DR JENNIFER STRAUSS AM

Jennifer Strauss was born in 1933 near Heywood in the Western District of Victoria and educated at Loreto Convent, Portland and Alexandra College, Hamilton. When she went to Melbourne University in 1951, she was the first of her family to go to a university, and although she held a State Government Scholarship and a partial Resident Scholarship at Janet Clarke Hall, she needed to wait a year for the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme to begin before she could afford what was then a full fee-paying system. She graduated BA Honours in English Language and Literature in 1954, and was very annoyed to be told that, despite her University Exhibition, she needn't bother applying for the University's Travelling Scholarship, as 'they wouldn't give it to a woman'. This formed part of her motivation for joining AFUW.

She did however, in those expansionist days, go straight into an academic appointment at the University of New England. In 1957 she won a UK scholarship to the University of Glasgow and arrived only to find that her chosen supervisor for her research degree had just left to take up a Chair at Sydney. In 1958 she made what was a good personal choice but a bad career one by giving up her scholarship to marry: 'marriage cancels all contracts' they said. Melbourne University forgave her sufficiently to employ her as a tutor in 1959, when her first child was born in November; and to re-employ her in 1961 as a temporary lecturer, since they were in need of a medievalist. In 1964, after the birth of a second son, she went to Monash as a Lecturer and worked her way up to Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor--rather slowly, thanks perhaps to the combination of a third child, a propensity to write poetry rather than criticism, a switch from being a medievalist to Australian literature and feminist criticism, and an active role in the academic union. At various times she was President of the Staff Association of Monash University, Chair of the Association of Victorian University Staff Associations, and Vice-President of the national Federation of University Staff Associations. She is a Life Member of the National Tertiary Education Union. She also served three terms on the Monash University Council.

Her publications include four collections of poetry, the latest of which was for four years a set text for VCE Literature; 3 critical books on Australian poetry; a large number of scholarly papers and reviews; editorship of 2 anthologies of Australian poetry and co-editorship of the Oxford Literary History of Australia. She has recently completed an edition of the collected poems of Mary Gilmore.

In the last ten years, she has been extremely active in AFUW. She has served three times as president of AFUW Victoria and twice as national president, guiding the association to changing its name to Australian Federation of Graduate Women. AFGW recognised her contribution by electing her as Member Emerita in March 2011. She currently serves on the Board of the International Federation of University Women as one of its four Vice-Presidents and is the Board liaison to the IFUW Committees for the Status of Women, Resolutions and Fellowships.

Jennifer Strauss was awarded an AM in 2008 'for service to education as an academic and scholar in the field of Australian literature and poetry, and to a range of organisations involved in women's issues and industrial relations'.