

HUMANIST viewpoints

VALE VICKI POTEPA 1922-2020



Vicki (last on right) with a group of other NSW Humanist Society stalwarts outside Humanist House in Chippendale in 2003

Our living treasure Vicki Potempa, active in our community across six decades, died 16 March in Maitland aged 98. This missed the pandemic, so she got hugs to the end. This issue is dedicated to remembering Vicki in all her dimensions.

Vicki fought for the right of each of us to die on our own terms, but sadly did not live to see this happen. This has been an injustice for centuries, and we need to continue the fight for our own sakes, and for everyone else's too.

It was Vicki's wish that we gave her a suitable Humanist sendoff and celebration. We will hold an event on Sunday 11 October 2020 starting at Humanist House at 3.00 pm. How this proceeds will depend on how many come along and the distancing rules at the time. Ring Angela on 0293614021 close to that time, if you need an update.



CALENDAR JULY – SEPTEMBER 2020

ALL EVENTS LISTED ARE ON SUNDAYS FROM 3.00–5.00 PM; ONLINE VIA ZOOM OR AT HUMANIST HOUSE, CHIPPENDALE

Our new online Zoom meetings, will especially benefit those not living in central Sydney. They will be held on the second Sunday of the month, and replace the former HuVAT talks at Humanist House. July will be a purely online event, but we may have hybrid events after that, with some gathering at a single location, such as Humanist House in Chippendale. Please be patient on the day as each of us gets used to something new. For each Zoomanists Online an invitation will be sent to all members with an email address in their record. Zoom does not cost anything to listen, but some software needs to be set up. Click "sign up for free" at <https://zoom.us/>

12 July 2020–NSW ZOOMANISTS ONLINE: LES ALLAN ON WHY HE CALLS HIMSELF A HUMANIST

Our first ever Zoom speaker will be Les Allan of rationalrealm.com, on *Why I am a Humanist*. Les lives in Melbourne, and is our first interstate speaker. Les explores the nature of reality, the norms of rational belief, and how we apply them to our core ideas. With people's personal beliefs and our socially shared paradigms demonstrating such bewildering diversity, rationalrealm.com seeks to deconstruct many of the irrationalities of our time. Les's own early experiences shaped his Humanism. In his talk Les will describe three dimensions of humanism: reason and evidence, compassion and equality, and autonomy and dignity. He will illustrate with historical and contemporary examples, drawing out what it means to live a good life – a life of meaning and purpose.

9 August 2020 - NSW ZOOMANISTS ONLINE: MURRAY LOVE ON ALTERNATIVE HUMANISMS

In order to grow in a competitive 21st century world, the Australian Humanist movement will need to consider alternatives. This means trying to appeal to a more diverse population, and learning to place our various Humanistic ideas and ideals in a networked context. We can also look at historic and contemporary usage of the terms 'Humanist' and 'Humanism' that many Humanists might be unaware of.

13 September 2020 - AGM OF HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW

Further details on the AGM will be distributed closer to the event. We will need to have a virus safety plan.

Late in July we will recommence 'live' events at Humanist House in Chippendale on the fourth Sunday of the month. These are designed for newcomers, and numbers are limited. Humanism is about community, and lock-downs and social distancing make this difficult. If you come, be ready to think about how new communities and friendships can bond across the 1.5 metre barrier. There'll be a limit of 20 people, so please be on time at 3.00 PM. There will not be food and drink available but please bring your own snacks. Soft drinks are available across the laneway. A place cannot be guaranteed except by early attendance. Nor can we reserve places for these unticketed events. A virus safety plan will be in place, and everyone attending will be expected to comply with its requirements.

26 July 2020 – FACE-TO-FACE@HUMANIST HOUSE: HUMANISM IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

NSW Humanists Meetup events have always been for those new to Humanism, seeking to renew Humanism, having new perspectives on Humanism, or making new friendships in a Humanist community. Yet pandemic conditions impede outreach to new people. This is a serious problem and we will be making a serious effort to find serious answers. We need to find new ways to find one another. There'll be a short talk to get things started, then discussion on how 2020 has changed our lives, and how we can still build community.

23 August 2020 - FACE-TO-FACE@HUMANIST HOUSE: ETHICAL ATHEISM

Ethical Atheism can be considered as Humanism stripped to the basics. We will also be inviting members of a small Meetup named Sydney Ethical Atheists. This event will make the most sense if it attracts members unsure about taking on the label Humanist, yet ready to accept they have grown out of religion, while still wanting to be part of an Ethical community. Some might prefer to call themselves 'spiritual' – without implying a life beyond the world we know. And there's no requirement to call yourself an 'Atheist'. We're using the A word to stand starkly beside the E word and make the point clearly. Humanism can get complicated pretty quickly. So we'll peel things back, and begin with the slightly less complicated issue of living an Ethical Life without religion. Here again, we might use different descriptions, but basically we mean living a good life, and leaving things better for having been there. Atheism and Theism are based on exactly the same evidence, so we won't be discussing those much. But there's plenty to discuss in the word 'Ethical'. Of course there are many ways to be ethical, and the last thing we need is to be arguing or finger-pointing over who is more 'ethically correct' than whom. If you're ready to share in an ethical community, come along and make a start. But remember it's BYO ethics. Don't come along just to judge everyone else, and decide if they're good enough for you. That's not how it works. Hope we see you there.

27 September 2020 - FACE-TO-FACE@HUMANIST HOUSE: PERSECUTION & PARANOIA

As usual, we will have a short talk to get things started, but we expect to have participants with a lot to say themselves. Persecution includes claims of discrimination, harassment, disrespect, suppression, muzzling, and possibly murder and torture in certain cases. Paranoia usually make exactly the same claims, but in this case they are largely unwarranted or seriously exaggerated. There are people in every group who suffer delusions of persecution, and conversely there are certainly groups who suffer the whole gamut of real persecution – right up to torture and murder. It's a mixed, messy tangled can of worms – claim, counter-claim, passion and unreason. It's not just about religion but includes ideology and identity politics on all sides of the fence. What about the privileged older white male who is a disabled gay Buddhist being rejected by his Mormon family? There's lots to talk about. There will be sensational cases like the events we have seen in India and surrounding countries, but it's also important to look at our own behaviour and the identities we hold. A sense of victimhood can be self-defeating at an individual level. Competitive suffering is a dangerous game. Taking on other people's battles can legitimise unintended abuse. How can we really offer the best help for one another to all live a decent life?

VICKI POTEPA-ACTIVIST



Vicki's own experiences as a woman migrant and battler who had lived through depression, war, and the raw Australia of the 1950s, led her early into the women's movement. She was a prominent member of many new women's organisations and for decades was often visible on Sydney's streets.

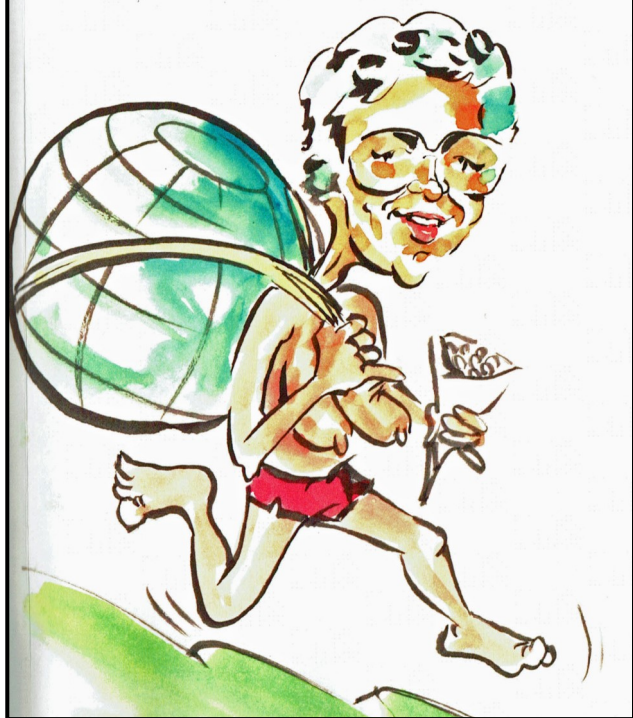
Vicki took on the toughest and one could say some of the most desperate fields of active support - particularly her work with prisoners. Here she made first-hand encounters with all the most intractable and hidden human shortcomings and abuses. Vicki's life experiences could fill a book - which they eventually did!



Even into her nineties, when street-fighting had got a little hard to handle, Vicki found ways to express her concerns in a great-grandmotherly style through dollmaking, embroidery, painting, jewellery making. Her passions found their way into everything she did. Here she is, the last time most of us saw her, drawing lessons from a painting of a girl with a dog, and relating stories of her active days. In her willingness to help anyone who crossed her path who needed help, Vicki encountered nearly all of the issues decades ahead of the crowd - child abuse, domestic violence, racism, the difficulties for homosexuals & transsexuals, elder abuse, severe mental health issues, prison reform, and the whole gamut of women's issues. She was the original bare-knuckle social justice warrior, and this often took place at a personal level, providing practical help with complicated situations to the individuals she took under her wing. She didn't always win, and her life and career trajectory bore the marks of battle in the many ways she was made to suffer for her courageous and unwelcome interference in the affairs of the very many bullies of this world.

Off My Shoulders

Vicki Potempa



VICKI POTEPA AUTOBIOGRAPHER

In 2007, after three years work, Vicki self-published an autobiography. The cover shows her cheerfully taking the world on her shoulders.

She wrote: "I realised I was not getting any younger, and my brain would probably sink into that twilight of oblivion. I have always searched for stability, sometimes succeeding, often failing. Thus the yo-yo of life dominated a large share of my existence - desperately sad days as well as happy ones, and finally the neutral zone."

Angela helped edit the book and writes: "I decided early on to leave it in Vicki's own 'voice' just as if she was talking. It is rather rambling but that's Vicki!!" Angela's back cover review reads: "I found inspiration as well as interest in this life story of an ordinary woman - migrant, battler, family member and social activist."

Angela does her best summarising this life elsewhere in this issue, but there are too many loops, twists and turns in this extraordinary story to summarise easily. You simply have to read it yourself.

Following are two abridged early reviews of the book, and some of the illustrations depicting Vicki at various stages in her life.

"Although I only first met Vicki some months ago [in 2007], after reading her book *Off My Shoulders* I feel I now know her quite well. Vicki is an extraordinary person who speaks several languages, can build and demolish houses, sew prolifically, raise children, earn enough money to support extended family by just about any means, negotiate anything and survive whatever life throws at her ... and write a book!

This is Vicki Potempa's 'Australian Story': an insight into the life of a battler. It lays out for us a fascinating tale that spans from Malta to Cairo to Nairobi and through many countries in her youth, to Australia as a young woman who found life was far from a piece of cake. Her later travels span the globe, and provide a rich background to her many experiences. Her vivid and detailed descriptions of places, events and people, provide much detail and colour to her full and very busy life. Vicki is articulate and her story flows with such ease that takes you along, wondering what on earth will happen next. She has an extraordinary tale to tell. Vicki worked as a linguist for the allied forces in the war, was accused of being a traitor for befriending an Italian POW (after the war had ended), literally built her own home in Sydney, and physically and financially supported the housing of others in her extended family.

Vicki worked tirelessly for over 40 years [in 2007] for the NSW Humanists, as well as working with women's action groups, particularly in the movement for abortion reform legislation - a cause for which she has special interest, as her account of her own experience demonstrates. If that is not enough, Vicki also got involved in a volunteer prisoners' welfare program. This is only a brief sketch of her achievements, and does not do justice to Vicki's tenacity in facing the many challenges, disappointments and heartbreaks life threw at her.

It takes a book to tell her story, and Vicki does this best herself. The book is an important contribution to our historical records. It is very much an Australian story even though Vicki's childhood was spent elsewhere. It chronicles the life of a post-war immigrant to 1950s Sydney, giving us an understanding of the sexist and racist discrimination that women faced in the nations of her childhood, and then Australia, at the time. We follow the struggles she had to provide herself and her family with a home (or should I say homes - it was hard to keep count!).

It is difficult for us today to appreciate the backbreaking, soul-destroying effects of the scant recognition of women's perceived role as the servants of their husbands, and the bearer and carer of their children, at that time. Lack of educational opportunities was also a crippling factor. Times are changing, although very slowly. Vicki recounts her developing political awareness through the early women's movement, with its activities in setting up women's shelters and abortion law reform activities that I joined in other places at a later time.

Vicki doesn't mince words. She tells things as she sees them. At times the story becomes rather personal, and Vicki's opinion of people and events is less than flattering. This is her story - this is Vicki - take her as she is."

Meg Wallace

"This book is such an interesting read. It paints an intriguing picture of times past. For me, this was an amazing thing to see through Vicki's eyes. A few decades ago life was quite Spartan, and there were shortages of numerous incidental things - cement for example.

We see a seemingly unending procession of people willing to take advantage of Vicki. There's a fine balance between being considerate and standing up for yourself, and it is difficult to get it right. But, equally, in the thick of the repressive and limiting values Australia had in decades past, it certainly wasn't easy. Things go wrong, Vicki gets sidelined by bureaucracies, and it does seem a bit depressing at times. But, equally the strength that Vicki had was an incredible thing to witness, and her life does come together at the end.

Vicki's encounters seem to include many people whose fear of 'feminism' (or other controlling, emotion laden words) - or indeed their own regard for religion - trap themselves in a pit of ignorance, where they become their own worst enemies, acting to limit their own opportunities. Vicki circulated in the early pro-choice and other movements - you get an intriguing historical perspective. It's great to get a perspective on these long distant battles, the details of which you are only vaguely aware of. The saga of Vicki's life, intertwined with developing social movements in Australia, is an amazing book. Not only do you see the trials and tribulations of one woman's life, and witness the strength which she ultimately draws on - you have a bird's eye view of Australia's past social struggles. Knowledge of the past enriches your view of the present; my view of the present was much enriched by Vicki's book."

John August



Vicki at the Athens Youth Hostel in her travels after retirement in the mid-1980s

Vicki in 1990



Vicki at her daughter Linda's wedding in 1980



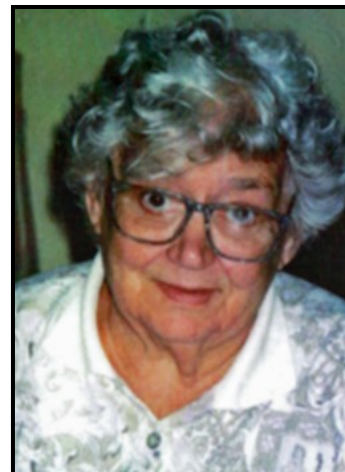
Vicki displaying a gigantic shirt designed to keep a very big prisoner warm



Vicki and her children in 1971



Vicki in 2006 (the camera loved her)



VICKI POTEPA-HUMANIST



Still strong and articulate at age 97, she brandished newly hand-knitted bears in proud Republican colours, and a painting, in the naïf style, of the loving bond between a dog and child, a message to Islam - an activist to the last!



That night she gave one last generous donation to the NSW Humanist Society - despite all attempts to dissuade her. Vicki had already made a large financial donation for the protection of the Society's main assets, when we were threatened with a legal case by hostile elements in 2010.

In her book *Off my Shoulders*, a life story she wrote and self-published at the age of 84, Vicki reports her first contact with the Humanist Society. In 1966 she read, in the *Daily Telegraph*, a letter to the editor from the then Secretary of the Humanist Society of NSW, Mrs Daphne Weeks, defending the right of women to abortion.

Vicki quickly contacted and joined the Society, having already forsaken the religion of her childhood and come to regard herself as an agnostic. Vicki wrote: "I went to talks... that stimulated my enquiring mind, which had been stultified before meeting this group. I began to get a grip on many of the problems that assailed humanity and became more discerning in my political ideas".

Vicki's impetus towards activism was her own traumatic experience in obtaining a necessary abortion. At 44 - the main provider for a family with two children, a useless husband, and her aged father - she became pregnant, but was told it was too late to get a lawful abortion. She ended up faking a suicide to get recommended for an abortion on the grounds of insanity!

Vicki Potempa was a long-term active member of the Humanist Society of NSW. She joined us 54 years ago and was made an honorary life member in 2000 for her contribution to the Society.

Vicki was never afraid to speak out, but felt her chief talents were practical. For some years she served as Treasurer on the Society's Committee. A fabulous cook in the Mediterranean style, she was always providing delicious food for our various social events.

Even after Vicki moved to the Hunter area in 2002 we still often saw her at our monthly meetings and socials. She made the awkward journey by public transport to keep in touch with friends, and get intellectual stimulation.

We saw her at Humanist House one last time in December 2019 at our end-of-year social - after a long absence. Vicki spoke of her life as a Humanist to those assembled.



Back in the old days - when the Humanists held Easter Bonnet parties for Agnostics - left to right are Vicki, Affie, Angela & Robin



Vicki (back) with Lilian Emmet (front) at Lilian's 90th birthday party at Humanist House in 2007. Lilian herself also lived to 98. (We only had a B&W version so this is artificially colourised)

This label of 'insanity', then followed her through her working life and ensured she would stay at low-level low-paid positions in the Public Service.

Vicki remained an abortion law reform activist for the rest of her life. As the Women's Liberation movement erupted around her she got involved in the Union of Australian Women, the Women's Abortion Action Collective, the Women's Refuge movement, and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). She was a member of the Labor Party, and demonstrated against the Vietnam War.

Vicki became very involved as a prison visitor through the CRC & Justice Action, using her linguistic abilities and functioning as a chaplain to the non-religious. Everywhere Vicki went she made lasting friendships, and impressed everyone by her passionate advocacy for social justice, and her willingness to work hard.

The year 2000 International Humanist Convention, was titled *Australis2000*, and held at the Law School, of University of Technology, Sydney. It was mainly organised by then president Affie Adagio, but it was Vicki who took over the daytime catering responsibility, single-handedly, feeding the international delegates, and those from all over Australia.

Living independently until late 2019 Vicki sadly then had to be consigned to a nursing home due to progressive congestive heart failure. Towards the end of her days she begged for voluntary euthanasia, which she considered should be her right.

A number of us made the long trip up to the Hunter Valley to visit Vicki including Fred Flatow, John August, Ian Bryce and myself. There also came friends from other groups. Back before the era of social distancing, Vicki was able to have

something she craved, a hug and someone to hold her hand. She managed to reach her 98th birthday and enjoyed that day with visits from all nearby family members.

Shortly after Vicki died, Covid-19 had arrived, and her funeral was limited to 10. Her Humanist friends were unable to attend. Vicki was adamant we should hold a Humanist Wake for her, and even donated some money to that purpose, but this has had to be postponed due to the limits on social gathering. The NSW Humanist Society hopes to hold an event to commemorate our beloved Vicki later in 2020.

In a long life of activism, Vicki deservedly received many citations and awards - too many to list here!

Vicki Potempa was an extraordinary human being. A woman, a battler, a migrant, a proudly self-described 'wog', and a hard worker at jobs some might consider menial, yet who made modest good financially. Vicki's good brain never found the niche it deserved in days of limited opportunity, yet she made a name for herself through the support of anyone who needed a hand up, or a fair go.

For Vicki, becoming a Humanist changed her life, expanding her horizons within a fellowship of active, thoughtful, well-informed people. Vicki was a consistent participant in the NSW Humanist Society cherishing what it stood for, and the people within it, and in turn we all cherished her.

Compiled by Angela on behalf of the Committee



Vicki at Humanist House in 2015 holding bibs embroidered by the Grandmas in Revolt with peace slogans in various languages

In 2015 Vicki formed the group Grandmas in Revolt to save Australian Grandsons from being enticed to fight overseas. She also devised a poem to express the group's aspirations.

*Do not judge us as sweet and senile
But hear us now, we have turned feral!
We use our bibs as international flags
To stop your preaching and hateful bile.
On war, religion, and patriotic morals we gag.
In lurid death there is no glory!
To rob grandparents of simple pleasures*



VICKI POTEPA GLOBAL CITIZEN

Vicki Potempa wrote her life story at the age of 85 in her self-published book *Off my Shoulders*. Much of the material for this review of her life is taken from her own account, but includes further undocumented details of her full and active life to the age of 98.

Victoria Potempa was born in 1922 in Port Said, Egypt of Maltese heritage. Her parents were British Subjects and her father, a ships' engineer, had enlisted in the British Navy in WW1.

Vicki was the third child of four. Her father worked in various sea-faring roles around the Middle East – often away from home for many months, or sometimes out of work, especially during the Great Depression.

Their family life ranged from modest well-being to poverty. There was also civic unrest from time to time with 'foreigners' like Vicki made unwelcome. Her older brother Emmanuel contracted meningitis at the age of 16, and was left disabled for all his life.

Vicki did her primary studies in Italian with the Franciscan nuns, and then went to the Maltese school that taught in English and French. She had a good education until the age of 16, when she was dux of the school. The prize was one year's higher tuition in Cairo, but her parents were unable to pay her board and the prize went to a boy!

Vicki became a nascent feminist. She developed her pattern-making dress-making and sewing skills, having no other occupation.

By 1939 and WW2 her father was called up again - at age 59. Her mother died at age 49 from complications of diabetes. The family moved to Cairo after being bombed out at Suez, and Vicki found work with the British Army as a typist,

and eventually worked in Intelligence, censoring prisoner-of-war letters.

She accepted a transfer to Kenya to continue this work. In Nairobi, she attended the Catholic Church - the religion of her childhood - once only. She describes, a long and rather narrow church, divided into three sections.

The first (at the back) was bare, with cold tiles for the Africans to kneel on: the second had wooden benches for the Indian Goanese; the front section had carved benches with velvet cushions and velvet hassocks - reserved for white people. "They called this the House of God - the god who had made all people equal". Vicki records other examples of apartheid, which distressed her.

After the war, she returned to Cairo but life there was even more in turmoil with refugees from Palestine. Her family, despite living in Egypt for three generations, could never get citizenship or preferential for work. She migrated to Sydney in 1949. As a British subject Vicki qualified for an automatic visa.

By the end of 1950 – fed up with paying for lodging - she managed to buy a small piece of land in Moorebank. Residential land was then cheap.

She cleared the land herself, and laid the cement foundations. With the help of two workmen she managed to put up a temporary masonite cabin. She writes: "What today would be called appalling conditions were close to paradise for me then."

Her father and her disabled brother arrived and moved in. She says: "I brought [them] to Australia so they would not starve, and I had to be responsible for their welfare." Meanwhile she was earning only ¾ of male wage, and doing all the housework - as the only woman!

Gradually a more roomy dwelling was constructed - more land was bought, so her brother could have his own place.

Vicki married Gerard, one of the two workmen. He was also a migrant, being Polish, but of German descent. Their communication had begun in Italian!

Struggling financially, Vicki had her first child - a girl, named Linda. She realised

at that time that her husband "gave every sign of being inadequate in providing for a family and accepting some personal sacrifices, as most parents do".

Gerard gradually began to drink more and only gave her a small proportion of his wages for the household. Vicki got work herself, whenever she could. A boy Julian was born five years later when Vicki was 39. She had thoughts of leaving her husband, but there was no support in those days for single mothers.

Meanwhile they had constructed a house on the land. The bank loan had to be in her husband's name, but Vicki wisely held on to her title for the land.

Both husband and wife worked on the building to minimise costs. The old cabin was let out and the loan paid off. It was a hardscrabble existence, as were the lives of other migrants around her.

Vicki writes about a traumatic experience procuring a legal abortion in the mid-1960s. Around this time she began to frequent the Humanist Society and other groups active in abortion issues, women's rights, and political issues - "expanding my horizons".

She left her husband in 1970. After two years of living with her other brother Luigi, she was able to buy a large old house in Merrylands, while still owning other patches of land. She had worked in factories, shops, as a tea lady, and on the Census which led to other public service employment.

She says, "To be living during the years 1967 to 1975 was to be living through exciting years of social and political reform in Australia. It also meant taking kicks from the morons, who thought themselves superior to those who demanded change."

As anyone who knew her can appreciate, Vicki was 'bolshie' - not afraid to speak up, standing up for her rights, protecting others - including young female work-mates who were routinely sexually harassed.

Vicki was accused of being a Communist, unchristian, and suffered discrimination being denied promotion due to her challenges to the status quo,

her age and sex, and also wearing the label of 'insanity' which she had accepted to obtain her abortion.

Vicki began prison visiting, obtaining a voluntary role at the Civil Rehabilitation Committee through recommendation from her local Labor Party branch.

The CRC and later Justice Action were looking for linguists, particularly women to advocate for prisoners of NESB. Vicki also contributed to the Humanist Society and her other groups.

Then fast forward to retirement in 1984. Vicki had travelled around Australia but now went backpacking the world - "a vagabond on the loose." She bought a one year air ticket Cairo, Greece, Italy, France, west coast USA, Mexico, exploring by bus inexpensively.

In 1987 Vicki toured New Zealand. Then in 1989 she covered seven countries across South America, going to Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela.

In 1995 she courageously took her 13 year old grandson on an extended tour of Asia to expand his horizons - Malaysia Singapore Thailand Indonesia. At first horrified and petulant, he soon relaxed into fascination and easy-going mixing with those encountered.

In 2002, Vicki moved from her familiar neighbourhood to Thornton near Newcastle, nearer to family. She was rather lonely there at first. Her plans to share her large house didn't eventuate. Through the Women's Electoral Lobby, she became involved with *Carrie's Place*, a women's refuge in Maitland.

Vicki joined an arts and crafts group, and found "companionship and tolerance." Later the women were offered free computer skills courses with TAFE. Vicki persisted, despite deafness and "newfangled jargon", learning sufficient to operate her new computer and finish off her book.

The women put on a local production of *The Vagina Monologues*. Vicki thought she was too old to perform, but sewed costumes and provided meals for rehearsals. She believed "friendships were cemented on full stomachs."

In March 2006 they repeated the show as a fundraiser at the very grand Civic Theatre in Newcastle. This time, Vicki had a prominent speaking part. It was a sell-out, and a wonderful night. Affie Adagio and myself drove up to attend and stayed with Vicki overnight.

Vicki had sewn 28 pairs of large bloomers in hot pink and various black lace and ribbon trims, which hung on a washing line across the rear of the stage as the fabulous set decoration.

She received a lot of attention from the media for her debut stage performance at age 83 [see next page] taking the opportunity to speak about the disgrace of poor service provision for victims of domestic violence.

Vicki appeared in a segment on Compass ABC TV and was front page in flamboyant costume in a Sydney newspaper weekend magazine.



Vicki in 1978, packed and ready for one of her many adventures abroad

Unfortunately, the NSW government cut funding to *Carrie's Place* and other women's refuges in 2012, and they became less about feminism and more about homelessness. She found other companionship in her declining years at local ethnic clubs.

Vicki busied herself with craftwork, making mobiles from beads, knitting and a new hobby - painting. She still made many of her own clothes.

Vicki continued to faithfully attend Humanist meetings in Sydney almost every month until recent years despite poor public transport. She often stayed at my place overnight and we chatted in the evenings; as she got increasingly deaf the chat was rather one-sided.

I felt very fond of her - she was almost a second mother to me.

On the Monday mornings, I would drop her at public transport and she would go visit old neighbours, often by then in a nursing home, or we would frequent artshops, craft supplier or op-shops for her to fuel her hobbies.

I joined Vicki and Linda for Vicki's 90th birthday in Newcastle, celebrated at the annual dinner of the Union of Australian Women - one of her many groups. They paid tribute to her many years of involvement. In return, she provided every woman attending with one of her handcrafted bead mobiles.

Vicki remained independent in her own home until late 2019, although increasingly housebound and lonely. I visited her once or twice. My final trip to her area was earlier this year when she had had to enter a nursing home and was clearly dying. Her long, brave life ended at 3.00 pm, 16 March 2020 at the Opal aged care home in Maitland.

At 98, suffering oedema and bronchial infections and needing oxygen and morphine, Vicki didn't quite get the dignified death she wished for all human beings. She had family close and a few visitors, but had outlived most of her old friends.

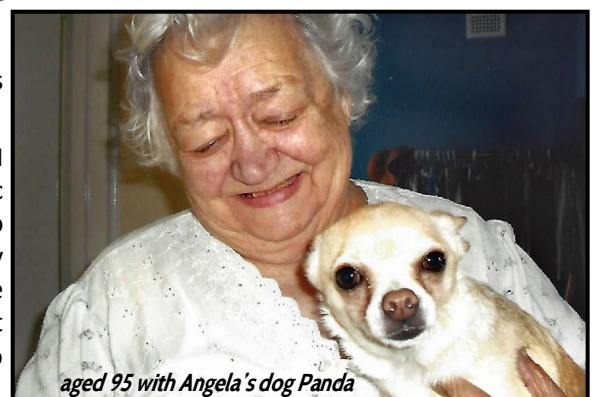
Vicki leaves a daughter and son, two adult grandsons, a younger foster grandson, and two great grandchildren who she delighted in.

By hard work, at mostly menial jobs, and wise investment, she came to own several properties during her life, and achieved a modest level of financial security. Vicki was able to help her daughter and grandchildren to get a start in life, and she helped support the education of her sister's many grandchildren in Egypt.

She certainly had her ups and downs and finally settled in what she called the 'neutral zone'. The Humanist Society owes Vicki a great debt of love and gratitude for her continual passionate support over many years.

Angela Drury

Details sourced from Vicki's book *Off My Shoulders*, along with Angela's own recollections of Vicki.

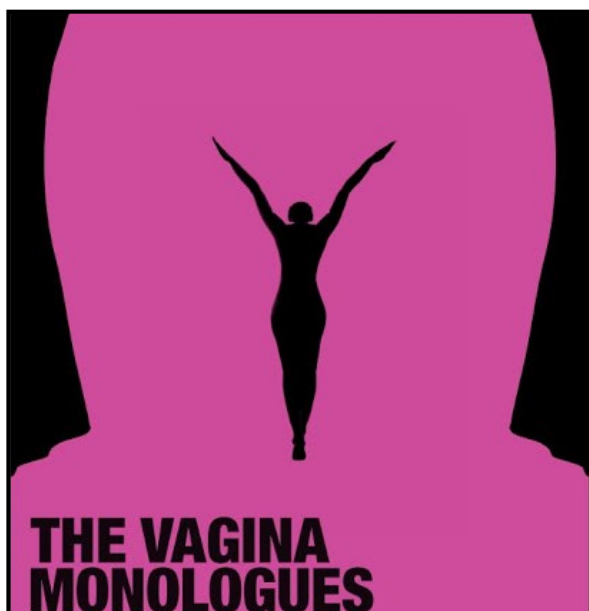


aged 95 with Angela's dog Panda

**VICKI IN
FLAMBOYANT
COSTUME
AS
PRESENTED
DURING
HER
PUBLICITY
RUSH
IN 2006
AFTER
APPEARING
ON STAGE
AGED 84

IN

*THE
VAGINA
MONOLOGUES***



The Vagina Monologues is an episodic Off-Broadway play written by Eve Ensler. It explores consensual and non-consensual sexual experiences through the eyes of women with various ages, races, sexualities, and other differences. Quite quickly, the purpose of the piece changed from a celebration of vaginas and femininity to a movement to stop violence against women. Each of the monologues deals with an aspect of the feminine experience, touching on matters such as sex work, body image, love, rape, menstruation, female genital mutilation, masturbation, birth, orgasm, or common names for the vagina. A recurring theme is the vagina as a tool of female empowerment, and the ultimate embodiment of individuality.

Some of the monologue titles: *I Was Twelve, My Mother Slapped Me* - *My Vagina Was My Village* - *The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could* - *Reclaiming Cunt* - *The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy* - *Because He Liked to Look At It*

More details at [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues) from where these extracts were supplied

VICKI POTEPA-FRIEND

"Vicki was already an old stalwart of the NSW Humanists when I joined - held in high esteem by all. I got to know her better, and read her fascinating book *Off my Shoulders*. I was privileged to interview her on my radio show, about her experiences helping prisoners. It was a prisoner gave her the striking painting of a woman with a pineapple, which hangs in Humanist House. On one of my visits we travelled to Morpeth, an old inland port, for an enjoyable lunch at a café. Having an interest in industrial heritage, it was something I appreciated. Vicki continued to read, do crosswords, and keep her mind active. Her difficulty with hearing made it hard to communicate, but she liked to read my notes afterwards. Her passionate yet thoughtful nature always shone through. She saw problems with the world and saw the Humanist viewpoint as important. It is sad that Vicki has passed on. She had a rich life, and it was great to be a part of some of it." **John August**

"Her passionate yet thoughtful nature always shone through"

"Vicki Potempa was a close personal friend, and we two got on famously! We met back in 1971. Humanist House had just been purchased, and the very first Open Forum was held there in April - kicked off and run by the late Nuru Higham. Apart from being a 'born again' activist in multiple causes, Vicki was always outgoing, never backward in coming forward, and slightly larger than life. Vicki was a dedicated supporter of the Open Forum and in charge of finance and catering for over 15 years. The Forum was exiled for a while in 1984, but Vicki's unwavering support at the AGM that year saw us re-admitted. Her visits to the Wednesday night Open Forums declined. Over the last 15 years I have seen her mainly at HuVats, AGMs and socials. Vicki was only the second person I know of who walked out of a nursing home and back to her own place, and that at 94. It is just what she would do. Some people are vague, colourless and forgettable – not you Vicki." **David Duffy**

"always outgoing, never backward in coming forward, and slightly larger than life"

"In her active years, Vicki was a regular at Humanist House in Chippendale. She was always trying to help those in trouble, such as prisoners and refugees in detention. Later in life, Vicki moved out of Sydney, into a large house in Thornton near Maitland, in the Hunter region. Though in her 90s, she looked after herself and the house very well, and always appreciated and accommodate guests. We would get beautiful home cooked meals, such as meat balls, bread rolls, salads, and a large variety of vegetables. She would show us her latest paintings, as well as the many dolls she was knitting for her great grand children in Egypt. The handymen among us did repairs to doors, windows, gates, locks etc. which she and her daughter much appreciated. Vicki continued her activism in support of her ideals. She wanted children to have a more humane approach to animals, in contrast to her own childhood experiences in Egypt. She did this through lovely paintings of animals, which she gave to friends. How wonderful to see her promoting her values to the end." **Fred Flatow and Ian Bryce**

"How wonderful to see her promoting her values to the end"


"Vicky was kind hearted, generous and a Humanist activist like no other. Obstacles just created a passion to resolve each one to ensure justice and equality existed for all. Vicky visited people in hospital and prison. She carted free cooked meals from Fairfield to Chippendale by public transport for our meetings without complaint. That showed her loyalty not only to the Humanist Society but other organisations which received similar generosity on her part. Every end-of-year Vicky made gifts to hand out, such as a plastic covered set of whales for me, which I still hang in the front window of my car. I loved and miss her dearly as I'm sure others do. We shall not forget Vicky Potempa and her heart of gold full of kindness." **Affie Adagio**

"Vicky was kind hearted, generous and a Humanist activist like no other"



Here is Vicki with her friends Affie and Angela in happy days some years ago having a pyjama party at her house

HELP US REBUILD A FUTURE FOR HUMANISM IN AUSTRALIA

The Humanist Society of NSW has depended for too long on elder members who have made outstanding contributions, but quite obviously cannot continue to carry the load. **We need help**  **We need YOU!**

Just a few more members getting involved can make a real difference. If you're already busy elsewhere, then you're just the very person we need! We need energetic, skilled, personable people who can take initiative as we don't have a volunteer coordinator - or maybe someone could volunteer for that coordinating role!

Humanism has a long tradition of thinking globally, and the Humanist Society of NSW has a long history of acting locally. Help us get back on track, working for a more just society, a more meaningful lifestyle, an economy of human flourishing, growth that doesn't trash the planet, and an expanding circle of care and concern.

Text President Murray Love on 0406 438 521 today to discuss volunteering

Please email anything you'd like to share to Murray Love at: love@optushome.com.au

This special issue is totally dedicated to celebrating the life and achievements of Vicki Potempa 1922-2020

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Page 6: Vicki Potempa-Humanist

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Many thanks to contributors Affie Adagio, David Duffy, Fred Flatow, Ian Bryce, John August, Meg Wallace, Murray Love, the literary legacy of the great lady herself, and especially to the major contributor Angela

PLEASE CHECK OUT OUR CALENDAR OF EVENT ON PAGE 2

HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW INC.

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David Duffy, (02) 4782 1130 (*am only*);
(02) 9212 2122 (*Wednesday evening*)

The views expressed in *Humanist Viewpoints* are not necessarily those of the Humanist Society of NSW Inc.

2020-2021 SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE

WE HOPE MEMBERS WILL STAND BY US THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT TIMES

Prompt renewal keeps down costs, worries and workloads, but we appreciate that circumstances can mean delays, and we're grateful to receive your renewal at a later time during the year. Posted reminders are expensive. Please place a reminder in your calendar or diary for each July 1. Please consider including a donation. There are several ways to renew:

Direct credit to Society's Bank Account: (*Annotate deposit with name and purpose*)

BSB: **062-003** Account No. **0091-0957** Account Name: **Humanist Society of NSW Inc.**

PayPal to accounts@hsnsw.asn.au (*send name & purpose to same email address*)

Cheque to **Humanist Society of NSW**, c/o P.O. BOX **784** EDGECLIFF NSW 2027

Single \$35 - Double (any 2 members at same address) \$45 - Pension/Concession \$20

PLEASE NOTE VIEWPOINTS WILL BE ISSUED THREE TIMES THIS YEAR WITH THE FINAL ISSUE OUT LATE OCTOBER