

ORAL HISTORY IN NEW ZEALAND

CONTENTS

Foreword		i
Korero Taku Whaea: Talk my aunt Learning to listen to Maori women	Cushla Parekowhai	1
Three women trade unionists talk	Nelly Bell, Tilly Hunter, Therese O'Connell	5
Talking to "working girls"	Jan Jordan	12
Women and the work place: The Calumet District Women's Caucus	James B Lane	16
Southern Voices: Background to a book	Adrienne Simpson	22
Creating a directory of oral history holdings	Maribeth Coleman	26
Auckland Public Library's 1990 oral history project	Megan Hutching	33
Taking root in a new land: Hamilton Public Library's 1990 oral history project	Bill Lovell-Smith	36
Presenting oral history	Helen Frizzell	40
NOHANZ Code of Ethical Practice		45

Volume Four

1992

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND

FOREWORD

The 1990s seem set to see a continuing surge of oral history activity in New Zealand, as the country celebrates the anniversaries of further significant turning points in its history.

The sesquicentennial year generated a lot of interest in our past. In this issue the fruits of two oral history projects set up to mark 1990, by Auckland and Hamilton Public Libraries, are described.

The 1991 NOHANZ conference on "Women and Oral History" was planned to stimulate ideas for projects to mark the 100th anniversary, in 1993, of New Zealand women winning the vote. A selection of papers from the conference are reproduced in this volume; they raise a number of issues, some controversial, and open up a wide range of avenues for exploration.

Another major step forward for oral history in New Zealand in the 1990s will be the launch of the Directory of Oral History Holdings, compiled by NOHANZ and due to be handed on to the Oral History Centre in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, later this year. The editors are pleased to include an article on the compilation of this comprehensive database, and to congratulate all those involved in its achievement.

*Louise Buckingham
Brigid Pike*

KORERO TAKU WHAEA: TALK MY AUNT LEARNING TO LISTEN TO MAORI WOMEN

Cushla Parekowhai

When I was first approached to give this paper, I thought a good title might be something like "Korero ki Taku Whaea", which approximately translates as "Talking to my aunt". However, on arrival in Wellington I noticed an error in the conference programme. A small but significant article "ki" had been inadvertently left out of the title. So now if you read the misprinted programme it says "Korero Taku Whaea" which literally means "Talk my aunt".

Given that you have all conscientiously roused yourselves early on Sunday morning to hear an address entitled "Korero Taku Whaea", I wondered to myself how I might resolve the problem of the absent article. A really interesting possibility suggested itself yesterday while listening to the presentations of other women. During their sessions a few questions were raised for me about the nature of "talk" itself - how it is exchanged and why. Who is speaker and who is the listener; and what is the nature of their relationship to the narrative itself? Are the voices which tell the story ever neutral, or are they involved in the events themselves? How does "perspective" affect narrative and can it be described, or is it all inside, outside and upside down? In this way perhaps, "talk my aunt" has rather fortuitously become a more appropriate title for that which I am now about to say.

One of the things that occurred to me after yesterday's discussion was the subtle range of positions assumed by the various interviewers. We heard from a number of women who were to different degrees inside a particular cultural perspective speaking to other women who appeared to be proceeding from some shared and mutually understood position. What I am

hoping to suggest is that as a young Maori woman who has been similarly involved in a process which recorded the talk of others, I am myself learning about the vast complexities of this relationship. This involves maintaining a responsibility for not only that which has been said but also for the transcribed narrative which emerges once the story is told. That is to say, I too was learning that what you hear is never necessarily what is meant.

For example, I thought I might begin to tell you about an experience I had away over in Rotorua, heartland of the Arawa country. My father's family is from Tai Rawhiti, the East Coast, land of the rising sun. I am not Arawa. On this occasion I was accompanied to the interview by my researcher, Raina Meha, a young woman with connections to that area, and close by at Lake Rotoiti. We had been taken to the old home of the informant's aunty who was Rangitiaria Dennan, better known as Guide Rangī of Whakarewarewa. Guide Rangī was to be the subject of the interview. What I began to appreciate was that the woman who in fact was inside the narrative (who was, if you like, really and truly talking to her aunty) was my researcher and not myself because it was she who had a relationship in whakapapa, in genealogy, with the informant and therefore her story. This meant that although the korero and the talk were addressed to me as the interviewer, I felt as though I was actually quite outside the story, given the particular way the story was told.

I will describe to you a moment from that conversation in which I was absolutely aware that I was a participant in a story that was paradoxically both my own and not my own. The informant was a remarkable talker. She was a small Maori woman with wonderful dark hair streaked a little with grey. She wore it pulled back in a no-nonsense bun and it matched her feisty, pragmatic approach to the information she was sharing. Being on the outside of Arawa, as it were, it was as though I was not only being spoken to but spoken through in order that those "inside" Arawa like my researcher might weigh and consider the serious nature of what it was she was

Cushla Parekowhai was an oral history field worker and journalist for *Ko Kui Ma Te Kaupapa: The Book of New Zealand Women* (Bridget Williams Books, 1991). She is now "between jobs" and looking for work.

saying. So the informant was talking to me, an outsider, in order to talk to somebody else. I think that this is possibly an important part of the process. Maori women gave their stories to many more people than just a little nobody like me. They knew that their korero would be recorded on a machine so that it could be translated into a book. So in this way their words and the wisdom they contain were deliberately told to an audience which was on the one hand particular but on the other universal. This shows how the relationships within the korero are being continuously negotiated and redefined according to the context in which the narrative might appear.

OK. Imagine, if you will, a little wharepuni. It is a beautiful late summer afternoon and it feels and smells as old as old. The door of the wharepuni is open and we have been talking about Guide Rangi's garden. The roses on the front lawn are blooming. There is a pink one and a creamy yellow one. My informant had been saying that the old lady believed that outside the whare in the garden was te ao pakeha, the Pakeha world. That was where Guide Rangi welcomed and received people from outside our culture into a Maori space that she made and cared for as her own. I, as the Maori interviewer, along with Guide Rangi's whanaunga, my young Arawa researcher, was part of the culture, and we were taken inside the wharepuni, and this is what was said:

One of the women down the pa, she withdrew from Aunty's concert party and started her own group. That woman would always call Aunty "E tiko". Aunty never took offence. We know what tiko is and even "hamuti" - now that's dirt to some Pakeha, but to Rotorua Maori no, tiko is coming from your own body. It's not filthy at all. In fact, people say it's the highest tribute you can pay to a person. It's the same as "E kuri". The kuri was a real person to the Maori, it would not be thought of as an animal. The dog was a valuable treasure because before the Pakeha came, cloaks were made from dog skin. The purge of the dog was kept, mixed with berry juice, fermented for five years and used for the pigment in moko. So Aunty never took offence at being called kuri either. She had conflict in her life, but she had the Maori wisdom to understand it.

Now, this episode in the story placed me in a kind of existential confusion. I understood that the informant was really talking about the politics of life in the pa. The community that she was referring to was Whakarewarewa - the picture postcard ideal of a happy Maori village where all the brown faces had permanently perfect smiles. However, this was not

the reality, at least, not all the time. For Maori people to remain a vital and vibrant group we must work through and resolve the struggles within ourselves and our communities. In this instance the informant is acknowledging that there is a lot of dirt, a lot of our own low-level cultural crap which we as Maori people have to deal with in order to have a sharp and focused vision.

Now I'd like to illustrate for you how the very fact that you are Maori, that you are talking to and working with Maori people, does not necessarily guarantee you an "inside" position. An interesting story was told to me by a family from Raukawa of the Horowhenua, Otaki and Levin. Their aunty was called Mirika Wehipeihana but she was known by her nickname Daddie. Daddie's experience is important to our purpose today because her story suggests another way in which the sense of being both inside and outside a context is understood and acknowledged by Maori.

Daddie was a skilled and professional nurse. She was approached by Apirana Ngata to become involved in health care initiatives on the East Coast. My researcher and I have jumped on a Railways bus and are sitting in a new aluminium garage which has been converted into a comfortable extra room. The informant is looking at some old photographs and recalls:

... Daddie didn't speak Maori when she left home, but when she got up the Coast she really learned the Ngati Porou way of talking. Daddie became entirely fluent in the language, so much so that when she came back to Raukawa for a visit, our old people would always laugh and say, "Ah, go home, Ngati, go back to the Coast." In those days she was a favourite of Sir Apirana Ngata. Ngata encouraged her and in return she did so much for his people. Over the years that she was up the Coast she fought to lower the incidence of TB. But they had to do what she said. She'd say to Ngata, "It's no good, the people are going to die." He said, "So what are you going to do?" She said, "Let me have the right to go to your people's houses and instruct them and the situation will improve." From that time on they never considered her an outsider.

What is interesting is that in professional terms Daddie was confronted with the same kind of caring exclusiveness in which I found myself, while listening to oral histories away over in Arawa. Because Daddie was in fact from Raukawa, her relationship to Ngati Porou was the same as mine was to Arawa. In her case it was Ngata who guaranteed her access to the people she had come to serve. In much the same way, my researcher was the

guarantor, if you like, of my privilege or my right to hear the story being told to her.

What I am saying to oral history field workers is that there is a way in which you can be aware of and act on the shifts in perspective and relationship implied in Maori narrative without necessarily succumbing to some kind of culturally sensitive paralysis. As the Pakeha woman, Bev McCombs, spoke on the first day about her experiences of the Maori Women's Welfare League oral history project in which she shared the awhina and support of Maori women like Mira Saszy, it became clear to me that this Pakeha field worker knew and acknowledged that her position as an outsider in the stories happening around her had a status and integrity all of its own. That is to say, she was absolutely confident that her Maori friends would not let her down. A place on the paepae was made for her by these generous Maori women in order that she could sit not in front of, or behind, but beside them. Ultimately, however, it was the Pakeha woman's ability to keep the faith, and trust the judgements of those who already knew more of the story than she did which helped her learn to listen.

In this way the culturally sensitive inertia which prevents anything constructive being done is overcome. This means that being outside is good, being outside-in is good, being inside-out is good, and being every which way is good too. In other words, it's all true, depending on how you hear it. The trick is realising where and how it is you're hearing it at the time. The fact is, Maori people are aware that whoever you are, your perspective will be different from theirs. Fortunately this does not obscure the story since it is the acknowledgement of this difference which provides shape for the narrative and describes the relationship that the various voices may or may not have to the words.

To illustrate this I thought I would talk in terms of a rather special incident which for me extends this idea about being inside, outside, upside down.

I was story collecting in the Gisborne area. As I have said before, my father's people come from Poverty Bay. I have never lived there although we used to visit with my relatives at Christmas and New Year. As little kids we bathed in the same river and played in the same trees as my father had done. On this particular day I was taken to hear a story told by a wonderful woman called Ruby. Ruby was built like a bus. She was wearing this amazingly orange frock which looked like a

shower curtain, but Ruby was one of the most graceful people I have ever seen. She could float like a butterfly, although I never felt her sting like a bee. I remember walking up to her fifties-style State house. The lawns were mown neat as neat. Right in the middle was this big tractor tyre with an old punga growing in the centre while around the edge was a thick row of black and purple-centred pansies. Ruby came to the door to welcome us to her home. I noticed that one side of her house was navy blue and the other side was light green. The first thing she did was to apologise for the paintwork; her boy had been meaning to finish it off for a few summer holidays now but just hadn't got around to it. We went into the kitchenette for a cup of tea. I sort of sensed that my coming for a story could be something special because on this plate was a pile of mallowpuffs. Ruby had all these little mokos running around hungry for a biscuit and she was saying, "Now don't you touch those, not yet anyway." So we had a cup of tea and a mallowpuff and then Ruby told me her story.

It was about her Nanny Tira. Again the story described a community and a particular Maori woman's place in it. During Ruby's talk I was discovering that a narrative had begun to emerge that was "outside" the story actually being told. In this peripheral narrative other texts and subtexts supplied a kind of commentary on the story itself. This is in fact why Ruby is telling the story in the first place. So imagine I have just finished my mallowpuff and am considering dealing with another when Ruby says:

. . . But there were mean times after the war. Nanny was renowned for having this little fox terrier. They would be hard pressed for food and come dark they would go rustle some sheep or cattle. This dog sort of knew how to flush the animal out without any noise, quietly and quickly. When Uncle Wi talked about Nanny Tira's dog, it wasn't so much stealing as survival. I can't remember the dog's name, but I'm sure she had a strange, spooky name. Maybe it was "The-Secret-Rustling-Dog-of-Puha-Lane-That-Didn't-Bark".

I think in this piece from the story of Nanny Tira, Ruby is acknowledging that her grandmother, who was a respected, determined and honourable Maori woman, was reduced by economic circumstances beyond her control to thievery and petty crime. Nanny Tira's sheep stealing and cattle rustling was not an activity Ruby was proud of, but nevertheless she was going to own it because it happened.

However, this reclaiming of an "outlaw's" past which most families would prefer to forget is not without criticism of the system

which marginalises Maori people and forces them to act illegally against their will and better judgement. The fact is that even in the 1990s, Maori people are still at the bottom of the heap. Economically we represent those who are most likely to be unemployed, and we are those most likely to be in prisons or mental hospitals. Our times seem not so very different from the "mean" times Ruby was talking about. In a way I was beginning to feel inside Ruby's korero, that my relationship to that story was imbued with some kind of political analysis which addressed the enormous human resources which Maori people draw upon so that genuine justice might be done.

After the interview I remember talking to this relative who had introduced me to Ruby. I said, "Uncle Wi sounds like a hard case," and she said to me, "That's right, you should know him well." And I said, "Why is that?" And she said, "He's your grandfather." So Uncle Wi, the voice which Ruby chose to provide a perspective on the moral rectitude of Nanny Tira's entrepreneurial activities, was in fact inside my own and I did not know it at the time.

This is what I am saying about the nature of talk. Korero is a kind of continuum of exchange, where the position given to you as listener changes all the time. Your ability to be aware of and function with regard to this position improves with knowledge, it improves with experience, and it improves with context. This is part of the dynamic which are my talking "aunts". The Maori people who spoke were entirely up-front about their relationship to the korero. They seemed to be unashamedly asserting "ko au tenei" - this is me and this is what I think. In this way I learned to listen as much to what the informants were saying as to that which they weren't. I learned, too, that being born slightly brown does not necessarily privilege you with a highly developed ability to "hear" what it is that is really being said. It helps but ought not preclude the valuable insights available to other pinker kinds of listeners whose analysis and opinion assist me as a Maori person in developing a critique of my own.

Finally I would like to share with you a bit of story which tells us something more about

the nature of talk. The interesting thing about this korero was that I actually was not personally present when this interview was recorded. It was set up in a long letter I wrote to the informant's nephew who took responsibility and control of the interview himself. I quite like this as an example of the oral history interview you do when you're not doing an oral history interview. That is to say, now both the interviewer and informant are exclusively and independently inside - in the narrative - and all that was left for me to do as the oral historian was concentrate hard and really, really *listen*.

Anyhow, this is a small piece from the story of Nanny Whiu from Tolaga Bay who was in her time a wise and wily Maori woman of the world. The fact that this may be the story of Nanny Whiu in no way diminishes the sense in which the narrative feels like the voice of all my aunts. On this occasion the informant says:

Nanny Whiu was a keen drinker. Nevertheless I think she was a very religious person. A lot of the people from the Apostolic churches used to come down on her and berate her about her drinking and so forth, telling her that she should be preparing a way for herself because she was getting old. All she'd say to them was, "Christ was a happy man. He went to parties. He turned water into wine because they ran out of drink, so he must have been a gay blade like me." When she drank, she always raised her glass and said, "Here's to you, Jesus." She never let booze get on top of her. The Christians used to tell her it was bad for her health to drink. She was dirtying the temple of God, they said. She said, "Ah, no, it's the things that come from deep down inside that dirty the temple of God."

So I would say that although not one of us here today physically heard the story of Nanny Whiu, there is a way in which her korero speaks directly to us all, irrespective of proximity or culture. That is to say, if your belief about the real meaning of talk is as Nanny Whiu's was, then that which you say and that which you hear cannot be undermined by base and mean-spirited attitudes. After all, true korero which tells us the things we need to know most about ourselves is always available to those who are able and willing to "listen". Just go ask my aunts . . .

No reira, ka nui te mihi ki a koutou. Kia ora koutou katoa.

THREE WOMEN TRADE UNIONISTS TALK

Nelly Bell
Tilly Hunter
Therese O'Connell

Nelly Bell

Nelly (Ellen Edith) Bell, from Hamilton, was active in the Clerical Workers' Union from 1936 to 1965. For 15 years she was president of the New Zealand Clerical Association, the national association of clerical workers' unions in New Zealand. She was the first woman to hold the position, and saw many changes in the political and industrial organisation of that part of the trade union movement.

I had the good fortune to be born into a very politically oriented family, the type of family that was more or less agin' the government most of the time. My father was an Irishman, so I grew up with a great sense of what was just and what was unjust. I think that had a big influence on my eventually becoming so active within the union to which I happened to belong.

I started my working life in the mid 1930s, when getting employment was as bad or worse than it is today. I was at secondary school and my parents said, "Well, you just stay at school until you've got a job." So I stayed at Hamilton Technical College, in patched gym frock and darned woollen stockings, till 1936. When I did get a job, after two years of applying for anything I thought I could do, it was a clerical post and I was one of over 100 applicants. The job was mine because I displayed unusual tenacity (the interviewer's words). After four years I got married.

In 1940, married women working was, for the women themselves, a problem. The idea that women were going to replace men in the workforce hadn't really taken off, to the extent that it did as the war progressed and the

following one or two years. So, you left work when you got married with the usual presentation, all that kind of thing, and went home to be a good housewife and produce children - which was fine. I quite liked having my children. But after two years, of course, my husband got drafted into the army and went overseas. So I was left with two children and very little money, and finally took another job. I was lucky enough to apply for a job in the local taxi office and I got it, and I said, "Well, I've got a baby, and I want shift work because I'm still breast-feeding some of the time." And they said, "Oh, well, that's something we can accommodate; you are a trained telephonist, you know the city very well, that's what we want." So, that was the arrangement.

And that was fine until the Labour Department, which then had a Manpower Section (which most of you wouldn't be old enough to know much about), heard about it. If you had any skills, they had the right, once you'd decided that you were going to work, to put you where they thought you were going to do the most for the War Effort.

So I got this letter saying that since I'd elected to go back into the workforce, they thought I should go to the hospital. Well, believe it or not, the hospital wasn't prepared to take somebody on who had a baby and had to worry about feeding it. The Labour Department had to concede that I'd perhaps best stay where I was.

At that time I joined the union. I had previously been a member of the union, having joined in 1936, which was the time when the Clerical Workers came into being. When I had started work, my father had said, "Have you got a union?" I said, "I dunno," and he retorted, "Well, you'd better find out." So I found out and joined the union, but I didn't have a particularly active role. I was a member and I used to sit there, people coming into the office and collecting the fees; if things weren't too good, I'd say I didn't like it, but you couldn't do anything. It wasn't as active as it became later on.

But I became angry about one or two things. Once, when I was asked to work on

These talks were recorded at the 1991 NOHANZ Conference, "Women and Oral History". The three women were invited to give unscripted, impromptu talks on their time in the trade union movement, how they became involved, their expectations when they went into it, what happened, and how it matched up with their earlier expectations. Sue Piper facilitated the session.

Labour Day, I had an involvement with the Labour Party to run some children's races at the Labour Day picnic. They said they wanted us to work; well, I didn't think that was very fair. I said so, and they said, "Oh well, you can please yourself. You can come in and work on Monday, or don't bother coming in on Tuesday." That seemed pretty unfair to me, and made me pretty union-conscious. Of course, jobs were so hard to get that believe me, you went in on Monday and did the job. But because of a sense of responsibility, I arranged for someone else to do the children's races that I'd become involved in.

When I went back into the workforce, I returned to the same union. I had never really not been a member of it. I had to pay two years' subs for the time when I was being a wife and mother because I had never bothered to resign, which is one of those things that happen in unionism. You don't think much about them when you're young but of course when I got older I realised the implications of those things, and I thought they're probably right to demand subs from those who do not officially resign and then return to the same area of coverage.

I became active in the union when I realised they had about £3,000 excess of income over expenditure. I thought, why on earth haven't we got a welfare organisation; what are we doing with £3,000 sitting in the bank? So I went along to a meeting to tell them all about this, and got listened to, and everyone thought it was a great idea. So then Dave Jacobs, who was at that time the officer, came and tried to explain to me that in case there was ever a big "blue", they needed funds to carry the workers over that time. So I had to "can" it, at least for the time being, but years later the union did get involved in the welfare area.

We finally decided we should have a branch at Hamilton, because the offices were up in Auckland. And they said, "Would you like to be the secretary?" I thought it didn't sound too onerous so I took it on and I remained in that position, as honorary secretary of the Hamilton branch, for the next 25 years. Incidentally, I remained in the job in the taxi office, apart from about a year and eight months when I had two post-war children, and then I went back to the office to help them train some new staff and I stayed there until I was 67. I retired six years ago from the Hamilton taxi office. I spent my entire working life in that one job, apart from the time before I was married. And I was a member of the union all my working life.

My expectations of the union were that I felt people had rights as employees; they had rights to decent conditions; and rights to have their say. And that was really why I got involved, to try and do something about that. As I became more involved, more issues came forward that had to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis, and of course people would ring up when they had problems and tell me about them. And I'd have to communicate with Auckland and get the officers there to do things and so on. Hamilton became a very strong and efficient branch, with many extra activities, including the Credit Union, still an important and useful service to members.

My first involvement at national level was when a delegate from Hamilton, who was going to a conference, suddenly opted out and rang me at work one morning and said, "Do you think you could go to Invercargill to a conference of the New Zealand Clerical Association?" I didn't really know very much about the association; I was a member of the Auckland union, and my union was centred in where I worked and the area I was working in. But I thought, oh well, I guess I could but I'd need to know a bit more about it. So the delegate said I could go to Auckland and fly out from Auckland, and they would brief me before I left. Well, that sounded fine. So off I went to Invercargill and that was my first experience of the national union.

I went to every conference from then on until I retired as national president. I can't remember which year it was that I retired, but I was in that position for 16 years anyway. I got to know a lot about efficiency, and one of my aspirations as I got to understand that was that it was very important that the clerical workers should have a national body and belong to one organisation. They could have their local unions but coverage was very important from a national point of view.

Probably one of my greatest disappointments over the years since I left that job is that there has been a breakaway, and Auckland is now out on its own from the rest of New Zealand who are in the national association. I still firmly believe that that is wrong.

My other great disappointment, which probably makes me feel that there have been a lot of years wasted, is that since the 1800s when unions first came into being in New Zealand, we have had a union system which has been fairly effective; we've had national coverage; and the Employment Contracts Act has destroyed all that. It is one of the great disappointments of my life. I feel all the things that we worked for and gained for

working people are vanishing. Maybe out of it will grow a much stronger and better union movement but it's going to take some years for that to evolve, as our other system evolved, and I think many working people are going to suffer enormously in the interim. They are already beginning to suffer.

Another great disappointment is that I was very active in the equality of women and the equal pay issue, as a trade unionist, and the repeal of the Equal Pay Act recently was to me another enormous step backwards. I think that's taken us back years and years and years as far as women in the workforce are concerned. I don't quite know how modern women are going to get around it, but I guess like us, they are going to find ways to do it. The only way they can do it is through the union movement; the same as the only way they are going to combat the effects of the Employment Contracts Act is by remaining members of their union and making sure that they use their unions as their bargaining agents. Don't get a whole plethora of people negotiating their awards, because if that happens we are going to have worker against worker, and the only way they'll be negotiating is down.

Postscript

Hearing the others reminded me particularly of the place that women held. When I became president of the Clerical Workers' Union, it was considered to be a milestone, although membership was predominantly female in the union, that the national president was a woman. When I became president in Auckland, which was a very male bastion, they couldn't understand it at all. This was something extraordinary.

I think we've come a long way from there, because there are a lot of women now playing pretty active and important roles. The first national conference I went to, there were two ladies there - there was me with the Clerical Workers' Union (we had had another lady in previous years but she wasn't there that year), and a lady from the Joint Council of Labour who sat on the back seat (I think her name was Harris), who listened but didn't actually take an active part. Next time there were two other ladies and me, and from there it sort of grew; and the last one I went to, about a third of the delegates were women.

It is good that women are taking a more active role because women make up at least half the workforce. And that is a change from when I started work because in those days you worked just for that period when you left

school until you got married. It was very unusual for married women to work, and was so even when I went back to work during the war. That was because women were being taken back into the workforce to take the places of the men who were overseas, and everyone expected, I think, that we would just bow out very gracefully when our husbands came back. I did, because I got pregnant right away and had two more children, which took me out for a little while. Pregnant women were at that time not accepted in offices or for that matter, in most work places.

The assumption that women were going to go back to their kitchen sinks was very predominant in the thinking of the country. When I returned to the workforce, as a working mother at that time, it wasn't even terribly acceptable - people would mutter, "I'm sure the family is going to suffer." But I was quite determined my children wouldn't suffer. The reason I was at work was that I wanted to give them more than they would get if they only had the pretty meagre wages which my husband, who was at that time an unskilled labourer, was able to earn. So I was very determined that wasn't going to happen in my family.

I suppose over the first part of my life as a working mother, my life was in two places: I was at the office, or I was with my children somewhere. That was my life. Looking back on it, it was a pretty unfair sort of a situation to have to get yourself into, but to be considered acceptable in society, it was necessary. Also, with no childcare facilities, it was essential. Mind you, I really enjoyed my family and loved the time I spent with them. I must acknowledge the support of my husband and children as they grew up and became a major factor in my active involvement; also the help of my parents in the early years and during the war.

Listening to Therese and Tilly, I realised how unusual it was for women to be taking such an active role. People thought it was quite extraordinary that you were going to fight for your rights, not only your own rights as a woman but the rights of all the people you worked with. Working in a job where there was no equal pay - I was a taxi telephonist - I took phone orders and I despatched the taxis, and did exactly the same work as the men telephonists and they got nearly double. And there were no penal rates on Saturdays and Sundays, which I can see happening again. I could go on about that - it's all so inevitable as a result of recent legislation.

Tilly Hunter

Tilly Hunter, who has been an activist in the labour movement in Wellington for many years, was the first and only ever woman member of the Printers' Union National Council, in the 1950s.

As is probably obvious from the moment I open my mouth, I don't really come from what could be loosely described as the working class. All women, of course, come from the working class, whatever their social level may appear to be.

The reason that I embraced what could again be loosely described as working class politics with enthusiasm, and up to a point still do, is because of my age basically. I left school at the end of 1946 and came to Wellington, to Victoria University, and to Wellington Teachers' Training College, which I was attending at the same time. They were full of what were then described as "rehab", demobbed ex-servicemen. It might seem an exaggeration that everybody left the Services shouting "Joe for King", but a very large number of them did. And these were the people who influenced my thinking.

The 1939-45 war had left me at the tender age of 17 feeling that war was the greatest waste of human resources, let alone our natural resources, and that it was vicious and it was evil. The socialist influence that I came across, here at Victoria, made me believe that this was the only possible answer against a recurring evilness of war. I have remained a constant fighter for the peace movement ever since. I therefore joined the Socialist Club here, which ran seminars at which many speakers were fulltime trade union functionaries. I then joined the Communist Party and continued in this type of education.

I still believe an enormous amount of Marxist theory is probably the most far-reaching political theory that the world has ever seen. It is possibly regrettable that we have never had a state that has really been able to put it into operation.

I got married, and Susan and her brother Michael were born. My marriage broke up and I found myself of necessity having to earn a living. I decided that I did not want to go on teaching, and that I wanted a simple, repetitive type of job. I got a job in a print shop, started off by collating periodicals and so forth, ultimately becoming one of the first women in Wellington since 1946 to operate a guillotine. They all said that I was too small, and I'd say at that stage I weighed about seven stone. The lumps of paper were, well, if

you learn to do these things, women can do anything. If you just learn to lift carefully, you'll be surprised how much you can lift up. Because of my socialist beliefs, I immediately joined the union and immediately started nagging.

The Printers' Union has the most delightfully old-fashioned nomenclature. I became firmly the "Father of the Chapel" (the secretary, incidentally, was the "Clerk of the Chapel"). From there I became a delegate to the Wellington Board of Management of the Printers' Union. There I found it interesting. As a woman, you had to wait while they finished making their sexist remarks; you had to wait while they mentally patted you on the head. Then, if you sat there, as I think every woman is perhaps still having to learn, and certainly at this point had to learn all the time, eventually they actually started listening to what you had to say, rather than who it was that was saying it and what did she look like.

At this time it was discovered - a heinous crime - that the fulltime functionary in Wellington, the Wellington secretary, was actually fiddling the books. At that point, in most unions and certainly the Printers' Union, the secretary was not in the job for life, he was not appointed by an executive. The secretary was an elective position. And there were, I think, something like 10 months of his term to run, when they decided to appoint me as interim secretary. They decided that I wasn't really in a career position as a guillotine operator - which is true for the aristocrats of the printing trade, the linotypists, the compositors and so forth, although these are all dying trades now. So, I thought, well, why not? And I loved it.

Bits of it made me want to scream. The members of the New Zealand Union (the national secretary was in the office next to mine in Trades Hall) expected me to go and talk to the boss or the manager or whoever, rather than go and see the delegate on the job. As far as I was concerned, my only contact with the boss was to ring his secretary, as the law required, and not ask but tell him that I was exercising my right to come and see my members.

I except two companies on this point. One was Neil Blundell, who at that stage owned and operated the *Evening Post*. He invited me and the chairperson of the Wellington Printers' Union formally to afternoon tea, along with his own staff at the *Evening Post*, and the father and clerk of the chapel. He wanted to meet me, so that he would know who I was, and any time he saw me in the

building, that was fine, no need to ask permission. And Sir James Doig, of UEB, did exactly the same thing.

The others, I used to write them letters and sign them with my initials - N M Piper - and they didn't believe it when I'd walk in. "Are you a union official?" they'd exclaim. Some of them, the ones in bigger organisations, thought that I was the secretary's secretary. If I had been a secretary I'd have known how to do typing and take shorthand. Most of them made sexist remarks; I should point out I was under 30 at this stage. And all of them set my teeth on edge. But not nearly as much, I might tell you, as the guys who were my members, who set my teeth on edge even further, by believing that there was no way that I, as a woman, and a young woman, could possibly negotiate, discuss or know anything about anything to do with the union.

John Dickinson's had a factory at that time in Haining Street. John Dickinson's was an overseas-owned company. There was considerable cause for discontent in that factory. People were being asked to forgo tea breaks so that the machines wouldn't have to be stopped, and being short-paid on overtime or not being paid meal money, or not being provided with meals in the cafeteria - all the little things that make up the day of a trade union official. Stationery-making generally is a very, very noisy process, even by printers' standards; the workers also were intimidated by their foreman and by the manager. I found it impossible to speak to them.

Eventually I talked to the job committee and said, "Can I talk to them all together for goodness sake, between 12 and one? How about the canteen?" Permission was granted by management for me to do so, but I had to think about this and I thought, those swine are going to be there and it will be just as intimidating as me standing by a machine and trying to find out what's bugging them. So I trundled off to whoever was running the Trades Hall at the time and booked a room, just in case. Then I went back and sure enough, just as I was standing on a chair about to harangue the multitude, in filed most of management and all the foremen. So I said, "I see that we have visitors who are not members of our union." Because I had thought this one through, and it was only a matter of 50 yards across the road, I said, "I have booked the room in the Trades Hall, and all of you who wish to listen to me and tell me and the union generally what is bugging you, I suggest you gather up your sandwiches and

come with me." With which I climbed down off the chair thinking, "I wonder if it will work!" And there was this clatter of feet behind me down the stairs.

I was 150 feet tall that day. There were only two people in the union who stayed behind. When we got over to the Trades Hall the members presented me with a list of demands, all of which I think, except two, were implemented, and also voted to stay out for the afternoon.

Therese O'Connell

Therese O'Connell became involved in the trade union movement in the early 1970s when she was branch chairperson of the Local Bodies Officers' Union. In 1975 she began working fulltime as a union organiser for the Wellington branch of the Clerical Workers' Union. She was in the Clerical Workers' Union for 14 years, as organiser, then education organiser and finally as Secretary - Women's Rights.

During those 14 years she held a number of positions in the trade union movement, including being on the executive and vice-president of the Wellington District Trades Council; national convenor of the Women's Committee of the New Zealand Federation of Labour; and subsequently the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions. She was also on the executives of those two organisations representing women. She now works as an entertainer.

It is hard to know where to start, actually. But it's really interesting to hear both Nelly and Tilly talk about their early experiences, or their experiences. In fact, one of the things you may notice is that anyone involved in the trade union movement loves to talk. So, all of you people interested in oral history, if you're looking for an area, well, you'd just be flooded by the stories. It is one of our traditions, talking. It's what we know best. And sometimes we listen to one another as well. That's always an extraordinary time.

Like Nelly, I think for me one of my biggest influences is the fact that I have come from an Irish heritage, and that may be a cultural cliché but it seems that you get to learn a lot about justice when you come from an Irish background, and injustice. You live with that. I come from Taranaki, and that's also really important to me, because it's like Invercargill. It's a place that nobody goes to unless they really want to go there. So it becomes very important.

I was also born in a very important time -

at the end of 1951. Not that I found out it was an important time until I joined the trade union movement. And then it seemed to me that everyone was talking about '51, and the names of the heroes. To me, what it showed up in the end was that actually, it was the men's story of work because even though it did involve women and it was very dramatic, there were lots of other things that happened too that we're only just uncovering now, because women have never been heard within the trade union movement particularly well. And even now, it's a struggle to get heard.

I started working after school, like all those of my generation, when you got those jobs where you'd go and do the dishes down at the local restaurant. They didn't have washing machines. It was a terrible job. And all those other little jobs, like the milk bar, and Woolworths during the school holidays, and nurse aiding. There'd be a lot of people here who went through all those ones. I never thought much about it. I come from a family of girls - that's also really important. I do have one brother. People think that I'm from an all-girl family - I'm always talking about my sisters - but he's there. And my father's not dead - even though I find I usually talk about my mother, he's still alive.

So I had all these jobs that mostly women did. All those cleaning-up jobs. It wasn't until I came to Wellington that I began to realise there might be other ways and means. And also, coming from Taranaki, it wasn't a union town, even though my mother joined the union in 1939 or 1941. That was when the Clerical Union went to Taranaki, joined up all these people, gave them their cards, and then didn't see them again for 20 years. My mother still has this very clean card from when she was a Clerical Union member.

So I came to Wellington - so exciting - and started working, and started meeting up with boys. After all, I came from a Catholic background and we weren't encouraged to meet with boys particularly. But working in the same place as them I discovered they were paid more than me for doing the same job, which absolutely horrified me. That was how I got really involved, through the work that I was doing and starting to try and look for somewhere where there was work being done about things, really unjust things, like unequal pay. The only people who seemed to be doing anything were in the trade union movement. So I started to get involved.

I was a shop assistant down town and I thought, I'll go and join the union because I'd heard there was some interest in equal pay.

This was also the start of women's liberation, and they were the only people who were really talking about things like equal pay. I actually went to the Trades Hall. It was the weirdest place in the world and it's not that different now. It's all these corridors and closed doors, and the people are all terrified. It was really the most intimidating place to go into. It's always made me laugh when I've heard union officials saying in the past, "It's where the workers gather." That's absolute bullshit. Nobody would gather in the Trades Hall unless you were invited in there, because it was actually where the union officials hid.

So we went into these corridors. I took a friend with me; I always think it's a good policy (I learnt it from the nuns, you know, two by two). And we went off into a corridor, knocked on the door, and I said, "I'd like to join the Shop Assistants' Union because I am a shop assistant." And this guy was very suspicious, really suspicious. And he said, "Hold on a moment." I had to stand outside in the corridor while the doors were double-unlocked. And then I was brought into an anteroom. There are probably people still there that have been there for years. You go in, and this guy who had come out was really suspicious, and he said, "You want to join the Shop Assistants' Union?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, because, you know, I work in a shop, in a bookshop."

"How many hours do you work?"

"Well, I'm only working parttime there at the moment. It's only 25 hours a week."

"Well, you don't have to join."

"But I want to."

"Do you want to take over the union?"

I was amazed. I soon found out that he'd seen me not long before this on TV, about women's liberation, and he recognised me. And here was I, innocent, wanting to join the union. Who'd want to join the bloody union? At that time, it was useless. And so, he was terrified. It was horrible.

Anyway, I joined the union, and I then asked, "When are the meetings going to be?" And he said, "It's in the public notices." I don't know how many people read the notices - I read the death notices every day but I don't read the public notices.

One of the things for me, becoming involved in the union movement, was that I thought that that was where justice and

fairness were, and people go to support each other, brothers and sisters together, and all that. And what I found was that there were some people who were like that but most weren't. Trying to be involved in the union movement was like being involved in a totally different culture, even the language was different.

I started to get actively involved in unions, first the Local Bodies Officers' Union, when I was a clerical worker with the city council. It was so easy in those days to become involved in the union. You just had to say, "I'm interested" and all of a sudden you were on at least six committees. That's still a real problem in the union movement. They suck people in and wear them to death, and then if you get on the wrong side, it's straight out. That sounds very harsh but sometimes it feels like that. I soon got involved. I ended up being the branch chairperson. It seemed to me from the very beginning that I was constantly arguing about structures, about changing the union, about how the women were going to get involved in it. And really, I suppose, for me one of my biggest involvements in the union movement was that I felt very strongly about developing a women's movement within the trade union movement. It seemed that it was the only way that we were going to get any changes.

There are so many stories to be told about the women in the union movement. Eventually a number drew together, and with other women who had been there for some time, a fighting spirit, a camaraderie, a way of trying to change things, developed. And we developed within our union, the Clerical Union, a strength and found ways of surviving as women within the structures that were actually alien to a lot of us, alien also to a lot of the men involved in them as well. So that needs to be changed.

One of the ways that we survived - and it was the best way that we survived anything - was by singing. We developed a women's choir. It was really great. A lot of the women

who started to be involved in the union had so many different fights on in their areas, and they knew they could come to this - we started to call it the women's committee - and say very nasty, hurtful things about the people that they worked with. And we knew it wouldn't go outside the room. And that was so important. We could come, say nasty things about people, feel good about it, feel better, have a good sing-song (it sounds like a religious revival group; in fact, it probably had elements of that in it), and then go back into battle for particular things. We fought battles not only within the union (I make it sound as if that was all we did, and it was a lot of it), but also all the other issues such as the struggle to organise women workers and get involved in their shitty working lives. And for many it is shitty.

Songs therefore were really important. I was a union official for the Clerical Workers' Union for 14 years. I loved most of that time. I found it a real challenge and feel really unsure and concerned about what is happening now, with the whole scene for women workers. But I am sure that the spirit of women is stronger, and there will be a great fight back.

I thought I would end with a song, one of the first we wrote back in the seventies when the Christchurch firemen were opposed to women firefighters. During a Federation of Labour conference, we decided we wanted to get our message across to our brothers, so we sang them a song at the social, to tell our story. And this is the song we sang to the Fire Brigades Union - "The Firefighters":

I'm a little firefighter,
Sue is my name.

I don't get to put out fires,
isn't that a shame?

Some day they'll be bright enough
to recognise our claim.

When there is a fire, they'll shout, "Quick!
get the girls to help us, get the girls to help us,
even though they lack a dick."

TALKING TO "WORKING GIRLS"

Jan Jordan

This morning I am going to talk to you about my involvement in interviewing sex workers, and to begin with I would like to give you some background as to how I first began talking to "working girls". In many ways it seemed to happen by "accident" - it was something I suddenly found myself doing without necessarily having planned it.

Previously I had been engaged in research for my master's thesis which had focused on women and crime in the nineteenth century. I spent a considerable period of time analysing court and police records in Canterbury, and these included brothel registers and much information on women's involvement in prostitution. The thesis was complete and I was working on other projects when Shelagh Cox invited me to write a chapter on women in the sex industry for the book *Public and Private Worlds*. Initially I felt daunted. It was one thing to be safely and quietly examining boxes of archival records, but quite another to be faced with researching the contemporary sex industry. I knew there was not much written; I knew I would have to go and interview those involved; and I did not know where to begin.

So the first time, I simply walked into a massage parlour, feeling very apprehensive, and said, "Hello." I was very fortunate because I met women who were responsive and immediately cooperated in becoming informants. Not every parlour or woman I approached responded in this way, however. Some were, understandably, mistrusting and suspicious, and the issue of "insiders" versus "outsiders" inevitably arose. I could lay no claim to "insider" status, never having been a paid worker within the sex industry. The most I could claim to be was what I heard an

Australian academic researcher on prostitution describe herself as - a "charity tart"!

A few sex workers said they would have preferred someone from within the industry to be conducting such research, whereas others expressed considerable relief that I was *not* part of their scene and that I was not coming from anywhere specific in the industry. I had the advantage of independence, and of not being identified with any one particular group, such as escorts or strip girls or street workers. Whenever tensions have arisen about my not being a sex worker, we have usually discussed these openly and, in the case of my most recent research, for the *Working Girls* book, I have worked as closely as possible with the women to ensure that they had considerable control over the book's format and contents.

When I had done the research for the *Public and Private Worlds* chapter, I had been particularly interested in the policing of prostitution and had spoken with sex workers and police officers, but in a somewhat specific and contained manner. I had obtained the necessary information but without taping interviews or talking in depth with the women.

What I realised, however, was that these women had a lot to say, and that their lives were incredibly varied and interesting. I was also forced to face the extent to which I had internalised many common stereotypes about prostitutes, and no doubt it was inevitable that I had picked up much of the cultural "baggage" surrounding this industry and the women who worked in it. What I now realised, however, was that, as with most stereotypes of minority groups, these were biased, misleading and generally inaccurate. I was intrigued by the diversity of women involved in the sex industry, and by the range of backgrounds they came from. I was also impressed by the honesty and lack of pretension with which most of them spoke about their lives.

Before I knew it, I realised I had embarked on a project aimed at having these women's stories told. One of the themes which has been surfacing a lot at this conference concerns hearing from groups whom our society usually silences, and it was certainly part of my agenda to ensure that voices from the sex industry were no longer silenced

Jan Jordan is a lecturer at the Institute of Criminology, Victoria University. She has been researching the area of sex workers for the past six years, and for the past three years has been a trustee for the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective. She is author of *Working Girls: Women in the New Zealand Sex Industry* (Penguin, 1991). This article is based on a transcript of a talk Jan Jordan gave to the 1991 NOHANZ conference, "Women and Oral History".

through social taboos or ignorance. I was aware that even within the women's movement a high level of ambivalence and suspicion still existed from feminists towards prostitutes and vice versa, and believed it to be important that the stage be set for greater dialogue between these two groups. Therefore much of my motivation in producing the book *Working Girls* arose from the desire to contribute to the process of making women's lives visible, and ensuring that sex workers' own voices could be heard.

There were also other motivating factors involved. I had realised very early in the piece that sex workers' lives served as a microcosm in which I could see highlighted many of the issues relevant to my own life and that of other women I knew. The tensions and struggles in their lives were all too often familiar to me, and increasingly I came to focus less on the differences between us and more on the similarities.

To some extent this process is evident in the book. When I first started interviewing I was intrigued by the differences, and I wanted to obtain information about those areas I felt I knew very little about. Hence Sarah's interview, which is the first in the book, is tightly structured to cover such issues as where she works, what she does, how she feels about it all, and so forth. It was important for me to know such details initially so that I had a backdrop against which I could locate other aspects of the women's lives. Thus Sarah's chapter fulfils a useful function in the book in answering many readers' initial questions about the sex industry, and then since that framework is established, it frees people up to consider some of the other dimensions involved.

As I conducted more interviews I could feel myself relaxing and leaving more room for the women to tell me about the issues *they* considered to be important, rather than my always structuring it according to my interests or agenda. Thus when I interviewed Caroline, who has had a long involvement in the bondage and discipline side of the industry, I actually focused very little on her work scene as such. Instead we talked about some of the role tensions in her life which were really important to her. For example, as the mother of two teenage daughters, she had struggled for a long time to reconcile her role as a mother with her involvement in the sex industry. As a feminist she had endeavoured to establish some kind of rationale for her participation in an industry which others

dismissed as purely exploitative of women, and similarly as a lesbian she had needed to resolve for herself any potential conflict between her sexual preference for women and her role as a sex worker paid to satisfy men. I found her to be one of the most fascinating, challenging women I interviewed, precisely because we focused so heavily on her as a mother, a feminist, a lesbian *and* a prostitute. We touched briefly on the bondage and discipline side but that seemed incidental to who she really was. Now, in the light of the Plumley-Walker trial, people often find it hard to believe that I spent all this time with her without ever going to see the racks and dungeons!

In order to obtain a better understanding of the industry overall, I also spent considerable periods of time with sex workers outside the interview context. Often, for instance, I would sit in the massage parlours chatting to the women about their work, or simply meet up for coffee. One night I was challenged by one of the streetwalkers that I had not spent enough time out on the streets. "Come out with me for the night," she urged. So Tracy Lee and I met up and walked the block around Marion Street and Vivian Street. She was all geared up in her flashy "work" clothes, teetering along in her mini skirt and high heels, while I was trudging alongside in very ordinary jeans and shoes. A car pulled up beside us in Marion Street, so I quickly told her that if it was a client looking for "business" she should go with him and I would meet her back at the coffee bar. She sauntered around to the driver's window and the next moment I heard her laugh and say, "Sorry, love, but I don't think she's available" - the guy thought I was the new girl on the block and up for hire!

One central issue in any consideration of prostitution concerns the extent to which it represents women negotiating with men to strike a bargain around access to their sexuality. Those with a narrow understanding of this area often see sex workers as the only ones making such bargains, but I became increasingly aware of the ways in which these women make explicit and blatant the kinds of bargains which many women end up making with men. Historically there is evidence to suggest that women's sexuality has had a price tag attached to it for centuries, and female sexuality has long been treated as a commodity which can be exchanged, traded or sold. The marriage contract itself can be seen as one way in which this exchange has been arranged, and in the book Sarah accordingly comments:

I see very little difference between housewives and prostitutes. A lot of housewives are doing the same sort of job that we are, and they're exploited in the same kinds of ways. They're saying to their husbands, "I'll give you sexual favours and give you children if you support me and feed me and bring me home money. They're doing it for their livelihood as much as we are, and the only difference is that they've made a commitment to *one* person, presumably for love. But that fades away often. Then they lie there like we do and think about their shopping lists." [Jordan, 1991, page 31.]

Part of what I was attempting to achieve in the book was bringing out such dimensions and exposing the connections and similarities between sex workers and other women who do not so overtly exchange sex for money.

If I was to conduct another interview project similar to this one, I would probably make some changes to my procedures. When I began the research for *Working Girls* I was not thinking of myself as an oral historian. As far as I was concerned, I was simply talking to women about their lives. However, I realise now that it would have been useful to have approached it as an oral history exercise, to have recorded the interviews on better equipment, and to have obtained the women's permission, if they were willing, to lodge these at some future date in the oral history archive.

A further aspect which I became aware of during this project was the necessity to assume I would probably *not* be able to locate some of the women later, rather than trusting there would be no impediments to my doing so. Sex workers participate in an essentially covert occupation where their "true" identities are concealed most of the time, and this in itself can make it difficult to trace them later. Furthermore, I discovered that some of the women were very transient and difficult to keep in touch with. Thus I was not always able to take the interview transcripts back to the women for checking immediately prior to publication; of the 17 women interviewed in the book, I subsequently found 12 - five simply slipped through the net. Even though they had all agreed to be interviewed for publication in a book, and all personal details had been changed, I still found it a difficult decision to go ahead and publish without that final clearance, and in a couple of cases did actually refrain from publishing.

Now I would like to say a little about how I experienced the interviewing process. I am sure I learned far more from it than they did, and was aware of a wide range of reactions as I interviewed the women. At first all I felt was

sheer terror. I also felt very naive, and scared of rejection. I was concerned that they might dismiss me as an outsider and not trust me or want to talk to me. As I intimated before, some *did* in fact react in that manner. Most, however, not only agreed to talk but also expressed their appreciation at being asked to do so. They felt pleased that someone wanted to listen to what they had to say, since many felt isolated and misunderstood by those outside the profession. One woman said, "I've always wanted to tell my own story but I didn't know how to do it", and so generally the women were enthusiastic about participating in the research.

Afterwards some of the women said they had found being interviewed to be a positive experience for themselves. It was encouraging to see where they had come from and where they were now. Several were impressed at how eloquent they sounded; one woman commented that "I was always told at school I couldn't string two words together to save myself." Another woman had experienced multiple abuse in her childhood and ended up in girls' homes and prison, but had managed to get her life together in quite a remarkable way since then. When she first read her interview back she was amazed at how terrible it all sounded, yet how far she had moved on. "I read about it all as if it was somebody else's life," she said, "and then I realised it was me, and that's not where I'm at any more."

For myself, I found I gained a lot from doing the interviews. I began relating strongly to their accounts of the switch-off mechanism they use to deal with clients, and acknowledging the extent I had used that myself in abusive contexts. At times I would share with the women some of the connections I was making, and the interviews would go back and forth and often range in scope far outside the agenda for the book.

I also noticed that I was affected by the women's directness in their use of language. There were no taboos on talk about sex, or using very explicit and up-front sexual language. For the women, these were simply the terms they used to describe their occupational world. Whereas for most people, sexual language is used to describe events in their private lives, for the sex worker it denotes her public reality. I found I quickly became equally blasé in my use of terms, and was undoubtedly a little too candid at times in dinner party conversations with the uninitiated!

It is impossible, doing interviews such as these, not to be emotionally affected by the

content. We have already heard at this conference some stories about women's lives which have been very moving, and I found it hard at times listening to some of the tales of abuse and violence which the working girls had experienced. Harley, for instance, had one nice, well groomed client abduct her, then beat her to a pulp, breaking three of her ribs before tossing her out of the car. She had screamed for help, but no one had come; later a guy admitted he had seen her being beaten but said, "I thought it was your boyfriend, I thought it was just a domestic." [*Ibid*, page 41.]

One of the sad realities for many of the women was that they not only experienced violence from clients, but felt there was nobody to help them. Often the police did not seem to be very sympathetic, and others could not be relied on for support, so they felt they had nowhere to go.

A very positive recent development has been the formation of the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC). Although the collective's principal mandate is in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention, it also provides useful support and networking functions to sex workers throughout the country. In relation to violence from clients, for instance, NZPC encourages workers to record any identifying details about aggressive men and circulate these on an "ugly mugs list" so that others can be alerted to the danger.

The collective represents one very visible way in which sex workers in New Zealand are empowering themselves. For the last three years I have been on NZPC's Board of Trustees and I continue to have contact with many of the women I interviewed for the book. Sometimes we have done presentations to community groups together, and at other times I have written job references for women wanting to leave the industry.

So although the book is complete, my involvement has by no means ended and I expect I will be "talking to working girls" for a long time yet.

References

Jan Robinson (1987). "The Oldest Profession." In Shelagh Cox (ed) *Public and Private Worlds: Women in Contemporary New Zealand*. Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington.

Jan Jordan (1991). *Working Girls: Women in the New Zealand Sex Industry*. Penguin Books, Auckland.

WOMEN AND THE WORK PLACE: THE CALUMET DISTRICT WOMEN'S CAUCUS

James B Lane

For almost a century, the Calumet region of northwest Indiana and northeast Illinois has been one of the most heavily industrialised steelmaking centres in the world. It epitomises the rise and decline of labour-intensive industry in what some people call America's rustbelt.¹

I got involved in researching the Calumet District Women's Caucus as a result of a larger project having to do with oral history and the work place. Specifically, I was examining the changing nature of occupational narratives among steelworkers over the past 20 years, a period that has seen a dramatic shift in the size, age, gender and racial composition of the work force.²

During the early 1970s, folklorist Richard M Dorson brought a team of field researchers to the Calumet region to determine whether steelworkers possessed a body of folklore comparable with that of cowboys, lumberjacks, coal miners and oil drillers. The folklore of steel came out, Dorson found, not in songs, like with lumberjacks and cowboys, but in oral narrations: anecdotes swapped during breaks or maybe in bars. They dealt with deaths and accidents, thefts and vandalism, horseplay and sleeping on the job, rats and other mill creatures. They often featured oddball characters with strange nicknames such as the Wartman, Onion Head and Fuck-face Jones. An overriding theme was the hatefulness of work: in these vignettes steelworkers often assumed the role of trickster or prankster pitted against an authority figure. Steelworkers' tales generally dealt with the unusual rather than the commonplace. Thus, they were not so much representational of

daily routine as bizarre, dramatic, symbolic parables.³

When my students and I interviewed steelworkers almost two decades later, we discovered a large body of gender-based stories which, for the most part, had gone unexamined by Dorson. These stories reflected the growing number of women hired between 1974 and 1979 by the region's three largest steel mills (US, Inland and Bethlehem). When told by male informants, these stories usually fell into the genre of scatological humour. When told by women, the narrations generally had as their underlying theme the pervasiveness of sex discrimination in the mills.

Particularly valuable was an interview with Valerie Denney, a millwright at US Steel who brought a feminist perspective to her stories about the hazing of newcomers and the varieties of mill humour. As she described it:

Clearly there is a pack mentality that goes on. You have a few outspoken people who set the tone. The rest of the people just tend to go along. But you go through this thing as a female worker. Everybody's got to try you out. With the guys, the most outspoken leaders try you out and determine your mettle and then it's fine. With a woman, every single person has to try you out. That's part of the reason it takes so long to get comfortable because you've got to run through everybody's game. Everybody runs a game on you.

For example, one guy's game consisted of first talking dirty and then putting up a *Playboy* pin-up. I thought, "Should I make a big deal about this or what? Is it just going to encourage him?" I waited until he was out of the bullpen and took the pin-up down and threw it away. He never put up another one. He probably knew that I was the one that took it down, but he wasn't faced with it directly and forced to respond.

Then he started reading dirty books out loud. There were five of us working the back turn. We were sitting around. He had brought some pornographic material in and started reading it. I wasn't morally offended by it, but I realised that it was some kind of attack on me. It was an attempt to make me feel uncomfortable. So I just said the first thing that came in to my mind; I didn't even mean it but it worked. I said, "Sometimes I get the idea that you guys are all homosexuals." He stopped and never did it again.

James B Lane is Professor of History at Indiana University Northwest. He is the editor of *Steel Shavings*, a magazine dealing with the social history of northwest Indiana. He is also the director of the Oral History Project of the Calumet Regional Archives. This paper was delivered at the 1991 NOHANZ conference, "Women and Oral History".

Later two young women in their twenties came into my department. They didn't last. They were so distracted by all the male attention. It would have been a hard thing to handle. I was happily married when I came into the mill and was not looking for male attention. It was fun for them, but they got so much attention that they didn't have time to learn the job.

That's the thing. Nobody cares about you learning the job. Nobody looks out for you but you. They were distracted and didn't understand that they had to look out for themselves, that these guys who were flirting with them and spending time with them were going to go off and do the job; and if these girls couldn't do the job, they'd be in trouble. They didn't make it.

One was dating a married man. She was about 22 and he was about 45. His job was going to be there. If there ever was going to be a conflict, it was going to be her that was expendable. He was needed while she had no skills and was not getting any. He put her on his crew. She never had to do a thing. There were a lot of jokes about it - that she filed his fingernails.

She never carried any hoses or tools either. Millwrights have to use pneumatic tools for tightening bolts. They use air so you have to carry hoses to hook up to the outlets. It was a big drag, dragging these hoses around. They're fairly heavy and dirty. That's typically what the low-status people on a crew had to do.

It's really hard because they bring the women into the departments one by one. There's one here and one there and one there. There's nobody there to help them through it. That's why the dropout rate is so high.⁴

Valerie Denney belonged to a Women's Committee at US Steel, as well as the district-wide Women's Caucus, and introduced me to newsletters, flyers and other written materials having to do with those organisations, which whetted my appetite to do a full study about them. My method of research was first to exhaust the written records and then proceed with oral histories. That way, I could perhaps measure the value of the interviews in terms of what information and insights I gained from them that I could not otherwise have gotten.⁵

The avowed purpose of the Women's Caucus was to articulate and redress the particular problems of women steelworkers through the development of women's organisations at the local, district and international levels of the steelworkers' union. A caucus statement of grievances and demands called for better washroom facilities for women, an end to sexual harassment and what were called "revolving door" hiring and firing policies, a shorter probationary period for new employees, and provisions for maternity leave and child care. A caucus recruiting poster -

entitled "Sister! Is Your Job Getting You Down?" - portrayed two women, one white and the other African-American, about to be crushed by a man's shoe, symbolising the heel of management.⁶

Caucus newsletters, appearing four to six times a year between 1977 and 1982, were valuable in three ways: first, in providing a history (called a herstory) of important caucus milestones; second, by recording personal "on the job" testimonies of aggrieved women steelworkers; and third, by delineating caucus activities, which ranged from monthly meetings and yearly conferences, banquets and picnics to frequent participation in protest rallies and lobbying activities, sometimes in support of wider feminist issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment, Affirmative Action and Abortion Rights. The caucus also put together consciousness-raising programmes on such topics as "Myths of Rape" and even staged a hard hat fashion show (one caucus demand was for hats, shoes and other safety gear in a variety of sizes more applicable to women).⁷

Prior to the formation of the Women's Caucus in the winter of 1976-77, a national Black Caucus of steelworkers had instituted a lawsuit which resulted in the so-called Fairfield (Alabama) consent decree of 1974. Among other things, the Fairfield decree brought about an industry-wide pledge that at least 20 percent of new hires would be women. Also pre-dating the caucus were the formation of two local women's committees, one at Bethlehem which filed a lawsuit over pregnancy leave (limited then to six weeks without benefits), and the other at US Steel's Gary works which was called the Wash Room Committee. After I began interviewing the founders of these local committees, I realised how they were at least as important in effecting change as the district-wide caucus.⁸

In the spring of 1978, women at US Steel's Gary works set up a Committee on Sexual Abuse which held hearings and concluded that overt sexual harassment was "just the tip of the iceberg" of a host of gender-based inequities ranging from unfair job assignments to pornographic displays. (Not just graffiti and pin-ups - electrical apprentices were shown images of female nudes interspersed in a slide presentation, supposedly as a teaching device to relieve boredom.) A caucus editorial advised filing grievances against sexually abusive foremen and other managerial personnel, adding: "Your foreman is never [just] a personal problem. He is your Boss."⁹

Once the Women's Caucus was successfully launched, the newsletter frequently mentioned how the movement was spreading to other districts outside the Calumet region. Women from all over the country would attend the Calumet region district women's conferences. Caucus officers would frequently travel to Pittsburgh, Birmingham and elsewhere to train other women in how to set up their own caucus.¹⁰

I have interviewed more than a dozen members of the Women's Caucus as well as several women steelworkers who never joined the movement. One insight I gained from these oral histories was the degree to which the Women's Caucus was an outgrowth of a rank-and-file democracy movement within the steelworkers' union. This democracy movement arose in the early 1970s in opposition to the entrenched union leadership, which had allegedly bargained away union members' rights. Under the banners "Right to Strike" and "Right to Ratify", the democracy movement supported the candidacy of Ed Sadlowski for district director. Sadlowski lost a disputed election in 1973, won a court-ordered special election in 1974 and ran for president of the international in February 1977. He lost, but another democracy movement candidate, Jim Balanoff, was elected district director in that same election. As Mary Elgin put it: "The founders of the caucus got to know each other during that campaign. It made it all come together."¹¹

Caucus co-chairs Roberta Wood and Ola Kennedy, who worked closely together during the Sadlowski-Balanoff campaigns, saw the caucus as a means of organising politically-conscious women. One unstated purpose of the caucus was to provide leadership training, guidance and emotional support for women seeking union office. "To get women a place in the union," was how Diane Kaczocha put it. Prior to the caucus, she said, "Women weren't even listened to at meetings." Many caucus members subsequently became assistant grievors and ran for other elective union positions. In time it became common practice for all union factions to slate at least one woman on their ticket.¹²

Caucus members sought social contact with sympathetic union brothers, as well as political contact. In fact, their main fundraiser was a weekly mixer at a local disco.¹³

While union politicking was prohibited during caucus meetings, it commonly took place beforehand and afterwards. Non-aligned women steelworkers viewed caucus members as "politicians" who were constantly

pushing their agenda and encouraging attendance at union meetings. Caucus newsletters focused on sex discrimination by *management*, but combatting sexism within the union was also a caucus objective.¹⁴

Robin Rich recalls that prior to hiring in at the mill, she had never even heard the phrase "sexual harassment". Then a week or two later, she walked into a shanty, where a bunch of guys were sitting around and, in her words, "one guy had his dick hanging out for my benefit. I felt like I was going to pass out, I was so upset," she said. "I went running out of there. Since I was on probation, I didn't know what to do. Meanwhile, I joined the Women's Caucus. After my probation period was over, I told the union president and he told the guy he couldn't do that to a union sister."

Another insight gleaned from the oral histories was the degree to which caucus members belonged to left wing radical organisations, including a bewildering variety of sectarian splinter groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Spartacist League, the Revolutionary Union, the Revolutionary Workers Party, the October League and the Marxist-Leninist Organising Committee (whose members were nicknamed the Albanians). One of the last told me that "everybody knew who everybody was. For the lefties, that was part of their job - to figure out who people were, who they sat with at union meetings, what newspaper they distributed." She added: "In the beginning, people were always in the embarrassing position of trying to recruit each other. Somebody would seem to be really progressive and show up at meetings, so you'd put a lot of energy into recruiting them until you found out that, of course, they were there because they already belonged to an organisation."¹⁵

More important than these aforementioned splinter groups, however, were the Communist Party (CP) and the International Socialists (IS). The latter was a Trotskyite group, tiny nationally but strong locally because many IS members moved to northwest Indiana specifically to join the industrial labour force. All of these groups, in one way or another, believed that the key to meaningful change lay in radicalising American workers. The CP had roots in Gary dating back more than a half century. Roberta Wood was a CP member who believed in "popular front" alliances such as the Women's Caucus (and the Union Democracy Movement) as ways of nudging the labour movement leftwards. CP members such as Roberta Wood were respected as good

Robin Rich described the caucus as a core group trying to get women to have the guts to stand up and be leaders in the union. Ola Kennedy said: "We kind of trained them. If you're going to be a union leader, you've got to have confidence." She added: "Once I told Gloria Kelley that I wanted her to be a speaker at the Christmas dinner. 'Oh,' she said, 'I just can't do it.' I said, 'Oh yes, you can. And she did.'" Gloria Kelley later became recording secretary in her local.²⁴

The demise of the Women's Caucus coincided with the massive lay-offs of the early 1980s. The last hired, women became the first fired. While the caucus had been the defender of the principle of affirmative action, the group never seriously considered questioning the principle of seniority which so adversely affected women millworkers. Seniority was the cornerstone of unionism, for one thing, and was seen as one of the protections against management harassment. To have recommended making seniority exceptions for women would have jeopardised union solidarity within the democracy movement. Instead the caucus fruitlessly pursued other alternatives such as shorter work weeks.²⁵

Mary Elgin, who was one of the last caucus co-chairs, recalled that, "Women were getting laid off in such large numbers that meetings got to be too depressing. It made me think about tailing it off. The whole conversation would be, 'Are you still working?' 'No, I've been laid off.' And they'd talk about losing their house and car. Over half the women at one point were not working [including co-founders Roberta Wood and Ola Kennedy and newsletter editor Doreen Labby]." Mary Elgin concluded: "There was nothing the rest of the women could do to save them. I decided it was counterproductive to have these women assemble."²⁶

The caucus movement, according to Robin Rich, lost some of its steam when women started getting elected to union positions. As Diane Kaczocha put it, "We became relaxed. A lot of women were involved in union office and we had accomplished our main goals." The same week Robin Rich was elected to the executive board of her local, she was laid off. For the next several months, she put her energies into a caucus committee to provide food and other aid to the unemployed. The priority, she said, was survival, adding: "By the time I got back to the mill in 1987, it was hard to think about what we should be doing as women anymore."²⁷

Although the Women's Caucus failed to satisfy the ambitious aims set for it by its radical founders (the Union Democracy Movement is also largely moribund as are the CP and the IS), it was a consciousness-raising vehicle which helped win tangible benefits for women workers in terms of washroom facilities and disability pregnancy leaves. Most of all, it signalled that women were in the mills to stay, that women steelworkers were not just a passing thing, and that sexual harassment would not be tolerated. As Robin Rich put it, "Now supervisors get training in how not to sexually harass. It still happens but nothing like before. Even so, a whole lot of management offices have pictures of nude women on the wall. To me it's a real throwback and an indication that the women's movement isn't as strong as it used to be."²⁸

So what about the importance of oral history? To repeat, the interviews provided me with four new insights into the caucus movement: first, the primacy of the local committees; second, the link with the Union Democracy Movement; third, the extent to which radicals dominated the caucus leadership; and fourth, the degree to which the caucus was a vanguard movement rather than a mass movement. Even more important, the occupational narratives fleshed out the nature of the mill experience for women. For example, Roberta Wood recalled that women were given jobs that were harder than would be given to men just to see whether they would do it. As Cheryl Petersen put it: "I'd warn the new women. I'd say, 'Listen, you're in for the worst hell of your life.' The blast furnace area was so filthy you couldn't see 30 feet in front of you. Then you'd walk the steps to the furnace. It was terrifying. . . . My first six months, I felt so harassed. I went home too tired to eat. I'd go to sleep and wake up crying. My folks would say, 'Quit.' My dad would give me that look, like 'she can't handle it'. I kept going to prove him wrong."²⁹

When Diane Kaczocha entered Bethlehem's blast furnace, she learned that all previous women assigned there had been run out by the men. Her foreman made her lift hundred-pound bags and caused her to get burned by not warning her of danger. The foreman's tactics only made Diane more determined to stick it out. When she joined the caucus, she made sure that the organisation found the time to take up individual complaints, as well as more general issues pertaining to women.³⁰

References

- 1 See Powell A Moore, *The Calumet Region: Indiana's Last Frontier* (Indianapolis, 1959).
- 2 In the Gary-Hammond-East Chicago steel mills, for example, there were 1559 women workers in 1975, representing 3 percent of the total. That compares with 2485 in 1981 (8 percent) and 1018 in 1985 (5.6 percent). See EEOC *Employment Analysis Report Program*. Records for those years are in the Calumet Regional Archives (Gary, Indiana).
- 3 See Richard M Dorson, *Land of the Millrats: Urban Folklore in Indiana's Calumet Region* (Cambridge, 1981). Also see James B Lane, "Land of the Millrats Revisited", *Steel Shavings* (Vol 19), 1-2.
- 4 "Reminiscences of Valerie Denney", *Steel Shavings* (Vol 19), 68-77.
- 5 These written records are located in the Calumet Regional Archives of Indiana University Northwest.
- 6 District # 31 Women's Caucus, *Newsletter*, Vol 10 (September 1978).
- 7 *Newsletter*, Vol 11 (November-December 1978). See also *Union Sister* (newsletter of the Bethlehem Steel Women's Committee), September-October 1979.
- 8 *Newsletter*, Vol 9 (June 1978); interview with Diane Kaczocha, 23 May 1991.
- 9 *Newsletter*, Vol 8 (April 1978); *Newsletter*, Vol 16 (January 1980).
- 10 *Newsletter*, Vol 13 (March-May 1979).
- 11 Interviews with Roberta Wood (25 May 1991), Al Sampter (14 May 1991) and Mary Elgin (17 April 1991). Typescripts are in the Calumet Regional Archives.
- 12 Interviews with Ola Kennedy (21 March 1991), Diane Kaczocha (22 May 1991) and Robin Rich (24 March 1991).
- 13 Interview with Robin Rich.
- 14 Interviews with Doreen Labby (30 January 1991), Cheryl Petersen (1 April 1991) and Robin Rich.
- 15 Interview with Lin Katz Chary (18 March 1991).
- 16 Interviews with Valerie Denney (8 and 22 February 1990) and Ola Kennedy.
- 17 Interview with Roberta Wood.
- 18 Interviews with Valerie Denney and Doreen Labby.
- 19 Interviews with Lin Katz Chary, Robin Rich and Diana Kaczocha.
- 20 Interview with Doreen Labby.
- 21 Interviews with Robin Rich, Mary Elgin and Ola Kennedy.
- 22 Interview with Cheryl Petersen.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Interviews with Robin Rich and Ola Kennedy.
- 25 Interviews with Mary Elgin and Diane Kaczocha.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Interviews with Robin Rich and Diane Kaczocha.
- 28 Interview with Robin Rich.
- 29 Interview with Cheryl Petersen.
- 30 Interview with Diane Kaczocha.

SOUTHERN VOICES: BACKGROUND TO A BOOK

Adrienne Simpson

The showpiece of Wellington's International Festival of the Arts in March 1990 was a gala season of Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (*The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*). The production proved to be a triumph for Donald McIntyre, the singer who undertook the massive and pivotal role of Hans Sachs and brought to his interpretation all the insight and authority that had long marked him as one of the world's leading bass-baritones. For the Auckland-born McIntyre, it was the first time he had ever appeared on the professional operatic stage in his own country.

The massive publicity campaign surrounding the festival inevitably centred on *Die Meistersinger*, one of the largest and most costly theatrical projects ever undertaken in New Zealand. A significant amount of this media coverage was aimed at giving information about Donald McIntyre and his overseas achievements. That one of this country's greatest artistic exports should need such an introduction struck me as depressing. Unwary friends were treated to diatribes about the extraordinarily high proportion of New Zealanders who were currently singing at international level, and how they belonged to a continuing tradition which, taken on a per capita basis, made this country one of the world's most productive nurseries of vocal talent. One day, I said, I would like to write a book about some of our finest singers so that everyone in New Zealand could marvel at their exploits.

Adrienne Simpson is a music and theatre historian. She is co-author with Peter Downes of *Southern Voices - International Opera Singers of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1992). She was the 1991 National Library of New Zealand's Research Fellow, and is a member of the NOHANZ Executive Committee.

My comments had an unexpected outcome. A few months later, Ian Watt, the then newly appointed managing editor of the Octopus Publishing Group (NZ) Ltd, approached me and expressed interest in just such a book. I was keen to grasp the opportunity, but because I was already heavily committed to a project about touring opera in 19th century New Zealand, I asked if I could bring in a colleague as co-author. This was agreed, and I was fortunate that theatre historian Peter Downes was prepared to set aside his own major project on the Pollard opera companies and join me in what we both felt was a thoroughly good cause.

From the beginning we rejected the idea of creating a dictionary of names, facts and dates. Tracing a singer's rise to prominence and giving detailed coverage of their achievements was important, but we also wanted to bring each individual alive for the reader by allowing space for at least a flavour of their personality and attitudes to emerge. By examining their early lives in detail we hoped to find patterns that would help explain why New Zealand produces so many good singers. Obtaining personal insights into their working methods and the way they had planned their careers also seemed valuable. Since we felt that the only satisfactory way of gleaning this kind of information was by interviewing those singers still living, the commitment to an oral history component in our research was made at the outset.

Having decided on our approach to the book, we then drew up a list of singers for possible inclusion. We knew we would be unable to write about all the New Zealanders who had sung successfully overseas. There were simply too many of them. After consultations with Octopus, a limit of 20 chapters was decided upon. The first would be introductory. The remaining 19 would each profile an individual artist. This would give us sufficient scope to treat our subjects with the required degree of substance, yet keep the finished publication to a realistic size, and therefore price. It was at this stage, too, that

the project acquired its title, *Southern Voices - International Opera Singers of New Zealand*.

The 19 singers finally selected for *Southern Voices* all fulfilled three simple criteria: they had been born in New Zealand, had maintained international (as distinct from New Zealand) prominence as opera singers over a considerable number of years, and were known primarily for their singing which had been their principal career and the major source of their livelihood. Beyond these essential qualifications we took into account several additional factors, including length and eminence of career, participation in notable events, or creation of important roles. We also weighted our choice towards those who had completed, or were nearing the end of, their careers. The chosen singers, arranged in order of birth as in the book, are:

Frances Alda, soprano (1879-1952)
Rosina Buckman, soprano (1881-1948)
Denis Dowling, baritone (1910)
Oscar Natzka, bass (1912-51)
Inia Te Wiata, bass (1915-71)
Bryan Drake, baritone (1925)
Noel Mangin, bass (1931)
Heather Begg, mezzo-soprano (1932)
Peter Baillie, tenor (1933)
Donald McIntyre, bass-baritone (1934)
Anson Austin, tenor (1940)
Barry Mora, baritone (1940)
Patricia Payne, mezzo-soprano (1942)
Rodney Macann, bass-baritone (1942)
Malvina Major, soprano (1943)
Kiri Te Kanawa, soprano (1944)
Richard Greager, tenor (1946)
Patrick Power, tenor (1947)
Keith Lewis, tenor (1950)

As can be seen, all but four are living singers. Some have retired, while several others are, by their own admission, gradually reducing the amount of work they accept. Opera places enormous demands upon its performers, and very few can maintain their vocal and physical strength sufficiently unimpaired to sing internationally at the normally accepted retirement ages of 65 or 60. Even Kiri Te Kanawa, who is still well short of 50, admitted in a September 1990 interview published in the *New Zealand Herald*: "You are looking at the back end of my career. I am winding down and there is going to be one day when I am just going to come out on stage and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, it's been great. You've given me a wonderful life and I'd just like to say thank you - and goodbye.'"

In writing about the majority of these singers we were therefore able to view their working lives in reasonable perspective.

What we could not do was work from secondary sources. Only three books existed: Frances Alda's colourful autobiography *Men, Women and Tenors* (Boston, 1937); Beryl Te Wiata's biography of her husband, *Most Happy Fella* (Wellington, 1976); and David Fingleton's biography *Kiri* (London, 1982). There were very few useful articles available, and even fewer turned out to be accurate. In most cases we were astonished at the scarcity of secondary documentation. *Southern Voices* outlines the careers of at least half these singers for the very first time.

Our aim was to produce a lively yet accurate text, a book that would be of interest in itself as well as providing an informed and scholarly starting point for future biographers. Initially, we spent hours working through the specialist journals - such as the English magazine *Opera*, the American *Opera News*, *Opernwelt* (Germany) and *Opera Australia* - that exist to chronicle and review productions around the world. This enabled us to build up chronologies of each singer's career once they left New Zealand. We tried to complete these chronologies and acquire as much background material as possible before obtaining the oral interviews so essential to the next stage of our work.

We had already made contact with the appropriate singers, or with their agents, informing them about the book and explaining that we would like to arrange an interview. We had also drawn up a list of standard questions to which we needed answers. Starting from the obvious (family details, date and place of birth, schooling, qualifications), the list went on to cover career information, their approach to the craft and technique of opera, and their opinions on topics as diverse as the right attributes for success, and what they felt about New Zealand. These questions were supplemented with others that were specific to the particular individual being interviewed. We bore in mind the need to be flexible, so that we did not discourage interviewees from expanding on our questions or digressing into matters of interest to themselves. In the event, some of these digressions yielded fascinating anecdotes that have enlivened our text.

Right from the beginning, financial realities and our tight schedule made obtaining these oral histories difficult. Many of the singers we wanted to feature were based abroad and spent much of their time jetting between different international opera houses. We could hardly afford to jet off after them. Most replied quickly and enthusiastically to our

initial inquiry, often with the information that they did not have a visit to New Zealand planned within the limits of our research period. It quickly became clear that we were not going to be able to conduct all the necessary interviews in person. A bit of lateral thinking was needed.

We first investigated what already existed. The Alexander Turnbull Library's Archive of New Zealand Music held three relevant oral history interviews: Bryan Drake (MS C 3143-3144, interviewed by J M Thomson); Donald McIntyre (MS C 2479-2481, interviewed by Roger Flury); and Patricia Payne (MS C 2531-2532, interviewed by Adrienne Simpson). All were recent, all were comprehensive, and Jill Palmer, the Turnbull music librarian, readily granted permission for their use, subject only to our making an official request and giving her the finished chapters to read before they went to the publisher. Since all three singers were based in England, the existence of these oral histories was a great help. Although they had not been tailored to the specific requirements of *Southern Voices*, they covered virtually all the material needed. We were easily able to supplement them through personal correspondence with each singer, and we later managed to acquire our own interview with Donald McIntyre when he made a brief visit to New Zealand in the middle of 1991.

We felt initially that obtaining further oral histories through the Turnbull would be a suitable procedure. It would ensure the tapes found a good home where they would be available to other researchers. Jill Palmer took a keen interest in our project, and generously commissioned interviews with two singers who visited New Zealand early in the research phase of our work: Anson Austin (MS C 3564-3567, interviewed by Peter Downes) and Patrick Power (MS T 1083, interviewed by Kerry Stevens). However, in the end we decided against organising subsequent interviews through the Turnbull.

There were two reasons for this. The first was one of fairness to the library itself. Our interest was to get the right material for the book. This did not necessarily square with what a good oral history interview for the Turnbull should be. Where we carried out an interview ourselves we could make adjustments and ask questions on the Turnbull's behalf as well as our own. This is what happened with the Anson Austin oral history. Patrick Power, however, was available only while passing through Auckland to record a broadcast performance, and the interview with him was set up with the assistance of

Kerry Stevens of Radio New Zealand. Kerry had little time to prepare and worked entirely from the list of questions we supplied to him. Future users of the archive tape, mystified by references to "the book" and "Adrienne would like to know about . . ." will no doubt wonder what was going on.

The second reason was the important one of flexibility and practicality. To use these oral histories effectively they needed to be transcribed as well as listened to. If the tapes were ours we could do that at our own pace, working directly on to typewriter or PC. Since neither of us owned laptops, Turnbull tapes had to be laboriously transcribed by hand at the library and then typed up at home. If nothing else, the exercise proved that when oral histories are used for publication purposes, or as a source of historical and biographical information, they need to be made available in hard copy format. Of course, transcripts must be checked against the original by researchers. Apart from picking up minor mistakes made in transcription, hearing a person speak gives many valuable insights into their personality. But for any serious scholarly work based on spoken material, transcripts are essential. Moreover, abstracts certainly do not provide an adequate guide to the potential material in an oral history.

Thereafter we carried out interviews on our own account, or enlisted the aid of qualified colleagues elsewhere to carry them out under our direction. We also accumulated some interesting oral material which had originally been generated for other purposes. We obtained, for example, a video-taped interview with Keith Lewis, who had recorded it for Television New Zealand while on a visit to New Zealand some months before we started researching *Southern Voices*, and another he gave to Radio New Zealand's Concert Programme at the same time. By diverse means we eventually built up what we feel is a significant oral archive, which we currently retain. However, it is our intention to place the bulk of our material at Jill Palmer's disposal once we have completely finished with it, so that as much as possible can be preserved in the Turnbull and so provide a database for the future. As well as oral histories, the material includes copies of reviews, correspondence, programmes, general background items, and transcripts of interviews with friends and colleagues of the various singers.

Before we began collecting our oral histories, we worried that the number of questions

on our list would prove daunting to those interviewed. This never became a problem. Most artists, we found, like talking about their work. They will respond well as soon as they are sure that the interviewer genuinely knows and understands the subject under discussion. Once we, or our agents, had established a rapport, we were treated to some cynical comments on the subject of other interviewers. Several singers had suffered badly from inaccurate newspaper reporting, and one had not granted an interview for over 15 years because she was "sick of people who knew nothing about opera and got all the names wrong".

In general, the singers concerned showed great enthusiasm for our project, and we were touched when some expressed gratitude that we were taking an interest in their achievements. Several reflected on the anomalous situation of being known in an international context, yet almost unknown in the land of their birth. "In Italy we'd all be heroes," said Malvina Major, as she contrasted New Zealand attitudes to the arts with those of other countries. We liked the phrase so much that we used it as the title for our introductory chapter.

In the course of our work we did reach certain conclusions as to why and how such a high proportion of singers from one small country has made an impact in the international operatic arena. We also found ourselves delighted and often amazed at the extraordinary exploits of these artists. But readers who want to know more about such aspects, and about the singers themselves, must buy the book. From the NOHANZ point of view, it is obviously of more general interest if I conclude by outlining the way in which we used the oral histories we had gathered.

Here again, our decision was made early on. We had no intention of simply transcribing and printing interviews. We treated the singers' descriptions of their upbringing and personal lives, and the anecdotes they told us about their careers, as a starting point for obtaining hard information; and we always cross-checked what they told us for accuracy. We drew material freely from those sections in which they expressed personal opinions, particularly when they talked about their attitudes to their work and the attributes needed to become a professional artist. We also reproduced many comments reflecting their feelings towards New Zealand. In general, however, our approach was to illumi-

nate the narrative with judicious quotes from these histories, which we integrated into our own text.

Oral historians might well ask why we did not simply let the singers speak for themselves by producing edited transcripts of our tapes. To point out that, as four of the singers were no longer living, they were unable to speak for themselves rather begs the question. Not all of those interviewed were succinct or articulate. But more importantly, not all were accurate in what they said. Some had only the haziest recollection of dates; some were unsure where certain events had taken place. Their words provided a starting point, and often involved us in a considerable amount of further research. To print transcripts of these tapes would have had about the same relationship to a full description of the subject's life and career as a pencil sketch bears to a finished portrait.

There were other problems. One singer had been interviewed so often that he had acquired what might be described as a standard technicolour version of his life. He clearly trotted this out by rote whenever a tape recorder was put in front of him. When checked, some of his stories turned out to be either highly embroidered or to have conflated more than one event. Other singers, as we won their confidence, gave us material that was too personal, or too libellous, to have been published as it stood. It was up to us to distil what were sometimes painful and tragic, yet important events, into a form that all concerned felt comfortable about seeing in print. In the course of our work we came across just one singer whose memory for dates and ability to evoke an occasion in a vivid and well constructed way struck us as sufficiently outstanding for his narrative to have been presented almost as it stood.

Our approach obviously reflects a particular attitude to oral history. We were writing biographies which we did not intend should be ephemeral. Accuracy of information and a rounded approach to the subject were among our paramount aims. In such a context my own feeling is that oral histories must be regarded as an important primary source, but never as a finished product in their own right. We could not have written *Southern Voices* without the use of oral history techniques. Yet, as we quickly found, to have taken what was told us as gospel would have been most unwise. How successfully we have fused oral history and conventional historical research is for the reader to decide.

CREATING A DIRECTORY OF ORAL HISTORY HOLDINGS

Maribeth Coleman

Over the years many finding aids have been created to give people access to the resources available in libraries and other institutions. Researchers use union catalogues of serials, theses and bibliographies; indexes to periodicals and newspapers; and registers of archives and manuscripts, to direct them to where existing material can be found. Until now there has been no such finding aid for oral history tapes in New Zealand. The National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) is in the process of filling this void by creating a Directory of Oral History Holdings to be accessed nationwide through the Kiwinet computer system of the National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga O Aotearoa. This finding aid will indicate not only where tapes on a particular subject are held, but whether they are part of a larger collection, who made the recording, a brief summary of the contents, as well as accessibility and restrictions on use.

There are a number of ways in which oral history is created. Some research workers who are expert in the field and therefore capable of interviewing participants, seek answers to questions that are not to be found in traditional written documents. They can seek clarification, confirmation, and interpretation of events about which there is some disagreement. Oral history can also be an attempt to capture the recollections of people, ordinary and distinguished, on whatever aspects of their lives they are willing to reveal to the interviewer or the interviewer wants to know about. Thirdly, for many indigenous

peoples whose history and culture is transmitted in the spoken rather than the written form, being able to capture that tradition on tape provides a permanent record. A fourth broad category of oral history involves an attempt to record the attitudes, recollections and feelings of people whose lives are not recorded in letters, diaries or memoirs, but whose perspectives on their lives and the events surrounding them give a balance to those of the more literate.

How did the Directory of Oral History Holdings come about? In 1987, newly arrived from the United States and attending one of my first NOHANZ committee meetings, I asked chairperson Claudia Orange where I could find a listing of all the oral history tapes in New Zealand. She answered that there was no complete national directory that included holdings of large and small institutions as well as tapes held by individuals. It was decided that this was a project NOHANZ could take on and I was asked to organise it. Oral historians Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson had sent out a questionnaire in 1983 for the New Zealand Oral History Archive (NZOHA). It was a good beginning, but now a more comprehensive questionnaire for each tape was required.

The first step was for me to enlist the help of Peter Morris, NOHANZ secretary. Together we worked with Tim Lovell-Smith, oral history librarian at the Alexander Turnbull Library, to devise a questionnaire compatible with the computer listings the Turnbull was using for its oral history holdings. This was not as easy as we had hoped. We wanted to make sure that the questionnaire was in a form simple enough not to put off all but the most dedicated professional. It was to go to museums, art galleries, religious institutions, government agencies, libraries, university departments, as well as to individual New Zealanders. It had to be clear and concise, yet give us all the information required. We wanted to know where the tapes were held, what they contained, and whether there were any restrictions on their use. Fitting the information we wanted into the format already existing on the Turnbull computer took many months of meetings.

First working as an oral historian while an archivist for the Alexian Brothers in Chicago, USA, Maribeth Coleman retained her interest in oral history on coming to New Zealand through helping to set up the Directory of Oral History Holdings.

The next step was to obtain funding. Requests for money were written. And finally, NOHANZ received a grant from the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board to establish a national Directory of Oral History Holdings in New Zealand.

Now it was down to business. NZOHA gave me a desk in their office in the Turnbull Library. Paul Mahoney, NOHANZ president, wrote a cover letter for the questionnaire. Working from lists of institutions and individuals, I began sending out the questionnaire. A filing system was developed for the returns. Peter Morris wrote letters to the editors of newspapers throughout New Zealand stressing the fact that many individuals were becoming aware of their own history and were making tapes, or had made tapes of family members in the past. He invited them to contact us for questionnaires. I wrote to magazines, historical journals, local history organisations, genealogical societies - any place I thought might have access to material. I set up tables at conferences and coerced other NOHANZ members to take material to meetings they attended. When responses did not come back I sent out reminders. Notices went to libraries in the hope they would be put up on bulletin boards. Questionnaires went to local government bodies. Many of these were returned by the Post Office as addresses and names had changed when they became regional bodies encompassing greater areas. I had a crash course in New Zealand geography as I pored over a map trying to locate a town and to fit it into the new classification. People in the Oral History Centre became used to my asking, "Is this town in the North or South Island? Top or bottom?"

We then contacted the institutions who had been sent forms in 1983. We acknowledged that the respondents had already done this exercise but stressed that it was important to have more comprehensive information.

The response has been good, but not as extensive as I had hoped. Individuals and small institutions were the first to reply as they had fewer tapes. I realised what a time-

consuming job filling in the forms could be, especially when we were asking that a form be completed for each tape. It is understandable that in these times of staff shortages and increased work loads, most institutions with large holdings simply do not have the time to stop and perform this exercise. One of my latest reminders has asked for the number of tapes each institution holds, to at least give us some idea of what exists.

Much of the information obtained has now been entered on to the computer network of the National Library. It is hoped that in the near future NOHANZ will turn over the directory project to the director of the Alexander Turnbull Library Oral History Centre. The initial work of compiling a backlog of information is understandably overwhelming. We will recommend that a further grant be sought to hire field workers throughout New Zealand to complete the questionnaire for institutions.

Once the directory has been created and is accessible to patrons either on Kiwinet, or in hard copy for those facilities not on line, NOHANZ anticipates that the Oral History Centre will continue to update the directory by seeking and obtaining from participating institutions and organisations listings of their acquisitions. It is also expected that members of NOHANZ will keep the Oral History Centre informed of their own work and of the work of other oral historians working in the field. The hard copy should be updated once a year.

It will all be worthwhile. Researchers will know what is available. Those who make oral history tapes and those who use them will be working together. Tapes made for one project often contain material useful for an entirely different subject.

A final plea - if you have a questionnaire not yet completed, please fill it out and return to: NOHANZ, PO Box 3819, Wellington.

The questionnaire is reproduced on the following pages. Readers may photocopy and use this if they wish to contribute to the directory.

DIRECTORY OF ORAL HISTORY HOLDINGS

SURVEY

USE OF THE FORMS

Part A deals with your collection of oral history recordings as a whole. This part will give enough information to provide a useful short entry for the oral history database. **Please complete**, even if you do not intend completing Part B.

Part B is concerned with individual recordings or interviews. Notes are provided for your guidance. Please complete one form for each interview. Photocopy extra forms as required.

NOTES TO PART B

NB The word "recording" refers to the recording, together with any accompanying material.

- 1 **Title**
eg Interview with ...
Recording of ...
- 2 If the recording is not an interview, enter the name of the recorder.
- 3 **Part of.** Indicate if the recording is part of a larger collection.
eg Part of Martinborough Oral History Collection
- 4 **Linguistic note.** Indicate if you think that the language of the recording is interesting in use of dialect, words, etc.
- 5 **Restrictions.** Detail any restrictions on access to or the use of the recording. Give details (continue on back of sheet if necessary).
- 6 **Summary of contents.** Key people, places and topics should be included for searching on the oral history database.

ORAL HISTORY SURVEY

PART A

ORAL HISTORY HOLDINGS

I LOCATION

- 1 Name of organisation or person holding the material:
- 2 Address:
- 3 Phone number:
- 4 Contact person (if an organisation):

II PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

	No of tapes	No of hours
Cassette tape	}	}
Open reel tape		
Videotape		
Other (please specify)		

III ACCESSIBILITY

- 1 Are the recordings available for research?
Freely available Yes/No
Available with restrictions Yes/No
Please specify:

2 Are finding aids available for your recordings?

Transcripts Yes/No

Abstracts Yes/No

Indexes Yes/No

Lists of contents Yes/No

IV CONTENT

General description of the contents and period covered in the collection as a whole. Identify key people, places, topics and events. For Maori topics, list iwi and hapu.

Form completed by:

Institution/Organisation:

Please return to NOHANZ, PO Box 3819, Wellington.

ORAL HISTORY SURVEY

PART B

WORKSHEET FOR INDIVIDUAL RECORDINGS

Please read attached NOTES first.

Name

Institution/Organisation

Your recording reference number (if any)							
Title (see Note 1) Interviewer (see Note 2) Commissioner/ copyright holder of the recording							
Where recorded (city or locality) Date							
Physical description	Number of tapes: Type of tapes: cassette/open reel/videotape Playing speed: Details of recording equipment:						
Finding aids	<table> <tr> <td>Abstract</td> <td>Yes/No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Transcript</td> <td>Yes/No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Index</td> <td>Yes/No</td> </tr> </table>	Abstract	Yes/No	Transcript	Yes/No	Index	Yes/No
Abstract	Yes/No						
Transcript	Yes/No						
Index	Yes/No						

B1

Other Information

Part of
(see Note 3)

Language(s) used

Linguistic note
(see Note 4)

Technical quality

Satisfactory/Poor

Restrictions
(see Note 5)

Summary of
contents
(see Note 6)

Period covered

From

To

Form completed by:

Institution/Organisation: Date

Please return to NOHANZ, PO Box 3819, Wellington.

AUCKLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY'S 1990 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Megan Hutching

In late 1988 Auckland Public Library's specially constituted 1990 Committee proposed to the Auckland City Council that two major programmes be funded by the city as part of the 1990 commemorations. One of these was a photographic project. The other, an oral history project, was selected by the committee because it was felt that 1990 provided a good opportunity to develop the library's resources so as to further reflect the cultural inheritance of the city.

Prior to this time, an oral history archive did not exist at the Auckland Public Library although there was a small and diverse collection of recordings that had been acquired over the years. Normal staffing levels were such that it was impossible to process those tapes or record more interviews.

The management structure of the project consisted of a project coordinator and two field workers, one of whom was to work exclusively with the tangata whenua. Planning and management support was to be given for the duration of the project by the library's co-curator of manuscripts, Theresa Graham. Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson of the Oral History Archive in Wellington provided helpful advice and suggested the establishment of a project advisory committee which consisted of professional historians and subject specialists.

The brief of the oral history project had two elements: to record the oral history of the tangata whenua of Auckland, their language, kawa and traditional knowledge of the area; and to record the oral history of more recent migrants to Auckland - Pakeha, Maori, Pacific Island and other ethnic groups. The project's objectives were to preserve the native language of the tangata whenua and to increase Auckland Public Library's oral collection of Auckland's history.

Megan Hutching was coordinator of Auckland Public Library's 1990 oral history project and is now oral historian at the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs.

Both the brief and objectives were very broad and needed to be further defined once the coordinator was appointed in October 1989. The project ran only until March 1991 so it was essential that the topics of possible interviews were finalised before the field workers began in January 1990.

We were concerned that the oral history project should relate to the wide variety of interests that the library exists to serve, and that it should both reflect and uncover the past. Eventually it was decided that interviews would be topic-based rather than life histories of the interviewees, and would be conducted in five areas:

- the oral history of the tangata whenua
- entertainment and recreation in Auckland after 1945
- Auckland in the 1930s
- migration to Auckland after World War Two
- suburban profiles of two suburbs - Glen Innes and Blockhouse Bay.

(There was, of course, overlap between the topics, particularly in the cases of the tangata whenua and the two suburban profiles.)

Another decision that had to be made was about the type of equipment to be used. We bought Sony recorders, microphones and tapes. The library had two Sony WM D6C recorders and a larger TCM 5000EV, two ECM 144 clip-on and one ECM 909 freestanding microphones. Sony HF60 tapes were used during the project. We were able to get a large discount on the price of the cassettes in return for acknowledgement of Sony's sponsorship on the poster used to publicise the project.

The two field workers, Jennifer Andrews and Sarah Dalton, began work in January 1990. Before we began interviewing or even planning the interviews, we all went to a week-long training seminar run by Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson at the Wairarapa Polytechnic Summer School in Masterton. The course imparted theoretical and practical oral history knowledge and gave us the confidence we needed to begin such an extensive project.

Much of the first month after we returned from Masterton was spent telling groups and

individuals about the project. Where to find interviewees was an issue that had to be addressed early. We used a variety of methods to search out potential subjects. Senior citizens' clubs were visited, particularly in the areas selected for the suburban profiles, and extensive use was made of the Auckland Public Library's Infobank file of clubs and organisations. A poster was issued to community centres and citizens' advice bureaux to publicise the project, and we issued press releases to local and suburban newspapers. Rest homes were also contacted. We were interviewed on radio and, a method which was particularly useful for the suburban studies, took note of further contacts recommended by interviewees.

The NOHANZ Code of Ethical Practice was adopted. It was especially necessary to explain to potential informants how their interviews would be used, particularly with Maori who might not want the general public to have access to traditional knowledge. A preliminary meeting also gave each person the opportunity to refuse to be interviewed, to place restrictions on his or her tapes, or to employ some form of self-censorship when being interviewed. The tapes were not to be edited, and this had to be carefully explained to each potential interviewee.

On completion of an interview, the informant was asked to sign an agreement form, of which there were two types: one which allowed general access by the library's patrons to the information, and another which allowed the participant to place restrictions on the use of the material. Informants were encouraged to set a fixed number of years for any restrictions rather than, for example, "until my death". This was for the obvious reason that staff time at the library does not allow constant checking to see if interviewees are still alive. Some informants have not set a blanket restriction on the use of their tapes but have stipulated that their permission must be gained before the material is consulted. Almost all were happy to place no restrictions on the use of their interviews once it was explained why they were being collected.

Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to three-and-a-half hours; most were between one-and-a-half and two hours long. All the proposed topics were covered and percentages can be broken down in the table to follow.

Two things should be mentioned here. The number of interviews conducted for the "tangata whenua" category is obviously small. Family problems for our first field worker

**Coverage of Six Topics in
Auckland Public Library Oral History Project**
%

Glen Innes	16
Blockhouse Bay	10
Entertainment	10
Auckland in the Thirties	25
Migration to Auckland	18
Tangata whenua	4
Other*	16

* The "Other" category consists mainly of interviews done on Waiheke Island.
(NB Percentages are rounded so may not add up to 100)

meant that she had to resign and it was some time before we were able to find a suitable replacement. Unfortunately that interviewer felt herself unable to continue and so for most of the project's duration there was no Maori interviewer. There were lessons to be learnt from the difficulties encountered and the library has future plans for facilitating the recording of Maori oral history.

Secondly, the archive was fortunate to be the recipient of a number of large donations which included copies of the interviews conducted by Manying Ip for her book *Home Away From Home*, interviews recorded by Kaaren Hiyama for her forthcoming history of the suburb of Grey Lynn, and an especially large number of tapes from the Mt Wellington oral history project that came to the library after local body amalgamation in 1989.

The Auckland Public Library Oral History Archive was formally opened to the public on 11 September 1990 with an afternoon tea to which all interviewees and other dignitaries were invited. The collection is part of the library's manuscripts collection. Public access to the tapes is gained by way of an oral history database devised by manuscripts curator Theresa Graham, using Inmagic, version 7.1. A terminal for staff use is in the department and a hard copy is available for public consultation. This contains a very brief abstract of the interview and gives the interviewee's name and the accession number of the interview. Staff are also able to undertake keyword subject searches using the database.¹

In line with the practice of the New Zealand Oral History Archive (now the Oral History Centre) at the Alexander Turnbull Library, each interview is accompanied by a file which contains a copy of the consent form signed by the interviewee, a sheet containing technical data about the interview (equipment used and name of interviewer, for example),

biographical information on the interviewee, and an abstract of the interview. Depending on the wishes of the informant, some files also contain original and photocopied photographs and copies of ephemera that add to the interview or the "picture" of the interviewee. They were assembled quite simply with manila card for backing, a clear sheet of mylar on the front, and a plastic spine which slid on to bind everything together.

The question of confidentiality was of key importance. Because the library is a public institution and most of the interviews have no restrictions on access, we decided to remove the interviewee's address from the public copy of the file and to make the tape identification more vague.² The full address is on the master copy of the file.

Access to the collection is initially through the New Zealand and Pacific Department on the first floor of the library where the database and public copies of interview files are available. The tapes are housed in the temperature- and humidity-controlled rare books storage area on the second floor where the oral history listening room is also situated. It is therefore necessary for potential clients to inquire first at the New Zealand Department desk and then, if they wish to listen to the material, to accompany a staff member upstairs. This is not an ideal system but is a result of the lack of sufficient forward planning undertaken by the library in the initial stages of the project.

It is probably appropriate at this stage to talk about some of the issues that arose as the project progressed. I have already mentioned that there was not enough planning in the initial stages: little consideration was given to where the tapes would be housed or where they would be used, for example, and no money was available for publicising the archive. There was no provision for including the holdings on the library's computerised catalogue, and it was undecided where the listening room would be situated. A lack of finance because of local body amalgamation and city council restructuring meant the library was unable to make any commitment to future recording or management of oral history.

Because it was likely that there would be little organised collecting once the project was completed, it seemed an excellent idea to encourage volunteer interviewers to record interviews on behalf of the library. To this end, one-day training seminars were organised. Many of those who came to the seminars, in whatever capacity,³ have agreed to deposit copies of finished interviews at the Auckland Public Library.⁴

In effect, the lack of a plan for future recording means that the archive will remain static except for those donations. The most obvious disadvantage of the library itself not undertaking such a programme is that the collection will not reflect the range of Aucklanders' experiences but rather the interests of the interviewers who have donated tapes.

All is not grim, however. By the completion of the project in March 1991, oral history holdings at Auckland Public Library had increased from 13 interviews which had been neither catalogued nor indexed, to 197, most of which have been indexed. This is a significant increase.

It has been collected, like much of the material in the Turnbull's Oral History Centre, for its own sake, in the sense that while we were interviewing we were unaware of who would be using the material and why. In such a case, where interviews are being recorded to provide primary source material for the future, it is especially important that they are thoroughly researched and conducted by interviewers who have a good historical grounding enabling them to ask searching questions and consider the wider issues involved in the topic being discussed.

If oral history is to be considered a serious research tool - as it must be in a country which has such a strong indigenous oral tradition and whose European culture is still historically young enough for it to be possible to record the memories of pioneers - then it is of utmost importance that it be done properly, in terms of the research for the interview, the subsequent availability of the information gathered, and the future development of the discipline in New Zealand.

References

- 1 If researchers wish to use the collection, the manuscript reading room is open from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm Monday to Friday, in the George Grey rare books room on the second floor of the central library.
- 2 Instead of saying "an interview at 56 Grace Avenue, Mt Roskill", for example, we said "at her home in Mt Roskill".
- 3 Once it became known that the library was running seminars, we had many requests for training from people unconnected with the project, such as members of local historical societies.
- 4 For example, since the end of the project, 44 interviews have been donated to the library by the Avondale 1990 Committee who undertook an oral history of that suburb.

TAKING ROOT IN A NEW LAND: HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY'S 1990 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Bill Lovell-Smith

During 1990 the Hamilton Public Library conducted an oral history project as a community-based historical exercise. Called "Taking Root in a New Land", the project aimed to involve local people in the telling and recording of their own migration histories. The scope of the project included immigrants associated with the region up to the present day, and their descendants, but excluded migrants of British or Maori descent. By the time of its completion this oral history project had recorded interviews with 41 migrants or their descendants, drawn from 24 of the region's cultural and ethnic groups; it demonstrated in the process that Hamilton is indeed a city and region with a remarkable cultural and ethnic diversity.

Initial approaches were made to the Waikato Ethnic Council and Interchurch Commission on Immigration to be involved both as interviewees and interviewers. This invitation was then extended to other international/ethnic clubs in Hamilton, and to other suggested contacts. The interviewees gave voluntarily, and in a very real sense, their lives as they have experienced them. The interviewers also worked on a voluntary basis: some already knew their subjects, others started as strangers, yet finished knowing the person they interviewed in a way that, for themselves, was a unique and rewarding experience. Fifteen interviewers were members of a Waikato University course, "Geography of Migration and Employment"; these students conducted interviews for the project as part of their course work.

The material gathered in the course of the project is to be shared with the wider community, the aim being to inform, and in particular to illustrate the richness and diversity of the region's inhabitants, their common goal being to "take root in a new land". An exhibition based on the project's material and incorporating videos of special ethnic events, portraits of the interviewees, displays of cultural objects and memorabilia, is planned for the

This article is based on a radio talk given in February 1991 about the Hamilton Public Library's 1990 oral history project. Bill Lovell-Smith was the coordinator of the project.

Waikato History Museum in 1992. The creation of teaching resource kits is also a possibility, as is the construction of a radio programme using selections from the interviews. The oral histories of the migrants, representing so many of the region's ethnic and cultural groups (although most of those interviewed would claim their experiences are not wholly typical), will be preserved by the Hamilton Public Library and will be available to the general public to listen to, to enjoy, and to learn.

Until recently we in the Hamilton region have had access to quite limited resources on the life histories of our inhabitants. These new spoken histories will help re-create the texture of the past and give it meaning. These are by definition very personal accounts, given willingly by people who often in their early years could not have envisaged that one day they would be members of Hamilton's community. All too often war and violence have driven them from their native lands. Others have discovered and used educational and employment opportunities in this country that were not available to them for a myriad of reasons: discrimination against their race, gender or religion being but some of those reasons. For others, it is a lifestyle choice that has brought them to Hamilton. It must be remembered though that all the migrants have their own unique stories to tell and this they do, describing their native lands as they remember them, their reasons for migrating, how they came to settle in the Hamilton region, and what aspects of their native cultures they are able to retain, discard or contribute to their new land.

As I have stated, there is a wide range of reasons that lead people to "take root in a new land"; the reasons are as varied and numerous as the migrants themselves. For the Cambodian people who survived Pol Pot's "killing fields", migration was a conscious choice premised on the fundamental need for survival. One such survivor is Pha Nich:

1975 Khmer Rouge have power on their hands and the leader of the Khmer Rouge name Pol Pot and so whole country is got to be communist and made people very starving, no food, no clothes, no nothing. All they can do is just work for them. . . .

In 1975 I was pregnant, the child's name is Lyna Tim, and I stay in Battambang, but my husband have to move out to and live in Thailand. But I called in live with him. . . . It was really hard, because I can't do anything. During the Pol Pot time it was so hard, no house, and all people had to build a house themselves. So I had no man to help in the family. By then I got new baby born - it was really hard, because the Khmer Rouge were just pushing people to the place where we had no food and no crops to grow, just the trees. And you could find yourself something that you could eat that was not poison, just to make yourself not too starving.¹

Helena Martul was one of the 733 Polish children who arrived from Persia on board the American troopship *General Randall* in November 1944. As an orphan she had been part of the mass deportation of Polish citizens to the Soviet Union during the war. Eventually she joined the refugee Polish community in Persia, where in 1944 she was selected to become one of the New Zealand Government's "Invited". Helena recalls the terror of those early days of the war that marked for her the beginning of five years of sorrow and suffering, ending finally in her finding a new and peaceful life in New Zealand:

And I was about to start standard three when the war broke out. I can remember the day very vividly. It was Sunday and it was the most beautiful day and, as I mentioned before, my family was not church-going but somehow I used to go to church, and on that particular Sunday I was dressed in my Sunday best, and I was walking to church - that was actually in the same street as we lived [town of Kowel in eastern Poland] but on the other end. And I was passing the fields, because it was September, first of September, and of course fruit is ripening, the wheat is ripe, and oh, the countryside looked lovely. And all of a sudden these planes come and next thing the whole earth started shaking and bangs and I was terribly frightened. People came from it seemed to be nowhere, rushing around, and we all dived into the field and stood under the tree, and that was my introduction to the bombing. I'm not sure whether I went on to church that day, or whether I went back home, I can't remember. I think I might have gone back home, I was too shaken . . . Anyway, after that first Sunday, the week that followed was quiet. You wouldn't even know that there was a war on, you know, where we lived, and then the following week it started. They were really bombing. We had a big army headquarters and barracks in that town and also a main railway station that they were trying to hit. And because they were bombing almost day and night, oh, I was so frightened.²

For other migrants war did not intrude into their lives. Their decisions to migrate were made in times of peace, yet ultimately for them too, taking root in a new land meant

changes and sacrifice. Mose and Safarira Atimalala of Samoa chose to put their children's future before their own:

Mose: My first impression to me was that it was very much confined, and closed from that of where we were in Samoa.

Safarira: The fences were what put me off. 'Cause we are open in Samoa - the houses. And here the fence, you got to be fenced from your next door neighbour, but not in the islands, you're free to run everywhere [laughter] . . . We had to sacrifice our good jobs in the island all because of bringing the children for better education. At the moment I think it's worth it, bringing them in here, if we look back.³

A number of those interviewed made the point that one of the difficulties they encountered in their settling in to their new country was not having English as their first language. But with the help of sponsors and newly made friends they were able to overcome this cultural barrier. Early employment experiences, for example, were often ones of exasperation, but also of humour. Ola Toimata arrived in Hamilton from Niue in the mid 1960s. Here she shares with us a "learning experience" from her first job:

But however, I was determined to listen and learn, and ask that person with me how to do it and where do I put it. As I tried to accept the fact that I am here and I had to work a lot longer or full-time so I could get plenty of money to help my husband to come over. So I did and a Cook Island mother felt my need, exactly like when she first arrived here, and she was well known to the hospital area that where she worked as a ward's maid. And she's a Christian person and she heard of me, an Island person too, and she offered this chance for me to get a kind of job like she had, at the hospital, and she took over from there and got me a ward's maid job during the day, Monday to Friday . . . When it was morning tea break I continued work because I feel it was not fair to stop because there was plenty of work to do, but this European old lady said, "No, you go for morning tea." And what is morning tea? Morning is a morning, tea is a tea, what's those two things that she say? So, I just said, "No, thank you" and I carried on work. I did that for a few weeks, so another European came and growled at me: "You must stop, you allowed to stop, you not allowed to work and you come with me." So she took me to another place where all the ladies are seated and have their cups of tea and smokes and eat. So that's one thing I learnt, oh, "morning tea is to stop and have a drink of tea in the morning".⁴

Being able to work, being able to contribute to their adopted land, is a theme that emerges from the interviews. Machiko Poole, a Japanese woman who has lived and taught in Hamilton for a number of years, expresses the importance of contributing to her adopted

society, of playing a full part in society as a whole, and not being a burden. Machiko has fashioned in herself a blend of cultures:

I'm proud of Japanese I think, yeah, and I love living in New Zealand . . . I really appreciate the New Zealand people, so nice, and I never felt I was an outsider. They accept what I am and it's really nice. . . . [On being positive about Hamilton]: Ah yes, yes. Especially if you go to job, and if you work in a society they, so that you feel a part of New Zealand, I think you are a new Zealander if you work, and if you contribute, well, it's not contribution, but I do something for this society, so I think that's the reason I think I feel . . . When I get sick I want to have the Japanese food, and some kinds of food the children like, and we do, but it is very difficult to get the ingredients so I have to ask my family to send here. It's not every day but sometimes for special occasions. I know that in Auckland that there is quite a few Asian shops . . . but not in Hamilton . . . I think food is the last one that remains you, your culture, as a culture, so even if you get used to living in Western style, could be that sometime I want to have Japanese food.⁵

Food undoubtedly plays a significant role in the retention and expression of cultural identity. In settling in to a new country practical considerations of availability, compatibility and taste can call for modifications to the traditional dishes eaten by the new settlers, yet as Machiko Poole has stated, most go to great lengths to preserve their food culture. Hedi and Farideh of Persia, with some of their Persian friends, talk with some relish of their Persian foods:

I think daily we are mostly we are cooking Persian food, but we do some New Zealand cooking and South American cooking, we have barbecues, Chinese cooking, but mostly Persian cooking. We love to buy fish and chips from the corner.

[What is Persian food?] It is basically rice, like the potato for the Western world, but mostly rice, long grained steamed rice with, they prepare it with stew, basically lamb. In Iran they have more lamb than beef, and then they prepare the vegetables - beans, fried vegetables - and then they serve it with the rice, and then they mix it with rice, but steamed rice. It's very tasty, spicy, but it's not hot and spicy, spiced so far as good fragrance and nice taste and flavours.

[Are there any things that you would like to buy that you can't get in the shops in the way of spices or, do you have trouble finding these sorts of things?] Ah, not really. We can find more or less everything here, but [there are] some specialist spices or some special herbs or vegetables which we can't find it here, but we are happy, we can find everything in New Zealand. One of the things which is nice for Persians, they can lend each other things which they know the other one does not have. So at least once a year you can get a meal that you not had. There are all the vegetables in the garden.⁶

Whilst the retention of identity through food

is important to the cultural and ethnic groups, issues such as the degree of assimilation and interaction with the host community were also raised. Pravine Puna, a Hamilton-born member of the Indian community, expressed his ideas on the future of his community's identity:

In Hamilton we have basically two Indian communities. There's the Punjabi community who are members of the country section, and there's the Waikato Indian community which is basically Gujrati people. So I think what we have got to do there is integrate a bit more, and get out and mix with the Hamilton community. We try to do that in our little way but the responsibility is always, well, the burden is placed upon us, basically. Now there's talk - I know in Auckland and Wellington they've got their own centres, the Indian communities have bought a building here, a building there - but I don't think that that will eventuate here. And I hope it doesn't, because we should be making use of our facilities like the Founders' Theatre, you know, and advertise ourselves that we blimbling exist. I know we seem to be too conservative compared with the Hamilton community - as far as I'm concerned I will talk to anyone on the street and, we want to create a good name for ourselves, and it takes one person to say, "Gosh! Not all Indians are the same!" . . . I think whereas all the other communities seem to have integrated, the Indian community haven't. Firstly, not even within their own people; secondly, within the European community. Look, we depend on you people for our jobs, for our bread and butter. That is true!⁷

Having taken root in a new land, the migrants and their descendants continue to maintain kinship ties and old friendships with their countries of origin. The raising of a family, however, seems to act as a block to a permanent return to their home countries. Visits by themselves and their descendants are common, reinforcing their understanding of their cultural heritage. Anita Lisignoli followed her father to Te Pahu (Waikato) from Italy in 1922. In this excerpt she talks about what living in New Zealand meant to the Italians, the ties with Italy and its New Zealand emigrants, and in particular what it meant to her family:

Yes, yes, seeing we have quite a few relations on both my family and my late husband's family's side, we always kept our contacts up with them and them with us, in the hopes that someday, we are always hoping to see them all again. And our aim was to work and to be able eventually to return to see our homeland and our village and our relations. And it's a very big satisfaction in one's life if they can return to that land of their birth, and that's one thing I aimed for very hard, and thank God I was able to achieve that wish.

[Some of the Italians that came to New Zealand, their

aim was to work in New Zealand and then go back. Do you think most of them did that?] No, very few did that because they found that in New Zealand there was plenty of work available and a fairly good standard of living, and free. And people were treated evenly. But one thing my father and even my late husband used to say, that here in New Zealand we were treated equally with the New Zealanders. If ever we had to have any business or we had to attend accountants or lawyers we were always treated with courtesy which, I'm afraid to say, that is not so in European countries and Italy too. Over there the customs were so, lawyers were held on a high pedestal, and here in New Zealand we were happy with more, ah, were more opportunities on equal terms with everybody . . . Although Italy had progressed after the war, had progressed considerably, but they [Italians in New Zealand] had established roots in New Zealand, and when you've got a family your children have established roots and it's hard to transplant them back to the villages.

[Yes, because your parents, your grandparents . . . ?] Had gone. Relations had gone too. And even in Italy world had changed. The world has changed. When we were there, that's many, many years ago, people lived in villages and hardly moved out of villages. Now instead even the relations and friends have, with progress, have scattered, and if you go back you don't find many. Some have gone - France, Scotland, England - or gone to another village. Europe has changed after the Second World War.

[Now, your children, two of your children have gone back to Italy, haven't they?] Yes, my children's ambition was always to return to see where their parents came from, and they were able to, and really enjoyed it. But they had no desire to live there . . . New Zealand was, well, you've got to go out of New Zealand to see how good New Zealand is.⁸

Finally, I would like to play a piece of music from Bolivia. Simón Acarapi's passion for his native music is common to many of the migrants interviewed. Music enables them to touch base with their homelands. Simón Acarapi:

Entitled "Bolivia", the rhythm is huayno. It's a fast step dance, and in this song a little description of the Bolivian history is given from the time of their independence. Here it is, "Bolivia".

References

- 1 Pha Nich (Cambodia), interviewed by Robyn Williams, 30 July 1990 (Ref OH0088).
- 2 Helena Martul (Poland), interviewed by Rosemarie Brycki, 1 August 1990 (Ref OH0082).
- 3 Reverend Mosé and Safarira Atimalala (Samoa), interviewed by Bill Lovell-Smith, 7 November 1990 (Ref OH0093).
- 4 Ola Toimata QSM (Niue), interviewed by Bill Lovell-Smith, 4 December 1990 (Ref OH0084).
- 5 Machiko Poole (Japan), interviewed by Bill Lovell-Smith, 14 December 1990 (Ref OH0121).
- 6 Hedi and Farideh (Persia), interviewed by Bill Lovell-Smith, 15 November 1990 (Ref OH0083).
- 7 Pravine Puna (India), interviewed by Bill Lovell-Smith, 15 November 1990 (Ref OH0097).
- 8 Anita Lisignoli (Italy), interviewed by Gina Lisignoli, 14 July 1990 (Ref OH0089).
- 9 Simón Acarapi (Bolivia), interviewed by Bill Lovell-Smith, 4 February 1991 (Ref OH0122).

PRESENTING ORAL HISTORY

Helen Frizzell interviewed by John Irwin

Helen Frizzell is the oral historian with Presbyterian Support Services (Otago), and coordinates the agency's Community History Programme which enables the community to record and share the memories and life stories of its elders.

John Irwin is a film and video producer at Otago University who is interested in exploring the use of video for recording and presenting oral history. He recorded this interview with Helen Frizzell in Dunedin, November 1991.

- *Helen, you've had five years' experience as an oral historian. Part of your present work is to find ways of presenting the material you've recorded. Why is it important to present the collected material?*

I feel it's really important that the oral history one records is shared with the wider community now, as well as being stored for future generations. Everyone's life story is unique, and the material you're recording is often rich and colourful. There's a huge interest in oral history but the material in its raw form isn't always accessible except perhaps to family members and researchers. Generally it doesn't reach a wider audience.

- *You've worked in New Zealand and observed oral history projects in the UK and USA. What are some of the ways of reaching that wider audience?*

There's a huge range of media available. You're really only limited by factors like time, budget and imagination. For example, there's the compilation tape, which combines extracts from interviews and possibly a sound track of music and other effects. Then there's the tape/slide show, combining slides and extracts from interviews. There's also local radio, where you present programmes based on interview material. All of these are very effective because you can actually hear the people you have interviewed speaking - it really does bring the material alive.

There's also the print media. Many of the groups I visited presented their material in book or booklet form, often combining photos with the text. Some produced material for specific use in schools, for reminiscence work with the elderly, and for articles in newspapers and magazines. Another interesting approach was the use of calendars and post-cards to present material, often used for fundraising.

And then you move to the audio visual media - videos and documentaries. One of the most interesting ways of presenting material that I saw was through the performing arts, theatre in particular, where oral history material was presented through drama and music.

- *In Britain they have developed a genre of documentary theatre where a theatre group works with a particular community or group and produces a dramatisation on a chosen theme or themes.*

Yes, I visited a group called Age Exchange Theatre who worked with the local community in southeast London. The production I saw, called "Who could afford the doctor?", was about health changes in the UK. They went out and interviewed elderly people about life in Britain before National Health came in, the impact of the NHS when it came in, and ended up with an observational comment on what was happening now. The interviews were transcribed and the words of the interviewees adapted into a play by a writer. During rehearsals the interviewees were brought in to give feedback and advice to the professional actors. The play was performed in a variety of venues: day care homes, hospitals, boats and schools. Often the interviewees went along and talked to the school children so there was quite a lot of cross-generational work.

- *What particular media have you used to present material?*

Most of my experience has been in exhibition, which combines oral history extracts with photographic material and graphics. This seems to be one of the most effective and popular ways of presenting oral history, one

that reaches a lot of people and brings them together.

• *What exhibitions have you been involved with and what form did they take?*

I've produced two exhibitions. The first one, in 1987, was based on a single life story, that of Bessie Turnbull who grew up in Mosgiel, Otago, and worked in the woollen mills for 57 years. This was a 12-panel exhibition and tape based on the memories and photographs of her life. The second one, "Shirakee: Children in Walker Street 1900-1920", was quite different. It was a collection of testimonies - a 26-panel exhibition and tape based on memories and photographs of childhood in and around Walker Street, Dunedin.

• *Let's consider the process of putting an exhibition together, drawing on those two projects. First of all, what determines the medium of presentation?*

The factors you've got to consider are the time you have available, the skills you can draw on, and the budget you have. If you have only a few hundred dollars, then it's no good embarking on a video presentation, but you may be able to do a compilation tape. Another important thing to consider is the audience you are trying to reach. As a community historian, I'm trying to reach not only the people involved in the project, but the wider community. I want to somehow provide a forum for people to meet and exchange ideas and memories. Exhibition is a very good medium for that because it can go into a wide range of venues, reach a lot of people, and provide an opportunity for interviewees to meet with one another and the general public.

• *Did you decide on the method of presentation before you started the interviews?*

When I started the Bessie Turnbull interviews I had no idea how I was going to present the material. From that experience, I think it definitely does pay to have an idea because you can save yourself a lot of time. While you're doing the interviews you can also be collecting photographs and getting them copied, and looking for other memorabilia that might complement the exhibition.

• *And in the case of Shirakee?*

With Shirakee I started out with the idea that I would present it through exhibition; I knew I

had the budget for an exhibition and I knew there were people who had the necessary skills. I worked with a writer, photographer and designer. And the time period available suited an exhibition. I also wanted to build on the skills I'd learned through doing the Bessie Turnbull project.

• *If you set out with a predetermined end use of the material, can it compromise the interviewing process and limit the use of the material in other ways?*

Yes, that's something to be aware of. My approach is to ensure that the interviews aren't specifically geared towards an end presentation. I pan wide and then select out. In the case of the Walker Street interviews, the focus was on childhood. We did in-depth interviews and then selected material for the exhibition which represents about two or three hours out of 65 hours of tape.

• *Tell me about the editing process, how you ended up with two or three hours.*

Well, we sat down and evaluated the material. We went through all the tapes and transcribed those bits that we thought might be worth including in a presentation, and ended up with a considerable amount of material which had to be edited further. Essentially we were looking for material that was quite precise, that gave new perspectives, that added to our understanding of the area in which these people spent their childhood. We used quotes that complemented one another, that were interesting because of the language used and gave a flavour of the street. Wherever there was doubt about the accuracy of statements, we checked it against other references. We also wanted to ensure that all the interviewees had quotes included in the exhibition, and that every chapter or theme had a quote in it from each community.

• *How many communities were involved?*

There were three - European, Lebanese and Chinese - and from these we interviewed 16 people. I might add that we looked for quotes that could be visually illustrated. It's really important to ensure that the quotes you use are kept short because people will be standing and reading. Shirakee is large - 26 panels - and that's a good hour-and-a-half's reading, which is a long time. It's not like sitting in your own home and reading a book, so you've got to try and keep quotes very precise.

- *During the editing stage I suppose you're also thinking about themes, how you're going to shape the project.*

Yes, the overall shape is vital. The Bessie Turnbull exhibition had a chronological shape. It basically followed the life history interview - her childhood - where she grew up, domestic routine, school, church and so forth, and then went on to her working life and retirement. The Shirakee exhibition had 14 major themes like chapters of a book. Starting with overall impressions of the area, it moved on to home life and then out to life in the street and further away. There was a logical flow to it.

- *Did you find that the material began to reveal the themes, or did you and your team impose themes on it?*

We started off with about 30 possible themes, but very quickly it naturally fell into about 14. I think we were looking at it as a book really and it just fell into those themes. We started in the home and then moved outwards. Something we found very helpful was to put a story board together. It gave us an idea of the flow of the exhibition and where the gaps were. Another thing about putting exhibitions together is the importance of being well organised. With Shirakee we had 16 interviewees and hundreds of quotes so we colour-coded all the interviewees' text so we could instantly see if one interviewee had far more quotes being used than others. It also meant that we didn't inadvertently credit an interviewee with the wrong piece of text. It's important that everything is clearly labelled and identifiable so you don't mix things up.

- *Visuals must be very important with this kind of exhibition.*

Yes, visuals are absolutely crucial because they draw the reader to the text and illustrate what people are talking about. If you have panels of text only, then people won't want to read it. There is quite a range of possibilities for visuals. There are photos of course, which we borrowed from people's private collections and copied, or we got photographs from old newspapers of the time or the major institutions like museums, libraries and so forth. In Shirakee we also used advertisements of the period, drawings, postcards, and used things like colour photocopying. For example, when someone was talking about broken biscuits, which is hard to find a photograph of, we went and photocopied some broken biscuits.

- *What about the overall design aspect?*

Design, again, is a vital ingredient. You can have very good photographs and wonderful material in terms of oral history text, but if it's not put together with thought given to layout and flow, then it can really crash. You've got to attract people to the panels; they've got to want to read them. So it's important that they aren't too cluttered, that the type size is large enough to read (especially for elderly people). We also found that laminating the panels has helped their longevity. You've also got to think about how you're going to hang the panels, eyelets, drawing pins, nylon cord, or whatever. Also you've got to think about exhibition venues and mobility. For example, Shirakee is very difficult to move because its 26 heavy panels require a large space.

- *Do you feel you ended up with a good balance of visuals and text?*

Yes, I think we did - the panels are well laid out and there is a good balance. There's also really good use of colour which makes it more appealing.

- *What shape did the exhibition take?*

The exhibition has a one-panel introduction which explains what the project's about, gives a background to the area concerned, and indicates the methodology used. The following 24 panels allow the interviewees to speak for themselves. The last panel contains the credits of those involved, which I believe is essential.

- *Did you make much use of memorabilia?*

When the exhibition was hanging in the Otago Early Settlers' Museum, objects were also displayed to add to the overall flavour.

- *Did you use other media to complement the exhibition?*

When we were putting the exhibition together we had thought of making a video to go with it, but because of lack of time and money we ditched that one. Instead I decided to put together a 12-minute compilation tape of some of the voices of Walker Street and sound effects. The tape adds an extra dimension to the exhibition and gives a real flavour. It was done in conjunction with a sound editor. When you're doing a compilation tape the quality of the recording must be good; you need access to the right editing equipment and someone with the skills to do that sort of work.

• *And obviously a well amplified playback system?*

Yes, that is something that New Zealand museums are just getting into. Overseas I saw a number of exhibitions with wonderful set-ups; you would walk past panels and trigger off sound. It helped convey the whole flavour of what you were looking at. There are all sorts of ways of combining different media to add to the total effect.

• *Is the title important? What does "Shirakee" mean?*

It's important for an exhibition to have a title that grabs people's attention and encourages them to examine further, to go and have a look. "Shirakee" was the name of a childhood game but is also the Lebanese word for sharing. We used it because it not only described a game, but also the experiences the children shared in the street. It also describes the basic nature of oral history, which is the sharing of memories.

• *Speaking of sharing, how did you involve the community, the interviewees in particular, as the exhibition developed?*

It was absolutely vital to the success of both the interviewing project and the presentation that we had the support of the Chinese and Lebanese communities we worked with. We got this by contacting community leaders right from the beginning and letting them know what we were doing. We spent a lot of time explaining things and gradually we gained their confidence. They were quite wary at first. Some thought we were going to revive the old reputation of the street, but gradually they came to trust us and put us in touch with people to interview and helped us locate photographs and material like that. So we kept constant liaison right through the whole project.

Once we'd got an idea of the shape of the exhibition and the content, we took each interviewee's extracts back to them and told them how we wanted to use it and then asked permission to use their material, which they all gave. I think that sort of informing and involving was important and really helpful in ensuring the whole project was a success.

• *Are there any particular difficulties working so closely with members of the community?*

Yes, we did strike some difficulties. They weren't major but when you're presenting material publicly, some of which is quite

sensitive, it's inevitable that people get anxious about the final outcome and what sort of light it is going to shed on them and their community. Because we were very open about what we were doing and constantly liaised, we circumvented many potential problems. Those that did arise came more from people not directly involved. Having the support of some key members with a standing in those communities and interviewees ensured that these problems were dealt with.

• *Can we talk about your role as the director or coordinator of the project. What are the important things that you need to be aware of?*

I think first of all you have to have a real empathy with the interviewees and the communities, which means you have to know everyone involved even if you aren't doing all the interviewing. I made sure that I was available when they wanted to see me and that I kept them informed. Also there's a responsibility attached to presenting people's memories. It must be done ethically. You've got to be well organised, coordinate things well, meet deadlines, keep everyone informed, mould a team and so on. The team who worked on Shirakee were really interested in and committed to the project. They wanted to see a really good presentation and everyone worked hard for it.

• *The budget for Shirakee was \$5,000. Could you give us a breakdown of that budget?*

Design, which also included the poster, invitation and street map, cost \$3,988; photographs cost \$700 (there were approximately 91); \$214 was spent on miscellaneous items, such as a storage box to hold the exhibition, and colour photocopying; and that left \$100 to cover the opening.

That was actually quite cheap for the size and quality of the exhibition. It's important when putting together something like this to be adaptable, to think of different ways of saving money, to bargain, seek sponsorship and so on. For example, with photographers and designers I found that the people with the highest profile around the city weren't necessarily the best when it came to costs, deadlines and approach. The Bessie Turnbull exhibition, for example, probably cost about \$300 in total. I got local photographers who were keen to copy photos just for cost price. You can always find people in any community with skills you can utilise, who are interested in what you are doing and keen to be involved.

- *In your budget you had a sum set aside for publicity and the opening.*

If you're going to put this sort of thing together and you want people to come along, you've got to think about publicity. We did that by putting posters around the city, articles in the local papers, and ensuring material got on to the radio. So that needs thinking ahead and coordinating. Having an opening that brings together all those who have been involved in the project is really important - it's a celebration of everyone's efforts. The opening for Shirakee was held in the small Chinese church in the street on which it was focused. It was a great day, like a street party. People stayed around and chatted for ages. There was a real buzz in the air.

- *What then was the overall impact of the exhibition on the people involved, the community and the city at large? What were the benefits?*

The response to both exhibitions I've done has been absolutely overwhelming. With Shirakee, in the first week about 400 people must have visited. It was wonderful to watch

people meeting - young and old, neighbours and people who hadn't seen one another in years. Many interviewees spent time with the exhibition and talked to members of the public. The interaction between the different groups of people, the communities involved, was great. For many Lebanese, it was the first time they'd felt able to enter the Chinese church even though they had lived in the vicinity for years.

- *So there was a good positive local response. What about further afield?*

There's been a real interest nationally. The exhibition travelled to Wellington a few months ago and was on display in the National Library and had really good feedback. Since then I've had numerous requests from different centres around the country who want to have the exhibition on display, to raise the profile of oral history, what it is and what can be done with it. I think the whole response to Shirakee does illustrate the growing interest in oral history in New Zealand and also in its public presentation.

NOHANZ CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE

This Code has been established in recognition of the rapid spread of oral history practice and the consequent need for standards in the collection of oral history material, its preservation and its proper use.

The Code exists also to assist in the appraisal of oral history projects by setting ethical, professional and technical standards that are essential in maintaining oral history as a valid form of documentation.

Sponsoring institutions and other collectors of oral history have the following responsibilities:

- To select interviewers on the basis of professional competence and interviewing skill, attempting where possible to match appropriate interviewers to interviewees.
- To inform both interviewers and interviewees of the importance of this Code of Ethical Practice to the successful product and use of oral history.
- Subject to any conditions prescribed by interviewees, to prepare and preserve easily usable records, to keep careful records of the creation and processing of each interview to identify index and catalogue interviews; and when interviews are open to research, to make their existence known.
- To ensure that conditions of preservation of recordings and accompanying material are of the highest possible standard.

The interviewer has the following responsibilities:

- To inform the interviewee of the purposes and procedures of oral history in general and of the particular project for which the interview is being carried out.
- To inform the interviewee of the mutual rights involved in oral history such as editing, seal privileges, literary rights, fiduciary relationships, royalties, and determination of the disposition of all forms of the recording and accompanying material, and the likely extent of its dissemination and use.
- To determine the preferences of the interviewee and to respect any prior agreements during the conduct of the oral history process, carefully documenting those preferences and agreements for the record.
- To prompt informative dialogue through challenging, perceptive enquiry grounded on thorough research and on the background and experience of the interviewee.
- To conduct interviews in a spirit of objectivity, candour and integrity, and in keeping with common understandings, purposes and stipulations.
- To guard against possible social injury to or exploitation of interviewees and to conduct interviews with respect of human dignity.
- To treat every interview as a confidential conversation, the contents of which may be made available only as determined by written agreement with the interviewee.
- To ensure that recordings are made to the highest possible technical standard.
- To place the material, if possible, in a depository where it will be available for general research subject to any conditions placed on it by the interviewee.

NOHANZ

ISSN 0113-5376