

# The Spinifex Quiz Book

A Book of Women's

~ Answers ~

SUSAN HAWTHORNE



 SPINIFEX



Susan Hawthorne writes fiction, poetry and non-fiction. A novel, *The Falling Woman* was published in 1992, and in 1993 her collection of poems, *The Language in my Tongue* was published in the volume *Four New Poets*. Her fiction, poetry and non-fiction have been published in magazines and anthologies in Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America, and a German translation of *The Spinifex Quiz Book* will be published in 1994. In 1989 she received the Pandora Florence James Award for Outstanding Contribution to Women's Publishing.

Other books by Susan Hawthorne:

Anthologies

*Difference* (1985)

*Moments of Desire* (1989/90) with Jenny Pausacker

*The Exploding Frangipani* (1990) with Cathie Dunsford

*Angels of Power* (1991) with Renate Klein

Poetry

*The Language in My Tongue/Four New Poets* (1993)

Spinifex is an Australian native desert grass that is drought resistant and holds the earth together. In central Australia spinifex grass is traditionally burnt by Aboriginal people as a means of regenerating the land.

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Spinifex Press Pty Ltd,  
504 Queensberry Street,  
North Melbourne, Vic. 3051  
Australia

First published by Spinifex Press, 1991  
Second edition published 1993

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Typeset in Garamond Light by Claire Warren, Melbourne  
Made and Printed in Australia by The Book Printer, Victoria

National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

**CIP**

Hawthorne, Susan, 1951– .  
The Spinifex quiz book.

2nd ed.  
Bibliography.  
Includes index.  
ISBN 1 875559 15 9.

1. Women – Miscellanea. I. Hawthorne, Susan, 1951– . Spinifex book of women's answers. II. Title. III. Title: Spinifex book of women's answers.

305.42

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## *Acknowledgements*

There are many women to thank for both the genesis and the final shape of this book. The idea for the book came up in a meeting of the Australian Feminist Book Fortnight group, because there was a genuinely collective need for such a book. My thanks to the group for the idea. Thanks, too, to the individuals in the group who provided the initial questions: Judith Rodriguez, Sue Martin, Kate Veitch and, in particular, Jennifer Lang who provided numerous questions and organized them into sections. I would also like to thank Cathie Dunsford, Diana Ellerton, Sandy Jeffs, Renate Klein, Jocelyne Scutt, Dale Spender and Lynne Spender for providing questions in areas I knew little about and which helped the overall balance of the book. I would like to acknowledge the writers of the books in the bibliography, as well as other books not listed, without whose research this book would simply not have been possible. Finally, thanks to the magical workings of Claire Warren, typesetter extraordinaire, to Elizabeth Wood Ellem for her fantastic index, and to Liz Nicholson for her imaginative cover design.



# *Introduction*

Did you know that the first known writer in the world was a woman; as was the first novelist? But it is not only in areas such as writing that women are responsible for cultural advancement. Many cultures credit a female deity with creating the world and with inventing all manner of things, including the wheel! Many of the world's oldest artefacts depict women, and Marija Gimbutas, archeologist of Old Europe, claims that there is no evidence of a father figure in the oldest known historical human era, the paleolithic era (Gimbutas, 1990: 316).

In addition, there is an enormous range of traditional stories from around the world that point to a time when women had much more sacred and secular power than now. Much of early human history is guess work and is limited by the imaginations of people engaged in deciphering it. Three sets of footprints across a volcanic ash plain in Africa may be interpreted as a group of men or a nuclear family, but rarely is it suggested that it may be a group of women. There is no reason for that other than our own prejudices. Likewise human figurines previously interpreted as male are now being relooked at and reinterpreted. Closer to our own time, many cultures have a range of tales about heroines who performed remarkable feats of physical or intellectual strength. This book, in part, is intended to bring to the fore some of this knowledge. All the questions are based on previously published material and shortcomings may be the result of earlier distortion of texts relating to women.

The first thing to say, with regard to the questions asked is, don't feel bad if you don't know the answers. There are many questions about history, the arts, science and women's lives that simply are not part of the mainstream from which educationalists draw their facts. Some of the questions, if you were to look up a male-centred reference book, would either not appear, or have a different answer. This discrepancy is due, not to mischievousness on my part, but rather to the distortion of knowledge about women that prevails in our culture. A great deal of information about women has been lost or destroyed over the generations. The burning of the great library in Alexandria in the first century AD was one of

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the first great losses. The greater part of Sappho's poetry was lost when the church fathers burnt her work as the works of a heretic. Much more was lost during the years of the witchburnings in Europe. In some instances the losses were not irrevocable. The works of women remained on library shelves gathering dust and have, in recent years, been picked up and read again by feminist scholars in countries all around the world. As a result there is a great deal of re-evaluation of human history from its earliest beginnings going on. But new knowledge takes time to percolate through a culture. In spite of the re-assessment, the caveman image still predominates in the popular imagination, as do many other false images of women.

Have you ever been asked, 'Where are all the great women composers / artists / inventors / scientists / explorers / philosophers / doctors / economists?' The problem with this kind of question is that if you don't have a quick answer, then it is assumed that there were none. There have always been women working at the forefront of just about every human occupation – even those with which we might not want to identify – such as military expertise. Indeed, this is one area where many women's names appear in the records. Sometimes a man has been credited with, say, a work of art, because the person (probably another man) couldn't believe, or did not wish to believe, that a woman could paint so well. At other times men were given credit, because they were the public figures associated with the discovery which they could not have achieved without assistance, without mathematical skill, or without the daily support of a woman. The Japanese poet Sei Shonagon described the sentiment of many women when she wrote:

*Very Tiresome Things:* When a poem of one's own, that one has allowed someone else to use as his, is singled out for praise.

Even more tiresome were the times when men stole, outright, women's work, thereby establishing lucrative reputations for themselves. Who knows that it was women who invented the basic tools for our contemporary computer society?

When you are asked such a question it is helpful to know a book that contains the answers to these questions. The questions and answers in *The Spinifex Book of Women's Answers* will go some way towards changing the popular conception of what women have, or have not, achieved. The book by no means includes every woman of achievement – many volumes would be needed for that. Some

of the questions are phrased in such a way as to make it possible to guess at an answer – there being more information in the question than in the answer. This had been done to help allay the over-whelming feeling of not knowing the answers. Anyone who can answer correctly more than ten percent of the questions is doing well at countering their conditioning and their education.

Amongst the traditions dealt with in this book are also new ones: contemporary feminist traditions. Just as women's work has not been adequately passed on previously, contemporary feminists are concerned to ensure their work is recorded and remembered. Books, art works, political stances and famous utterances are included in this area.

This book can be used in many ways. You can sit down and read it straight through (you will find the answers at the end of each section). You can use it as the basis for a quiz night – a quiz night all about women, or if it's a mixed quiz, as a way of evening up the odds. A question about a famous sportsman should be balanced with one about a famous sportswoman, and so on. The book can be used by students and teachers, as the basis for games or as a source of information about what women have achieved throughout history and in the modern world. Girls need to know about women who have been mathematicians, poets, mechanics, politicians and many other things besides. We all need to know more about our very long history. How does it change a woman's view of herself when she hears that female figures created the world, or that a woman excelled at the same chosen occupation?

Clearly, for an edition published in Australia, questions about Australia and other English-speaking cultures predominate. I have, however, included questions about many other cultures and about women from countries around the world. This does, of course, make it even harder – but not for everyone. These questions will be easier, no doubt, for some. What I have discovered in putting this book together is that what is obscure for one person is very obvious for another. Each of us has our own special interests and this applies to me as the compiler of the questions. I would be interested in hearing from readers who are able to provide questions in areas that are presently under-represented. It is also important to acknowledge and rectify the cultural misrepresentation of European-centred history. Many, so-called 'European' cultural institutions were imported from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Likewise, many oral traditions from around the world record historical events in

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religious ritual or storytelling form. Some of these oral traditions predate written historical records. Inevitably, however, some areas will not have been adequately covered.

The questions in the book are divided into six categories: Science and Spirit, Herstory, Lives, Time and Place, Ideology, Sport and Culture. The categories provide a focus for questions, but they are not meant to be limiting and you will also find questions about Sport or Science in categories such as Lives or Ideology. Similarly there are occasions when the answers may be incomplete, where, for instance just a few names are listed and the list could be extended. This is not always a quiz about right and wrong answers – there are still many areas where our knowledge is incomplete. Feel free to add your own answers to questions such as, Which goddesses are credited with creating the world? There are too many to list, and if I were to attempt it there would still be omissions. And there are cultures where the names of deities cannot be pronounced – I hope I have not inadvertently overstepped any boundaries in this regard. There are other questions where different traditions provide different answers, and where I have discovered this to be the case, as with immunization and the origin of the Amazons, I have included the variant answers.

The Sources represent those books which were the source of at least three questions or critical new information. Some provided many more. In general, they provide further reading or information on many of the questions. I hope that this book inspires you to read more about the lives and achievements of the women in it.

*Susan Hawthorne  
August 1991.*