

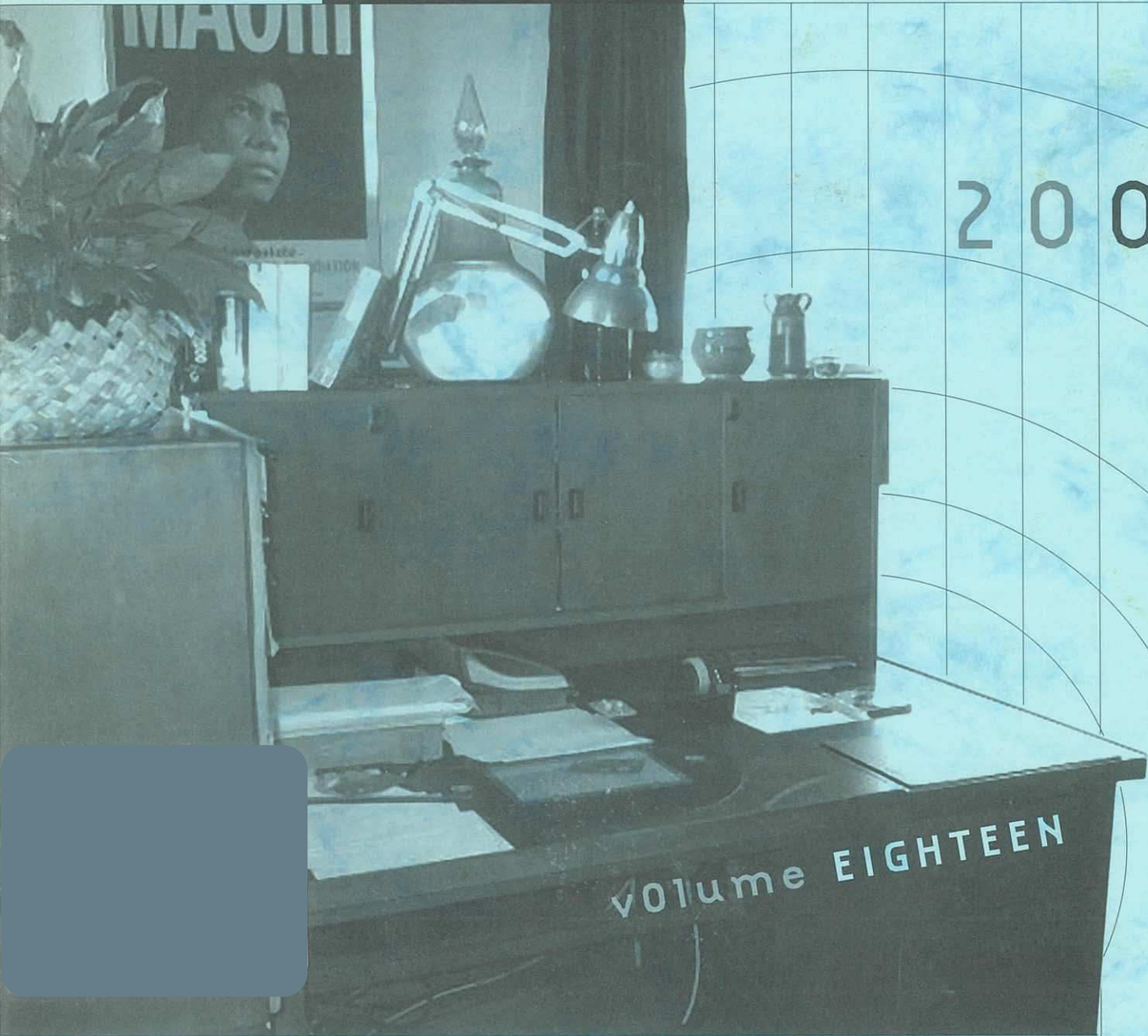
# Oral HISTORY

in New Zealand

National Oral History Association of New Zealand  
TE KETE KÖRERO-A-WAHA O TE MOTU

2006

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*Oral History in New Zealand* is an annual publication of the National Oral History Association of New Zealand, Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te Motu (NOHANZ).

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**NOHANZ**

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# Editorial

There are a number of changes in both the layout of the journal, and among the editorial team, that we should draw to your attention. First of all, the journal will now begin with the reports of oral history projects. These cover a wide range of subjects, beginning with Margaret McClure's fascinating account of women's stories of divorce in the 1950s and 1960s. This is followed by Pip Oldham's report on the Mike Walker project in which she describes what happened after the subject of her oral history project died before interviewing could begin. And finally Loreen Brehaut describes the value of oral history as therapy for those facing terminal illness.

Two refereed articles follow the reports. Rachel Baskerville interviewed a number of accountants, exploring the historical development of anti-nepotism clauses within Accountants' partnerships. She found that anti-nepotism clauses (preventing promotion or selection on the basis of familial relationships or social influence) appear relatively unique to the accounting profession in New Zealand, and has used oral history to explore the reasons why. Although unable to uncover a definitive event that triggered the inclusion of such a clause, oral histories suggested that managing father and son relationships, in the wider context of the firm, was the primary reason for the clause. The oral histories recorded for her project provide insights into the collective consciousness of a profession, and the construction of its past through memory.

In the second article we move to a very different context. Olive Sykes returned to a commune, in which she had lived for sixteen years, to record its oral history. Her relationship to those in the commune raised many issues surrounding the practice and ethics of 'insider' interviewing. This position has created tensions both for herself, as an active participant in the earlier years, and for her informants. She explores, for example, the potential for personal harm in the stories about the use of drugs and alcohol. An alternative model of representation, she suggests, one that conceals both place and individuals through 'narrative licence' and disguising identities may be the way to negotiate these issues.

Book reviews complete the journal's contents, and those reviewed in this issue are:

Hazel Riseborough, *Ngamatea* (Rachael Selby); Beth Robertson, *Oral History Handbook*, 5th edition (Helen Frizzell); Carol Archie, *Skin to Skin* (Susan Fowke); and Megan Hutching, ed, *Against the Rising Sun* and Alison Parr, ed., *The Big Show* (David Young).

Finally, a note on the editors of the journal. Both are in a process of transition: Megan Hutching is leaving the Ministry for Culture and

Heritage in June 2007, and will be living in Auckland. Anna Green will be taking up a position in the History Department at Exeter University in the U.K. in July this year and will, with regret, step down from the editorial team.

*Oral History in New Zealand* welcomes contributions, whether long or short articles, book, documentary or exhibition reviews, reports of meetings and conferences, or work in progress. The deadline for contributions to the 2007 issue of the journal is 16 July 2007, and these should be sent to:

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*A Guide for Contributors* is available upon request from Megan Hutching.

# 'When a happy marriage turns to custard'

## WOMEN'S STORIES OF DIVORCE IN THE 1950s AND 1960s

MARGARET MCCLURE

*(The following notes are from an informal talk given by Margaret McClure in 2006 at the National Library of New Zealand as part of a series organised by NOHANZ in association with the Alexander Turnbull Library and the Ministry for Culture & Heritage.)*

'When a happy marriage turns to custard, it's hard.' How hard? There's been very little written on the history of love and marriage in New Zealand history and even less on the ruin of marriage. We have one history of divorce, which is sketchy on the twentieth century and focuses on statistics of marriage and divorce; there's a need for a more human account. I was inspired by Gaylene Preston's film, *War Stories My Mother Never Told Me* – which showed how oral history is a good tool for understanding love and relationships.

For this study I interviewed a small sample of nine women to see what the experience of divorce was like at a time when filing for divorce was an exceptional step to take. A few of my friends offered up their mothers for the cause; the others volunteered to be recorded after I was interviewed on radio by Kim Hill. I've changed the women's names and home towns to protect their privacy.

If you want to look at divorce through oral histories how far back can you go? If women divorced in the 1950s, they are in their 70s or 80s now. In ten years they may not be here. They are old women, and their age gives them a mask of respectability. Old age effaces their former beauty, and makes any connection with passion or violence indiscernible. If we met these women here today at a public meeting we would not guess what they've been up to: that when they were young they have sat with their friends and 'planned how we could kill our husbands'. One of the challenges of oral history to capture stories before they are lost, but another is to look beneath the ordinary and find experiences that are unexpected or extraordinary.

For a social historian another attraction in the topic of divorce is that it encompasses secret, whispered stories. Because divorce in the mid-twentieth century was uncommon and a source of shame these

experiences have not been shared as widely as other events. War on the battlefield has been described more often than war in the bedroom or the sitting room. One woman whom I interviewed runs a factory in Hamilton, where I interviewed her. Her son works in the same company, and had never heard her story, so the whole interview was carried out in her office behind a closed door and in a whisper, so that there was no chance of him over-hearing her.

The story of divorce is the story of marriage, too, and so I asked these women why they married, what marriage was like, and what brought them to the point of divorce. I asked what the experience of divorce was like financially and emotionally. Were they now living happily ever after / or miserably ever after? I'm going to recount a few of these stories here, highlight some common threads in the others I heard, and discuss the limitations of this study.

The first story isn't typical, but it shows that women in the fifties and sixties were not always the victim in the process of divorce. Gloria Sargeson divorced because she wanted to: she had fallen passionately in love with a man who was not her husband. She had been deeply in love with her fiancé who was killed in the war. At the end of the war she wanted a home and family and joined the rush to marry: 'Wartime was a defining thing: it led me to the marriage I made'. She went to work for a doctor who tried to make her his mistress. Although she resisted him and left, the experience left her feeling tainted, and disillusioned with the difficulty of meeting someone she loved as she had loved her fiancé. So she took second-best, and at a time when her best friend was

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Margaret McClure is an Auckland historian.

praying 'please God send me a pilot officer', Gloria married the first young man she met in uniform. He was younger and his innocence appealed to her. After marriage she soon found that had nothing in common with him: 'the chemistry was gone', and 'I knew I'd done a mad thing'.

Gloria had a contented life with her children and friends until the day when her husband brought home a newcomer at his office, someone from overseas, charming, with black hair. He put her life in turmoil as she rediscovered passion. 'We fought it and fought it.' Deeply in love she decided to leave her marriage. She had a son and daughter, and did not know anyone else in this position, or what to expect. Her realisation of the cost of her decision came suddenly when her lawyer rang, with an abrupt: 'You'll have to give up your son. Decide by tomorrow.' As her mother said, 'You have to choose between your man and your child', and that is what she did. She felt she could not rob her husband of both a wife and a son, and taking her daughter, she left her son with his father and did not see him for another twenty years.

Gloria's experience of divorce was unusual for this period; she was lucky in love a second time round, and her family remained uncritical. She did not face poverty, because she was joining someone well-to-do. And unlike other women I met, she faced no stigma. Together with her new husband she shifted to Britain, and out in the wider world she felt that 'you realise what a drop in the ocean your problems are'. But she faced an ethical problem, and was clear-sighted about the choices she'd made: 'You come face to face with your own capacity for ruthlessness.'

Another woman whose personal life was shaped by wartime was Peggy. She married a miner when she was sixteen, had a baby, and loved her life until her husband, Ivan, volunteered for war without telling her first. She was so shocked when he appeared outside the kindergarten in uniform and handed her a hot pie that she threw it back in his face. Ivan was captured in Italy, transported in cattle-trucks, lived on a loaf of black bread a day, and slept on a concrete floor. For two and a half years his only contact with her came through ten words on a postcard.

Peggy was told that Ivan would be returning, but wasn't expecting him the night that he arrived. Suddenly there were two strangers on the doorstep in the dark, and an officer saying, 'Here's your husband'. Ivan looked terrible, 'He looked a hundred'. His young daughter did not recognise him: 'That's not my daddy'. He came home a silent man, spending weeks without speaking to his wife, and only coming to meals if the

children called him. He got drunk more and more often. Peggy began to have panic attacks, and an operation which her doctor attributed to stress. She went out to work in a department store, and there met a man who was kind to her but she waited fifteen years before she left home when her son was fifteen. In 1959 she moved out, went to live with her friend, and remembers with some pride, 'we were the first de facto couple'. All her friends and family told her how brave she was.

So out of nine women, there were two whose experience was shaped by wartime losses. What about the others? One had an unconsummated marriage, four faced a husband's adultery, one a husband's drunkenness, and another a husband's violence. These were the 'crimes against marriage' that they were required to prove before the advent of 'no-fault divorce'. And to gain maintenance from their husband after divorce women had to be the innocent partner.

One means of remaining guiltless in the eyes of the law (in other words not being the deserter) was to try and make life so difficult that a husband would go of his own accord. One woman was married to a man who gambled away most of his earnings and beat his son. To prompt him to leave she ate meals with her children in a different room from him, and put sugar in the petrol of his car. He stayed on, and so she took her children to a child psychiatrist to talk about their life, and succeeded in gaining a divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty.

Some of these cases sound extreme to us today. Peggy enjoyed a five-year courtship, a wonderful relationship, 'pure magic: people used to look at us as we walked down the road'. But as her marriage remained unconsummated for five years she could not understand her husband's lack of interest in her. She knew she was beautiful, and was mystified until she found that he was spending nights with another man. When she tried to understand the implications of this, she could only find one book on the topic in the library; homosexuality was a taboo subject with the threat of gaol in background. Finally her doctor told her, 'You need to leave'.

There were no legal grounds for divorce unless Peggy trapped her husband with a partner, and she thought that was too grubby, and so applied for an annulment. She was inspected medically to check that her virginity was intact by a Roman Catholic specialist who was unsympathetic, and with a lawyer present to prove that the right woman was being examined. Her case was successful and set a New Zealand legal precedent.

Peggy walked out of court on a fine day and thought, 'Perhaps I'm on the road to changing my life'. When she arrived home, she celebrated by sharing a bottle of whisky with her Irish boarder, made love for the first time in her life, and conceived a child. But, because was reluctant to spill the beans on her husband, all her family and friends thought her marriage breakdown was a result of this fling. Her father refused her any financial support and she and her child lived in severe hardship for years.

There were other extreme experiences. Maria came from a missionary family, and made the mistake of marrying a philanderer who was later imprisoned for molesting children: 'I did not know the half of what he was'. Both her sister and her minister encouraged her to leave: 'You don't have to be a doormat', said the minister, while her sister, tired of seeing her with a lump in her throat, paid her legal fees. Although she became an outcast from her extended family after her divorce, she had huge support from her daughters who immediately drew up a list of jobs to do. For their sake she took them on visits to the prison and allowed their father to join in family festivities. On these occasions she felt a sense of great relief: 'Thank heavens I don't have to take him home!'

*What did these and other women have in common?*

Firstly, most of them faced financial hardship. They had been sinned against, and society recognised that in granting them a divorce, but the social systems for supporting them were ineffective. Men had to pay maintenance but payments were small and could be irregular. As Maria said, 'How could I leave when I did not have a penny?' and later, 'Money-wise it was terrible'. Although these women were intelligent, out of the nine all except one, who was a teacher, had no training. Unprepared for the working world, they coped by working part-time, taking on jobs that are often done by immigrants today: sewing as an outworker, pumping petrol, cleaning hospitals at night, cooking in hostels and residential care institutions. Several of these women were untrained because they had married young. One went to court at sixteen, pregnant, for permission to marry without her parents' consent. The judge asked, 'Can you boil a kettle?' 'Yes.' 'Well, you can marry.' Another was nineteen, living on a farm, before she eloped with a commercial traveller who came to the door.

Middle-class women became poor because they did not gain an equal share of their husband's income. One well-to-do woman saw her husband sacked from his position as manager in a large company when the boss

found out about his affair with a younger woman, but he was able to take his superannuation and a full year's salary with him, and easily found another job. He kept the boat, the car, the caravan, and his savings. His wife received no share in the superannuation, and found her family cast adrift from their middle-class life of boating and holidays. Unaware of her rights, she felt her lawyer could have been more assertive, and later worked in a lobby group to change the law to distribute assets more equally.

Most of these women were stigmatised by their friends and family. Their divorce meant that they had gone against the grain of society and entered a different category, and most of them knew no-one else in the same position. Divorce was almost unheard of. Peggy, who had left her silent soldier-husband, went back home when her own daughter was getting married – back to her former husband, and her daughter and son, and made the traditional cups of tea, stood with her old husband in the photos, so that the bridegroom's family did not realise that the bride's parents lived apart.

Children of divorced women could be ostracised and forbidden to play with the neighbours. They sometimes solved their intense feeling of difference by inventing stories about where their father was. One daughter of a divorced woman began to go to church, and enjoyed the way she could shed her family at the door and enter another world 'where everything was perfect while my family was so imperfect'.

Most of the women in these interviews became resilient people. Although one took sleeping pills 'to drug myself through the weekends' before her divorce, and another took an overdose then rushed next door for help, once they were on their own, they managed. Success came from seeing their children through: 'I've come out on top'. The child who found refuge from her unorthodox family in the beauty of a church could also say about her mother, 'We felt so secure. She had done this terrible thing for us. We knew we were loved.'

Most women worked their way into more satisfying jobs. One of them had caught her husband in bed with her daughter and booted him out, and then began her life again by taking third form schoolwork by correspondence. She went back to secondary school, then moved from a job as a hospital cleaner to training as a nurse. Her encouragement came on a grooming course where the leader told her, 'One day you're going to make it, Joan'. After eighteen years on her own and before marrying again, she could say of her divorce and her new start 'it was the making of me'.

These accounts of divorce provide no clear-cut

black / white picture of the role of professionals in the divorce procedure. There were doctors who disapproved, while others gave a woman permission to bring an end to their marriage, warning that the alternative was a mental hospital. Lawyers were a mixed lot: one with his feet on the desk and greeting his client with: 'What the hell are you doing here?' 'I don't like swearing', she replied. Later after her court case she commented: 'You weren't very nice', and got his reply, 'You don't pay a lawyer to be nice'. Other lawyers were helpful in opening a woman's door to a better future.

These accounts of divorce give us a feel for the '50s and '60s but they have significant limitations. The project involved only a small sample of women, and a period of two decades. The interviews were one-sided: we don't have the partners' stories here, and for the most part we hear of innocent women and sinning men.

Interviews can go wrong in practical ways. The worst thing that can happen when you're interviewing a stranger about humiliating events and personal grief is to find out afterwards that the tape recorder was not recording. The person you interviewed cried as she spoke. Can you ring and ask to have a second go and re-open the wound? I did this once, and on the second interview the woman insisted that her daughter be present, too. It 'broke the rules' to have someone else there, but I gained a different perspective when I heard how the child's bitterness was greater than her mother's.

It is difficult to manage the privacy of the whole topic of divorce, even when people have offered to be interviewed: some of these women felt that they were spilling the beans on someone else's life as well as their own. They dealt with their desire for privacy by asking for their own names to be changed on the tapes, by not naming their husbands, or by requesting that the tapes be held for twenty years before they became accessible. One asked for the name of her husband's company to be deleted from the tape.

Many of the grounds for divorce are sexual, but how do you ask people about sex, especially women from an older generation? It was harder than I thought. The only time I asked a woman directly whether she enjoyed making love, she cringed: 'It was very difficult', and later withdrew permission for her interview to be held in the Alexander Turnbull Library's oral history collection. I wasn't so frank again. On the other hand, there were women who offered insight into their sexual relationship in understated ways. Gloria remembered falling in love

with her husband's friend: 'There was chemistry there. We were young. We were *nice*.' The woman whose marriage was unconsummated for years spoke of trying to arouse her husband's desire: 'I knew I was beautiful. I sat on the edge the bath and felt cheap'.

The issue of boundaries also arose when discussing violence. There were two cases where women had suffered from violence. Is the interviewer prurient to want to understand what this means? To ask how far women had to be pushed before they left?

'When he was drunk, he got nasty.'

'Nasty? *Would he hurt you?*'

'Oh, he was nasty.'

We hear of the power of the interviewer to manipulate her subject, but the story-teller can be powerful, too. The historian, like the journalist, can be carried away by the desire to uncover, to reveal difference, and to know the whole story. But it is the narrator who has ultimate control of the story, and however old a woman is, she can retain her dignity and privacy against an interviewer's intrusive questions.

Despite their limitations, the shared experiences of these nine old women are valuable. They draw us back into a world which was divided neatly into two divisions – between a woman who was married, and a woman who was divorced. By highlighting the way in which the family era of the fifties and sixties was also a time of teenage pregnancies and young marriages, a time when many women could not envisage earning a living, accounts like these help to remove our nostalgia for a simpler age. But while these stories fill some gaps, they also remind us that the truth can be elusive, and there are some things we will never know.

*The interviews for this project are archived at the Oral History Centre, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington*

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# One of the gifts of my life: Reflections on the Mike Walker oral history project

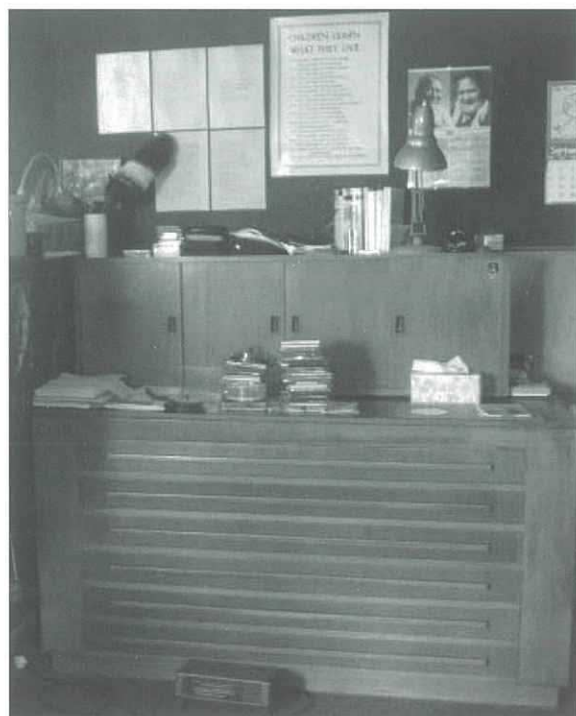
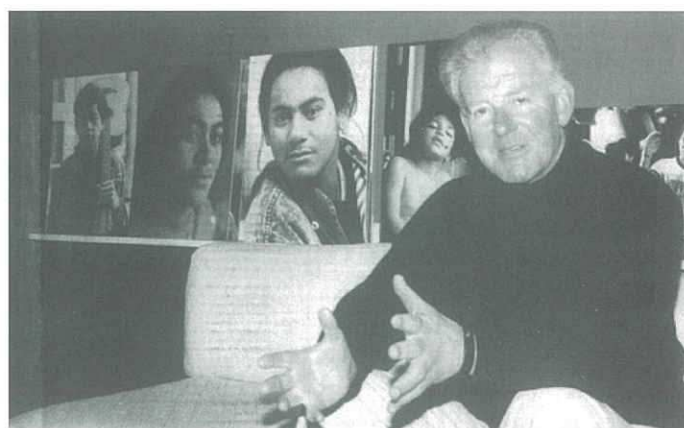
PIP OLDHAM

Mike Walker was born in 1932. He moved to Levin as a child and, apart from a brief spell in Wellington as a young man, he never left.

While still at primary school Mike developed an interest in photography and film. His parents bought him a magic lantern home movie projector together with a large array of 35mm cellulose nitrate film. The need to join and repair the films drove Mike to the local cinema where he spent many hours working with the projectionist. Mike became an avid movie-goer and one of the youngest members of the Levin Film Society.

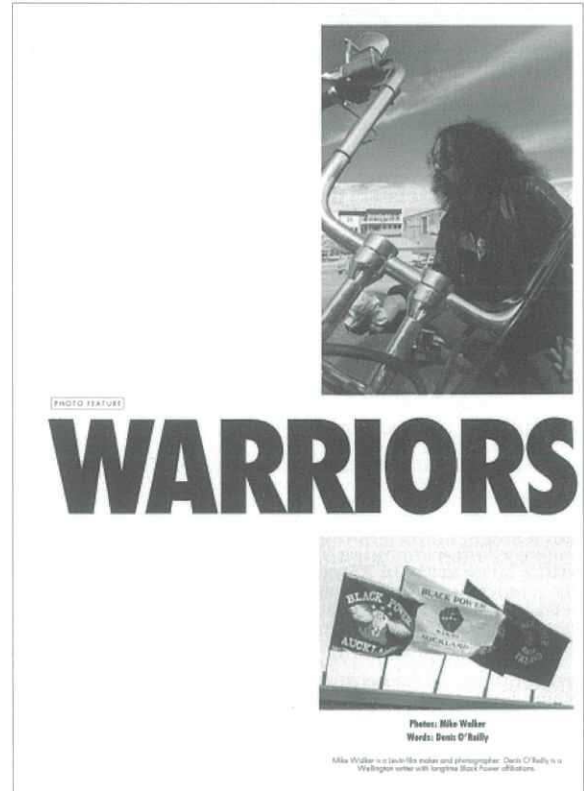
His strength at school was in graphic art which led him to employment at the National Publicity Studios in Wellington where he met Scotsman, Bob Morrow, who was to be a friend and business partner. Morrow had trained in film animation with Gaumont British Animation, part of the Rank Organisation.

Mike joined Morrow in what became Morrow Productions. They worked initially in the field of animation but, with the arrival of television in New Zealand in the early nineteen sixties, expanded



*Top: Mike Walker, (The Mail, Horowhenua, 26 August 1993.)  
Middle, bottom, and left ~ his home and workspaces. (Mitch Manuel)*

Pip Oldham is a Wellington oral historian



*Left and above: Part of a Warriors photo essay first published in Metro Magazine*



*The Yogi Boys, an Otara street gang who Mike Walker auditioned for the film Kingpin in June 1982 (Mike Walker)*

into live action as well. They produced a variety of documentaries and commercials, and, finally, a feature film trilogy in the early eighties. All this work was based in Levin at the house Bob and Mike shared next door to the one in which Mike had grown up. A former joinery workshop in the garden provided a studio and many local locations were used.

In common with other filmmakers of the period, financial and technical difficulties abounded. In addition Bob Morrow suffered from bi-polar disorder. There were periods of heavy drinking, hospital treatment and, ultimately, death in 1980 from an overdose of a prescription drug.

Animation has changed greatly since Morrow Productions made their advertisements for the National Bank featuring Henry and the Sweet Little Bank Teller he met at the Bank, and the Mr Dollar commercials at the time of currency conversion.<sup>1</sup>

Mike's best known works are a trilogy of films: *Mark II*, *Kingpin* and *Kingi's Story* that were conceived and made between 1975 and 1985.

*Mark II* is 'a road movie about three unemployed teenagers who go adventuring in a two tone *Mark II*'.<sup>2</sup> In *Kingpin* 'teenagers in a reform school fight for supremacy – but Willie refuses to accept their domination'<sup>3</sup> and in *Kingi's Story* 'Kingi is in a police cell. This is his story – his own memories of how his life's problems led him into inevitable conflict with the law'.<sup>4</sup>

The films are '...social realist dramas of contemporary Maori and Pacific Island working class New Zealand in the style of classic American action genres'. It has been suggested that the later well known film *Once were Warriors* was a continuation and amplification of this trilogy.<sup>5</sup> I understand that the films are still shown in secondary schools around the country.

The 'reform school' of the films was Kohitere Boys Training Centre which has since closed. The Training Centre was one of four in New Zealand. The films, *Kingpin* and *Kingi's Story* used Kohitere, and the Junior Extension at Hokio Beach, as a setting. Inmate boys were actors and were, in the case of *Kingi's Story*, also involved in the screenplay. Mike said:

*The production of Kingpin was in some ways inevitable. My partner Bob Morrow and I, through our film company Morrow Productions, had had an association with the Kohitere Boys Training Centre since 1953 [...] institutions such as this are pulsing with human drama: 70 to 80 boys (more in earlier years) taken from their families by the courts because of criminal and sometimes violent offences, bringing shame on their families or, in some cases, not even knowing who or where their*

*families were; and more recently the acute social problem of the large numbers from the racial minority groups of Maori and Polynesian people.*<sup>6</sup>

Mike Walker's film-making career was curtailed by ill health. He continued to work as a professional photographer displaying skill as a visual artist and documentary photographer.

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

I was introduced to Mike by a friend of his. She knew he was making slow progress with writing his life, considered his story important and encouraged him to consider recording an oral history. In what I learned to be his inimitable style Mike was agreeable despite my obvious lack of knowledge of Levin and the film industry and inexperience of oral history recording (this was to be my second project). He and his friend even helped apply to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage for an Award in Oral History, Mike sending careful corrections back and forth between Wellington and his post box in Levin (he did not trust his mailbox).

Though not stated in so many words, the application was for an in depth life history covering Mike's early life, interest in photography and film as a young person, work experience at the National Publicity Studios, the company he and Bob Morrow ran and its work, the film trilogy, reflections on living and working in Levin, Mike's relationship with Kohitere and its inmates, and his experiences of sexual orientation and sexuality and living with someone with bi-polar disorder.

Mike died suddenly four days after the Award funding came through. Megan Hutching at the Ministry had an open mind as to what to do. She suggested I formulate another way to tackle the project.

## REFRAMING THE PROJECT

An anecdote was told at Mike's funeral about his dog who would be told 'too soon' when he appeared for his meal hours before it was due – Mike died too soon for those who knew and loved him. My project needed to wait until raw grief had begun to ease.

Gradually over the months after Mike's death I spoke to people who had known him trying to sort out who to interview and with what focus. With hindsight it was at this point that I could have decided on a wide series of shorter interviews with a biographical focus on Mike. As Sarah Gaitanos found with her research on Nola Millar<sup>7</sup> many people knew him (and I was

given the names of many more). Everyone had a great deal to offer, however, Megan Hutching had discreetly warned me about trying to do the original project at one step removed.

I decided to undertake six separate interviews attempting, in my selection of interviewees, to pick up strands of Mike's life.

Thus what began as a six-interview project with one person became an entirely different project with six (ultimately five) interviewees connected with Mike through friendship.

### SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

I met Mike only once. He had told me about a friend of his, an artist living in Levin, who he felt had a keen perception of his work. Mike had wanted me to talk to his friend as preparation for the oral history I was to do with him. At a human level it felt appropriate to include this friend as an interviewee. Moreover his life has important parallels with Mike's, thirty years on. He grew up in Levin leaving briefly to finish his schooling at Lynfield College, Auckland in order to secure entry to Elam Art School (entry to Elam from Horowhenua College would have been very unlikely in the early 1980s) and returning to work as a self-employed artist. His relationship with Mike was an integral part of his life, work and thinking; at the time I interviewed him he was still making mental lists of things to discuss with Mike, so ingrained had that habit become as part of their friendship.

Mike's home was directly over the road from the Catholic Church. He had answered my question about religion in our preliminary interview by saying that he was an honorary Catholic: he enjoyed diplomatic relations with the Vatican whilst not practising any



*St Joseph's Catholic Church, Levin*

faith. The next interviewee, a priest, recounted at Mike's funeral how he turned up on Mike's doorstep one day with the words 'I've had a gutsful of the Church.'

'Can I come in for a beer?' Thus began a friendship that led him to call Mike 'one of the gifts of my life' and to record the view that '... he'd be one of the reasons I am still a priest.' The interview discusses concepts of spirituality and religion in relation to Mike and the ways in which Mike's personal experiences informed his humanity.<sup>8</sup> Reading *Father Mychal Judge, an Authentic American Hero* by Michael Ford, the story of the New York Fire chaplain who was the first official victim of the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York I could not help but see parallels with what this interviewee said about Mike.

When he agreed to be recorded, this interviewee wanted to keep Mike as the primary focus, leaving his own wider life story for a later date. Nevertheless his interview contains material about his family background, how he came to be a priest, his work in the Levin parish and, as it was current at the time of the interview and he was involved, the building of St Joseph's the new Catholic Church in Wellington.

The next two interviewees had connections with the films. One had been previously married to the director called in by TVNZ to work on *Mark II* when Mike's health prevented him from continuing alone. She became a close friend and had experience in recent years helping Mike to market his photographic work – the commercial aspect was not strength of his. Her interview covers her recollections of the process making of *Mark II* and its impact on her family life at the time.

The second 'film' interviewee acted in all three films, helped with scriptwriting and later joined Morrow Productions. I recorded five and a half hours with this interviewee over three sessions – much more of a life story. He describes his Cook Island family background, growing up and education in South Auckland in the 1960s and 1970s, experiences with gangs and in prison, Mike and Bob's reaction to growing use of computers for animation, as well as the living in Levin theme already noted. His personal background and his experiences with Mike as a young man provide a strong connection with the subject matter of the films.

The last interviewee was the person who introduced me to Mike in the first place. Like the Levin artist, this was an intuitive selection: it felt right. She was able to talk about living and working in Levin, in her case at the local authority, and also her experience of friendship with Mike during a period of depression, providing a parallel with Bob Morrow in this respect. Mike's friendship towards her reflected a quality that others spoke of, an understanding that

people are frail and a rare ability to support a person without identifying with them. A life story element of this interview is the interviewee's teenage years and experiences as the parent of a child with severe physical and intellectual difficulties.

#### HOW DID THE PROJECT TURN OUT?

The answer to this is: 'I don't know.'

I had wanted first hand information from Mike Walker about the making of the films. There is some information in two interviews but not as much as I wanted. My attempts to interest several additional interviewees who were friends of Mike's and were involved in the films in different ways were not successful. At the time I approached one of these he was exploring the possibility of issuing the films on DVD with the now customary extra features. We might have been covering similar ground, I don't know. I did not press these people, and undoubtedly could have worked harder to secure these interviews. Maybe I lacked credibility and /or standing to explore this aspect. I respect that; there is a difference between a researcher, however well informed, and an insider in a specialised field. It was also suggested to me that in life Mike had not always had his loyalty reciprocated and it is possible that this was a factor. Whatever the reason, this objective of the original project has not been fully met. Fortunately, before he died Mike deposited carefully documented material at the New Zealand Film Archive. He was also interviewed widely at the time the films were made.

The 'life in Levin' aspect has been well explored through the lens of people operating in different spheres. Mike had an analogy that Levin was '...like a swimming pool, you don't put your head under and you associate only with others who have got their head above water'.<sup>9</sup> There is support and amplification of this point of view in the interviews: difficulties being a creative person in a provincial town and operating on the margins of a community, lack of options for young people, attitudes towards new ideas and points of difference, and paucity of people with shared interests.

These themes are reflected in the different friendships depicted in the interviews. The interviewees range in age, gender, occupation, economic, social and cultural ways. Mike Walker was not a person to join clubs or groups; he disliked labels, especially the 'gay' tag. His friends were an eclectic group, carefully chosen and nurtured and reflecting the diverse needs that he had as a person living on the margins of society. The interviewees know of each other but are not friends amongst themselves, which

accentuates the sense of a man with a patchwork quilt around him, some edges touching, some colours and tones reflecting, all part of the whole but individual in themselves.

Each of these friendships is explored: the sort of friend Mike was to the interviewees, how the relationship worked and what it tells us about Mike, at least in the later stages of his life. Because of this the material is at times intimate and personal. Knowing what I know now about Mike, I suspect that this might have been a characteristic of anything he recorded also.

I will leave it to others to judge how valuable the material is. One interviewee saw scope to analyse these interviews and re-interview on closely focussed themes and topics, an interesting and tempting possibility. My guess is that the value of the work lies in the individual topics covered, some of which have no direct connection at all with Mike and his work. I have in mind the New Zealand Oral History Archive's Martinborough project here.

#### WHAT I LEARNED

The delay between my first contact with Mike early in 2004, tentative inquiries with people leading to reframing the project in late 2004, recording of the interviews in mid 2005 and completion of the project in 2006 was much too long to make the most effective use of the research I had done. A concentrated period of research and interviewing would have ensured more ends tied and been more efficient time wise.

I also underestimated the logistical difficulties that would be posed by interviews out of Wellington (3 out of 5). In future I would be much more determined to gather information and tie up loose ends while I was with the interviewee rather than leave matters to deal with by post from a distance, adding time and work.

This particularly applies to the visual aspect of the project. Because Mike was a visual artist I had wanted to provide a strong visual element to the project for deposit at the Alexander Turnbull Library. Mike had agreed to take photographs of his 1940s home and workspaces. I was not able to provide as many of these photos as I would have liked (he had not taken them before he died). There are photographs amongst his estate that are of relevance to the recorded material but these form part of a wider body of work that needs to be archived and preserved. Finding the correct repository for this material in its entirety has not been easy for Mike's executors as various institutions showed interest in some, but not all, of what was available. As far as I know this remains unresolved. I

hope that when a home is found for the visual material some cross-reference can be made to this project.

Finally, in view of the personal nature of some of the recorded material I did not ask the interviewees to sign the recording agreement form until they had had an opportunity to listen to the recorded material. This introduced an element of delay. I also suspect that some found the form recommended by the Oral History Centre confusing. I wonder whether it can be simplified so that it is readily understood by all interviewees.

#### TECHNICAL

I was encouraged to apply for funding to purchase recording equipment. At the time I came to do my recordings in 2005 it was not clear what digital recording equipment would be most suitable so I made the decision to make analogue recordings using hired equipment. In order to complete the project I have now purchased a digital recorder and embarked on the whole new field of learning that this step entails.

As a beginning oral historian there were some technical issues that I have since been able to improve upon. The most notable was learning to make allowance for a significant drop in volume that can occur when an interviewee moves from recording easily recalled information to information of a more deeply reflective or emotional nature.

#### THANKS

I would like to record my thanks to Megan Hutching at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage for unfailing support and patience, and to the five interviewees who gave of themselves and their time in memory of their common friend, a man whose personal qualities, developed out of private suffering, left an enduring and loving imprint on everyone who knew him.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> 'From Len Lye to Gollum: New Zealand Animators', Chris Wilks, held at the NZ Film Archive.
- <sup>2</sup> New Zealand Film Archive, catalogue description.
- <sup>3</sup> New Zealand Film Commission, film home page for Kingpin.
- <sup>4</sup> New Zealand Film Archive, catalogue description.
- <sup>5</sup> Lawrence McDonald, 'Film As a Battleground, Social Space, Gender, Conflict and Other Issues in Once Were Warriors', *Illusions*, Spring 1995.
- <sup>6</sup> Mike Walker, quoted in London Film Festival Programme, 1985.
- <sup>7</sup> Sarah Gaitanos, 'Oral History In a Theatre Biography', *Oral History in New Zealand*, vol 15, 2003, p.24.
- <sup>8</sup> Michael McCabe, interview, 12 April 2005, side 5, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- <sup>9</sup> Morice Crandall, interview, 17 June 2005, side 4, Alexander Turnbull Library.

*The interviews from this project are archived at the Alexander Turnbull Library's Oral History Centre, Wellington*

# The oral historian in hospice work – oral history as therapy

LOREEN BREHAUT

I had read in the literature and been interested for some years in the potential therapeutic uses of oral history, having myself noticed the beneficial effect that life story interviews seemed to have for the subjects, who sometimes treated them almost like counselling sessions.

When a new hospice was built in Blenheim, I offered my services and discovered that they did intend to offer what they called a 'biography service' to patients when first referred to the hospice. Interested volunteers were enlisted and given the basic hospice training, followed by a session for 'biographers' run by workers from the hospice in another town who had been offering this service to their patients for some years. It was during this training session that I became aware of the differences between the traditional hospice 'biography' service and the oral history work I was accustomed to. I should like to address some of these points here.

- 1) The reason for the interview. Oral history normally has the purpose of recording memories which will otherwise be lost – the main reason is to save the words spoken by the subject. It is expected that what is recorded will be made available to others and ideally be given public access. In contrast, the therapeutic interview is conducted for the sole benefit of the patient. Any further access by outsiders or even their family members is entirely in their control and the interviewer has to accept that nothing might be archived. This can be very difficult for an oral historian to bear! I suggest to volunteers that they request the material for archiving (after the interviews) but if turned down they must comply with the patient's wishes.
- 2) Selection of interviewees. In oral history work one would avoid interviewing subjects in collapsed physical condition who might not be able to maintain a recording session for more than 10–15 minutes at a time, but this can often happen with hospice patients. Medication often affects their memories, as well. We have to just manage as best we can if they want to be recorded. Patients may

be in bed in the hospice or at home, on oxygen or under the influence of drugs. One tries to cope with all conditions.

- 3) Value placed on the recorded voice. It is common practice in some hospices to re-use the recorded tapes – that is, they are transcribed and then the recorded voice is discarded. I have managed to convince our committee that this is unacceptable, and we return the tapes to the patient with any written material for their personal record.
- 4) Editing of transcripts. Although I normally transcribe my oral history interviews, I am aware that many colleagues do not, and in fact believe that transcribing and editing processes are not strictly part of oral history practice. I am particular to preserve a verbatim transcript whatever further processes are planned, and if editing I take great pains to retain the exact words and speech patterns of the interviewee. The transcribing process is a different skill to the interviewing one: as Paul Thompson writes, 'In transferring speech into print the historian needs to develop a new kind of literary skill, which allows his writing to remain as faithful as possible to both the character and meaning of the original.'<sup>1</sup> In the hospice situation, the construction of a written story (the 'biography') is prepared from the transcript, printed and presented back to the patient in booklet form. This might be a highly-edited version of the actual interviews, depending on the skills of the volunteers involved and their commitment to the verbatim word. The patient is given editing opportunities while the manuscript is still in draft form. Some of the volunteers are more creative writers than oral historians and like to construct a good presentation, not necessarily

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valuing the actual words spoken. Also, the physical condition of the patient sometimes makes well-organised and fluent interviews impossible.

However, experienced oral historians will recognize strong overlaps with their normal practice:

- 1) Ethical behaviour. The same conditions of informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for the interviewee apply as in any oral history work, with the exception of archiving responsibilities. A heightened personal sensitivity is of course a great advantage.
- 2) Respect for the spoken expression of an individual's memory. This may require a dedication to recording standards under difficult conditions (as indeed may field work in other types of project). Allowing the patient to express themselves in their own way and in their own time is a skill sometimes lacking but useful in all oral history interviews.
- 3) Power sharing. There have been discussions and reminders in 'traditional' oral history texts about the importance of sharing control of the interview between the two parties. It is sometimes difficult (but necessary) for a researcher to avoid treating interviewees like information sources to be mined for data. Hospice work demands a truly cooperative approach where interviewers permit their skills to be used in the way that the patients desire.

When about to start my involvement at the hospice, I posted a request on the oral history online discussion list<sup>2</sup> for people with experience in this work who had advice to offer. There were a number of replies raising issues such as the potential difficulty of working with ill people, possibly drug-affected and in pain. Something of a storm erupted after one list member described recording a conversation about death with a dying patient and her son. Oral historians are not necessarily willing to undertake that type of interview, and the general opinion was that it is inappropriate. 'One of our professional standards should be to recognize the limitations of what we do (and very few of us are therapists)' was one response. 'Nothing less than the highest professional standards will do,' was a strong reminder. The necessity for hospice training was stressed by several, but also, 'in the other direction, I think it's important for hospice trained volunteers to have some oral history interview training.' The most sensible remark was, 'in the end it is all about being able to tell one's story and make meaning out of it.'

In her article 'Reminiscence and Oral History', Joanna Bornat distinguishes the two processes as follows: 'The interviewer who focuses on a life

history with a view to finding out about the past and an individual's life in that past, is working as an oral historian. The interviewer who encourages life review, reflecting on those same experiences but with a view to encouraging greater self-awareness and personal reflection by that older person, is engaging in reminiscence.'<sup>3</sup> In other words, the main difference turns on for whose benefit the interview is being conducted.

I believe that life story interviewing with hospice patients is oral history, albeit with slightly changed parameters. Oral historians are neither counsellors nor therapists. While their offering of time and skills may have a beneficial effect on the patient, this is related to the traditional interview techniques of listening, focused attention, eye contact and overt interest in what the person is saying. The process of informed consent means that the patient understands why their interviewer is showing them such concentrated interest, and in a life stage where medical concerns are the usual topics of conversation, they are permitted to take their minds back to more interesting times. This is what we always hope to do with our oral history interviewees.

In summary, the skills of the oral historian can be very valuable in the hospice situation, but some of the traditional attitudes need to be left at the door. The process of life review – which is generally what the patients engage upon – is confirming and helpful to most people in this final life stage. What is created is 'the last possible edition of the volume each of us has spent a lifetime creating and amending.'<sup>4</sup> Successful completion of a patient's wishes is a rewarding process for both parties in the exercise.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.262.

<sup>2</sup> H-ORALHIST@H-NET.MSU.EDU .

<sup>3</sup> Joanna Bornat, 'Reminiscence and Oral History,' *Ageing and Society*, 2001, vol.21, pp.219-241; reprinted in Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson, eds, *The Oral History Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge, 2006, pp.456-473.

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Butler, 'Butler Reviews Life Review,' *Ageing Today*, [www.asaging.org/at/at-214/legacymem.html](http://www.asaging.org/at/at-214/legacymem.html) .



# A very private matter: anti-nepotism rules in accounting partnerships

RACHEL F BASKERVILLE

*His mind had not preserved memories like fossils forever embedded in their original form, inanimately awaiting excavation; on the contrary, the very act of revisiting these sites had sufficed to scatter these 'artifacts' into more recent layers of living memory and imagination, thereby transforming them.<sup>1</sup>*

Schoolcraft calls this transformation a 'mutilated reality' and yet these memories provide frames of memory which work together in the construction of self. In a profession, these frames assist individuals to make sense of the profession and its values. One objective of this study is to review the manner in which oral histories address the 'problem' of memory. Early on in the development of the discipline of oral history there were some particularly insightful reviews and commentaries on this issue which may have calmed some of the more vociferous opponents of oral histories as data.<sup>2</sup> Yet accuracy in recollections still presents a challenge in oral history analysis.

In reviewing the manner in which memory functions, Schoolcraft reminds us that in utilising memories of the 'Occupation' years during periods of war; meetings, names and chronology took an importance that they would not otherwise have initially possessed.<sup>3</sup> The passing of time did not relax the grip and recall of these memories. In addition, makeshift situations experienced at these times destabilise the memory or disrupted processes. At such time, the memory loses its 'fixed backdrop', and compared with other more stable periods, recall is increased.

Given the context of the moment of recall, and the selective processes of remembering, those undertaking oral histories have to consider how to address such an issue. A major contribution can be found in Thompson's chapter on 'Evidence' in which he highlights the special value interviews possess, as subjective spoken testimony.<sup>4</sup> It is inevitable that different individuals recall different perspectives from a shared or widely communicated event, as will be demonstrated in this discussion of anti-nepotism rules in accounting partnerships. More 'traditional' historical resources such as newspapers, correspondence, minutes of Cabinet meetings or parish councils, diaries, or even census data and registers,

have been subject to assessment in respect of their claimed objectivity or soundness, with many biases or selectivity being apparent.

The consensus developed by oral historians as to the means of achieving a sufficiently rigorous analysis of the interview data is that there must be consistency in multiple recollections of key events. In the example provided in this paper there was a diversity of recollection as to a particular event. Knowledge of this event gave rise to anti-nepotism rules in some accounting partnerships. The evolution of anti-nepotism clauses appears to have led to a sustained acceptance of the 'rightness' of such principles, although there was only sparse recall of a possible originating event. Accordingly this case tests the principle of only using data where there is inter-participant consistency. Furthermore, the smoothness of a life-long career in an accounting partnership, and the homogeneity of such organisations in this jurisdiction, provided a stable frame for the idea of anti-nepotism rules.

This led the researcher to question: why should the memory of a significant event be lacking when the consequences of the event remains structurally embedded? By reviewing recollections of the reasons for anti-nepotism clauses in partnerships, an attempt is made to engage this question. The significance of this research is that it informs our appreciation of the importance of contextual understanding. This article therefore outlines the research processes, before reviewing different stories of the event and its consequences, and the way in which the 'event' informs current professional accounting partnerships.

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## THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF IT

*Narratives can be powerful tool for opening up new areas of inquiry in stabilized and well established fields of knowledge...new complementary lines of research may be opened.*<sup>5</sup>

Unexpected outcomes from narratives are of significant value in an oral history. Data for this study was derived from a larger project, for which the research question can be broadly stated as: Why did the survivors survive?: reasons for the differential survival of large accounting firms from the 'Big 8' of the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> The interviewees were respondents to a survey of members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of New Zealand who had been partners in major audit firms between 1982 and 1992, and who had agreed to be interviewed. Most were retired partners because it was believed they would talk more freely about their experiences. All of New Zealand's large firms were represented, and participants were from both urban and rural practices throughout the country. The objective of the interviews was to discuss and review the reasons for the survival of the remaining 'Big 4' firms, and to discuss factors that had contributed to the collapse of other large firms in New Zealand in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

The interviews were conducted in 2002, and nearly all tapes have been deposited in the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington.<sup>8</sup> These interviews were unstructured, but they all covered similar topics: individual work histories, audit practice, income allocation, international affiliations, and particular firm histories. Although the interviews provided valuable insights into the original research questions — in particular, the income allocation issue and individual firm histories — there were some unexpected revelations during the interviews. There was confusion concerning distinctive characteristics between the Big 8, and answers concerning the underlying significance of the audit business were divergent (was it primarily to provide a 'backbone' of steady cash flows throughout the annual cycle, or bringing in associated accounting activities). A survey prior to the interviews had shown there was widespread concern at the problem of inequitable partnership income allocation. But it was the unexpected revelation of the existence of anti-nepotism rules halfway through the interviews which prompted this study.

How can oral histories evaluate such evidence? As noted by Peneff, to achieve a reading of the events with as much representational faithfulness as possible, *you have to know how to pick out by experience or*

*intuition the spheres where the narrator will show him or herself to be a good source, and where the facts will be fudged; both dispositions can be combined in the same individual, since detachment, a sense of objectivity, and an aptitude for realism or perception can coexist with blindness to what is portrayed, a wish to pass over critical moments of existence, or a tendency to systematic misrepresentation.*<sup>9</sup>

But conversely, oral historians cannot be all-knowing, and Tonkin warns that 'Historians who use the recollections of others cannot just scan them for useful facts to pick out, like currants from a cake. Any such facts are so embedded in the representation that it directs an interpretation of them, and its very ordering, its plotting, and its metaphors bear meaning too'.<sup>10</sup>

All records of accounting arrangements depend on the experience of the teller and the recorder for both the construction and interpretation of the events. When researchers use oral history interviews, they look for internal consistencies, and seek confirmation in other sources, whilst being aware of potential bias of both the narrator and interviewer. Could these rules be applied in examining this topic of anti-nepotism?

With anti-nepotism rules, their somewhat unusual characteristic may have been submerged by 'normality' and the consensus nature shown by senior partners in mentoring the new partner into the organisation. The other characteristic of these organisations was that in many cases there was only a 'token' deed of partnership and new entrants were not expected to request a copy for inspection:

Q: Did you ever find [anti-nepotism clauses] in partnership deeds?

No. Those days we rarely had deeds. It was all verbal agreements. In fact, it was only much later in the Cook & Company ... that we ever had a deed, or a partnership agreement. It was all very much a handshake-type arrangement, or the common thing that they'd say, 'on the back of a cigarette packet'.

[The senior partner] called me in and he said 'Tom, delighted to see you, sit down. We had a meeting yesterday and decided to make you a partner from January,' this was November, I think it was. I said 'Thank you', he said, 'Congratulations, and, you know, see me about anything you want,' and that was it. Out the door. [Q: No deed?] No deed, Lord, no, we didn't have a partnership deed. You got around to signing those months or years later. As to income, as to accounts: no, you didn't see those. If you insisted, and you were liable to get a black mark, you would be shown a set of accounts, but you weren't allowed to take a copy. It was a very patriarchal.

There was no discussion of this casual attitude to

the formal side of a partnership organisation in the few written partnership histories in New Zealand.

When asked, interviewees provided only a few intuitive reasons for anti-nepotism clauses, with no inter-participant consistency, and little certainty on any detail of the founding incident. As will be further discussed, the very lack of consistency in the understanding of the reasons for the original rules demonstrates that, once the rules were instituted they had such traction that the rationale became irrelevant. In order to discuss the exact nature of the anti-nepotism rules, the next section reviews ideas about the incidence of nepotism, and data from the interviews.

### THE PHENOMENON OF NEPOTISM

Historically, selection or promotion based on consanguinity used to mean the advantages, or opportunities for advancement, enjoyed by a Pope's nephew. However, the meaning enlarged to include unfair preferment of - or favouritism shown to - friends, protégés or others within one's personal sphere of influence.

Adam Bellow remarks that preferred access through family ties or patronage is characteristic of certain professions; in particular banking, the military, the church, medicine, and the law.<sup>11</sup> Nepotism, or generational succession, enjoyed a resurgence in American politics in the 1920s and 1930s, and 'far from being controversial, it seemed as natural as breathing'.<sup>12</sup> It was later seen as a strategy for class or elite domination, contravening the American ideals of a free society where everyone could advance on the basis of merit alone. In addition to its occurrence in politics and some professions, Bellow suggested systematic nepotism had been practiced by the poor and in working classes, for example, firemen, policemen, and builders. It is seen by some as a rational group strategy.

Bellow does not address the accounting profession, nor whether any professions had anti-nepotism rules. However, many would agree with the view that 'any entitlement to advancement on grounds of merit alone, free of any tinge of political nepotism, must be jealously guarded by any self-respecting profession'.<sup>13</sup> Nepotism can be seen as undermining a basic sense of fairness, promoting wastes and inefficiencies, and as an obstacle to healthy economic growth. The anti-nepotism movement was a middle-class and professional class phenomenon.

It would seem likely, then, that anti-nepotism rules would be observed in professional partnerships in a variety of jurisdictions. However, so far as can

be ascertained, it does not occur in accounting firms outside New Zealand, or in other professions. This is surprising, given Bellow's analysis of the middle-class origins of anti-nepotism sentiment.

In this oral history research, the first reference to anti-nepotism rules appeared in the twentieth out of the 40 interviews, and the narrator was talking about some other individuals and their involvement in local politics; how it assisted in building up business links:

*[\*\*] avoided it all, because his father had been the Elliffe of Hutchison Elliffe & Cameron, and in those days they didn't allow sons of the firm to work for them. Or become partners. [Q: Before the Second World War?] It may have related to a specific problem that Hutchison Elliffe & Cameron had, but [\*\*], never. He went to work for Wilkinson Christmas. Noel Barclay started, or became, Kirk Barclay. I think his brother Roy too. But their parents were in Hutchison Elliffe & Cameron. [Q: Do you think there's some benefit in that? Sons not working in the same firm as their father?] Well evidently there had been a problem with one of the names in the firm. [...] But I think that there is something in that. But certainly it's gone the full circle. Because [\*\*]'s son is one of the senior partners in KPMG now.'*

After this comment the question of anti-nepotism rules was raised in other interviews, and responses sought from those already interviewed.

### NEPOTISM IN ACCOUNTING PARTNERSHIPS

The most common reasons, provided in interviews for the retention of the anti-nepotism rules were that fathers and sons tend to fall out, that it was necessary to allay suspicions that the son was taking the easy road to the top, that the son would be able to rise irrespective of merit, and that it averted perceived favouritism.

It was apparent that the rules differed among the Big 8 firms by the late 1980s. For example, one partner of Wilkinson Wilberfoss (which became Arthur Young) recalled a father and son both being partners in his firm in the early 1970s, but the firm had an anti-nepotism rule thereafter which precluded a father and son working in the same office in the first partnership term of the new partner (the son).<sup>14</sup>

Barr Burgess & Stewart, predecessor firm of Coopers & Lybrand, also had a rule:

*The rule was you could not have a son working or a partner in the same office as his father. But we did have [\*\*]'s son ... became a partner. [\*\*] was a partner in Invercargill who then retired, and his son became a partner, finished up in Whangarei.*

Deloitte's predecessor firms were Hutchison Elliffe

& Cameron (already discussed) and Watkins Hull Wheeler and Johnston. Watkins Hull Wheeler and Johnston had a policy after 1972 against fathers and sons in the same firm. Tom Davies recalled this date was convenient as it was just after Bill Parsons, the son of partner Geoff Parsons, became a partner. After that, children of partners were not allowed to be employed at all, apart from holiday jobs. One partner did not recall precisely why this policy was introduced into the predecessor firms of Hutchison Hull:

*I have a dim recollection that there might have been a son in the Auckland Office who had aspirations not matched by partners' assessments of him (his father excepted, of course)...A few years later there was a mild 'disturbance' when Dunedin Office – for which read [\*\*\*], who possibly was also chairman at the time – insisted that his son ... be made a partner at the unheard of age of 28. I think [\*\*\*] was possibly the most autocratic senior partner I have ever come across, and to cross him could be unpleasant. I suspect we bent the policy to avoid war in the South. Anyway, [his son] was perfectly competent, although he wandered off a few years later ...*

KPMG and its predecessor firms (Morris Patrick; and Gilfillan, Gentles, Pickles, and Perkins) bucked the trend of anti-nepotism rules, although it was considered valuable for a son to get experience in other firms and overseas. Subsequently there was nothing to prevent their joining the same firms as their father. Neither did the predecessor firms of Touche Ross (Clarke Menzies and McCulloch Butler and Spence) have any specific clause. Price Waterhouse was a small franchise arm of the international firm, and Arthur Andersen did not have a presence here until late in the 1980s. Partners of the predecessor firms of Ernst & Whinney could not recall an anti-nepotism rule.

There were frequent memories of father and sons both being partners, but in different firms, as described with Lawrence Anderson Buddle<sup>15</sup>: 'All the partners in our Christchurch firm had sons and many of them qualified as accountants but none of them ever came into the firm'. This had not been the case earlier, particularly in local firms.

Q: Buddle & Company<sup>16</sup> sounded like a whole sequence of fathers and sons?

*Well it was; and I think that was part of the perception that I have had and I've read about it often, that in business, the first generation makes it, the second generation spends it, and the third generation tries to regroup it. With the Buddle firm, I never knew Joseph Forster Buddle, but I did know Frederick Charles Buddle who was still alive when I joined the firm [c. 1960].*

*We were at 41 Shortland Street on the second floor, and there was a short diagonal walk across the road to the Auckland Club. Fred Buddle would always go to the Auckland Club from 12 'til 2, have his whiskeys or whatever it was and then come back and go to sleep in the stuffed chaise lounge in his son Peter's office, until 3.30 and then go home; and I have a vivid picture of him walking diagonally across the road from 41 Shortland Street to the Auckland Club. He was an inveterate pipe smoker, and he had tapped the dottle of his pipe out into his umbrella and his umbrella was in flames behind him as he walked across the road [Laughs].*

Two of those interviewed were sons of partners in the firm they joined as a partner. One of them, Derek Holland, recalls that the partners other than his father had to persuade his father to allow him in as a partner, as the other partners feared losing his skills to their firm. Tom Davies' father had retired the year before he became a partner. Another recalled that when another firm offered a partnership to his son 'they thought they were getting a treasure, getting my son in the first place...but he didn't prove to be a particularly good accountant and I think he disappointed them a bit.'

A further argument for anti-nepotism was the increasing practice of utilising peer review within each office as a form of quality control. Peer review relies on relative independence of individuals within each office and may have been impacted by family relationships. However, as mentioned above, there was no consensus on the precise details of the founding incident.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Memory is a social as well as an individual process.<sup>17</sup> In the relatively small professional community of accountants in New Zealand, these interviews provided an insight into how such a community has a conversation with itself about the nature of professional relationships and professional identity. Whatever the ambivalence about the detail of the founding event, the anti-nepotism rule had considerable traction once established, as shown by the extent to which participants had not previously considered if there was a just cause for the rule. Although anti-nepotism rules were not evident in all partnerships, even those interviewees from firms without the rule agreed it 'made sense'. The subsequent use (or abuse) of the founding event in justification of such rules gives an insight on the extent to which history provides representational faithfulness, or merely a representation.

In addition, the narrative in each interview may have reflected the speaker's own theoretical

suppositions, particularly in the question: why not in legal partnerships? For example, the analysis by Adam Bellow of the rise of anti-nepotism in middle-class America makes us wonder why there are no such clauses in other professional partnerships. Asking this question produced inconclusive responses. One partner suggested it was 'because law's all about emotion and the joy of words and things, and accounting is cold, hard clinical facts'. Another thought it might be 'because lawyers are like doctors, they are dynastic. [Q: Why are accountants not so dynastic?] I think it's because there's not quite the same mystique... a sort of Druidic culture. Once you were initiated into it [the legal profession] you can't imagine doing anything else'.<sup>18</sup>

The messages from the past influence present practice and assist in answering 'why the memory of a significant event should be lacking when the consequences of the event remains structurally embedded'. I would suggest that anti-nepotism rules continue because they resonate with two of the premises underlying partnership organisations: that the members are equal, and that each partner gained their position under meritocracy. They are partners, for better or for worse. The trust required in the step of becoming a partner was illustrated by the comment that it was 'bad form' to seek a copy of the partnership deed. It is expected that each member leaves the partnership in a better state than it was when he or she entered. Working for the greater good means there is a commitment to transfers of (intergenerational) wealth outside the usual limits of consanguinity. Any single partner wishing to make a case against the anti-nepotism clause would, prima facie, be deemed to be acting in a manner contrary to the principles of these archetypal partnership codes.

Rainer Maria Rilke saw a modern world 'laced with often barely noticed material traces from the past that contained non-contemporaneous meaning and messages'.<sup>19</sup> Although a present-day encounter with such objects may result in their appearing ungrounded or stranded because they are detached from their original surroundings, in fact this detachment does not 'prevent them from continuing to signal backward to human worlds of meaning which would otherwise be lost from view'.<sup>20</sup> Recording a past event which informs the present gives a temporal depth to present partnerships arrangements, and enables the researcher to interpret present practice. Documentation of this phenomenon provides a means of both deepening and broadening an understanding of the current manner in which these organisations construct and reconstruct themselves in an environment 40 or 50

years removed from the original 'significant event'. In the context of partnerships the rule made sense, and continues to make sense, irrespective of why it started. The interview data were unexpected and there are no clear guidelines on dealing with such 'surprises'. However, these diverse memories provide a contextual understanding of the meaning of partnerships and why anti-nepotism rules may have been introduced to reward merit, rather than birthright.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ralph Schoolcraft, 'Restoring "The Tatters of a Mutilated Reality": Response to Susan Suleiman', *South Central Review* 21 (1), 2004, p. 850.
- <sup>2</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12, 1981, pp. 96 – 107.
- <sup>3</sup> Schoolcraft, p. 83.
- <sup>4</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, OUP, 2000, 3rd edition.
- <sup>5</sup> Sten Jonsson & Norman B. Macintosh, 'CATS, RATS, and EARS: Making the case for ethnographic accounting research', *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 22, (3, 4), 1997, pp. 367-386.
- <sup>6</sup> The Big 8 was a reference to the largest of the international accounting firms of Arthur Andersen, KPMG Peat Marwick, Ernst & Whinney and Arthur Young (later to merge to become Ernst & Whinney) Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand (later to merge to become PricewaterhouseCoopers); and Deloitte Haskin Sells and Touche Ross (later to merge to become Deloitte Touche).
- <sup>7</sup> As described in the previous footnote from mergers among the Big 8.
- <sup>8</sup> One withdrew from the oral history project and another agreement remains pending.
- <sup>9</sup> Jean Peneff, 'Myths in Life Stories', in *The Myths We Live By*, Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson (eds), NY and London: Routledge, 1990, p. 42.
- <sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin, 'History and the Myth of Realism', in *The Myths We Live By*, Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson (eds), Routledge, 1990, p. 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Adam Bellow, *In Praise of Nepotism: a history of family enterprise from King David to George W. Bush*. Anchor Books, 2004, p. 503.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>13</sup> Aneurin Bevan, cited in the OED.
- <sup>14</sup> By the time the son was made a partner in 1979 the father in this case had retired.
- <sup>15</sup> Affiliated to Arthur Andersen, but after that affiliation was lost in the late 1980s, this firm was mostly absorbed by Price Waterhouse.
- <sup>16</sup> An early Auckland firm which later merged into Lawrence Anderson Buddle.
- <sup>17</sup> Thompson, p.132.
- <sup>18</sup> This commentary was from an accountant now working with the Law Society in New Zealand.
- <sup>19</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, in David Gross, *Lost Time: On remembering and forgetting in late modern culture*, University of Massachusetts, 2000, p.147.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

# Tuning in, turning on and dropping out:

## REVISITING THE COMMUNE YEARS AS AN INSIDER RESEARCHER

OLIVE JONES

*It has commonly been assumed that being an insider means easy access, the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly, be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study...<sup>1</sup>*

Some of the information that has come to light as a result of my research into a 'hippie' commune that flourished during the 1970s and 80s raises a number of ethical issues. These issues are linked to my insider status in the project: I lived on the commune<sup>2</sup> for sixteen years and still maintain close ties with many of the people who have become my informants. This particular commune differed from most that were established around that period for a number of reasons: it was an 'open' commune without ownership, membership or restrictions on who lived there; it was established on arable farmland rather than marginal land, and it was based on a philosophy of anarchy – that is, that all people should be free to make their own decisions regarding conduct and action, and therefore there was no need for regulation.

Consequently, the commune attracted many people from a diverse spectrum of society, including people with mental health issues, addicts, alcoholics and eccentrics. It was also primarily made up of young adults who were rejecting mainstream society, many of whom were experimenting with such things as drug taking, spiritual quests and sexuality. For these reasons, there is the potential to inadvertently convey a picture of the commune in the public arena as something freakish, or an object of ridicule. During the interview process, the events that were discussed were often highly personal and my informants exposed behaviours and attitudes that many outsiders would consider odd or dysfunctional. A further consideration is that many 'intentional communities' that were established during this period still exist, and the portrayal of one in such a way that risks stereotyping through discussion about drug taking and other themes such as promiscuity could serve to reinforce prejudices that might negatively impact on others.

The commune still exists, though it no longer operates as a co-operative enterprise. Almost all

the people who founded the commune have moved on, though many still live in the same district and continue to interact socially. The commune currently houses a number of people who are mostly long term beneficiaries, many with alcohol and drug dependency issues, who for the most part are not interested in the original values of organic farming and self-sufficiency that were the establishing principles.

My knowledge of events and people connected to the commune has not only been informed by my own involvement during its early years, but in the process of conducting oral history interviews I have been privy to disclosures by informants about subjects that could be detrimental to those involved if such information was to be made public. This article explores some of the issues that have arisen as a result of my position as insider in the research process.<sup>3</sup>

Before I begin to analyse the relative advantages and disadvantages of being an insider in the process of conducting oral history interviews, I believe it is important to acknowledge the fact that any interview is a 'negotiated accomplishment.'<sup>4</sup> According to Fontana and Frey:

*Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in an interaction with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place.<sup>5</sup>*

While the context may include the researcher having insider knowledge of the subject under study,

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there are a range of other variables to do with the relationship between the researcher and informants that have a significant influence on the outcome, including the dynamics of the rapport that develops during the interview process, as well as historical, personal and political issues. Because of this, Holstein, Gubrium and others<sup>6</sup> advocate approaching the interview process in reflexive terms, treating it as a social encounter where stories are told and the shape of them is informed by the relationship between the respondent and the interviewer.

If one takes this into account, Merriam's assertion that an insider is more likely to achieve a result that essentially projects a more 'truthful, authentic understanding of the culture'<sup>7</sup> does not necessarily follow.

Researchers such as Narayan suggest that 'it is no longer useful to think of researchers as insiders or outsiders; instead researchers might be positioned "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations."<sup>8</sup> Narayan suggests that instead of defining insider / outsider status, it is more relevant to focus on the quality of the relations between researcher and informants, as well as the purpose for the research. In the process of extracting information it is imperative that the researcher recognises that not only does the subject have their own independent voice, but that the process of getting information is collaborative and a shared construction.

I would argue that the suggestion that the insider / outsider status of the researcher is less significant than other factors is not necessarily relevant to every situation. In my commune research, I believe my prior relationships with informants has inevitably informed the nature of the exchange during interviews, as well as the ways in which the subject expresses their 'independent voice' in the course of the collaboration. Throughout the process of interviewing, as well as during the process of editing and selecting material to include, I was conscious of an inner conflict between my professional role as researcher and potential author, and my personal role as insider and participant. However, I am also aware of the fact that it is not only my position as insider that has influenced the results and responses I have received from my informants. The relationship and rapport that I established with each of my informants in the course of this 'negotiated' exchange during the interviews, while informed in some situations by our previous relationship, and in others by my reputation as one of the commune founders, was also shaped by

my motivation: that is to collect people's oral testimonies of the commune experience for the purposes of including their stories in a book. I wanted to re-tell the story of the rise and fall of the commune, including the voices of those who lived there at various points of its development to illustrate the contradictory and diverse elements and attitudes that have shaped the community over time. With this in mind, I encouraged discussion and recollections that reflected the contradictory points of view that I considered were central to the demise of the commune. While each interview was a 'negotiated exchange', it was also shaped and influenced by my own ideas of what were the most significant themes and issues.

The commune became a divided and conflict-ridden experience for most participants, and inevitably I was aligned with, or identified as sympathetic to, a particular faction as much as anyone else. Consequently, the resulting dialogue in the interviews reflected these divisions. Some informants spoke frankly and in depth about controversial issues, obviously secure in the assumption that I was sympathetic to their views, while others who perceived me to have a different political perspective either spoke with reserve about the same topic or avoided it altogether.

However, in spite of this reserve, I believe that my status as insider put me in a position of trust, as well as allowing me access to people that I might not have had as an outsider. I believe many of my informants consented to speak openly on tape because of our past relationships and my positive associations with the commune, as well as the fact that they perceived me as having a sympathetic understanding of the behaviours and challenges central to the experience of living communally. Further, some of my informants, who have chosen to live quite a reclusive lifestyle on the commune, have an entrenched wariness and suspicion of 'outsiders.' Two key participants declined to speak with me because it was 'too close to the bone' according to one, and past negative experiences of the commune and acrimonious departures were not experiences they were willing to revisit. Although neither of them said so directly, I suspect that the fact that I was one of the people to whom they were opposed politically also influenced their decision not to participate in the research.

My insider understanding of personalities, the relationships that existed between key people, as well as the historical events that informed the experience, made it possible for the interviews to be conducted on a level that went beyond the purely explanatory. I

believe it also enabled my informants to delve more analytically into the experience and its repercussions than if the interview had been conducted by someone who was unfamiliar with the events and people that made up the experience.

However, in having my informants' confidence, I was often given very candid and personal accounts of both situations and relationships that have the potential to be quite damning both for the individuals concerned as well as for the charitable trust that owns the land if the information was to be made public. With the position of trust comes an ethical responsibility to my informants as well as those they refer to; to protect their integrity and privacy, in spite of the fact that some disclosures clearly illustrate some of the key conflicts and factors that led to the commune's collapse.

Lesley Hall, writing about the ethics of interviewing and informed consent, describes a situation where part of a recorded interview was played at a conference in which the narrator was present, but had not been aware that her recording was to be used. Hall suggests that 'an interview recorded in the privacy of one's home is a very different matter from a conference, and the intimacy of the former perhaps leads to disclosures that might be expressed differently in a public forum.'<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the disclosures given to me during an intimate exchange in the privacy of my informants' homes take on a different perspective when removed from that confidential environment and placed in the public arena. This is an interesting issue in itself given that qualitative interviewers often seek to interview people in the secure environment of their own homes.

Larissa Webb, who spent some of her childhood and early adulthood living in a commune in the Coromandel, wrote her masters thesis on her research of a community in the region.<sup>10</sup> She suggested that being an insider had been advantageous because she had some familiarity with issues and people prior to starting her research. It also allowed her 'ease of access to information' as her established position meant she was able to participate in social occasions 'thus allowing [her] to spontaneously partake in or hear discussions.'<sup>11</sup> However, she was also concerned about offending her informants, and felt that 'the personal nature of [her] relationship with [her] informants might cause [her] to be unduly mindful of how [she] represent[ed] them.'<sup>12</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith highlights this in reference to her own research concerning indigenous peoples researching their own communities. She warns that 'insiders have to live

with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis, and so do their families and friends.'<sup>13</sup> Like Webb, I no longer live in the community but I continue to have long standing relationships with many of the people involved. I imagine it to be similar to belonging to a tribal group – in spite of leaving it to live elsewhere, I consider these people to be part of my extended family. Not only do I wish to be able to return there in future and be welcomed when I visit, but I also respect my informants' rights to maintain cordial relations with others with whom they continue to interact.

As Webb suggests, being an insider also enables the possibility for a richness and quality of data to emerge, due to a trusting and intimate relationship between informant and researcher, but this very richness can be problematic due to the sensitive nature of some of its material. An example of this dilemma in both my own research, as well as Webb's, is the subject of drug use and dealing. While marijuana and other drugs were considered an ordinary part of the lifestyle for many in the commune movement, much as alcohol use is in mainstream society, 'communitarians were acutely conscious of the popular image of intentional communities [...] as drug havens.'<sup>14</sup> Consequently, frank and candid discussion about drug use and about issues concerning dealing or abuse of drugs understandably raises concerns for many informants about possible repercussions should this information become public. As a researcher, my interest in encouraging open discussion of the topic is compromised by the knowledge that because marijuana and other recreational drugs are illegal, the implications of this being made public could be detrimental to those involved. They can also tarnish the reputation of communities. Comments made by one of my interviewees during discussion of the Ohu scheme<sup>15</sup> clearly illustrate this dilemma. He said:

*I wasn't that impressed by the whole hippie trip really, to be truthful. I'd just gone up to the [name omitted] valley where people just wanted to hang out and grow dope and eat dates and fuckin' almonds from the bulk foods shop in Wellington, and take the crop down there and that was basically it. The [Ohu] lasted about 25 years, but basically people went there to grow their crop really.'<sup>16</sup>*

While this person's comments obviously reflect a personal bias and deep cynicism, they are potentially damning for a number of people, and given that the Ohu being discussed is still considered by many to have been one of the few successful ones (in so far as it lasted as long as it did), these comments are potentially



very destructive, and support the popular image of communes as 'drug havens' that Webb referred to.

A further theme connected to the topic of drug use that emerged throughout my interviews concerns the different cliques that formed within the commune. These were seemingly influenced by the supply and sharing of marijuana. Valerie described it thus:

*I think if we had had no drugs in the place, say, no dope, I think it would have been so different. [...] There was always that false friendship stuff, because all these alliances were made, that weren't really around people liking each other or doing things together, but they were around the drug intake. Friends to do with 'oh let's have a smoke together, sit around and have a laugh together, and who's supplying who', and that's gone right through, it's still happening up there now. [...] So it kind of adds to this non-tangible thing. Because not only does it kind of confuse people's brains, but it also creates a make believe world. I think the whole thing was a make believe thing in lots of ways'.<sup>17</sup>*

The issue of false friendships and alliances is a significant aspect of the factions that existed on the commune. The repercussions of this became apparent during further discussion about the controversial subject of who was most qualified to move into vacant houses when they became available. It was revealed that a few of the long-standing and influential trustees had a relationship with a particular person who wanted to move into a house against the wishes of the majority of the community members. It was suggested that because the person was a dope grower and supplied a number of the trustees with marijuana he was given precedence over other – some considered more worthy – applicants and granted permission to move into the house. This event precipitated the departure of one of the longest serving and most communally oriented couples in the community. During the interviews, comments about this event not only highlighted some of the allegiances and divisions within the community that were influenced by drug use, but also exposed the corruption within the legal entity of the trust. These events are relevant to the story of the rise and fall of the commune, and clearly illustrate some of the challenges that living there created. However, they also have serious implications for the people concerned should they be identified.

Another very debilitating element that has played a significant role in the demise of the farm is the abuse of alcohol. It was talked about at length by most informants:

Robin:

*Before I came up [to live] I knew quite a lot of people*

*who've come up here. I came here a few times myself, and when I did come up, yeah, it was quite alcoholic, and everyone you met at the front gate sort of thing, everyone was drinking and it was all pretty messy and derelict sort of style.<sup>18</sup>*

Mary:

*Alcohol is at the root of the problem. Definitely. They drink every day. When Jay's working and he earns good money he buys heaps. And they've all got different paydays on different days. And so one buys the alcohol on the Tuesday, and then on the Wednesday Jay'll buy it because it's Mandy's [benefit] payday and then on Thursday it's Mac's. You know? So it goes on. I've been there early in the morning to see Mandy and they were on the booze then, so I said to Mandy I'll see you later. And that was like half past nine in the morning. And then Charlie comes up to get on the piss. [...] if you don't have a drink with him, it gets worse. So you just have a little drink and then sneak away when he's not looking. Otherwise he just gets at you – 'you've got to have a drink with me! You're supposed to be my friend!' He gets quite nasty actually, you know. So it's easier to keep him happy to sit and have a drink, talk to him for a bit and then leave.<sup>19</sup>*

Kurt (talking about Mary):

*...she's been a very long time on the farm, and [...] I didn't find her very uplifting as far as the farm goes. She was an alcoholic, anyway, and somewhat supportive in other people's dependency, if you like. Like her son has big problems. I mean there was another big scene happening with him when he was there. [...] That was one of my arguments I had with the trust, when they put Mary in that house. [...] I said if they do that then I believe that all the people we managed to get rid of over the years will come back, because they get the message that if somebody like that can get a house, then anything is possible at [the commune]. And all sorts of people who we thought would never come back, did.<sup>20</sup>*

Mac:

*Ah hell yeah, I'm sure I'm a different person when I'm sober to when I'm pissed. Oh god, I think I'll not touch it ever again all the time, especially when I've got a hell of a hangover. A few years ago I'd drink about one cask over a couple of nights. That was good. But it's – you know, not like that now. Now, sometimes it's two casks a night [...]. I like myself better when I'm not drinking so much. [...] I've got more self respect. [...]. Sometimes I think it's not very good for me being here because every piss-head in the area knows where I live. I could just use my determination and tell people I'm not drinking. One or two people would get really offended. They'd think I was a deserter. There's a few that would say good*

*on you, and leave me to it. But if I let it be known I'm trying to give up drinking, they'll come from everywhere! As if to say don't leave us! Here, we've brought you this bottle of whisky! I suppose it's a bit like one of my brothers is dying, let's go and rescue him.*<sup>21</sup>

These extracts from interviews with Mary, Kurt and Mac describe the different points of view of people who lived on the commune for a long time. They also help to develop some deeper insights from their stories about the way the commune developed through its openness and charitable nature. It is a significant element of the social problems that undermined the original ideals of self-determination and led to the demise of the group. It also paints a very negative and alarming picture of the present state of the commune.

Webb attempted to avoid the risk of doing harm by creating a fictional composite community that drew on the elements of four established communes in the Coromandel. While she wrote about actual people and events, and quoted her informants throughout her thesis, she changed names and altered the geographical and social details of the communities in order to disguise the people and events being referred to.

It would seem to me that my own approach of using extensive oral history interviews to illustrate people's experience of the lifestyle is problematic in terms of protecting the rights to privacy of participants. This is mostly because of the very personal and conflict-ridden nature of the experience.

Webb attempted to sidestep these problems through creating a fictional commune, but in the process of doing so, shifted in her own role as researcher. Rather than 'conducting interviews in a spirit of objectivity'<sup>22</sup> from a standpoint of reporting events and situations as objectively as possible, she moved to a stance of representation, creating a fiction drawn from actual people, places and events.<sup>23</sup>

This leads me to question the concept of what constitutes 'non-fiction' in the process of researching a particular community. Ideally, in my own research, I would like to present the voices of my informants 'truthfully.' That is, I would prefer to identify the commune, to use people's real names, and to present the stories of their lives as they were told to me – with all their contradictions, expressions of injustice, and opposing views that were central to the commune's collapse. To change names and to alter parts of the stories in order to protect the identities of the participants raises questions about authenticity and truth that Merriam suggests insiders are more likely to achieve.<sup>24</sup> Altering people's stories not only leaves the reader wondering how much is in fact fiction

and how much is actually real, but also increases the researcher's own level of 'interference' and a further departure from objective re-presentation of events.

The very personal nature of the topic and the fact that the commune has gradually run down to the point where it is populated by dysfunctional people with drug and alcohol abuse issues, means that in identifying places and people I am faced with the choice of either omitting large parts of people's testimonies, then manipulating the remaining material to make it into a coherent narrative, or asking my informants to decide which parts of their narratives are included and what left out. This latter option has a number of problems, including the fact that I am only presenting my informants with their own words, and they do not have a broader perspective of the fuller account of events, including the points of view of others to balance against their own candidness.

Webb's model of a fictional community has given her the freedom to discuss actual issues without implicating those involved. Given that my research includes exposing the intimate details of people's lives and their relationships with other people, many of whom still live in the same small district and continue to interact with one another, I am faced with a similar dilemma as Webb over how to protect those concerned. There are a number of ways I can do this: I could alter details of names and places to disguise my informants' identities as already suggested, although many people who are familiar with the alternative lifestyle movement in New Zealand would easily identify the place and people. Or I could report in more general terms about the particular subjects that are problematic, and thereby move away from my original desire to re-present the commune using people's own words and stories. For example, I could discuss the subject of drug use with reference to things people have said without naming them, quoting them directly, or making it identifiably clear who is implicated. To this end I would be applying narrative licence to the interpretation of my research to protect my informants, but in the process losing the authentic voices of the participants and replacing them with my own.

It may be that applying 'narrative licence' and manipulating information to disguise identities is the only way I can include the information I believe is necessary to create a coherent and honest re-presentation of the commune. If I was to do this I would then need to clearly explain my methods and motivation in the foreword of the published text.

Issues of authenticity and truth therefore, must be viewed in the context of the situation. However,

whatever methodological approach is applied to the re-presentation of the commune's history, there will inevitably be a degree of selectivity and a departure from authenticity. It might be argued that a fictional element exists in the presentation of all research. Gubrium and Holstein describe interviews as storytelling, where people 'accomplish coherence in their accounts'<sup>25</sup> during the encounter with the interviewer. As well as this, the transition of physical event to recollection, retelling, interpretation and recording takes the original event through a number of filters and distortions to the eventual written form.

The purpose of my research is to re-tell the story of the commune incorporating its many complex and opposing views. The stories I have been given in the course of interviewing the participants express the contradictory recollections, emotions and perspectives of a range of people. Through my own manipulation of the material to avoid exposing individual people in sensitive subject areas, I am adding to this process of distortion of actual events, while remaining mindful of trying to convey a picture of the commune that illustrates the experience as authentically as I can possibly make it.

While I acknowledge the significance of the interview as a 'negotiated accomplishment' and agree that the quality of relations between researcher and informants is paramount, I believe that insider status of the researcher in the research process is just as significant and has a central effect on the outcome. However, while my status as a long standing member of the commune has given me an informed understanding of issues, and access to critical subjects and information, I am still left with the challenge of balancing the historical, personal and political issues discussed here, with the uncensored words of my informants. It is now left to me to take the final step in this 'negotiated accomplishment' - that is, to return to my informants to negotiate a final agreement about what will be included and made public and to what extent people will allow themselves be identified in the process.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> S.B. Merriam, cited in Russell Bishop, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3d ed, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), Sage Publications, 2005, p.111.
- <sup>2</sup> To protect its identity I will simply refer to it as 'the commune' throughout this article and will only describe its location as being in rural New Zealand.
- <sup>3</sup> As I am discussing some personal disclosures from my informants, quotes from their interviews will carry pseudonyms.

- <sup>4</sup> Cited in Andrea Fontana and James Frey, in Denzin and Lincoln, p. 717
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 716
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 717.
- <sup>7</sup> Merriam, cited in Russell Bishop, in Denzin and Lincoln, opening quote.
- <sup>8</sup> K. Narayan, *ibid*, p.113.
- <sup>9</sup> Lesley Hall, 'Confidentially Speaking: Ethics in Interviewing', in *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, Anna Green and Megan Hutching (eds), AUP, 2004, p.155.
- <sup>10</sup> Larissa Webb, 'Living Together? Change and Continuity of a New Zealand Intentional Community'. MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1999.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.21.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, University of Otago Press, 1999, p.137.
- <sup>14</sup> Webb, p.21.
- <sup>15</sup> The Ohu Scheme was a government-based initiative in the early 1970s established by the Kirk-led Labour government, which aimed to enable groups of people interested in communal living and alternative lifestyles to lease Crown-owned land in rural areas for the purpose of establishing experimental communities.
- <sup>16</sup> Trevor, 28 August 2006, Tape 1, Side 2, personal archive. All interviews are held by the interviewer.
- <sup>17</sup> Valerie, 22 April 2006, Tape 1, Side 1, personal archive.
- <sup>18</sup> Robin, 26 August, 2006, Tape 1, Side 1, personal archive.
- <sup>19</sup> Mary, 30 August 2006, Tape 1, Side 2, personal archive.
- <sup>20</sup> Kurt, 22 April 2006, Tape 2 Side 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Mac, 30 August 2006, Tape 1, Side 1.
- <sup>22</sup> NOHANSZ Code of Ethical & Technical Practice.
- <sup>23</sup> In the context of this paper, 'representation' is taken to mean a situation or event that is depicted or symbolised in order to establish a generic example, while 're-presentation' refers to the act of re-presenting events and situations as they were told to me, acknowledging the integrity of the informant's voice.
- <sup>24</sup> Merriam (opening quote).
- <sup>25</sup> Cited in Fontana and Frey, in Denzin and Lincoln, p. 717.

*The interviews for this project are held by the author.*

# Reviews

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Hazel Riseborough, *Ngamatea: The Land and the People*  
Auckland University Press, 2006.  
304 pp., paperback

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Reviewed by Rachael Selby,  
Massey University, Palmerston  
North

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Those who travel north on the Desert Road in the Central North Island of New Zealand, have time to cast their eyes to the east over the tussock and the sand to the mountains on the horizon and wonder what lies beyond the Kaimanawa ranges. Nestled east of the ranges between the Kaimanawa Range and the Kaweka Range is Ngamatea. Ngamatea is a sheep station high up in the tussock, north of the Gentle Annie on the Taihape - Napier Road. Today the Gentle Annie is sealed and while still a slow drive, it is scenic. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was avoided by all who did not have to traverse it. Yet it was the only road to Ngamatea and all those who went there to work, or to deliver the mail or other goods, respected it for the dangers it held, narrow, steep and winding. The description the author provides of her first long journey to the station is distinctive as one feels the tension of the long slow careful drive and the relief as she is told that the worst is over.

This book is the story of Ngamatea. The author, Hazel Riseborough draws on her passion for history and for Ngamatea in recording its development, its

history and its changes over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is more than a history. It is about people, ordinary people and extraordinary people who lived and worked at Ngamatea for short and long periods over many years. It is the story of the owners and their lives. It is also the story of the sheep musterers, the shepherds, the cooks, the shearers, farm workers and visitors to Ngamatea. It is a book which records so poignantly the lives of men and women who lived and worked in a unique environment, unique because of its location and its geography, its climate and ruggedness, unique because of the demands it made of the people, the animals and all those who developed the land in the area.

Hazel Riseborough interviewed over sixty people to collect the multiple perspectives of people who were keen to contribute to the story of Ngamatea. It is an important book because it records a world which no longer exists. Chapter four, *The Muster*, is particularly special. The descriptions of head shepherds and their teams of men, dogs and packhorses, riding north to the far reaches of the property through gullies and rivers with a cook and his tools to feed the teams on a very limited diet for weeks at a time is captivating. The stories told by those who worked at that time in the harsh environment and of their relationships is fascinating. With the late 20<sup>th</sup> century land development, this way of life has gone, yet the people who lived it have clearly enjoyed telling their stories and recounting their amazing and spectacular experiences.

The history of the families who have owned, developed and nurtured the property is written with a tenderness which the author clearly feels for both the place and its people. The description and the detail is so beautifully recounted

that when one puts down the book, it is as if one has been watching a movie. The photographs throughout the book are wonderful and provide detail of the people and the place, of breeds of sheep, landscapes, buildings, machinery, shearing sheds, children and their pets. The cover shows clearly the red colour of the tussock which is seldom seen elsewhere. The maps and diagrams provide further useful clarity.

The interviews and conversations with families, friends, workers and service providers have been extensively used as the basis for the book. The views of so many people have been incorporated within the chapters providing many perspectives and descriptions of life at Ngamatea. It is a fine example of how sensitively and expertly interviews can be used to create a view of the world.

This book is a gem. It will captivate everyone who has even a passing interest in the history of farming in New Zealand. It will enthral those who have worked in the region between Taihape, Waiouru and the Hawkes Bay and on similar but different properties in the South Island. It will fascinate those who know people who worked the land in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and who are interested in the changes in farming practices. It will interest those who want to read a book based on many interviews, particularly oral historians who want to move their interviews from tape to text. I highly recommend the book to oral historians who can learn much from the ways in which the interviews are used, the structure of the book and the creative structuring of the chapters.

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Carol Archie, *Skin to Skin: Intimate, True Stories of Maori-Pakeha Relationships*. Auckland, Penguin Books, 2005. 279 pp., paperback

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Reviewed by Susan Fowke, Wellington

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If you feel like reading something positive about race relations in New Zealand then this is the book for you. And if, like me, you are incurably nosy about other people's lives, you will find satisfaction in reading these often surprising, refreshingly frank, and informative stories about the lives of a real mix of New Zealanders.

*Skin to Skin* is written by Carol Archie, a broadcasting journalist whose work, particularly on Radio New Zealand, has often focused on Maori-Pakeha issues. This is her second book – the first was *Maori Sovereignty – The Pakeha Perspective*, published in 1995.

Archie tells us that recent research from Dr Paul Calister, Victoria University, shows half of all Maori living as a couple have a non-Maori partner. And that nearly 70 000 New Zealand couples are in Maori / non-Maori relationships. For *Skin to Skin* Carol Archie, talked to ten of these couples, as well as members of their whanau – children and in-laws.

The first story is told by Deirdre and Professor Ranginui Walker and their family. Deirdre Walker is Pakeha, born in New Zealand, to English-born parents. Now, one of Deirdre and Ranginui's sons has an Chinese /

Thai wife, and they have two children. This family like many others in the book shows that the first mixed-marriage can be just the start – the children and grandchildren too will often have a mixed-marriage, some of which add other ethnicities to the mix.

And of course in no time at all the exponential family growth, along with the inclusion of other races, has produced not only a bi-cultural whanau but a multicultural whanau, and if this book is anything to go by, a living testament to good race relations – different colours, different values and different cultures living together in equality.

Not only the Walker story but others in *Skin to Skin* are those of well-known New Zealanders – Sir Tipene O'Regan, Carol Hirschfeld and Moana Maniapoto.

But most are people not in the public eye, from the North or South Island, in cities or the country – some with te reo and some without. And, almost without exception, with strong extended-family and tribal connections, and with a marae and its activities central to their lives – Pakeha partners included.

In one way or another they have all had similar experiences, including similar problems. Every Maori tells of racist experiences – at school, in shops, flat hunting, or at work, etc. Some only recognising the experience as racist after finding their Pakeha partner has no such difficulty. Until he and Gwenda married, Maanu Paul thought everyone who wanted to draw money from their bank account was restricted to \$200, and that every customer at the furniture store was kept waiting.

It might appear that mostly it is the Pakeha wife or husband

who makes the adjustments, to adopt or accommodate different values and ways of doing things. But it must be remembered that the Maori partner has always been and still is leading life largely in the Pakeha way.

Several Maori comment on the Pakeha habit of washing tea-towels along with personal clothing – an absolute 'no no' in their culture, as is sitting on a table or bench used for food preparation. (I feel compelled here to add that I (Pakeha) always wash my tea-towels separately because that's what my mother (English) has always done!)

It is fascinating to read the story of Betsan Martin, Pakeha, previously married to a Pakeha, now in a relationship with Rakato Te Rangiita who had a "tohunga" upbringing and is now a kaitiaki of Ngati Tuwharetoa. They met at a seminar he held on personal leadership.

During her first marriage Betsan had become interested in social justice and theology, later becoming an Anglican priest, involved in the Anglican Church's endeavour to reach bicultural partnership in church structures. She says "I was captivated by the Treaty of Waitangi and the history of our country. I thought, I've lived here all my life and haven't known about this!".

After her marriage broke up, and after a lot of thought, she arranged for her son David to go to the kohanga reo at Kokiri Marae in the Hutt Valley, and then to a kura kaupapa Maori – her daughter, currently living in Paris and a fluent French speaker, followed the same path. And now another daughter has a Maori partner, and Betsan has Maori grandchildren.

David, though he sees

advantages in his Maori education, says "I've got two perspectives on the world. I feel sometimes it sort of isolates me ... I find it hard to relate to either Maori or Pakeha." And he sees that the Maori culture is exploited – "Like the haka and the koru. I feel I'm part of a society that's treading on what I value."

Of course intermarriage is nothing new; since the 1840s families such as these have been

part of the fabric of New Zealand life. But for some reason it seems we don't recognise this as being a crucial part of the reality of our bi-cultural nation. But the personal 'life-stories' told in *Skin to Skin* are just a tiny part of many more. These partnerships should be recognised as being of great value, and an integral part of the reality of New Zealand race relations – something we can hold up to look at and talk about, and

to experience in a positive light. Yes, in this, we have succeeded!

*Skin to Skin* could play an important role in a more overt recognition of this success. I think it should be bought by all college and high school libraries – preferably in a class set – every story tells us so much about ourselves and our country and every one would be a marvellous catalyst for class discussion.

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Beth M Robertson, *Oral History Handbook*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006. Paperback

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Available from Oral History Assn of Australia, SA Branch, P O Box 3113, Unley, SA, Australia 5061

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Reviewed by Helen Frizzell, Dunedin

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While looking through the bookstands at the IOHA Conference, Sydney last July, I came across Beth Robertson's *Oral History Handbook*. It looked familiar. Twenty years ago, I had one of her first editions which had long since been thumbed to bits. And it was with a touch of relief that her updated version included modern technologies of oral history.

Knowing I was to lead an oral history workshop on my return to work that would include the use of Marantz 671 digital recorders which I'd never seen before, let alone used, I found myself desperate for information. Sure enough the relevant section in the *Handbook* looked readable and seemed contemporary – so

I made the purchase. And was I thankful – what a godsend. With Beth's clear explanations and most importantly for me, her demystification of the jargon, I was able to update my workshop to incorporate what she aptly identifies as the 'current reality'.

And there is much more to this publication than simply advice on recording equipment. The *Handbook* provides practical and useful advice on oral history methodology. For example, there is an informative section covering preparing for the interview, including the ethics of oral history, copyright and publishing on the internet. And recognising the limitations of a handbook and the rapidity of technological change, Beth regularly directs the reader to other sources of information and helpful websites.

The *Handbook*, peppered throughout with amusing cartoons, provides useful sample letters, forms, examples of ways of asking questions, and appendices. One that I found helpful was the Australian Oral History Association's *Guide to Commission Oral History Projects*. Also, the A4 format is easy to manage.

Did I have any quibbles? Well only two things come to mind. Chapter three dealt with developing questionnaires but didn't explain at the beginning the two different types of oral history interviews: life history and topic based. Beth primarily dealt with one style only and didn't elaborate the different questions and different preparation required for each. Also, more substantial information about the administrative aspects of oral history projects, including interview data, project files and reports would be useful.

Easy to dip in and out of, the latest edition of the *Handbook*, which has been sponsored by the National Committee of the Oral History Association of Australia, has an international audience. It is a timely and a welcome update of a classic – extremely useful for newcomers to oral history and a good refresher and reminder to current practitioners.

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Megan Hutching (ed.), *Against the Rising Sun: New Zealanders Remember the Pacific War*. Auckland, HarperCollins Publishers, with Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2006. 272 pp., paperback

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Alison Parr (ed.), *The Big Show: New Zealanders, D-Day and the War in Europe*. Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2006. 239 pp., paperback

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Reviewed by David Young, Wellington

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Two trends in modern life have enabled the publication of these 'in their own words' accounts of life and events in World War Two. One is the amazing longevity, in this case of men who survived events that ended more than 60 years ago. The other is public history's interest in how the footnotes, and footmen, of history can provide another take on general history's more sweeping compass.

It is the History Group, Ministry for Culture and Heritage's Alison Parr and Megan Hutching who have produced these books. Parr did the interviews for the *Pacific War*, the history group's Ian McGibbon wrote a magisterial summary of the events in that war and Hutching, who takes first credit, did the edit. For *D-Day*, it is Alison Parr who, with the help of her colleagues, conducted the interviews and wrote an informative backgrounder of the events and her subjects' role in them. She also edited her material.

It is worth remembering that unless they were very senior officers, combatants in some theatres had little idea of where their action fitted into

the larger picture. Wartime censorship played a part in this. For those serving in the Pacific, particularly, it was probably not until the overview histories were published that they were granted much idea of just how and where much of their extensive war was being fought. I think of my own father devouring, not so much the official histories, but books like *Challenge for the Pacific*, ex-marine and journalist Robert Leckie's 1966 publication on the pivotal 100 days of the Battle of Guadalcanal. He studied it to learn just what had brought about the almost inexplicable carnage that confronted No. 3 Squadron on their arrival shortly after that decisive battle.

Now, thanks to these two publications from the mouths of Kiwi ex-servicemen we can get a feel for the intimate, raw experiences of their wars in both these theatres. Apart from edited diaries and well-wrought fiction, viz Sebastian Faulks, oral history is as close as one can get in the printed word to a sense of being there. This is especially so when careful photographic research has yielded such revealing and apposite images. I think the collusion between photographs and text works even more closely in the Pacific book than the D-day one.

Both works adopt a similar format and length and follow a similar approach. Megan Hutching's has the advantage of a magisterial summary of the Pacific war by Ian McGibbon. Parr also offers a helpful opening, moving between general background and related references to the servicemen in her survey.

Each work privileges the spoken word over any other text - Parr offers spare linking

narrative in hers that is usually linked to her questions. In the *Pacific*, Hutching's editing is able to limit intrusion to pretty much just questions. However, both introduce each narrator with biographical details and both manage to balance coverage of all three branches of the services.

Sequencing of stories must have offered some challenges. Hutching begins with the fall of Singapore and a pilot's story of eventual capture. She manages to include the New Zealand experience on New Caledonia, then moves to each deployment across the Pacific from Espiritu Santo, through Henderson Field, Bougainville, the Green Islands, and into the Bismarck Archipelago.

*Pacific's* interviewees offer up the tedium and the terror of war. Endless cards and struggles with malaria punctuated by chow lines and mail days. But there is also the adrenergic horror of battle - kamikaze strikes, bombings, machine-gunnings and the smell of Japanese in the jungle. It was of talc when they were alive, of stench when left, as bobby-trapped bodies often had to be. We have the torpedoing of *Leander* in the Solomons in 1943 and 'the terrible smell' of hot blood after the explosion; the urgent use of cement to seal crucial damage at sea. Ominipresent are the Americans with their snazzy gear, their candy, their lingo and, shocking to Kiwis, their prejudices against their own black soldiers. This is the work of good oral history.

The photographs are striking too. Especially memorable is a group of pilots scrubbing up in the Pacific, each looking barely of shaving age. Now in his 90s, Harry Bioletti had been a cadet on

the *Auckland Star* who somehow managed to take a series of pictures of exceptional quality - and give a great interview.

*The Big Show* is perhaps more easily structured from the point of view of being limited in both time and place. For the same reason it is overall more intense, more graphic in its expression of traditional warfare. From the Kiwi perspective the secrecy of the build up, the logistics on air, sea and land of D-Day's massive onslaught includes even the dicey business of forecasting the weather for the English Channel. If you were lucky enough to get an American Landing Craft (Infantry) you even had your own ice chests and coffee-maker. But for all that preparation, one commander was night-blind. It hadn't been accounted for: 'Made you giggle, really.'

A number of landings end in total disaster. Among the interviewed is a Frenchwoman whose family helped shelter those, including a New Zealander, whose planes crashed over there. We get dawn at sea after a night watch, bombings from the air, baling out of a burning plane, the bearing of grim news to a dead pilot's new widow - death, often death. Some 10,000 New Zealanders were engaged in these operations.

From both books we are left with a sense of a generation of men who for the most part were willing to join up, but for a number of whom the idea of having to kill with a bayonet was unappealing. So they entered the navy or air force to at least get some distance from it. Together this pair of books are testament to the stoic, understated qualities of a generation for whom self-promotion remains almost the worst crime. Which is what makes

their contributions and the work of their interviewers and editors such an achievement.



# NOHANZ Origins

The National Oral History Association of New Zealand  
Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te Motu (NOHANZ)  
was established as result of the first national oral history seminar  
organised in April 1986 by the Centre for Continuing Education  
of the Victoria University of Wellington and the New Zealand  
Oral History Archive, a professional organisation then based in the  
National Library that worked on major oral history projects.

## Objectives

- To promote the practice and methods of oral history.
- To promote standards in oral history interviewing techniques, and in recording and preservation methods.
- To act as a resource of information and to advise on practical and technical problems involved in making oral history recordings.
- To act as a coordinator of oral history activities throughout New Zealand.
- To produce an annual oral history journal and regular newsletters.
- To promote regular oral history meetings, talks, seminars, workshops and demonstrations.
- To encourage the establishment of NOHANZ branches throughout New Zealand.
- To compile a directory of oral history holdings to improve access to collections held in libraries archives and museums.

# Code of ethical and technical practice

This Code exists to promote ethical, professional and technical standards in the collection, preservation and use of sound and video oral history material.

Archives, sponsors and organisers of oral history projects have the following responsibilities:

- to inform interviewers and people interviewed of the importance of this Code for the successful creation and use of oral history material;
- to select interviewers on the basis of professional competence and interviewing skill, endeavouring to assign appropriate interviewers to people interviewed;
- to see that records of the creation and processing of each interview are kept;
- to ensure that each interview is properly indexed and catalogued;
- to ensure that preservation conditions for recordings and accompanying material are of the highest possible standard;
- to ensure that placement of and access to recordings and accompanying material comply with a signed or recorded agreement with the person interviewed;
- to ensure that people interviewed are informed of issues such as copyright, ownership, privacy legislation, and how the interview and accompanying material may be used;
- to make the existence of available interviews known through public information channels;
- to guard against possible social injury to, or exploitation of people interviewed.

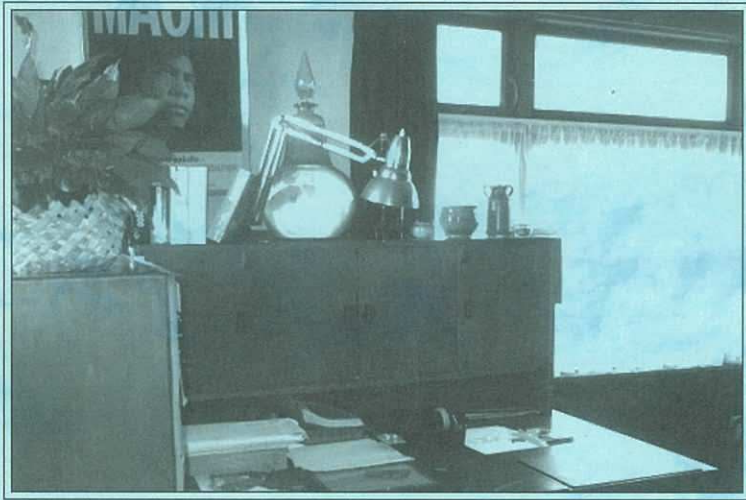
## INTERVIEWERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING RESPONSIBILITIES:

- to inform the person interviewed of the purposes and procedures of oral history in general and of the particular project in which they are involved;
- to inform the person interviewed of issues such as copyright, ownership, privacy legislation, and how the material and accompanying material may be used;
- to develop sufficient skills and knowledge in interviewing and equipment operation, e.g. through reading and training, to ensure a result of the highest possible standard;
- to use equipment that will produce recordings of the highest possible standard;
- to encourage informative dialogue based on thorough research;
- to conduct interviews with integrity;
- to conduct interviews with an awareness of cultural or individual sensibilities;
- to treat every interview as a confidential conversation, the contents of which are available only as determined by written or recorded agreement with the person interviewed;
- to place each recording and all accompanying material in an archive to be available for research, subject to any conditions placed on it by the person interviewed;
- to inform the person interviewed of where the material will be held;
- to respect all agreements made with the person interviewed.

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Mike Walker's office in Levin. PHOTO COURTESY OF PIP OLDHAM



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