‘SIT DOWN GIRLIE’
‘You’ve come a long way baby’

Happy 2007 to all Girlie Readers
Back in the 1970s a cigarette company riding on the success of the women’s movement advertised their fags with the slogan, ‘You’ve come a long way baby. You’ve got your own cigarette now…’. But how far have women come? There are more women in paid employment and we no longer are forced to leave the public service when we get married. But a study of Victoria’s public service has revealed that bullying is rife, with female staff more likely to have experienced bullying or harassment than men (22 per cent compared with 18 per cent) and women are less likely to make complaints. While official government policies are to provide safe work places with no harassment or bullying, the examples set by our senior leaders are far from inspirational. Hence the new year witnessed Amanda Vanstone being sacked as Immigration Minister for carrying out John Howard and Philip Ruddock’s repressive immigration policies. Leone Taylor, Liberal Party member, was dumped as head of the Adelaide South Central Area Consultative Committee, which advised the Federal Government on grants to particular areas because, according to The Australian (24 January 2007), she failed to favour Alexander Downer’s electorate with grants. He denies her allegation that he told her he wasn’t interested in the Consultative Committee’s recommendations and was only interested in grants to his own electorate.

Family Planning
China has made some concessions to families unfortunate enough to have a girl child as their first-born. The one-child policy previously prevented a couple having a second child but China’s population Planning Minister, Zhang Weiqing now says the laws have been changed to alter the policy so that many families will be permitted to have a second child if the first is a girl. China now has ‘multi-dimensional’ family planning policies with some flexibility being introduced in regional areas or for ethnic minorities. There has been concern about the future demography of China because of the imbalance in the number of boys to girls. Mr Zhang said the practice of aborting girls poses serious problems for China and people could be strictly punished for abortions that have no medical purpose (The Australian (24 January 2007). The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has been playing a supportive role in assisting China to implement human rights obligations into its family planning policies.

Vroom vroom!
Japan’s Health Minister, who described women as ‘birth-giving machines’ while urging them to do their best to halt the country’s declining birth rate, has outraged many women (The Age 30 January 2007). Hakua Yanagisawa addressing the Liberal Democratic Party said, ‘The number of women aged between 15 and 50 is fixed because the number of birth-giving machines and devices is fixed, all we can do is ask them to do their best per head.’ He then conceded, ‘…although it may not be so appropriate to call them machines.’

Changes
In India millions of women are experiencing menopause as early as 30 years of age because of poverty and malnutrition. A study by the Bangalore-based Institute of Social and Economic Change found one in five Indian women have gone through menopause by the age of 41. The global mean is 51. The problem is worse in the rural areas where there is more poverty among female agricultural workers.

‘Do you remember when…’ A salient reminder
A reminder of how traumatic illegal abortions are can be found in Jo Wainer’s new book, Lost : Illegal Abortion Stories. Jo is the widow of Dr Bertram Wainer who was a pioneer in the provision of legal and safe abortions for women in the 1970s.

In 2007, however, protesters continue to harass women attempting to enter abortion clinics. The Royal Women’s Hospital in Melbourne has taken out an intervention order against protesters who harass their patients, and the East Melbourne clinic where a security guard was shot by an anti-abortion protester is seeking protection for their staff and patients. An agreement has been reached that will allow Victoria Police to enforce Melbourne City Council regulations and impose fines on anyone threatening or harassing or intimidating patients and staff. (Carol Nader, The Age 26 January 2007)

I plan to stay single
Projections from the Australian census results to be released later this year indicate that, for the first time, the number of unmarried women is expected to exceed that of single men. In the United States 51 per cent of women are unmarried. Bernard Salt demographer has said the previous Australian census in 2001 counted 3.5 million married females over the age of 15 and 3.4 million unmarried females. He attributes the rise in unmarried females to conscious life style choices being made by people in their 20s and 30s who don’t formalise their relationships.

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