

Oral History Workshop in Townsville

Ariella Van Luyn



Room at the Thuringowa Library

On 19 and 20 May, Helen Klaebe, Bryan Crawford and Ariella Van Luyn flew to Townsville to run a two day oral history workshop at the Thuringowa Library, Townsville. The workshop was a collaboration between the library and the OHAA Qld. Annette Burns, local history librarian at Townsville, with the support of library staff, arranged flights and accommodation for Bryan, Helen and

Ariella, and organised the venue and catering for participants and facilitators

over the two workshop days. The facilitators' fees were paid for with a Gambling Community Benefit Fund Grant.

Eighteen participants attended the workshop for diverse reasons. Participants included Alicia Bolam, Annette Burns, Robyn Maconachie, Barbara Mathiesen and Janeese Henaway from CityLibraries, Townsville. Judith Ecuyer travelled from Saunders Beach, looking for advice on her current projects on the history of Saunders Beach and her own family. D'esley Smith from the Performing Arts History Society Townsville (PAHST) is hoping to record oral histories from Townsville



Alicia and Janeese conducting preliminary interviews and designing questions

artists. Phil Heang, from Writers in North Queensland, plans to rely on oral histories to augment his play writing. Kerry Kendall and Cliff Robinson both hope to capture stories from Bush men and women. Kris Patterson from the Zara Clark Museum in Charters Towers, plans to record oral histories of residents in Charters Towers. Maxine Cuddihy, from Townsville, hopes to use oral stories for their family history. Jenni Townsend wants to collect oral histories to augment her work in Indigenous education. Others, like Diane Laun from Townsville, Sharon Russo from Ayr, and Fiona Scott from Home Hill, came along without a project in mind, but hoping to learn more about gathering oral stories.

On Saturday, the group split in two. Facilitators Helen and Ariella took half the participants through the steps in an oral history project, budgeting, and writing information and consent forms. Meanwhile, Bryan showed his groups the basic equipment needed for an oral history project, and worked with them to get some hands on experience using audio equipment. The



Kerry and Cliff conducting preliminary interviews and designing questions

OHAA Qld's new H4N Zoom recorders had their first outing, as Bryan and his group opened the boxes and tested them out. After lunch, the groups swapped. In the final session, Helen and Ariella took the group through planning the preliminary interview and designing questions. After Helen and Ariella gave them feedback, participants went home to work on their questions, ready to test them the next day.

In the evening, Bryan, having passed through Townsville but never actually visited the town, finally fulfilled one of his dreams: to walk down The Strand and have a beer looking out over the ocean to Magnetic Island. Ariella was more than happy to join him.

On Sunday, the groups reconvened and recorded short oral histories in groups. After a quick Morning Tea break, the entire group listened to interviews, reflecting on the questions asked, interviewing technique and recording quality. The afternoon was spent thinking about ways to present oral histories as digital stories, family histories, traditional histories, fiction and nonfiction, as well as in museum displays and exhibitions. Helen took the group through evaluation processes, sharing the recent research she has gathered as part of her Smithsonian Fellowship.

Helen had also brought along some digital stories, which were outputs from a number of oral history projects, she, Bryan and Ariella had worked on. Helen showed the group digital stories made as part of the collaboration between Cardwell Historical Association and the OHAA Qld, funded by an RADF grant, which documented stories from the aftermath of Cyclone Yasi. She also played digital stories from her PhD, 'Sharing Stories: Kelvin Grove Urban Village.' These stories, speckled throughout the two days, keep the group entertained and enlivened.



Anita and Phil conducting preliminary interviews

The group was keen and happy to participate. Helen, Bryan and Ariella found them a pleasure to work with, and they shared a lot of laughs over the two days. Library staff plan to set up an oral history group in Townsville, based at the library and supported by staff members. It will be exciting to learn about the new projects and stories collected as part of this enthusiasm for oral history practice in Townsville.

Photos by Bryan Crawford