



voiceprint

Newsletter

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

20

November 1999



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voiceprint

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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

Angela Wawn has had to retire from our Editorial Committee due to the pressure of business and the nature of her 'on call' hours of work. The committee, and I am sure all members, are grateful to Angela for her contribution to Voiceprint over the past five years. Angela, thank you so much for your contribution, good luck in your future endeavours. Ed. Committee

Thank goodness the physical grind of domesticity has eased. Wash days are not weighed down by boiled sheets hauled from a copper with a pole, nor rung out by a hand turned mangle. When I read Palmer and Kirchhof's pieces in this issue, I was reminded of own mother's red blistered hands and her enormous excitement when we got a primitive washing machine! I'm sure the articles in this Voiceprint will trigger memories for many.

The stories are about Australian women.— migrants. "Open All Hours" is Gwen Palmer's journey through the century. She came from England in 1911. Astrid Kirchhof's piece is of German and Austrians who arrived in the thirties. All were economic or politic refugees. Despite different languages, cultures and educational backgrounds, their identities were largely shaped by their similar focus on family survival and supporting their husbands.

With them, we cross time, continents and our own country. We move through urban and rural economic circumstances. With hardly any financial reward or recognition, "life was not meant to be easy". Accounts of domestic grind and business minutiae responsibility, amaze. Monumental sacrifice and personal achievement are glossed over but perseverance, resilience, and humour shine through.

Gwen who worked almost 24 hours a day running a complicated market and household, took exception at being valued at 16/9d! Susie's mother revolted, by refusing to open a garage door! Well may we smile at these small expressions of Women's Liberation but these incredible women are gutsy role models for the next millennium!

The other pieces in this Newsletter and the notes on the Biennial Conference once again remind us how silence is often louder than blabber. The articles are filled with insights we hope you enjoy, and also inspire us to continue filling voids.

Katja Grynberg

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New Members July 1999 to October 1999

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| Philippa Gemmell-Smith | Teacher, interested in pioneer history and the Bicentennial National Trail |
| Valerie Rubie | Teacher, researcher, interested in Chinese history in Australia, family and local history |
| Angela George | Historian |
| Marion Armstrong | Interested in history and oral history |
| Jennifer Thompson | Sound studio co-ordinator, documentary making, interested in cultures and languages |
| Robin Appleton | Interested in history and oral history |
| Susan Leong | Auditor |
| Margaret Parker | Journalist, producer |
| Angela Potts | Retired, interested in family history |
| Leanne Tam | Auditor |
| Janet Green | Registered nurse |
| Jeanette McAlpine | Interested in history of railway workers including women workers |
| George Cady | Retired engineer, interested in engineering history |
| Greg Borschmann | Oral historian, interested in cultural and natural heritage |
| Kevin Bradley | Sound archivist, National Library of Australia |
| Ian Goldsmith | Librarian, National Library of Australia |
| Shelly Grant | Sound archivist, National Library of Australia |
| Jo Kijas | Student |
| Kristy Muir | Student, interested in war history |
| Hilary Robinson | Museum educator |
| Margaret Mary Torrens | Interested in oral history |
| Cecily Brady | System administrator, interested in family history, architecture |
| Maria Whipp | Interested in oral history |

Welcome to all our new members, especially those who joined at the National Biennial Conference in Melbourne in September. It was great to meet you and share the buzz of that occasion. If any of you would like to expand on your interests, or if we have not recorded them accurately please contact the Editor and we will record your comments in the next edition of Voiceprint. Thank you all for your support.

Nuts and Bolts – short items of interest to members

At the Biennial General Meeting it was resolved that the National Secretariat be taken on by the NSW Branch. Rosie Bloch, Judy Wing and Bernice Evans as our NSW office bearers will also undertake the duties of the National Executive. A grateful thank you to Stuart Reid and the West Australia Branch for their two years of custodianship. The next Conference will be in 2001. It is hoped that this may take place in Canberra, with the support of the National Library as part of the “Celebration of Federation”. However this will depend on finding a Conference Committee in Canberra itself. Confirmation and further details later.

Recognition for Sue McClean. Sue has been awarded equal third prize for her paper submitted for consideration for the Max Kelly Medal. Sue’s paper “Progress the Iconoclast”: Campaigns, Ideologies and Dilemmas of Historic Building Preservation in New South Wales, 1900 – 1939. Sue’s paper was published in the journal *Public History Review* at the end of 1998. Congratulations to Sue! (*A challenge for Members! Who will be next? The Max Kelly Medal is awarded annually by the History Council of NSW. Entries close May 1 each year*)

REPORTS

National Biennial Conference

Report from Oral History Association of Australia National Biennial Conference 2 – 5 September 1999. Held at the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Alastair Thomson delivered the keynote address in which he gave an international perspective on oral history since its beginning in the late 1940s. As well as being a geographical tour he outlined many of the issues experienced in common around the world, and also some of the differences. He mused on whether there was a 'right way' to do oral history. He pondered the issues pertaining to memory, methodology and the technological future. And he concluded with the challenge to oral historians, as to many others of course, to stay abreast of ethical understandings and guidelines to cover the new situations in cyberspace. However, 'as oral historians we need to remember our own recent past and to adopt the lessons we have learnt about memory and history, about the humanity of our craft.'

Australia is valued internationally for its oral history community and the work done here in the communities, the universities and the Oral History Association of Australia.

Professor Roy du Pre from South Africa shared a session with Ambrose Chalarimeri from the far north

Kimberleys and Professor Tom King from Nevada. They looked at how oral history has added to the historical record when the history of a particular people or culture is not necessarily perceived chronologically or where it might in fact have been treated as 'invisible'. There is a real issue, especially in South Africa, for rewriting the school history textbooks. Oral history will be germane for the recording of the history of those previously seen to have been non-participants.

Dr Rob Perks, Curator of Oral History at the British Library, introduced us to the Millennium Project, The Century Speaks, which he is coordinating together with the BBC in the UK. The voices of thousands of people will be recorded through 40 regional radio stations. They will address themes including Living Together, Eating and Drinking, Money, Playtime and Going places, Life and Death, Beliefs and Fears, Who are We, Belonging, Crime and the Law. There is not a theme for war nor specifically for the Depression as these topics have been already extensively covered. They will appear of course in the course of other

themes such as Growing Up and Where We Live. Radio programs from the interviews will start in autumn 1999 (in fact the week following the conference) and will continue to be presented into early 2000. The archive of all of the original recordings will be deposited in the British Library. It is a very exciting project indeed and the largest general life story ever in oral history.

The largest single oral history project is arguably Stephen Spielberg's Survivor of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. It is now almost completed world wide and Australia contributed nearly 2500 interviews with Holocaust survivors living here. Pauline Rockman, Regional Coordinator for Australia reported on this.

I offered my paper entitled, The First of those who Know...The beginning of the century through the eyes of those who were young when the century was young. The Bicentennial Oral History Project. I examined not only the tales of the narrators, but what other information they gave during the telling of their stories. It was a pleasure to be able to highlight this important Mitchell Library collection.

Gwenda Davey reported on the pilot project of Bringing them Home, Oral History Project. ABC Radio National whose Social History Unit has been much enlarged was represented by Jane Connors and Bill Bunbury. Siobhan McHugh spoke in her usual informed

and lively manner about her project on public housing. She interviewed Bryan Brown, the film actor, and a group of Samoan chiefs amongst others. Her book, soon to be launched is entitled, Shelter from the Storm. Bryan Brown, Samoan Chieftains and the little matter of a roof over our heads.

Esoteric subjects where the use of oral history is so important included a pioneering study of the British Commonwealth Overseas Forces; women's political mobilisation in rural Victoria in the 1970s; the families of prisoners of war in WWII; how that war was perceived by adolescent girls through their reading; changes in rural life; women's narratives in post-war British migration to Australia; the story of Walter Street in Claremont, WA; stories of the forest, specifically those of tree-fellers and many more.

The National Library of Australia was well represented and the Conference listened with interest to the technological recommendations made by that institution. The short answer seems to be digital, but when it comes to longevity and archival standards the jury continues to be out. Like all institutions we stay in touch with the technical staff at the NLA so that we can follow their lead when they feel sure of their own ground. They were able at the conference to give us the state of thinking in regard to technology right up to date. I noted

that their advice was also closely attended by Rob Perks of the British Library.

The Conference was very well attended even to the last session on Sunday afternoon. This was addressed by pioneer oral historian Wendy Lowenstein who spoke about Tom Hills of the Waterside Workers' Federation in Melbourne. She also spoke extensively about the recent Patricks waterfront dispute. It would seem that here she was able to combine both her favourite roles – activist and oral historian. There is sure to be a publication!

Wendy Lowenstein was one of five Honorary Life Members honoured in this, the twenty-first year since the establishment of the Oral History Association of Australia. Now in her 73rd year she is as feisty and fascinating a speaker as ever and has published a great deal since her ground-breaking and very well-known *Weevils in the Flour on the Depression*. Louise Douglas, New South Wales, was also made an honorary member. *(note citation elsewhere in this newsletter)*

The standard of presentation at the conference was very high and the topics widely varied. Rob Perks had asked me who was up and coming in oral history in Australia. I hoped that the Conference would answer that question and this it resoundingly did. Oral history is clearly alive and well in the universities at post-graduate level and more and more

consultants are being engaged for research in the general community. It is very encouraging indeed.

The State Library of Victoria generously hosted the Conference and, at the welcome reception given by them, the Queensland Branch publication *Talking Together, A Guide to Community Oral History Projects* by Lesley Jenkins was launched. It is well-illustrated with examples as well as pictures and the whole is charmingly presented with very pertinent cartoons. It will be a very useful publication for practitioners and community leaders alike.

Journal No. 21 containing some papers, was published at the conference.

Congratulations to Leslie Alves and OHAA (Victoria) for an inspiring, (beautifully catered!) and well-run conference. **Rosemary Block**

July Seminar

This seminar attracted a very large audience; obviously many members are interested in learning about using video to add another dimension to recording their interviews. Frank Heimans, producer and director of the SBS archival and television series Australian Biography had a wealth of knowledge, illustrations and insights into the production of this series, which he shared with the audience. Not many of the group were experienced in using video but Frank made his information so accessible we all felt inspired to try this medium and rush off to buy a camera! Frank had recorded interviews with many famous Australians for the programme and used short excerpts from many of the interviews to illustrate the techniques involved in using this medium. Oral historians I am sure are all convinced that the recorded voice and the silences reveal much of the personality of the interviewee, as well

informing us about particular events and topics. It was fascinating to see how 'seeing and hearing' expanded our insight into the personality being interviewed and the feelings and emotion generated. We see so many interviews on television, where time is of the essence, it was particularly enjoyable to see examples of the medium used to advantage. All good things take time to mature show their true colours, and so it is with a video interview. Frank showed us how important it is to take time, allow the thoughts to develop, the personality and the character to show through – keep the camera rolling! Thank you Frank for sharing with us. **Joyce Cribb**

Oral History for Young and Old

On August 23 Rosemary Block welcomed the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Aquilina, to a student oral history presentation in the Metcalfe Auditorium at the State Library. Rosemary explained that this was a unique occasion of partnership between the Oral History Association of Australia, NSW Branch, the Ethnic Communities Council and Moriah College Primary School.

The oral history project was conducted by ninety Year 6 students from Moriah College as a celebration of the Year of the Older Person. The students recorded their oral history interviews in small groups. Each group explored the life of a senior member of the community, preparing and asking questions about their cultural backgrounds, their childhood memories and the events and achievements of their adult life. Most of the interviewees were recruited through the Ethnic Communities Council, so that the diversity of their life experiences reflected the diversity of multicultural Australian society at the end of the second millennium.

The OHAA, in its commitment to the training of young oral historians, played a major role in guiding the students, in the practices and protocols of oral history, and in hosting the formal presentation which was attended by the

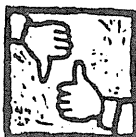
student oral historians, the senior living historians, members of the Ethnic Communities Council and members of the Moriah College school community.

In addressing the gathering, both the Minister and the Chairman of the Ethnic Communities Council, Mr. Paul Nicolaou, expressed their regard for the high quality of the written documents and the oral presentations, which were featured. Mr. Aquilina spoke about his personal understanding, as the child of immigrant parents, of the need to encourage young people to pay attention to their own cultural heritage, and his commitment to oral history as a communication channel between the generations.

The students provided impressive evidence of how much they gained from the oral history experience. Their written documents were prepared with care and imagination. However, the highlight was the spoken words with which they paid tribute to the qualities they discovered in their living historians,

In concluding the presentation, Mrs. Donna Delabaere, Principal of Moriah College Primary School, spoke of the value of oral history as a learning strategy, which addresses a wide range of skills¹⁵, educational, social and cultural.

Ruth Wilson



Talking Together – Katja Grynberg

Talking Together – A Guide to Community Oral History Projects (Oral History Association – Queensland Inc), by Lesley Jenkins <ISBN: 0-9591400-7-7>, is money well spent. It's terrific value at only \$10. The booklet is a practical, easy to use and logical guide for newcomers and professionals. Everything you will ever need to know is outlined. There is a wealth of information about building and planning projects, training, research, documentation, selection, technique, logging and transcribing, equipment, storage, evaluation and end products. The varied format and cartoons make for easy and delightful reading. The inclusion of sample questions, hints, ethical guidelines, bibliography, resources, release forms and fee outlines make it an invaluable asset.



Mosaic – Alan Jacobs

MOSAIC by Diane Armstrong (Published by Random House Australia – \$19.95)

Reviewed by Alan Jacobs (In Voiceprint No 18 Diane told us about her personal journey and the reactions of some of her relatives when gathering the oral histories used as the basis for writing this book.)

There is something fascinating about large families. Perhaps it's the mayhem, the sibling rivalries, and the sheer audacity of bringing so many children into this world. Diane Armstrong's *Mosaic* exploits this fascination through a free-flowing, almost novel-like account of her forebears, spanning five generations, one hundred years and the most turbulent events witnessed this century. It is no small achievement and it bristles with life.

Beginning in 1890 in Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter of Krakow, her parental grandfather, Daniel Baldinger, a devout and industrious Jew, divorces the wife he loves because she is barren. He wants a son to say *Kaddish* for him when he dies, so that his soul can find eternal peace. He marries the younger Lieba who bears him six sons – and five daughters.

Armstrong develops a monumental account of the trials and tribulations of the Baldinger family members, she pieces the entire jigsaw together like a diligent detective, chronicling family

rivalries, some of which have lasted to the present, criss-crossing the lives of her father and mother, and her numerous relatives, revealing their dreams and disappointments, triumphs and tragedies.

This book is structured like a classic Greek drama. Part one introduces the members of the Baldinger family, detailing their childhood, the spouses they marry, their status by 1939. Part two is the conflict, in this case the horrendous struggle of each member to survive the Holocaust, a family torn asunder. Part three is the resolutions, dealing with post-war stories of the surviving family members, separated by four continents.

It would be facile to classify *Mosaic* merely as a Holocaust book: its purpose embraces more than that. Yet the Holocaust gives the book its spine; it sews the fate of each family member and provides the motivation for the journey Armstrong embarks upon. And it provides moments of small insights

from personal anecdotes easily overlooked in more academic studies.

Most of the Baldingers survived the Holocaust on their wits and rode their good fortune. By contrast, Armstrong's mother and sister were the only survivors in their family.

Each story in the Holocaust is unique and as Armstrong elicits the unique story of every family member it becomes a microcosmic study of hell. The account of her own family's survival is gripping. Posing as Catholics in Pizszczac, a small village in Poland, she and her parents cling to their survival by a "gossamer thread" in an environment where Jews were denounced for fifty zlotys.

Mosaic beautifully evokes the lost world of pre-war Jewish Poland. It contrasts eerily with the Poland Armstrong visits fifty years later, a Poland devoid of Jewish life – familiar but unrecognisable.

The author's own psychological journey provides a most fascinating part of the book. She is on a desperate search to find the child within, the little girl who'd spent the war years as a Catholic in Poland.

Streets evoke memories, houses provide glimpses of her past life. All help to validate a former existence she can only remember in shards. But it is not until she meets, almost by chance, the aging Catholic priest who once

befriended her father in Pizszczac, that she finally begins to understand the miracle of her own survival.

Though there is much to be gained from this book, it is not without blemishes. There is an emphasis on the trivial and occasionally it intrudes, breaking a powerful narrative. And a tendency to be repetitive becomes irritating at times. Nevertheless, *Mosaic* is a work of many levels. Ultimately it succeeds because most of its characters demonstrate how the human spirit can soar way, way above adversity.

(Alan Jacobs is a freelance writer. His anthology of Australian Jewish writing Enough Already has been recently published by Allen & Unwin)

ARTICLES

Gwen Palmer “Open All Hours”

A story of long hours and hard work in shops and stores.

Alan Veenstra compiled this oral history from recordings he made with Mrs. Palmer a resident of Nareen Gardens, Central Coast, NSW

England

Gwen was born into the Cowell family in 1909 in England and came to Australia at the age of two years when she and her family rejoined her father Simeon (Alfred Simeon Cowell) who had gone ahead to Australia before sending for his family. Gwen's father had learnt his trade as an Engineer at Napiers in England. Both Gwen and her mother suffered from bronchitis and it was their family doctor who suggested that Gwen and her mother would enjoy better health in a warmer climate such as in Australia. Gwen's parents came from large families: Gwen's mother came from a family of ten children (two of her brothers died in childbirth). Her mother's father had been a Master Gardener and her paternal grandfather was the head of Caxton's, a Printing firm in Kent. The Cowell Family were strict Plymouth Brethren, much too strict for Alfred Simeon and little contact existed with his family after Simeon changed to his wife's Anglican Church membership (Gwen is aware of only one letter to her father, received from Simeon's father after they arrived from England).



Gwen Palmer (on right) at Christmas Party at 'Nareen Gardens'

Gwen's parents, Ethel May and Alfred Simeon married when they were 21 years old. Violet, their eldest daughter was born in 1905. Gwen's mother (expecting her third child) had to wait until after her son (Howard William) was born in 1911 before leaving England, because her mother's parents insisted they stay in England until after the birth. Gwen suffered whooping cough, which not only spread to her older sister, but also to the baby-brother who died at the age of five months and prior to the family's departure to Australia; the baby was therefore never to be seen by his father!

Australia

Having left England the family arrived in Australia in November 1911. They had travelled by sea on one of the Cunard White Star Liners sailing around the Cape of Good Hope and Gwen remembers from her mother's stories afterwards, that during the voyage they had sailed close to a severe hurricane with all passengers confined to their cabins at the height of the storm.

Gwen's father bought a Motorcar Garage in Western Australia and ran it until the start of the First World War when he sold it prior to joining the Defence Force. Gwen's mother gave birth to another daughter, Doris Edna, known affectionately as Dolly. Gwen was to continue to suffer the after effects of the whooping cough. It affected her eyes and frequent visits to eye specialists in Perth were necessary. She could not attend school until, at the age of eight, and after she had an eye operation. Awaiting her eye operation and living at Cottesloe, at the Cottesloe beach, Gwen would run along the pier, jump in the water and ride the waves back to shore. Gwen recalls that there were at the time some six bathing sheds on wheels at the northern side of the beach; the sheds had long shafts so that it was possible to relocate them over the water so that 'bathing ladies' could enter the water without setting foot on the sand. Gwen's parents' home was near

Peppermint Grove, about ten minutes from the beach and it also was close to Kings Jetty on the Swan River. Here she spent many an hour catching crabs on a cord fishing line or dog paddling to the yachts lying in mid stream.

One of Gwen's hobbies was growing silk worms, costing a halfpenny (1/2cent) for 50 eggs or one penny (1 cent) for live worms. She collected mulberry tree leaves and fed them to the worms; afterwards she would spin the silk thread. The family did not have a mulberry tree and the children would go along to Peppermint Grove where all the big house had trees. By picking the fruit they could have the mulberry leaves, and the households ate the berries.

World War I in Western Australia

Gwen's father, Alfred Simeon, sold his thriving motor garage and enlisted with the Australian Infantry Forces (AIF) wanting to become a pilot. Because there was no Australian Air Force as yet established those wishing to become Airmen were shipped to England for training. On conclusion of their courses they formed the nucleus of the Australian Flying Corps, which later became the Royal Australian Air Force. Alfred Simeon was to become a contemporary of many well-known names in the early days of Australian aviation: Kingsford Smith, Ulm, Hinkler, and the founder of Qantas, Sir Hudson

Fysh. He must have served with some distinction because after a stint of service in France, he was seconded for a while to the RAF in England to assist in the development of aircraft engines and was offered an opportunity to participate in the first flight to Australia performed finally by Smithy and Ulm.

Gwen's younger sister Dolly was 6 weeks old and Gwen was 7 when her father left for overseas for his pilot training. During the First World War groceries were to become scarce because they came by ship from Sydney (no overland train-track had as yet been established) and frequent dock strikes also caused shortages. To produce butter a small tin of cream was shaken violently so as to make it for spreading on slices of bread. Gwen's family followed the custom that any groceries purchased were paid for every two weeks and Mr Luce the grocer rewarded payment by giving a small cone-bag of boiled lollies, which in turn were used to sweeten cups of tea! These were war years so 'we made the best of what we had', Gwen recalls.

Gwen had her eye operation in Perth Children's Hospital where she spent her 8th birthday. Her mother bought her a beautiful celluloid baby doll, which she kept for 70 years and it remained as a lifetime possession.

New South Wales

At the end of the War her father's Commanding Officer, Colonel Oswald Watt and who was a Director of Mercantile Mutual Insurance Company, persuaded Gwen's father to move to Sydney, and the Colonel arranged for him to accept a job as an Insurance Assessor. Simeon had his own office in the Mercantile Building in Pitt Street Sydney and he stayed with the company until he retired in 1950. In his job he not only acted as an independent assessor for the Company but acted for other insurance companies as well.

At this time the family lived at Lane Cove and her father was to build a home there. Gwen met her first boy friend there at the age of seventeen and she eventually married him in 1932.

The 1920's were a great time for beautiful musicals being shown at Her Majesty's Theatre, which was situated on the corner of Pitt and King streets, Sydney, opposite Prouds Jewellers. It was much later pulled down and Woolworths built a store there, and, later again it became the main entry to Centrepoint shopping Centre. The family saw great shows at Her Majesty's, their mother and father taking them to most shows. Having seats in the Dress Circle they wore semi-evening frocks and saw famous artists such as Gladys Moncrief in "Maid of the Mountains", "Rio Rita" and "White Horse Inn", Josie Melville in

“Sally”, Manie Bremmer in “Rose Manie”, Nelson Eddy, George Gee comedian in “Kid Boots”, Cecil Kellaway in “Princess Charming”.

For some time Gwen’s father pursued obtaining a patent for a special car gasket he had devised and he spent many nights in their garage developing it, as well as producing its blueprints. Meanwhile another baby girl, Bertha, was born to the family and both her mother and the baby were very sick. It seems that both his wife’s and his daughter’s frequent illnesses prevented Gwen’s father from giving the ‘Car Patent Device’ his full attention. The numerous Specialist Doctor’s fees for his wife and baby daughter, resulted in restricting the family’s finances and the Patent did not proceed towards finality. Her father’s love of cars never ceased, and if he was not taking the family out for a drive on the weekend he could always be found in the garage tinkering with the car.

Gwen had to give up school and did not go to work because of the ill health of the second of two sisters born after her and also her mother was not in good health. Gwen was, however, ‘passionately’ fond of gardening and spent a lot of her time outside in the garden.

On her 16th birthday Gwen received a violin from her father and was taught to play by a German teacher, Charles Wentzel, who was keen for her to

continue her music studies so that she could become part of an orchestra she had wanted to start up. Gwen was to have been a principal player but she wasn’t interested in being in an orchestra and Mr Wentzel did not proceed with the idea. However Gwen had gained honours, in her first examination in music.

Life Before Supermarkets

After marrying in 1932 Gwen lived for a while at Lindfield, where her husband managed a grocery store for a Mr Anderson. They then went to Drummoyne to manage the Woodlands store there. They disliked the area and couldn’t move quickly enough when her husband was offered a position at Willoughby after 10 weeks. The grocery store at Willoughby had been purchased by Broadhead and Barcham, who operated 12 ‘Cash and Carry’ stores. Previously the company had gone into voluntary liquidation because its secretary had embezzled a few thousand pounds (a large some of money at the time). The store run by Mr Palmer was to become the smaller of two shops of identical name in the same street, and was located some distance from the main shops; it came into being when the original owners retired from their family grocery business and Mr Barcham decided to take it over. Gwen’s husband, Harold, was given the position of the manager and they lived on the premises,

staying there for 17 years. (Many years later Woolworths purchased the chain of Broadhead and Barcham Stores). After World War II the store was moved further down the street into a more convenient location.

Gwen was to help out in the store for which she received no wages. This arrangement continued because Gwen liked her work and therefore stayed on for more than fourteen years. One day the Store's owner came to say that Gwen was to be placed on the pay roll (because personnel problems had developed in a similar situation at the Firm's Crows Nest store). She was awarded a wage of one pound, sixteen shillings and nine pence per week (\$3.68). However the sting that came with it was that, because Gwen and her husband lived on the store premises, from that day their rent was increased by one pound! Gwen calculated that her salary was therefore 16/9d or \$1.68, which was a small amount at the time. Gwen reflects that at the time she did not mind working without a wage, but took exception to her work being valued at a mere 16/9d! Her husband however persuaded her to stay on.

Operating a Grocer Store

Most days Gwen was in the shop at 5am and worked on well after closing times, however these were depression times, and Gwen worked in the shop as well as

raising a family. Wholesale items arrived in bulk, with the exception of packets of self-raising flour and dripping. Biscuits were loose, to be packed in paper bags to customer orders. Sugar came in 60 lb (27 kg) bags, plain flour and icing sugar arrived in 40 lb (18 kg) calico bags and were all repacked in the shop to smaller quantities. Butter arrived in 54 lb (24 kg) wooden boxes and had to be 'patted' into 1/2 and 1 lb parcels. The bacon came in full sides, which then had to be 'boned' and cut into rashers. Everything was weighed and placed into large boxes under the shop's counter ready for sale. The large cheeses were skinned and customer orders were filled by cutting through the cheese with a wire having two 'dolly' pegs on the ends.

Every Thursday Mr Palmer walked around the homes collecting orders, which were put together in the shop before delivery on Saturday mornings by two boys using a 'billy cart'. Most of the supplies came from the head office of Barcham and were delivered on Thursday mornings, so that Gwen did most of the packing of customer's orders. Mr Palmer was a very trusting person and Gwen recalls incidents where people bought items promising to pay and were never likely to return to honour their promises. There were no refrigerators then and blocks of ice were brought in 3 times a week for the ice chest. Shop windows were dressed with groceries and small

cardboard advertisements, and the window displays had therefore to be changed every week. The shop opened from 8.30am to 6.00pm weekdays and to 9.00pm Friday nights and 1.00pm Saturday afternoons. As time went on they were allowed to employ two teenage boys and had the use of a motor bike with a sidecar to collect and deliver groceries.

At the outbreak of the Second World War (Gwen's children then being Pamela, 5 years and Howard, 12 months old) her husband Harold decided to join the Defense Force and Gwen remained to manage the shop. Gwen says no truer words were spoken than 'Life wasn't meant to be easy...!' She struggled on without her husband's presence with occasional help from her sister-in-law until the latter in turn had to look after her own mother. Gwen said it was difficult to get someone reliable to look after her son and daughter. During those times Gwen's father-in-law died and then a few weeks later her mother died. Fortunately Harold was stationed at 2 Stores Depot, Waterloo, and was able to come home most nights.

Gwen remembers that when her husband left his employment to join the war-effort he was, somewhat later, given a glowing reference. Harold also, then remarked that Gwen was not likely to get one, for the perceived reason that for all those years she worked for below

award wages, and that this would surely reflect adversely on the store owners.

Ardlethon

Ardlethon was a small country-town in the wheat and sheepbelt of the Riverina, having a large tin-mine nearby. When Gwen's husband retired from the Air Force he said he was not content to work for others again and the family moved to Ardlethon to run the General Store which also incorporated a Tea-room. The two shops were opposite the railway station and included the newsagency. Newspapers, however, were delivered by the postman! Later the couple purchased the bakery next door and connected the three shops to become the commercial hub of the town. The family worked long hours – 7am to 11pm for seven days a week. After that time of day the town's electricity was frequently turned off, in which case the cleaning up in the shops was done by light from a kerosene lamp. Gwen made pies and sausage-rolls in a woodburning stove for sale in the Tea-room. Son Howard's daily chore was to collect milk from the local dairy farm, which he brought back in two cans hanging from the handle-bars of his bicycle. Gwen's father came to live with the family at Ardlethon, where the three adults of the family became prominent as members of the local Lawn Bowling Club.

The citizens of Ardlethon recall that

Gwen was the founding President of the Women's Bowling Club and her father's engineering skills were frequently called on to affect repairs to the Club's poker machines. After some ten years at Ardlethon Mr Palmer got ill and they sold out. The family moved to Bellambi to run another newsagency, however this was also a strain because this time Mr Palmer had to do newspaper deliveries himself with the help of his son. Gwen preferred to run the shop if only to keep an eye on her husband who tended to be over sympathetic to people who would or could not pay. The ill health of Mr Palmer contributed to the decision to sell the newsagency, however the purchaser took advantage of his trusting nature and the full purchase price was never received, partly because the business was allowed to run down in a short time through bad management. Gwen's husband died at the age of 68 after having several strokes.

Gwen herself gained employment in a Wollongong store and worked for some time before retiring herself. Later she and her daughter Pamela moved to Sefton in order to be closer to her son Howard.

Central Coast

Gwen had loving ideas about her homeland and she was delighted to look up long-lost relatives and enjoy the countryside, when son Howard and his wife Joy took her back to England in 1987 – for the first time since leaving there in the year 1911.

Gwen and her daughter Pam moved to the Central Coast into a self-care unit. Later Pam, who has a disability, moved to be on her own in a unit nearby Nareen Gardens Retirement Village. Gwen latterly lived in the Hostel at Nareen Gardens and scored probably a Guinness record by having gone up in a Hot-air balloon in order to celebrate her 80th birthday!

For some time she kept the loan records of the Residents' library at Nareen and these she kept with as meticulous detail as must have been her past attentions to the running of the shops. In her days at Nareen Gardens Gwen got much enjoyment from looking at the beautifully kept lawns because "the gardens always attract a great variety of birds at my doorway".

Gwen quietly slipped away on October 29, 1998 and is survived by daughter Pam, son Howard and Howard's only daughter Vicki. Gwen was especially proud that Vicki had given her three great grandchildren, Jasmine, Rhys and Emily Rose, named after Harold's mother.

Experience of Jewish Women that Immigrated from Germany and Austria to Australia in the 1930s

by Astrid Mignon Kirchof MA (Hist)

(Astrid lives in Munich, however her taped interviews made as part of the research for her thesis are held at the State Library of NSW)

This article resulted from a master thesis handed in at the University of New South Wales in 1999 about German and Austrian Jewish women who immigrated to Australia in the 1930s and 40s. Here, the last part of this work about the women's experiences after their arrival in Australia, a country of which many of the immigrants only had a vague awareness, is of interest. Besides the emotional aspect of adjusting to a new climate, language and culture, I was inquisitive about the work conditions of the immigrants. Therefore, I was curious to see if this also affected them and if their new lives and work experiences changed their self-image.

To learn about the women's impressions and experiences of that time, it seemed the obvious thing to interview them. This was the main research technique adopted for the thesis, and altogether I interviewed 14 women. Where it was not possible to interview the actual immigrant women, I interviewed their daughters. In getting into contact with the women I

experienced many different things, including rejection. However, mostly I was accepted. Some women just did not want to or could not speak about this part of their past, others could not imagine that they had anything interesting to say and therefore refused. It seems that women still underestimate the significance of their lives. One notable example was that of a woman who agreed to give me an interview but called me a couple of days later to tell me that her husband had written a book about both their lives and that she would be happy to give it to me as a present. When I explained that I was interested in her point of view, she referred me again to the book saying that it explained everything. Indeed, the book is interesting, but it does not reveal the female dimension of their past.

I also tried to prepare myself that I might not be accepted because I am a non-Jewish German. When it happened that I was rejected I learned that even if one is prepared for it, it is difficult to deal with this experience. All the women I finally interviewed were welcoming,

warmhearted, interested and even helpful when it came to arranging further interviews. The youngest interviewee was 66 and the oldest was 93 years of age. I met in a café with some before the actual interview so that we could talk about the questions I would ask and explain more about my expectations and what I wanted to know about their lives. Others would tell me: "You can come right away and I will answer you everything I remember." Most interviews took place in the interviewee's home, and a few in the Jewish Museum in Sydney. At the minimum I stayed with my interviewees for two hours, but with some I spent a whole day. A few I met again after the interview at a private meeting. The interview itself was held in either English or German whatever the women preferred. Nearly all of the first generation interviewees still spoke German fluently, even with a German or Viennese accent.

When I started working on this project I learned that there were less Jewish refugee women from Germany still living in Sydney than I had assumed. Therefore, I extended my interviewee circle to include Austrian Jewish refugee women. For the interviews I developed a questionnaire with two sections: 1) the years before the immigration in Germany and Austria, and 2) the time immediately afterwards in Australia. It

also turned out that the time factor was a problem. Many women in the Jewish community were no longer alive or too old to be interviewed. Since I was looking for women who were already married in their home country, the number of available women was reduced even more. Finally I was able to conduct 14 interviews, six of them with Austrian and eight with German women. Within the group of Austrian women half belonged to the immigrant's daughter's generation. I also interviewed three German daughters talking about their mothers' lives, and five German women from the actual immigrant generation. In the text of this article, when I have referred to information revealed in the interviews, I have mainly used the phrase 'The interviewees or their mothers (respectively) expressed that...'. It is always the actual immigrant generation I am interested in. Therefore here, 'the interviewee' refers to the woman who immigrated with her husband in the 1930s. The expression 'or their mother (respectively)' indicates that I interviewed the daughter about their mother's life. Consequently, it was not the daughter's experiences that were examined. Furthermore, for my research it was important to know how the mother felt and coped with her situation in comparison to her husband. Since I did not interview the husbands, the

answers were influenced by the wives' or daughters' convictions.

Apart from the fact that in general it was easier for younger people to immigrate and adjust, a majority of 64% of the interviewees stated that they did not feel fearful or timid. On the contrary they were happy to be in the new country and be rescued, and they looked positively towards the future or were "prepared to make it". Most women stated that they felt good on the ship and for many of them it was experienced as the only holiday they were going to have for a long time. One woman described her and the other immigrants' feelings as follows: "We were all young. We had the cheapest wine and Arnott's biscuits and we had lots of fun [and] parties. We never took it serious. ... The climate suited me, I loved the outdoor life, I was an outdoor person. I loved it, we went to the beach. ...We were both (respondent and husband) very happy from the beginning." Even though many praised the beauty of the country, still 29% stated that the heat was nearly unbearable in the beginning. Some women also needed time to get over the "primitive" housing conditions they found. One respondent talked about her impressions in the first month after arrival: "...we landed in Kings Cross and we found there a little flat, a unit. And we had enough money to pay a deposit. . We were not used to the heat, and I

didn't know how to treat a child in the heat. Instead of putting things on I was taking them off, you see. ... She (daughter.) got sunstroke. She cried and cried, we didn't know. ...We were in this place, it was a terrible room in Kings Cross. ...We were there for about a month. We were in this place. It was awful because it had mice and bugs. I've never seen a bug in my life before. ...We didn't know a soul, nobody who would come to help you or anything."

While not all respondents particularly answered the question of whether they suffered from culture shock after coming from Europe, still ten women recalled theirs or their mother's feelings. 29% replied that Australia was culturally way behind Europe and this had a deep impact on them. They were missing the food they were used to, and even if they could buy groceries with the same name as in Europe, it was not of the same quality. One woman even held the opinion that still today the food quality was less than in Europe. Moreover, they lacked amusement. There were no operas, concerts or theatre plays. The only diversion they could afford from time to time was going to the movies. Yet, a further 29% of interviewed women were not distressed by this fact. One woman stated that they had more important problems to think about than high culture. Another respondent announced an awareness that this was

lacking, but in exchange, Australia had offered a lot of opportunities that they did not have in Europe. One more respondent remarked that she and her friends just laughed off the bad food quality.

As Konrad Kwiet points out more than 60% of all Jews in Sydney settled in the Eastern Suburbs. Today the immigrants live mostly in Bondi, Randwick, Bronte, Woollahra or in more expensive areas such as Dover Heights, Double Bay, Rose Bay and Bellevue Hill. In the first years they also stayed in Kings Cross or even more in the west in Enfield or Earlwood. Later on many of them preferred to live in the more quiet area of the North Shore on the other side of the Harbour. 21% of the interviewees settled here, in Wollstonecraft and Lane Cove.

Until the respondent finally settled in the home in which she was staying at the time of the interview she moved around within the Eastern Suburbs area. Marion Berghahn relates that a restless moving had its roots in the deeper feeling of homelessness and the desire to find an agreeable environment. She stresses that the loss of one's home through persecution is one of the most crucial events in a person's life. Taking the difficulties and problems into consideration, the interviews disclosed that not only the women, but also their husbands, coped considerably well with the situation they were thrown into. Half

of all women or their mothers respectively, did not feel desperate or had devastating problems with learning the language and adjusting to the exile. For some it was also easier because they immigrated with their family and thus, did not feel as homesick and lonely as other refugees. Those who had problems in settling mentioned that they were scared of the future, that they felt lonely, or could not handle the loss of status they had suffered. One woman was even convinced that "he could adjust better than I ...because he was more intelligent. He could work on himself. I was more spoilt" 43% of all husbands coped well enough, so that both spouses gave loving assistance and relief to each other in difficult circumstances. A few times it was stated that the husband soon found a job or that he engaged himself in an organisation or party which helped him to adjust. Sometimes he just had to be stronger than his wife, since she felt more distressed about the situation, or finally, it might just have been that because of his personality he could not let himself down. However, half of all men were unhelpful or were even a burden to their wives. One daughter remarked curtly: "My father talked a lot, but my mother seemed to do all the work." In one case the father died "of a broken heart" still in Shanghai, before the immigration to Australia. Another daughter recalled that the father was a

pessimist and would put the problems of coping on his wife, because "my father didn't make changes easily at any time." Some German husbands, even after years, felt homesick for Germany and could not adapt to the Australian life properly. It took a long time for the refugees to re-establish themselves in their old professions and often they had to be inventive in building up a new life. In particular, Jewish medical officers and lawyers had to overcome the suspicions of their non-Jewish colleagues. Most academics had to pass their exams again. Some tried to work as scholars or aimed at cultural careers, especially music. Those interviewees who tried to find a job in economics went into the toy or textile industry.

The Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS) settled a number of refugees on small properties that included poultry farms, mixed farms and glass house tomato growing endeavours. The Chelsea Park Training farm, an agricultural enterprise founded in 1938, took immigrants that could not find work in the city. The end of the Second World War concluded the AJWS's involvement in rural issues because post war immigrants had little interest in working on farms. Most of all interviewees and their husbands managed to find work after arrival in Sydney. In time, only four men (31%), but ten women (71%) had to accept a

complete change of their former occupation. 77% of all couples worked in the trading business as shop or company owners. They opened grocery and textile retail stores or toy, cloth and leather goods companies. 23% of men were academics. Only one immigrant, who practised as a lawyer, could not go back to his occupation and instead built up a cleaning cloth factory together with his wife. Two couples went to the country to be farmers and sheep shearers respectively, but after the war, opened their own shop. One interviewee remembered their first time on the farm during wartime: "Having the farm was a lot of advantages. ...We had eggs, we had cheese, we had butter, we had ...everything, you know, because we had the machines. He (husband) made the milk, you know, skim milk ...and the other things we used up for butter. I helped with the washing of the eggs you know, with the machine. The machine was in the back veranda and I did that and then I helped making the cheese and I tried to cook then you know, I had a "Primus", to cook with. . My husband liked apple tarts. We brought "Kuechenwunder" from Germany." The circumstances of the women who immigrated to Australia varied but still had surprising constants.

One daughter recalled how the mother secured the living after the whole family fled to a camp in Shanghai in 1939. By this time the father was

already sick and finally, in 1943, died “of a broken heart”. Also he was most unhappy that he was not the breadwinner any longer. The daughter reports that the father used to be a travel agent and was unable to work in professions where he was qualified, for example as a tailor or shoemaker. Therefore, he stayed at home while the mother had two jobs. From nine in the morning until two in the afternoon she had a secretarial job at a German newspaper, then she came home and prepared lunch for the children. Her next shift went from four in the afternoon until eleven at night where she worked as a cook in a restaurant. The respondent explains that her mother’s motto was: “I have to survive for my children”. The daughter married and they finally left Shanghai. In Australia the mother did not work anymore, but was mostly responsible for her grand children and the daughter’s household.

Even more women found that their husbands had problems working in any profession other than their trained occupation. One explained: “he tried but he was such a 100% doctor.” Therefore, it was she who earned the money for the first three years in Sydney, until he passed his exams to become a medical doctor again. In order not to have to pay rent, the interviewee had a position as property manager and looked after the unit block in which they were living.

Moreover, she had a job as finisher in a clothing company where she had to sew buttons on dresses. She also worked as a hawker and sold ties but admitted in the interview that she found this job troublesome and gave it up after a while. She also rented out one room of the 2 1/2 room flat and had a paid “Mittagstisch” where she cooked every evening for eight to ten people after their work. Besides being the breadwinner, the respondent was also responsible for the household. She could not speak English, but practised in the evening with a neighbouring woman and otherwise tried to survive in every day life, while her husband learned both English in a class and at home. Until he was able to practise his profession again he basically repaired things in the house and loved to play chess. His wife became a nurse in his practice.

As pointed out before, most interviewees worked together with their husbands, mostly in the shop they opened together. One woman explained that she used to work in a jointly owned furniture shop with her husband and also was responsible for the household and the children. In the mornings she gave their baby son to the neighbours and afterwards took their daughter to school for which she had to take two trams. After that she helped in the shop. In the afternoon their daughter went straight from school to the store and the

mother took her home and prepared the family's dinner. Sometimes, when the neighbours called her at the shop because her son had been woken up, she would go home in between to look after him. Even in the afternoons, after cooking the dinner for the evening, she came back and helped in the shop again. They had a tiny flat with a bedroom for herself and her husband, a glass sunroom for the children and a lounge room where all their refugee friends usually met on the weekends and she prepared an enormous dinner for all of them. During the time until 1949, they lived in several flats and finally bought the house in which the interview took place. Not until the 1950s did she receive a washing machine, and was the first one among all her friends. She recalls doing the laundry still living in the unit block: "The wash house was downstairs. Do you know what I did? We're still laughing about it ...people used to boil the laundry in the copper. Do you know what a copper was? A cauldron ...And then you threw it (the laundry) into the sink with a stick. Out of the copper I poured water into a bucket, which I then carried up to the third floor and cleaned the loo. The boiling soapy water! Today you squirt (the toilet detergent) into the loo. ...Maybe they even had it then ...I wouldn't know ...I didn't "

Some of the interviewees even tried working in different types of shops or

closed one shop in order to open something bigger. One daughter reported that her parents first had a cake shop and then a grocery shop. Finally they opened a ham and beef store. In the last business they lived above the shop. The shop, which was open from six in the morning, was the nucleus of the family happenings. The laundry was next to the shop in the back. Her mother used to work in the store and even if there were customers, she would excuse herself, run outside to the laundry and turn the washing kettle. The daughter related how her mother did absolutely everything. At eight in the morning she came down when the children (there were six) had had breakfast, or sometimes she brought one of the children down when he or she was ill. The father was unhealthy regularly and could not work as much as her mother could. Finally he got Parkinson's Disease and only then did he realise how hard the mother was working and started lending her a hand from time to time with daily obligations. Nevertheless, the mother loved working and to see success in her work. Moreover, she did not mind working for her husband. The daughter described the relationship as a "love story" between the demanding father and the devoted mother. Only one interviewee, among those who arrived in Sydney with their husbands, did not work with him because he was an

architect. All the other respondents worked in their own businesses. After a few years some worked part time when the shop or company flourished, and they preferred housework to being in the family trade. Staying at home or working part time was the case for 43% of the respondents.

Getting involved in the Jewish community or in an organisation could help tremendously to adjust. In general, immigration produced a higher activity rate than the home country. The interviewees frequently stated that the exile created a higher awareness about being a Jew. As a result of this the urge of the Jewish Community to survive and even extend grew stronger. Also, the desire to support religious or charitable institutions and to pass on their faith to the next generation became more obvious. Over half (64%) of all respondents or their mothers respectively and half of the men (50%) became involved in different kinds of organisations. Either they were active together with their husbands, mainly in the synagogue or in the organisation B'nai Brith or they were involved in particular women's or other associations. A few of the women supported an organisation through financial aid, and some couples only attended meetings without engaging any further. The major Australian Jewish women's

organisations were and still are the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and the Women International Zionist Organisation (WIZO). Because of effective male resistance, Jewish women in Australia did not play a noticeable role in the organisational and political scenery of community life. The only organisations working exclusively for and with women were the Jewish Girls Guild and the Jewish Ladies Maternity Society. Therefore, it was necessary to find another forum where women could become active.

As Suzanne Rutland illustrates: "Women were in the forefront of welcoming Jewish migrants, especially from the European continent, at a time when their men-folk were often unwelcoming of such migration and fearful of its impact on their status in Australia."

Other associations were mainly interested in the building up of the Congregation such as the Temple Emanuel Guild, which was founded in 1939. Besides contributing financial aid towards a number of Jewish and other benevolent and wartime funds, they also sewed for fairs, had festivities for children in the Religious school or gathered for card afternoons. Moreover, they co-operated with NCJW and received lectures on Zionism from WIZO. As shown, those associations basically

worked within religious and philanthropic fields. If women were interested in joining a non-charitable women's league, they had to search somewhere else or even establish new groups if they felt the need for it. One woman described the situation for women when she arrived: "They had no provisions here for childcare, you know, for young children, at all. ...There were like charitable organisations. ...I got a group of women around myself here and we started to work very hard ...to set (a group) up ...here in this area. And the council, the municipal council, they helped us..."

Two women were involved in non-Jewish (women's) organisations. One was active in the mentioned women's group, the Friendship Society that worked for the mutual communication between Russia and Australia, and she was also active in a peace organisation. The second woman was a member of an international women's association that fought for the right of abortion. Interestingly, both women were the least bonded to the Jewish community of all respondents or their mothers. Two women were engaged in WIZO, and one of them holds a leading position. Two more women pursued different organisations both separately and together with their husbands. While one woman had joined a fund raising society, the Jewish National Fund for Israel (JNF),

the other woman delivered food for old people since the early 1950s for the organisation Meals on Wheels. More than half of all active women, or 55%, were solely or in addition to their own activities a member of an association that they joined with their husband, or because of him. Two women were connected to their temple, though only through the occupation of their husbands. Yet, the women were mainly involved in B'nai Brith where they took over social obligations and one was a secretary. The father in law of one of the interviewees from Vienna rebuilt B'nai Brith in Sydney. The first women's B'nai Brith chapter in Sydney was established in 1945.

As mentioned before, immigrants more frequently joined organisations in exile than in their home countries. Marion Berghahn also points out that refugees tended to associate with other refugees because they tried to create a substitute "for the lost home, thus providing them with a degree of emotional security." All of the interviewed women or their mothers respectively found friends in time, but nearly all of them stayed within the Jewish refugee community. 71% stated that they were involved in the Jewish community, if not through organisational work, then because all their friends were Jewish. However, only two women had separate friends from

their spouses. All other women shared friends entirely with their husbands. One respondent reported: “[We] never did anything separate. No never. Only I did, during the day, with lady friends But on the weekends only always together with the husbands of the friends. At that time there were married couples all with small children”. Out of the ten women who replied to the question of whether role models within Jewish families have changed, none answered positively. However, this obviously did not affect the women’s self image. Only 21% agreed to the statement that her or her mother’s self-confidence has changed. Only one daughter reported that the mother loved the father, put him before herself, and would do anything for him until his last breath. Another interviewee explained that she has not changed, but accepted the distribution of duties. Similar to this, a respondent from the daughter generation held the opinion that even though their mother always worked in Australia and might have experience a rise in self-esteem, she still would never have questions the gender roles in her marriage. One daughter recalled that the mother become forceful in exile, but this did not extend to the parent’s relationship. One of the oldest respondents had the interesting observation that she did not change because of her work or the many other responsibilities she had. She started to

question her husband’s position rather because of a general transformation in society. She reported a dialogue about this with her daughter “ ‘Suddenly I became a feminist’ ‘What do you do Mum?’ I said ‘I don’t open the garage door any longer’ She said ‘Mum this is great progress’. Because I always did everything. ...Time helped me in this respect. ...Why should the woman do all these things? In the end she is discriminated against for being only a housewife. ...Many things I didn’t like, but you don’t talk about everything. ...certainly I still treated him in the old was. ...The garage door, that was the start”.

Nearly all interviewees outlined that they or their mothers did not feel suppressed or that they did not have to stand back in any way. The mothers described their marriages as happy. Nevertheless there were incidences that were raised in the course of the interviews such as reports about the fathers interfering into the wife or daughter’s life. There were narratives about the daughter who was not allowed to get the education she was aiming at and a statement about the father who subdued the mother’s artistic inclination to paint. Also, reports were given about the father who could not handle the loss of authority resulting from not being the breadwinner any longer, or the husband who interfered

when the wife went out without him. Yet, rarely the interviewees were as outspoken as the following woman: "When he decided to propose and I accepted I was told that I was making the biggest mistake of my life, which I did. But of course, having a missionary sense, I didn't think anyone could stay with me for any amount of time and not change, you see, which is all wrong. Because you can't change people. ...He was not a man to marry. ...He would have been much better off with a housekeeper and a dog." It appears from the interviews that both the husbands and wives coped considerably well, however the women's lives changed more than the men's as a result of the immigration. The situation in exile drew women back in terms of gender relations because to survive, the families had to stick together and function as a unit. The women had to care for the children and household, which previously was the responsibility of the servants or maids. Furthermore the women worked in Australia with their husbands in the same business whereas previously they had had different occupations, so as a result they became less independent than before the immigration.

As much as oral history is a very vivid source that removes the history from the realm of the abstract, one also has to be aware of the sometimes uncertain

results of this technique. In my case, the time in question was exactly 60 years ago, which brought back a period in the interviewees' lives that they might not or would not want to remember in all its detail. The time that has elapsed lies like a filter over the past and might have changed the notion of what had actually happened. A problem with the interviews was that in some cases I did not interview the actual immigrant, but the immigrant's daughter who gave me their view of their parents' lives. The fact that this was a daughter talking about her mother's life was a complicating factor when analysing the interviews.

Looking back at the actual interviews I realise that I learned considerably and not just about Jewish refugee women or how to conduct interviews. I also felt a growing fascination in the project and a sense that my mind was opening to a wider experience. Overall using oral history was an interesting and effective approach to analysing history.

(Ed. Note: We have incorporated relevant footnotes supplied by Astrid into the text. Anyone requiring a detailed list of reference please contact the Editor)

Life Member

In this the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the Oral History Association of Australia branches were invited to submit candidates for Honorary Life Membership in honour of their contribution to oral history and in honour of the special anniversary. New South Wales Branch were delighted to offer Louise Douglas for the bestowal of Honorary Life Membership. Her citation follows:

Louise Douglas has been closely associated with oral history and the Oral History Association of Australia since the Association's first conference in 1978. As a member of the academic staff of Macquarie University in Sydney she supported the conducting of oral history interviews as an important historical data collecting activity for social history research.

The Oral History Association of Australia was established by Jean Teasdale in Western Australia in 1978. In 1980 Louise Douglas was the editor of the Association's journal of that year, No 3. The New South Wales Branch had been established in 1979 and by then had already held workshops on oral history.

In 1978 she undertook to be the Oral History Co-ordinator for Australians 1938 one of the volumes of *Australians: A Historical Library, the Bicentenary history*

of European settlement. She saw this volume which used both oral and written sources through to its completion.

Louise was an organiser of the New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Project and was fundamental to its coordination and completion in 1988. It was deposited in the National Library of Australia and in the State Library of New South Wales where its 200 interviews continue to be the most consulted items in the oral history collection in the Mitchell Library.

In 1988 together with Alan Roberts and Ruth Thompson she published *Oral History: a Handbook*. It is a very good reference work and it still complements in several important areas the Association's *Oral History Handbook* by Beth M. Robertson.

During the years when the branch was small Louise and a handful of others kept the membership and the branch active with regular workshops and meetings.

Louise was a key member of the New South Wales Conference Committee preparing for the Conference held in Sydney in 1993. She inspired a focus on the recognition of oral history in the postmodern world. The keynote address by Professor Deryck Schreuder at the conference acknowledged that oral records should be considered equally as

valuable to the historical record as any other type of archival material.

Louise was at this time a senior curator at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. She is now General Manager of Product Development at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

Diary of Events



Executive meeting Date

Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meetings held at the State Library at 5.30pm on the 30 November.

Seminar Dates for 2000

8 April; 29 July; 28 October

National Biennial Conference

(2001 Date to be announced)

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