

Liberation, on men's terms

Lismore's favourite lantern lady, Jyllie Jackson, said despite popular perception all was not rosy between the sexes in the aftermath of the 1973 Aquarius Festival.

"It was exceedingly sexist" Ms Jackson declared.

While she was living in Kathmandu for a two-year sojourn during the festival, Ms Jackson settled in the Nimbin area in September 1973, aged in her early 20s, and stayed for two decades.

"I was already on a path to an alternative lifestyle - the principles, ideals and dreams" Ms Jackson said.

"Nimbin seemed to me to be the opportunity to live that."

"I met my husband, fell in love and had babies, built houses and grew vegetables."

But not all was perfect in paradise.

Despite their ideals of peace, harmony and "free love", Ms Jackson recalled gender relations among post-Aquarian settlers were "no less sexist" than in mainstream society.

"The progressive thinking was in sexual liberation ... and there was a lot of sexual experimentation and some women were involved in that as well. But the men wanted that, and they wanted to be the boss" Ms Jackson said.

Born in Africa and raised in a convent in England by "strong and independent women", she said she had always maintained an instinct for sexual equality.

But to many men, it was still a foreign concept.

"I had a boyfriend who was there and he didn't last two months because he expected me to cook and clean for him" she said.

"We were doing the liberation thing, gaining equality in decision-making, but we had to work really hard for it. There were only a few men for whom those concepts came easily."

In most ways, women's core responsibilities at the time remained traditional.

Ms Jackson became closely involved in local pre-schools and community schools of the district and the evolution of the Birth and Beyond support network for new parents.

She was a registered wet nurse of "grand proportions" who breast fed more than 100 babies during the 1970s.

"We cooked and we cleaned and we nursed babies and we started the schools - all the stuff that women (and some men) did and still do" she said.

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