

# OHAA On Tape

**March 2004**

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Hello Everyone!

I hope you're all having a wonderful year so far and that you've all survived The Heat. The Association has got off to a great start with wonderfully informative workshop on editing conducted by Sue Pechey on 28 February. Those of us who attended learned a great deal and enjoyed exchanging stories and ideas with fellow participants. We welcome workshop attendee, Robin Trotter, as a new member.

Our Annual General Meeting followed the workshop and the new Committee is:

President – Lesley Jenkins  
Vice-President – Sue Pechey  
Secretary – Suzanne Mulligan  
Treasurer – Maxine Kendall  
Editor *On Tape* – Suzanne Mulligan  
Committee members – Kate Roberts and Joanne Scott  
North Queensland Rep – Sandra Hodgson

Those of you that subscribe to the Oral History List will have noted an extensive discussion on “minidisks”. One of the contributors, Ken Howarth, has written a paper on the subject that is reproduced for herein for your information.

We're very fortunate to have our Queensland Branch represented at the

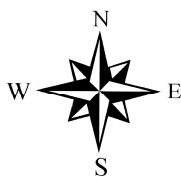
International Conference in Rome later this year. Our president, Lesley Jenkins, and member, Helen Klæbe, will be attending. Helen is presenting a paper “Partnerships” where she will argue that “oral history research methodologies are growing in popularity as an instrument of capturing contemporary stories or voices, of the local, personal, public and the global experience. A corporate or global organisation can benefit from partnering with an oral historian to produce collections that are relevant and useful to both, but superior methodology is essential.”

We will all look forward to reports from Lesley and Helen on their experiences in Rome.

Please email me with news of the projects you are working on or your particular interests. Have you discovered an interesting oral history web site? Have you read a book recently based on oral history interviews? Could you send me a review so I can print it in the newsletter to share with other members?

Suzanne Mulligan  
Editor





## 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. Please include photographs and other illustrations or images with your submission, if possible.

Deadline for receipt of copy is 30 April 2004. Please apply to the editor for a copy of the *Brief Style Guide*.

**Editor:**

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Northern Territory Archives Service

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## President's Report

Delivered at Annual General Meeting – 28 February 2004

This hasn't been a particularly busy year for the Queensland Branch—though we haven't been entirely inactive.

Lesley Jenkins ran our basic oral history workshops twice here in Brisbane and I ran it over a weekend in Eumundi. These are constants in our lives, covering topics such as the choice and use of equipment, setting targets and outcomes, choosing informants, doing the research, developing skills in asking questions, discussion of copyright and defamation laws, ethical behaviour and developing the documentation to make a project accessible. We find a persistent, but not large demand for these workshops and they are the backbone of what we offer the public. They are also our chief way of ensuring that professional standards are met in the projects carried out in Queensland.

Lesley Jenkins and I participated in a three-day workshop (spaced several weeks apart to allow participants time to put their newly acquired theory into practice) sponsored by the Cobb and Co Museum in Toowoomba, under the guidance of RMO Vickie Warden. Participants came from established public and private museums and collections in Toowoomba, and the workshops have already led to some very interesting work being done in that city.

We have also worked on a series of interviews for the Redlands Shire Council in 2003, which indirectly brought the Association in touch with their historian, Tracy Ryan—it was very satisfying to work with an oral historian in an administrative role and to observe the way she is creating a local community archive.

We were approached by the national body to hold the biennial national conference here in 2005. We have declined to do so while as the State library is in the process of reconstruction and expansion because we simply really do not have the resources. We have, however, put our collective hand up for the national conference in 2007.

In 2006 the international oral history conference will be held in Sydney and I cannot encourage you too strongly to put that event down as a must in your calendars—Lesley and Helen Klæbe are off, later this year, to the international conference in Rome, but 2006 may be your only chance to see an international conference in action. Many of you will be eligible for RADF and other arts related funding to defray costs of going to that conference, so don't be backward in coming forward in asking for it.

I need to thank all the working committee members for their support of the Association and for their tolerance of my sometimes exasperating communication channels—I have been largely an absentee president and feel that the Association will benefit greatly from my replacement! I especially appreciate the skills and energy of Maxine Kendall and Suzanne Mulligan have brought to the positions they hold—it gives one a great sense of security to have the bookkeeping, editing and records so very capably taken care of. I greatly enjoy my contact with the committee (though I have probably missed as many meetings as I have attended), since it is the nearest I come to a peer group in a rather isolated occupation.

Sue Pechey





# Oral History Training

The Oral History Association of Australia – Queensland Inc will be conducting an oral history training workshop. Lesley Jenkins, an experienced oral historian, will facilitate the workshop. The day will cover the following aspects of oral history:

- . Introduction to oral history – what it is, how it can be used and what can be made from the recordings
- . Memory – its reliability, its triggers, its possibilities
- . The interview and interviewing techniques – researching, the questionnaire, the venue and ambience
- . Tapes, equipment, copyright and ethics
- . Making the tapes accessible – indexing, transcribing and logging

When: Saturday, 17 April 2004  
10am – 4pm

Where: Bulimba Library, cnr Riding Rd & Oxford Street

Cost: \$60.00 (members) \$66 (non-members))

## ENROLMENT ESSENTIAL

Please enrol by making cheques payable to the OHAA-Qld Inc and send to the secretary, Lesley Jenkins at 93 Petersen Street, Wynnum 4178. Email enquiries can be sent to Lesley at [recordinghistory@optusnet.com.au](mailto:recordinghistory@optusnet.com.au)

- . If you have a working tape recorder please bring it along.
- . Morning and afternoon tea provided. Please bring your own lunch.



## **President's Notes**

I receive a number of enquiries about oral history because of my role in the oral history association. This may increase now that I have taken the baton from Sue Pechey, the former El Presidente. I also hear about work because I am on the National Committee of the Association, which in turn has links with the International Association. I also receive enquiries in my capacity as an Independent Oral Historian/ Writer and Curator. The range of enquiries has also increased as resourcing for oral history appears to have decreased with the State Library of Queensland. I always find it interesting to hear about the range of activities involving oral history that are taking place, or are planned in the state, and it would be even more useful if people provided a bit of a 'what worked' and 'what didn't work' at some future date. Please feel free to email me with a line or two about your work. Some enquiries and projects:

- Jesley Chua, oral historian in Singapore, is Calling for Contributions to the 25th Anniversary Publication of the Singapore Oral History Centre. By the way, she says, best wishes for the Year of the Monkey.
- The Deception Bay Historical Study is underway which contains a healthy component of oral history.
- The Police Museum is investigating oral history - training, recording etc.
- Mary Howells, at Logan City Council, is embarking on a new project under the working title of Logan Ridges - Woodridge to Park Ridge – which she doesn't expect to be completed for a couple of years
- enquiry from Brisbane City Council wanting someone to interview an aged resident of Bulimba
- a history of the Hmong who settled in FNQ involving training and oral history work with our Nth Qld Rep, Sandra Hodgson. This project may be auspiced by the Association.
- A series of interviews with members of environmental organisations was recently completed for Redland Shire Council
- . A series of interviews with men who served in Vietnam, Korea and WW11 was recently completed for Redland Shire Council.
- A member has been involved in recording interviews for a project in far Nth Qld called 'Port's People'.
- After receiving training Main Roads staff are recording interviews with current and former employees
- Rosemary Severin from the State Library is passing on information about oral history to rural and regional librarians.
- 10 oral histories have been completed by a member for the Women's Legal Service. They will be archived at the Service and they will also find their way into the written history (currently under development) to celebrate their 20 years of operation.

Lesley Jenkins  
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# Minidiscs – do they have a future?

Ken Howarth Heritage Recording UK

Introduction: Minidiscs were launched in 1990 by Sony and have rapidly become a popular consumer product. There has been considerable speculation on the Internet and elsewhere about the longevity and suitability of Minidiscs as a long-term storage medium. This speculation has ranged from enthusiasm to outright condemnation. Yet, their popularity, especially amongst oral historians, seems undaunted. Should archivists be concerned at the longevity of Minidisc? I was recently invited to the UK Maxell plant where Minidiscs are produced to learn more about the manufacturing process. [Please note: The conclusions are primarily those of the author, and do not represent those of Maxell: whose help and co-operation is gratefully acknowledged.]

## What is a Minidisc?

The Minidiscs manufactured at the Maxell plant are largely made of polycarbonate. There is a thin inner polycarbonate disc coated with a magneto-optical layer –the recording/playback surface – which is enclosed in a polycarbonate case for protection. The discs are quite small – the case dimensions being 72mm wide, 80mm depth and 8mm in thickness. Other types of Minidisc are available such as ‘playback only’, but the main type likely to be encountered by archivists, librarians and museum curators, will be magneto-optical.

## What is magneto-optical recording?

The technology, perhaps surprisingly, is not new. It is well tried and tested, having been used in computers and recording studio mixing desks for some years. Without going into complex manufacturing detail, the polycarbonate surface is ‘sputtered’ or targeted to produce a microscopically thin layer of magnetically highly stable terbium ferrite cobalt – the recording/playback surface. Other layers are then added including a titanium/aluminium reflective layer followed by a protective lacquer coating. When a recording is made, the laser instantaneously heats the point of focus on the recording layer to what is known as its Curie point. (Approx. 180°C) At that instant, the crystalline nature of the coating can be affected by a magnetic field. Polarised light reflected from the surface during playback represents the position of the magnetic field during recording and reflects polarised light in such a way as to represent either a “1” or an “0” as a digital code.

## The not-true fidelity argument

Minidisc uses a system called ATRAC data compression. The system relies on a variety of techniques to allow 74 minutes of stereo (90 minutes is possible) on such a small disc. The main method employed is based on a psychoacoustic principle that constantly adapts the audio signal to the ear’s continuously changing sensitivity, masking out unwanted noise generated by the system. It does not truncate frequencies as is popularly believed. The full range of 5-20K Hz is capable of being recorded.

Dietrich Schuller has pointed out in a paper entitled ‘*Minidisc for field recording? Applying archiving principles to data gathering*’ (International Association Sound Archives Journal 14 Dec 1999) that in their view there are serious limitations to Minidisc. Much of the argument, for example, that copies will degenerate when copying sequentially one from another is well-known, and occurs whatever copying method – digital or analogue - is used. However practical experiments by the author using speech material suggests that at least 20 copies can be made without reaching the unacceptable levels of noise and distortion present in reel to reel or cassette copying.

A more serious argument is made that the reproduced sound is intended for the human ear and that for some scientific work where instrumental examination of the audio is paramount e.g. bird song, then Minidisc is unsuitable. A conclusion reached by IASA is ‘that the employment of data reduction in sound archiving was simply against archival principles’.

## Minidiscs – why they will be used

Whilst IASA would seem to condemn Minidisc, the reality is that in Europe and the especially in the UK, Minidiscs are popular with both consumers and professionals. The manufacturers intend that Minidiscs will eventually replace cassettes, although it is unlikely they will take over completely. (There are still enthusiasts around who make wax cylinder recordings)

For practical high quality field recordings such as in oral history work, Minidisc is far superior to most cassette-based systems. As good-quality cassette recorders become harder to obtain there will be little choice but to go for either DAT or Minidisc, MD being the cheaper option.



There are many archive collections containing ordinary ferric oxide cassettes. These cassettes were never intended to be 'archival', but they exist in large numbers. Recent examination of a collection in Holland showed virtually no deterioration after 15 years of correct storage and usage. Minidiscs will – are being used - for field work – what other choices are there? Certainly local history, oral history, folk musicians and other similar field workers will use the system and sound archivists and others, must be prepared to deal with the resultant recordings.

### **Minidiscs – storage**

UNESCO suggest  $20^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 3^{\circ}\text{C}$  at  $40\%\text{RH} \pm 5\%\text{RH}$  over one year. Some video archivists are suggesting even lower relative humidity figures and temperatures for plastics, but UNESCO's figures are reasonably attainable in an average museum or archive situation. To avoid deterioration by the effects of light, plastics should be stored in the dark in acid-free boxes. The boxes should have at least one small perforation (say 3mm) to allow any off-gassing from the plastics to escape.

There is a strong argument that Minidiscs and indeed CD-R's too, should be copied to an analogue format - as a safeguard should the medium fail. If serious long-term preservation of Minidisc is to take place then consideration must also be given to the preservation of Minidisc playback equipment, if only because of the fast changes in recording technology and the redundancy of contemporary systems.

### **How long will they last?**

This is difficult to answer but after discussion with manufacturers and colleagues and examining the available literature - assuming correct storage, handling and care - a 30-year life would seem possible.

#### Arguments for

- Easy to use
- Cheap
- Availability of Minidiscs
- Long-life span
- Difficult to accidentally erase
- Minutes and seconds code as a cataloguing aid
- Easy search and access
- Up to 20 copies from sequential recordings for speech
- Tried and tested technology
- Can be replayed almost indefinitely without loss of quality
- Can be re-recorded up to a million times before failure.
- Better sound quality than many cassette systems

#### Arguments against

- Audio compression argument
- Direct digital multi-copies difficult because of in-built prevention to stop pirating of commercial music
- Essential there is little or no physical movement of the equipment during directory writing and table of contents recording and track erasure procedures.
- Warps if left in sun (so do cassettes, CD's video tapes etc)
- Needs low humidity for long-term storage
- Loud unexpected sounds are not well handled by Minidisc. They sound 'wrong'.
- Unknown long-term behaviour of the recording layer.

Finally, on a personal note I have used Minidisc in my studio ever since the early 1990's. I have not attempted to store the Minidiscs correctly as they are used mainly as a studio tool for holding audio material on a temporary basis or for field recording before editing in the computer. So far, I have not encountered any major problems with the system.

If you require any further assistance or advice on Minidisc or wish to contact Ken he can be reached on 01492-584113 or by e-mail [ken.howarth@btinternet.com](mailto:ken.howarth@btinternet.com)

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## North Queensland Representative – Sandra Hodgson

After being vacant for a couple of years, we are very pleased to have the position of North Queensland representative filled by Sandra Hodgson. She has some exciting projects happening up there, as you'll see on the following pages. Here she introduces herself to members:

I am originally from Melbourne, moved to Queensland in 1986. I trained as a teacher (special education, language and literacy, teacher education) crashed out in 1980. Went freelance after switching to sort-of arts: a BA in writing and literature. I taught short courses in creative writing and landmarks in literature to adults in Melbourne, Brisbane, finally, briefly in Innisfail.

Met a v. cute Welsh geologist in Queensland and married him in 1988; went bush a lot, did a book review program on ABC Brisbane with occasional interviews, interviewed bushies. Got interested in North Queensland history, history in real life, did some history at JCU Cairns. In between, did oral history workshops with Barbara Erskine. (Oral history connects well with my earlier grounding in literacy work with non-English speakers.)

At present much involved in developing social history projects that affirm identity within a region or locality, that give a sense of context of belonging (however briefly: how did I get *here*?! ) in a place to individuals and groups. I enjoy working with artists as exhibition coordinator and as a writer and social historian.

I'm lucky to be in a place where I can do this - for now, anyway. If I put up a decent proposal to director John Waldron at the Australian Sugar Industries Museum, it will fly.

ASIM is a classy set up including an Art Deco-era picture palace converted to an art gallery, occasional opera house and convention centre as well as a separate museum and archive to the industry (covering sugar towns all the way up and down the east coast) ASIM does travelling exhibitions too. Did anyone see *Refined White* (history of then Ćekanakas<sup>1</sup> in the industry), also *Sweet Talking*, or *Belbin photographic exhibition*? BUT funding by the industry has been discontinued!

I am studying visual arts at JCU and Tropical NQ TAFE.

Some of the oral history projects in which I have been involved include:

- *Ulysses Link* Mission Beach 'Pioneers Tea Party' OH session and exhibition;
- *Uses of Oral History* seminar given to Indigenous Australian Studies Unit, James Cook University, Townsville;
- *Introduction to Oral History*, Mission Beach History Group
- Various research projects for Innisfail Regional Archives Network (*IRAN*).
- Oral history seminar trainer, Winton, Cairns.
- Oral history workshop trainer, Cairns.
- Interviewer and writer for the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* and book *Many Voices*, National Library of Australia, Canberra;



## News from our North Queensland Representative

1. **James Cook University** had a lively and active North Queensland Oral History Project going for some years. Margaret Bird was the curator and when I last saw her at JCU in 2001 she was working her way through the extensive OH tape collection (10 years and more) digitalising. Even older tapes were in good condition for digitalising. May Abernethy took over Margaret's position about two years ago. My understanding is that for the time being, the NQOH Project, as a repository, cannot accept new tapes. The project was part of the History Department, I think. Di Monaggetti is Head of history Dept., TVL. They have a fabulous NQ photo collection, too, largely catalogued.

2. The Australian Sugar Industry Museum (ASIM) OH (+exhibition, book and school materials) project *Sweet Talking* tapes are held by JCU's NQOH Project above.

**ASIM's Refined White** exhibition (travelling, opens at National Museum, Canberra on 18 March 04) has an OH component. The tapes are held at ASIM, Mourilyan via Innisfail. No transcripts, but excerpts used in exhibition. Imelda Miller was the OH historian.

**ASIM also holds about 30 uncatalogued, untranscribed tapes donated by HS English teacher, Julianne Sweeney** (now Adelaide resident) and recorded by Julianne Sweeney and Innisfail HS children sometime between 1998-2002 approx. The theme of these interviews is **multiculturalism** and given the diversity of the school population interviewing, these will cover quite a range -- if the tapes are Okay. A problem: no releases for this material.

3. I recently completed four interviews with Miss Thelma Mellick. Two of these tapes are of very poor sound quality (stopgap recording machine) and two are good quality. These interviews are transcribed. I hold the original tapes, only until a suitable repository can be found. (ASIM does not have climate control except a day time rattler in Director's office and in a smaller exhib. area) An exhibition will follow, 3 July-15 August 04: **Family Fabric: 102 years of the Innisfail Mellick Family Business**, developed in collaboration with two artists will be held at ASIM 4 July- 15 August 04. Artists are photographer Glen O'Malley and collage-maker Stephanie Risely, with modest desktop publication by self, who is also curating. The material is available under a release.

Last year a similar exhibition was held at ASIM: **The Life and Times of Tiger See Hoe**. I did no new recording at that time, instead referring to **Diana Geise's work**, including transcriptions, held at **NLA OH unit Canberra**. However, Tiger has much more social history under his hat, and we start interviews next week, treating topics not already covered by Diana. NLA also holds many interviews with NQ & FNQ Chinese, living and recently dead.

4. NLA also holds DAT tapes I made with two interviewees, one on Palm Island and in one in Townsville, who were directly involved in **the infamous Palm Island Strike of 1956**. I was interviewing for *Bringing Them Home* OH Project (NLA) and the Palm Island material came up. As it was not directly BTH, it was simply stored. It would be wonderful to bring it back to Queensland and have it transcribed. One interviewee, Dulci Isaro was deported along with her ringleader father, Willie Thiaday, the rest of the family and seven other families. It's a gripping interview. Willie Thiaday wrote a small book about it (for years regarded as the only book with an Aboriginal author) which is mentioned in one of Ross Fitzgerald's Qld histories. Dulcie reckoned an Auntie in Cairns had a box of the books under her bed, and could I advise how to distribute them. When I asked later about them, Dulcie had changed her mind. Recordings were made with NLA's glorious DAT machines, and super mikes. I'd gladly transcribe the material if SLQ can get tape copy from NLA.

5. ArtsNexus has received funding for an **OH project** to be undertaken probably midyear at Dimbulah on the Atherton Tableland. The project is called **Storylink; it's an ArtsNexus Youth Entrepreneur Program (YEP)**. I'll be conducting workshops **bringing together young people and their seniors who were tobacco farmers** (Last tobacco crop sale in the traditional growing area Mareeba-Dimbulah was on 20 Feb. end of an era.) Aim is for potential and past entrepreneurs 'exchanging ideas, sharing values and attitudes, learning skills in a general thematic framework of *Placemaking*'. Tapes, copies, all indexes and some transcripts are anticipated product perhaps of interest to you.

6. Proposed: **a history of the Hmong who settled in FNQ** (first settler family in 1988, so very accessible, first generation, primary material) proposed, using Hmong interviewers and recorded in Hmong language, transcription into Hmong and English. Funding for this is yet to be sought as there are various minor but time-consuming complications. OHAQ is keen to auspice. (Hmong families may be present on the Sweeney tapes mentioned above.)

7. **Afternoon tea conversation with Palmerston original settlers approx.** 2 hours, with transcript. Contact is Janet Elders, 4064 5284, email: [toads@znet.net.au](mailto:toads@znet.net.au). Janet has appropriate signed release forms.

Sandra Hodgson  
North Queensland Representative



## Oral History Recording Standards

Even though every interviewee is a bit different in how they respond as interviews stretch on, I'm always reluctant to let any recording session go too long. In fact, I generally try and limit sessions to a maximum of about one-and-a-half hours. Years ago I began to notice just how often thought patterns and speech become less focussed, both for interviewees and interviewers, as they proceed through longer recording sessions, with all the negative implications for the standard of achievement in the interview.

When you work on the transcript, after several recorded hours the decay factor is often quite noticeable in the quality of detail in recollections, the competence of the interviewer's approach, and the increased level of false starts, ums, ahs, convoluted syntax etc. Longer sessions often produce more angst for interviewees sighting their spoken word in print too.

Generally, it's easier to predict which interviews are going to be substantial enough to warrant more than two recording sessions, but for any that look like being relatively short, I try and gauge at the beginning, when meeting the interviewee for the first time, if there may be need more than one session. If in any doubt I negotiate right up-front for the possibility of two. The benefits are numerous -- time to review the first session and refocus/follow up; consistent freshness and mental focus in questions and responses; feeling comfortable to expand on fine detail without stretching attention span of either party, etc. etc.

If I have agreement for a second session, I have learned not to try and squeeze the full story into one, even if it seems it could be done. The interviewee might seem happy to continue, but they don't have the insight gained from having worked on previous interviews where the decay factors became noticeable. So, if possible, I'll always opt for winding it up before fatigue sets in, and come back another day, fresh to the task and with my interview plan reviewed. I suspect that oral historians are a particularly dogged and persistent breed, and we are reluctant to let go once we are actually there and recording, but I recommend caution. Remarkable how much effort it takes for the interviewer to listen silently and still remain mentally active, isn't it?

Where a re-visit is not practicable, and long sessions unavoidable, planning is particularly critical. I see better results where long sessions are carefully paced, regularly paused for refreshments etc., and the occasional off-tape discussion and formative review.

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The following is an extract from the web site:

[http://www.dva.gov.au/media/publicat/vov/page\\_06.htm](http://www.dva.gov.au/media/publicat/vov/page_06.htm)



## **Recording and Preserving Veterans' Memories**

It is highly desirable that the stories and other information gained from interviews with veterans be properly recorded and preserved. To do this requires a systematic approach to making contact with veterans, preparing for the interview, conducting the interview, and deciding in what form the results of the interview should be preserved and how this material might be used in the future.

The needs and interests of those making contacts with our war veterans will be varied. The different questions they ask will stimulate memories over a wide range of topics and it is this very range, from military battles to personal anecdotes, that sustains vibrant, collective memories. Memories of war, freely given, have the authority of individual eye-witness accounts, but also the collective authority of a veteran community whose motive for passing on these memories is 'lest we forget'.

To harness the emotive authority inherent in veterans' memories it might be better to focus on one theme - Anzac Day. What is remembered on such days? Young people do not have intuitive answers to such questions. If most interviews at some point address this question, the sum of the interviews will have a powerful organising theme and interviewers will deepen their understanding of what it means to be human.

'Do you mind telling me what you remember on Anzac Day?' This can be a very useful initial interview question. It can allow the veteran to provide wide-ranging answers and to feel valued, but it could also be distressing. Tact, some knowledge of the person about to be interviewed and flexibility in skirting around any distressing questions will be needed. Generally it is best to arrive at the interview with a key question and a range of three or four associated sub-questions. This way, the interview is likely to have more direction and veterans are more likely to feel that their specific memories are valued. However, do be ready to suspend your questions, if necessary. The key word is "listen".

Interviewers require many skills. Foremost among these is to be considerate and responsive toward the person being interviewed. In the sections "Preparing for the Interview" and "Conducting the Interview" the particular skills needed for an effective oral history project are described.

### **Preparing for the Interview**

It is possible to interview someone without knowing anything about them or events that have affected them. If the questions are asked generally enough, with enough interest, most people will open up and tell their stories. For example, "Do you remember what you were doing on your twentieth birthday?" is usually an effective opener. In contrast, an over-prepared interviewer may intimidate, and a bombastic one may actually put words into the veteran's mouth by 'correcting' the facts being remembered. The ideal is to know a little about your subjects and the effects of the conflict on them, but not to reveal too much knowledge. Your questions should encourage those whom you interview to speak with confidence, certain that you are genuinely interested in them



and what they have to say. To win this confidence it is often necessary to complete a little background research.

## **Conducting the Interview**

Once the necessary arrangements with veterans have been made, the actual interviews could take place at the local school, RSL club or other suitable community venue. The topics for discussion may grow out of a general social activity or a focused learning activity or be part of a wider research assignment. The expected interview outcomes should be clear to both parties.

While preparing for the interview, the purpose will have been clarified. The actual techniques of oral history interviews are described in a number of places, including *Past-Continuous*, and various internet sites. The New England's Association of Oral History Home Page, <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~cohadm01/neaoh.html>, contains links to other oral history web sites, which are mainly in the USA but also include the National Library of Australia, where the Oral History Collection contains tape-recordings and transcripts. In fact, Australian public libraries are increasingly the source of excellent oral history material.

Some of the principles mentioned in such sources for conducting effective oral history interviews, suggest:

- begin slowly, especially if the veteran is hesitant, with questions about something easy to remember, like food, or what the beds were like during the war;
- allow the person being interviewed to go from topic to topic;
- listen carefully and follow up points with a new question or two, rather than just reading out a list of prepared questions;
- try prompting with a few specific, concrete questions, perhaps about whether the veteran remembers a particular birthday or Christmas during the war, if you find that his or her memory is faltering;
- be clear about what you want; and
- be considerate. If the answer is moving too far away from your question, gently ask another question to get the interview back on track, but do not forget that fascinating, unexpected details can sometimes be revealed when the interviewee is wandering down memory lane.

## **Recording the Veteran's Memories**

Interviews can be taped (audio or video), transcribed from tape or produced from summary notes. For a *Valuing Our Veterans* project, as described in this book, you might decide that your outcome will be typed, edited, transcribed, categorised records.

## **Interview Outcomes**

In thinking about what to do with the results of your interviews, see what has been done in Australia and other parts of the world.

Finally, to ensure maximum public awareness of this project, tell others what you have done.