voiceprint

Newsletter

of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

of Australia

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Editorial

This edition of Voiceprint *has been timed to get to you before the next seminar. We do want to be able to remind you of this important discussion on ethical issues.*

The State Library has requested that there will be only 2 seminars in 2001. The provisional dates for them will be early May and November. However, The Royal Australian Historical Society has requested a joint seminar with the OHAA to be held at the end of July – so keep these dates in mind..

The committee is at present considering publishing 2 editions of Voiceprint *next year. Could members please note that copy for next year will be required end of January and end of August.*

Thank you to those who have responded to our request for more copy for Voiceprint *– and we have more promised for the coming edition. However please do nor rest on your laurel's. There is so much happening in oral history – we do want to keep everyone informed! It is very pleasing to have Jill Baxter's report of the Bouddi Project – who else has a local project. Please share it with us.*

The last seminar focused on family history and we have some new members from this field. We hope that you enjoy the continuation of Ruth Wilson's interview with the Mannigel sisters. The story of Evelyn Sladden informs us of her experiences as a young woman in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Life stories are always interesting.

We hope that the 'confessions' of Bill Bottomley set you thinking about the whole process of recording and presenting oral history. We look forward to you contribution.

Your editorial committee – Joyce Cribb, Katja Grynberg, Ruth Wilson

PS: I would recommend my colleague Ruth Wilson's book (see review) for those who would like to know more about the art of conducting interviews, Joyce Cribb

Contents

New Members May to August 2000

Since we have had a special seminar for family historians we are pleased to note their support. However, our welcome is of course for everybody listed here. How glad we are to have made contact with you and we look forward to keeping in touch!

Lynda Kelly	Social welfare officer/ now postgraduate history student
Johanna Perheentvpa	Student. Interested in Australian history
Ouranita Karadimas	Teacher, interested in family history
Eunice Lovell	Postgraduate student, interested in history, heritage and environment
Julia Roberts	Officer, Old Parliament House, Canberra
Jane van Balen	Audio-visual archivist and librarian
Louise Lowe	Accounts officer, interested in genealogy
Parkes Historical Society	President, Mrs Yvonne Hutton
Gina Dolphin	Museum assistant
Shaun Ryan	Interested in trade union history
Rosemary Nichols	Registered nurse
Sandra Blamey	Community Development Consultant
May Malouf	Student

Oral Histories to go on-line

The Oral History Association of Australia (NSW) Inc. has very generously donated $12,000 to the State Library of New South Wales to support an archivist to enter the oral history collection on to the on-line catalogue. Susan Lloyd, who is an experienced archivist and has been working for some time in the Mitchell Manuscripts Maps and Pictures Section has been appointed to undertake this task.

REPORTS

July Seminar – Joyce Cribb

The July seminar on family history was a great success with approximately 100 attending. It was such a privilege to hear Doreen Mellor, Project Manager, National Library of Australia speak about the **Bringing Them Home Oral History Project** – stories from indigenous people and others involved in the process of child removals. This project is now well under way with teams of interviewers from around Australia trained and commencing on the huge task of collecting up to 400 interviews. All the interviews recorded will be transcribed and the recordings preserved using the latest technology available at the National Library to ensure that the recordings can be accessed well into the future by all Australians. I am sure we are all looking forward to hearing some of the stories from this project.

Alan Gold, novelist and columnist then outlined some suggestions for writing up the family history from the oral interviews. Alan explained how some of the techniques he uses as a novelist could be applied to add another dimension to a family history. He suggested that the history can be built into a larger picture with information about the local area, the nation and the world providing a context for the family history.

The morning went far too quickly, but was very enjoyable and informative for all those present.

A Community tells its stories - the Bouddi Oral History Project – Jill Baxter

In 1995, the Pretty Beach & Wagstaffe Progress Association held a Nostalgia Day in Conjunction with the first ever flag raising ceremony at the Wagstaffe Community Hall to celebrate Australia Day. The Day was a resounding success, with former residents travelling from far and wide to take part and join with present residents and old friends to talk about times past and times present. I went along with my tape recorder, representing the Local Studies department of Gosford City Library. The tapes, which were recorded on that day, were far from the standards set by Rosie Block and the OHAA. Background noise of voices, tea cups, asides from other people, even the slow sinking of one interviewee's chair into a sandy spot, all supplied atmosphere to the recordings. I think that future listeners will find these tapes interesting, not only for the stories told by the interviewees, but also for their vitality and sense of community, which the background noises contribute.

Since that day, our community on the Bouddi Peninsula has continued to record the memories of our oldest residents, with the unfunded resources supplied by volunteer interviewers. We now have wonderful verbal pictures of life here covering almost the whole of the 20th century, especially during the years of the Great Depression. People are now asking, "Will there be a book?"

This year, our community celebrated Bouddi 2000, with an Historical Photographic Exhibition, followed by a sound, light, music, dance experience "This is the Place," written and performed by local writers, musicians, dancers and school students. At the exhibition, many visitors came from far away. They enjoyed seeing old school photos and many other photographs. Local organizations were invited to contribute their own historic photos. The Volunteer Fire Brigade contributed photos of their work, churches contributed their histories, accompanied by photographs, environmentalists displayed their special images, family historians contributed precious photos.

At the entrance to the display, we had a place for people to leave their

names and addresses if they wished to take part in what is now the officially titled Bouddi Oral History Project. We received many potential interviewee contacts.

A gentleman, living in Queensland, heard of these happenings, and wrote to a local contact, contributing a little of his family memories of living here. I designed a Personal Memories Questionnaire, which I sent to him, as I could not interview him personally. He replied with a wonderful description of his life, from infancy, in 1926, with his parents. They lived in, what was then, a remote part of the peninsula, running a little store for tourists, above Maitland Bay beach. His father constructed the early track, down to the beach. He also sent a bundle of photographs as a bonus, which I was able to scan into my computer database. We have collected scanned copies of many photographs, now stored on a CD.

In preparation for the proposed book, the logged interview tapes have been indexed by subject and time. Local residents, perhaps suspicious of the intentions of a comparatively recent arrival, asked me "Who's going to write the book?" I replied, "The people who record their memories on the tapes will be the authors of the book." This is how I visualise the project, using quotes from the tapes to develop pictures of life as it was so long ago and supporting these with the photographs we have been lent so generously.

There is still a long way to go, but we aim to complete the project in 2001, with funding, good management and a large amount of luck, not necessarily in that order!

Why Don't You Ask? – Ben Haneman

Consultant physician and book reader. This review courtesy of the Australian Jewish News. A BIG ASK. Interviews with interviewers. Ruth Wilson, New Holland Press 2000. Paper back. Pp 314. Price $22.95 including GST.

Asking remains a very good way of finding out. Asking others, interviewing others and being interviewed takes up a great deal of our lives. Moreover, reading, listening to and watching interviews on TV are a popular form of information gathering and also provide entertainment. Most people could name you one or two popular and reliable interviewers. This book is a collection of highly informative interviews of successful practicing interviewers.

One reason for buying this book is because it is written by Ruth Wilson, a well regarded Jewish educationalist, who has to her credit the oral history endeavour, Project Heritage, well established at Moriah, Masada and Emanuel schools. Oral history is further acknowledged in her interview with Rosemary Block, Curator of Oral History at the State Library of New South Wales.

But there is a still better reason for reading this book. As each interviewer is interviewed their professionalism and their skills are highlighted, made explicit and are explained. It is immensely encouraging to realise how consciously committed they all are to their interviewing tasks and how they have each developed a functional philosophy as to their duties in seeking more information on behalf of the reader or the viewer. Together, they constitute a profession, which has established ethical standards.

Ruth Wilson's choice of interviewers is commendable if not inspired. Not only did she interview acknowledged leaders in the media field but she thought laterally enough about the interviewing task so as to include the diagnostic doctor, the investigative detective, the judge and the mediator.

She introduces each of her interviewees with a delightful sketch of the actual person. Some may find these to be unduly adulatory, but that wasn't my impression. It reflects Ruth Wilson's essential friendliness and courtesy together with a felicitous choice of people to interview. The introductions throw a useful light on who is being interviewed before Wilson gets down to

her serious business of the actual interview. And Wilson does precisely what a good interviewer should do, she asks the questions which the audience is most desirous to have asked.

It was interesting to have confirmed the prejudice which many of us share, that politicians are rarely to be trusted and that a modified interview technique, a more searching one, is needed when dealing with them. Best, is to have in your hand, written evidence to immediately contradict a big fat fib they have just uttered.

What makes a good interviewer? Somebody who has gone to great trouble to be knowledgeable about the possible substance of the interview and of course, the interviewee. Next comes an ability to listen, flexibility and rapid intelligent thinking on how to follow up some new angle that is revealed by an unexpected answer or to elicit the sort of information the public keenly requires. This is particularly true in political matters.

This book is already sold out at my local bookshop. One hardly wonders why. It is superbly written, is topical, highly cerebral and will make its reader better able to evaluate and appreciate the next interview read, seen or heard. Again and again, the message comes through on the need to listen. So easily said, so difficult a skill for all of us to master and perfect.

ARTICLES

Taping, Typing and Trusting: Confessions of a Transcriber – Bill Bottomley

When I embark on an oral history project I do everything myself – I tape the interviews, transcribe them, organise to have them checked and approved for publication by the repondents, then try to find an effective way to present those interviews to the reader – to ensconce the transcriptions in a readable and coherent written presentation. I've been interviewing people for various reasons since 1970, and from the experience of conducting hundreds of interviews – and transcribing the resulting tapes – I've come to a few conclusions that don't gibe too well with accepted professional and academic data-gathering orthodoxy.

Words alone are not enough

In the course of taping and transcribing all these conversations over the years, I am repeatedly impressed by how different interviews seem when I am transcribing them compared to what I felt about them driving away with the warm tape in my bag. It's happened too many times not to warrant attention – I drive away from an interview feeling that there was much of value in what had been said, only to find that after transcription it turns out not to be quite the mother-lode of usefulness that I felt it was when I was in the midst of taping it. Not that it's useless, just that it turns out to be not nearly as good as I thought it was. And, perhaps more significantly, the opposite happens too. Many's the time I've been surprised at how much good stuff there is, after I'd typed it up, in an interview that I'd felt was a tad lacklustre while it was being taped.

I'm sure that I'm not the first researcher to have experiences like this, but nonetheless I'd like to reflect for a moment on the implications that this aspect of the interviewing/transcription process holds for orthodox oral history methodology, and to do this I want to look closer at the act of transcription itself.

Many of the people that I have interviewed are from rural areas, and quite a number of them, especially the men, have turned out to be not particularly articulate – which is not to say that they don't have something to contribute – it's just that saying exactly what they mean doesn't necessarily come easily to many of them. It is not part of their culture to be fluently articulate. To many, even to be interviewed is more than a little daunting – it's something outside their everyday experience. For example, it is a very common conversational practice to

leave sentences unfinished, just hanging there. It seems to me that this happens most when the speaker feels that s/he doesn't need to actually complete the sentence because what is left unfinished will be understood from either the construction of the sentence or from what has gone before in the conversation. So I often find that, when transcribing a tape, if I type out only the actual words that are said I finish up with words printed on the paper that are either misleading or whose precise meaning is unclear.

So, what to do? The hallowed tenets of Objectivity tell me that I should only traffic in what is *actually* said, and rigorously exclude anything that could be called "subjective" on my part. Objectivity, as I conceive it, is something we strive for, rather than ever arrive at – a sort of methodological compass. But subjectivity plays a positive role in the whole process too, and it is a role that I feel is too often overlooked. There is a considerable element of subjectivity involved in the interview process, and subjectivity doesn't have to be a no-no. Understood and harnessed properly it can enrich and give added meaning to otherwise arid literal transcriptions.

I think it is very important to remember that the interview is *a social transaction*. There is a whole lot more happening as the tape is rolling than just recording the sound of words being uttered. There's a lot to be processed in the interviewer's head while in the midst of the interview, a lot to keep track of. And there is eye-contact, there is body-language, there is the constantly renegotiated feeling-tone of the social context and the sense of rapport or otherwise of the people doing the conversing. There is no shortage of literature about communication skills that stresses the importance of these factors – the slight nod, a raised eyebrow, a grimace. A sentence delivered with a wry smile playing around the speaker's lips can change the meaning radically from what is conveyed by only the words themselves – for instance, when the speaker is being ironic, or sarcastic. These non-verbal aspects are an integral part of any conversation, and are crucial to an understanding of the meaning that is intended, yet they are lost in a strictly literal transcription.

Time after time I find myself transcribing a passage, only to realise that the actual words on the tape don't convey the meaning that I know the speaker intended. I was there at the recording, and I know what the speaker was on about, because I was subjectively involved in the conversation – in the transmission of meaning – and the meaning was clear to me because all those things that make up the social context enhanced my understanding of what was being said in a way that the

words on their own could not convey. That is to say, my subjective involvement in the social act of conversing and recording is actually an *advantage* methodologically – something to be acknowledged and used, rather than seen as a hindrance to objectivity.

Consequently, it is not unusual for me to rearrange whole sentences while I am transcribing, so that their meaning is not garbled by the hesitations and re-starts and mid-sentence revisions or digressions of everyday speech. And it is a very rare interview indeed that doesn't need whole paragraphs and slabs of subject-matter repositioned in the conversation so that topics are dealt with in an appropriately organised manner. To my mind, this amalgam of methodological and social awareness can be a sharp tool in the hands of a sensitive interviewer/transcriber. It has been pointed out to me that the danger of doing things this way is that I might be wrong in my understandings – I might end up attributing something to the respondent that they didn't mean, or unwittingly distorting what they meant. But there is a safeguard against this happening, because the transcript is returned to the respondent for them to check that I haven't got anything wrong. If I have, they soon tell me. So, I see the role of the interviewer/transcriber not as a mere mechanical recorder of the spoken word, but as something more akin to a kind of midwife who assists with the delivery of meaning.*

But consider for a moment what is becoming increasingly common practice among 'professional' oral historians – the sort of people who get funding from a large institution to write an oral history of some aspect of their organisational past, for example. Oral historians with a grant of some sort may or may not do the interviews themselves. If the grant is generous enough to allow it they would likely hire interviewers to do the legwork for them, and most would contract out the transcription of the tapes to avoid what is generally considered to be a tedious task that can be relegated to somebody with typing skills. But unless the person doing the transcribing is the same person who was conducting the interview, all of these other things we've just looked at are not taken into account – all those crucial modifiers of meaning that are going on in the complex social situation that is the interview. The baldness of typescript leaches much from the human richness of a conversation, and farming out the transcription seems to me to maximise the distance between the two.

Another aspect of professional oral history practice that I'd like to question is the practice of having the interviewee sign a formal Release Form giving permission for their transcriptions to be

published. I understand the reasoning behind this – it is a prudent thing to do. But it is something that I find difficult to do, again because of the essentially social nature of the relationship between the viewer and the interviewed.

I'm always impressed with how much people are prepared to divulge to a stranger. Every time I go back to them with the final transcript so they can have a final check, I just can't bring myself to then ask them to sign a formal Release, even though I have been advised that not to do so is "unprofessional". But to me, what I'd be saying, in effect, is: "Here, sign this because I don't trust you not to sue me over something in the future" and suddenly assumptions of litigiousness and distrust are introduced into the social relationship between both parties, and I'm not comfortable with that.

But, I've been asked, what if someone changes their mind, or goes senile and *does* want to sue you over something you've published once it has appeared? Well, as a sort of commonsense hedge against this, I deliver or mail the final transcript with a covering letter asking the respondent to consider it carefully as it is the last chance they'll have to make changes before it is published. Then I make follow-up phone calls to get their OK, and make any alterations they specify. I'd rather maintain the rapport and trust of my respondents than risk alienating them by trying to cover myself against the unlikely event of legal action. (Mind you, one day I may come to rue this approach, but it's a risk I'm prepared to take.)

Respondents are more than just raw data repositories to be exploited by researchers for their own purposes. Without the respondent's testimony the oral history project would not exist, and for me he social relationship with the respondent is not finished as soon as the transcript is approved. Everyone that I interview gets a complimentary copy of the ensuing publication as a token of my appreciation of their co-operation and help. This can be costly sometimes, but I think that the money is better spent that way than paying someone to do the transcription, (which these days can set you back quite a bit).

These remarks are not applicable to all oral history projects. Obviously some projects are so large that it would be impossible for one person to do both interviewing and transcribing, and obviously some projects may be controversial and more prone to possible litigation. However, these days the separation of interviewer and transcriber in the research process, and the de rigeur garnering of signed Releases are coming to be regarded as signifiers of professionalism and orthodox 'best practice'. But at what cost?

* Footnote: I should say at this point that none of this is to suggest that the colloquial feel and informality of oral testimony should be sacrificed in the process. Sometimes I transcribe material that is not strictly relevant to the topic simply because it conveys the richness of vernacular expression and warrants inclusion on its own account. In a recent conversation with some old-time timbergetters I was captivated by expressions such as: "Andy was so skinny he never shot a shadder" and "I dunno why she went into hospital – I think she had her valves taken out"

An Interview - and a Scoop - Out of the Blue: One Woman's World War 2 – Jan Henderson

Thanks to Di Ritch, who was otherwise engaged, last year, I interviewed an English woman, at her family's request, during her annual summer visit to Sydney. She agreed to share her story of World War 2.

In 1939 Evelyn Sladden (then Evelyn Curtis) looked forward to university at the Sorbonne, but war intervened. 'So very quickly everything had to be changed' and she obtained a place at St Andrew's. 'It was a very last minute thing,' Evelyn says. And 'it was a bit inconvenient, living in Devon, having to go right the way up to the east coast of Scotland for university'. Three years later she gained her MA in History and French.

Born in South Devon in 1922, Evelyn was the youngest of five sisters and one brother. Her father was a barrister. Her mother ran the household. They lived in 'the most beautiful old manor house with huge gardens', an orchard and tennis court. Staff included a cook, housemaid and parlourmaid, nurse and nursemaid, a groom and two gardeners. The house had ten bedrooms but no bathroom. One loo upstairs served all the women and one downstairs her father and brother. 'A string of maids brought up the tin bath each night'.

From the age of four her family's French governess looked after Evelyn 'almost exclusively' until she turned nine. Evelyn spoke French at home and at prep school, a French convent on the coast at Torquay. Then she attended public school at Benenden, 'a beautiful school on the Weald of Kent', all girls.

On graduating from St Andrew's, 'the War was on and I had to join up', Evelyn says. She decided on the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) 'because in my family everybody was in something else'. Her sisters were in the Land Army, the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRENS),

the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) and Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), and her brother was in the Royal Marines. Besides, Evelyn liked the blue WAAF uniform 'very much'.

She signed on in Gloucester, went to Morecambe for initial training, then Ayr for further training. Her first pay was 38 shillings per fortnight. She was chosen to be a plotter in the Ops Room, and plotted in Ayr 'for a bit'. Next came a posting to Turnhouse.

She noticed in the Air Ministry Orders (AMOs) that more ATA pilots were needed. Her sister, Lettice, was an ATA pilot, and offered to use her influence. Evelyn applied, but 'waited and waited and nothing happened'.

Meanwhile, another AMO sought people with degrees interested in studying Japanese. 'I thought it would be fun,' Evelyn says. She applied, and went to London for an interview. Accepted, she began a course at the School of African and Oriental Studies in September 1943. Trainees lived in a property taken over by the RAF in Hallam Street, off Regent Street. During the Blitz, as service personnel, they were called upon to fight rooftop fires caused by incendiaries.

Evelyn and six other 'Jappy WAAFs', as they were called, studied for about six months. The group shrank by one when a recruit without a degree pulled out. In February 1944 they were posted to Station X, now known to be Bletchley Park, Britain's top secret wartime communications establishment.

Evelyn is talking for the first time about Bletchley, because 'after fifty years it's no longer secret'. Before this, she only discussed it with her five colleagues. The six remain 'very, very great friends' after all these years, and still meet for annual reunions. At Bletchley, the 'Jappy WAAFs' lived in the RAF camp. They first moved into a bicycle shed. 'The bikes were literally moved out that morning,' Evelyn says. 'It was so damp, one of the girls got TB.' They ended up in Nissan huts that held 16-18. They ate in the RAF mess and wore WAAF uniforms on duty.

They worked 'in offices in another very closely guarded camp with security men'. They decoded Japanese for the remainder of the War, about eighteen months. Evelyn says: We were all in various offices and all had a certain section of a book to cope with. It was all past history, decoding, but they hoped by getting intelligence out of these reports, it would help them cope with present problems. 'It was listening to Japanese pilots talking from one pilot to another.' Evelyn thinks the tapes 'must have been copied by our Intelligence Service'. There was no other equipment, just the books for their transcriptions. They handed their reports to the 'people in charge'.

Evelyn remembers Bletchley as a large establishment with 'huge' German and

French sections. The 'Jappy WAAFs' worked 8-4, 4-11, 11-8, with two days off between shifts. At lunch-time Evelyn played tennis, her sporting passion since childhood. Bletchley was near a large railway junction, so days off were spent in London (to the south). They did not mix with others, such as the Navy or Army people. Evelyn thinks this was 'just the way it happened, and working shifts it wasn't very easy to'. Bletchley was 'totally secret'. How did she cope with that environment – what did she tell her family? 'I just told them I was a cook. They were a little surprised at this,' Evelyn says.

Evelyn and her colleagues were due to go to Delhi with the RAF Tiger Force as part of Mountbatten's operations, 'but the atom bomb was dropped'. The war ended. It was 1945. The Jappy WAAFs were 'all scattered'.

Sergeant Evelyn Curtis was redeployed to the RAF HQ in Germany, called BAFO (for the British Air Force of Occupation). She married Squadron Leader Peter Sladden in Germany in 1946. He was a RAF civil engineer building runways for the Berlin airlift.

In 1947 the Sladdens settled in Salisbury, later Harare, in Southern Rhodesia, later Zimbabwe. They spent over 30 years there. While they brought up their children, Peter established his family engineering company, working in Rhodesia, Malawi, Zambia and Botswana.

Evelyn won the WAAF tennis championships at Wimbledon after the War. She then played in Rhodesia, South Africa and Kenya, as well as England. After ten years in South Africa, in Johannesburg, they returned to England in 1990.

Evelyn has forgotten the Japanese she applied all those years ago at Bletchley. 'It was only operational,' she says, along the lines of 'shoot down the bombers'. When a Japanese delegation visited Rhodesia, she could not talk to them at all. They ended up showing her photos of their children.

These days, Evelyn and Peter leave their farm in Norfolk each northern winter to visit their daughter's family in Sydney, then their son's in Johannesburg. Evelyn still supports Zimbabwe in Davis Cup tennis. Like millions of others, Evelyn Sladden's life was shaped by World War 2. Her tape shows, once again, how personal recollections illuminate aspects of the big picture. Revelations about Bletchley's fundamental importance to the war effort tend to focus on unravelling the German Enigma code. Evelyn discloses other dimensions.

Evelyn's tape and story are with her family. It was a pleasure recording them.

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

Continuation of interview by Ruth Wilson. First part of this story was published in Voiceprint 22. *The sisters continue with memories of going to high school in Griffith*

RU So the transition when you went to high school, you moved from Yoogali and came in by bus each day? Or rode your bike?

DI Yes, sometimes rode the bike but basically by bus.

RU What were the changes?

DI Well the one that I'm aware of at the moment was that in the Yoogali school, I suppose that more than a third of the children were Italian and my best friend, Linda, was Italian. And as soon as we arrived at High School we were streamed into the A class and our friends were streamed into the C or D classes. It's not to say anything about their intelligence, it has to do with the fact that they came to school not speaking English. And I didn't resume that friendship, I made friends with people in the A grade, and I think that was a great loss.

RU Was it easy for you to make those friendships with the town people, did it feel like the same sorts of friendships?

DI No, no it was different because we were farming people and a lot of them were town people. There was a difference.

RU Can you describe it?

DI Aah, I think, without being aware of it, it was a class difference, and some of these people came from homes where the fathers ran businesses, and in some way that was considered superior. So, there was some adjustment.

RU Would you say the Yoogali community was structurally different from the Griffith community?

DI It was almost completely rural, wasn't it, farming? Except Mary Gardiner and the shop.

RU Was there a sense of hierarchy in the farming community?

MAR Being a soldier settler had some sort of feeling about being special I don't know when, I think that idea came around maybe around the High School age, somehow that was special.

RU So what did it mean to be a soldier settler family?

MAR Well, I think partly it is being rewarded for service, having gone away and fought, that you were rewarded in some way.

RU Did it make you more Australian?

MAR I think it grounded me more in the country, I don't think I thought 'Australian', it was like I felt grounded in Griffith this was my place, it didn't matter whether it was Yoogali or Griffith actually, it was like I belonged here. I really belonged, the soldier settler thing meant that I belonged on this place. I don't think, we were only saying the other day, it never occurred to us about the Aboriginal people who had been here once. This was our place, it was our right and Dad had earned it and he was a hero.

RU And how had he earned it?

MAR By fighting. And working hard, and clearing. We have photographs of three neighbours, they would assist each other, to clear, so you had a group that went on this property and then we'll go over to that property, so these men worked together as a team, helping each other. A team of men who deserved this land.

RU So what you're saying is that you already felt special. Was there any sense in which you were comparing yourself with other people? Or was it more in reference to you own identity? Did you feel sorry for people who didn't have this background?

BOTH Oh, no.

DI The people in town that I referred to, business people, there were those, then there were the soldier settlers, but there were times when the farmers who were not soldier settlers and who were Italian farmers, there were questions about that, I think part of it was that they didn't do the clearing of the land, they didn't do that early hard work and then came in. Because many, many of the farms failed. There was very bad administration, they were not given enough land to make it viable, and then there were the years while they were waiting for it to produce and lots of people walked off, they were paid three hundred pounds to walk off. And this was an avenue for the Italian community to come in. I'm quite sure that there was an attitude towards the Italian farmers which was, 'Oh well, you've come in and we've done the hard work, and now you're taking it over.' I think

that was around. I can remember even when I was at High School, an argument in the bus, reflecting that attitude.

RU Most of this would have happened pre-war?

NOTE Di began high school during the later war years.

DI One of the things that farmers, or the people who advised them, weren't sufficiently aware of was that if you put lots and lots of water onto land, then salt begins to rise to the surface and ruins the land. Now, I remember in the story of Judith McCann's family, the farm was sublet for a while and when Mr. McCann came back there was a lot of salt, with no explanation about how this had happened. This is a thing that our Dad was very aware of. He would set the water going on the irrigation and get up in the middle of the night and when the water had got to the end of the furrows he would cut it off so there wasn't an excess of water. He managed it very carefully. That takes care and effort but you'll only take the care and effort if you're aware that it's a problem.

What the belief about the Italian farmers was that, and I remember hearing about this very distinctly, that they'd come onto a fruit farm and to get some cash quickly so they'd plant vegetables in between the rows of fruit trees and water them as much as they felt the vegetables needed and run the risk of salting. With unawareness of what was really happening.

Now that was the basis for an attitude towards Italian farmers. I don't know how it was resolved but if you see that there were in fact inter-ethnic problems those are the things that could be part of it.

MAR I think, too, I remember on one occasion Dad losing our horse and he found him on an Italian farmer's property, he just searched for him and found him. He wasn't cranky about the fact that the guy had taken the horse over, because he said he wouldn't know where the horse had come from or how to get it back, but he had worked him too late and he was sweating and he hadn't rubbed him down. He said something like. 'Typical', you know like, 'They don't know how to look after the animals.' Not often did I hear anything as a comment from Dad but that was clear that he didn't approve of not taking care of the animals and he assumed that this guy didn't know how to.

DI So there was a standard that he had, you don't have a horse sweating at the end of the day when the day cools down.

MAR Another thing that just came to my mind about Italian farmers was that you had spraying programs and I don't think it was addressed well enough for them. They couldn't read the instructions and they would harm themselves and the fruit by not using the correct spraying programs. But it didn't seem to me anybody was actually .... they may have been trying to take that up with them and help them. But I have a recollection that a lot of Italian farmers ended up in hospital as a result of not knowing what to do correctly with sprays. I remember Dad discussing that with us.

RU So far when you've talked about differences, you've mentioned Catholic, you've mentioned Italian, you've mentioned Aboriginal, were you aware of any other groups or was that pretty much the way the perception of the general community was. Protestants, Catholics, Italian non-Italians.

MAR The Greek cafes.

RU How did the Greeks fit into the scheme of things?

MAR I don't know generally but as far as we were concerned, I would say, 'Fine'. They were the people who ran a good cafe and you could go in there and I had no concept of 'Greek' other than a cafe, did you?

DI No!

MAR Didn't know what 'Greek' meant.

RU You didn't have the sort of concept for the Greeks that you had for the Italians? Was there something really different in the way you saw...

MAR Because we **met** at the level of farming...

DI But we also met them at school. There were no Greek kids that I remember at school.

MAR In primary school is was Italian, we got to know the Italian kids.

DI One Greek family when we went to High School travelling in the bus and they were just nice blokes. That was it.

RU Did things change with the war, in perceptions, particularly the Italians?

MAR A very interesting thing happened there. We had a man working for us called Beppo, and Beppo and Dad got on fine. Beppo was very angry that his sons in Italy had joined the Brownshirts and he talked to Dad about this, how upset he was. And one day Beppo went into the bank to get his

money and they wouldn't give it to him because he was an alien. And so he said, 'I hope a bomb drops on the bank!' He was arrested and was going to be interned and I remember Dad being very upset and he went into the Police station and he said, 'This man is not what you're saying he is. He's anti-Mussolini, he's a reliable person, blah blah blah,' but no go, they interned him.

RU What was your perception of what the war was about? Because you were by then, early teens.

DI Yes, just before I went to High School, the war started. Oh, it was about England and Germany, Mum was on the English side. And we didn't know that Dad was one of the Germans (laughter)

RU Any sense of the issues?

DI Not really, I didn't fit in the assassination that led to it. Hitler...

MAR I remember listening to Hitler, speaking on a very poor radio, in those days the radio was pretty poor. And the incredible tension in the house as you heard him speaking. I remember both Mum and Dad saying the worst thing that could happen to Hitler would be that he understand what he's done. Then he would actually feel it. So we were getting a clear message that it was immoral.

RU In what ways did the war actually impact on your lives?

DI Food, rationing, but it was good for the farm because we sold prunes for the Americans. It was a profitable period. What I do remember when war was announced, was that Mum burst into tears and went across the road to where our Grandmother was living at the time. And I think this was the English thing. Apart from war, it was her home that was threatened. We didn't know just what the threat would be at that stage, of course. But I remember her reacting very strongly to that. Not that she knew the first war, being in Australia by then.

MAR I do remember negative comments about Chamberlain. Letting the side down.

RU It didn't have any impact on your perceptions of the Italian families? Apart from Beppo which you've told us...

MAR No, no I don't think so. I do remember Dad saying that during the first War the Italians were not very good soldiers because they turned around and ran away. And I remember saying 'Good on 'em!'. (laughter) I think that's the only sensible thing to do.

DI But there were a lot of soldier settlers in Australia who were Italians who'd been in Australia from a very early migration, enlisted, went to England, and fought and came back and became soldier settlers. Numbers of those. It's very complicated.

RU That's complicated. Did they have the same status as the Italians who came later? Was there any difference?

DI I couldn't say. I don't think that I know which ones they were. It's just that I've read it.

RU To go back to your social life. Guides, Brownies, was that all part of your life?

MAR Church, a lot. We used to ride our bikes into town and back to go to Sunday school. To the Methodist church. Neither Mum or Dad went but we went.

RU Was it something you looked forward to?

MAR Yes, we did it and we were with friends... I don't think I was at all overwhelmed by it. (laughter) But earlier, Mum was Anglican and she wanted us to be brought up religious but Dad called himself an agnostic, didn't he? He remembered very bad experiences in very orthodox religious training when he was young which he rejected; so that was Mum's preference. But in our very early years, the Salvation Officers, women, used to ride their bikes out to Yoogali where there was little hall and they ran Sunday School there. And that was a social event. Looking back on it I realise that some of the religious teaching was not the best. But it was what you did, you had religious education.

RU What about the food that you had at home? Was that typically Australia food, was there any way in which that was influenced by your Italian neighbours?

MAR Unfortunately, no, I think though, at school, sometimes we had the good sense to swap our peanut butter or whitebait sandwiches for stuffed pepper. But no it wasn't influenced, it was the typical **English**, roasts on Sunday, bread and butter custard, chops, meat and three veg.

RU When you think back to that, is it like 'comfort food' for you? Or is it something that you feel you could have done without?

MAR There's nothing like my mother's roast on Sunday. (laughter)

DI I can't do it.

RU Were you ever aware of relationships between different groups, particularly when you came to High school and you saw what was happening, going on with the towns people? Did you ever get a sense that there were maybe either class divisions or background divisions?

DI I think one that I became aware of that you Ruth were Jewish. I didn't know what to do about it. And I'd had all this Christian upbringing which didn't help. It was just that the Jewish people in the town seemed to be different and they were professional people too. That was part of it, I think. But to go back a bit, you (Marion) visited an Italian friend's home.

MAR Oh, yes. My best friend in primary school was Lola Pasin and I got myself invited to her place, by hook or by crook, I really wanted to go and visit her. So she asked me. They lived in a little sort of galvanised iron place behind the house of the people they (her father) worked for. A lot of Italian farmers came out and worked on the property of people who had a bigger property. I remember thinking it was really lovely, it was warm, nice food. Mrs. Pasin was in the back and I thought it was great but I couldn't work out why she wouldn't talk to me. I thought she didn't like me. And then it clicked, that she didn't know how to talk to me. She didn't have the English. And also she probably felt, 'Who is this person coming into my little house? I don't know her.' So I remember going home thinking, 'I don't think Mrs. Pasin liked me.' (laughs) But I don't think that had anything to do with it. But it was never repeated and Lola wouldn't come to my place. So those sort of barriers were there which I didn't understand at the time. Looking back I'm sure, (a) she didn't have English and (b) how did she feel about me coming to her house?

RU A class..... ? (unclear)

Mar Something like that , or more, maybe she knew, 'Soldier Settler'? Could be, but you know I loved it and ate all this gorgeous food. I would have done it again.

DI Well Jenny visited Mary Sartor and Mary Sartor did come back to the farm. But we don't have Jenny to tell us what it was like.

MAR I remember Julia Ceccato walking round from a long way in the summer to visit Jen after she came home when she had polio.. Mum was really touched by that.

RU In High school when the romances start, were there any prohibitions do you think, if you had wanted to have an Italian boyfriend? or a Greek boyfriend?

MAR Oh yes.

DI Mmmm...

MAR More that they were Catholic, or Greek Orthodox. But the Catholic bit. I was madly in love with an Italian boy in first year which of course I never discussed. (laughter) So I allowed myself this lovely fantasy of being in love with this Italian boy but in the light of reality, no way. Because I know when I went to University my mother saying, 'Now make sure you don't get involved with a Catholic boy.' So 'Italian' wasn't really the main issue. It was more around the power of the Catholic church and you'd have to bring your children up Catholic. And that I think related to her own things, that happened to her. She was at a convent boarding school.
And I remember there was a family where the girls **did** have Italian boyfriends, and I thought, 'Ooh, that's interesting.' (laughter)

DI Well, the daughter of one our neighbours married a Catholic and the father wouldn't go to the wedding. This was Shirley.

RU What year was that?

MAR Oh, forties, fifties, quite late. He was a bit stuffy.

RU You've kept more in touch with the Griffith scene than some of us. Would there be many of those mixed marriages now?

MAR Heaps, heaps.

RU So when did it break down? When did that resistance break down?

MAR Well, there are kids from our year, Anto Lorenzi, that's just one. And now when I've been reading the histories, oh. The one exception that I knew about, then, was Rene Bonomiand and Arthur Mills, wayback, wayback. Brian Mills's mother was from one of the very early Italian families. We didn't know, back then. Mum knew her and used to say what a lovely woman Rene was and I wasn't sure what it was about.

DI 'In spite of' being Italian,' I think?

RU When did you become aware that there was an indigenous community?

DI (pause) Mmmm I was aware of two or three Aboriginal people in town. We were both aware of the bus that used go to the High school, but until High school, I don't think we were aware at all, were you? (to Marion)

MAR Not in the sense of a community. I mean I remember there was a particular family down the road who, an Italian family who really made a mess of the house and used to throw all the chickens and things over the fence and it just descended into a very untidy house and I can remember being aware that Mum and Dad regarded this particular family as not keeping up a standard.

DI Not an Aboriginal family?

MAR No, Italian. But it wasn't like it said that all Italians are like that, it was more that this family was keeping up the standard. It wasn't as a community that we were regarding them as not OK.

DI But I'm trying to think of having met Aboriginal people. When we were at Yoogali we would not have. Except that you had that directive, later, from Dad, about up at the Hotel.

MAR That's right. Yes, sorry, I didn't really answer your question. You said indigenous. Yes, the Victoria Hotel was the place where the Aboriginal people went on a Saturday and often some of them would get quite drunk and on the lawns outside, and Dad would say, 'You don't go up there, the blacks are up there.' So it was more 'be careful because...' it was about safety and drunkenness, rather than anything else. I don't think the Aboriginality entered into it.

RU He used the word 'blacks' that was the most common way...

MAR Yes, that is what he did say, 'black.'

DI I can remember the Ledwidge family. I'm aware that I would liked to have talked to Norma Ledwidge, this was in High school, knowing that she was Aboriginal but I was never brave enough to do that.

RU When you say 'brave enough' what do you mean?

DI Had enough courage to go and talk to someone and say 'Hello'. There were a lot of people I wouldn't have gone up to say 'Hello', but I sort of wanted to say 'Hello' to her. And then there was Victor, wasn't there? He was in your year, wasn't he?

MAR Not in my class but perhaps in my year. He was a prefect.
But as far as the family attitudes were concerned, as much as we were aware of Aboriginal people, there was an openness, because I remember the story that Dad told was that Norma and Victor lived in the town (there might have been others) didn't live on the mission, or at Darlington Pint. Obviously had enough money to have the clothing required. A lot of kids came in from Darlington

Point on the school bus, came in with whatever they had. Victor and Norma were not as poor and Victor was certainly a prefect, '48 say. Norma I don't think went on after third year. She was great runner.

DI Which helps!

MAR Yes.

RU So are you aware of any prejudice expressed by any other student's?

MAR I never heard anything, the Ledwidges were just part of the school. I think there was a bit of a feeling about the kids that went on the Darlington Point bus. They weren't all Aboriginal but certainly a high proportion of them, from the Mission. It was more like, they weren't important in the scheme of things, they were there. They were usually in the lower grades. And I think, with us, we did tend to stick with those in the grade we were in, we didn't sort of go off anywhere else. All I can think of was that we used to think the Darlington Point kids were lucky because they could never be kept in, they had to get on the bus.

DI But I'm sure that there was no sense that we were on the land that had been the land of these people.

MAR No. Not at all!

DI There's one thing that I remember Dad saying, that when he was living out of Sydney, as a little kid. There were woodcutters, it was that stage down at Green Valley. He used to bear reports of what the men said, how at the weekend they'd go out 'Shooting blacks'. That was early this century. Now he said that with a tone of voice that meant that it was a bad thing to do, and that this was the way these people were. That stuck with me. He didn't say much about it, I don't know if you (Marion) remember the story. It was a statement about 'This is the way it was like, this is the way it was, then.' He had a lot of tolerance.

RU When you look back at your life in Griffith, those growing up years, what were your ambitions?

DI I wasn't as clear as Marion was about University, I think it has to do with being the eldest child, a characteristic that you just go along and do as you're told. And the careers advice was, 'Nursing or kindergarten teaching, dear.' Which I did. And so it's only in later years that I've developed ambition. Which is a pity. It had to do with being a girl. I should have done something like science. Or maybe engineering.

MAR I think you would have thrived at University.

RU So why was it different for you, Marion?

MAR I had to juggle my subjects to get matriculation because I went into Domestic Science under my mother's influence.

DI Dad's influence, too!

MAR Definitely, and I remember in first year, in tears, coming to Mum and saying 'I want to get out of this, I want to get into the other stream' and, no budge.

DI I'd done Latin and French and worked hard and Dad thought that I was working too hard, and I think that it was the blue stocking bit, 'We're not going to have that again' and he made Marion go into the domestic science class.

MAR And I was miserable. Really miserable. So I had to juggle in fourth year, to get subjects that would get me into University. And I did.

RU What were they, Marion?

MAR Economics, general maths, English, physiology, history, geography. So I made it, by really thinking hard how to do it. And got my matric. I remember Mr. Wiles saying to me, 'Well you can do anything, you've got what it takes to do whatever you like.' That was great to hear that.

RU This was your careers advisor, from school?

MAR Yes. And when I went to University, I thought, 'This is the life.' This is where I want to be. So I just had that feeling despite what my parents actually were pushing me into, I wouldn't let them do it, I found another way.

RU Dianna, what has been your experience of Griffith since leaving school? How much time have you spent there and what have you seen change?

DI What I've seen change is that it's bigger and brighter and there are houses now underneath where the hermit's cave was, it has spread and it's a terrific town. But I've been back, reunions and part of my University work when I was visiting Aboriginal communities where there were students. So I've visits there that were more than tourist.

RU But you've not lived there?

DI I've not lived there again just visits and meeting up with various people. So it still remains a place of the past.

RU Elaborate?

DI Well my mind has all the pictures of the past and I can put on top of that the way the town is at the

moment. Things that I encounter now when I go there, I just sort of place on that old picture. It's just become more complicated, successful, brassy in some ways, a big vigorous town.

RU Marion, you?

MAR I've been back to reunions, my husband and I have been once, I just wanted to take him and show him it all. It was very sad to see the old farm house had been pulled down and a new one put up. That was a bit of a blow. But I like going back, I like to get the feel of it, as Di says, it's alive, I love to see the way it's become Italian in its character, I'm always talking about food, but the food range, you know, it's just wonderful. So, yes, it's great place to go, I don't belong there any more, I like going there, it's great to walk into shops and talk to people that I knew. I value my roots incredibly, that I grew up on a farm there. And that has actually fuelled my interest in the environment, my profound interest in the environment, and I'm actually very committed to the Aboriginal cause and I do believe that came out of connection to the earth, as much as the attitudes of my parents because I think I've moved past them but it's that connection to the farm.

RU Can you recall any ways in which the Aboriginal people were discriminated against? Any concrete examples of that?

MAR No, it's more like just a general thing of dismissal, they didn't count, they were just like on the edges.

RU Has that changed, is there an Aboriginal presence now?

MAR Well I believe so. This is what Dianna and I have heard, that there is quite s
strong group of Aboriginal people, that's right, isn't it?

DI Yes, this is what we've been checking on as we're going back there. We hope to make connections with them. There's an Aboriginal preschool, run by an Aboriginal woman, so that serves the community, and there's a group Gala, it's group for the education of women, including Aboriginal women. Run by a white woman. We're hoping to meet with them. A self-education, moving on. What we don't know is whether they are Wiradjuri people.

RU They're the people of the....

DI Yes. It's Wiradjuri land that our farm was built on. But we didn't know, it was never acknowledged.

RU Have there been any land claims?

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RU They're the people of the....

DI Yes. It's Wiradjuri land that our farm was built on. But we didn't know, it was never acknowledged.

RU Have there been any land claims?

DI Can't be, I don't think because of the nature of the alienation of the land, way back from the end of last century. Selectors got large properties, and the settlers came, legally I don't think they have any claim at all. I don't know. But one of my Aboriginal friends who was born in Griffith and whom I see, talks of going on to one of the Italian farms picking grapes. I see an irony in that, that the people whose land it was, at the bottom of the pile, doing the labouring work. Or none.

MAR I think so much energy was taken up with dealing with the Italian community and issues, it's like the Aboriginal issues were pushed aside.

This is the end of this interview. We look forward to receiving further transcripts as Dianna and Marion conduct further interviews which explore community life in Griffith and its environs some sixty odd years ago. Ed

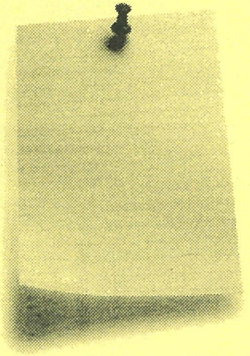
Diary of Events

Executive meeting Dates for 2000
Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meeting held at the State Library at 5.30pm on 28 November.

Seminar Date for 2000
28 October.

National Biennial Conference
30 August – 2 September2001
Should you be interested in speaking at this conference contact Dr Susan Marsden Ph (02) 6247 6766
Fax (02) 6249 1395 Or write to Oral History Section, National Library of Australia, Parkes Place, Parkes, ACT, 2600

Noticeboard



Note from Lynda Kelly
Ph (02) 9265 9782
Email <lkelly@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au>
"Introducing the City of Sydney Historical Association: An association is being set up for local residents and the general public to explore the unique history of the city area. This is an exciting new project which aims to create a more accessible and inclusive history. Meetings are planned for 14 October, 11 November, 9 December"
Contact Lynda for further details.

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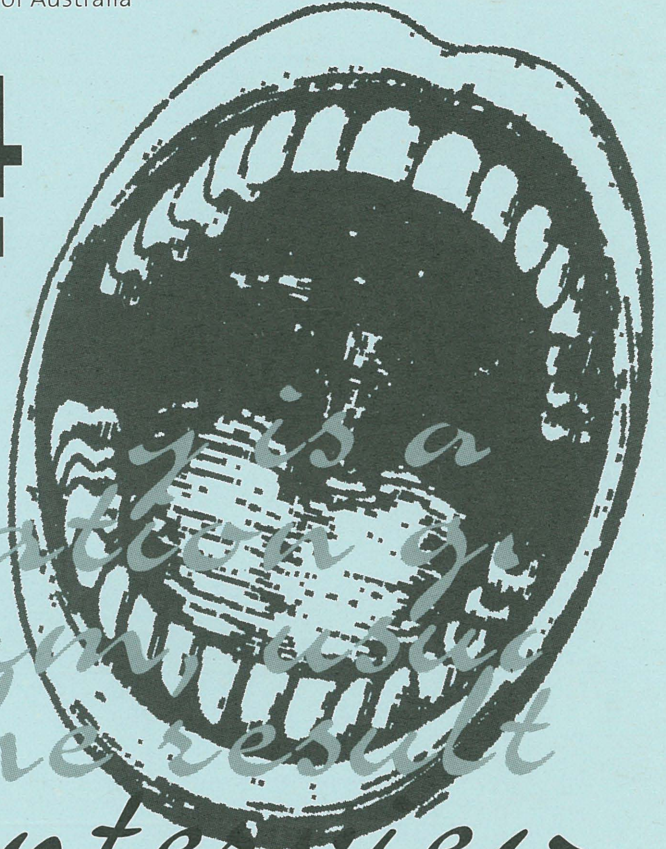

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