



# voiceprint

Newsletter

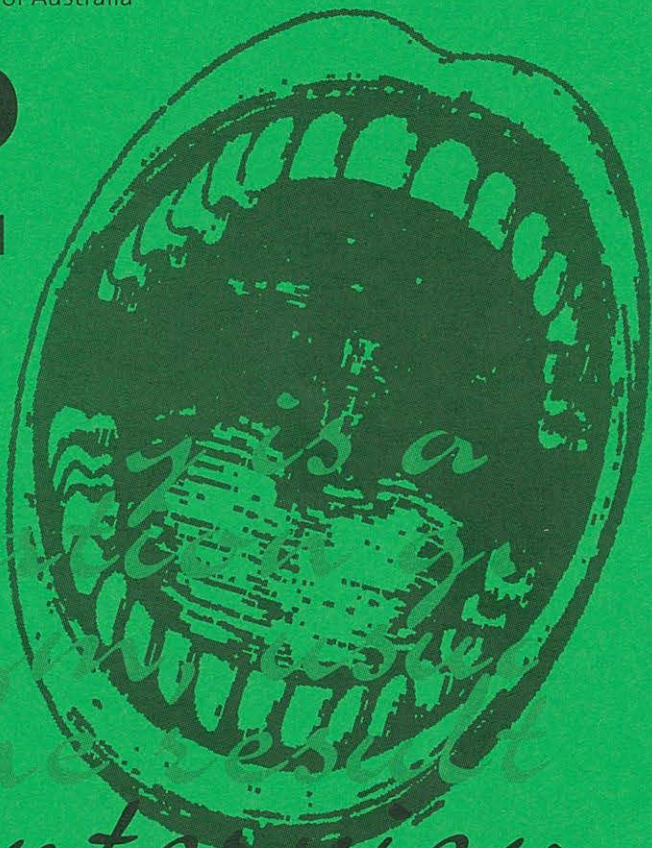
of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

of Australia

# 30

April 2004



*interview*

means of finding

the past by asking

questions of people who



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# Editorial

*Here is Voiceprint No. 30 for your interest and enjoyment. I looked at the number thirty, a good round number, and wondered if there was any significance in reaching this milestone. It reflects the tenth year of publication, the inaugural issue was produced in August 1994. Over this period Voiceprint has been spreading the word about oral history conducted in NSW and much further afield. We try to bring you information from the national body as well as items of interest from around the world. Note that this year, in June, there will be an opportunity to attend the International Conference to be held in Rome. The thought of Rome in summer brings back many delightful memories! I am sure we will have some reports for you in the next issue of Voiceprint.*

*This issue is one to stir the memories. So many have flashed by as I have sat at the computer editing the text for this edition. We need to continually stir up those memories that interest and excite us – history is so fascinating. Looking at Voiceprint 1 there were articles about a number of projects in NSW as well as information on South East Asia and Great Britain – there is much in the past and the present, which is soon the past, to inspire the future!*

*Thank you to Sandra Pires for the story about her father and Sydney's sandstone. After reading about Alf, I looked again with fresh eyes at some of the lovely buildings in the city which I passed by last week. Stories like this allow us to appreciate our built heritage. It is the stories of the workers that add life to this heritage. I am sure you will also appreciate the story of Richard Raxworthy and his oral history of the construction of the Harbour Bridge. Richard will be missed by all who knew him but his work in oral history remains to inspire future oral historians.*

*This edition illustrates that it is not only great buildings and great work that are of interest – garbage is also interesting! I wonder if some of the members will have memories of running down the road, carrying the garbage bin, yelling at the truck to stop – at 2am in the morning!. Those too young for such 'fun memories' (with the distance of hindsight) will just have to read Good Riddance. Thank you to Pauline Curby and Virginia Macleod for telling us of this project.*

*Enjoy Voiceprint 30. Please send in many articles and items of news for the next edition – copy by August 2nd. Thank you*

**Joyce Cribb**

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## New Members

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It is always pleasant to greet the New Year with a list of new members. I am particularly heartened because it is at this time of year that I reluctantly remove the names of members who have not renewed. Thank you for joining and for cheering us up and on! And a Happy New year to all our members and thank you for your on-going support. **Rosie Block**, President.

<b>Stephanie Coleman</b>	Researcher (and newly appointed Branch Secretary!)
<b>Vicki Luker</b>	Historian
<b>Christine Yeats</b>	Archivist
<b>John Witte</b>	Railway worker
<b>Sandra Pires</b>	Filmmaker
<b>Paul Rheinberger</b>	Archaeologist
<b>Jen Thompson</b>	Writer
<b>Sharon Page</b>	Audiologist
<b>Sue Singleton</b>	Archaeologist
<b>Ann Ryan</b>	Interested in oral history
<b>Simon Dikkenberg</b>	Documentary maker
<b>Paola Favaro</b>	Architect and academic
<b>Elaine Charles</b>	Administration manager
<b>Katrina Neal</b>	Social/market researcher
<b>Barbara Osmond</b>	Lecturer and women's hockey enthusiast
<b>Dr Annette Salt</b>	Historian
<b>Nance Millar</b>	Sociologist
<b>Dianne Switzler</b>	Genealogist
<b>Film Australia</b>	
<b>Market Research Society of Australia</b>	
<b>NSW Women's Hockey</b>	

# Nuts and Bolts

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## Vale

### *Richard Edwin Raxworthy 1932-2003*

It is very recently that you read my citation in honour of Richard Raxworthy. All that I said there in praise of the professional and the man, stands. I had not thought that I would be writing so soon in terms of farewell to a colleague and a friend.

When I heard that he had retired I knew he would be the very person deserving of a life membership of the OHAA. Life memberships are bestowed on members of the Association who have contributed a great deal to oral history and who, for whatever reason, will not be continuing their interest in oral history in as active a fashion as before. When I told him that the NSW Branch would be putting his name forward he said, "Why would you do that? Do you think I am going to die?" "Richard," I said, "It is a Life Membership!"

He knew his health was failing because of his years as a marine engineer at risk of inhaling asbestos fibres. He said they had always known it was a dangerous substance. The pipes in the engine rooms were insulated with asbestos, but then boxed in to contain the danger. However, in a crisis these protective wooden boxes would be broken in order to mend a pipe, and almost never replaced. The fibres then floated free.

I never in all the months that Richard knew he was dying ever heard him complain or inveigh against anyone who might have been held responsible. He was eventually fully on oxygen and unable easily to walk as far as the post box. Even then he was as interested in the various history areas he had made his own. Even then he still hoped to find a publisher for his detailed account of the Sydney Harbour Bridge builders. However, in this last while he generously gave permission to Peter Lalor to use the material so I am sure we will yet see Richard's memory honoured in print again.

I was away on holidays when Richard died although I had spoken to him just days before I left. Sadly therefore I was not present at his memorial, but I believe the citation I wrote for life membership was read at his death - so he was right in the end.

Richard died on Christmas Eve. I think he was waiting for his beloved son Julian, to get to Katoomba for the holidays. The memorial service was held at Point Pilcher Lookout, Medlow Bath, Blue Mountains, and it is a singularly beautiful place, on Tuesday 30 December 2003.

His son Julian said he had chosen this spot for the memorial service because he had visited it often with Richard. His father took him on many expeditions to beautiful places and he feels that's what gave him the stimulus to study landscape architecture. He said his father saw himself as an outsider and a wanderer and this began with his being sent to boarding school at the age of 4, followed, after school, by his life at sea. He kept himself separate, he was a loner and knew he had trouble with intimacy, although late in his life he resolved this too. When Julian was growing up and despite the failure of his parents' marriage, Richard insisted on all three spending all festival times together and Julian so looked forward to these occasions.

Julian went on to say he felt blessed by the memory of his father's energy and enthusiasm. He was a man of a thousand stories, had a brilliant memory and a real connection with the people he interviewed. He had generosity and perseverance and great courage – a beautiful, beautiful man.

### **Eulogy spoken by Peter Lalor**

*"My name is Peter Lalor and with my wife Sue, I am attempting to write a book on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.*

*That is how we came to know the wry, intelligent, towering figure that is Richard Raxworthy: Keeper of the keys to the bridge. Coming to the Harbour Bridge and its history without encountering Richard is and will always be an impossibility. He is and shall always remain its gatekeeper and its greatest historian, recorder of its stories, documenter of its construction and master of its anecdotes. I used to say to Richard that he was probably familiar with every rivet and every piece of steel used in its construction. If the truth be known he probably even knew the tensile strain of every piece and who put it there. And then some.*

*For somebody coming to the history of the Harbour Bridge now, Richard is a curse and a blessing. A curse because there is nowhere you can go that Richard hasn't been before you. A blessing because Richard went there before it was too late, before the stories had passed and it is a blessing because Richard proved to be so generous with his research and his knowledge.*

*You begin a project like the book we are doing with starry eyes and great ideals. Sue and I decided that there should be plenty of room for a new approach. We were naive if not downright foolish. "We will find out the stories of the men who built the bridge, " I told my publisher, and went snooping around the archives for names and hints as to who these people were. It took me about two days and it would have taken a good historian about two seconds to encounter Richard's oral histories. If you don't know*

*about these recordings, let me just tell you that they are in some ways the Rosetta Stone of Harbour Bridge history. (Ed.: They reside in the oral history collection of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales where they are registered MLOH No. 1).*

*Here on tape, in extraordinary colourful detail, are fascinating interviews with the men who dug the quarries, worked in the fabrications shops, riveted it together, poured the concrete, drew the plans – even the woman who did the pays in the pay office. Richard found them and recorded them.*

*He had the foresight to make these tapes 23 years ago for the fiftieth anniversary of the Bridge in 1982. With his portable tape recorder he began to piece together the history which would have been lost forever or twisted out of shape because until he came along, there was no one to make sure the records were right.*

*Richard was a most careful historian. On the tapes you can hear his ears prick up at times when he hears something he hasn't heard before and you can then hear him chase every rabbit down every burrow in the field to make sure that what he is told is true. Near enough was never good enough. At times it's amusing. Richard is talking with a man who laid the concrete on the approaches or one of the tin hares and Richard will correct him, gently, he was always gentle with the old men, but he would lead the person to the truth. He often knew more about the jobs these people did than the people themselves, but he had a wonderful interview technique, gently teasing out detail and fact, snooping in the corners of people's memories.*

*So Sue and I retreated from the builders and thought that maybe we could write about the major figures associated with the bridge. John Job Crew Bradfield was an obvious start. That bright idea lasted a few minutes until we discovered that Richard had written the definitive book on Bradfield too. Then I found a bloke called the Reverend Cash, a preacher who had become de facto chaplain for the Bridge workers and who had documented the Bridge's early construction with his camera and - you guessed it, Richard had been there too; I found Cash's archives, but Richard had already been through them. I found his parish newspaper and all the articles. Richard had sat on the porch at the Lavender Bay church and read them one afternoon many years before. It went on and on. At times I felt like he was stalking us, waiting down every lane, hiding in every box. There was little sand without his footprints on it.*

*One day I drove out to the State Records Office and researched the coroner's records from the era of the Bridge construction. I rang Richard and told him, expecting him to be impressed by what a sleuth he had forced me to become. You guessed it, he'd already been there too. Eventually I realised that there was not a path he had not walked down, not a story he did not know, not a fact that he had not recorded in one of his books or papers.*



*At times it was ridiculous. I tracked down a research paper published in a medical digest. It was an obscure article on the injuries suffered by people who fell from bridges. I read it with glee, but my heart fell when I got to the attributions. The doctors had gone to Richard as their first port of call.*

*It goes without saying that Richard is also the king of the engineering history of the Bridge. It was a subject close to his heart and I suspect that even Bradfield, Lawrence and Ennis may have struggled to have beaten him for his understanding of the intricacies of its construction. That was an interesting part of Richard's work – he not only grasped the importance of the scientific facts of history, he intuitively knew that the workers' stories were of equal importance. Few historians are so balanced.*

*All of this was, I must confess, a little disheartening for Sue and me. And one day we decided there was really nothing we could do that he hadn't done before and I wrote to him saying I didn't think I could write a book. Richard wrote back an email I found the other day. In it he has listed about 35 possible topics for a book on the harbour bridge. "Be not discouraged " he wrote. (He could be cruel like that.)*

*And then a strange thing happened, Richard turned around and said that he wanted us to access his work, yes, he was writing a book about the Bridge, but there was probably room for two or three of us – I suspect he knew we were no real competition – and Richard invited us into his world.*

*He packed our car with the fruits of his decades of research, rang and demanded we come and take more. This is a remarkable thing, Richard had every right to be the troll demanding a toll for all those who crossed the bridge in his wake, but he was an unfailingly generous man who sublimated his ego to the history's greater call.*

*Richard's attempts to publish his history were often sabotaged by ignorant publishers, associates and the like, but he was a dedicated man and would not let such small things stop him. When I said earlier that Richard was a curse and a blessing, he was much more of the latter than the former. To be invited into his mind was an honour. To listen to his stories and luxuriate in the generosity of his intellect was a wonderful thing.*

*Sue and I would drive up the mountain - as one must always when one is visiting a great sage – and crowd around the table, spilling crumbs from the Greek sweets we brought as offerings, me trying not to cut off his oxygen too often with my chair, but always managing to do so. Richard in his dressing gown. And he would talk in that wry, intelligent way of his. Too often we found ourselves nodding wisely when in fact he had left us behind, but he would come back and round us up like slow sheep, pushing us on further. I loved visiting Richard.*

*Toward the end we corresponded by email or phone, as he got sicker I became less sure about calling him, not wanting him to waste his precious breath, but 10 days before he died I placed a call to make sure he had received something and I remember looking at the timer on the phone when I got off. He had talked for over 20 minutes, telling his fascinating tales, wheezing and coughing, but sharp and amusing to the end. Nothing would quiet his stories and nothing will.*

*Sue and I only knew Richard in relation to the Bridge, but over time he told me the tales of his life, of his father, his wife, his son Julian. He was a man who recorded and related tales with equal skills. And as far as the Harbour Bridge is concerned, Richard Raxworthy is the man. He is the person who made sure its history will always be coloured by the stories of the extraordinary men who worked in her workshops and risked their lives on her arch. Without him they would be lost and the Bridge would be a cold grey lifeless structure.*

*They don't need a plaque or a monument to Richard Raxworthy because everybody who studies the history of the Bridge will find that it is a living testimony to his dedication, professionalism and skill.*

*We will miss him terribly, but know that people will dine on the fruits of his labour for many generations to come.” – Peter Lalor (author).*

*(Blood Stain by Peter Lalor was published by Allen & Unwin in 2002 and won the Ned Kelly Prize for True Crime. Sue and Peter Lalor's Bridge book is due for release early next year.)*

**John Lee, Director, NSW, Australian Credit Union Historical Co-operative, wrote the following and was at the Memorial.**

*“Richard Raxworthy became involved with recording the oral histories of Credit Union pioneers in 1985 when he was contacted by members of the newly created Australian Credit Union Historical Co-operative.*

*Richard was recommended by Mark Cranfield, Curator of Oral History and folklore, National Credit Union Movement Library of Australia, as being an oral historian who could undertake the oral history recordings for the co-operative. Richard went on to record over 600 oral recordings of the Credit Union family throughout Australia. He also became an active supporter and volunteer of the Co-operative and developed an extensive knowledge and understanding of the Movement's history.*

*There is no doubt of the importance of Richard's contribution of oral and written histories relating to the Australian Credit Union Movement. The Movement owes*

*Richard Raxworthy much gratitude for his efforts, and mourns his passing."*

Richard will be missed by his many friends but his contribution to oral history will live on. **Rosie Block**, President

### **Independent List Serv**

Some months ago the secretary of the OHHA Qld Branch, Lesley Jenkins, posted an item to the International Oral History Discussion List. The request sought information about the existence and aims of organisations supporting Independent Oral History Practitioners. Lesley received a number of responses but the short answer was that no support arms of existing organisations existed and that there were no specific organisations for this group. Many replies referred Lesley to an organization based in the US for personal historians. Lesley was also interested in finding out how practitioners, and those commissioning them, ensure that 'best practice' prevails given that there is no credentialing system. This is an issue that the personal historians have been grappling with for some time. Lesley decided to tease this out a bit further and she conducted a workshop for independent contractors and those interested in the field at the OHAA National Conference in Perth in September.

Lesley circulated a form for those at the workshop which, when returned, indicated that there were more people interested in becoming independent contractors than there were people actually making any sort of living from this field. All this indicated to Lesley that oral history practitioners are a rare and endangered species and that perhaps they need to support each other. With that in mind she started an email discussion list. So far people have contributed long and detailed pieces that they wouldn't to the larger and more American focussed listserv. It has also been very 'chatty' but as Christmas approaches it has become quieter. A number of people overseas have joined up but the focus will remain an Australian one. The listserv was set up by a professional computer company, Blueprint Consulting, as a voluntary service so material is archived and there are no advertisements. As Lesley was also interested in furthering best practice in oral history it is mandatory that those joining are also members of the oral history societies wherever they may reside.

If members would like to sign up to the Independents List Serv they need to put this request to [mailman@oral-history.com](mailto:mailman@oral-history.com).

## **About the Committee**

*We thought members may not know all the NSW committee members or know of their work and interests. We continue with brief biographies of members, who have been with the Committee for some time (Ed).*

**Michael Clarke** is a civil engineer who spent his career with the Public Works Department of NSW, retiring as Chief Engineer in 1992. During his career he worked on flood mitigation, water supply and dam construction, contract management, personnel and other administrative activities, strategic planning and management of activities to do with country town water supply and sewerage, the coastal zone, floodplains, estuaries, waterways and fishing and tourist ports. He commenced the PWD's oral history program in 1991.

He has been a member of the Sydney Engineering Heritage Committee since 1990 (Chair in 1995-96), and a member of Engineering Heritage Australia (formerly the National Committee on Engineering Heritage) since 1995 (Chair 2001/02).

Michael manages the Engineering Heritage Committee's Oral History Program, which has so far conducted over 170 biographical interviews of prominent engineers. He also manages the National Engineering Oral History Program which he commenced in 2001. The master tapes, logs etc. of all interviews are lodged with the State Library of NSW. He has prepared detailed procedures and policies for the conduct of both programs.

He presented the paper *The Heritage in People: Oral History in Engineering* to the Newcastle Engineering Heritage Conference in 1996 and *Oral History in Engineering: Issues and Opportunities* to the Toowoomba Engineering Heritage Conference in 2003.

In 1999 Michael arranged for the recording of seven hours of reminiscences by his three siblings and himself of their family life and his parents, who had been missionaries in Samoa in the 1920s, where his elder brother and sister were born.

Michael has been a member of the OHAA Management Committee since 1996 and assisted with drafting its *Guide to Commissioning Oral History Projects*. He also contributed the article *Tendering for Oral History* to the October 2002 issue of *Voiceprint*.

He was a member of the Management Committee of the History Council of NSW in 2003 and is a committee member of the newly formed Australian Society for History of Engineering and Technology (ASHET).

In 1999 Michael completed *Sydney's Engineering Heritage and other sites*, an enlarged edition of his 1994 walking guide which won a National Trust Heritage Award in 1995. Since 1994 he has conducted over 100 walks and tours based on the book.

*Diana Ritch* considers oral history to be the Family Business. As the daughter of oral history pioneer Hazel de Berg, Diana was first introduced to oral history in 1957 when Hazel recorded Dame Mary Gilmore.

After that the home was taken over by tapes and tape-recorders, with wonderful people coming and going as her mother recorded them. Before her death in 1984, Hazel had recorded 1290 people and her recordings became the basis of the Oral History Collection in the National Library (NLA).

A year before her mother died Diana started doing interviews, and in 1985 was contracted to work with the NLA as a freelance oral historian. The brief from the NLA is to interview "notable Australians" and, though concentrating on the arts field, Diana has branched out into other areas, eg religious leader Rev. Alan Walker, astronaut Paul Scully-Power, entertainer Col Joye, photographer Olive Cotton and publisher Kevin Weldon. The NLA has been involved in a range of special oral history projects and Diana was an interviewer for both their AIDS Project, interviewing people whose lives had been effected by the AIDS crisis, and their Bringing Them Home Project on the Stolen Generation.

Outside the NLA Diana has worked on several assignments including local histories, histories of businesses, family histories and teaching oral history in schools. From 1995 Diana was an interviewer for the Steven Spielberg Oral History Project, interviewing Holocaust Survivors for the Shoah Foundation. She is the oral historian for The Rona\Tranby Foundation and teaches Indigenous Australians to interview their own people.

Diana has been on the committee of the NSW Ora| History Association for about 12 years and really enjoys meeting and talking to other oral historians. "It's a continual learning process. Mum would have been thrilled with the many directions that oral history has taken. We oral historians are in a very privileged position and I feel very honoured each time someone trusts me with their story."

## Seminar: Turning Professional

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*Three of our members Laurel Wraight, Louise Darmody and Bob Mitchell who have recently turned professional generously provided a seminar on November 8th. They spoke of the service they offer and shared many insights into how they have set up their business. A wealth of information for anyone planning to turn professional. (The members were kind enough to provide Voiceprint with their notes from which we have put together some notes for the interest of members on the talks of Laurel and Bob. Louise's text tells of her experiences in her own words. Thank you Laurel, Louise and Bob. Ed)*

**Laurel Wraight** has set up a business called "Memory Moments". Laurel records life stories on video / dvd combining pictorial images and sound to tell the story. At times both picture and sound are recorded together but the finished product is often enhanced by sound that is separately recorded and added to the video tape. Laurel describes herself as an oral history addict who in another life was a counsellor with a social work background. She finds she is more comfortable listening than talking! Laurel was introduced to the value of oral history on video when her school boy son interviewed his grandfather for a school assignment – a great success from which they both benefited and now a treasured tape for the family.

Laurel described how she prepared a detailed business plan before she started her business. Her basic training in oral history came from the Association's

seminars and with the video she learnt from trial and error in three unpaid visual biographies. She found each one was a vast improvement on its predecessor. Those present at the seminar were able to view many extracts from the biographies as Laurel explained the technical considerations in video production.

Laurel archives the original unedited camera footage so the primary source remains consistent with the accepted definition of oral history. However, she feels whilst the interviewer's input is important to historians, a family commissioning a 'living portrait' of a loved one does not want the presence of a stranger to shift the focus, so the interviewer is edited out in the final product. If the person's response does not make sense on its own, she creates a title page to indicate the subject being discussed. Occasionally she will use a title page to cut down the time

in telling a story. When a visual flow has to be maintained with interviewees over a period of time, Laurel asks the 'star' to wear the same outfit each session. This allows for the combination of related scenes recorded on separate days, or the opportunity to rearrange the order of subjects covered, and maintain the flow without distraction. She also finds this policy lifts image pressure off the person. However, she has found that clothing isn't the only 'giveaway' to combining scenes – hairstyle can also be a giveaway!

Laurel finds that non-verbal cues make up 80% of communication, expressions, gestures, backgrounds and how the story is told gives insights into a person's feelings. It is a very time consuming process. Each story takes about 4 months to complete. Her simplest project took just over 3 hours per finished minute! With the visual dimension as well as audio she finds the editing necessitates unstinting and intensive concentration on many levels, as well as the smooth operation of many different technologies! It is, Laurel stated the editing that takes the time and if video was being used for normal unedited oral history interviews, the time consuming editing problems would not apply. So far Laurel has only used word of mouth to promote her business.

### **Costs**

In Laurel's my case, *Memory Moments* has not yet been a runaway commercial

success. However, her dream was to give the opportunity to ordinary people in all echelons of society to tell their story. As yet the resolution of this dilemma between her dream and commercial reality eludes her. The initial financial outlay, and the continuing running expenses have taken her by surprise despite the planning and research. The length of time for each project was also far beyond what was predicted. This limits the number of projects that can be completed in a year, as well as causing long gaps between payments. By the time some income is received, outlay is required for necessities such as tapes, software, copyright licences etc. The biggest cost has been the equipment, and it will, of course with the pace of advancing technology, need replacing every few years. Laurel started because she saw a need, and, an opportunity to meet it. Seeing the benefits to her clients over and over inspires her to keep going.

Laurel suggested that the quality and longevity of video tapes has greatly improved in recent years, but their fragility is a concern regarding long term preservation purposes. Even though videos are analog, all projects are digitalised in her editing computer. She records each video directly from the computer, thereby avoiding generational deterioration and is using Digital Versatile Disk (DVD) more and more which is said to last forever!

## **Louise Darmody**

*"Good morning it is lovely being here with like-minded people. Like you, I have a great love of the art of storytelling and this is the driving force behind my life and business, Sound Memories. This morning I'm going to cover the 4W's – WHO, WHAT, WHEN & WHY - the basic ingredients of any yarn. Why and when I established Sound Memories; who I focus on and how I used my pilot project to test the water. What approach I use in the business, with agreements, equipment, copyright and marketing.*

*Firstly, why did I establish Sound Memories? To answer this question I'll tell you a bit about my life. As the daughter of publicans in Alexandra, a small country town in North East Victoria I was born into a fun filled, story-telling world. I learnt that no matter what jobs people have or don't have every one has a ripping story to tell. As a primary teacher for ten years I found story telling was a springboard for all learning and fun. While reporting for ABC radio for a decade I had the privilege of recording stories for AM, PM, The World Today, News, Talking History, The Health Report, Earth Worm, The Country Hour, Country Wide, Bush Telegraph and Rural Reporter. I interviewed some very famous people but the best stories came from ordinary people. While on leave from the ABC I was copying an interview with Doug and Mary Stoddart my uncle and aunty. Uncle*

*Doug, a butcher's son told me as a young boy he had to saddle up a horse and cart and deliver the meat before school. He said that at the ripe old age of 8 his horse bolted, ran into a fence and was killed. Doug spent his day at school crying. This story, and many other touching stories I've recorded, made me realize this is what I wanted to do - record the stories from ordinary people who have such delightful tales.*

*Since then I've resigned from the ABC and last year established "Sound Memories". I now produce radio style documentaries for private clients. I edit, add sound effects and music to the interviews to help bring the stories to life. I've completed 10 major projects, one corporate and 9 family history CD's.*

*My first step towards establishing "Sound Memories" was to carry out a pilot project, but who was I to interview? I told a friend of mine about my idea and she was very excited about me interviewing her parents, who I hadn't met. Alan and Elspeth Clark's stories were spell binding with tales about Shackleton the intrepid explorer, Changi and shooting snakes to survive in the bush. I employed a graphic artist to design a very professional looking CD cover and insert for the Clark family's limited edition CD's.*

*With this prototype under my belt and a very positive response from the Clark family I carried out valuable work that got "Sound Memories" underway.*



*I thought where else to go to with my CD but to the grand recorder of great tales the Mitchell Library. The Library suggested Rosie Block whom I hadn't met before. Rosie listened intently and gave me some wonderful advice and invited me to an Oral History Association workshop and these ideas helped put my business on track.*

*I then spent weeks working on letters to a wide range of newspapers about my business. The Mosman Daily and the Sydney Morning Herald contacted me and their articles led to hundreds of enquiries. Of these calls several people commissioned me to interview their loved ones. Although there is always intense interest in my business one of the challenges I face is that my service is so unique that it's not in people psyche to preserve their precious stories in this way. Hopefully this attitude will change when my clients who have all been extremely happy with their CD's spread the word.*

*So far you have heard the reasons why I established Sound Memories but what you really want to hear is the nitty gritty – what approach do I use to run the business? I registered the name, Sound Memories with the NSW Department of Fair Trading. My business is the communication arm of the company Michael Williams and Associates Pty Ltd. To operate commercially I have public liability insurance and professional indemnity (corporate jobs require between 5 – 10 million dollar professional*

*indemnity). The capital equipment I need, computers, soft ware, microphones, microphone stands, mini-discs and insurances have cost over ten thousand dollars.*

*The next big question on your mind is what should one charge for this service? The fees Sound Memories charges clients are tailored to each individual's needs, copyright fees etc. and are a realistic rate for professional skills and high standard of equipment. Before starting projects I send an agreement to clients which must be signed by both parties. This includes my approach to the CD, the services included in their quote and the assumptions of the agreement. I outline in detail issues which relate to copyright of photos and music. Copyright legislation requires great attention to detail. To find out more you can contact the Australian Copyright Council, which can be easily accessed on the World Wide Web.*

*I use production music which is not available in retail outlets and is administered by the Australian Performing Right Association (APRA). I use this category of music because I only have to pay one license fee and one lot of royalties for each project through one organization, APRA. If I was to use popular music I may have to obtain several fees and obtain permission from the composer, the publisher and the performers.*

*My business took a different direction last year when I was commissioned to use*

*a really good story to communicate a scientific message – a message directed to dairy farmers! Land & Water Australia, a Commonwealth research and development body for farmers was my client for this job. L&WA says the CD has been well received by the industry and is being used to spread sound management techniques to other farmers. The farmers also discussed the fascinating history of their farms and the 12-page booklet in the CD has photos that relate to their stories. A settler on one of the farms employed teams of workers who milked 600 cows by hand in the 1890's! They then exported their butter to England.*

*So where to from here? Following on from the success of the dairy farmer CD I'm now talking to other corporate groups about specific projects using a good yarn to communicate a message. I'm also still doing Life History CD's for clients. I love all the work I do and feel very honoured to able to be the recorder of such precious stories".*

**Bob Mitchell** has been a resident of Sutherland shire for more than 50 years. He worked as a business analyst for most of his working life, and has been an oral historian since 1996. Bob runs his own oral history business, "Family Chronicles" and concentrates on 'life story family interviews'. He records on cassette tape and all tapes are labelled, logged and boxed for presentation to his clients. For some commissions he finds that several sets are required as individual family members want to have their own set. His oral histories commenced with, a memoir of his late father *Score Larrikin*, which was published in *Voiceprint* in 1997.

Bob has worked a lot with older people in retirement villages and nursing homes. He was successful in obtaining a Seniors Grant from Sutherland Shire Council to conduct talks on oral history and reminiscence to seniors groups in the shire from 2003 – 2005. The grant has assisted in supporting this part of his work. Bob talks about reminiscence, oral history and family life stories to the groups. He plays extracts of tape recorded interviews with older people. This is very much an inter-active presentation, with an emphasis on humour. Bob uses the senses of sight, sound and smell to trigger memories. He has what he calls a 'Box Of Tricks' – memorabilia such as old household items, old photographs, newspaper and magazines, etc and a 'Box Of Smells' –

strong smells that have endured over the years, such as moth balls, 'Friar's Balsam', cloves, eucalyptus oil, and sweets of yesteryear.

Bob gives talks to groups who work in various capacities with the older population. He again uses his boxes of tricks and shares his knowledge about how to trigger memories. Members at the seminar were able to similarly share in his knowledge as he displayed his interesting collection of memorabilia from his boxes and listed the topics and examples of question that he finds useful.

Bob told members of the equipment he needed to run his business; PC, printer, internet & email access, tape recorder & tape duplicator, digital camera & PC scanner, laminator, guillotine, tapes, labels, business cards & stationary etc. All of this equipment he estimated as worth about \$8,000.

Bob markets his business through the use of newspaper editorials & advertisements, flyers, community notice boards & letterbox drops. Business is also created from his work with seniors. His target groups are the elderly family members themselves, and their children / grandchildren. He finds most of his work comes from family

members rather than from the eventual interviewees themselves.

Bob can provides his clients with various packages, as required by the commission, from a basic set of logged tapes to a package with a synopsis included and numerous current and historical photographic options also included. Bob maintains a library of all the interviews he conducts and can provide replacement copies for clients if required.

## Man Behind our Sandstone – My Father – Sandra Pires

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When he was twelve he finished up with school and headed for the local marble quarries. His father chose stonemasonry as a trade for him as it was “good money back then”. What his father didn’t know was that fifty years later his son would be the Master Mason of the Government Stone Program in Sydney, almost the furthest point across the world from his homeland.

What began as an oral history of Alf Pires the stonemason, and a simple history of some of the buildings he worked on around Sydney, ended as a stream of memories and stories, a timeline of dedication, innovation, hard work and inspiration. A story about the man behind Sydney’s public buildings’ sandstone heritage restorations, a story I didn’t quite know well enough, this story about my father.

In August 2002, my father suffered a stroke and it was a time of great uncertainty for us, my mother, brother and me. We had never seen my father in such a helpless state. ‘It was the smoking’, the doctors said. Although this was a time where we almost *lost* my father, I felt through researching his history that, in actual fact, I *found* my father.

I asked him the first question and suddenly realised I didn’t know, but should know, what his response would be, “What was your mother’s name?” Alf was born on the 4th of July, 1942 in Monte-Trigo (wheat mountain) in the South of Portugal. He grew up with three brothers and three sisters on a small farm. They sold carob and almonds and they ate rabbits, lamb and chooks for dinner, he said. “We were happy back then”, he recalls. When he began working he spent his money watching the only television in the ‘whole of the town’ at the local café, playing games with his friends. Half of the money he earned, went to his mother, Rosa Dias Lopes.

“When did you begin working?” I ask him. It seemed whilst growing up that all my father ever did was work. He worked seven days a week for most of the year, for most of my teenage years. He loved his job, but I never knew just how much until now. He recalls his first job at the quarry when he was twelve as ‘fun’ and ‘interesting’. The men whistled and sang throughout the day, there was a real camaraderie. He learned by watching the older masons, although they didn’t let him in on everything, and some became jealous, he says, because

he was paid 'as a man' when he was only fifteen. In Portugal, they used sandstone "only to sharpen the tools", he muses. Alf found sandstone when he came to Australia.

"What did you want to be when you were young?" "A stonemason", he replies to my ongoing questions. He had always wanted to be a stonemason and he recalls the times when he was five and six years of age carving out troughs for the horses and other animals on the farm. "It's still there today" he says with a hint of pride. Most of his basic skills were learnt during the seven years he worked in quarries in Portugal such as rock-face, chisel finish, and sparrow-pick. "No machines back then", all the work was done by hand. Sometimes he and another mason would have to lift stones cut to 150 kilos or more in weight. It was during these times, when he was twelve taking out stone from the quarries in Portugal that he met his long time friend and colleague Manuel. The two of them are still working with stone together, but now for the Government stone program. Between them you could write a book about stonemasonry.

When Alf was nineteen he migrated to Argentina to avoid serving time in the military in the Angolan war. He chose Argentina as a brother and sister were already living there. He recalls the day he left Portugal as one of the saddest for him and his family because "on the same

day, the same moment they lost two sons, you know". His older brother was leaving to serve in the Angolan war.

The next nine years were spent in Argentina, where once again Alf resumed work on the quarries. The money, however, was poor and so he began working for an oil mining company in the south of Argentina. At the quarry he says, "I used to get 18,000 pesos a month and at the oil ... I use to have 1250,00 a month". It was an isolated and sometimes dangerous job checking that the oil pumps were in working order under freezing conditions. He thanks the penguins for being his friends. The oil mining job allowed him to save enough money to come to Australia where "they were looking for skilled workers at the time".

When Alf arrived in Australia he remembers thinking that this was a "good country". I asked him what his first impressions were and why it was that he thought it was a good country. His response wasn't what I expected. "You didn't need a drivers license with a photograph", he replied. After living under the dictatorship of Salazar in Portugal for many years, to be able to roam without proof of identity represented a freedom never before experienced by him.

In Sydney once again Alf resumed his passion, working with stone. He applied for and got two jobs in one day, "Getting

work was easy in those days". However, he chose the one at Paddington where he was living. He worked there for eighteen months and, whilst on a job at Government House, he met some of the stonemasons working for the Public Works Department. He decided to apply for a stonemason position there and began work with the Public Works Department in 1971. He wanted the job because it was with the Government and he still remembers the words of Peter Healy who, interviewed him for the role, "If you're any good, you've got a job for life. If you're no good, tough luck."

This year was the perfect time to be researching my father. I was seven months pregnant and following my father's memories and his footsteps as he walked again around his buildings, or so it seemed. He worked on over 150 buildings; Sydney Hospital, Chief Secretaries Building, The Australian Museum, the NSW Art Gallery, Government House, Police and Justice Museum, Central Railway Station. I see him touch the sandstone on the façade of these great sand castles and I realise, he knows these buildings. He hasn't just worked them, he knows what has happened to them over the years. He knows the sun, the salt, the wind and the rain over the pediments, the window jams, the cornices, carvings and letterings. He knows what year the different stones were placed. He knows

what stone makes up which segment, Maroubra, Bondi, Wondobyne, Pyrmont. I didn't know he knew.

As the interviews continue I find myself remembering the times when my father would bring home unused pieces of stone. Some of my happiest days were spent trying to imitate him carving. My brother and I would be there for hours, chisel in one hand, a mallet in the other in our small backyard chipping away pretending to be apprentices.

My father is a softly spoken, humble man, who finds it extremely hard to speak his mind. Although the work he has performed on the buildings represent a part of who he is and somehow seem to speak for him, his hands-on knowledge has an important significance for his trade and future stonemasons. Smaller things, such as the fact that salt is extracted from the sandstone of the NSW Art Gallery with a vacuum cleaner, and that the steps of the Old Supreme Court were part of a large piece of granite taken from the shores of Balmain at low tide are also important. In both those cases it was Alf who was instrumental in making them happen.

Whilst researching my father I had the opportunity to talk with many people who worked with him, architects, including the Government Architect, geologists, artists, cleaners and

tradesmen of all types. All were important in understanding Alf and everyone said the same thing: "...he's a good man and he loves his job". It is worth noting the personality and type of person who currently holds the title of Master Mason. I can no longer see Sydney sandstone without knowing my father was a part of it, a part of the sandstone buildings of Sydney. He loves these Australian buildings as his own and he feels proud to be taking care

of them, doing what he knows best. I thank and applaud the Department of Commerce (especially Ron Powell and Joy Singh) for having the foresight and flexibility to allow me, his daughter to do this research. I don't think anyone could have helped him to open up as much as I did, or learn as much about him, as I did.

On my twenty-first birthday, my father gave me a stone. It's becoming clearer why, on it, reads the word 'Remember'.



# Good Riddance

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*(Pauline Curby and Virginia Macleod authors of Good Riddance A history of waste management in Manly, Mosman Pittwater and Warringah kindly consented to my request to write of their experiences in writing a history about rubbish! Thank you both for your contribution. Ed.)*

## **Pauline Curby writes:**

For fifty years the Joint Services Committee (JSC) of Mosman, Manly and Warringah Councils have jointly disposed of waste generated in their local government areas, and when Pittwater Council was formed in 1992 after the northern part of Warringah Shire seceded, it too joined the JSC. These four councils have the distinction of owning the only remaining council-operated waste depot in Sydney – Kimbriki Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre. In the space of a decade this depot at Terrey Hills has been transformed from a fairly uncontrolled tip, a source of pollution and an exemplar of poor environmental management to an innovative recycler and an industry leader in best-practice waste disposal. In the process of reinventing itself as an environmentally responsible organisation Kimbriki – instead of costing the ratepayers money – actually makes a profit.

Therefore three years ago when the JSC decided to record the history of this partnership there was money in the kitty to pay professional historians to

undertake the task. The initiative for commissioning a history of waste management came in the first instance from Mosman Council, but the other JSC members eagerly embraced the idea. Initially some of the committee members considered that anecdotes about 'colourful' characters would make up the bulk of the work, and were rather surprised to find that the history encompassed far more than this.

A small steering committee, led by Mosman library manager Jill Cuthbert wrote a succinct brief to include – among other things – a chapter on the waste disposal practices of the first inhabitants of the area. Virginia Macleod and I were commissioned to write a comprehensive history of waste management in the four local government areas and the work was soon under way. Our task was facilitated considerably by the expertise and sound judgement of the steering committee. In addition the JSC and the staff of Kimbriki took a keen interest in the project and were helpful, but never intrusive.



### **Polluted Water**

There were many memorable times during the course of this project. One of these relating to documentary research deserves mention. The Warringah Council records manager assisted our research by bringing files in from storage so we could painstakingly trawl for references to magic words such as 'garbage', 'incinerator' and 'landfill'. Some of the most interesting documents we found were letters (usually of complaint) written by residents to Warringah Council. Many of these concerned Curl Curl Lagoon where over a 20-year period a once-beautiful coastal lagoon was degraded as surrounding sand dunes were mined and mangrove swamps infilled with garbage.

One poignant letter, written in the late 1960s as a new section of Curl Curl tip was about to be opened was from neighbouring bulb nursery owners F. H. and K.C. Holloway. They objected to the proposed tip expansion because of possible pollution of Greendale Creek. There was a well on the Holloway property that had supplied their nursery with water for irrigating for 50 years, and it was feared that this would be contaminated – as had happened previously – if a tip were located in close proximity. The tip opened up nonetheless and not long after it began operating it was 'alive with rats'. The Holloways complained that polluted

water 'orange red with smells' was flowing into the creek killing all the vegetation. A Council site inspection, presumably on a good day, found no pollution, however. So the Holloways had to put up with the tip, as did many other effected residents. This was often the way prior to the rise, in the last 30 years, of environmental awareness and strong resident action groups.

### **Bad Bastards and Great Blokes**

Another memorable experience relates to an oral history interview – one of the many conducted during the course of the project – with Narrabeen resident Bill 'Woofa' Barnett whose father Wilf Barnett was Mosman Council's garbage contractor for 30 years. This interview, together with supporting information from documentary sources, brought to life the experiences of a great character of waste history.

Wilf Barnett was one of Sydney's largest sanitary and garbage contractors and also did work for Manly and Warringah Councils. As Mosman Council's garbage contractor from 1936-66, his rule was almost unchallenged. Despite some hitches, it was considered that he gave 'excellent service'. 'Woofa' Barnett recalled that his father was a tough man, and although he had some 'bad bastards' working for him most of them were 'great blokes'. They wended their way through Mosman's back lanes

and took short cuts by climbing fences in order to collect garbage. Some did the same route for years and were well known to residents, who sometimes asked them to water plants or perform other small tasks if they were away. The favours were repaid, and, as Woofa recalls, 'Come Christmas time they needed an extra truck for all the presents' that the residents gave them.

It was not all plain sailing with the garbage service, however. Complaints about noise escalated in the 1960s, and Barnett admitted that he was having staff trouble. Then at the end of 1964—only one year into a three-year contract—he found that he had miscalculated badly as he had not anticipated the large increase in the number of units constructed in Mosman at this time. Barnett was stuck with many more garbage services than he had budgeted for. He battled on, but six months later, finding the 'mental and financial stress' too great, he informed the Council that he wished to discontinue his contract. For the first time in 30 years he asked for his contract to be cancelled. Mosman Council would not let him out of the contract, however, and so he resolved to 'see it out'. Wilf Barnett was not in good health. A heavy drinker for many years and an illegal starting price bookie, he worked and lived hard. At this time he suffered a series of heart attacks, and he died in 1968. He had been a

tough but charismatic man and had survived in what his son describes as 'a pretty hard scene'.

**Virginia Macleod writes:**  
*Interviews never wasted*

It was clear from the start that writing a history of waste disposal would always be lacking a vital sensory element. To put out the garbage or pass by the garbage truck is a pungent experience as the putrescible contents waft their fermenting odours.

It is easy to forget when reading council minutes or government reports that garbage tips and waste have an invasive quality. The historian quickly becomes inured to headings about complaints of 'smoke nuisance' at Manly's and later Mosman's incinerator. But the effects of living next to a suburban tip are brought to life by Josie Edmonds who lived above Mosman's Balmoral tip (Interviewed as part of the ShoroC oral history project – Memories of the 1930s and the depression). She remembers her childhood permeated with smouldering garbage and smoke carried on the prevailing summer wind from the spontaneous fires at the tip.

Apart from trying to introduce the olfactory, other aspects of the world of waste were certainly enhanced by the use of oral history. Mary Gibson held salvage rights for many years at several tips in Warringah, and resisted moves to

close her operations. She was supported by many messages of goodwill and appreciation and The Manly Daily received more letters on the subject of Mary than it had on any topic before. Mary even took Warringah Council to the Supreme Court. Interviews with Mary and people who had helped her brought alive the joy and treasure-hunt element of getting something for nothing as well as an emphasis on past ways of recycling goods.

*(The following extract from the book tells of Mary Gibson's work)*

**“As soon as it hit the ground it was Mary's’**

*Growing up during the depression years in Strathfield, Mary Gibson had seen her mother struggle on very limited means. Moving to Narrabeen opened up a new world, when she acquired the salvage rights at the tips in Narrabeen, Careel Bay and later Terrey Hills. This was to become her life's business and pleasure. Initially she worked at Mona Vale Post Office, visiting the tip before and after work and at weekends, but by 1965 she was at the tips full time.*

*As Mary says, 'It was so exciting!' There was the thrill of the treasure hunt. Each day would bring a new find or happening: abandoned kittens to be found a new home, an exotic tiger skin rug, a stuffed emu with nodding head, a reindeer head*

*with antlers, military medals, swords, uniforms and guns, clocks, paintings, records, ski and surf equipment. She helped people find a lost ring: with a prayer to St Anthony and Mary's honed vision, there it was, glinting through the dirt. Over the years she found 93 wedding rings.*

*Anything deposited at the tip was hers – life's needs, wool, cosmetics, tools, mowers, toys, furniture, clothes, crockery, sometimes even the entire contents of a house. Now Mary could shower her mother with things she needed, and her mother in turn gave to her friends and neighbours.*

*Mary had recycled nearly eight million bottles by 1974. They were sorted at the tip and delivered to suppliers. She reckons it didn't really pay, and was 'more of a public service'. Metals were more lucrative, but they had to be 'cleaned' – stripped down, having handles removed from pots and pans. Aluminium, copper, brass and batteries were loaded into tea chests and taken to Spruces at Manly Vale.*

*Mary had a loyal team of friend and workers, including 'bottle boys', lads she always paid a 16-year-old's wage, no questions asked. Their work was to pull out all bottles, dodging the dozers; they were the 'despair of plant operators'.*

*Mary is a woman who found a niche and became a legend. An entrepreneur at the forefront of the craze for antiques; benefactor, offering a myriad of found*

*objects and opportunities to young and old to make a few shillings; a woman who took on the council and upheld her rights; an astute businesswoman; and a tireless physical worker and the last of the old-style salvagers. But above all she is remembered for recycling. Her assistant Marie Coxon says it was 'a wonderful way of keeping our history' and sees tips now as 'a shocking waste and a disgrace to have anything useful just destroyed as landfill'.*

*Mary was able to earn a living from her work selling goods at her second-hand shop. It was a tough life but obviously paid its way and appealed to the entrepreneur that she was. With hindsight the whole process has become imbued with romance, preservation and virtue not only by Mary but also her friends and customers."*

**Pauline Curby Concludes:**

*Good Riddance A history of waste management in Manly, Mosman, Pittwater and Warringah* is mainly about the collection and disposal of what is termed municipal solid waste, although other types of waste are mentioned where relevant. It is a local history set in the context of developments in waste disposal generally in NSW. This was a collaborative work, and over a two-year

period the writers enjoyed a happy and productive partnership. Researching and writing this book opened our eyes to many fascinating aspects of the history of Mosman and the northern beaches and to some of the problems that NSW has faced in the past with regard to waste disposal – and indeed still faces in the present.

*(Good Riddance A history of waste management in Manly, Mosman, Pittwater and Warringah, by Pauline Curby and Virginia Macleod, published by Warringah Manly Mosman and Pittwater Joint Services Committee, 2003 is available from Kimbriki Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre, Terrey Hills, NSW 2084, Councils' libraries or bookstores. RRP \$34.95)*

For further information see <http://www.shoroc.nsw.gov.au/goodriddance.html>

# Diary of Events



## Committee Meeting Dates for 2004

20 April; 8 June; 10 August;  
12 October; 30 November. Members are  
welcome to attend the Management  
Committee meetings held at the State  
Library 5.30pm.

## Next Seminar

8 May and then 31 July and 6 November.

## International Conference

XIIIth International Oral History  
Conference, Rome, Italy, 23 - 26 June  
2004. The theme for this conference is  
*Memory and Globalization*. Members  
who might like to visit Italy and attend  
the Conference can find further details  
on the International Oral History  
Association website  
<<http://www.ioha.fgv.br>>

## From All Quarters

Oral History Association of Australia  
Journal 2004, No. 26

**CALL FOR PAPERS** – An invitation to  
contribute a paper for inclusion in the  
*OHAA Journal 2004*, No. 26.

Reports on oral history projects, or  
articles on theoretical, ethical and  
methodological issues reflecting the  
2003 conference themes of diversity in  
practice and purposes are sought for the  
2004 issue of the OHAA's annual *Journal*.

Papers presented at the OHAA  
conference in Perth, September 2003,  
which have not yet been published in  
the *Journal* are particularly requested.  
Other papers about issues and projects  
which authors wish to share with the  
oral history community are also welcome.

Photographs and other illustrations  
or images are encouraged.

Deadline for receipt of copy is  
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Mr Francis Good

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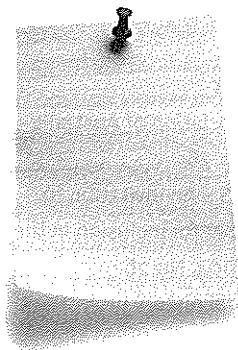
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