



voiceprint

Newsletter

of the New South Wales Branch
of the Oral History Association
of Australia

18

March 1999



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The views expressed in articles in this *Voiceprint* are not necessarily those of the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia, nor its editors



Editorial

In this issue of Voiceprint we introduce you to Diane Armstrong, author of the recently released and handsomely produced volume, Mosaic, an account of her Polish roots as well as of her own life. In order to re-create the Polish past in which she has her roots she sought out surviving relatives and connections whom she then interviewed – a challenging oral history project, even for a professional journalist.

The process undertaken by Diane Armstrong has been expressed poetically by the late Ted Hughes in his poem about a conversation with his uncle six years after the death of his mother. Over a cup of tea the two men “keep the past alive”. Evocative images surface throughout the poem enliven the act of an elderly person re-creating and transmitting memories of people, places and events from his past for the benefit of his nephew.

Those of us who have interviewed elderly people will recognise this encapsulation of the effort they make to keep talking – “air hijacked in the larynx/to fly a dream populated with glimpses”. We will also remember the almost magical way in which the voice grows stronger as frail story tellers recall incidents from the past. Hughes expresses this as the renewal of his uncle’s prime, “exercising what happened/As his body tries to renew its cells”.

Perhaps the most memorable of the striking images in the poem occurs in the concept of the reminiscences as “archaeology of the mouth/Treasures that crumble at touch of day”. Since I discovered this poem nearly twenty years ago my experiences as a recorder of oral history have affirmed this metaphor time and time again. I have witnessed the role of the oral historian as ‘archaeologist’, digging and delving among words in order to make sense of the past. As recorders of oral history we sometimes do as Diane Armstrong has certainly done in Mosaic – assist in the uncovering of gems that illuminate meaning and enable a later generation to achieve new insights about and offer fresh interpretations of times gone by. And so lustre is added to the treasures mined by oral historians.

Ruth Wilson

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New Members from December '98 to February '99

Welcome to all of you new members! We are glad to number among our members two additional libraries. We are so pleased to be strengthening further our ties with New South Wales public libraries.

As ever we have individual members with fascinating backgrounds and interests. I do hope that the Association will be useful to you and that you will enjoy your membership. Welcome again!

Helena Brusic

Graphic designer, interested in archaeology

Gay Breyley

Translator/journalist

Christine de Matos

PHD student – Australians in Allied Occupied Japan

David Perry

Film producer

Bankstown City Library

Pamela Macdonald

Medical Practitioner – Mother's oral history

Canterbury City Library

Margaret Cockerell

Retired – Local and family history

Mariko Batho

Student – colonial and family history

Jill Finch

Retired administrator – general history

Brother Gerard P. Williams

Retired teacher – interviewing retired members of a religious order

Vicky Duke

Office manager – Cooroy/Noosa local history

Krissa Wilkinson

Student – writing, theatre, sculpture, the environment

REPORTS

Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation

by Katja Grynberg

We grew up in Australia in homes where many of us were protected from the real stories our parents carried. But even without having been “there” it was as though we knew that unspeakable place. *Holocaust* filled us with horror and incredulity, but also awe. Despite study and work in other areas, it was inevitable that some of us would eventually find ourselves in an arena that we knew in our bones. This was a space from which I always wanted to flee but as they say, ‘you write what you need to read; teach what you need to learn’. So for most of us, working for the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation was much more than filling a role in an organisation, it was also a personal journey.

In 1994 I remember reading that after the making of *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg vowed to record 50,000 testimonies. I scoffed, thinking this was not possible but I have learnt an invaluable lesson – ‘if you will it hard enough, almost anything is possible’. In February 1995, the Shoah Foundation began its work in Sydney. Many survivors from Hitler's inferno had come here to “the furthest place from Europe” to build a new life. Sydney was the first city

outside the United States to which the Foundation came.

Over the last four years the Foundation set up or sent teams that reached the four corners of the globe. Interviews were in Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Flemish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Ladino, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Sign, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Ukrainian and Yiddish. People who thought they had been forgotten were given a voice. Loved names were remembered; lost places commemorated; isolated communities found.

On January 31, 1999, in Los Angeles there was *An Evening of Tribute*. There are now 31,978 miles of tape and 115,965 hours of testimony! Over 50,000 faces have been videotaped, voicing testimonies in 31 languages plus sign language, from 57 countries because as Spielberg said, “it is essential that we see their faces, hear their voices, and understand that the horrors of the Holocaust happened to people like us.” That night, Nelson Mandela, Shimon Peres, Hilary Clinton, and Simon Weisenthal added their voices to Steven

Spielberg's congratulating everyone for the work that had been done. But we were also reminded that this was only the beginning.

During the days we were in Los Angeles it was reinforced that there are four stages to this project – gathering the testimonies, cataloguing, disseminating, and educating. Cataloguing is the key to unlocking the contents of the testimonies which are meant for sharing. They are a global possession.

Because interviews that have been catalogued have been viewed, segmented and indexed, it will be possible for those searching for information to move directly to the place in the interview where the Thesaurus index term they are searching for, is used. Currently the Thesaurus lists 10,000 index terms. This is used to catalogue each segment of an interview. Using a Biographical Profile search, an entire interview can be watched or by using the Biographical Profile database, information about certain experiences can be found.

At present, teams of cataloguers are creating Biographical Profiles which enable the Foundation and those who wish to search the archive, the ability to find information in testimonies that have not yet been catalogued. Biographical Profiling, being a much faster task than cataloguing, allows the

Foundation a clearer idea of which experiences are represented .

The Foundation is connecting to repositories where testimonies will be on line though not yet accessible to the public. In order to accommodate other institutions around the world, they are exploring connections to other fibre-optic networks. This will permit access to the initial repositories and to major research universities in Canada and the United States and within the next year to other continents and countries as the networks come into being.

Three documentaries and a CD-ROM are the initial offerings of the Foundation. Other interactive tools are being devised as well as books. Projects are currently being discussed in Germany, the Netherlands and Australia as models for multi-national educational co-operation.

Materials produced engage students in examining racism, hatred, and anti-semitism in order to promote tolerance. CD-ROM narrated by Leonard DiCaprio and Wynona Ryder allows students to trace four survivor's experiences from their prewar years, incarceration, loss of family and ultimately their liberation. An interactive time line focuses on events from 1939-1945 so that students can explore relationships between specific experiences and general events. There is also teacher training.

In *The World Must Know*, Michael Berenbaum, writes that Emil Fackenheim, (a survivor of Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, who became an eminent Jewish philosopher) concluded that “the Holocaust was a rupture of philosophy, faith, history and culture – a rent in the very fabric of society and civilisation itself. The task of those who live in its aftermath is to mend, to patch together by creative deeds the fabric of our own humanity.” He adds that Elie Weisel says “that in a world of absurdity, we must invent reason, we must create beauty out of nothingness. And because there is murder in the world...and we know how helpless our battle may appear, we have to fight murder and absurdity and give meaning to the battle if not our hope.”

We made very special friends on this personal journey. We scraps of a people who came “from the ends of the earth”, found to our wonderment others with names and faces from those places we knew only from ghost stories. If history had been different, we might have been family and friends from birth. So on that Sunday night in January, we had one hell of a celebration! We whirled and danced to life! We reaffirmed our commitment to human rights and vowed not to remain numbed and silent. It is with enormous humility and gratitude to the survivors, and the Foundation that we have learnt and have regained hope.

And we promise to teach our children about integrity, dignity, and above all, tolerance – the birthright of everyone.

Eva Scheinberg, Pauline Rockman and Katja Grynberg, Regional Coordinators for Australia, were in Los Angeles for ‘*An Evening of Tribute*’ given by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. In Australia 2,495 testimonies have been given. This represents 4.98 % of the total done. Per capita, Australia has one of the highest percentages of survivors.

Other countries where interviews took place were Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mexico, Moldova, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USA, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Zimbabwe

Precious Memories – by Jana Vytrhlik

Recently, the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney hosted the most significant Judaica exhibition ever seen in Australia, *Precious Legacy: treasures from the Jewish Museum in Prague*. The collection from Prague represents and attests to the extraordinary story of the survival of centuries old Jewish legacy in Nazi occupied Bohemia and Moravia. The exhibition, however, also celebrated the continuation of Jewish traditions and culture in Sydney. While Prague has one of the greatest Judaica collections in the world, the Czech Jewish community is very small when compared to the glory of the pre-war years. Australia, on the other hand, has a large and vibrant Jewish community which comes from all corners of the world and shares rich and inexhaustible sources of experience, knowledge and stories. It was therefore the prime challenge of curatorial development of the exhibition to incorporate the experiences of the Sydney Jewish community into the *Precious Legacy*.

Almost all Czech and Moravian Jewry vanished during the Holocaust, and the rest was silenced during the decades of communist oppression. Generations of Czech people grew up without any knowledge of the Jewish history, culture and traditions, nor of the role the Jews

played in the history of the Czech nation and of the horrors of the Holocaust. Objects from the Prague Jewish Museum became silent witnesses not only of prosperity but also persecution of Czech Jewish communities throughout centuries. In Sydney, these objects were given a voice.

Precious Legacy presented more than 300 artefacts dating from the mid 16th century to 1940s: synagogue textiles, richly adorned silk and velvet next to simple household cloths embroidered with patterns mirroring local folk art. Early Hebrew manuscripts and prints. Outstanding pieces of silver like Torah shields, finials and crowns, Hanukkah lamps or spice boxes made in Prague, Brno and Vienna. 19th century portraits of middle class Czech Jewish citizens and a small yet moving collection of objects and drawings from the Terezin ghetto.

To bring these objects alive and to provide a human context for the exhibition, the Powerhouse Museum developed in a close collaboration with the Sydney Jewish community a 3-part series of audiovisual recollections by the Czech-Australian Holocaust survivors. Researchers were sent out to undertake a

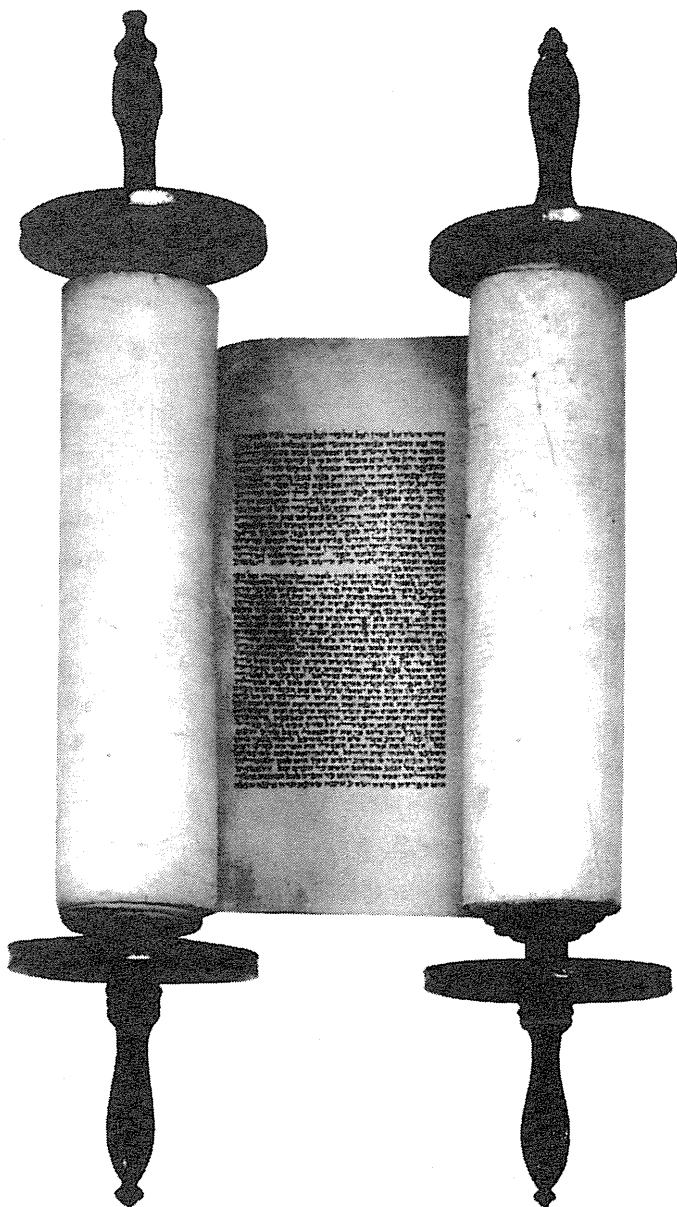
complex task: to find those survivors who recall the life in pre-war Bohemia and Moravia and have interesting stories about how some of the exhibition objects were used either in synagogue or their households. Supporting memorabilia, archival material and interesting items were also sought to provide visuals for interviews. The search proved to be very successful and soon, hours and hours of interviews were recorded and transcribed for further selection. It was clear that there is much more material than anyone could have imagined.

The next task, a much more difficult one, was to select the best and most relevant stories. It was a quite an emotional experience for the entire team, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Yet in the end, the visual oral histories of *Precious Legacy* brought a clear aspect of hope to the exhibition. Although the exhibition on one side celebrated the survival of a rich Jewish legacy, it also told the tragic story of Czech Jewry, so common worldwide. Visitors watching the vivid stories were able to interact with the display, and ask questions themselves. Families launched on journeys of their own storytelling. Discussions evolved from the display. Many, especially the older ones identified with the stories presented. So, although indirectly, Holocaust survivors were involved in the creation of the overall exhibition experience by documenting

their personal experiences in testimonies, providing rare memorabilia and later, acting as exhibition guides.

It is perhaps not too often that Holocaust survivors smile and light up when they recall experiences of their lives. They did for the *Precious Legacy* exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum.

The Exhibition Precious Legacy: treasures from the Jewish Museum in Prague was displayed at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney between 25 November 1998 and 28 February 1999 and viewed by tens of thousands of visitors. *Precious Legacy* was curated by Dr Jana Vytrhlik, Manager of Education and Visitor Services at the Powerhouse Museum. During the late 70's Jana worked in the Jewish Museum in Prague and completed her thesis on the Judaica collection in 1976. She has been living in Sydney since 1986 and was appointed as a member of the Sydney Jewish Museum Management committee in 1997. Jana also edited and co-authored, with Dr Suzanne Rutland, the book *Precious Legacy*, published in conjunction with the exhibition by Powerhouse Publishing. The book covers the history and significance of the Jewish Museum in Prague, revealing the history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia and provides an overview of major festivals, customs and traditions. An essay on the history of the Jewish community in Australia is also included.



**Torah Scroll, Bohemia
or Moravia 1863-1864**
Photo taken from
Precious Legacy
Catalogue, courtesy
of the Powerhouse
Museum



3-part oral history series developed for the *Precious Legacy* exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum: *Recollections from pre-war Bohemia and Moravia*

1. *Childhood memories*
2. *Family life*
3. *Journey to Australia*

Precious memories told by: Jana Gottschall, Olga Wachtel, Benno Perlman, Judith Nachum and David Benedict.

Development and production team

Project manager: Jana Vytrhlik
Research and audio recording:
Eva Scheinberg and Katja Grynberg
Video interviewing: Eva Scheinberg
Editing and production director:
Linda Krueger
Production: Powerhouse Museum,
October 1998

**Synagogue key, Prague,
late 19th Century**

Photo taken from
Precious Legacy
Catalogue, courtesy
of the Powerhouse
Museum

Flesh + Blood – by Ace Bourke

*The Museum of Sydney invited OHAA members and friends on 28 November 1998 to a special viewing of the exhibition, **Flesh and Blood, A Sydney Story 1788 – 1998**. The following extract from the catalogue will tell you something about the exhibition. We suspect that Ace Bourke in interviewing his relatives did not really know that he was 'doing' oral history. However, he learnt a great deal of information from family members so it was surely oral history! Of course his family connections go way back to the beginning of European settlement so those investigations were dependent on a different kind of research. But here again he depended on consultation with the historians in his family.*

The exhibition of Ace's story was illuminated with superb paintings and drawings from the collection in the Mitchell Library. It is always a thrill to see these icons beautifully lit and displayed.

Ace's own family's photographs, informatively captioned, were a delight. We particularly enjoyed the photograph of a sixties-clad Ace in London with his pet lion cub, Christian.

Ace's own abiding interest in and support of Aboriginal painting was a great adjunct to his story and provided fascinating viewing. Ace spoke to the interested crowd of members and then took us all on a guided tour of his family and friends. It was a splendid opportunity to get together with the Museum of Sydney and we are most grateful to Sally Watterson for making us so welcome. We look forward to sharing occasions again in the future. Do look out for these and come along!

We hope that those who could not come enjoy reading the catalogue essay which follows – and that those who were able to be present at the Museum enjoy the revisiting.

Editor

Flesh + Blood is a personal story of Sydney told through my colonial family connections, and through contemporary images of Sydney by indigenous and non-indigenous artists with whom I have worked as a curator.

Working in the field of indigenous art, I have been made acutely aware of the importance of documentation and recording oral histories. Culture, heritage and languages can disappear. I regret not talking more with my elderly relatives, and of having allowed irretrievable

information to die with them. Names on the backs of old photographs can be wrong, or worse, there are none and there is nobody left who can identify the people.

Growing up, I was made to feel any reference to my background was politically incorrect. Since the 1970s minority voices have been heard and their social histories retrieved. Post colonial ideologies have sidelined families like mine. We are flesh and blood! What hope is there to define the Australian identity, or to understand our relationship with the Australian Aborigines, for example, if we can't look at ourselves in an unbiased way?

With my parents' marriage, two interesting blood-lines from colonial Sydney intersected: my mother is descended from Governor Philip Gidley King, and the Macarthur, Brown and Docker families – among others; and my father from Governor Richard Bourke, who retired to Ireland in 1837. My grandfather Ulick Bourke returned to Australia, marrying into families that include Mitchells, Scotts, Merewethers, and Hicksons.

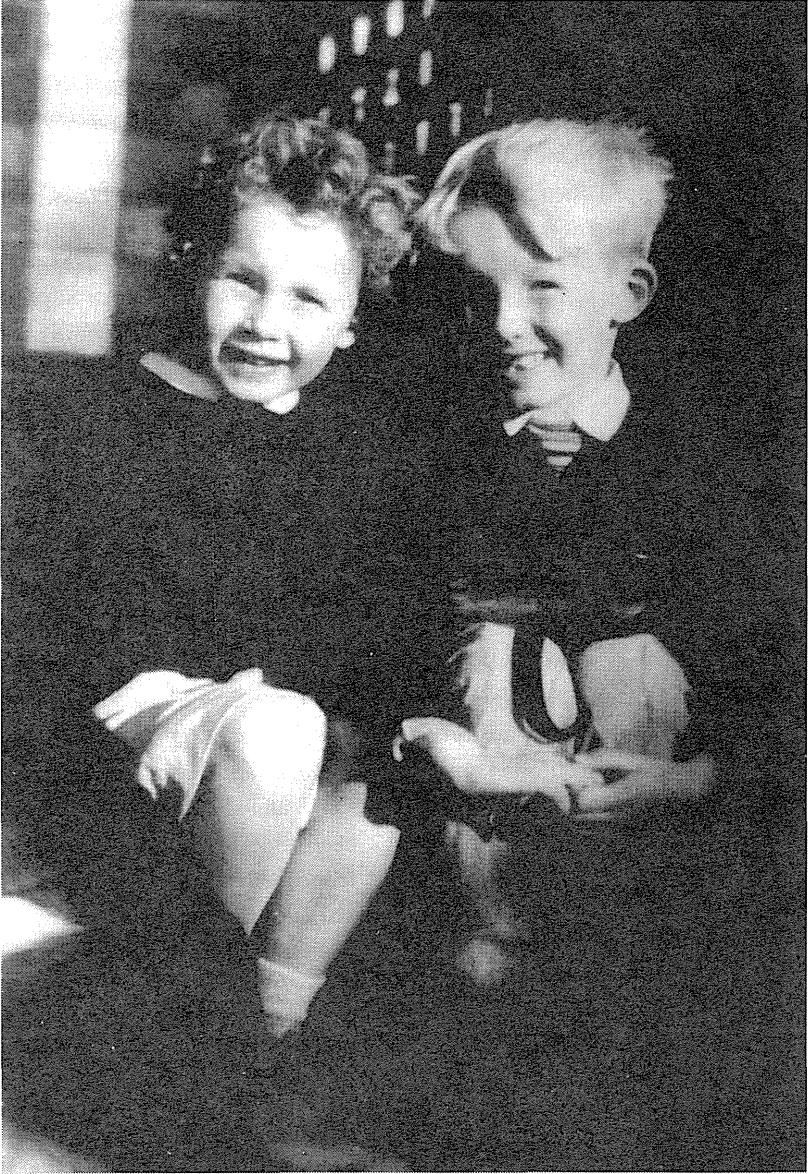
As I researched, I was able to envisage modern Sydney developing as a city from the 1830s. As I walk from the Museum of Sydney to the Mitchell Library and along

Macquarie Street, I can see buildings that escaped the visionless politicians and developers, although heritage preservation is still precarious in Sydney.

I wanted to re-create for *Flesh + Blood* the feeling I have, living in Sydney. Particular places evoke or trigger memories: Sydney landmarks with family associations; the Mitchell Library with the statue of Governor Bourke outside it; and 'Bourke Street' signs, are the most obvious to me.

Both the King and Bourke families lived in the first Government House, so I feel a strange connection with this site and empty forecourt. Hickson Street is named after Robert Purdon Hickson, first president of the Harbour Trust, who oversaw the rebuilding of the Sydney wharves after the outbreak of bubonic plague. I have been active with others in attempting to prevent the demolition and insensitive redevelopment of the wharves at Walsh Bay, among the last great timber wharves in the world.

Flesh + Blood looks at a few of our family houses that illustrate some of the changes in architecture, and the urbanisation of Sydney. Hannibal and Anna Maria Macarthur built *The Vineyard* (later named *Subiaco*) in 1836, on their estate near Parramatta, purchased in 1813. Looking at the Conrad Martens painting, it is possible to imagine the life lived there. *The Vineyard*, once one of the finest houses



Lindy and Ace Bourke 1952 Collection of Mrs RU Bourke (reproduced with permission, from the Catalogue, *Flesh + Blood* Exhibition, Museum of Sydney 1999)

in the colony, was gradually hemmed in by factories. It was demolished in 1961 and the site became the Rheem factory car park. Edward Merewether lived at *Castlefield* at Bondi in the 1880s (since demolished in 1915). Then there were uninterrupted views over dunes to the sea and across to Rose Bay. *Brislington*, the Brown home in Parramatta, was built in 1820 by John Hodges with earnings from a game of euchre. Today it still stands in the middle of Parramatta, as the *Medical and Nursing Museum Parramatta*.

It has been an interesting and humbling journey researching for *Flesh + Blood*, discovering what material is in public collections, and what remains in various family collections. This exhibition constitutes the Mitchell Library's largest number of loans to another institution. No other Australian institution can compete with the scope of the Library's collection.

The collection of David Scott Mitchell (1836-1907) – my great-great uncle and founder of the Mitchell Library – is extraordinary. As Robert Hughes said, it 'provides a means to know ourselves'. Mitchell collected papers, letters and journals, including those of the colony's first five governors, and I like the irony of him collecting material about my other

relatives. Mitchell also owned 47 Conrad Martens' paintings. There are photographs of his house at 17 Darlinghurst Road (since demolished and now the site of a sex shop in Kings Cross), overflowing with 61,000 books. Apparently he was familiar with most of them. His bequest is still buying works for the Library.

I have included for display Barron Field's *First Fruits*, the first published book of poetry in Australia, because it eluded Mitchell until he obtained this copy on his death bed. Governor Kings *Standing Orders* was the first book printed in the colony, and Mitchell owned two copies, and I especially wanted the one owned by my great-great-great-grandmother, Anna Maria Macarthur (nee King).

I have contacted relatives I had never met and I also heard quite a few times 'Oh so-and-so got everything.' Items have been dispersed over several generations to the many children. No Conrad Martens' paintings hang on our walls at home. All we seem to have is some family silver, family photographs, and print reproductions of family houses (that belonged to people with unbelievable names like 'Hannibal Macarthur'). Nevertheless my mother has been the main lender to *Flesh + Blood* (after the Mitchell Library), and many seemingly insignificant items at home have taken on new meaning for me.

From different branches of the family, the flotsam and jetsam of heirlooms, photographs, items, memories and anecdotes have proved fascinating. I feel as though I am putting a family album on exhibition. Very boring for some I fear, but there are beautiful paintings, journals and letters of historical interest and early photographs like Joseph Docker's *Sydney Cove* (circa 1860s). What must it feel like to lose everything in a fire, or to be a refugee, or be one of the many children of the stolen generations and not know your name or family?

Family names, often middle names, that have been handed down, now hold a new interest for me. I look for noses, likenesses. The paternal line seems to dominate and I too identified more with the Bourke side than the King. Despite a pattern in the family of men marrying well and into money, or women often being the line of descent, *Flesh + Blood* has ended up very 'Dead White Male'. The larger portraits are all of men, as are the entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, reflecting society at that time, with the exception of one relative, Rose Scott, who fought for women's causes, and lived an interesting and independent life. My research for the exhibition reinforced how women take on the custodianship of their husband's and children's family histories,

possessions and reputations. Generally men were the least interested in family history, yet the family historians have curiously been mostly men.

Flesh + Blood also gives a version, although incomplete, of a social history that illustrates how close-knit colonial Sydney was. This interconnectedness is demonstrated in the exhibition by the fact that there is a Conrad Martens painting in most family tableaus. Family names appear and reappear in the Legislative Council, government posts, the Australian Club, and the Australian Agricultural Company. Individual family member's community involvement included membership or participation in many organisations: the Subscription Library, the Australian Museum, the University of Sydney, sporting clubs and the Botanical Gardens. My great-great aunt (Lady Deas Thomson) was involved in the foundation of the *The Infants Home*, Ashfield, in 1874, and an aunt, Joan White, is involved today.

The families were also interconnected through marriage. Governor King's daughter Anna Maria married John Macarthur's nephew Hannibal. Governor Bourke's daughter Anne married the Colonial Secretary Deas Thomson, and their daughter Susan married into the prominent Macleay family. Two of Joseph Docker's grandsons (brothers, Wilfred Law Docker and Arthur Robert Docker) married two of Simeon Lord's

granddaughters (sisters, Ada May Lord and Florence Lucy Lord), and the Bourkes and Merewethers are related through the paternal and maternal lines.

Although family members mixed in the same social circles, there are recorded disagreements and much jostling for power and positions. Governor Bourke, a Whig liberal, found great opposition to some of his reforms from the conservative Tory, 'exclusive' faction, personified by the Macarthurs and Kings. Bourke also made it difficult for Phillip Parker King to serve on the Legislative Council. In the exhibition, however, there is a painting of Bourke and Phillip Parker King together in the Port Phillip settlement. James Mitchell, father of David Scott Mitchell, and Bourke also feuded, and it is ironic that Bourke's statue, by an accident of history, stands outside the Mitchell Library.

In general, my relatives came to Australia for employment and career opportunities. From reading letters and journals I perceived Governor King was often worried about money, and Governor Bourke, before coming to Australia, was always anxiously angling after his next commission. The Browns left England after consumption had killed six family members. At best these families were 'landed gentry', some were

quite wealthy and well connected, and some middle and upper-middle class. They were not the great names of our history, or instrumental in the defining moments. They were not the rich merchant brand-names, but members of a close-knit yet sometimes divided, influential, conservative elite.

By the end of the 19th century, due primarily to a series of population increases and economic circumstances, most of the Kings, Bourkes, Mitchells, Hicksons and others dropped out of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Family fortunes were divided between too many children. By the second or third generation, some inheritances were dissipated, and there were several bankruptcies. Society dramatically changed with the World Wars and the Depression. Other families managed to retain their money and influence, until threatened by multinationals in the 1970s. Class distinctions have become more fluid: my older relatives mostly refer to themselves as upper-middle class; my generation mostly sees themselves as professionals.

Flesh + Blood held some surprises. My great-great-grandfather EC Merewether was aide-de-camp to Governor Gipps, and was a third relative to have lived in the first Government House. He oversaw the move to the present Government House, and Bourke had initiated the plans for it to be finally built. In the 1960s I boarded

in Robson House at Sydney Church of England Grammar School (SHORE) North Sydney, and I recently discovered that in the early 1900s my great-great-grandfather Robert Hickson and family had lived in the house next door. Elizabeth Bay House is one of my favourite houses and I learnt that my great-aunt, Susan Deas Thomson, Richard Bourke's granddaughter, had married into the Macleay family, and lived there longer than anyone else. I also had no idea that Bungaree and Phillip Parker King, my great-great-great uncle, knew each other, and that he was one of the first to draw Bungaree.

Bungaree accompanied Phillip Parker King when the *Mermaid* surveyed the north and north west Australian coastline in 1817-1818. His portrait by Augustus Earle seems a brilliant parody of a colonial governor. While I have so many relatives (more than 1,000 at the King family reunion in 1988), and a wealth of material to choose from, there seem to be no descendants of Bungaree, and few provenanced items. Bungaree's club, which ironically had to be borrowed from England, reinforced for me the reality of annihilation.

Flesh + Blood demonstrates the role of artists and photographers in the community, as both documenters and dreamers. They show truths, and create

myths, memorials, and versions of history. At first, painters provided a European version of Australia, and then a response to the new landscape with a new visual vocabulary. The iconic images of contemporary Sydney in the exhibition include Jeannie Baker's *Hyde Park*, Brett Whiteley's *Sydney Harbour*, Peter Kingston's *Luna Park Chess Set*, Martin Sharp's prints and posters, and William Yang's photographs of Bondi, and Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson. There are early works by two of the most influential gay Sydney artists, Peter Tully and David McDiarmid, both sadly dead. The collaboration between Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson, with artists like Peter Tully and David McDiarmid, produced the first wave of sophisticated, wearable Australiana. This exciting era was well documented by William Yang. I exhibited most of these artists in my first art gallery Ace's Art Shop, and later at the Hogarth Galleries. Artists like Peter Kingston and Martin Sharp have fought to raise community awareness and to save our heritage, particularly Luna Park, and more recently the wharves at Walsh Bay.

Michael Riley's *Sacrifice* series of photographs about Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality are both a memorial to the dispossessed, and a response to those like Governor Bourke, who believed in the 'civilizing' power of

the missionaries. Clinton Nain's *Two Natives Dancing* coincidentally incorporates a drawing by Governor King. Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennett and Brenda Croft have contributed works that comment on Sydney's colonial past, bringing *Flesh + Blood* an ironic full circle.

From settlement in 1788 British policy towards the Aborigines was ill-defined and uncertain. As Henry Reynolds, in particular, has illustrated, there was no provision for buying land from Aborigines. Governor Bourke cancelled the only treaty made with the Aborigines – spurious though it was. Policy swung uneasily between protection and punishment. Governor King stated, 'I have ... considered them the real proprietors of the Soil, I have never ... suffered any injury to be done to their persons or property'. However, he also said, 'the settler is not to suffer his property to be invaded or his existence endangered by the natives ... Settlers may fire on any natives they see. Every means is to be used to drive them off.'

It is clear that many of the issues facing people in the 19th century are still unresolved today. Our current leaders are no closer to recognising the rights of Aborigines or compensating them for their dispossession. What about the blood on our hands? I do not feel a personal guilt for the past, but I feel a sense of shame, sorrow and urgency for the present.

The only Australian Aboriginal memorial is the Aboriginal memorial of 200 log coffins curated by Djon Mundine in 1988, yet we create monuments to wars fought in another hemisphere. As a curator of Australian Aboriginal art, I hope to have facilitated the telling of some indigenous stories and the retrieval of some of their histories. Aboriginal artists and friends have confirmed the importance of family, place, memory, cultural values, and the documentation of histories, encouraging me to retrieve and tell my own story. They are part of my Sydney story, and I dedicate *Flesh + Blood* to my family and to them.

Ace Bourke is Curator of *Flesh + Blood* and Co-Director of the Hogarth Galleries, Paddington

*(Reproduced with permission, from the Catalogue, *Flesh + Blood* Exhibition, Museum of Sydney 1999)*

ARTICLES

A Mosaic of Voices – by Diane Armstrong

In her nursing home in Israel, Auntie Lunia was shaking a formidable 94-year-old finger in my face. 'On no account should you write this book,' she said. 'Nobody needs it. Your children won't thank you for it. Don't do it!'

I stared at her in dismay. I'd travelled halfway round the world to record her story, and the idea of going home empty-handed was unthinkable. Avoiding a confrontation I knew I'd never win, I patiently lured her into talking about her childhood. Auntie Lunia had a passion for fashion and once I got her describing the outfits she used to wear, she was soon lost in the realm of the past. Clothes led to décor and then to people and events. With her extraordinary visual memory, she painted such vivid pictures that I felt as though I'd been there myself.

Auntie Lunia described the velvet dress and white laced-up boots which she wore to an aunt's wedding in 1901, the Biedermeyer furniture and Sevres porcelain in her grandmother's house, and the tweed suit she copied in 1915 when she travelled to Kaiser Wilhelm's funeral. But her reminiscences weren't all frivolous. With tears streaming down

her furrowed cheeks, she relived the anguished moment in 1939 when she realised that she would never see her only son again. As she talked, revealing her character in every word, her long life and times unfolded enthrallingly before me. It didn't take long to discover that her initial hostility towards my project stemmed from the fact that she had reinvented herself in her new country and felt ashamed of her humble beginnings.

No sooner had I overcome Auntie Lunia's objections than I came up against another obstacle. Her 87-year-old sister was adamant that she wouldn't delve into the traumas of the past. 'It's all right for you,' Auntie Andzia said, jabbing the air with a well-manicured finger. 'You'll have your story and I'll have nightmares.'

Although she wasn't impressed by my arguments about the importance of recording her experiences for posterity, she eventually relented. Once again, I found that reminiscing about childhood broke the ice. Laughing, she recalled a train journey with her mother in 1916 when she was 8. They were taking a huge basket of eggs to a poor relative in Vienna, and placed it on the rack above their heads. During the journey, the eggs

broke, and yolks dripped down on their embarrassed heads.

After several days, Aunt Andzia relaxed enough to touch on her war experiences which she hadn't talked about for years. 'The war lasted for six years,' she began. 'Each year had 365 days, each day had 24 hours, and each hour had 60 minutes, and every one of those minutes was like eternity.' She was an enthralling raconteur and I listened spellbound as she described her fortunes and misfortunes when, against all odds, she managed to save herself and her two small children during the Holocaust.

My next stop was Los Angeles to interview Uncle Izio, a frail but alert 90 year old whose mind was more fragile than his health. Depressed and embittered, he seemed to find every question controversial and threatening. The past was a painful country, one he had done his best to avoid for most of his life. Every topic was a potential minefield and every question seemed loaded.

When I set off around the world eight years ago to gather information for my family history, I never imagined that interviewing most of my elderly relatives would prove to be such a battle of wills. What amazes me is that I succeeded. I was convinced that it was vital to record their experiences of a vanished world.

Although I had prepared a list of questions covering every period of their lives in chronological order, I didn't interrupt their train of thought, and only stepped in to guide the conversation along when there was a pause. After every session, I checked my list to make sure that the main points had been covered and began each session clarifying or expanding whatever had been omitted.

Some questions were useful memory-joggers, eg: 'What do you remember about your first school? What went through your mind when you saw that? Where were you on 1 September 1939? What did your father say when you failed your exams? Who else was there with you? How did you feel when you arrived in Warsaw and couldn't remember your sister's address?'

Regular coffee breaks were essential to stay alert and concentrate. It's so easy to half-listen, let people run on and miss the telling details that bring a situation to life. For instance, when my cousin Krysia talked about having to stand behind the wardrobe with her mother and little brother for several weeks so that the landlady wouldn't discover they were in the room, I didn't let her get away with her description of the experience as 'awful'. After some prodding, she recalled why it had been so awful. They couldn't use the toilet unless the landlady was out, had to take turns sitting down, and had to stifle every sneeze and cough. And

that's when the horror of their predicament became clear.

In their haste to tell the story, distance themselves from the past, or avoid painful memories, my relatives often glossed over their feelings, without which the narrative would have been impersonal and dry. It often took several attempts to elicit their feelings. Not surprising given that most of them had spent their lives suppressing their feelings.

When I'd finished interviewing 27 aunts, uncles and cousins in America, France, Poland and Israel, I had a suitcase full of microcassettes and a head bursting with stories. When I'd finished transcribing them into the computer, I had 100,000 words of oral history that spanned one hundred years, and a gallery of extraordinary characters.

And that's when my dilemma began. How could I structure the story to sustain the narrative without losing the power of those individual voices?

The solution came to me while I was writing. I decided to weave between past and present, so that readers would have a first hand experience of those remarkable people, and hear their voices as they stepped in at crucial moments to tell their own story.

When MOSAIC was published, I felt nervous and vulnerable. I'd revealed so much about my relatives as well as myself. Although I admired them, I didn't gloss over their faults and foibles, their envy, vanity and snobbery. Would their humanity shine through?

These days, when I receive letters from strangers telling me how they can identify with Aunt Lunia, Aunt Andzia, Uncle Izio and my other relatives, I feel that thanks to their own words, MOSAIC has become a tribute to their strength, courage and endurance.



**National Biennial OHAA Conference
3 – 5 September 1999, State Library
of Victoria**

Call for papers

The theme will be 'TALES OF THE CENTURY', with a focus on narrative and story telling.

Proposal for papers (250 words) are especially invited from members. Please send to: The Secretary, OHAA, Victorian Branch, PO Box 267, Foster, Victoria by 11 December 1998.

Enquires during business hours – phone 03 9372 7182 – AM Meeting Conference Secretariat. After hours – 03 9438 2791 and Lesley Alves will assist you. Interested members please discuss your ideas for a paper with the conference organisers as soon as possible.

**Oral History Association of Australia
*Call for papers for the 1999 Oral
History Journal***

These should be in hand no later than Friday 23 April 1999. Late papers will not be accepted.

Topic for 1999 Conference and Journal: " Tales of the Century Aspects of 20th Century Life"

Papers should reflect the Conference Topic. 'Book Reviews' should be in hand by Friday 28 May 1999.

The editor would appreciate synopsis of papers, if possible, by Friday 26 February 1999. Please consider submitting your original work or projects. A brief style guide can be obtained from the Editor to whom all papers must be submitted.

Margaret P. Hamilton Editor, OHAA
Journal 12 Bulwer Street Perth WA
6000 Ph/fax: 08 93281048 (all times)
Email: guymar@iexpress.net.au

Publication date will coincide with the National Conference in Melbourne 2-5 September 1999.

Crossroads of History: Experience, Memory, Orality XIth International Oral History Conference

Istanbul, Turkey, 15-19 June, 2000

Remembering the 20th century, imagining the 21st century; virtual oral history: the new media and the word; the millenium; crossroads of continents; remembering conflicts; experience history; teaching oral history; community projects; methodological and ethical issues.

Proposals are invited from around the world for contributions to the XIth International Oral History Conference. The proposal may be for a conference paper, workshop session or thematic panel. The single page proposal should include an outline of the proposal together with the following details: proposal title and the name, affiliation and short vitae, mail address, email address, phone and fax numbers for each presenter. You should also indicate the language of your paper (English or Spanish) and the languages you can speak

The Conference Committee will confirm acceptance or rejection of proposals by July 1, 1999 Australian enquiries to Janis Wilton, School of classics and history, University of New England, Armidale, Tel: 02 6773 2107 email:jwilton@metz.une.edu.au

Executive Meeting Dates for 1999

Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meetings held at the State Library at 5.30pm on the following dates: 12 April; 7 June; 31 July (seminar and AGM); 9 August; 11 October; 29 November or 6 December.

Seminar Dates for 1999

10 April; 31 July; 6 November

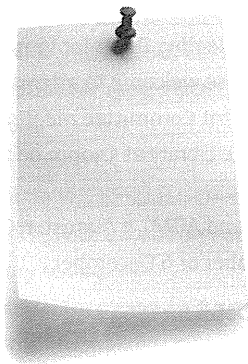
Oral History Society Annual Conference

15-16 May 1999, with the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex, Brighton, England. The theme for the conference "Landscapes of Memory – Oral History and the Environment". The proposed conference themes are: Memory and Place; Protest; Green Lifestyles; Heritage; Oral History and Development. Enquires to be sent to Steve Hussey, History Department, Essex University, Colchester, CO4 3SQ, England. Email <husss@essex.ac.uk>

An Invitation from America to attend

Oral History Association National meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, 7-10 October, 1999. The theme is "Giving Voice: Oral Historians and the Shaping of Narrative". Further information – Susan Armitage, Editor, Frontiers, Women's Studies Program, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164 4007. Email <armitage@wsu.edu>

Noticeboard



The Max Kelly Medal

The Max Kelly Medal was established by the History Council of New South Wales in honour of Max Kelly's work and memory. The Medal is awarded to a student, or any other person beginning work as an historian, for a work of excellence in any aspect of Australian History. The work may be an article, paper, essay or comparable submission in any other media and must be original work based on primary sources. The successful entrant will receive the Medal plus an award of \$500. Nominations close May 1 each year. Time for Oral Historians to think about projects for 1999 nomination. Further details from The Executive Officer, History Council of New South Wales, GPO Box 1875, Sydney, 2001. Tel: (02) 9252 0758

Nancy Keesing Fellowship

The Fellowship aims to promote the State Library of New South Wales as a centre of research into any aspect of Australian life and culture, to provide a readily accessible record of the research undertaken and to promote the use of the collections of the State Library. Each year a sum of money is available for the Fellowship to assist a writer with their project. Another opportunity for financial assistance to Oral Historians. Details from Jill Jones at the State Library on 9273 1499.

Oral History Transcription Service

Professional transcriber. Reasonable rates. Contact Gabrielle Godard on Ph 9310 3940 Fax 9310 3941. Urgent work accommodated

Shopping in Ku-ring-gai

The Ku-ring-gai Historical Society is conducting an Oral History project in relation to shopping in the local area. Interviewers and interviewees required. Inquiries to Joyce Cribb 94889334

Hot off the Press!

Photos taken at *'An Evening of Tribute'* given by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles and attended by Eva Scheinberg, Pauline Rockman and Katja Grynberg, Regional Coordinators for Australia.



Left to right:
Pauline Rockman,
Steven Spielberg
with Akubra hat and
Eva Scheinberg



Katja Grynberg
presenting
Steven Spielberg
with a book from
the Holocaust
Association of
Australia