



# voiceprint

Newsletter

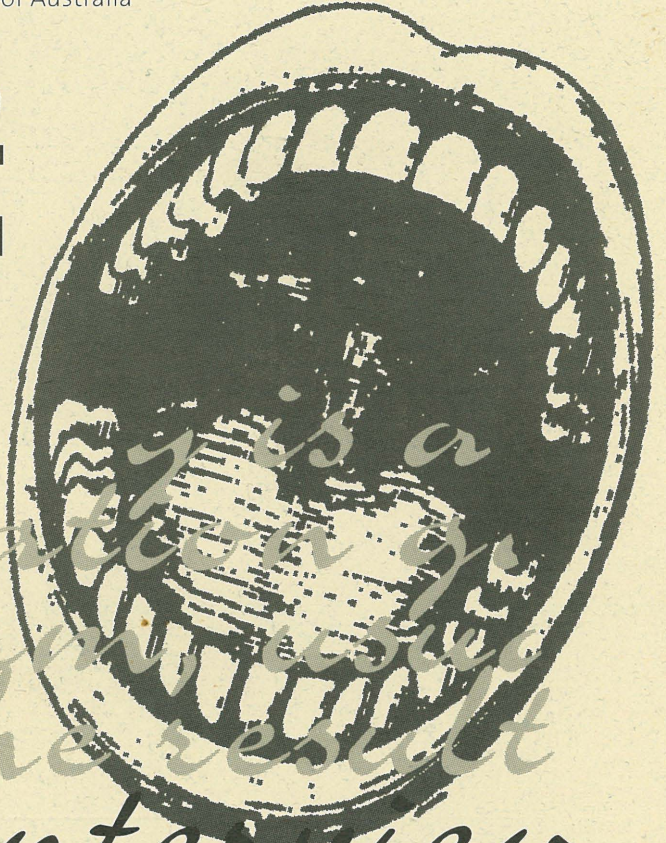
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of the Oral History Association

of Australia

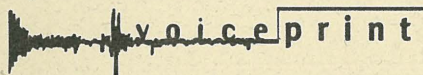
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July 2000



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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

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# Editorial

Voiceprint number 22, has been put together. I am not sure if its good luck (I doubt it is good management)! However we do have some very responsive members and an editorial committee who find the words that come together and magically here is Voiceprint! Thank you all for your help and assistance and of course we are grateful for the co-operation and help from our interstate editors. When it was time to put this edition together there was not one thing, yes, no words at all waiting in the folder to be printed – but to the phone, and within a few days the words are coming in. I sometimes dream about having so many words in the folder that I worry about deciding what will have to be left out!!! Perhaps next time – surprise me. I know there are many projects under way, tell us all about them.

In this edition we have some further articles which present some views in relation to the ethical considerations which arise when conducting oral history projects. This is the topic for the October seminar so we hope these articles stimulate your thinking. We know many of you are concerned to know more of the issues. We also have some interesting thoughts about oral history – Hope you enjoy them.

It is a pleasure to be able to present a first report of the SHOROC project. This project created a lot of interest when it was announced and we hope to be able to keep you informed. Ruth Wilson is always doing interesting things – hope you enjoy reading about this oral history with a difference from Griffith.

So here is Voiceprint 22. Think about the ethical issues, the role of oral history as part of the big picture, and listen to the voices of those who have a story to tell – especially women and those who struggle to find themselves. What a delightful story from Katja! Enjoy your reading.

**Joyce Cribb for the editorial committee**

PS Note contact details inside front cover – Thank you.

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## New Members

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Welcome to these new members since our last list in March 2000.

We are delighted to have this steady arrival and a wonderful range of interests.

<b>Bronwyn Smith</b>	Interested in women's history
<b>Alison Halliday</b>	Teacher, interested in literature, military and local history, biography
<b>Weroona Nursing Home</b>	Interested in publishing oral history
<b>Beverley Sodbinow</b>	Interested in Australian women's history
<b>Anne Smith</b>	Interested in local history
<b>Sandra Ridgewell</b>	Teacher, interested in history
<b>Mei Yi Leung</b>	Student
<b>Jill Brown</b>	
<b>Robyn Smith</b>	Teacher, interested in genealogy
<b>Michael Abrahams-Sprod</b>	Interested in German Jewish History, Holocaust studies
<b>Dianne Schultz-Tesmar</b>	Interested in oral history and museums
<b>Jennifer Griffiths</b>	Historian
<b>Frances Morris</b>	Student, interested in public history
<b>Barbara Henery</b>	Librarian, interested in architecture, heritage, music, women's issues
<b>Jennifer Bolton</b>	Kambala School

A very special welcome to Finn Holle – another boy for Vanessa and the third grandson for Rosie!

## Nuts and Bolts – short items of interest to members

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### **Discover Australia's oral History Collections**

This website contains a National Directory of Australia's Oral History Collections which you may visit at the National Library website at <[www.nla.gov.au/ohdir](http://www.nla.gov.au/ohdir)>.

## REPORTS

# A Positive Impact. The Ethics Application for the Nurses' Story – Jill Barclay

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*(Reprinted from Word of Mouth the newsletter of the South Australian Branch of OHAA, January 1999, No.36...Earlier in VP No 19 we printed some comments made by Beth Robertson of the South Australian Branch in relation to ethical issues. As members have expressed an interest in ethical issues and it will be the focus of the final seminar for the year we present for your information further discussion of the issues. Ed)*

In any story there are complex issues that relate to informed consent. Oral history is no exception. While there is a range of strategies from which the history can be gained, extending from a structured set of questions where the interviewer's intentions are uppermost to the unstructured interview, where the participants intentions are uppermost, extreme care must be taken to avoid harm to the participants.

Traditional ethical issues that have evolved around research in regard to informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm, gain the support of social scientists. However, there is controversy about ethical issues relating to the more overt/covert type of fieldwork including the surreptitious use of tape-recording devices.<sup>1</sup> Punch argues that there are two schools of thought on this issue. While Warwick and Douglas argue that the covert use of tape-recordings mirror the deceitfulness of life in the real world, others like Kai

Erickson are strongly opposed to the study of uninformed subjects.<sup>2</sup>

It would appear that university ethics committees, in an endeavour to protect the human subjects from supporters of Warwick and Douglas's argument, have viewed oral history as placing the subjects at risk of this sort of methodology. Dr John Hepworth, Chair of the University of South Australia's Ethics Committee, claims that one of the problems with oral histories is that people sometimes say things without thinking them through and then want to retract them. Issues such as informed consent, established ownership of the transcript, date of usage and rights to publish all must be clearly demonstrated before ethics approval can be granted. Further, here cultural differences exist between the researcher/interviewer and the interviewee it is important for the researcher to ensure that there has been a written exchange with an agent or individual who is respected in the

interviewee's community and will act in their best interest.

Clearly the Oral History Association of Australia's *Guidelines of Ethical Practice*<sup>3</sup> do protect the human subject and would appear to meet the requirements of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's *Guidelines for Responsible Practice in Research and Dealing with Problems of Research Misconduct*.<sup>4</sup>

Each university has its own Human Research Ethics Committee whose guidelines have been influenced by such documents as the National Health and Medical Research Committee's *Ethics in Qualitative Research, Statement on Human Experimentation, and Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*.

In my experience, using the Guidelines of Ethical Practice *as set out* by the Oral History Association, no difficulty has been experienced in obtaining ethics approval for my research through the Menzies School of Health Research, Alice Springs, University of Sydney. My research, titled 'Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia, the Nurses' Story' involves an oral history methodology to disclose the deficit in Australian literature and the Royal Flying Doctor Service literature, that is, the nurses' story.

The subjects are past and present flight nurses, their peers and the customers of their care. The consumers

of the RFDS include indigenous people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. They come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and their ages extend across the lifespan.

While ethics committees at universities throughout Australia consist of a mix of people including academics and representatives of the legal profession, if a researcher is to achieve the goals of a project within a particular community, it is also important to seek understanding and approval from representatives of that community.

The Menzies School of Health Research's Ethics Committee, because of its location and the nature of many of its research projects, has a process whereby the ethics application is also sent out to a representative Aboriginal group for approval, ensuring cultural sensitivities are properly addressed by the researcher. This process adds a further dimension to the ethics process but is most necessary if the researcher is to gain access to Aboriginal subjects in the research.

The impact of the university's Ethics Committee on this case study of oral history has made the researcher more acutely aware of responsibilities to the subjects. It could be viewed as a very positive impact on the research which has not impeded the practice of oral history but rather strengthened the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee.

This strengthened interaction seems to create an atmosphere where the interviewee often asks for the recording to be temporarily suspended while some “off the record” information is given. While this can be very frustrating, as it is often very valuable data, one is ethically bound to respect the wishes of the interviewee. Lesley Alves writes: –

Morally obliged to respect the informants wishes not to reveal those things they do not wish to be revealed in public and to refrain from using information that may harm people. This ethical obligation is wider than laws of libel. It is about respecting people’s confidences and private sensitivities to the third party implicated.<sup>5</sup>

Research proposals for university ethics committees ensure that the researcher has a thorough understanding of the ethical issues associated with oral histories and reinforce the view of Punch that common sense and moral responsibility must be uppermost in the mind of the field worker undertaking interviews, and that these two notions must be applied to “our subjects first, to the study next, and ourselves last”.<sup>6</sup>

## References

1. Fontana, A. and Frey, J., 'Interviewing: the art of science,' in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, California, 1994.
2. Punch, M., 'Politics and ethics in qualitative research' in Denzin and Lincoln.
3. 'Guidelines for ethical practice' in Robertson, B.M., *Oral History Handbook*, Oral History Association of Australia (SA Branch) Inc., Adelaide, 1994.
4. Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, *Guidelines for responsible practice in research and dealing with problems of research conduct*, Deakin, ACT, 1994.
5. Alves, L., "'Don't record this...': Private and public sensitivities", in *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 16, 1994, p. 84.
6. Punch, p.373.



# Of Aprons and China: Some Ethical Issues in the World of Women's Culture – Alvis Smith

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*(Reprinted from Word of Mouth the newsletter of the South Australian Branch of OHAA, January 1999, No.36)*

I am married, and have five children and nine grand-children. Except for two years when the children were young and I was tied by my apron strings to the wash trough and the kitchen stove, I worked as a pharmacist in England and Australia. For the last twenty years of that working life I was Chief Pharmacist of a large hospital in New South Wales. This led to my induction into the very diverse and rich world of women's culture. My duties included many visits to remote rural hospitals and clinics-most of which were run by women. The wearing of nurse's aprons and those important morning and afternoon teas revealed many more subversive feminist power lines than I imagined were possible!

I resigned in 1988 and moved to Adelaide. Here I studied for a Bachelor of Arts Visual Arts degree at the South Australian School of Art in the University of South Australia. I returned to the same university in 1997 to undertake a two-year, full time post graduate Master of Visual Arts Research Degree within the Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design. I believe some of my latest experiences may be of interest and help

to you. My proposed Master of Visual Arts research thesis will examine how aprons and china painting were produced and used within the cultural life of women in South Australia from the 1890s to the 1990s. My research will also seek to understand and interpret, from a feminist viewpoint, the meanings and significance of these items and the occasions during which they were used.

There has been focus on women's art such as painting, but not so much on china painting which has been allied with craft and considered outside mainstream art and frequently ignored by historians and state collections. This is a problem in South Australia in particular. Textiles are acknowledged as of some cultural and artistic significance. Yet little has been researched and written on the use of such functional textile items as aprons which have been used and decorated by women for many generations.

Sadly, many aprons have been discarded and destroyed. There are however many women who can remember the occasions for which they wore aprons. I anticipated that taped

interviews with such women would provide a rich source of information on feminine culture – in particular within the domestic sphere. The proposed interviewees included women who lived in country areas as well as those who lived in cities. Some women were involved only with aprons, other interviewees with both painted china and embellished aprons.

However there are ethical issues involved when research involves human subjects. Ethics can be defined as a science of morals. Lack of ethics in research work can lead to litigation, hence the University of South Australia has a comprehensive Ethics Protocol to protect researchers and subjects. The Human Research Ethics Committee, which is an advisory committee within the University of South Australia, must approve all proposed research which will involve human subjects. Indemnity is only provided to the researcher after such approval has been granted. Taped interviews with women were used within my research methodologies. All questions that I intended to ask had to be sufficiently clear to gain approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee, yet open-ended enough to allow for a variety of responses by the interviewees. I also provided evidence to the Committee that I had considered a wider range of ethical issues other than the questions themselves. Some ethical

issues are obvious. Most people who conduct taped oral history interviews realise the importance of confidentiality, slander, copyright, storage and access. However there are a diverse range of other issues which should also be considered.

**The aim of the research:** Ask yourself questions. Why are you doing this? Who will benefit the most – yourself, your supervisor, your interviewees, the university? Who is using whom and why? Does it matter?

**Personal safety:** I was surprised when the university made me consider this.

On the Ethics Protocol Proforma I stated that I would travel alone in my campervan to the Strathalbyn, Barossa and Mount Gambier areas to conduct interviews and would stay in accredited caravan parks each night. I had travelled safely in such a manner for many years. Most of my proposed interviewees were like myself-female and elderly. They would definitely not be dangerous women!

However there were two occasions during some of my prolonged research trips when I questioned my safety. I then realised that it was my ethical duty towards my university to maintain a safety awareness at all times when engaged in sanctioned research. The first instance happened on a hot windy summer's day when I ignored my 'bushfire danger' instincts and drove into unfamiliar country with smoke on the

horizon. I spent my childhood in bushfire country and certainly knew of the dangers, but deliberately chose to drive that day because of a possible interview. I could argue that the country woman I was to interview would need my help should the fire approach her establishment. I could also argue that I might be caught on the road by the fire and who, if anyone, would endanger their own life to rescue me? This is an ethical issue. The second incident occurred a few days later. I left my campervan in a roadside rest area and went for a solo walk in the bush. An unexpected encounter with a burly male caused me concern. There is indeed a question of ethics as to why and from whom you expect assistance in difficult situations when you travel alone and leave the safety of your vehicle in an isolated area.

**Consider appropriate ethical relationships with your family:** Do not take it for granted that your interest in your research and the time away from your home while you tape oral histories will not affect your partner and children. It is a matter of ethics to discuss what will be involved for all people in your family before you undertake lengthy research. I am indeed fortunate to have an understanding husband. He helps with the photographic documentation of aprons and hand-painted china. After he photographed the fiftieth apron he

did admit that he found them more interesting than he had imagined. He has even taken to wearing an apron in the kitchen now as he cooks our evening meals!

**Informed signed consent is essential for interview transactions:** It is a necessary ethical consideration to obtain informed signed consent from any organisation or institution before you either seek access to records or seek members to interview. It is important to fully inform your interviewee of the reasons for the interview, their rights and your rights. The interviewee should then sign a consent form for the interview before taping is commenced. The interviewer should also sign the same form before the interview, declaring that full information has been provided to the interviewee. After the interview an appropriate validation of the information should take place and the interviewee be provided with two copies – one to keep and one to return to the interviewer with a signed acknowledgement as to the content and permission for use by the researcher.

Even with all due care, unexpected problems can occur. I was surprised when one charming interviewee sent her transcript back to me unsigned, but with a covering signed letter. English was not her first language and she stated that the grammar in the transcript was so bad that she did not sign it! I had

changed the few instances of bad grammar as spoken in her tape and thought the transcript read very well. I believe she may have changed her mind for quite a different reason to that stated. It would now be unethical to use her information within my thesis without further negotiation.

**Interlopers:** If possible, do not allow other people to be present during the interview unless the interviewee is under eighteen years of age or has expressly requested company. I always spend time talking with an interviewee before commencing to tape the interview. It takes time to explain my proposed questions and to answer any questions the interviewee or family may ask. I aim for a relaxed interviewee. However I try to do the taped interview without any other people present apart from interviewer and interviewee. Most onlookers cannot resist interjecting and this can intimidate the interviewee. Such interlopers may also hear confidential information.

**Behaviour of the interviewer:** You are a guest in the interviewee's home or studio. Consider the ethics of that fact. It is a privilege to be invited into someone's home for the interview. It is not your right. Leave your academic accent and words in the university. Use simple words. Do not talk very much about yourself but be happy to answer any questions asked of you. Dress

appropriately for the interview location. Should you interview on a farm, wear washable slacks and flat shoes. You may well end up viewing stock or be greeted by farm dogs which bark, jump or bite.

Consider the situation of your interviewee. A small posy of flowers, a plate of home-made biscuits or a cake to be shared over a cup of tea after the interview, are items appreciated by many elderly housebound folk. You should write a 'thank you' letter or send a pretty card after the signed transcript is returned to you. It is a privilege that people have freely talked to you.

Be generous by providing a transcript for your interviewee to keep. Some people do not like to hear themselves on tape, where unfinished sentences and repeated words become obvious. As I always work from the validated transcript returned to me by the interviewee, I provide them with another copy to keep. Usually I type my own comments at the beginning of their copy of the transcript, detailing the setting of the interview and my appreciation of their cooperation.

**Artist's copyright:** This is an important ethical issue. The copyright of the painted or drawn image that you photograph, such as that hand-painted onto the china which I am using within my research, belongs to the artist who produced the original art work. You may not reproduce your photograph depicting

their work in a commercial publication, without first gaining their consent. A thesis is not a commercial publication, nevertheless I always gain the artist's signed consent to use the photograph within my thesis when I interview the artist. Should I publish commercially at a later date, I would obtain permission for that also. At times it is impossible to

trace the artist or owners of the copyright. If you publish such artwork, then you should state that fact.

*(This is the major part of Alvis's text. Have for lack of space available excluded a description of finding old aprons in a second hand store.)*

## SHOROC on a Shoestring: An Oral History About the Depression in Manly, Mosman, Pittwater and Warringah – Roslyn Burge and Paula Hamilton

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These four local government areas (the SHOROC Regional Group of Councils) cover a sizeable area of metropolitan Sydney – from Bradleys Head at its southern tip and north to Barrenjoey Lighthouse, right along the coast and as far inland as Coal and Candle Creek.

Last year the SHOROC libraries received a Library Development Grant from the State Library of New South Wales to undertake an oral history project to record the memories of people who lived north of the Harbour (in these particular local government areas) during the Depression and the 1930s. Associate Professor Paula Hamilton, Dr Paul Ashton and Roslyn Burge from the Australian Centre for Public History at

University of Technology, Sydney, were commissioned to undertake this project.

Throughout the two year timeframe a total of 72 interviews will be recorded and logged. As we continue to review literature on the Depression and the 1930s – and especially publications about the northern beaches – a bibliography and chronology of events for the period are being compiled. A final summary report will highlight key outcomes of the project at its conclusion.

Local history in these areas has a strong tradition and each SHOROC library already has a number of oral history interviews. Pittwater has been recording the memories of local residents since 1988 and now has 67 in

its collection; and Manly began its collection in 1984.

During the 1930s there was a greater variation in the economic impact on the population than previously thought. Some sections of the population were able to protect themselves a little from economic crisis depending on their occupation or because of their domestic economy, particularly in some areas of the northern suburbs where people had small farms.

Settlement through the northern beaches at this time varied widely. Mosman was already a well established suburb, as was Manly – also regarded as a holiday destination; whilst Pittwater and Warriewood were more sparsely populated.

One prospective interviewee remembered his father had a motor car as early as the 1920s and by the end of the next decade he had also acquired a company car. Another interviewee told us of her mother's afternoon tea shop in the gardens of their home, a small farm at Belrose, then a pleasant "afternoon run" from the city where visitors would come to buy produce. Her enterprising mother ensured those travelers who arrived by chauffeured car took afternoon tea on the verandah of the home while others sipped tea in the gazebo.

It's impossible to avoid the landscape in this beautiful part of Sydney. Shoreline forms part of the boundaries of each area and the ocean, Narrabeen Lakes, Pittwater or the harbour feature in most residents' memories. But not all of them have a continuing passion for the sea.

One interviewee lives in the same street he moved to with his parents in 1919 and from this eyrie has an extraordinary view across Collaroy Beach and Long Reef. Despite proximity to the surf, illness in early childhood restricted his beach jaunts and shapes his distant attitude to the water today.

Another interviewee, Bradley, now lives south of the city but carries with him his birthplace. Named after Bradley's Head, where his father was the ranger for many years, Bradley regarded the harbour as his playground during the 1930s, interloping at community and organisations' picnics at Clifton Gardens and hovering as fishermen emptied traps by the zoo wharf.

By speaking to a wide range of people who lived here throughout the 1930s about their memories of the areas we hope to record a broad cross-section of not only their experiences and reminiscences but also diverse images of a much changed landscape.

Jean's family moved to Manly from Brookvale during the 1930s but her mother was thrilled to return to Brookvale. Manly was a favourite weekend



destination and her mother tired of making scones for relatives who popped in for afternoon tea on their way back to the ferry! Jean's stories embrace her family and they provide her still with the framework for her life. Further north at Narrabeen Jim's stories of growing up at the same time are very different. His father worked for Warringah Council and with 9 children to feed there weren't quite so many choices. From the age of about 10 Jim worked every Sunday for 5 years as a caddy at Elanora Golf Club. Enthusiastic and ambitious, he worked hard and arranged to caddy for the same golfer the following weekend so he could avoid the "draw".

Jim told a wonderful story after the tape was finished about one of the men closely involved with the establishment of Elanora – a man so mean with tips ("they're only boys, threepence will do") that somehow his balls were never retrieved from the bushes!

Already a number of themes have emerged from the pilot interviews. Education – its absence; the long journey (one girl travelled daily from Collaroy to Burwood); sounds of Harbour Bridge construction for another girl at Fort Street. Work – that of parents and interviewees. Travel – how readily people travelled about. Sport and leisure: community dances, Venetian Festival, sand sculpture at Manly, drives to Palm Beach, fishing and boxing. Housing –

simple timber cottages at Narrabeen which still survive, flats in Manly, the tent settlement at Palm Beach and the huts of Pearl Bay. Religion – its importance and its absence. The importance of music, family ceremonies, games and entertainment.

Many of the potential participants in the project are now in their eighties and their stories are those of youth. This is one disadvantage of the prescribed timespan of the Project. Life certainly didn't stop at the end of the decade and they could tell many tales beyond the period.

This time next year we hope to provide an update of the project.

*(We look forward to receiving it. Ed)*

## ARTICLES

# In Defence of Oral History – Bill Gammage

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*(Reprinted from Word of Mouth, the Newsletter of the South Australian Branch the oHAA, June 1999, No.37).*

What follows is elementary. I have written it because a number of recent criticisms have condemned oral history by arguing that examples of it do not meet European historiographical standards, whereas it seems to me mere prejudice first to treat all oral sources as identical in value, and second to contrast an opinion of what oral history is with a notion of what written history ought to be.

As to the first, most of the rules of evidence employable in assessing written sources can be used to assess oral sources. A researcher must consider whether an informant has first-hand or hearsay status in relation to each piece of information offered, and what biases are present, and how information might be checked, just as with written sources. Although most historians have been trained only in written methodology, they should be capable of making this mental transition.

As to the second, in literate societies theories about written methodology are certainly better developed than those about oral methodology, but a better comparison is between how sources are used in practice. Anyone can find

examples in which oral (and written) sources have been misused: in such cases the best conclusion is that these invalidate the misuser, not the source. Any fair analysis of oral sources must be capable of assessing, their inherent qualities, and might well begin with how historians in literate societies actually use evidence.

The important difference between written and oral sources is that written can freeze evidence in time. That can be an advantage, but not nearly so great or so unique an advantage as first appears. There is no evidence that writing renders accounts of the past immutable – indeed, all the evidence is otherwise. Despite theory, history changes with the times: all accounts of the past change with the present. The immutable nature of written evidence is in practice invariably less important than a user's interpretation of it. If it is argued that the value of written sources is that how they are used can be checked, this applies as often to properly collected oral evidence. Both can be checked at their point of recording and no earlier than at that point.

This admits a greater degree of subjectivity into all history than

European historiographical theory allows, and possibly because it is in respect only to written history that theory masks its distance from practice that some historians are uneasy about oral history. It is of course a good thing that historians have an ideal objectivity to work towards – history otherwise would have little point but it is entirely another thing to claim that objectivity has ever been obtained. Yet those who condemn oral sources must be saying something like this, for they argue that oral sources are unlike written sources in being subjective in various ways, which finally is to say that written sources are objective. Nor is a verbal sidestep applied to this argument reasonable: if it is argued that the degree of subjectivity matters, and distinguishes written from oral sources, as a generalisation that is patently not sustainable, and in practice how valuable a source is depends not on whether it is written or oral, and not only on how well it can survive historians' tests to establish its accuracy and impartiality, but on what alternative or corroborative evidence exists.

Finally, of course, properly recorded oral sources are also at that moment frozen in time, and from that moment an oral source inevitably falls somewhere within the range of classifications of accuracy and impartiality applied to written sources. Indeed, though it is rarely made relevant in practice, looking

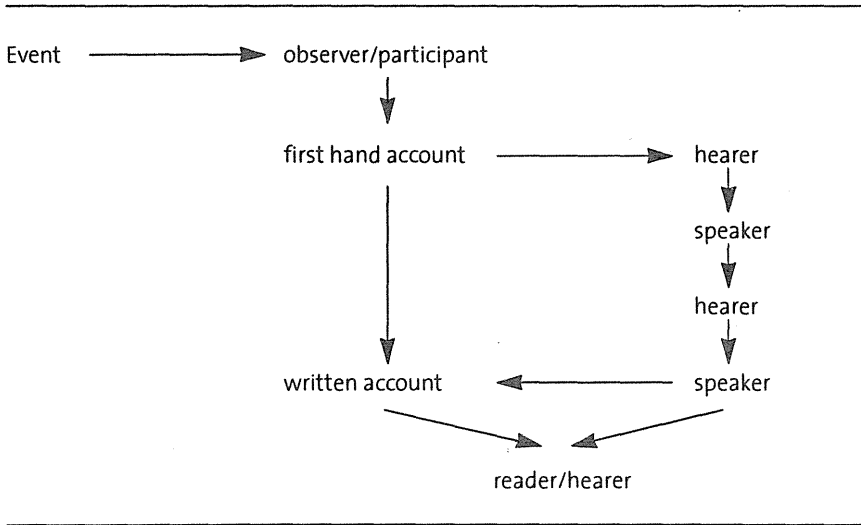
at sources in this way suggests that written sources are almost never truly 'primary' – even an original source is likely to have been spoken before it was written or, if written, revised before it was shown the light of day.

Historians considering a source want essentially to know how 'true' it is – how accurate and impartial it is. Each historian will have subjective ideas about what these qualities are, and each might vary standards in assessing them as circumstances change, but essentially each asks how much the source is in a position to know about the statements it contains, and what individual and cultural bias it might have. Historians have to be aware that they confront perpetually fluctuating and interacting levels of knowledge, accuracy and impartiality, both in their sources and in themselves. They are confronted, in short, with unbridgeable gaps between their desire to recreate the past, what they have to work with, and their urge to reinterpret.

Written history has no methodology which solves these problems, but it does have a methodology which puts them in a straightjacket, showing how they might be identified, and how to minimise their effect. In European societies oral methodology is not nearly so well developed, but nonetheless a great number of commonsense principles exist, especially in relation to

the use of oral history in literate societies.

This diagram suggests the kinship between oral and written sources:-



It has been suggested that 'hearer-speaker-hearer' is the weak link in this chain, and that its existence invalidates oral history. Yet it does not always exist, and even where it does it is only one among many points common to written and oral sources at which error and bias might occur, and it should not be especially rejected by literate historians because it seems to them 'new'. Obviously the longer the chain the greater the possibility of error, even among societies which do not substitute

writing for memory, but this cannot invalidate a short or nonexistent chain, and in any case the main criticism is otherwise, namely that the claim is weak not mainly because of its shortness or length, but because the evidence it offers cannot be checked. Again, that is not always so, especially since truly primary oral sources have no chain, but where it is so it is only like some written sources. Sturt's field book for his 1829-30 journey, for example, is missing, but that has not prevented historians accepting information based on it. The same point is true of a thousand historians since Herodotus and Tacitus. Quite simply an

historian's cautionary tests should be applied not literally to the chain, but to the evidence itself. As with any evidence, these tests would include an estimate of the source's accuracy and impartiality, and a comparison with other evidence available, written or oral.

It has also been objected that oral accounts, whether first hand or hearsay, degenerate over time. This objection must finally apply to facts rather than to interpretation, as time amends all interpretation. Clearly the mind can forget, rearrange or create 'facts', and the ways in which these activities relate to time must be almost infinitely variable. This being so, there can be no or very few facts methodologically definable as such. A strict application of written theory, which tells historians to seek the truth via facts, would thereby leave them little or nothing to work with, but the practice is otherwise: historians accept statements as facts and form hypotheses from them, both of which suffice and operate until suspected or contradicted. If this is good enough for written history, surely it is for oral history.

What is necessary in relation to any evidence, oral and otherwise, is an educated assessment of what it can tell, and what it cannot. Oral history can tell us much, including some things written sources cannot, but it would be foolish to claim that twentieth century historians now have the skills to maximise its potential. Equally it would be foolish to claim that there remains nothing to learn about oral history, or that those who err while learning have proved the uselessness of their sources. We have yet to develop a genuine oral methodology: in particular we need more closely to define categories of oral evidence and to evolve procedures for testing the information oral sources offer. Let us see what lies along the oral history path rather than proclaiming so quickly that it is not there.

# A New Aussie, Katja Grynberg.

## Thoughts on Oral History – Katja Grynberg

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I was born in postwar Europe but have lived here all my life. As a child I asked very little about 'over there'. 'Over there' was shrouded, cloudy but 'over here' was also muddled. I thought of myself as an Aussie self consciously, scared of being 'found out'. We were different. By the time I had children myself, more and more, it was important to fill in blanks. I started collecting family stories to make sense of where we'd come from. Tentatively bare bones were fleshed out by my mother who was always careful not to shock.

At the same time, I also needed to understand the place we all called Home. My checkered career brought me, a confirmed landlubber, to the attention of the Sydney Heritage Fleet (then the Sydney Maritime Museum) where I found myself taping stories about Sydney and shipping. Colourful characters taught me more than I would ever learn from text books. Their stories weren't patch-works of caught snatches. They took me to the heart of matters.

Old timers showed me how the past *feels*. My questions didn't seem painfully intrusive. Stories were eagerly shared, not locked away. Strangely, hearing about the wonder of love, excitement at adventure, fear in fragile times, taught

me about myself as I sympathised, empathised. Living historians took me to deep spaces via the most beautiful place in the world, Sydney. As I sat at peoples' windows, staring down our Harbour, like a voyeur, I became part of a joy-filled world where people sailed eighteen footers followed by merry-makers and gamblers on ferries. I was elated when Depression boys cadged supplies from coal burners chugging down the coast, intrigued by life on pilot boats navigating reefs, swept away by resilience and humour in the face of troubles.

Some people were concerned about their lack of education. Newer Aussies worried their accents weren't "Australian" enough – that they might not be understood. But sighs are universal, laughter infectious. Collections of recollections are priceless national treasures voicing everyday concerns, reminders of what will always be important. The blend of voices are the warp and weft of a unique Aussie tapestry. For me, each story was the lifting of a heavy blanket that not only added colour but repaired torn fabric.

An old timer born at the turn of the century in Scotland, told me that when he migrated to Queensland in 1911, it was



the nearest thing to a socialist state! When I relisten to his memories of Brisbane's then only high school, I see boyish concentration as he scratched crayon across slate board. I hear pride when he speaks of apprenticeship, the one awarded per state to war orphans, by Prime Minister Bill Hughes. The 'Big Honour' for a British Empire lad, catches in his voice seventy odd years later. This captain responsible for crews and national security, present at the bombing of Darwin, spoke of heroism modestly, matter-of-factly. However, the memory of the Repatriation Department fitting him with his first trousers and his widowed mother's words, brings a tone I can't read in a text book. His voice quickens when he says: "Scottish people don't cry".

As a young recruit he explored the world. I hear his excitement and wonder at Port Said's Middle Eastern bazaar. I feel magic and understand a boy's infatuation with Islam as he strokes an exotic fringed prayer mat. How different is his youth to my father's, my grandfather's. When he speaks of unloading military supplies from a coal burner in Port Jackson, I glimpse Sydney's wartime. "We unloaded military supplies. Carried petrol drums on that old coal burner. Sydney didn't know how close it came to blowing up". I recognise something of that anguish as he talks of unloading

bodies from the hold of a torpedoed American ship. Anguish is universal.

On another interview, I listen to stories about a war warden and how Sydney was blacked-out; how windows were covered. I add this account to the sea captain's. This war zone is unlike the one I pieced together as a child. Breath is fanned into dry accounts I'd tried unfathoming from books. Voices join my memory bank. I savour new idioms, try out new expressions, add interesting words. In my mind I build blueprints, sketch chapters with different endings. My head houses maps, dictionaries. Black and white images of frosty dusk are suffused by evening hues as I'm told "dad took his old lantern from house to house checking that lights were blacked out while I listened to the wireless with mum". I imagine families around a wireless and I try not to compare. I concentrate. Schizophrenically, I think about my mum's secret radio story as my mind floods with sounds of an old radio serial I heard as a child. My head leaps between rooms and continents when I change tapes.

Then again, serious times have their lighter moments. A marine engineer told me about conditions and seniority as an apprentice on Cockatoo Island. Bombed ships were being repaired. "On the ferry to work, tradesmen played cards. Woe betide any apprentice who sat in the wrong seat. If you whistled and

disturbed them, you'd find yourself doing days and days of filthy work". He chuckles and I can't help thinking what a blessed place this is; how glad I am that we flotsam found this shore.

During the war, Sydney also had a prison camp. At St Ives, Italian prisoners-of-war captured in Libya, were allowed to help local Italian market gardeners. Clearly security was not an enormous issue. Boredom was relieved. During this time trades were learnt, relationships with locals formed. After repatriation to war-torn Italy, many returned and married. Some became builders of post war Australia. As one business man told me: "I was from a poor place in southern Italy; hardly any schooling. At St Ives I learnt to read plans from a professor of architecture. I came back and married the daughter of the man for whom I gardened. And as they say, the rest is history"! This is one of my favourite stories. I smile when I play back the tape. I hear his wife clanging tea cups in the kitchen – still insisting on being heard.

And what about Depression days? What about the time my mum was born when my grandfather trundled suitcases full of money to buy a loaf of bread in Germany? That was the time, "long before the weir was built at Fullers Bridge where farms were scattered

along the Lane Cove River. Families camped in big tents for a fortnight or so along the banks. People bought eggs and chickens from the farmers on the river. Mums would stew sugar bags full of quinces. Bracken fern was built up inside tents and covered with canvas to make a spring bed where everyone slept together. We caught enough fish to keep us going. If the weather was good we swam at Clifton Gardens." I love the seeming innocence, the seeming carefree-ness. I love the chuckle, the twinkle in the one good eye. Ah, but that's another story – one about a grain silo accident in the Far West. He reminisces about boyhood on the waterfront where "no-one had money during the Depression. Anything from the North Coast would be thrown over the side of the cargo boats. Spuds, butter. Jam melons hit the water like bombs. We collected mussels and oysters. No-one went hungry."

Listening to the voices I picture Sydney before electricity when fire wood was chopped for fuel, washing was done in coppers and coke dropped in the water from Mortlake Gas works. "Islands of coke floated around Johnsons Bay. Coke was scooped up for fuel along that shore where luxury homes and pleasure boats are now anchored. Timber yards lined that shore. A boat building industry meant that if you needed timber, you just rowed around the Harbour and

found what you needed. There was always stuff floating around." A gnarled finger points to a finely carved mantelpiece. There's a tear in his eye. "I made it for mi wife". The spool is quiet; he clears his throat. I imagine the woman with whom he shared more than seventy years. We are both quiet.

I hear about sailing boats and tramp steamers, cargoes and passengers, the NSW Central Coast and Torres Strait. I sail with a ninety year old through canals and I fly with new arrivals. Old timers tell me about taking nuns for free pleasure trips on the Harbour. They tell me about sailing in the first and the fiftieth Sydney to Hobart Race. I hear taped chuckles as they describe how "punters dived off the side of ferries when coppers came. Gambling was illegal, y'know."

I picture a grandfather floating a weather-board shed to Double Bay in 1885. It's not there now. But I see it standing where the modern marina is. Powerful cruisers have replaced ghosts of canvas sailing boats. Factory yards don't line the shore where luxury units have been built, deliveries aren't made by horse drawn carts. Life is faster, slicker, yet the more things change, the more they stay the same. Slowing down to stop and listen reminds me of the stuff of life. Without being heard, who am I?

And so I remember a story about how it took nine days to come from France. I'm told we were the first to arrive by plane. And in my mind's eye, I see a photo of me tucked in the crook of my father's arm like an old fashioned worn leather brief case. I'm grinning cheekily. They told me with pride, "we weren't DPs." I used to be in a muddle about Displaced Persons, about camps filled with people with no where to go, waiting for their stories to continue. But I'm happy to say, at long last, we did "live happily ever after in a land where kookaburras always laugh and sun remembers to shine out of the clearest sky and people feel warmth sharing stories".

## Sisters Revisiting their Early Life – Ruth Wilson

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Dianna Mannigel and Marion Armstrong are sisters who grew up in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area during the 1930s and 1940s. Their father, who fought in World War 1, took up a grant of land at Yoogali where the girls attended school until they were ready for their secondary education. They then moved on to Griffith High School which served students from a number of outlying farming districts as well as those living in the main town.

Dianna and Marion broke the family tradition by completing high school, continuing with tertiary studies and entering professions in which they have both achieved a high degree of distinction. In recent years they have taken on social activist roles in a number of spheres. When they opposed environmental degradation, the caption under a photograph which accompanied a newspaper report of their activities referred them as the 'green grannies'!

Like many of us the sisters have reached the age for recollection and reflection. In their frequent conversations about their childhood they discovered two things. First, they found that they remembered the 'same things' differently on many occasions, and enjoyed the process of working through their different perspectives on past

events. And second, their contemporary awareness of ethnic diversity as a positive aspect of multiculturalism led them to identify family and community attitudes which, unquestioned at the time, are today unacceptable. They were especially concerned by their own failure to recognise the discrimination implicit in the treatment of the local Aboriginal population. They noticed the absence of this theme in any of the stories recorded in the impressive local history produced by the Griffith Historical Society as a Bicentenary Project.

Out of these insights they have developed a desire to revisit the scenes of their youth in an oral history project with a difference. They have chosen to interview people from different ethnic backgrounds about what it was like to be Greek/Italian/Jewish/Aboriginal in regional New South Wales in the 1930s/40s. Their method is highly unorthodox. They have undertaken to interview as a team, and to include two members of the family in each of their interviews. They are aware that they are bending the rules of oral history established by current convention, but are committed to the idea of multidimensional oral history.

Dianna and Marion have agreed to the publication of some of the

interviews in *Voiceprint* as a 'work in progress'. We will be interested to have members' comments in due course, as the transcripts of these unconventional oral history interviews are included in our newsletters. We start in this issue with an interview in which the sisters are recalling their own childhood experiences to set the scene for future explorations of community life in Griffith and its environs shortly before and after World War II.

**Interview with Marion Armstrong and Dianna Mannigel, in Dianna's home.**

*Interviewed by Ruth Wilson, 22-6-1999*

RU Was your father Australian-born?

MAR He was Australian born but his father was German, he came from Germany about 1850. We didn't know much about the family, almost no sense of knowing the German side of the family. We never met the grandfather, he died when Dad was six and there were two other young children, it was very much a solo family. Which was the same case with my mother, she came from England with her mother in 1912. They married eventually in early 1931.

RU Did they meet in Griffith?

DI Yes. My grandmother had already established herself in Griffith with Mum. My Grandmother was at

Woodlands hospital. Dad had been there twelve years I think and then they married. So he spent a long time on his own, except that his mother, who was widowed, came and stayed with him.

So what it points to is a lot of isolation, material hardship, and I think that with pretty well all of those returned service men, many of them would have been wounded, many of them would have been suffering from shellshock, which is what he was. So here's this man, aged twenty two, struggling to clear the land for six months, before they could, before they could start their debts.

RU Marion, can you add anything to that, starting from when you were born?

MAR Well, I was born in 1934, in Woodlands hospital, where my Grandmother was matron. I was born at tea-time, according to Mum.

RU Do you have anything to add to Dianna's recollections of your parents, how they came to Griffith?

MAR Yes, Dad and Mum met at a dance. The Soldier Settlers used to have a lot of social functions, there's quite a few little old dance cards and things with their names on them. That's where they actually met. Mum didn't like Griffith but that was where the work was so she

- had to be there. She worked as kind of nursing assistant for her mother for a long time, and it was very hard work. She'd have liked to have gone nursing, training, but there was no money and she finally became a secretary to Dr. Bodicomb who was the owner of Nan's hospital.
- RU Now when you say your mother didn't like Griffith do you have any more ideas about why she didn't like it?
- MAR They had lived in Bowral, and she just adored Bowral, green, you know the sort of cool English climate, and the duststorms, the Bagtown, those sorts of things she found extremely difficult. But she did belong to a theatre club, she just loved elocution and acting, so that was really one of her main interests.
- RU How did your father relate to being a Griffith person?
- MAR I think it really became part of him, at a very deep level, to be a Griffith person, to be a farmer. It was very important to him, he was a scientific farmer, he thought a lot about what he was doing, why he did it. He was quite advanced, almost, would you say, like an organic farmer.
- DI Certainly experimental.
- RU Is the any thing you can add perhaps about the way in which either of your parents spoke about life before Griffith?
- MAR The Bowral bit was certainly very important. Dad had intended to be in the permanent Army, when he was discharged and he saw this notice in a tram saying, 'Irrigation lots for Soldier Settlers' and he just got on the train and went down there and never came back.
- RU Did he have to pay for that or was it actually given out to Soldier Settlers?
- MAR Given.
- DI But we've got documents here which show the debts that he entered into almost immediately. There are little account books which show that he had to pay for, be in debt for, e.g. hay for the horses. When he applied for the land, after he'd cleared, with everybody else, he applied for his little piece and there was a debt then of 527 pounds that he immediately entered into, because of the clearing, building ditches and things like that. So it wasn't a gift!
- RU Was life financially always a struggle? Or was it fairly soon that he got out of debt?
- DI When I was born, it was very severe. That was 1931. He'd tried share farming with his brother-in-



law and we've got a letter. Not long after Mum and Dad married, Mum went to Sydney, I think she went to find work. There is a lot of letters, I don't know how we've got them, lovely letters, and he referred to the wheat that he was share-farming on: 'The wheat is going up but of course that will not effect us except that more is paid off the machinery.' Which he'd borrowed money for. 'But it's good to see it going up', meaning it was growing, but in fact we know that immediately after that there was no rain and it died off. In one of the letters he said to Mum, 'I'm enclosing three pounds with this, but for the love of mike don't waste any of it dear girl, things are not too good. Have had to draw on my shares at the Co-op Grocery.' Back to that sort of business. He was working as a labourer at the prune shed, I think making boxes.

MAR What a whole lot of Soldier Settlers did, was that as their trees weren't bearing, and they were building up to bearing, they had to take jobs and a lot of them worked in what they called the 'Prods', The Griffith Producers. Just doing whatever was available and lucky to get it. That's what he did in order to have cash.

DI And he didn't tell his friends at the prune shed (which is how he referred to the work place) that he'd got married because he didn't want to involve them in giving him a present. And he was so embarrassed when they gave him a little silver vase and a couple of serviette rings. Which we still have. So it was very hard times.

RU Do you recall any stories that your father told about the pioneering days?

MAR Oh, yes. Out the back of our house was this raw timber sort of little shack, round back slabs, lined with tar paper. This was where he and a friend called George Newman lived while they cleared the place, and that stood for many years, perhaps pulled down after he left the farm. That was the sort of place they lived in, very primitive, with a fireplace standing on a cement slab. Single room.

RU We're talking about Yoogali. Would you like to explain where Yoogali was in relation to the town?

DI Mmm. Three miles out, just about on the railway line that would go to Leeton and Naranderah and Juneee. It was a village by itself.

RU Did you regard yourselves as Yoogali people or Griffith people?

MAR I think we were Yoogali people.

RU What did that mean?

MAR Umm, we weren't 'city'. (laughter)  
And we went to the local shop  
which was run by the Gardiner  
family, who had the Post Office.  
There was nothing else though,  
was there?

DI There was the recreation field...

MAR Oh, there was the Coronation Hall  
built by the Italians, this was 1937,  
that was the hall that everything  
happened in. And the man who  
built it was the father of children  
we went to school with, Tony  
Ceccato. We didn't know that at  
the time.

RU Your shopping, your store?

MAR Once a week, Saturday morning,  
shopping and going to the Mona  
Cafe and having milk shake and  
sandwiches. And Mary Maher was  
the waitress, our favourite waitress.

RU Where did you shop?

DI The Co-op.

MAR Oh yes.

DI And then, the shopping was such  
that you went to the counter and  
you asked for your goods, and they  
turned around and got the things  
from the shelf behind, there was  
no self-selection.

MAR And then, put the money in the  
little thing and pulled, and away  
it sailed.

RU Did you get everything from the  
Co-op? Dry goods, fruit and ?

DI Vegetables no, Mrs. Dreyer we

went to for vegetables. And  
Condon's butchery.

MAR What about manchester, there  
was Eardley's. Miss Cullen. You  
remember Valerie Blair, her  
parents had the haberdashery and  
materials, that Mum used to go to.  
Jeffrey's.

RU Did you have refrigeration at home?

DI Not then, not till much much later,  
not till, I think during the war years.

MAR 1939, I think we got a refrigerator.  
It was a big deal to get the  
refrigerator.

RU What are your recollections of  
school which was infants and  
primary school in Yoogali?

DI It was the one school with three  
rooms so we didn't know about  
'infants school'. There was the  
'babies' class'. We

MAR You started when you were six.

DI Well, you started when you were  
five, but Mum and Dad decided to  
keep me, anyway, another year at  
home. So I did actually start at six.  
We were in Mrs. Lane's room. Mrs.  
Lane was a war widow.

When I started school we were  
seated at long benches, four-  
seated, there was Mary Gardiner,  
Diana Centofanti, Mary Rostirolla  
and Dianna Mannigel. Two Mary's  
and two Diana's, in the different  
nationalities. That was just the  
way it went.

- RU How much was learning and how much was play in the babies class?
- DI In school it was all learning. Outside you played. Mum tells the story of how I came home and how I'd had to learn how to make meathooks! Simple early stages of writing. But we, the members of my family found it quite easy to learn reading and I think you, Marion, were aware that you couldn't understand why the other ones couldn't read. You said, 'Well you've only got to look at it and you can see.' But what we weren't aware of was that English was not their first language.
- MAR I remember feeling very sorry for Mary Rostirolla because she really had a struggle with reading and I had to sit there feeling highly embarrassed at the attention she was getting, she just could not do it. Now she was someone who spoke Italian with her mother at home.
- RU When did you first become aware that there were differences in the backgrounds, ethnic differences?
- DI Certainly that's not an issue we talked about, we were always aware that there were Italians, the biggest difference was that they were all Catholics. We were Methodists. That was the distinguishing mark.
- MAR I think it was more distinguishing than the Italian. I think that our family, perhaps Mum more, had a prejudice about Catholics, not strong but enough for you to feel it and so you thought about them, I did, more as Catholics than Italian and that was the difference. I remember having a conversation with Lola Pasin, about how we were really all the same anyway.
- RU What age would you have been then?
- MAR Fourth class. I remember the conversation, with another girl who was a Seventh Day Adventist, one who was a Catholic, me who was a Methodist. We were talking about the differences, and Lola and I agreed that we were not so different, which was interesting.
- RU And do you think that concept about differences would have come from the parents?
- MAR Oh, yes, yes.
- DI I don't think you were reflecting the family values, actually!
- MAR I don't think I was at all. In fact I think I was remarkable. These were the values that Lola and I evolved between us.
- DI I know that later on it was clear to me that anybody that I might consider marrying, it would be really bad if I tried to marry someone who was Italian and

Catholic. That wouldn't have been very acceptable.

I wasn't aware of what it meant to speak another language. I distinctly remember when I was about seven one of the teachers, not in my classroom asking me, 'Hullo, Dianna, can you speak English yet? And I stood there twiddling my fingers, and said, 'No Sir.' Because I didn't know that what I spoke was 'English'. When he was talking about 'English' he meant a 'language' and I didn't know. There I was with black hair and brown eyes, and a funny name.

RU Did that name which was different create any interest or any comment?

DI Strangely no, especially when you consider that it was German. And when you consider that Italian people were interned. The fact that Dad's name was German was I don't think realised by people and the fact that he fought against the Germans in France was known. But I think that the 'German-ness' was hidden because it wasn't until I was in either first or second year at High school that it became clear that it was a German name, we'd always thought it was French.

MAR We'd actually been told that it was French, Alsace-Lorraine was

supposed to be where it came from, that was on the border.

RU Did either of your parents have anecdotes and stories about their own childhood that they shared with you.

MAR Yes. Mum told me a great deal about her childhood which was a childhood of a divorced parent who came to another country without networks, without friends. When her mother worked as a District Nurse in Gippsland, got onto a horse, she'd never ridden a horse before, and rode off to be a district nurse. Mum was left in school, a convent, and she was not taken out during the holidays because her mother had to earn the living. So she was really quite a lonely young girl, I think. That was a thing that sort of stayed.

One other thing was that was I think important was that my grandmother was absolutely pro-Australia. She didn't hanker for Britain. She said, like, 'This is the place to be and let's make the most of it.' She was really a pioneer sort of person. I think perhaps Mum was reluctantly pulled along into that, I think she would have liked to have had stronger roots. I sensed that that was quite difficult for her.

DI I think my Grandmother deliberately cut off her ties with

her family at home. She was here, she was here. The links were lost. Until after the war.

RU What sort of memories do you to have about games, home entertainment, the sorts of things you did as a family? Did both of your parents participate in games with you?

MAR My sense of it is that the farm consumed so much, Mum worked a lot on the farm, and Dad was consumed by the farm.

DI And was exhausted at the end of every day.

MAR I do remember, though, we had a gramophone and we used to play records but during the war, we sat down and had a family conference, and Dad and Mum and us decided that we would give that gramophone to the Merchant Seamen. So it went. So I thought that was nice.

RU What other things did you do for entertainment?

DI What I remember was the 'Story Chair'. Dad used to read us a story. Three, then four, of us could sit around on his knees and on the arm of the chair. What we had was a weekly or fortnightly little English comic/storybook/magazine. They actually came from England and we had these stories, Fairy Twinkletoes who waved her magic

wand, and Rupert the Little Yellow Bear. It was great story time. At the end of the day.

And he also told stories, didn't he?

MAR He had amazing imagination.

DI Stories about witches, and tricky foxes and things that were around us.

MAR Do you remember when he told us a story about the fox that he'd killed and we all cried so much he had to change the story. *(laughter)*

DI The other thing was picnics. Mum didn't come on picnics, I think she was glad enough to be at home by herself. We all went out, to the hills and had lunches. Very simple, weren't they?

RU How would you describe your relationship with your parents, relaxed, in the ways that kids are with their parents to-day, or was there more formality?

MAR That's a hard one. With Mum, I actually felt more equal at times than was good for me, I tended to take care of her. Dad was fairly strict but fair.

RU That story telling must have made a great bond.

DI Yes, it did, and going on the picnics, driving along.

RU Were you expected to do jobs on the farm?

DI Yes, pitting apricots, picking up prunes, picking grapes...

RU From the time you were small?

DI Not very small, late primary. We were paid a little.

MAR During harvest, everybody worked, you really worked hard in that heat.

DI You had to get the fruit off by the end of the day or they lost their quality.

RU What about house chores? How much were you expected to do to help your mother in the house?

MAR I think we were expected to make our bed, to sweep, whatever was needed, wash up.

DI But I know that mum ironed till late at night. Listening to the radio. And she herself had dreadful conditions for washing.

MAR She would bottle fruit, too. It was a really hard life.

DI But Marion tended to get more of that because I being the eldest, got to do things with Dad. I learned woodwork and metal work. I was more a son, wasn't I?

MAR Mmm.

DI That meant that Marion copped the housework which wasn't really fair, and then you didn't get your turn in those other skills. There were four daughters, no sons, that was the way it was.

RU At what stage do you think you started to have a sense of identity about being a Yoogali /Griffith

person? That you saw that this was your identity?

MAR Part of my sense of identity was always confused with the notion that I would go away for tertiary education, that I wasn't ever going to live in Griffith forever. I think that came from Mum to some extent and she was quite determined that her lack of education would not be passed on to us so we all knew in our own minds that we would go away for tertiary education.

RU At what age, Marion?

MAR From high school on, I knew that my identity would mean education, so that was a good feeling, I liked it. Dad's idea just before I went to University was, 'You want to watch out you don't become a blue stocking and don't get married.' And I said 'Well that's a risk I'm prepared to take.' So in his mind was, 'Why don't you marry a nice Griffith man and settle down' and Mum's was, 'How about University and get an education so you can do what you want.' So there was quite a difference but once Mum said 'That's it', Dad would do it.

RU And he was willing to make the financial commitment, which was heavy?



- DI Yes. I can remember the blue stocking bit, that fear.
- DI An early and simple perception of where we were was, we used to go away, sometimes to the sea for holidays, and there was a story, (actually it's moving me now) when we came back home on the long train trip, we came into the back yard, we sat down on the overgrown lawn, patted it and said, 'Ah, the good old Griffith grass.' So, you've been away and came back home, wasn't it?
- RU This was when you were quite small?
- DI Oh, primary school. And you get a sense of living in Griffith when you travel, 14, 15 hours, to make that journey, which included going through Leeton and Naranderah, and early in the morning, going through Bowral, which was very significant for us and it was always green. We'd left dryness in January and there was this magical place we'd heard so much about. All that identifies Griffith! And it wasn't the Yoogali grass, it was the Griffith grass.
- RU For you, Dianna, obviously there's a lot of affection there?
- DI Ah, yes, it was good life.
- RU And the same for you, Marion?
- MAR Oh, yes. I'm very glad I was raised on a farm, in that place. I still have an incredible affection for cypress pines and dry grass. Whenever I see that I feel good.
- RU Do you have the feeling that if you had been a 'town' person it would have been different? You would have related in a different way?
- DI I don't think it would have happened. We really were 'earthed'. Barefoot a lot of the time except around the horse yard because of the fear of tetanus. But building cubby houses out among the trees. Dad, interestingly enough, didn't clear a portion of the land, which he could have, he could have cultivated it, but the cyprus pines were there, and we had this lovely place to go in, and make cubby houses. I think what we got out of that was a lot of autonomy. And getting the orange boxes which would arrive on the back of a truck and be piled up and we'd immediately move in. They were big boxes and we'd carry them round and make our houses, cubbies and so on. It's more than just playing, it's having a lot of control, and on that land.
- (To be continued)*

# Diary of Events



## **Executive meeting Dates for 2000**

Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meetings held at the State Library at 5.30pm on the 8 August, 10 October, 28 November. The AGM will be held Saturday 29 July prior to the seminar.

## **Seminar Dates for 2000**

29 July; 28 October.

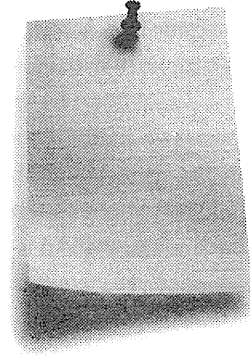
## **National Biennial Conference**

30 August – 2 September 2001

## **2000 ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING**

"At the Crossroads: Transforming Community Locally and Globally" Marriott Hotel, Durham, North Carolina October 11 – 15, 2000. The theme of the meeting is "At the Crossroads: Transforming Community Locally and Globally" For inquiries, contact , Alicia J. Rouverol, Southern Oral History Program, Department of History, CB#3195, 406 Hamilton Hall, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3195. <ajrouver@email.unc.edu>

## **Noticeboard**



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