



# On Tape

**Volume 9, No.4**

**Editor: Karen L. Barrett**

**October, 2009**

## **Contents**

Letter from the Editor.....	2
President's 2009 Report .....	3
News .....	4
Election of Office Bearers .....	4
Web site .....	5
Conferences, Seminars and Workshops.....	6
International Scholarly Symposium .....	6
16 <sup>th</sup> International Oral History Conference .....	7
Conference Reports .....	9
Report by Denise Phillips, Bursary recipient .....	9
Report by Pam Willis Burden, Bursary recipient .....	14
Report by Ariella Van Luyn, Bursary recipient.....	20
Impressions of the Conference by Ariella Van Luyn, Bursary recipient .....	22
Paper .....	23
Challenges from a Workshop on Memory .....	23
Education Opportunities.....	28
Digital Storytelling.....	28
The Web .....	29
Oral History around the World .....	29
Web Sites.....	29
Recording Equipment.....	31
2009 OHAA Membership Form.....	32

## Letter from the Editor

Hello Everyone!

Apologies for the delay, unfortunately I developed swine flu and pneumonia the week of the Oral History Conference and was forced to sequester myself. While I missed out on the conference, our other bursary recipients had (from all accounts) a wonderful time. Check out their reports in this Newsletter.

The OHAA (Qld) web site went live since the last Newsletter and you should all have received your username/password to access the member's area. If not please contact Suzanne. As with all web pages, some remain blank until we have something to fill them, if you can provide us with anything to fill those places let us know.

The AGM was held at the State Library last weekend. Read on for both the President's report as well as the makeup of the new Executive Committee. Some of us stayed on to natter over coffee which was lovely - you too could have this kind of fun, all it takes is attendance at meetings.

I hope you enjoy the variety of material for this Newsletter; it's certainly one of the largest we've had. That said, the next Newsletter is already around the corner and I'm always on the lookout for suggestions and submissions. This includes anything you find on the web, or an interstate Newsletter. Please do not assume that I've seen it. Feel free to email me regarding Website/Newsletter suggestions at any time.

As usual, if you have any comments to make about the Newsletter, please send them directly to "The Editor, On Tape", at [karenlbarrett@bigpond.com](mailto:karenlbarrett@bigpond.com) – I promise I don't bite and have rather thick skin. The Newsletter is only as good as its last edition, so comments, critiques or recommendations are very welcome. I would love the opportunity to listen to your thoughts or concerns.

Has anyone attended a book launch or maybe a conference/workshop/seminar over the past year? If you're prepared to provide some feedback (good/bad/indifferent), I'm prepared to publish. When attending workshops, conferences or seminars, please keep the Newsletter in mind....maybe even write down some thoughts while they're still fresh in your mind. It doesn't have to be an expose; even a quick email telling me in five sentences what you thought of the workshop (etc.) can be used.

Karen L. Barrett  
Editor  
Email: [karenlbarrett@bigpond.com](mailto:karenlbarrett@bigpond.com)

## President's 2009 Report

2008/2009 was another busy year in Queensland. Our committee comprised myself, Secretary Suzanne Mulligan, our new Treasurer Kate Roberts, Editor and Webmaster Karen Barrett and Loans officer Maxine Kendall worked very hard. As well, we truly appreciate the generous input provided by our committee supporter - Helen Klaebe. We also developed a very productive relationship with the newly appointed State Library of Queensland Oral History & Digital Storytelling Coordinator, Gavin Bannerman.

We started the year with two major tasks: creation of the website and appointment of the committee regional representatives. We were also committed, as always, to the delivery of training programs through our workshops.

A website is a bare essential nowadays and we expected ours to become an information portal and a forum for the OHAA Qld members and all interested in oral history alike. After reviewing seven quotes and studying various websites we finally decided on a new IT group, TeckoGecko Pty Ltd. They worked in close collaboration with the committee and took into consideration our desire to create a real forum for our members across the state, as well as engage other oral historians in Australia and overseas in a fruitful discussion. The website is still a work in progress as we continue uploading information. We obtained ISBN which enabled us to offer our site for publications. The site visitors will soon be able to revisit the papers of the 2007 OHAA conferences.

This year we were also working towards establishing close and more proactive relationships with oral history communities across the State. We called for Expressions of Interest from our members to become Honorary Regional Representatives of OHAA – Queensland. Six volunteers came forward and they will keep in touch with local communities to develop relationships and raise awareness about the role of OHAA and how we might help with any oral history projects, such as with training and support. With the help of these volunteers, we hope to run more workshops in the regional and remote areas of Queensland.

This year we had a number of workshops and Gavin Bannerman (State Library of Queensland) was instrumental in providing the Branch with workshop facilities thus contributing to the training of our members.

The first series of workshops held in December 2008 was our response to the appeal of the Don Dunstan Foundation: the Queensland Chapter who approached our branch with a request to help them start their Oral History project aimed at recording memoirs of prominent Queensland politicians and people involved in the Labor party. We designed training sessions in a way that would address several aspects of a typical Oral History project and would enable the participants to feel confident on every stage of their future project.

We engaged both Queensland and interstate facilitators and held a series of workshops over two weekends. Dr Helen Klaebe ran the workshop on 'Sharing Stories with each other: Collecting oral histories of our community'. Sue Pechey facilitated a two-day workshop dedicated to the development of editing skills applicable to oral history transcripts. Gavin Bannerman facilitated a workshop about the ways oral histories and digital stories might come to the State Library and the steps involved in acquisition and management of these stories. And finally, Peter Kolomitsev (Audio Preservation studio at the State Library of South Australia), conducted a practical, hands-on workshop, designed to enhance the participants' knowledge of digital recording.

Our next workshop in late March was dedicated to interviewing techniques and was facilitated by Daryll Bellingham, a professional storyteller and narrative consultant based in Brisbane. His workshop focused on using storytelling and narrative communication techniques to encourage interviewees to tell interesting, detailed and vital stories; and the benefits and strategies of dealing with emotions.

There are two more workshops planned for this year. One of them is on Digital Storytelling and the second – on Oral History Basics. But this is a material for the next President Report. We are looking forward to more workshops in future including one in Cultural Awareness that is currently being discussed with the State Library of Queensland. We also discuss a possibility of a workshop with a Playback Theatre that would explore an entirely different application of Oral History – as a theatre performance.

This year four of our members participated in the National Conference in Tasmania. To encourage participation of our members, we provided three bursaries of \$500 each granted on a competitive basis. One of them were set aside specifically for a member from rural/remote Queensland. The winners were Pam Willis-Burden, Ariella Van Luyn and Denise Phillips. The committee also provided a bursary of \$200 which enabled me to attend the conference 'Talk about Town: Urban Lives and Oral Sources in Twentieth Century Australia' in Melbourne.

We are very pleased to announce that our new Life Member of the Oral History Association of Australia is Suzanne Mulligan. We all know, appreciate and admire Suzanne's dedication to the cause of Oral History and to the needs of the members – that's why she was unanimously nominated by the members of our committee. We all congratulate Suzanne and wish her well in the years to come.

We are looking forward to a new year in Oral History with a view of providing our members with work-of-art recording equipment and more cutting edge training.

Lena Volkova  
**President**  
**Queensland Branch**

<h2>News</h2>
---------------

Our President wished to step down from duties this year, but with no candidates to replace her, the Executive Committee was faced with a difficult decision. Dissolve the Association, or conduct a random ballot of the members for our next President.

Rather than dissolve the Association we chose to conduct a random ballot

And so, our new President is

## **Gotcha!**

### **And yet, we're very close to resorting to this method!**

Our President needed to stand down from the position to attend to other commitments over the coming year. In the end, the Committee discussed delegating some of her duties in the hope it would relieve some pressure and encourage her to remain as President.

Lena's preference would have been to support a new President as Vice-President and I encourage everyone to consider themselves a potential President. With the advent of Skype, email and the Internet, the need to travel for meetings is minimal. I have suggested that members could attend committee meetings from regional areas using Skype, in the hope that members would not only enjoy the opportunity to network with their fellow members but be encouraged to volunteer time with regard to committee activities. Gavin Bannerman is looking into the possibility of people travelling to their local library and using the SLQ network to 'skype' into meetings. Given my own regional location, I hope to use Toowoomba as the first trial. If you live in Toowoomba/surrounds and are interested, please contact me.

At this late stage, if you are willing to stand as President, Lena is prepared to step down and act as Vice President. Her duties include participating in National Committee teleconferences at about 7.00 pm bimonthly, organising workshops, writing grant applications and the Annual Reports, assisting members in their enquiries about Oral History and collaborating with our Regional Representatives. I implore members not to sit on their laurels."

## **Election of Office Bearers**

President	Lena Volkova	<b>Non-management positions</b>	
Secretary	Suzanne Mulligan		
Treasurer	Kate Roberts		
<i>On Tape</i>	Karen Barrett		
Newsletter Editor			
		Loans Officer	Maxine Kendall
		Web Master	Karen Barrett

## **Web site**

As mentioned in the *Letter from the Editor*, during the past 3 months the OHAA (Qld) went live. You should all have received your username/password to access the member's area. If not please contact Suzanne. As a favour I would like you all to log into the members area and 'play' with the features available. Basically, I'd like as many people to test out the facilities and report back. To that end, and given the size of this Newsletter you will have received instruction on how to download the Newsletter straight from the web site. As with all web pages, some remain blank until we have something to fill them, if you can provide us with anything to fill those places let us know.

## Conferences, Seminars and Workshops

Prairie Centre for the Ukrainian Heritage, St. Thomas More College  
University of Saskatchewan, Canada  
The Kowalsky Eastern Ukrainian Institute  
Kharkiv V. N. Karazin National University, Ukraine  
Ukrainian Oral History Association  
Announce  
International Scholarly Symposium

### “IN SEARCH OF VOICE: ORAL HISTORY AS THEORY, METHOD, AND SOURCE”

**Kharkiv, Ukraine, 11-12 December 2009**

The two-day conference will begin with plenary sessions by leading specialists in the field of oral history from Canada, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. Papers are invited for three round tables to be held during the second day of the symposium:

**Institutionalisation of oral historical research.** In this round table presentations will deal with the organization of research activities in already existing centres of oral historical research.

**Oral history as a source.** Papers presented in this round table will deal with methods of organizing and preserving oral historical data, archiving the collected material, transcribing interviews as well as with general principles of collection development.

**Research dissemination.** The presentations in this round table will deal with questions of methods and principles of presenting, publishing, and exhibiting oral history projects. The presenters are invited to examine from this perspective their own published interview collections, research monographs, video and audio projects, exhibits and websites they created on the basis of oral historical research.

The prospective presenters are invited to submit their paper proposals (not exceeding 2,000 words, in Ukrainian or English) as well as personal information (full name, electronic address, postal address, telephone numbers, academic credentials, institutional affiliation, scholarly interests) to the email addresses:

[info.uoha@gmail.com](mailto:info.uoha@gmail.com)  
[natalia.khanenkofriesen@stmcollege.ca](mailto:natalia.khanenkofriesen@stmcollege.ca)

Proposal **deadline** is April 15, 2009, after which the organizers will inform you about the status of your submission. Presenters whose papers will be accepted will submit the final version of their paper by November 12, 2009. The best papers, in which the authors successfully employ both theoretical and empirical material, will be considered for the inclusion in the special post-Symposium collection currently considered by the conference organizers for publication.

Meals and accommodations will be provided by the symposium. In some cases, the organizing committee may consider partial or full reimbursement of travel expenses within Ukraine.

For further questions please contact conference organizing committee:

Gelinada Grinchenko,  
Associate Professor of the Department of Ukrainian Studies,  
Kharkiv V. N. Karazin National University, Ukraine  
[gelinada.grinchenko@gmail.com](mailto:gelinada.grinchenko@gmail.com)  
Natalia Khanenko-Friesen,  
Associate Professor of Anthropology  
St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan, Canada  
[natalia.khanenkofriesen@gmail.com](mailto:natalia.khanenkofriesen@gmail.com)



**XVI. International Oral History Conference  
Prague, Czech Republic  
Clarion Congress Hotel Prague  
7 – 11 July, 2010**

This year our attention will focus on finding and making meaning of the past and human identity through oral history. We will focus on number of research fields where oral history can contribute to better understanding not only of our past but our lives in general. Also, for the first time our conference will take place in an ex-totalitarian country. This enables us to analyse the specific role of oral history research in societies where other, especially official records about the past have been submitted to censorship or have been discarded.

We encourage scholars all around the world and all those who have worked with oral history in a wide range of settings such as museums, heritage agencies, academic institutions, law courts, radio and television, performing arts and community projects to participate in XVI International Oral History Conference in Prague, Czech Republic.

**THEMES**

1. Memories of violence, war and totalitarianism. The persecuted, civil rights, trauma and forgetting
2. Memory and Politics: Experiences of political participation
3. Islands of Freedom: The role of subculture, folklore and oral traditions in society. Alternative culture, music, dance and identity.
4. Memories of Family: Motherhood, fatherhood and generational exchange
5. Migrations: Exile, migratory movements, diaspora and the search of identity
6. The World of Work: Memories and experiences. Gender and the perception of labour
7. Gender/ing memories and the making of sexual identities. Oral Histories of gays and lesbians.
8. Health and Healthcare: health centres, the elderly and disabled; health workers
9. Ecology and Disasters: Environmental issues, natural heritage and cultural change
10. Sharing/Passing on Beliefs: Religion and oral traditions
11. Organizing Oral History: Institutions, archives, museums, organizations and grassroots groups.
12. Methodological, archival and technological issues Theory and Method in Oral History: Legal and ethical issues.
13. Teaching Oral History: Experiences in formal and informal education

#### 14. Oral History and the Media

**The Conference website ([www.ioha2010prague.com](http://www.ioha2010prague.com)) and online-registration system will be launched at the beginning of March, 2009.**

#### **TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIPS**

The International Oral History Association (IOHA) has a small Travel Scholarship Fund aimed at providing partial financial support for travel to and/or accommodations at the Conference, particularly for those participants from developing countries. Unfortunately, the fund is small so only a part of the costs can be covered. Therefore we suggest the potential applicants to start their fundraising at the same time of sending in their paper proposal. All IOHA Scholarship applicants will be asked to explain from where else they expect funding.

To be eligible for a travel scholarship, candidates must first have their paper proposals accepted. To receive a scholarship, finalists must submit their final paper by the published deadline.

Related information ON IOHA Scholarship and application forms will be available on the IOHA Website (<http://www.iohanet.org/index.html>) from May 2009.

#### **DEADLINES**

<b>DEADLINE ACCEPTANCE SHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>30 NOVEMBER 2009</b>
<b>Notification of award</b>	<b>By 5 December 2009</b>

#### **CONTACTS**

If you have questions or would like advice from an IOHA Council member about a conference proposal, you may contact your regional representative as follows:

**Oceania:** Megan Hutching (New Zealand) - [meganhutching@hotmail.com](mailto:meganhutching@hotmail.com)

To contact the Conference organizers in Prague, please email or write to:

**Pavel Mücke**

[mucke@usd.cas.cz](mailto:mucke@usd.cas.cz)

Oral History Center

Institute of Contemporary History

Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

Vlašská 9

118 40 Praha (Prague)

Czech Republic



## Conference Reports

*Islands of Memory*' - Oral History Association of Australia's 16<sup>th</sup> National Conference  
Launceston, September 17 – 20 2009



### **‘Oral history holds all lives valuable’: A Glimpse of the 16th National Conference of the OHAA at Launceston, 2009**

**Denise Phillips**

I have just returned from four engaging days at the 16<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA), *Islands of Memory: Navigating Personal and Public History*. The conference hosted 49 or so inspiring speakers and attracted about 135 delegates from across Australia and abroad. Held at the Tram Shed Function Centre in Launceston, Tasmania, we enjoyed the city's beautifully preserved, historic buildings and the picturesque, rural scenery of the Tamar Valley. A diverse range of topics was covered, with a mixture of single and parallel sessions. These topics spanned the use of oral sources in museums and heritage institutions, academia, the media, law courts, the arts, and family and local histories. This is a glimpse of the conference, from my perspective.

On Thursday 17th September 2009, Jill Cassidy, the President of the Tasmanian branch, opened the conference and Aboriginal elder, Nola Hooper, gave the Welcome to Country. The Honourable Ewan Crawford, Lieutenant-Governor of Tasmania, conducted the official opening. Drawing on his role also as the state's Chief Justice, he commented on how oral accounts give layered and often conflicting views of the past, and quoted Alessandro Portelli to remind us that these sources tell us about meanings. He drew on Alistair Thomson to suggest that oral history has never been so exciting or uncertain, with innovative approaches in analysis and rapid advances in digital technology.

Richard Whiteing, the Research Manager of Robben Island Museum at Cape Town, gave a moving keynote address in 'Remembering Mandela on Robben Island'. During South Africa's apartheid era, Richard joined the resistance movement, was exiled and became a member of the African National Congress. Richard has overseen an extensive collection of oral history interviews with Nelson Mandela's former fellow-inmates.

In sharing their memories of Mandela during his 18 years of imprisonment on Robben Island, rich insights into his life as a prisoner, political leader, comrade and family man have been captured. Mandela used subtle methods of resisting oppressive conditions within prison, challenging authority



*(Bill Bunburry, Alistair Thomson and Richard Whiteing)*

while still recognising limitations. If his warders said he must run, then Mandela would walk. Maintaining intellectual rigour and establishing clandestine political structures enabled Mandela to further the struggle against apartheid. Mandela, Richard told us, was noted for humanising the prison warders by ‘rescuing the human being within’, often through adopting a conciliatory or fatherly approach.

Several speakers shared their projects on Indigenous stories, showing the vital role oral history plays in the continuing process of reconciliation. Elaine Rabbitt argued that through storytelling, Indigenous Australians can gain recognition of past suffering and non-Indigenous Australians can glean a better understanding of how the past affects Indigenous lives in the present. Leonie Kelleher spoke passionately about the way Western society still privileges white voices and interpretations, particularly in law courts. She argued that Australia’s national story remains a work in progress, and advocated greater inclusion of all voices.

Through the oral histories of her own people about places and ‘Aunty Maggie’s’ house, Lorina Barker gave insights into the social interaction and culture of Aboriginals from Weilmoringle in north-west New South Wales. Lorina used the innovative concept of ‘memory maps’. Her narrators sometimes clammed up when the recorder was turned on, so she suggested they draw a map of their town or dwellings, or to show where things had happened. This put them at ease and drew out rich stories of humpies, new houses and town landmarks, such as the ‘car cemetery’. Noah Riseman delivered a well-crafted and nuanced paper about the role of the Yolngu people in defending Australia from Japanese invasion in the Northern Territory during World War II. Using oral histories, he challenged the dominant view that the Yolngu people were rallied into action by anthropologist Donald Thomson to show that they had also exercised their own agency in defending their lands. Helen Klæbe outlined her exciting pilot project to record responses to the Australian Parliament’s Apology in 2008 to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples, with the hope of others gathering stories nationwide.

One of Thursday morning’s parallel sessions was marked by three outstanding speakers. Together, they formed a powerful trio with a common theme of using oral history to empower others. Greater understanding of those with learning difficulties was encouraged through Susan Grimes’ presentation. Jan Gothard, having interviewed people with Down syndrome as well as being a mother of a child with Down syndrome, explored the difficulties of maintaining authenticity when interviewing those who present as less articulate. She nevertheless delivered a convincing case for empathetically assisting the less articulate to create narratives - because the alternative is silence.

Terry Whitebeach shared her moving journey of writing the book, *Bantam*, with her son, Mick Brown. Unemployed and living in a small, rural community, Mick was experiencing a troubled stage in his life. To tell his story, Terry often recorded his voice over the telephone. Terry reminded us that we can become paralysed by inaction when overtly concerned about the 'right way' to do oral history. This was heartening because it offered non-conventional ways to capture timely experiences which might otherwise be lost. Her willingness to fictionalise, although with a strong commitment to 'getting the voices right', enabled her to 'tell the truth' and raise awareness of critical social issues. That all three brought their own personal experiences to their work made this session particularly riveting.

Another highlight was delivered by Alan Harris Stein. Among numerous prominent positions, Alan is an archival oral historian, a lecturer at Chicago State University, and Associate Director of the Consortium for Oral History Educators. He shared memories of the acclaimed and arguably radical, oral historian Studs Terkel. The late Studs has recorded over 9,000 hours of tape and was dedicated to creating history 'from the bottom up'. Alan inspired us with a delightful trailer from the film, *Rocking the Boat: Studs Terkel's 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. The film mapped how activism, such as labour movements and the civil rights movements, has won significant social changes over the last century in America. Studs notes, however, that young Americans have no memory of these past victories which have brought benefits to their lives. Oral history, Studs says, is 'a corrective to collective amnesia', and that through memories, we educate society. He advocates that, 'You've got to rock the boat' to bring about social change and that the rewards for rocking the boat are found in creating a world in which it is easier for people to live. The trailer can be viewed online on *You Tube*, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1141734559388187113#>



(Jill Cassidy & Alan Harris Stein)

On a lighter note, we were regaled with stories of the Perth Zoo from John Bannister. Having celebrated its 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008, people's memories showed that the zoo was a 'constant in a changing place'. Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie spoke about their search for sensitive insights into Brisbane's Ekka through careful analysis. Negative or very personal memories were often considered incompatible with the grander, public narratives and clichés of this iconic, annual event. Emma Hewitt charmed us with a love-story. Emma then discussed how stories of love are shaped over time and argued that 'we manipulate memory to make the present plausible'. Using a partly postmodern approach, she also reflected on ways she might have projected her personal fascination with love onto her narrator, drawing attention to our own role in shaping oral histories. Emma concluded with the short but profound idea that, 'Perhaps in listening, we are loving too'.

Alison Alexander gave us a taste of the more colourful histories behind the dry, formal minutes of the Launceston Church Grammar School. We also got an often cheeky view of the academic career and occasional philandering of Theodore Thomson Flynn, the father of Tasmanian-born actor Errol Flynn, from Tony Harrison. Other topics ranged from women's economic aspirations in Western

Australian goldfields, to 'gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Aboriginal people' in northern Manitoba, by Maureen Simpkins who had travelled from Canada.

Unfortunately, Karen Barrett and Jayne Persian were unable to attend the conference because of illness. We missed their presence as each had had much to offer. Karen had planned to talk about the use of oral histories by the Main Roads Heritage Centre while Jayne was to discuss how personal memories of Displaced Persons from Central and Eastern European often differ from dominant, public narratives. Nadia Johnson kindly filled Jayne's place, and recounted her mother Valentina's migration from war-torn Europe during the 1950s in the style of a classical fairytale. Having crafted the story for her mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party, her contribution exemplified the special role oral history plays in preserving treasured family memories as well as supplementing official records.

A panel session, chaired by Janis Wilton, Joanne Scott, Alistair Thomson and Alan Harris Stein, reflected on the future of oral history in universities. Concerns were expressed about postgraduate students who want to conduct oral histories as part of their research, in spite of having little or no knowledge of the associated practice, theory or interpretative methodologies. The panel stressed



the importance of such students becoming well versed in all aspects of oral history. Throughout the conference, other concerns were repeatedly raised that Research Ethics Committees at universities sometimes group oral historians in with a disparate body of researchers and fail to understand the unique, ethical guidelines to which we already adhere. For some, this has caused delays in research. It was suggested that the OHAA formulate a uniform plan to increase Research Ethics Committees' awareness of the role and practice of oral history.

*(Ross Laurie & Joanne Scott, at the Cataract Bistro, on Saturday evening)*

During the conference, Janis Wilton, from the University of New England (UNE), was awarded the prestigious Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History. Her outstanding contributions to oral history include many publications and exhibitions on immigrants, memories associated with objects, and architect Harry Seidler. She has undertaken significant public history projects, such as *Golden Threads*, a study of the Chinese in regional NSW from 1850-1950. From 2000 to 2004, Janis served as Vice President and then President of the International Oral History Association. Not only is Janis a leading light in oral history, she is also incredibly generous in her support of others. Through 20 years of teaching oral history at UNE, Janis has shared her wealth of experience. I have personally benefited from this contribution, having been privileged to have Janis as one of my lecturers at UNE through to now being my PhD supervisor. On behalf of the Queensland branch, I extend our warmest congratulations to Janis for this truly deserved recognition.

As there were parallel sessions, this is just a glimpse of the many wonderful speakers. We often wanted to be in two places at once, so as not to miss anything! One that I missed was Jen Brown's



‘Blitz’, which creatively explored the cacophony of political and public rhetoric about the so called ‘War on Terrorism’ during 2004. Her work was also featured at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. On Saturday afternoon, we were treated to excerpts from Stella Kent’s play *New Tasmanians*, which explored experiences of post-World War II migration and resettlement. Later, dinner at the Cataract Bistro, with a chilly evening outside, gave us a chance to relax and chat to other delegates. The bistro was located a few minutes walk from the spectacular rapids of the Cataract Gorge, which I was lucky enough to see during a few free hours before the conference started.

Finally, I sincerely thank the Queensland branch for granting me a bursary to attend the conference. I was grateful to also have this opportunity to deliver my paper on the stories of Hazara refugees from Afghanistan, now living in Brisbane. The Hazaras numbered largely among the boats of asylum seekers arriving on Australian shores over the last ten years. I drew on French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, to show how past injustices can create a *wounded memory* over time, in which some aspects of the past are repeatedly emphasised while others are forgotten. Ricoeur argues, however, that we should encourage people to ‘remember fully’. I refuted this, advocating instead the need to understand the complex ways in which traumatic memories are recalled. It is here that the impact of the past and the intimate human experience is gleaned. In the case of the Hazaras, the repetitions, the silences, and the forgetting hold clues about both their profound suffering and resilience.



*(The view of the Tamar River, on the way to the Tram Shed, Launceston)*

In closing, congratulations to the Tasmanian branch for an exemplary job in hosting the conference. Although there were technological glitches at times which were disappointing for some speakers, this was overshadowed by the greater opportunity for learning and establishing new contacts.

These conferences expose us to the diverse uses of oral history. They can also prompt us to reflect on what sort of oral historians we are - whether we favour a narrative approach or close analysis, or a combination of both. I detected that while analysis of subjectivity has become an integral pillar of oral history, the traditional narrative was nevertheless alive and well. With the close of the conference on Sunday 20th, I have come away with my already firm love of oral history reinvigorated. Its ability to give voice to others and, as Terry Whitebeach says, to hold ‘all lives valuable’ is the hallmark of a discipline which I am proud to be part of.

\*\*\*

## OHAA (Qld branch) Report

**Pam Willis Burden**

I have just attended another absolutely exhilarating OHAA Conference, this time in Launceston Tasmania. It is so stimulating to be able to share your work and collecting experiences with others who are similarly enthusiastic. Times away from intently listening to papers were just as fulfilling – morning tea and lunch times were much too short as you shared experiences with others and learned of projects that you could not have imagined.

The Conference consisted of one keynote address and 44 papers; the panel about teaching History in Universities was recorded for the future, and we were treated to an excellent performance of a play by Stella Kent called “*New Tasmanians*”, based on oral histories of migrants.

Janis Wilton from UNE was presented with the Hazel de Berg Award, and thanked the much-lamented Hazel for being a ‘trailblazing pioneer’. At the AGM of the OHAA, our tireless secretary from Queensland, Suzanne Mulligan, was awarded Life Membership, as were Janis Wilton from NSW and Bill Bunbury from Western Australia.

Some fascinating themes emerged from the “Islands of Memory” title. The first was the value of silence, and what that revealed about the interviewee. Was he too embarrassed to continue on a thought, was he carefully considering what he might say next, or did he self-censor to respect the feelings of his future generations. In her paper “*Storytelling, Silence and Voice*”, Leonie Kelleher thought that silences in some Indigenous interviews were the result of considering who had the right to receive, or pass on, knowledge.

Another recurring subject was the unreliability of memory. In the last morning of the Conference, Greg Jefferys and Kim Kirsner both elaborated on this. Greg has been searching for a shipwreck on Stradbroke Island and had recorded an oral history with an elderly man who claimed to have the correct story of its location and why it no longer existed. But when he was interviewed again 3 years later, he presented a totally different story. Greg concluded that in the first interview, the man had ‘reconstructed’ his memory over time to give him ‘social currency’ within his community as an authority on the wreck. In the later interview, more truth had emerged, but at neither time was this fabrication deliberate.

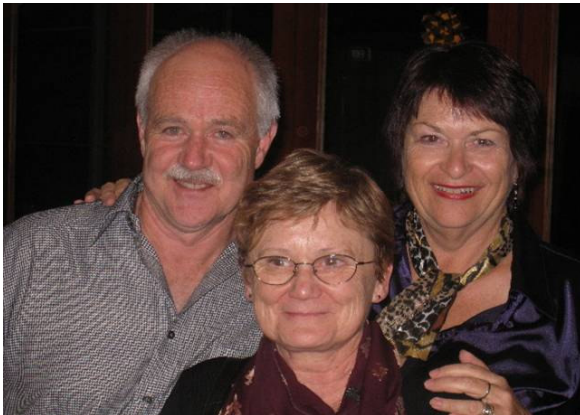
Kim was part of the ‘*Finding the Sydney Foundation*’, investigating the sinking of HMAS Sydney and the German ship the Kormoran. He discovered that in interviews with survivors of the Kormoran only a few weeks after the collision, their information about the location co-ordinates differed. Many had the correct numbers but in the wrong order. Their memories had already begun to fade. In his research he discovered that after 6 years, most memories are 30% less reliable.

Both papers concluded that it is necessary to cross-reference oral histories with other detailed written information and that oral histories should not be taken wholly to pinpoint a date or place or

any other precise information. But nothing can replace oral histories for descriptions of feelings or emotions when accuracy is not an issue.

Another continuing theme was a question of ethics. When should interviewees' names be used and when should they not be divulged. Michele Matthews in her paper "*Life and social relationships in the 1930s depression*" was asked by the Ethics Committee at Melbourne University to keep her interviewees on life during the Depression anonymous and was not happy with this. Susan Grimes in her paper "*Issues with Interviewing*" also said she was told not to reveal her dyslectic interviewee, whom she called Olivia. Yet some people ask specifically to record their stories, so why should they remain anonymous? There was not a concrete conclusion to this dilemma, with most people commenting that it really depends on the requirements of the interviewee and the private nature of the content of their recording. The question was posed of how many generations of relatives need to be asked to give their permission for an interviewee's name to be made public. Pam Sharpe's work in Gwalia and Leonora in West Australia was compromised by Roland Rocchiccioli's book about the area which named names without obtaining the person's permission.

Other fascinating papers included two from the National Film and Sound Archive. Ken Berryman showed four interviews that had been shot on video. In order to look professional, TV presenter Mike Munro provided his own cameraman, and made a memorable quote: "Winners are grinners and losers have meetings". Ken wasn't that pleased with Ted Kotcheff, director of '*Wake in Fright*' who trotted out exactly the same anecdote that he had been telling at all his recent media conferences. Ken was hoping for something more revealing for the Archive, and again touched on the 'reconstructed memory' theme. Comedian and writer John Clarke wasn't well filmed and appeared in profile which sometimes detracted from what he was saying. Barry Cohen, former Minister of the Arts who was filmed against a window and so wasn't that clear on the film, nevertheless revealed that he had 'given away' the wrong building in Canberra for the NFSA.



(Ken, Chris and Pam)

Chris Guster had been to remote parts of the Northern Territory to record oral histories of the founders of the Indigenous television service and showed a photo of a cupboard full of videos that had been made by one community with BRACS (Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme) equipment. They had made short films in language about their everyday activities and showed them on a closed circuit within their community.

Later the scheme expanded to other areas but as it no longer exists, her recordings and photos are remarkably valuable. Lorina Baker, who grew up in an Aboriginal community near Burke, later commented on how exciting her first experiences of seeing Aboriginal people in commercials on television had been, and that many local children of a certain era were named after characters in '*The Bold and Beautiful*'.

There were several papers on Indigenous themes. Elaine Rabbitt from Broome spoke about collecting histories of people who did not lead prominent lives. She observed that history usually recorded the activities of the dominant 'tribe' of people which is why there is a lack of Indigenous stories. She has been working with a local Aboriginal colleague with AIATIS funding on a project to give the Australian community new information to add to the reconciliation process.

Queenslander Helen Klaebe gave a wonderful paper on her work to collect a Response to the Apology to Indigenous people. She showed some digital stories made by the SLQ and observed that 'we have the oldest oral history in the world' – the storytelling of the Aboriginal people. She is working to 'give voice to people who have been marginalised'.



(Denise and Pam)

Unfortunately due to annoying parallel sessions which compel attendees to choose between two fascinating subjects, I was not able to hear another Queensland presenter Denise Phillips, who spoke on her project with Hazara refugees.

Noah Riseman's paper was about the recognition of the Yolngu people's contribution to the defence of the Northern Territory during World War II.

RAAF anthropologist Donald Thomson's omission of at least three names in his recommendations for recognition was corrected in oral histories and highlighted the need for further enquiries into Aboriginal involvement during the War.

Editor of the Journal Jan Gothard gave a paper on her experiences of interviewing people with Downs Syndrome and said one should 'enter into an interview as a meeting between two equals'. She said sometimes you had to 'create your own narrative if you get monosyllabic answers'. Although it 'loses the authenticity of the author's own voice' it does enable a person's story to be told by writing the narrative.

Two other mothers gave papers on interviews with people sharing the afflictions suffered by their disabled children - Terry Ann Whitebeach has a suicidal son and Susan Grimes has a dyslectic daughter.

The keynote address was from Richard Whiteing who spoke on Nelson Mandela and his time in South Africa's Robbens Island prison. Mandela had a great relationship with fellow prisoners and his warders and was a prime negotiator. He tried to use words from all eleven official African languages but could not speak fluent Africaans although he tried. Richard quoted extracts from oral histories taken from fellow prisoners and related an anecdote about the '*Robbens Island Bible*' which was the complete works of Shakespeare, in which prisoners underlined their favourite texts.



Another overseas guest was Alan Harris Stein from the USA who showed priceless footage of Studs Turkel talking about himself. This was extremely well received as most attendees had studied Studs' work but had never heard or seen him speak. He was jocular, amiable and enthusiastic about his work and remarked that we are 'suffering from National Alzheimer's Disease – there is no yesterday'. Alan said his presentation has started off as a documentary but was more valuable as an oral history to 'hear the voices'. Studs admitted that he was not at all technical and thought software was 'sheets and Turkish towels'.

Maureen Simpkins was another USA visitor who described her project in North Manitoba with gay Indigenous people, termed 'two spirited'. So far she has only been able to complete 5 interviews due to the distance and weather conditions of this northern wilderness. She stressed that her Ethics Committee insisted that she identify each interviewee.

The ability to listen to oral histories on the internet was explained by Shelley Grant from the National Library of Australia. Although the site is somewhat difficult to navigate, Shelley said it is possible to listen to oral history recordings in their entirety and some are many hours long. Time coded transcripts accompany the audio. Again the question of copyright was faced, and an End User Licence Agreement must be completed online before accessing the interviews. This is a fantastic facility and has had huge hit rates worldwide since it was interfaced with Google. However the NLA, although accepting the written material has refused sound recordings made by Gwenda Davey about children's games, and the tapes are still stored in June Factor's home.

Increasingly oral history recordings are accompanied by vision. Is this true oral history? Bill Bunbury's *Voiceprints* featured people from Geraldton. He took excerpts from their recordings and overlaid photos, old film footage and music to create what some people would call a documentary. His interview with postmistress Mrs Fong took an unexpected turn when she began speaking about her marriage to a Chinese man and the subsequent racist reactions. She said that she 'married a person not a race'.

Many other presenters showed Digital Stories, or explained how to create them. Myff Thompson noted that she asked participants to write a 300 word script and then make a 3 to 5 minute 'mini movie' during a two day workshop. But she said it was important that if the vision was turned off, the story still stood on its own.

Chrissie Theodosiou bravely stepped in at the last minute to present a paper after Karen Barrett from Queensland could not attend because of illness. Chrissie is a project officer with the State Library of Queensland and spoke of their partnership with the Q150 office to contribute digital stories about people, places and things that make up the Queensland identity. These stories are featured on the internet at [www.qldstories.slq.gov.au](http://www.qldstories.slq.gov.au) and also on YouTube.

Amongst the tireless workers, Christobel Mattingley has written 48 books in 39 years based on her oral histories. Some took 8 years to complete and her latest is on the atomic testing at Maralinga, which she said has slipped from people's consciousness after 56 years. The NLA collects all her research and manuscripts.

Alison Alexander has completed 2000 interviews in 25 years and told humorous tales about her project on the history of Launceston Church Grammar School, where headmasters were politely 'asked to resign' rather than be fired. She pointed out that annual reports and minutes never gave the full background to these events and they only report what the association wants to be made public. Even newspaper reports are dubious and oral histories are sometimes over enthusiastic. Alison suggested asking test questions of some doubtful contributors such as 'how high was the flood?' If you know it was 2 feet and the answer is 10 feet, you have a problem with accuracy.

Heather Felton has written a 500-page history of the Hydro Electric Scheme in Tasmania. She cut it down from 700 pages. The original commissioned history, written by somebody else, wasn't appreciated because it was 'too political and didn't feature people's stories', so the CEO commissioned oral histories to truly represent what it was like for the 3500 Europeans to work for the Hydro. Heather described her 18 month project as 'dicing and slicing the interviews to build up a narrative that you can understand'.

In another commissioned project, Rosie Block described the corporate history of Woolworths in Australia which is held in the State Library of NSW. Rosie made her presentation with overhead slides and cassette tape excerpts and called herself 'a dinosaur'. However the Library holds 109 cassettes of invaluable interviews with Woolworths staff, from the Managing Director down. The company began in 1924 and the excerpt of a secretary telling her story of calling MD Mr Christmas by his staff nickname 'Father', and then waiting to be sacked, is priceless.

Tasmanian Tony Harrison gave a fascinating account of Prof. TT Flynn who was actor Errol Flynn's father and a professor at the University of Tasmania. His work was not admired there as it was later in Ireland, and Tony presumed it was because the family only rented a house and so were not considered to be permanent residents. He was also Ralston Professor of Biology which made colleagues envious of his time for research. TT had a colourful relationship with Errol's mother and they lived apart until Errol's death when they moved together to Brighton in England. Errol never respected his mother. Unfortunately for Tony's research, many of Flynn's associates have now passed away.

With the rapid changes in technology, a group discussion on equipment and software would have been valuable. I spent many lunchtimes asking other delegates about the type of recording equipment they used – Ediroll, Fostex and Marantz were the most popular – and how they went about transcribing. Many people only do time-coded logs, and most others ask somebody else to do their transcribing - either a professional or a research student. Some people, including me, love the free internet download called [\*Express Scribe\*](#).



Social events included a fascinating pre-Conference day trip to the Tamar Valley. 15 of us stopped for morning tea on a thankfully dry but chilly day at Brady's Lookout, named for bushranger Matthew Brady who was captured by John Batman and hanged in 1826. Northern Tassie in spring was full of blossom, daffodils and woodheaps as fat cattle and lambs waded through green grassy fields after an extremely wet winter.



The first highlight was a visit to Platypus World, where the three tumbling echidnas starred, waddling over our shoes and using their long thin tongues to lap up cereal. Seahorse World stunned us by revealing that the fathers actually carry the eggs and give birth. And a deeply enthralling visit to the new Beaconsfield Mine Museum and Memorial to the rock-fall almost made us late

for wine tasting at Moore's Hill vineyard.

Our Conference was opened by the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice of Tasmania Ewan Crawford who revealed that even memories only three weeks old, recently given as evidence in his court, could not be relied on for veracity.



The Mayor of Launceston, Alderman Albert van Zetten addressed the Welcome Reception in the Queen Victoria Museum with an hilarious story of his grandmother and her inappropriate hand gestures to fellow motorists.

And our Conference Dinner at the excellent 'Cataract on Patterson' was addressed by local ABC announcer Roisin McCann. The dinner was especially memorable for me because of a surprise meeting with a colleague of 25 years ago, actor and producer Brendan Lunney.



I would sincerely like to thank the OHAA Queensland Branch for awarding me the much-needed bursary to attend this wonderful Conference. (Because it was held during school holidays, the airfares almost doubled in price.)

*(Al Thompson, Brendan Lunney, Pam and Margaret Leask)*



I made many new friends and learned so much in the three and a half days. I feel I can continue in my isolated work in Mossman with the knowledge that I have an Australia-wide network of similarly enthusiastic colleagues whom I can email at any time for advice, back-up and knowledge. I heartily recommend attending the Conferences to all members.

(Ken, Chris, Shelley and Janis)

## **Report on the Oral History Association of Australia's 16<sup>th</sup> National Conference: *Islands of Memory: Navigating Personal and Public History***

By Ariella Van Luyn

### **1. Purpose of report**

*Islands of Memory* was held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2009 at the Tram Shed Function centre in the Queen Victoria Museum precincts, Launceston, Tasmania. The purpose of this report is to present a personal experience of the conference, summarising some of the key papers delivered and major themes arising from the conference, as well as briefly describing how these concepts have allowed me to develop my own research and creative practice.

I'm currently working on a practice-led research project for my PhD at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). My project draws on archival sources and oral histories to create a nuanced and layered vision of the inner-city suburbs Newstead and Teneriffe, situated in Brisbane, Queensland. The project is a creative engagement with oral sources; the oral histories gathered will inform a number of works of historical fiction, bringing a depth and authenticity to imagined accounts of the urban space.

### **2. Key papers and themes**

This section will summarise what I consider to be the key papers presented at the *Islands of Memory* Conference in terms of contextualising and developing my own research.

Marie-Louise Anderson's paper *Travelling to Unknown Places: oral history and art*, considers her practice-led research, which is informed by oral histories. Anderson is an installation artist who has worked with a number of interviewees in Tasmania, Norfolk Island, South Africa and South Korea. In her paper, Anderson explains her interest in oral histories is not always in the facts. Rather, she is concerned with the experiential aspects of the interview, in order to imbue her works with a deeper emotional and thematic authenticity (Anderson's paper is published in the current edition of the OHAA journal).

Jen Brown is an artist interested in using oral histories in her new media installations. Her paper, *Blitz: navigating an intersection of oral history, politics and sound art* demonstrated her desire to capture, in her artwork, the discourses of a particular time: the War on Terror. *Blitz*, her installation piece, ran at the Queen Victoria Museum during the conference. The installation was set up in a darkened room. Participants were given a torch screwed to a piece of wood and encouraged to hold it up to their faces when they entered. The torch illuminated a surreal landscape of coloured reflective strips arranged in a maze-like pattern on the floor, indicative of long night-time drives through empty country, a mythic Australian landscape. The room was filled with sound bites from the media during the War on Terror. The viewer and listener—the ‘ear witness’ as Brown described in her paper—was transported to that time. However, juxtaposing such diverse sounds as George Bush’s speech with children’s laughter and a young Iraqi boy’s account of his experiences of war highlighted the incongruity of media presentation, opening a space in which the viewer might re-shape their interpretation of the past. Brown described this in her paper as ‘moving away from preservation of the past, into renewal.’

Terry Whitebeach, in her paper *Place and people: stories of and by unemployed rural youth in a small island community*, documents how she used a narrative approach to transform oral history into a novel and radio play. Whitebeach, with tremendous honesty and courage, talked about her son’s battle with suicide. To keep in contact with her son, Whitebeach encouraged him to tell her about his experiences in a rural Tasmanian community while she wrote them down. The result is a novel, *Bantam: A real book* by Terry Whitebeach and Micheal Brown. The characters and town, Whitebeach stated, are fictional, but identifiable. The novel is in Mick’s voice, using his vocabulary and perspective. Whitebeach also discusses the collaborative nature of the project. In her work, she seeks to emphasis the value of every life and perspective.

In their paper *Telling places in country: following historical storylines home*, Patsy Cameron and Linn Miller, consider their current collaborative research project of the same title. The project’s aim was to increase the participation of Australian Aboriginal people in historical narratives through ‘re-mapping, re-tracing and re-interpreting.’ The project was community based, multi-disciplinary and eclectic. One outcome of this work was ‘Luggenenenin’s story,’ the first person account of an Indigenous women travelling with George Augustus Robinson, re-created from Robinson’s journals.

Excerpts from the play, *New Tasmanians*, written by Stella Kent and based on oral histories of Tasmania migrants, were performed at the conference by actors from the school of Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Tasmania. The play was vivid and compelling, re-enacting the hope, anxiety and ambivalence felt by migrants travelling to a new country and encouraging an empathic response from the audience.

These papers and presentations indicate that, increasingly, oral histories are being employed in a multi-discipline context that encourages exploration of oral sources not so much as ‘repositories of facts and errors of facts’ (Tonkin, 1992, 12) but as complex autobiographical sources that reveal a complex ‘fusing of ‘past and present, interpretation and imagination’ (Grele 2006, 58). Oral histories seem to add an authenticity and power to imaginative interpretations of themes, places and

concerns. The papers emphasise the need to view oral histories not as static sources, but as dynamic, evolving, uncertain and ambiguous.

### 3. Research development and conclusion

I found I was able to situate my own creative practice in this context. I had been feeling uncertain about the validity of my own engagement with oral histories, particularly in the use of fictionalising techniques. However, after attending the conference, I was able to re-evaluate my understanding of how oral histories might be used. The occurrence of such projects demonstrates that, when handled with empathy and respect, oral histories may be used to enrich artworks and imaginative and historical re-creations.

### References

- Anderson, M. 2009. Travelling to unknown places: oral history and art. *Islands of Memory: Oral History Association of Australia Journal*. 31(1): 7-13.
- Brown, M. and White, T. 2002. *Bantam*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- Grele, R. 2006. *Oral History as evidence*. In *Handbook of oral history*. ed. Charlton, T., Myers, L. & Sharpless, R., 43-104. Oxford: Altamira Press.
- Tonkin, E. 1992. Narrating our pasts: The social construction of history. *Great Britain: Cambridge University Press*.

## Impressions of the Conference

By Ariella Van Luyn

I really enjoyed Bill Bunbury's paper one of his projects, *Voiceprints*. He talked about how one of the participants, Nancy, claimed she had 'nothing much' to tell, but went on to talk about her marriage to an Asian man at a time when the white Australia policy was still in full force. Nancy declared, 'I was marrying a person, not a race.'

John Bannister's paper on the Perth Zoo, *Rumble in the urban jungle: Perth Zoo and Oral History*, was incredibly rich in sensory details. He talked about oral histories that describe the 'whooping of monkeys, trumping of elephants and roaring of lions' in the urban landscape of Perth.

Jen Brown's new media installation piece, *Blitz*, was set up at the Queen Victoria Museum. Walking through the labyrinth of reflective strips and listening to sound bites from the War on Terror was a surreal experience.

Alan Harris Stein's keynote address on Studs Terkel was a reminder of how oral history could 'rock the boat.' Alan played heaps of footage of Studs, allowing him to speak about his legacy and beliefs in his own words.



*New Tasmanians*, a play by Stella Kent, based on oral histories of migrants was both funny and extremely moving.

Emma Hewitt's *Love and Remembrance: narrative truth and identity* was densely delivered but none the less fascinating.

I loved visiting the Beaconsfield Mine and Heritage centre on the pre-conference tour. I didn't realise that right next to the mine where such a significant event in Australia's collective memory there were the ruins of an older gold mine.



(Ruins at the Beaconsfield mine & heritage centre)

## Paper

### **Being Reminded to *Tell* the Story: Challenges from a Workshop on Memory**

**Denise Phillips**

*Because remembering is an action: to bear witness is to oppose.*<sup>1</sup>

While completing my Honours thesis about Hazara refugees, I attended the Emerging Scholars Workshop on Memory at Swinburne University in 2008. Here, I was both challenged and inspired about the use of memory in oral history. The workshop brought together 21 participants from a diverse range of disciplines, including History, Philosophy, Politics, Performing and Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and Anthropology. Although we did not always agree, all shared a passionate interest in memory. We were divided into small groups, each with a specific theme. To name a few, these included 'Theories of Memory', 'Sites of Memory' and 'Performing Memory'. Within each group, we had to merge our sometimes conflictive ideas to create a final presentation. In line with my research topic, I was put into the 'Memory, History, Justice' group. For me, the workshop raised issues about 'facts' versus analysis within oral history and our ethical duty as historians. This article briefly introduces the Hazaras and shares some of my experiences at the workshop. In short, I was reminded that while analysis of subjectivity uncovers vital deeper meaning, we must also remain acutely mindful of the human experience which lies at the core of stories entrusted to us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, New York, p. 269.

## The Hazaras from Afghanistan

The Hazaras are an ethnic, Shiite minority from Afghanistan. Many of the asylum seekers who arrived on Australian shores by boats between 1999 and 2001, and again this year, are Hazaras. The Hazaras have suffered institutionalised persecution for over a century and have been fleeing renewed persecution by the Taliban. They are targeted for several reasons. Although a minority, the Hazaras' numbers are nevertheless significant and pose a threat to Afghanistan's ruling Pashtun



class. Divisions within the Islamic faith add to tensions. As Shiites among a predominantly Sunni Muslim population, they are considered to be 'infidels'. With central Asian features, they also look different to other Afghanis who have a more 'southern European' appearance. The Hazaras have been massacred and had their lands seized. Relegated to the lowliest status of society, they have frequently been denied equal rights and their history has long been oppressed.<sup>2</sup>

*Caves at Bamiyan, in the Hazarajat. The Hazarajat is the Hazaras' traditional homeland in central Afghanistan*

**Photo: Courtesy of Hassan Ghulam**

**[Editors note: copyright restrictions]**

## Violations against humanity which lie at the heart of such stories

Before the workshop, we were asked to watch a French film, *Hidden*. Among numerous themes, *Hidden* explores suppressed memories within a family.<sup>3</sup> From this, my group began talking about how the past can be viewed from many perspectives, differing from one person to the next. The past might be hidden, distorted or commemorated. This prompted me to share some of my own family history about the brutal murder of my Aunt Fay in 1961, when she was 29 years old. I discussed how some family members have markedly contrasting memories of this tragedy. It was here that our group's facilitator, Professor Klaus Neumann, challenged my approach.<sup>4</sup> He poignantly reminded me that although there were different memories, a murder had nevertheless occurred.

Neumann was neither advocating, nor defending, an overtly positivist role for the use of memory. Nor was he suggesting that I ignore the significance of differing views of the past. Rather, he was urging me to not lose sight of core, proven facts, and moreover, to not lose sight of the *profound*

<sup>2</sup> William Maley, quoted in his *Security, People Smuggling and Australia's New Afghan refugees*, Working Paper no. 63, p. 8; Maley, *Security*, p. 9; Sayed Askar Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, Richmond, 1998, pp. 12, 13, 17; Peter Marsden, *Afghanistan: Minorities, Conflict and the Search for Peace*, London, 2001, p. 9; Denise Phillips, *Wounded memories of Hazara refugees: An analysis of remembering and forgetting persecution experiences through oral histories*, Honours thesis, University of New England, Armidale, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Haneke (director), *Hidden* (motion picture), Madman/Dendy Films, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Klaus Neumann does not define himself as an oral historian, although oral histories are central to his study of competing histories of the Tolai people in Papua New Guinea in his *Not the Way It Really Was: Constructing the Tolai Past*, Honolulu, 1992.



*violation against humanity* which lies at the heart of such a story.<sup>5</sup> The development of sophisticated, analytical methodologies within oral history scholarship remains critical to my refugee research. For example, analysis of subjectivity has helped me better understand the impact of trauma on the Hazara narrators.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the limitations of memory as a positivist source have been well documented. But, Neumann's brief comment nevertheless pulled me up. It was a blunt reminder of why I was drawn to oral history in the first place. When applying his comment to my research, it re-connected me to the political traditions of the 'history from below' movement; to pursue historical justice by giving voice to those marginalised and excluded from official sources. Klaus inadvertently reminded me to not only seek deeper meaning through analysis and interpretation, but to also tell of the injustice which is central to stories such as those of the Hazaras and also of my aunty.

**'But what are you going to do with these stories?'**

Later, when I played some sound clips from the Hazaras' interviews during my group's presentation, my thinking was challenged again. The Hazaras speak of their persecution experiences. One anonymous narrator gives insight into one of the most horrific atrocities committed in Afghanistan's civil war - a massacre for which no justice has been gained. In 1993, soldiers under the command of the Rabbani government (1992-1996) attacked Afshar, a district in West Kabul with a large Hazara population. One of the political strategies was to cripple the *Hizb-e Wahdat*, an armed, Hazara organisation demanding political and ethnic rights and religious freedom. Soldiers, however, turned the attack on Hazara civilians. After a 24 hour frenzy of looting, rape, abductions and summary executions, approximately 700-750 Hazaras were killed or remain missing.<sup>7</sup> Before silently weeping, my narrator recalls that

... they attacked the houses in Afshar. ... - and they burn all the houses and whatever stuff they took from the houses, they took them with them. And they kidnapped the girls, the young girls and men, and they have taken the people from there, and until now, it is unknown what happened to them ... civilian people were killed. Not the soldiers. ... if you were looking at Afshar it was like an empty spot, where you cannot find anything, and a strange place and if you look, was completely different, because everything were lost - and the houses were burnt and - - -<sup>8</sup>

After listening to this and other disturbing sound clips, one of the workshop participants asked, 'But what are you going to do with these stories?' Given the fear of retribution from speaking out, my

<sup>5</sup> What constitutes a 'fact' within history and the historian's role in determining what makes up history has been vigorously debated by scholars such as Arthur Marwick, Geoffrey Elton, Keith Jenkins and E. H. Carr. I have discussed this in my essay, *Does the acceptance that history is a creative and imaginative discipline mean that historical knowledge is necessarily arbitrary, partial, speculative, and ultimately little more than a form of argument?*, Essay, 401H, University of New England, Armidale, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, *Wounded memories of Hazara refugees*.

<sup>7</sup> Mousavi, *The Hazaras*, pp. 198-199; Human Rights Watch, *Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's Legacy of Impunity*, New York, 2005, pp. 70-100. Numbers have never been accurately ascertained. One Hazara website estimates that approximately 1,000 were killed or remain missing; See 'Afshar and Kateh Sahe massacre', *Hazara.net*, <http://www.hazara.net/taliban/genocide/afshar/afshar.html>, 2009, accessed 13 June 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous Hazara refugee & trans. Chaman Shah Nasiri, Oral history interview conducted by Denise Phillips, Brisbane, 14 May 2005, 44 mins, copies held in narrator, translator and interviewer's possession.

narrator's testimony is a bold act of courage.<sup>9</sup> His courage, along with the gravity of the war crimes committed, indeed makes this a pressing question.

### **Why I should tell these stories**

As I thought about this afterwards, the question sparked a two-part response. The first part of my response is not so much about *what* I should do with these stories, but rather, *why* I should tell them. The *why* aspect addresses what Robert Wennberg considers to be an ethical duty to the dead. When sharing life-stories, people often define themselves by their achievements and experiences. However, if history misrepresents their experiences in death, they can suffer 'posthumous harm'.<sup>10</sup> In turn, a form of justice for those who have died as victims can be delivered posthumously. Oppressors often maintain power by denying or controlling the history of those they subjugate. But, in remembering victims and disseminating their stories, we challenge the tools of oppression. Wennberg suggests that the evil visited upon victims of an atrocity or murder can be partly counteracted by using their stories to pursue change within society. The victim's life-story is then extended to the present; they are given a 'posthumous benefit'. In contrast, forgetting suggests that their lives and suffering did not matter.<sup>11</sup>

With some similarity, Avishai Margalit upholds the Hebrew concept of *yad vashem*, which honours the memory of the dead with name and place. He equates remembering with an act of humanity.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I feel compelled to share stories, such as those of the Hazaras slain at Afshar, to honour their lives. Remembrance of them can be used in the present to expose grievous violations against the Hazaras, oppose injustice and implore others to respond to their plight. Returning to the 'history from below' movement, I am inspired by major projects such as Australia's 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report; Steven Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*; and Peter Read's work of breaking silences about repression under the Pinochet regime in Chile.<sup>13</sup> All use oral history or testimony to speak out or to remember the dead. Oral testimonies are also serving as vital sources for the Human Rights Watch organisation and the Afghanistan Justice Project in recording war crimes committed in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Susan D. Rose, 'Naming and claiming: The integration of traumatic experience and the reconstruction of self in survivors' stories of sexual abuse', in Kim Lacy Rogers & Selma Leydesdorff (eds), with Graham Dawson, *Trauma: Life Stories of Survivors*, New Brunswick, 2004, pp. 164, 165.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Wennberg, 'The moral standing of the dead and the writing of history', *Fides et Historia*, vol. 30, no. 2, Summer/Fall 1998, pp. 54-57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-63.

<sup>12</sup> Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 21, 22, 28.

<sup>13</sup> National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families*, Sydney, 1997; Steven Spielberg (founder), *USC Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute; Peter Read discussed this work in his Keynote Address at the IOHA Conference, *Dancing With Memory: Oral History and Its Audiences*, Sydney, 12-16 September 2006.

<sup>14</sup> For examples, see Human Rights Watch, 'Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan', *Human Rights Watch*, vol. 13, no. 1(C), February 2001,

<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghanistan/index.htm>>, accessed 2 February 2008; and The Afghanistan Justice Project, *Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity: 1978-2001*,

<<http://afghanjusticeproject.org/warcrimesandcrimesagainsthumanity19792001.pdf>>, 2005, accessed 1 March 2008.

### **Different ways of telling the stories and reaching our audiences**

The second part of my response deals with *what* to do with such stories and returns me to the eclectic themes of the workshop. To date, my work has been presented only in academic formats, reaching a fairly narrow audience. The diversity within the workshop, however, encouraged possibilities of reaching wider audiences by presenting memories through artistic mediums. One group, for example, presented their memory work through a short play, while another used a letter-writing dialogue. In a journal article, Neumann also suggests that historians have adopted new methodologies and are valuing diverse sources but remain resistant to new, creative ways of expressing history. He explores 'experimental histories', in which non-traditional forms are used to offer alternative perspectives of the past.<sup>15</sup> While I argue that experimental histories should remain grounded in the principles of sound scholarship, they nevertheless expand the possibilities for conveying vital messages to different audiences. There are numerous examples which fit loosely into this category. In the radio documentary, *The Search for Edna Lavilla*, Eurydice Aroney uses creative storytelling techniques to present taboo memories about her grandmother who died from a backyard abortion in 1942.<sup>16</sup> Through theatrical performances, *Asylum* captures the maddening anguish some asylum seekers felt when being held in Australia's Immigration Detention centres.<sup>17</sup> Under the 1980s' Sanctuary movement, refugees from Central America consciously adopted performative styles in oral testimonies. They avoided political discussions and emphasised personal experiences with the aim of evoking empathy, rather than hostility, from their North American audiences.<sup>18</sup> By considering the many ways memory can be presented, we can also better carry out the vital work of disseminating these stories.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, this workshop was more challenging than a conference, where we often find ourselves among like-minded people. In having to explain and sometimes defend my use of memory as a historical source to a disparate group of scholars, it deepened my convictions about one of the fundamental cornerstones of modern oral history - to give voice to the 'other'. I encourage my colleagues to embrace the stimulation that comes from exposing our work to different disciplines and fields. While analysis enriches our understanding, we also need to continually reflect on the very personal experiences at the core of a story, why we are telling it, and how best to reach various audiences. Whether it be the murder of one young woman, or the massacre of members of a minority group, such acts must be exposed and condemned. Oral history, with its analytical skills and power of storytelling, remains a potent tool to address grave violations against our fellow human beings.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>15</sup> Klaus Neumann, 'But is it history?', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, March 2008, pp. 21, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Eurydice Aroney & Sharon Davis (producers), *The Search for Edna Lavilla* (radio documentary), Radio Eye, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 9 June 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Chidiac (director), *Asylum* (video recording), Urban Theatre Projects, Sydney, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> William Westerman, 'Central American refugee testimonies', in Alistair Thomson & Robert Perks (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edn, New York, pp. 495-505.

<sup>19</sup> For in-depth discussion on presenting oral histories, see Thomson & Perks (eds), 'Part IV: Making histories' & 'Part V: Advocacy and empowerment', *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 333-445, 447-559.

## Education Opportunities

### Creative Industries Faculty, QUT, 2009 Continuing Professional Education and Short Courses in **Digital Storytelling**

Digital Storytelling is a powerful means for enabling communication and social participation. Ordinary people work with expert creative practitioners to create first person narratives for a wide and growing range of purposes, including community building, cultural engagement, brand identification, education, and public communication. This form of co-creative media takes advantage of newly accessible technologies but is based in the ancient and universal tradition of storytelling.

A digital story usually combines 15-30 still images and a recorded script of 100-250 words to create an original personal digital story in the form of a 2-3 minute digital video. Creative Industries Faculty researchers at QUT have an internationally recognized track record in adapting Digital Storytelling to a variety of contexts and purposes including poverty reduction, public history, and youth engagement. From 2009 this expertise is made available to the wider community through Continuing Professional Education courses.

### 2009 Schedule

CPE units	Dates	Mode
CPE 1	7 April, 14-17 April	Intensive workshop consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 hour introduction on the evening of 7 April</li> <li>• Workshop 14-17 April (9am-1pm daily)</li> <li>• Seminar program 14-17 April (2-4pm daily – for academic credit option only)</li> <li>• Screening of stories on the evening of 17 April</li> <li>• Additional one-on-one consultation by appointment for academic credit option only – see study level options below.</li> </ul>
CPE 2	11 June, 23-26 June	Intensive workshop consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 hour introduction on the evening of 11 June</li> <li>• Workshop 23-26 June (9am-1pm daily)</li> <li>• Seminar program 23-26 June (2-4pm daily – for academic credit option only)</li> <li>• Screening of stories on the evening of 26 June</li> <li>• Additional one-on-one consultation by appointment for academic credit option only – see study level options below.</li> </ul>
CPE 3	10 Nov, 16-27 Nov.	Evening program consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 hour introduction on the evening of 10 Nov</li> <li>• Workshop on 16, 18, 24, 26 Nov (5-8pm)</li> <li>• Seminar program 17, 19, 25, 27 Nov (5-7pm – for academic credit option only)</li> <li>• Screening of stories 27 Nov 7pm</li> <li>• Additional one-on-one consultation by appointment for academic credit option only – see study level options below.</li> </ul>

In addition to the scheduled workshops, it is possible for additional workshops to be delivered off-campus and customized to address specific professional, community, cultural or commercial objectives of host organizations.

## The Web

### Oral History around the World

#### **Ghost town has lively history**

Akron Beacon Journal

But the real story of Blue Heron comes not from written records, but from oral history of its occupants. Blue Heron was part of the Michigan-based Stearns ...

<http://www.ohio.com/li festyle/64694947.html>

#### **OR oral history project under way**

Knoxville News Sentinel

Planned for years, the Center for Oak Ridge Oral History is taking shape thanks to a multiyear Department of Energy grant. While these personal historical ...

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2009/oct/03/or-oral-history-project-under-way/>

#### **Houston Public Library Launches Oral History Site**

Library Journal

Houston Public Library (HPL) is a pivotal partner in an ambitious oral history project, a multiyear, collaborative effort to that will help preserve ...

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6699865.html>

#### **Braceros: Recording a history of backbreaking work**

Capital Press (subscription)

Navarro, director of the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas at El Paso, has been recording their stories. Originally intended for the ...

<http://www.capitalpress.info/content/AP-bracero-program-100209>

#### **Capturing history's voice: Institute compiles veterans' stories ...**

Baylor University The Lariat Online

By Laura Remson As the director of the Baylor Institute for Oral History, it's no surprise that Dr. Stephen Sloan loves a good story. ...

<http://www.baylor.edu/lariat/news.php?action=story&story=62331>

## Web Sites

**Vermont Folklife Center Archive:** Field Research Guides. In an effort to provide useful information to fieldworkers, students, community scholars, and others interested in cultural documentation, ethnography and oral history, the Vermont Folklife Center archive provides online access to a series of research guides:

<http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/archive/archive-fieldguides.html>

**Living Stories:** a UK site where you can read and hear the stories of people telling their stories of haemophilia and HIV

<http://www.livingstories.org.uk/>

**When History gets Personal:** Post-War Britain is about to come dramatically to life in a major TV history by Andrew Marr. The Magazine is teaming up with him to compile a users' history - written, photographed and filmed by you. Andrew explains why personal history matters.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6658705.stm>

**Columbia University Libraries:** Oral History Research Office shows a number of interesting oral history projects that are underway.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral/>

**The Washington University School of Medicine Oral History Project** is an ongoing series of recorded interviews and transcripts dating from 1959. The project was envisioned to capture and preserve first person accounts and reflections on the history of the medical school, medical practice in St. Louis, and developments in the field of medicine. Interview subjects include faculty, staff and alumni of the School of Medicine, as well as family members, friends and others associated with Washington University. Users can listen to audio recordings or read transcripts of the interviews, and view images of the oral history subjects.

<http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/oral/index.html>

**StoryCorps:** the conversation of a lifetime. Our mission is to honour and celebrate one another's lives through listening. Since 2003, almost 30,000 everyday people have shared life stories with family and friends in our StoryBooths. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved at the Library of Congress. Millions listen to our broadcasts on public radio and the web. StoryCorps is the largest oral history project of its kind.

<http://www.storycorps.net/>

**Digital Audio Best Practices** has a guide for those undertaking converting their analogue collections to digital. Although it's a North American site, most of the information will help us.

[http://www.cdpheritage.org/digital/audio/documents/cdp\\_dabpv2\\_1.pdf](http://www.cdpheritage.org/digital/audio/documents/cdp_dabpv2_1.pdf)

**MemoryArchive:** a site where people can submit their own stories.

<http://www.memoryarchive.org/en/MemoryArchive>

### **The Oral History Association, US**

Have added a fantastic site for recording oral histories, as well as digital audio recording technology and additionally they have some great links to YouTube clips demonstrating commonly used digital recorders such as the Zoom H2 and the Marantz PMD671. If you know anything about sound recording, this is a fantastic resource: <http://www.oralhistory.org/technology/recorders/>



## Recording Equipment for Hire



Gambling Community Benefit Fund

The equipment may be collected from two points – in Brisbane City or Ipswich, or can be posted. Please email Suzanne Mulligan to make a booking to use the equipment. Below are descriptions of Kit 1 (audio equipment) and Kit 3 (video equipment). (Kit 2 is the same as Kit 1)

A copy of the Loan Agreement is available from our Secretary, Suzanne Mulligan.

### Recording Kit 1:

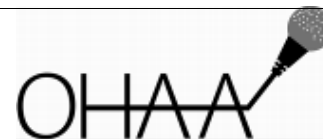


- Fostex FR2-LE Field Memory Recorder
- Headphones SEN-EH150, closed, dynamic
- Lapel microphone AKG C417, omnidirectional
- Microphone AT804, dynamic, handheld
- Microphone stand KM-23 105-500-55
- Bag, Tamrac Aero 50
- Memory card, Sandisk 2GB Ultimate
- Microphone lead
- Microphone cable Proel Bulk 250LU6 (for lapel microphone – not shown on the picture)



### Recording Kit 3:

- Sony Camera Digital HDD Memory Hybrid 1080
- Sony High Capacity ACCY Kit for Handycam
- Sony Tripod
- Bag, Tamrac Aero 50



Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA)  
ABN 16 832 377 060

Membership of the OHAA includes a subscription to the Journal of the Association, published annually. There are branches of the Association in all Australian States. Northern Territory members are attached to the SA Branch and ACT members to NSW. Branches hold regular meetings, run workshops and publish regular newsletters, and also provide a friendly and informative forum for those interested in oral history from any perspective.

**Membership Fees** (1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010) (please tick the appropriate box)

Individuals \$35

Institutions \$55

Students, Pensioners, unemployed \$25

Household \$45

I wish to join OHAA (please tick) \_\_\_\_\_

**I wish to renew my membership** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Pension/Student No \_\_\_\_\_

Interest(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**OHAA (Qld Inc.) not registered for GST, so "Tax Invoice" cannot be issued – only an "Invoice".**

**I enclose cheque/money order for the amount/s listed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

Please return this form to:

The Treasurer  
OHAA Queensland Inc  
PO Box 12213  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4003

Payment received (Office use only) \_\_\_\_\_



