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NOHANZ

The National Oral History Association of New Zealand
Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te Motu

**BEST WISHES FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW
YEAR!**

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NOHANZ • P.O. BOX 3819 • WELLINGTON
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NOHANZ

Newsletter

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www.oralhistory.org.nz

Newsletter: We seek news and views from around the country about what is happening, courses that are being offered, reports on projects in progress or completed. Email contact is Rachael Selby at:

R.A.Selby@massey.ac.nz

who is looking forward to receiving your contributions.

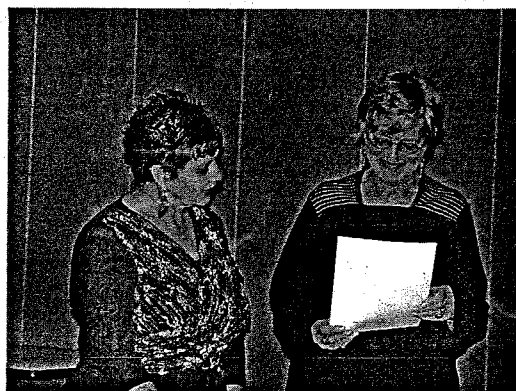
Judith Binney NOHANZ life membership

Megan Hutching

At a small informal function on 16 November, Judith Binney was given her certificate of life membership of NOHANZ. President Lesley Hall spoke about Judith's achievements as an oral historian - particularly her publications, including *Nga Morehu: The Survivors* which began her long association with Tuhoe. In New Zealand she pioneered the use of oral history interviews as source material for her books. Her interviews demonstrated that by interviewing people you uncover material that is simply not present in the written record, and also allow people to convey their own understandings of the meaning of the events they have participated in. Both have added richness to her work.

Judith then joined members at dinner at Uncle Chang's in Courtenay Place - which has become rather a tradition as the venue for our life membership dinners.

We will put the full text of Lesley's speech and more photographs on the website: www.oralhistory.org.nz



**A WORKSHOP WITH
ALESSANDRO PORTELLI
Sue Berman – Sydney, July 2006**

I had the extraordinary privilege of attending the International Oral History Association Conference in Sydney and I managed to grab the opportunity to attend a Master Class with Alessandro Portelli! What a great morning of listening and learning, and wonderful to share it with many colleagues from Aotearoa. At the time, Rachel asked that I write some reflection of the class for the newsletter. Well, it is now some months later that I sit with my notes and how I wish I had recorded Portelli's voice! The words sit so flat on the paper compared to the lushness of accent, intonation and humour, bringing about the 'phenomenological nod' that many of us expressed. I will try my best to bring the notes back to life in this short reflection!

Portelli started with a brief history of the emergence of Oral History. He detailed the pursuit of voice through testimony, explaining that the early focus was on interviews with older people as records of voices of the past. Mention was made to the work and influence of ethnography and folklorist of the time¹. The mainstream history thinkers raised questions of the value of oral testimony, especially of the reliability of the use of memory in the pursuit of 'truth'. But, as Portelli said *"You don't throw good stories away because they are not 'true', you interpret"*. I strongly related to Portelli's recount of being drawn to Oral History as *"catching the disease of storytelling"*. By weaving his own story of working with and developing oral history methods, Portelli

addressed the critics' questions and gave us, the audience, a deepened sense of perspective on method and theory. For example, Portelli explained the development of methodology to increase 'reliability' as integrating the use of archives with multiple interviews. He shared with us stories from his experiences of work reflected in his book *'The Death of Luigi Trastelli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History'*.

Approaching Oral History

As promised in the class blurb, Portelli took us on a journey to explore the construction of oral history practice, around the notion that memory is a verb. Memory or remembering is active (a verb) for creating meaning. He explained, for example that doing interviews in 1979 about an event which took place in 1953 means that *"what you collect is a document of that time (1979) about an event in 1953"*. The interviewer's job is not so much to access memory but to be present to the language and narrative constructed at the time of telling about a past event and time. The narrative is not discreet like a history time line; narrative telling may leap between relational events. The things that are lost may be that the recall is 'not strictly true' but the things that are gained are context, interpretation, and added meaning. Portelli suggested that different schools ask different questions. For example looking at *"what happened"* is the work of historians. *"What people think happened"* is the work of anthropologist and psychologist, and, *"the relationship between what happened and what people say about it"* is the work of oral historians.

Importantly, Portelli went on to explore the notion of relationship. In relationship are the interviewer (historian) and the participant (narrator). *"A suppression of you (the historian/interviewer) conveys a sense*

¹ See the wonderful documentary on Alan Lomax – The Songhunter - screened during the NZ Documentary Film Festival. See <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/lomax/>

that the narratives exist in a vacuum. People are not duke-boxes" says Portelli. "What you get in the human relationship is a performance". Portelli explained that your relationship with the participant is critical to the story that is told. People will tell different people the same story in a different way. A participant's effort in telling their story is in making the listener understand. Dissecting the word Interview is useful for visioning this concept – looking/strategy/judging.

"An interview is a learning situation". From this statement Portelli talked about power, and how it shifts when you don't know what the 'answer' is. He told us of a story interviewing for his book *"The Order has been carried Out"* where he subsequently learnt information about an interviewee's connection to a murder. The man had not told Portelli about this part of his story. This led us into a discussion about the gains and losses of research prior to interview. Portelli believed that prior research should be minimal leaving the power with the interviewee to control the interview as their story/interpretation. He offered some 'how to' tips in conducting oneself at interview. Firstly, *"mind your manners"*; followed by *"do not be intrusive"*.

In terms of interpretation and what we do with the material, Portelli noted that although the interviewee is in power during the interview, we (the interviewers) are then empowered by holding the tapes. It is our responsibility now to interpret. The interview/abstracts/transcripts are the record of the performance. Portelli insists that *"we are not giving people voice we are giving them an ear"* an amplification, *"story goes through us in the way we ask questions or not"* as the interviewee reads our interest. The next step is making text out of performance; that in interpretation we manipulate and change, add

performances together- *"there is no such thing as a neutral transcript"*.

Portelli described that the 'oral source' is the person; the document is the tape and the transcript is the tool. In translation we must aim to be as true to the essence of the relationship as possible. Interpretation is the process of editing the material. *"It's like quilting or film making – you take the pieces and you put them together – like a work of art"*. The process of writing takes place in space in the way the oral performance takes place in time.

Someone asked about the relationship with the transcript and the narrator. Portelli advised not to give back transcripts but to send the tape; send the narrator the extracts intended for publication with the context (which may have to be negotiated!) and that it can be useful to include the question that triggered the answer. In writing and editing different criteria are considered and you use different styles (long, short, one view, multiple views) depending on the audience or format.

In conclusion, Portelli wisdom is to take responsibility by applying analysis to your work and in doing so aim *"to be both passionate and objective"*.



What's up?

Helen Frizzell in Otago

After 20 years as co-ordinator of the Community History Programme at Presbyterian Support Otago, I am leaving to work as a freelance oral historian. This follows the organisation's decision to close the programme on 30 November 2006, in order to focus on other priorities.

Working in a social service environment has been a unique opportunity to explore various aspects of oral history and use different media to present material from projects to the community. This has included a number of exhibitions - Bessie Turnbull, Shirakee - Children in Walker Street 1900-1920 and People's Choice - the play 'My Place', The Op Shop & Warehouse Calendar, the ArtStore @ Taieri Court 25/25 Mural and Centennial Banner Project.

While sad to see the programme close I plan to continue working with individuals and groups in Otago and around New Zealand on oral history projects.

My contact details are: Helen Frizzell, 681 Portobello Rd, Broad Bay, Dunedin.

Tel: 03 478 0349 Cell: 021-1080-413
Email: helen.frizzell@paradise.net.nz

Oral History in New Zealand

All members receive the Nohanz journal *Oral History in NZ* each year. The 2006 journal will be in your mailboxes early in the new year. It includes reports and academic articles as well as book reviews and the Code of Ethical and Technical practice. Contributions from members for 2007 journal are welcomed. There is no particular theme, so feel free to contribute.

Discussion Point

Regarding Loreen Brehaut's idea in the last newsletter of a list of active oral historians who would be willing to answer questions from the public. We have gone some way towards addressing this by setting up an oral history email discussion list. This is not just for NOHANZ members, so encourage people to sign up.

Go to the following website to subscribe:

<http://lists.vuw.ac.nz/mailman/listinfo/nohanz>

Off tape

Here's a United States website that might be of interest, although it's not strictly oral history:

Commontales.com, gives people the power to tell stories from their life using text, pictures, hyperlinks and video/audio. The site is also used as a genealogical tool, in the form of 'Portraits' (essentially scrapbooks dedicated to one person).

www.commontales.com

Recent books

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge, 2006

This is the second edition of this very useful anthology of extracts from books and articles about the theory, method and use of oral history. The book is arranged in five sections. New material includes interview methods and the oral history relationship, the use of testimony in truth and reconciliation politics, memory and interpretation, the digital revolution and new technologies, community oral history projects and memory and history.

New projects: Oral history of dancing competitions in Dunedin

Lyne Pringle recorded this small project of three interviews with the help of an Award in Oral History. A well known dancer and choreographer herself, she saw this as an opportunity to trace some of her family history as well as the history of dance performance in Dunedin, and also New Zealand as dancing competitions are held all over the country. Lyne's grandmother had danced in competitions when she was a child and Lyne has her medals and photographs dating back to 1919.

This project received an Award in Oral History.

Websites

The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage has an online guide to folklore and oral history interviewing:

http://www.folklife.si.edu/explore/Resources/InterviewGuide/InterviewGuide_home.html

The Vermont Folklife Center guide is a resource for evaluating and selecting equipment:

http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res_audioequip.htm

Congratulations to Alison Laurie and Valerie Davison

NOHANZ member Alison J. Laurie and Valerie E. Davison have been awarded the Ted Gilberd Literary Trust Family History Award. This is an annual award for the best family history article published in the previous year's issues of The New Zealand Genealogist, published bi-monthly.

This year the trustees judged the winner to be Alison J. Laurie and Valerie E. Davison's article "In search of Catherine", published in the January/February issue, an account of the lives of Catherine and William Lawry who emigrated from Cornwall to Timaru in 1863. William, a poor tin-miner, found work here as a labourer, but after five children circumstances proved too much for Catherine, who spent the next fifty years in New Zealand lunatic asylums. The judges commended the authors for "their well-researched family history style of writing that tells the story of the research process as they develop the story". They considered that "the authors' account of life in an asylum in that day and age was handled in a sensitive manner and provides insights for those researching these types of records", further commenting that "the

use of footnotes to the well-referenced sources and effective selection of suitable illustrations added to the overall presentation of this winning article". The authors received certificates for their award plus \$100 in book tokens, and are now writing a book based on Catherine's story.

Congratulations to Alison Laurie and Valerie Davison



CONFERENCES

2007 Conferences - Wellington, Brisbane, Oakland, California.

For those who enjoyed the Sydney conference we have information about 3 conferences for 2007, Wellington in June/July, Brisbane in September and Oakland California in October. Band together and enjoy!

NOHANZ Conference 2007

This is advance notice that the Nohanz conference will be held in Wellington in the winter of 2007 - date to be confirmed in the next newsletter and on our website. The Executive anticipate that the 2009 conference will held in Auckland.

Brisbane, Australia Conference 2007 Old stories new ways

The Oral History Association of Australia (Qld Inc.) invites proposals for papers and presentations for its 2007 National Conference to be held in a delightful riverside setting at Riverglenn Conference Centre, Indooroopilly, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia from 27 to 30 September 2007. The theme of the conference is: Old Stories New Ways.

Proposals that relate to mediations and new work on the following are encouraged:

- a.. interpreting story;

b.. working with community;
c.. understanding memory;
d.. oral history and independent practitioners; and
e.. addressing changing technologies.

Proposals on other topics are also welcomed. The Conference Committee invites proposals from oral history practitioners in a wide variety of disciplines and settings, including academic institutions, museums, historical societies, archives and libraries, community organisations, media professionals, independent historians and oral historians, arts workers and reminiscence practitioners. We also encourage proposals from students. Sessions may address the many uses of oral history in media such as film, video, play back and other theatre, radio, exhibitions and multi media. Similarly, while sessions may be organised in a panel format, we encourage workshop proposals, media and performance oriented presentations and other formats that go beyond the boundaries of conventional conference presentation.

If you are interested, please send us a single page proposal (email info@ohaaqld.org.au or OHAA (Qld Inc., PO Box 12213 George Street, Brisbane Qld 4003 Australia) including an outline of your paper and the following details:

- * name (with your family name in CAPITAL letters)
- * affiliation
- * postal address
- * email address
- * phone and fax numbers
- * relevant theme
- * whether an individual paper, a thematic panel, a workshop proposal, an exhibition or a dramatic piece.

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: 28 February 2007
Acceptance or rejection of proposals 16 March 2007.

Full papers by email required by 30 May 2007.

For further details visit the website of the Oral History Association of Australia- Qld Inc - (www.ohaaqld.org.au)

Suzanne Mulligan Editor On Tape Oral History Association of Australia
<http://www.home.gil.com.au/~mulligan>
n_mulligan@gil.com.au

Conference in USA 2007 - for those in revolutionary mood!

2007 Oral History Association Annual Meeting
October 24-28, 2007 Marriott Oakland City Center Oakland , California

"The Revolutionary Ideal: Transforming Community through Oral History"

The Oral History Association invites proposals for papers and presentations for its 2007 annual meeting to be held October 24-28, 2007 at the Marriott Oakland City Center in Oakland, California.

As always, the Program Committee of the OHA welcomes proposals for presentations on a variety of topics. However, in keeping with this year's theme, "The Revolutionary Ideal: Transforming Community through Oral History," the 2007 Annual Meeting will concentrate on the revolution in oral history as it relates to social and political change, community survival and changes in technology.

Oakland is a symbolic center of revolutionary thought and action, and the committee is especially interested in realizing how "revolutions," both large and small, have an impact on society and community. The Association is seeking presentations which deal with social and economic justice, environmentalism, Black Power, civil rights, gender and

gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender peoples, migrant and immigrant communities, peoples with disability and independent living, and regional, Pacific and Western histories.

Communities have transformed rapidly over the years and the topics generated by such change will be explored at the conference. Proposals that deal with issues such as gentrification, urban renewal, community health, globalization and local empowerment are strongly encouraged. Technological changes will be another major component of the conference and topics such as digitization, consumption of oral history, community archiving practices, and the democratization of knowledge will be presented. Oral history projects that deal with specific revolutions such as the Chinese Revolution and the Sexual Revolution will also play a focal point in the conference.

Regional historians and students of the Bay Area, California, the Pacific Northwest and Canadian history are encouraged to submit proposals. In addition to those whose work concerns international topics, the committee invites proposals for presentations that reflect on the "revolutionary" process of oral history and the role of technology and theory in its practice. A variety of formats and presentation methods are welcome, including traditional panels with chair and discussant, workshops, and poster sessions, as well as media and performance-oriented sessions.

At the conference, we also look forward towards helping to create a community which can continue revolutionizing the field of oral history after participants have left Oakland.

Proposal format: submit five copies of the proposal. For full sessions, submit a title, a session abstract of not more

than two pages, and a one-page vita or resume for each participant. For individual proposals, submit a one-page abstract and a one-page vita or resume of the presenter. Each submission must be accompanied by a cover sheet, which can be printed from the OHA Web site: www.dickinson.edu/oha. Click here for COVER

SHEET: <http://omega.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/org_cfp2007cs.html>

Proposals should be postmarked by January 15, 2007. They may be submitted by mail or fax. E-mail attachment will also be accepted, but must include the "cover sheet" in electronic form and must be one complete document in Microsoft WORD format. Should you not receive email confirmation by February 5th, please contact the OHA office.

Submit proposal directly to the OHA office at the address below.

Queries may be directed to:

Mehmed Ali, First Vice President
mehmed_ali@nps.gov

978-275-1826

Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, Program Co-Chair

roqueramirez@chicst.ucsb.edu

626-354-1808

Norma Smith, Program Co-chair
nsmith@igc.org

510-465-2094

Proposals should be sent by January 15, 2007, to:

Madelyn Campbell

Oral History Association

Dickinson College

P. O. Box 1773

Carlisle, Pennsylvania 17013

Telephone: 717-245-1036

Fax: 717-245-1046

For courier service add: Holland Union Building, College and Louthier Streets

The next newsletter will be published in March 2007. Please send items for the newsletter by 15 February 2007.

