able to offer the Victorian community, in her name, the opportunity to continue and advance the good work she initiated and endorsed through the excellent auspices of the Victorian Women's Trust.

Ondine Spitzer
July 2016

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Victorian Women's Trust

9/313 La Trobe Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000

P: 03 9642 0422 F: 03 9642 0016 W: www.vwt.org.au