

## Katherine Cummings honoured

### Human Rights Award for *Katherine's Diary*

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission established the Australian Human Rights Medal and Awards in 1987. The Commission makes six awards to the media, six for literature and other writing, two for film and one corporate, to recognise 'some of Australia's most notable achievers who, through determined endeavour, have made a significant contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and equal opportunity in Australia.' The distinctive awards are made by Australian glass artist Pavel Tomecko.

In 1992 the Medal and Awards were presented in November at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, the Medal going to the Mabo plaintiffs.

Among those also honoured was our colleague Katherine Cummings, who received the Non-fiction Award for her book *Katherine's Diary*, 'a painfully honest account of the life of a transsexual growing up in Australia'. Other books receiving awards were *The Wolf* by Margaret Barbalet, Viking,

Penguin Books Australia (Children's Fiction) and *From the Republic of Conscience* ed. Kerry Flatley and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Aird Books (Poetry).

Katherine has worked in libraries since 1955 (at first with John Metcalfe and Wilma Radford, later with Allan Horton) and has been an Associate of LAA/ALIA since 1964. She was born John Cummings in Aberdeen, Scotland, and grew up in the Gilbert Islands, New Zealand, Fiji, Scotland and Australia. She has studied in Sydney and Toronto and has lived and worked in the USA. She is now a reference librarian at Macquarie University.

Her book is an intensely personal account, not sparing the problems and anguish but written with sensitivity and illuminated with flashes of a delicious dry humour. Katherine believes that her story had to be told, 'because it is the story of a great many people who are misunderstood, or placed in the wrong pigeonhole, by those who do not know that there are real distinctions to be made not only between transvestites, homosexuals and transsex-



Katherine with her award, November 1992 (Photo: Reece Scannell, Macquarie University)

uals, but also between the transsexuals who cross the gender border in their youth and live all their adult lives in the chosen gender, and those like me who strive against their obsession, marry, raise children and are finally forced to move into the new gender role by *force majeure*.'

You cannot read the book without gaining a better awareness and understanding of these people and some remarkably frank insights into Katherine herself. The author well merits her prestigious award. *Katherine's Diary* was published in 1992 by William Heinemann Australia (ISBN 0 85561 450 1). ■

## Library friends get mobile

### Di Thurbon finds that having no fixed abode is no barrier to friendship

The Dandenong Valley Regional Library Service's Forward Plan included a goal to 'establish new Friends of the Library Groups in 1993/94'.

Did this goal include the Springvale Mobile Library? We who work on the Mobile thought it did. After all what could be friendlier than a bookmobile? But how to form a cohesive group for a library which has twenty five different locations, and was there any other Friends Group for a Mobile Library? Would we be an Australian—or even a world—first?

Recruiting interested people was the first task. We put our plea for members on fliers and then distributed them in books, handed them out at the counter, and stuck them all over our walls. We left them in strategic piles all over Springvale Library. We made them into bookmarks and

handed them out to (very often) the same people over and over.

Probably, though, our greatest success came from talking to people and asking them to join.

Our first meeting was held at Springvale Library last November. I was the only member of a mobile staff of five who could attend, and six library members who had promised to come sent their apologies. Nevertheless thanks to the invaluable assistance of Daniel Ferguson (Convener of Victorian Friends Groups) and Jellie Wyckelsma (another well known Victorian Friend) the meeting was a success and the Friends of Springvale Mobile Library Service was on its way.

The membership now stands at thirty and we hope it will continue to increase. One of the members of our Executive, Cr Joan Sheen, is also a

member of the City of Springvale Library Planning Committee, a vital link between group library management, councillors, and the community.

The Mobile Friends are already pitching in. They have helped us to letterbox a new housing area and are organising a book sale for late February. Friends want a tour of Mobile sites, many of them finding it hard to imagine *their* Mobile anywhere else.

A bookmobile is a friendly informal meeting place. My personal hope for our Friends is that the group will develop and foster that site-based community spirit across the City of Springvale; and that the Friends' meetings and activities will not only promote and support the service, but will always be rewarding and fun for those who give up their time for their library. ■