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Step Up, Mrs Dugdale, Lynne Leonhardt (Matilda Bay Books)

Summary

When Henrietta Augusta Dugdale was denied access to her three young sons because she could no longer bear to live with their father, it evoked within her a keen sense of injustice that would see her pioneer the women's suffragette movement in Australia. This book, an imagined biography and historically accurate novel, tells the story and the passions of Lynne Leonhardt's great-great grand aunt Henrietta Dugdale Johnson. She was married three times, read and wrote extensively throughout her life and actively campaigned for women's rights in Melbourne, where she spent a lot of her life after relocating there from Queenscliff. When the women of Victoria were granted suffrage in 1908, Henrietta gave the victory speech at Melbourne's Masonic Hall, and died a few years later, leaving a legacy of freedom and choice for women today.

About the author

Lynne Leonhardt grew up on an orchard in Donnybrook in the south-west of Western Australia and travelled extensively as a young adult. She studied music and English at UWA and completed a PhD in Creative Writing at Edith Cowan University. Her first novel, *Finding Jasper*, was published by Margaret River Press in 2012 and longlisted for the 2013 Dobbie Award. She lives in Perth with her husband and four children. She is the great-great-grand-niece of Henrietta Dugdale.

Questions for Discussion

- Set in the years 1863-1903, this historical novel portrays an Australia that most modern readers would not recognise. What do you think is the most interesting point of difference?

- What do you think of Henrietta's character as portrayed by the author?
- How much of Henrietta's life with William Dugdale is shadowed by the loss of her first husband and why do you think the author drops the hints slowly, as the novel progresses?
- Discuss Henrietta's love for and subsequent loss of her children. How does this tragedy influence her activism?
- Of the three men who married Henrietta, which one was most likeable? Why?
- Henrietta has lived a life of privilege in England and arrives in the colonies with her seafaring husband. How is she influenced by her early years when she starts her activism?
- How are things different for the modern Australian reader as a result of the efforts of women like Henrietta Dugdale?
- Is Henrietta a loveable character? Why or why not? In what ways do you relate to her and in what ways do you find her inaccessible?
- Discuss the attitudes of the early pioneers in Australia towards women's rights and children's rights. Henrietta was able to influence enough people to make the changes. How do you think she achieved this? Through persuasion, beauty, wealth?
- The men in the book are portrayed as having power and influence while women have very little. How much has changed in the hundred or more years since?

If you liked this book, you may also like...

Finding Jasper, Lynne Leonhardt, Margaret River Press, 2012

The Magnificent Life of Miss May Holman, Lekkie Hopkins, Fremantle Press, 2016

Henrietta Augusta Dugdale: An Activist 1827-1918, Susan Priestley, Melbourne Books, 2011

After the War, Leigh Straw, UWA Publishing, 2017

A Unique Position: A Biography of Edith Dircksey Cowan 1861-1932, Peter Cowan, UWA Publishing, 1978