

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

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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).

NOHANZ also publishes a newsletter three times a year. Its editors welcome news, letters, notes on sources, articles or reviews relevant to the principles and practice of oral history.

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# Editorial

*Oral History in New Zealand* is an annual journal published by the National Oral History Association of New Zealand. This volume builds on the previous work of oral history researchers and contributes to building a body of knowledge about oral history practice both here and more broadly. Lesley Hall's paper examines and carefully explores issues of truth, memory and meaning within oral history interviews. Twenty years of interviewing key people is reflected in Lesley's paper in which she demonstrates her ability to constructively critique her own practice.

The second paper builds on a presentation made by Nepia Mahuika at the 2009 oral history conference in Wellington. Nepia ably demonstrates that we are a part of our surroundings and our landscapes. We cannot be separated from them. He focuses on interviews with Māori and especially uses examples from his interviews of space, environment, body movement, photographs and carvings which are a part of the interview and the 'life narrative'. While oral history takes the researcher beyond text and print, it still has limitations when we edit out sights and sounds, or exclude those that would further enhance our research.

Loreen Brehaut explores the way in which recording oral histories can be valuable when taking on a project such as compiling the history of a school. Loreen undertook to write the history of the remote Whekenui School in Tory Channel. This project resulted from an earlier project in which she recorded ex-Whalers from Tory Channel. She highlights the importance of finding a broad range of sources when undertaking projects and of unpacking the layers of information available from those sources.

Ann Packer's paper takes us on a different journey. In 1999 she recorded ten hours of tapes with Malcolm Harrison, a textile artist who lived in Wellington and became well known for his stunning art projects. One of the most well known works hangs in New Zealand's Parliament House and Ann explains this in her article. It was a work that brought together artists who were able to bring their skills into a piece which represents New Zealand's heritage and culture.

The book reviews by Paul Diamond and Margaret Long provide a glimpse at two key publications which have used oral histories well. Paul Diamond's review of *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century* explains that this book is a welcome opportunity to learn more about Māori artists and carvers of the twentieth century, a topic which is welcomed. The book is beautifully presented.

Margaret Long's review of Maureen Birchfield's in depth biography of Elsie Locke is a work to be admired. The research undertaken for the book is considerable. The partnership developed with the children of Elsie Locke is a model for others anticipating taking on such interesting biographies.

We welcome papers, project reports, book reviews and reports on research from members and others who wish to contribute.

RACHAEL SELBY

# Looking for answers: Striking the right balance

LESLEY HALL

This article is a result of my recent reflection on truth, memory and meaning-making which has arisen as part of my current oral history project with women scientists.<sup>1</sup> One narrator in particular has presented a picture of gender relations in science which, on the face of it, is at odds with the prevailing view of the majority of other scientists I have interviewed as well as overseas research.<sup>2</sup> This has led me to a closer examination more generally not only of what underlies contradictory accounts but also to consider how to manage the tension between asking probing follow-up questions, in order to satisfy academic demands for accuracy and subjecting the interview material to rigorous scrutiny, while also maintaining respect for narrators and the integrity of the oral material. As Douglas et al argue, although oral history is a research method which relies on interviewers behaving ethically in relation to the person or social group they are researching: 'the responsibility of oral historians to the people who have given assistance may be in direct conflict with their pursuit of the 'truth''.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, from a feminist perspective, Linda Measor warns that there is a contradiction in aiming for ultimate rapport and yet 'treating the person's account critically'.<sup>4</sup>

In order to begin to answer my own questions, re-visiting research into narrative and textual analysis has been useful, particularly in relation to Alessandro Portelli's 'socially-shared genres or motifs', Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet's 'myths' and Joy Damousi's 'stereotypes'.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, I have reviewed some of my earlier oral history interviews from the 1990s focusing not just on what people have said but more closely on how they have said it. I have also looked at gaps and silences in the oral material examining both how successful narrators were in resisting recording some stories for posterity, and how successful I was in encouraging them to make their private stories public. The danger with this

kind of theoretical analysis is that narrators, or their relatives, may feel that they are being judged. Let me counter such a possible interpretation by declaring unequivocally that offending any who have helped me with my research is the furthest thing from my mind: no slight is intended.

Linda Shopes advice at an IOHA workshop in 2007 has also been helpful. In publishing, Shopes claims, oral historians have to balance sensitivity to the narrator with establishing the truth for the historical record.<sup>6</sup> Alongside, or even as part of this process perhaps, she and Karen Olsen also argue for the importance of interviewers returning again and again to interviews 'listening for subtleties in points of view and interpretation that often lie below the surface of the words'.<sup>7</sup> Or, as Rhonda Y. Williams puts it: "We must attempt to detect what unspoken articulations divulge".<sup>8</sup> As a Senior Lecturer in Gender and Women's Studies, I am also naturally influenced by central aspects of feminist research, particularly in this instance self-reflexivity, gender and power relations and ethics.

As we are all aware, stories told in any oral history are not necessarily 'the truth'; they are simply versions of the truth, a snapshot taken at a particular moment in time when it was recorded. This is not to say that the narrators lie - though Shopes argues that narrators sometimes are dishonest, and often wilfully so - simply that the same story told at a different time, in a different place, or with a different interviewer could be different. As Portelli argues:

*What is spoken in a typical oral history interview has usually never been told in that form before... Thus, an oral history tends to*

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*be a story untold, even if largely made up of twice-told tales...*<sup>9</sup>

Traditional historians have often challenged the usefulness of oral history, mostly because it relies on oral testimony that, because of faulty recall, may be inaccurate.<sup>10</sup> However, Paul Thompson has argued very persuasively that the priority given by historians to the written word, whether that is in the form of other research (published or unpublished), newspapers, diaries, official records, and/or letters, is unjustified and should be subject to the same kind of scrutiny as oral data.<sup>11</sup> The 'sanctification' of written sources is unwarranted as documents are often orally recorded.<sup>12</sup> A newspaper article written today is not necessarily 'true', neither is it value free. Two newspapers or television channels may present the same material differently because of different editorial policies and/or political allegiances, as well as differences such as class, race and gender.

The 'truth' of oral accounts may be less important than the telling: "what people believe happened is often as important as what actually happened, for people think, and react in accordance with what they believe to be true".<sup>13</sup> Portelli argues that examples of 'unreliability' in oral history should be seen as a strength not a weakness: "...errors, inventions and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meaning";<sup>14</sup> 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true' and this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts.<sup>15</sup> How people make sense of their lives is affected by complex negotiations between theory and practice and awareness of social norms usually leads to re-interpretation or re-presentation of the 'facts' relating to the past.

Most people re-evaluate and rationalise life events continually as they gain further experience and new insight, and also distance from hurtful or upsetting encounters. As Maria Mies argued in 1978, pre-dating much postmodern theorising, the truth is impossible to obtain because it is not static, "but grows and develops during the course of a lifetime".<sup>16</sup> When telling stories people may emphasize some aspects of an experience or event while glossing over or omitting others. This, as Elizabeth Tonkin argues, is an obvious way in which recall can be said to be 'wrong';<sup>17</sup> the 'wrongness' in itself is a valuable indicator of current perceptions.

More recently Alistair Thomson has discussed how people compose memories so that they fit in with what is publicly acceptable, or, if they feel excluded

from general public acceptance, seek out "particular publics" which affirm their identities and the way they wish to remember their lives: "what is possible to articulate and remember changes over time and this can be related to shifts in public perception".<sup>18</sup> Even so, as Maynard and Purvis argue,<sup>19</sup> individuals do not necessarily possess sufficient knowledge to explain everything about their lives – they may only have a partial picture – and there is no such thing as a 'raw' or authentic experience that is unmediated by interpretation.

Preparing oral material for publication is an act of translation,<sup>20</sup> and, given my feminist perspective, in my case that translation requires taking into account present and past gender inequality.<sup>21</sup> Women's experiences discussed here must be placed in both historical and contemporary social, political and ideological context because the act of remembering is affected by changes in 'public meanings'.<sup>22</sup> For example, having an illegitimate baby in 2010 does not have the social stigma it did prior to the 1970s. Today, narrators may feel able to disclose such experiences, knowing that they are less likely to be judged as they were at the time their pregnancy became public. Age may also make a difference. Valerie Yow claims that people tend, with the passage of time to be more, rather than less candid: "Near the end of a life, there is a need to look at things as honestly as possible to make sense of experiences over a lifetime".<sup>23</sup>

As part of this exercise in reflecting on and researching issues of truth, memory and meaning-making I have come to realize that in the past, perhaps because of my sociological background,<sup>24</sup> I have tended to focus more on the content of oral history interviews than on the narratives themselves.<sup>25</sup> In the case of the woman scientist referred to in the introduction, when she eschewed any experience of sexual discrimination either in her scientific education or her career I felt discomfited and, if I am honest, initially disinclined to believe her version of the truth. Consequently, I tried to do what the experts recommend i.e. to ask more probing and searching questions or tackle the topic tangentially as that often leads to unexpected and often valuable revelations. However, this narrator resisted my vain attempts to encourage her to open up and remained firm in her conviction that gender was of little relevance in her scientific career.

How can this variance from the norm be explained? It is possible that hers is an example of what Portelli calls an 'exceptional story',<sup>26</sup> and that she was never discriminated against. In my

judgement, this seems unlikely given the weight of evidence to the contrary? Perhaps, in this interview I backed off too quickly sensing a possible conflict of opinion. On reflection, I think it highly likely that I chose not to challenge her version of events, at least at that particular time, as, not only could that be perceived as impolite, but also because the narrator is higher in the academic hierarchy than I am. Perhaps I lacked the confidence to challenge her authority, though I hope not. People of lower class or status often do not feel that they have the right to refuse to answer or ask probing questions, whereas middle class or higher status individuals may be both more assertive and more demanding.

Another explanation for the narrator's refusal to report any occurrences of sexual discrimination could be that she is oblivious to inequitable treatment or that she is experiencing what a Marxist would label 'false consciousness', that is, she is/was unaware of her own oppression. Related to this is that positivist science generally claims to be 'objective'; subjectivity is generally frowned upon.

Paul Thompson argues that recall can be prevented by unwillingness: either a conscious avoidance of distasteful facts or unconscious repression.<sup>27</sup> But many other interpretations of this particular narrative are possible. Maybe I did not phrase my questions in a way she could either understand or relate to; maybe she did not like my questions. As Friedlander argues: 'The process of searching, guessing, hypothesizing, and probing which the historian must undertake depends for its success on the degree to which his (sic) collaborator is willing to get involved in these questions'.<sup>28</sup>

One possible clue for the lack of evidence of gender discrimination in the narrative is to be found in overseas research findings that women scientists are unlikely to complain about negative experiences,<sup>29</sup> as doing so may increase the feeling of alienation they already feel in a culture commonly described by feminist science studies scholars as male.<sup>30</sup> However, other narrators did share such stories. Another explanation for the gap or silence in this story could be that this particular narrator was trying to protect her and/or science's and/or her particular discipline's public image. As someone who had 'succeeded' in science she may have felt that she had either her own reputation to defend, or that of science more generally. This is a problem often associated with 'studying up'.

'Studying up' is the term used for research with more powerful groups or individuals;

sometimes such narrators are referred to as 'elites'. Sandra Hale has discussed what she calls 'public' stories, that is, ones that can be used to promote a particular perspective.<sup>31</sup> The distinction here is between a public and private performance, that is, a consciousness on the part of the narrator that her or his version of history will be available to a wider audience. Hale's encounter with a prominent leader of the Sudanese Communist Party confirms Portelli's observation that both interviewer and interviewee bring their own agendas to an interview.<sup>32</sup> Hale was distressed to discover that her narrator disclosed only what she saw as strategic to reveal.<sup>33</sup> Hale found the tension between the respondent's perception of her as a Western, feminist, academic, an 'outsider', and her self-identity as a Marxist, anthropologist, sympathetic to the Party's goals, an accepted insider, too difficult to negotiate. Both Hale's and my experience lend support to Trevor Lummis's claim that "elite oral history is an especially difficult genre in that one is interviewing people with public reputations, departmental loyalties, and political allegiances to defend and uphold".<sup>34</sup>

Another oral history experience exemplifies the problem of trying to record 'the truth' for the record when that experience is one the narrator feels uncomfortable about making public. This could perhaps be labelled a 'hidden story', one that is only told to trusted intimates, because of the possible negative impact telling could have on one's public persona.<sup>35</sup> In 1991 I interviewed my then 81 year old mother-in-law (Margaret) about her early family life and work experiences. Off-tape, in one of our breaks, she told me of an experience of sexual harassment that had occurred when she was in service as a nursery maid at the age of 15 or 16 years old. Her employer, a military man, was the perpetrator. For the purpose of this discussion the actual details are less important than the reticence she displayed at 'putting it on the record'. Off tape, she told me the story twice in a very matter of fact fashion and did not display any overt signs of distress at recalling the incident. Had she done so I probably would not have pressed the matter. It took three attempts to overcome her reluctance to record the story and, even then, only after considerable discussion or what is probably more accurately described as a truncated version of a GEND 101 lecture on sexual violence.

I suggested to Margaret that these days the incident would be labelled sexual harassment and that this information about women's working lives would be very useful for future researchers to know.

As someone who has worked in the area of sexual violence, I also assured her that the perpetrator was the one at fault and that she bore no responsibility for what had happened. My experience is that women victims commonly feel shame or guilt.<sup>36</sup> Tamara Hareven claims that interviewees sometimes repress difficult experiences, sometimes "care to forget, or if they remember them, they do not want to talk about them".<sup>37</sup> This is a possible interpretation of the previous example of the scientist above. However, Margaret was not repressing the memory, nor was she declining to talk about the experience - her concern in making the story public seemed to be about how she might be judged by others, particularly her husband of 51 years. "Don't tell Rick," she urged.

So how can Margaret's reluctance to put her experience on the record be explained? She was not shy about discussing sexual matters, at least not to family members, so the topic area did not seem to be the problem.<sup>38</sup> I would argue that the root of her reserve probably lay in deeply entrenched societal views, what radical feminists refer to as one of the myths of sexual violence, that women provoke sexual violence by their own actions, thereby diminishing the predominantly male perpetrator's responsibility for such incidents.

This conclusion only emerged as part of our off-tape discussion in which she told me that she did not tell her parents or sisters of the event, only her boyfriend and the butler, her immediate superior.<sup>39</sup> Nor had she ever told her husband. I explained to her that many women survivors of sexual abuse, even today, do not make complaints because they feel (erroneously) that they might in some way have 'asked for it'. Historically, women's views of sexual violence have been discounted; some of the more common forms of sexual harassment are often dismissed as trivial,<sup>40</sup> yet it often leads to women responding as Margaret did, by changing her job and removing herself from a potentially threatening situation. Only after an in-depth off-tape discussion of her own experience and how that was typical of many other victims' responses did Margaret agree to record her story of sexual harassment in the workplace.

In this instance, as an insider, a trusted family member I was able to penetrate some of the 'impregnable and impenetrable silences',<sup>41</sup> whereas in the previous example, as a non-scientist, and outsider I could not, at least not in the first instance.<sup>42</sup>

I turn now to an analysis of two interviews with members of the Communist Party of New Zealand

(CPNZ). In the first with prominent activist Elsie Locke I discuss the use of probes to elicit further information and how this works when the narrator is forthright, assertive and resistant. No amount of urging from me would encourage Elsie to discuss the circumstances of her leaving the party, the memory of which still seemed to cause her considerable pain. In the second example I discuss a narrative that was full of internal contradictions when statements by the narrator conflicted with one another. To begin with some context for the oral material is provided.

Public condemnation of the CPNZ followed major international episodes such as revelations about 'the Terror' under Stalin in the 1950s. This often led to personal introspection as people searched for rational explanations for irrational occurrences, and many found their previously staunch beliefs to be shaken at their foundations. Connie Birchfield, one Wellington member who was appalled by reports of Stalin's administration, reacted in a way typical of many Communists; at first she did not believe the reports and reasoned that negative media reports were simply capitalist propaganda (Birchfield, 1997:157). However, rather than brushing events under the carpet, as the CPNZ leadership urged members to do; Connie wanted open discussion on the issues.

Free and open discussion had been discouraged previously. Elsie Locke, a friend of Connie's,<sup>43</sup> was cold-shouldered in the late 1940s/early 1950s when she tried to raise questions about Marxist theory and practice within the Party. A lengthy stay in hospital with a tubercular spine provided her with the opportunity for extensive reading; this included approximately half of the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*. When released from hospital Elsie expected Party members to welcome an exchange of ideas about her new found knowledge, and more flexible interpretation of Marxism:

*...Communism is not a doctrine but a movement and proceeds not from principles but from facts. And I thought, 'Yes, now we've been ignoring a lot of facts which don't seem to point our way'. We mustn't do that you see. And I came out of hospital with a much more broadened view of the whole thing... And I produced - it was usually referred to as my thesis - which suggested the party ought to be more flexible basically, and from then on I was slammed...*

Elsie's ideas were given a chilly reception and she was considered a nuisance for expressing her doubts and asking questions.<sup>44</sup> This story

has some resonance with the 'rebel' stereotype discussed by Damousi in her analysis of Australian Communist Party members. Damousi draws on Luisa Passerini's assertion that the rebel stereotype, which regularly appears in many women's autobiographies, could be the way they express problems of identity in the context of a social order oppressive of women.<sup>45</sup> Here are two more examples from Elsie's narrative:

*But I stuck to my guns on that, I just kept doing it (working on Woman Today despite CPNZ disapproval).*

*I got into arguments about this no end, yep. I had pacifist illusions and I had feminist illusions, yep.*

Note the emphatic 'yep' at the end of each sentence above, indicating to me that, arguments notwithstanding, she had no regrets for her actions or beliefs. Her attitude towards conflict is reflected in a statement she made to the United Women's Convention in 1977:

*I don't think that dissensions and divisions are anything to weep about. I think that they are an indication of vigour, passion and commitment. Stormy controversy is a sign of life, and peaceful agreement can sometimes mean nobody is really doing any thinking.*

However, I digress. With reference to the rebel stereotype referred to above, Damousi claims that in portraying themselves as rebels, women demonstrate their awareness of oppression and that their behaviour did not conform to social expectations. As an avowed feminist the oppression of women was something with which Elsie was extremely familiar. Much of her work within the Party, in her involvement with *Woman Today* and the Family Planning Association was focused on addressing women's inequality. However, many of her activities increasingly did not comply with the CPNZ's expectations.

Elsie eventually left the CPNZ in the 1950s but she resisted discussing this during our interviews:

*...and that's what I am not going to talk about. Very painful from about 1950 onto when I left. I was on the verge of leaving several times. I stuck to it partly because Jack [her husband] and I were trying to come to some sort of mutual understanding, but we never did. So in the end we just agreed to differ.*

The challenge this presented for their relationship

I cannot begin to imagine but the marriage lasted for over fifty years. The dilemma for me was whether and how to probe, or encourage Elsie to expand on an issue that was obviously upsetting. However, my gut reaction was that in relation to this topic Elsie was an immovable object and forcing the issue would have been counterproductive. The following exchange is instructive:

Me: So your leaving wasn't specifically because of Hungary?

Elsie: *No, that was the last straw. I was literally told - The People's Voice had a headline that said "For justifying Russia" - and I was literally told that it was a test of my loyalty to go out and sell this paper and I said, "No way. Goodbye". It was a great relief...*

Me: So leaving the Party because of all this sort of heart-searching and what had gone on, you know, within the Party and with Jack etc, so leaving was not a difficult thing to do?

Elsie: *No!*

Me: No? Right. Did you immediately become involved in other things?

Elsie: *Well, my life wasn't exactly barren then, was it?*

Me: No.

Elsie: *No.*

Me: You had been involved in other things all the time you were...

Elsie: *Yes. Yes.*

Listening to this closely now, Elsie's transition from expansive to short one word answers is palpable. Her irritation or anxiety about discussing the topic is evidenced in her sarcastic reference to her life not being sterile once she had left the CPNZ. Once I moved on to a new topic about what she did after she left the Party her answers were once again wide-ranging and unrestrained. My spontaneous decision to move on appeared to be the right one, at least from the narrator's perspective.

Pursuing painful topics is sometimes justified and necessary but there is no one size fits all guide to when to probe further and when to back off. It's a judgement call and every oral history interview is different. Each interviewer has to make the decision, generally on the hoof, as to which course of action is appropriate. From a historical perspective it would have been useful to know how Elsie felt about her decision and actions after a forty year gap but my judgment at the time was that to pursue this would have been to go further than Elsie was prepared to and, in my view; that would have been unethical.

At a later interview, however, I made another



tentative attempt to broach the topic again:

Me: So can you talk a little bit about what caused you to leave (the Party) in the end, what you feel happy with talking about?

*Well, it's all in the Landfall article really. All that I think is necessary to say.*

My assessment of Elsie was that she was a busy person who did not appear to want to waste time – hers or anyone else's.<sup>46</sup> Therefore one other possible interpretation of her reluctance to discuss this issue was that, as she had already written about her decision to leave the CPNZ in the 1950s, repeating herself was superfluous.<sup>47</sup> Earlier in the interview, in response to my question about how she came to join the Party she replied:

*Well, that's more or less in Student at the Gates anyway ... and that's partly in the piece I wrote for Landfall too.<sup>48</sup> I don't want to repeat myself too much.*

However, she then went on to talk at some length about her initial involvement without much prompting from me. As shown previously, this was not the case when I tried to probe further about her departure from the CPNZ. Nor was this the case when on another occasion, referring to an unspecified incident involving support from a male CPNZ member, she said: "I won't tell you the whole circumstances because it's another painful subject..." What seemed intuitively clear at the time of the interviews and evident now, when reviewing them again, was that Elsie did not wish to rake up distressing memories. Luisa Passerini refers to self-censorship such as this as "evidence of a scar, a violent annihilation of many years in human lives, a profound wound in daily experience" (1998:60).<sup>49</sup> This also reminds me of feminist directives to be aware of the need to follow the narrator's lead, to honour her integrity and privacy and not to intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back.<sup>50</sup>

Of interest to me is the extent to which Elsie's actions for leaving and her discussion of it forty years later are gendered. Although superficially women's and men's reasons for leaving seem similar, I would argue that they were generally experienced and reported quite differently. For example, Sid Scott and Elsie Locke both left the CPNZ after the Soviet invasion of Hungary, an event that led to much soul-searching among Party members, and both publicly aired their disaffection later in their writing. Scott wrote a book *Rebel Without a Cause* in 1960 about his experiences in the CPNZ; Elsie wrote an article in *Landfall* in 1958. However, a reading of both

publications reveals differences in how they discuss the Party. Scott's, despite declaring himself to be "purged of all bitterness", is harsh in his criticism and he takes a number of potshots at Party members.<sup>51</sup> Elsie does not make personal attacks in her article, nor did she do so in our interviews. In her letter of resignation from the Party there is no evidence of bitterness or recriminations: "I greatly appreciate the friendship and comradeship we have enjoyed, and hope this friendliness will continue despite honest differences between us."<sup>52</sup>

The letter could have been written in an attempt to ensure social relationships would continue unimpaired as well as to end her association with the Party on a friendly note. This interpretation is supported by Damousi's research (and mine) which found that women's relationships are central to their narratives.<sup>53</sup> Alternatively, the letter of resignation could be interpreted as an attempt to be (or appear to be) a 'good wife', or even an 'exemplary spouse',<sup>54</sup> to ensure that Jack's standing in the CPNZ was not negatively impacted by her decision. She may have put loyalty to Jack above her negative feelings towards the Party.

It is instructive that when male CPNZ members left or were expelled, family members often left at the same time or soon after. In Sid Scott's case his daughter left soon after he was expelled; so did his wife.<sup>55</sup> Gender differences are again revealed. Connie Birchfield's husband seems to have been an exception in leaving not long after his wife but Jack Locke maintained his membership despite Elsie's departure, so did Fi's husband Arthur discussed below.<sup>56</sup> From a gender perspective it appears that most male Party members did not feel duty-bound to support their wives in the same way that female family members did when their positions were reversed. And as Elsie herself said:

*Well Jack had priority because Jack's standing was higher than mine anyway...*

Elsie's loyalty to Jack is a key feature of her narrative.

What support is there for the thesis that women tell their life stories differently? Joan Sangster argues that women remember the past differently.<sup>57</sup> She quotes Gwendoline Etter-Lewis who says that women are more likely to understate things, rarely mention personal accomplishments, and disguise statements of personal power. Elsie certainly fits this profile. When asked whether she thought she was special (in terms of what she had achieved as a very young woman) she replied: "Not then," and, modestly, did not expand on

it further. When I gently challenged this with "No?" she said "Oh I don't know (laugh); I don't know. I just know what I did myself." When asked about how she had coped as a university student who had to support herself financially by working part-time she played down the difficulties:

*I had a few hard years. If I'd had a few more it wouldn't have mattered...*

And in response to a question about her experience as a solo mother in 1938 she similarly minimized her fortitude in the face of what many would consider adversity: "I managed to cope". However, in 1981, she herself acknowledged that memories of hard times may be suppressed or romanticised.<sup>58</sup>

Many women members of the CPNZ described their actions and decisions as autonomous, they presented themselves as active agents in the choices they made.<sup>59</sup> However, in this next example there are indicators that suggest that sometimes there was a conflict between what the narrator said she did and what she may have preferred to do. Duelli Klein refers to this tendency to give socially acceptable responses as 'faking' (cf in Hale, 1991: 125). Duelli Klein warns against rushing to judgement in such cases, reminding us that, "for women, faking may always have been necessary for survival",<sup>60</sup> and therefore this should be taken into account in our interpretation of women's experiences.<sup>61</sup>

Most men and women CPNZ members I interviewed joined on their own initiative. Fi was extremely active in party work over a number of years in Wellington and then Auckland, and was positively identified by other interviewees as a party member. However, she roundly refuted this, claiming that her husband had joined her up without consultation:

*[W]ell he [her husband] had been out to a meeting, and of course I was at home with the new baby, and he came home and ... he threw two new membership cards on the table and said "You're a member of the Communist Party!" and my hair stood up on end because my father would have thought they were a rabid lot. However, I was married to Arthur and respected him and his ideas and so I [have] been a loyal supporter...*

Fi insists that she was not a member as she destroyed the membership card, but her status is still uncertain; it is possible that her husband continued to pay subscriptions for her without her knowledge. It is clear that the majority of

members of the CPNZ considered her a fully paid up member:

*[N]o Communist in Auckland would believe (that I wasn't a member) because nobody except Arthur and me, nobody else in the Party, knows that I never joined, that he brought that membership card home and that I tore it up. And I never mentioned it.*

A recurrent theme in Fi's narrative is her depiction of herself as a martyr. She persistently portrays herself as doing things out of a sense of duty to her husband; her failure to put the record straight previously is perhaps a further example of this. In trying to make meaning out of her experience, perhaps she wishes that she had ripped up her membership card and gone against her husband's wishes, but was either unable, or unwilling, to do so at the time. In trying to understand inconsistencies in Fi's story, Alistair Thomson's work provides one possible explanation:

*...public remembering and private inner stories often seek to compose a safe and necessary coherence out of the unresolved, risky and painful pieces of past and present lives.<sup>62</sup>*

Alternatively perhaps, Fi's awareness of the public opprobrium the CPNZ has endured for much of its existence may have led her, consciously or unconsciously, to absolve herself of any responsibility for their actions by disclaiming that she was ever a Party member. Maybe it is another way of saying; 'It's nothing to do with me. I had no control over what the CPNZ did'. As Passerini has shown, public culture and ideology influence individual memory and these are sometimes revealed in discrepancies and idiosyncrasies in personal narratives.<sup>63</sup> In the following example inconsistency is clear. If Fi was not a member on paper she certainly seems to have been a member in practice:

*When it comes to the active side like that I am the one that always did it, not Arthur, because physically I was much more robust.*

Whatever the 'truth' of the matter, Fi undertook most of the tasks associated with being an active member; for example, she took study classes, she helped with printing of the Party newspaper, she held meetings in her own home, and helped with fundraising. Consequently, it seems reasonable for people to have assumed that she *was* a member. However, her own narrative seems internally contradictory.

*There is never any money behind communist parties and that is the only*

*way that they can do what they can do. It's all very well for someone else that's got moneyed people behind them or the business, the wealthy business community, they've got resources to call on. But we communists had nothing except what we produced, no, the only way we could do anything was (to do it ourselves), there was no other way.*

In this example Fi uses the pronouns 'they' and 'we' but finally includes herself in 'we communists'. She does it again in the extract below:

*I didn't want to part with the things we valued in my family, my father's ring, it had a beautiful diamond in it, and his tie pin with a beautiful diamond and many other things that I got from Mum's side of the family or from Dad... it wasn't really their worth in pounds that mattered to me, but they meant a lot to me and when we needed, when I say we, I mean the communists; when we needed a new press here in Auckland and we were running things at the Old Trades Hall... we had no money for the press so what we did we asked all the Party members to give anything that was of monetary value that they could possibly part with... so we all gave, not only us, all the party members in every group were asked the same and we produced enough money to get, to pay for the press, to pay for the machinery?*

Similarly, the narrative includes a number of statements that suggest she considered herself a member or, at least felt ambiguous about her status. For example, she said that it was easy to be overlooked if she "didn't speak up" or unless she "nosed into it"; "you had to see that you were included"; "you also felt confident that we wouldn't let each other down, that we'd be loyal to each other".

Fi's narrative also contains many examples of the good wife stereotype or the exemplary spouse myth referred to previously:

*[W]e took this man on plus his philosophy, we said for better or worse, for better or for worse, and meant it, so you put your shoulder to the wheel and try not to grizzle too much... I have backed him up merrily, and done whatever was asked, and worked just as hard in my way as he did in his for his cause...*

However, the narrative then transitions into what Peneff calls 'narrative as confession':<sup>64</sup>

*...although you can tell from what I said here, I never did think it would work, and I never did feel at one with other members of the Party... But I never felt as if I belonged at all because I had this secret that I was hiding, that you think is the answer to everything, but I don't, and it made me feel a sort of a traitor...*

But then she returns to the theme with which she began:

*...but still in action I was loyal and I backed Arthur up... That's the way we were brought up in those days. I thought it was right.*

This particular extract is a good example of conflicted feelings. Loyalty to Arthur was recurring theme in Fi's narrative: "I was only being a faithful wife"; "Where he goes I go"; "I felt it was my duty". However, an accompanying motif is that of doing things against her will, such as having a contraceptive device fitted when she actually wanted to have a baby; moving to Auckland at the behest of the Party; and selling the family jewellery.

Fi was an engaging and vivacious narrator. Her stories were continually punctuated with laughter. However, as Williams notes, laughter can be interpreted in various ways, 'hilarity, uneasiness and dissatisfaction'. Signs of dissatisfaction or resentment surfaced despite Fi's apparent efforts to be light-hearted and play down the sacrifices made for the CPNZ:

*[T]hat wasn't a very willing sacrifice on my part; the thing I resented most of all...; I think we made tremendous sacrifices...; and:*

*Arthur, a person of undoubted gifts and ability, from a personal point of view, has thrown his life away, and of course, up to a point, mine's been dragged down too.*

What then follows, I would argue, is an example of the hero stereotype:

*Although, being what I am (laugh) I managed to inject a few chapters where I've pulled something off on my own.*

Similarly, Fi portrays herself as a hero in this extract:

*I did the job as faithfully as if I had believed in it. I really worked hard.*

However, there are also elements of the martyr or

rebel stereotypes that can be identified here too.

Listening to the tape now I wonder whether I should have been more challenging of the contradictory statements contained in Fi's narrative. However, I am not sure if I was listening as closely to them then as I am now. I am certain that I tried to be respectful, especially as she was allowing me to interview her at her workplace.<sup>65</sup> However, in light of my more recent engagement with issues of truth, memory and meaning-making I have come across an assertion from Trevor Lummis, that part of respect lies in treating a narrator as a person capable of debate and discussion and not as an old oracle whose message cannot be queried.<sup>66</sup> I do accept that in normal social conversation there is a limit on the degree that it is acceptable to pry into someone's background, but that an oral history interview is an interrogation of sorts. However, the spectre that is raised by Lummis' claim is that attempts by oral historians to treat narrators ethically may result unintentionally in patronising them, especially those who, like Fi, do not fit the category of elites.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The title "Looking for answers" seemed particularly appropriate as it is the same as a self-reflective piece Elsie Locke wrote in 1958. See "Looking for answers", *Landfall*, Vol. 12, No 4; December, pp 335-354. It's also the title of a new biography of Elsie by Maureen Birchfield (daughter of Connie Birchfield) reviewed in this edition of the NOHANZ journal.
- <sup>2</sup> Research in both the US and the UK shows that there are still significant barriers for women achieving in science. See for example Barbara Bagilhole, Abigail Powell, Sarah Barnard and Andrew Dainty, 2007 "Researching cultures in science, engineering and technology: an analysis of current and past literature", Loughborough:UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology and National Academy of Sciences, 2006 "Beyond bias and barriers: fulfilling the potential of women in academic science and engineering (free executive summary)" <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11741.html>
- <sup>3</sup> Louise Douglas, Alan Roberts and Ruth Thompson (eds) (1988:30) *Oral History: A Handbook, Australia*, Allen and Unwin.
- <sup>4</sup> Cited in Jane Ribbens (1989) "Interviewing - an "unnatural situation?" *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 12, No.6.
- <sup>5</sup> See Alessandro Portelli (1996:403) "Oral history in Italy" in David K.Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds) *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Walnut Creek: Altamira Press. ; Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) "Narrative structures, social models, and symbolic representation in the life-story" in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist*

In conclusion, what I have tried to show in this discussion is that when conducting an oral history interview we need to strike the right balance between asking searching questions and treating with respect the person who has generously agreed to share their time and stories with us. We also need to listen carefully for the veiled meanings that the narratives contain. This means trusting our own feelings, not only about when warning lights go on that there is a hidden story waiting to be extracted by our expert interviewing skills, but also about when it is appropriate to back off and be sensitive to the narrator's need for privacy. Attentive listening of narratives when reviewing recordings enable us to explore the silences, gaps, contradictions and ambiguities in follow-up interviews if the narrator, whether an elite or not, agrees. As a consequence, memories may be triggered and a fuller approximation of the truth may be revealed, but not necessarily.

*Practice of Oral History*, New York; Routledge and Damousi: Joy (1994:208) *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press..

- <sup>6</sup> IOHA Conference Workshop, Guadalajara, Mexico, September 2007
- <sup>7</sup> Karen Olsen and Linda Shopes (1991:200) "Crossing boundaries, building bridges:doing oral history among working class women and men" in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, New York; Routledge.
- <sup>8</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams (2001:2) "I'm a keeper of information": history-telling and voice" in *The Oral History Review*, Winter/Spring, Vol.28,i1.
- <sup>9</sup> Alessandro Portelli (1997:4) *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- <sup>10</sup> Toni McWhinnie (1996/7:8) "Missing the point: oral history and historians", *Oral History in New Zealand*, Vol 8/9.
- <sup>11</sup> Paul Thompson (1988) *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin (1992:114) *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Luisa Passerini, (1979), Paul Thompson (1988).
- <sup>13</sup> McWhinnie (1996/7:8)
- <sup>14</sup> Cited in Alison Baker (1996:77) "History and myth: women's stories of the Moroccan resistance" in *Oral History*, Spring, 68-8.
- <sup>15</sup> Portelli cited in Alison Baker (1996:77)

- <sup>16</sup> Cited in Renate Duelli Klein (1983:61) "How to do what we want to do: thoughts about feminist methodology", in Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein (eds) (1983) *Theories of Women's Studies*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- <sup>17</sup> Tonkin (1992:115)
- <sup>18</sup> Cited in Wendy Rickard (1998:40) "Oral history - more dangerous than therapy?: interviewees reflections on recording traumatic or taboo issues", *Oral History*, Autumn, 26(2).
- <sup>19</sup> Mary Maynard and June Purvis (1994) *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London: Taylor and Francis.
- <sup>20</sup> Megan Hutching "The Distance Between Voice and Transcript" in Anna Green and Megan Hutching (eds), *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, Auckland, 2004, p.169.
- <sup>21</sup> As Selma Leydesdorff points out, theoretically speaking, the sharp distinction between male and female that was a feature of some oral history and feminist literature referred to here, has largely been superseded, influenced strongly by postmodern perspectives. Even so, "the lens of gender" on oral history, life stories and memories are still important as "every history" remains gendered. See Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson (2005) (eds) *Gender and Memory*, New Brunswick:Transaction Publishers.
- <sup>22</sup> Alistair Thomson (1990:78) "The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia", in Paul Thompson and Samuel Raphael (eds) in *The Myths We Live By*, London.
- <sup>23</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow (2005:19) *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- <sup>24</sup> Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet is critical of Sociology's tendency to focus on content analysis of oral history rather than analysis of the narratives and textual structures themselves. See "Narrative structures, social models, and symbolic representation in the life-story" in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, New York; Routledge.
- <sup>25</sup> This is not exclusively so. For example, I always review interviews before conducting a follow-up one.
- <sup>26</sup> Alessandro Portelli (1997:87) "What makes oral history different?", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>27</sup> Thompson (1988:114).
- <sup>28</sup> Peter Friedlander, (1996:151) "Theory, method and oral history" in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds) *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- <sup>29</sup> See Barbara Bagilhole, Abigail Powell, Sarah Barnard and Andrew Dainty, 2007 "Researching cultures in science, engineering and technology: an analysis of current and past literature", Loughborough:UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology and National Academy of Sciences, 2006 "Beyond bias and barriers: fulfilling the potential of women in academic science and engineering (free executive summary)" <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11741.html>
- <sup>30</sup> <http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/html/putting-equality-into-practice/changing-culture/>
- <sup>31</sup> Sondra Hale (1991) "Feminist method, process, and self-criticism: interviewing Sudanese women" in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, New York; Routledge.
- <sup>32</sup> Alessandro Portelli (1997:10) "What makes oral history different?" in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>33</sup> Hale (1991:131)
- <sup>34</sup> Trevor Lummis (1987:25) *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*, London: Hutchinson.
- <sup>35</sup> Penny Robinson (2008:2) "Linen cupboard stories: intimate conversations and oral narratives in *National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) Journal*, Volume 20.
- <sup>36</sup> Because of the existence of many societal myths about sexual violence e.g. "She asked for it", many women victims often feel responsible for having in some way encouraged the unwanted behaviour.
- <sup>37</sup> Tamara Hareven (1996:248) "The search for generational memory", in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: an Interdisciplinary Anthology* 2nd edition, Walnut Creek, California: Alta Mira Press.
- <sup>38</sup> For someone born in 1909, Margaret could be described as liberal in relation to sexual matters, certainly in her youth. She married Rick in 1940 after they had been living together "in sin" for seven years.
- <sup>39</sup> She told me that the butler was later sacked for raising the matter with his employers. Margaret had already left her employment by then.
- <sup>40</sup> Mary Maynard (1993) "Violence towards women" in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds) *Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies*, New York: Gilford Press pp102-107.
- <sup>41</sup> Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern (2006:84) "Participation, truth and partiality: participatory action research, community-based truth-telling and post-conflict transition in Northern Island" in *Sociology* 2006: 40:71.
- <sup>42</sup> I hope that this may change if the narrator agrees to a follow-up interview and if rapport and trust is able to be established via further contact. I am certain that my gut feeling that something is not quite right has validity. As Dana Jack has argued, our personal discomfort can be "a personal alarm bell alerting us to a discrepancy about what is being said and what the woman is feeling". See Anderson, Kathryn and Dana C. Jack (1998) "Learning to listen: interview techniques and analyses", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>43</sup> Elsie Locke, then Farrelly, joined the CPNZ in 1933, after graduating from university. She travelled to Wellington where she soon became a leading member of the Party. In 1934, with the support of the CPNZ, Elsie began a monthly newspaper, *The Working Woman*, which ran until November 1936. It was superseded by *Woman Today*, which ran from April 1937 until October 1939 and sought to appeal to a wider audience. Elsie was a hard-working and formidable character but generous with her time and hospitality. For a more rounded picture of Elsie than I have space for here see Maureen Birchfield's recent (2009) biography reviewed in this journal.
- <sup>44</sup> The rationale for this was that to question was to challenge democratic centralism and by implication the Party leadership.
- <sup>45</sup> Damousi (1994:208).

- <sup>46</sup> For example, she rose at 5am every morning so that she could write before her husband Jack was awake some time between 8am and 9am.
- <sup>47</sup> Locke (1958).
- <sup>48</sup> Locke, Elsie (1981) *Student at the Gates*, Christchurch: Whitcoulls.
- <sup>49</sup> This very much echoes Elsie's feelings in my view. After leaving the Party she decided not to speak about the details of her departure from the CPNZ again, even to her husband: she and he (he remained in the Party) "agreed to differ" on this.
- <sup>50</sup> Anderson and Jack (1998).
- <sup>51</sup> Jean Peneff argues that narrators such as CPNZ members often transform their past from one that was devoted to collective action to one that ends in bitterness. See Peneff, Jean (1990) "Myths in life stories", in Paul Thompson and Samuel Raphael (eds) *The Myths We Live By*, London: Routledge. My research did not support this in relation to female CPNZ members - gender differences were palpable.
- <sup>52</sup> Elsie Locke MS Papers 7202, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- <sup>53</sup> Damousi (1994:205)
- <sup>54</sup> See Chanfrault-Duchet's discussion of myths and how they allow narrators to communicate the meaning they want to give their experience in "Narrative structures, social models, and symbolic representation in the life-story" in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, New York; Routledge, p.81. Within the female life story, she argues, these myths incorporate "socio-symbolic images of Mother and of Woman..., the bad Mother, the exemplary Spouse..."
- <sup>55</sup> Sid Scott (1960:222) *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, Auckland:

Collins. Scott was a former leader of the CPNZ.

- <sup>56</sup> Ron Smith, a male CPNZ member I interviewed, hinted that Birchie was under his wife's thumb and bowed to pressure from Connie. The subtext is that in so doing he was not conforming to societal expectations of a New Zealand husband's behaviour. Women like the Scotts however did behave in socially accepted ways by supporting their husbands'/fathers' by leaving the CPNZ after either their expulsion or resignation.
- <sup>57</sup> Joan Sangster (1998:89) "Telling our stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds) (1998) *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>58</sup> Locke (1981:179).
- <sup>59</sup> Lesley Hall (2003) *Better Red Than Wed: Gender Relations and the Role of Women in the Communist Party of New Zealand 1921-1970*, unpublished PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington.
- <sup>60</sup> Duelli Klein's discussion of 'faking' relates to the differences in versions of events told researchers by battered women and their children.
- <sup>61</sup> This is not to suggest that women are victims, merely that 'common sense' understandings tend not to recognise the effect of dominant ideologies and societal structures.
- <sup>62</sup> Alistair Thomson (1994) *Anzac Memories: Living with the legend*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>63</sup> Cited in Alistair Thomson (2006:54) "Four paradigm transformations in oral history" in *The Oral History Review*, Vol. Issue 1.
- <sup>64</sup> Peneff (1990:39)
- <sup>65</sup> Fi was still working part-time at age 93.
- <sup>66</sup> Lummis (1987:68)

# 'Out of sight, out of mind'?

## The significance of our surroundings

NEPIA MAHUIKA

The absence of visual scripts and cues in oral history interviewing remains an area of concern for those who might subscribe to a primarily 'aural' encounter in their practice and interpretation. We could be mistaken for thinking that what is essentially 'out of sight' is conceivably also 'out of mind'. Yet, we know better, and in many instances, interviewees often use visual aids and prompts, most commonly photos or even diaries and genealogy books to assist them in the performance and narrating of their lives. Indeed, Oral history, as Dan Sipe reminds us, is a 'methodology rooted in multiple modes of communication'.<sup>1</sup> Beyond just the oral are visual clues that allow us to reveal potentially hidden or obscured meanings that are denied by the sole use of oral recordings. This paper examines the significance of our surroundings in oral history, and draws on a range of interviews to illustrate how vital the environment can often be to both the interviewee and interviewer. It focuses specifically on Māori and iwi interviews, and considers space, environment, body movement, and the use of photos, whakairo (carving) and other devices in the performance of life narrative. These interviews, all of them life histories, were undertaken as part of two separate theses projects: the first, a Masters study concerning the ways in which individual Māori constructed powerful narratives regarding their lives and identities; the second, a Doctoral study on the transmission of oral tradition across generations within Ngāti Porou.<sup>2</sup>

### SETTING AND SURROUNDINGS

Seated on the beach at Tūparoa, on the east coast, I recorded the life story of an elderly relation of mine. It was not, in my mind, a normal interview. Certainly a different setting from most I had conducted previously. The cacophony of sound from the crashing surf only meters away made listening and recording difficult, yet this

inconvenience seemed unimportant in relation to the noticeable significance of the site she had chosen. As if to emphasize this point she boldly affirmed, 'ko au ko Ruataupare, ko Ruataupare, ko au/I am Ruataupare, and Ruataupare is in me'.<sup>3</sup> She was referring of course to her genealogical descent from one of our most celebrated female leaders, most certainly inspired by the fact that only a short distance away stood the carved meeting house and marae of the same name. At that moment I cursed the fact that I did not bring my camera with me to capture the obvious implication not only in her remarks but the surroundings which inspired and drove home that statement. For those who listen back to that recording, the physical inferences are most certainly unsighted, the words heard, but the tangible stimulant absent from the oral recording.

Listening has for some time been stressed as a key methodological and interpretive concern in oral history, not surprising given the nature of oral sources. Alessandro Portelli underscored its magnitude noting emphatically that 'oral sources are *oral* sources', transcripts, he argued further, problematic because of their propensity to turn 'aural objects into visual ones', thus losing the meaning inherent in tone, volume, range and the rhythm carried in popular speech.<sup>4</sup> In an exploration of interviewing techniques and analysis, Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack have emphasized a need to learn to listen in oral history, for moral language,

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meta-statements, and the logic of the narrative.<sup>5</sup> 'Sharpening our listening skills', as they argue, allows the historian to become more alert and aware of the subjective dimensions in the narrator's story.<sup>6</sup> Yet, this emphasis on listening, although highly relevant and useful, seemingly accepts the idea that oral history is predominantly about sound and hearing, when in fact it is a collaborative process within which interviewer and interviewee are stimulated by all the senses.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the impact of the surrounding world can change the dynamic of the recording, providing challenges that require broader interpretive frameworks to unpack them beyond just the 'oral'.

For Māori, the natural and physical world with which we share a strong connection is often invoked to help tell the story, as it was with my nanny at Tūparoa. On this topic Mere Whaanga writes that 'we tell our important stories in many art forms, - in mūteatea or waiata of various types, through the carving and tukutuku that adorn the whareniui'.<sup>8</sup> Such was the case when I visited another elderly relation at his home in Te Araroa. Our interview began in a batch, not far from the main house, but he tired soon of the confined space, and prompted me to bring my video camera and follow him as we walked to the marae. His life narrative then wove together with the natural world he grew up with, in explanations about the geography of various pa sites, and a brief kōrero about the carvings and history of the meeting house.<sup>9</sup> For some this might not be understood as your classic life history interview, but for Māori, these physical sights and spaces are intrinsic to understanding the individual, who they are, and who they represent. In this instance, the land becomes part of the life narrative, the hills and buildings physical reference points from which hang stories about the individual's childhood, and their past, present and future lives. This connection to the landscape, as Keri Brown writes, 'is crucial' for Māori, 'goes beyond a purely physical attachment', and is 'central to Māori identity' and the maintaining of whakapapa links.<sup>10</sup> At the interview in Te Araroa, the interviewee's reference to the environment reflected this relationship. Perhaps more importantly, it also highlighted both his role as ahi kaa and kaitiaki (caregiver) for the land and marae, and a desire to teach and impart his knowledge to future generations.<sup>11</sup> At Tūparoa, this connecting was also at play in the affirming of her genealogical roots within immediately recognizable imprints on the local whenua (landscape). Writing particularly of Māori women, Naomi Simmonds points out that this connecting is sometimes felt within a 'reciprocal

relationship' with Papatūānuku who 'looks after and nurtures' and therefore, in turn, must be looked after also as both a physical space and spiritually living being.<sup>12</sup>

Interviewing in the moment, and capturing as much of the surrounding world, for me, meant having to move, follow, observe and view. The 'hikoi' (walk) that I took with my relation at Te Araroa enabled him to relax in his element, and helped me to see and experience the narrative beyond the interviewer's chair. This methodological variant on the seated life history required an engagement with the sights and sounds of the local setting, and allowed the narrator to literally take control in steering the interview. Katie Moles writes that by walking 'people are able to connect times and places through the grounded experience of their material environment'.<sup>13</sup> This natural setting, as Donald Ritchie observes, usually provides 'an abundance of stimulants' for the interviewee.<sup>14</sup> Being aware of how to tap into, view and read, these visually dynamic words requires a multisensory approach to research. Longhurst, Johnston and Ho, have suggested that this might be thought of a 'visceral approach'; visceral in reference 'to the sensations, moods and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live.' 'Paying attention to the visceral', as they argue, 'means paying attention to the senses - sight, sound, touch, smell and taste'.<sup>15</sup> Many, if not all the interviews I undertook involved eating, drinking, walking, singing, and of course talking, at varying stages. More than just mundane experiences or simple social ritual, these acts and interactions were often parts of a performative politics relative to each person's subjectivity.<sup>16</sup> For instance, I was told by one aunty that in order to interview her mother I would effectively have to chase her around the kitchen, because she was a kāuta person, who never stayed still, and felt much more comfortable moving, cooking, and working.<sup>17</sup> This was at once an affirmation of her commitment to the people and a personal ethic of hard work, while simultaneously a protective strategy to place her world at the centre of our kōrero. Similarly, I interviewed an uncle at work in Gisborne, amidst the clouds of dust and noise of his workshop, a surrounding reflective of his passion for carving and Māori art.<sup>18</sup> This was not just a workplace though, and as I cursed once more the absence of my visual recorder, it was clear that this whole environment served as a living breathing embodiment of his identity, public and private lives.



## PHOTOGRAPHS AND PROPS

One of the obvious values in being able to see the settings and surroundings of our interviewees lies in the fact that these sites are commonly interactive locations. Michael Belgrave, in his oral history study of the Mercy Sisters of Auckland notes how... 'photographs, letters, diaries, postcards and even the special layout and location of buildings can become more meaningful' when we involve a multi-sensory approach to thinking about their relevance. In this way, he writes, 'memory can turn physical space into social and historical space'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one of the first interviews I undertook in my doctoral thesis took place in a small room that had been converted into an office in the home of another older relative. Our interview began with *karakia* (prayer), after which he proceeded to tell his story, to recite initially his *whakapapa* (genealogy) by referring systematically to the photographs set around the walls of the room.<sup>20</sup> In the living room of another uncle, some few months later, a similar ritual played out, this time photographs of people were replaced with pictures of the various trucks he had owned and operated throughout a long career on the roads.<sup>21</sup> For both, these carefully situated photos enabled their remembering, and were important visual reminders of the lives they had lead, and how they wished to recall them. Brownyn Dalley stresses that 'photographs often offer access to the past that other sources, especially written', are seldom able to do.<sup>22</sup> Oral historians have recognized, for some time now, how the 'use of props', as deliberate mnemonic templates, 'provide the focus for a more detailed life testimony'.<sup>23</sup> Penny Robinson writes that 'photographs, are sometimes used as mnemonic devices that allow' interviewees 'to refer to certain people or events'.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, the images employed by both my uncles assisted the shaping and content of the stories they told, yet to really value the way in which they were used one had to be there, to see this interplay in action, and to appreciate the nuances in their narratives and performance.<sup>25</sup>

One of the very first life history recordings I ever undertook was with a *koroua* (male elder) from Ngāti Toa, who had lived in the Waikato for much of his adult life. He brought with him a large *whakapapa* book, from which he told me he had been reading extensively prior to our interview. In it, was a broad compilation of photos, Christmas and birthday

cards, letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, and genealogy charts. It was a virtual archive of visual mnemonic templates designed to assist him in remembering and telling his story.<sup>26</sup> I wished then, as in later interviews, that I could have shown how he interacted with these objects. In an interview some years ago now, my grandfather commented on the significance of objects such as these in the conveying of Māori and *iwi* history.<sup>27</sup> He, along with another *papa*, Jacob Karaka, referred to the use of *tokotoko* (carved walking sticks) in not simply recording history, but through touch enabling speakers to recite already memorized narratives and information. This, however, required an immersion in the social and spoken worlds of their communities, from which the stories were transmitted and learnt; the carved objects then, mechanisms to support and facilitate oral recall, rather than texts to simply be read or recited verbatim. Nevertheless, the employment of these types of objects in life histories, highlight still as Sipe notes, how narrators' respond and 'refer to their setting and objects', and perhaps more poignantly how 'the spoken word' is always 'embedded in a setting, a situation, [and] context'.<sup>28</sup>

For Māori, objects and visual images are often invoked, and made use of, from a distinctive cultural worldview. Significantly then, as Gillian Rose points out, 'the interpretation of visual images' must then 'address questions of cultural meaning and power'.<sup>29</sup> In Ngāti Porou for instance, these are worlds with diverse perspectives, changeable depending on where the interview takes place, and with whom. Indeed, for most of those interviewed away from the coast, images of home were more common in the interview environment.<sup>30</sup> However, on the coast, the natural setting spoke immediately to this layer of their lives, and allowed a more vociferous local affiliation to *marae* and *hapū*. For some these included flags, crests, shirts and beanies as symbols of their explicit association, and sometimes disassociation, with certain groups and peoples on the coast itself. Indeed, one interviewee, an ardent critic of the Runanga (tribal authority), insisted on conducting his interview beneath a flag that accentuated a political detachment from his identity as Ngāti Porou.<sup>31</sup> This interview, one of the few that I fortunately was able to film, tells not just the story of his life, but visually grounds that narrative within a powerful political account vital to understanding the discourses at work in his interview. The use of objects and the need to see how they change and influence what is being said, or might be understood, is clearly an important part of many oral

history recordings. Listening to a recording, without being able to see and observe what is happening, instantly takes away another potentially higher layer of meaning, though it should be noted that at times visual and moving images can also detract in some ways, or at worst, mislead audiences.<sup>32</sup>

#### BODY MOVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Where I grew up, Ngāti Porou people were sometimes referred to as Ngāti 'blows' which I always found amusing. Although I'm sure that most of that identifying arose out of pūhaehae (jealousy) and teasing, it was, in my mind, also a telling commentary on our self confidence and tribal parochialism. Ngāti Porou people, at least in my experience, have a certain way of speaking, particularly those who have been brought up back home. Some describe it as a humorous style, while for others, it is more expressive and performative. The use of humour, whether in formal speech-making, in the telling of stories in the wharenuī, or on family occasions was, in my upbringing, a common feature we associated with our tribal identity. Neal R. Norrick tells us that 'a humorous (or overly serious) approach to one's own past... conveys a particular identity'.<sup>33</sup> For many of those I interviewed, not just Ngāti Porou, humour was employed for varying purposes, and on most occasions was a highly entertaining performance. At the kitchen table of a close relation a few miles south of Whakawhitira, two uncles I was fortunate to record joked of the time they were 'chased out of Tikitiki' after pursuing some of the local girls at a community dance.<sup>34</sup> Their body language, as much as what they said, carried the story, their facial expressions inextricably tied to the performance. On another occasion, an interviewee recalled how he had managed to subdue a classroom of noisy High School students:

*They put me in charge of this one class that put a teacher into the mental asylum, that's how much they got at him... This is what they used to do: 'Morning Class'... not a word. 'Morning class'... not a word... I turned my back to write the mornings activities up... Click, click, click, click... I look around- matches, they could only be thrown from a, all around me, aimed at my head... turn around, not a movement. I turn around- click, click, click... no movement, just big grins on their faces. Got the duster and rubbed off what I had*

*written, and what marks they had put up there. I says, 'this is your last warning, if I get anymore of those things then someone's in trouble.'*<sup>35</sup>

As this story was recounted, he acted it out, including the sounds of the clicking matchsticks. For effect he also turned away from me, to tell the story, looking back over his shoulder to maintain eye-contact. The overall performance showed that although the class was difficult, he had handled the situation competently. It was both a humorous anecdote, while also a meaningful explication of how he was always in control. In both these recordings, the narrators did not rely solely on their voices, but physically enacted their narratives. The fact that people 'speak with body language, expression, and tone' is not an overly contested issue, yet, as Sipe stresses, to appreciate 'more fully the expression and process of memory generation' inherent within these performances, it is important to capture in moving image this 'creation and presentation'.<sup>36</sup>

Storytellers, in the Māori world, whether they are recounting a life history or speaking more formally, tend to draw on models and templates common in social ritual and oral tradition. These include proverbs, songs, and genealogies, which comprise their own dramatized dimensions. Danny Keenan maintains that 'the paepae' itself 'can be used to organize Māori oral histories wherever they may be presented or written, so that they are constructed according to the same conventions that apply on the marae'.<sup>37</sup> In many, if not all of the recordings, I have undertaken with Māori, most have at some stage integrated some of these practices and performances in their interview. One of the more common has been the singing of songs, or waiata. Of particular note, I recall spending most of the morning with an elderly relation at his home in Rangitukia, where he sang and recounted a variety of old compositions specific to the local area.<sup>38</sup> A well known figure on the coast, his distinctive features consisted of an eye-patch and a well-worn embroidered blazer. To simply document his interview in an oral recording would miss the rich texture and authenticity evident in his demeanour; a countenance too difficult to explain here in the written word, a person needed to be seen as well as heard in order for his interview to be truly appreciated and understood. Mervyn McLean has written that 'sometimes a singer actually identifies himself with the songs known to him'.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, in this case, the songs recited during the interview were

local and tribal classics, filled with an emotion heard in the rise and fall of the pitch and tone, but also indelibly etched in the face of the performer. Indeed, they served to reveal in an aural sense his identity, while in their visual execution, the deep meanings in the songs were given life in ways that the oral record could not possibly hope to expose. Despite the potential in exploring more deeply the performative aspects of oral history, scholars have tended to investigate them predominantly in relation to dance.<sup>40</sup> However, in Māori and iwi communities, such as Ngāti Porou, performance is a significant feature in storytelling, both public and private. To appreciate and understand more fully the deeper meanings in these narratives, oral historians should consider probing further than the soundtrack of a recording.

## CONCLUSION

One of the strengths of oral history is that it purports to understand the significance of meaning beyond text and print. In many ways this is what makes it such an exciting and inviting methodology for researchers, who like to hear and listen rather than simply read and write. It breathes life into otherwise silent sources, allowing a rich tapestry of sound to reverberate and resound in the ear. But, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, there is much more to the senses than just listening. Interviews take place in vibrant settings, where sites provide a significant visual texture to the words and accounts of narrators. Objects and props are commonly employed to help structure and convey ideas, while body language and humour

interweave to enable often dynamic performances. These sights and surroundings have the potential to reveal more depth than oral recordings often allow. Indeed, visual recordings, as Dan Sipe affirms, provide an opportunity to 'document not only the interview's explicit information, but the process itself.' Within the capturing of this dialogic relationship between interviewer and narrator, there is also scope, as he points out, to 'investigate the role of memory, and the function of narrativity.' In this regard Sipe argues further that the interviewer should be included, and seen, in the video-taped interview.<sup>41</sup> However, Māori do not always feel comfortable with sound recordings, let alone video. Of particular concern are the intrusive dimensions of not only the shape and size of the recording equipment, but the capturing of an individual's image, or of something considered tapu (sacred) or restricted. Nevertheless, there are still many who are comfortable with these developing technologies, and those who understand the advantages in storing visual treasures for following generations. Similarly, oral historians might yet consider their own relationship with visual recording, if not solely for the benefit of enriching their practice, but for the serious analytical and interpretive rewards they offer. This, however, requires a refocusing of the blurred lines, where aural and visual sources collide, where what was once perhaps out of sight no longer remains out of mind, and where 'interpretive' practice replaces a sterile 'reconstructive' mode that no longer relies on the blind leading the blind.<sup>42</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dan Sipe, 'The Future of Oral History and Moving Images', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998, p.379.
- <sup>2</sup> The Masters thesis drew on twelve interviews undertaken in the Waikato, Tainui, region, with three whānau,(families) over three generations. Nēpia Mahuika, 'Being Māori Tūturu? Māori Life Narratives and Contemporary Identities' (Unpublished Masters thesis: University of Waikato, 2006). The Doctoral study draws on sixty interviews, also over a range of generations, undertaken with descendents of Porou Ariki, the eponymous ancestor of the east coast tribe, Ngāti Porou. Thesis, forthcoming, 2011.
- <sup>3</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Hine Tangipo, Tūparoa, 29 December, 2007. Note: Some, but not all, of the interviewee names used in this essay have been changed, with pseudonyms provided to, as much as possible, enable anonymity.

- <sup>4</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different', in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, New York, 1991, p. 47.
- <sup>5</sup> Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack, 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses', in Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, New York and London, 1991, pp. 11-26.
- <sup>6</sup> Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 26.
- <sup>7</sup> Sipe points out that 'orality, at its core, is not purely a concept grounded in sound', 1998, p. 382.
- <sup>8</sup> Mere Whaanga, "telling our stories: hapū identity in waiata, pakiwaitara and visual arts", *Oral History in New Zealand*, vol. 15, 2003, p. 8.
- <sup>9</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Rawiri Wanoa, Te Araroa, 8 January 2008.

- <sup>10</sup> Keri Brown, 'Upsetting Geographies: Sacred Spaces of Matata' (Unpublished Masters thesis: University of Waikato, 2008), p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> Ahi kaa here refers to one who keeps the home fires burning, often someone who maintains and looks after the marae, hapu and iwi affairs.
- <sup>12</sup> Naomi Simmonds, 'Mana Wahine Geographies: Spiritual, Spatial and Embodied Understandings of Papatūānuku' (Unpublished Masters thesis: University of Waikato, 2009), p. 110.
- <sup>13</sup> Katie Moles, 'A Walk in Thirdspace: Place, Methods and Walking', *Sociological Research Online*, vol.13, issue. 4, 2008, [http://www.socresonline.org.uk/13/4/2.html]. Retrieved 24th August 2009.
- <sup>14</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing oral history: a practical guide*, Oxford, 2003, p. 139.
- <sup>15</sup> Robyn Longhurst, Lynda Johnston, and Elsie Ho, 'A visceral approach: cooking 'at home' with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand', in *Transactions*, Royal Geographical Society, 2009, p. 334.
- <sup>16</sup> For further reading here, see Longhurst, Johnston, and Ho, 2009, p. 342
- <sup>17</sup> A kāuta is a cooking shed. Personal communication (Research Diary), Nēpia Mahuika with Ariana Ngatai, Tikitiki, 12 December 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Derek Lardelli, Turanga-nui-a-Kiwa, 18 December 2007.
- <sup>19</sup> Michael Belgrave, 'Three steps forward - one step back': Individual Autonomy and the Mater Hospital', in Anna Green and Megan Hutching, eds., *Remembering, Writing Oral History*, Auckland, 2004, p. 125.
- <sup>20</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Pine Campbell, Hamilton, 15 November 2007. Pine initially wanted to keep some of this kōrero off tape. We spoke twice about the photographs, and their significance. He pointed out, on occasions, where the photo was taken, to illustrate the family connection to the area.
- <sup>21</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Prince Ferris, Ruatorea, 10 January 2008.
- <sup>22</sup> Bronwyn Dalley, 'Chance Residues: photographs and social history', in Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, eds., *Disputed Histories, Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, Dunedin, 2006, p. 169.
- <sup>23</sup> See Hugo Slim, Paul Thomson, Olivia Bennett, and Nigel Cross, 'Ways of Listening', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, London and New York, 1998, p. 119.
- <sup>24</sup> Penny Robinson, 'Whose place? Mine, yours or ours', *Oral History in New Zealand*, vol. 15, 2003, p. 14.
- <sup>25</sup> Raphael Samuel has pointed out that it is the knowledge that people bring to photographs which make them so useful, and historically valuable, Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1; past and present in Contemporary Culture*, London, 1994. For further reading particularly on photographs and images as valuable historical sources, see Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, Ithaca, 2001; and Roy Porter, 'Seeing the Past', *Past and Present*, 118, 1988, pp. 186-205.
- <sup>26</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Erueti Green, Hamilton, 11 May 2004.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Nēpia Mahuika and Jacob Karaka, at Hopuhopu. Personal Collection.
- <sup>28</sup> Sipe, 1998, p. 382.
- <sup>29</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, London, 2001, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>30</sup> A number of those I interviewed away from home (the coast), referred to photos of mount Hikurangi, their marae, or maps of the coast. These were often displayed on walls, the mantelpiece, or kept in family photo albums or whakapapa books.
- <sup>31</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Tini Wharehanga, Turanga-nui-a-Kiwa, 12 January 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> This is most common in documentary, where the editing of scenes often creates the illusion that what audiences are seeing is the real-time motion of an interview.
- <sup>33</sup> Neal R Norrick, 'Humour in Oral History Interviews', *Oral History*, vol.34, no.2, 2006, p. 86.
- <sup>34</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Jack Takurua and Edward (Boy) Keelan, Ruatorea, 13 December 2007, 8.40-8.52.
- <sup>35</sup> Erueti Green, tape 1, side B, 33.50-35.15.
- <sup>36</sup> Sipe, 1998, pp. 382-83.
- <sup>37</sup> Danny Keenan, 'The Past from the Paepae: Uses of the Past in Māori Oral History', in Anna Green and Megan Hutching, eds., *Remembering, Writing Oral History*, Auckland, 2004, p. 145.
- <sup>38</sup> Life narrative interview, Nēpia Mahuika with Te Kapunga Dewes, Rangitukia, 11 December 2007.
- <sup>39</sup> Mervyn McLean, 'Sound Archiving and the Problems of Dissemination of Waiata', *Oral History in New Zealand*, Vol.2, 1989, p. 15.
- <sup>40</sup> For further reading here see Jeff Friedman, with Catharine Moana Te Rangitakina Ruka Gwynne, 'Blood and Books: Performing Oral history', *Oral History in New Zealand*, vol. 19, 2007, pp. 14-25; and Jeff Friedman, 'Muscle Memory: Performing Oral history', *Oral History*, vol.33, no.2, 2005, pp. 35-47; and Angela Impey, 'Sound, Memory and Dis/placement: Exploring Sound, Song, and performance as oral History in the Southern African Borderlands', *Oral History*, vol. 36, no.1, 2008, pp. 33- 45.
- <sup>41</sup> Sipe, 1998, p. 383.
- <sup>42</sup> For further reading on the significance of the interpretive and reconstructive modes see Michael Roper, 'Oral History', in Brian Brivati, Julia Buxton and Anthony Seldon, eds., *The Contemporary History Handbook*, Manchester, 1996, pp. 435-52.

# Using oral history to compile a school history

LOREEN BREHAUT

When I was interviewing ex-whalers in 2005-6 for the Tory Channel Whalers' Project,<sup>1</sup> one of the interesting topics which emerged was that during the winter whaling season many men took their families to live near the whaling station in a remote part of Tory Channel, and that a public school operated on site. Some of the men were themselves the children of whalers and had attended the school as well as later working at the station. I began to seek out other family members and in 2006-7 proceeded with an oral history project based around Whekenui School.<sup>2</sup> One of New Zealand's most remote schools, Whekenui School operated only from 1951 to 1962. Local children had previously been enrolled in the Correspondence School, with an untrained supervisor paid by the parents. This arrangement was known as a Grade 0 school, but did not cater for the children of seasonal workers. The Perano family, owners of the Whaling Station, lobbied the Education Department for years for a school which would serve not only whalers' children in winter, but the families of local farmers and fishermen all year. Eventually they were successful, mainly by supplying the site and the building themselves, and the school opened.

I was able to locate twelve ex-pupils of the school who were willing to be interviewed, in addition to the three whalers I had already interviewed who had also attended. To my surprise, although most had clear and fond memories of their days living near the whaling station, their memories of the school itself were almost absent. As Ken Gardiner told me: 'I can't remember much about the school really at all. I've tried to think about it since we were first talking about it, but no, there's nothing really that comes to mind.' Few could name their teachers or remember anything remarkable about their constantly interrupted schooling, although some had perceived a problem.

Most attended one primary school for the first and third terms (New Zealand operated a three-term

year at the time) and Whekenui School for the winter term. Some years they wouldn't go to Whekenui at all, but might perhaps stay with grandparents or aunts while the rest of the family departed for Tory Channel. Only a few seemed to be aware of the huge disruption this must have caused their teachers and learning difficulties it posed for themselves. If they had problems, they generally put it down to being poor students - a commonly-repeated expression in the interviews.

You went from this school - say from Waikawa, you went from there, and you might have done that work up here. And you went down there and you're sort of doing virtually the same as what you had before, and sometimes it would be the other way around. And then you're coming back again, and you could miss things.

*Yes, that's right, but then again you could sort of half-pie double up, that's what I was saying before. Some of the work we were doing here, then we'd go back down there and you'd already done that.<sup>3</sup>*

*I think the hardest part is probably on the child, really. It's the break, the unsettlement of going from one school to the other. I think that's probably where we noticed it more than anything.*

Getting used to a teacher and then having to get used to another teacher?

*Yes, that's right, then having to slot back in, or try and slot back in where you left off. We probably found that a little bit difficult. ... You're with strange people for*

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*Perano Whaling Station in 1951. 'Children wandered through the very dangerous whaling factory to deliver their father's lunch or even to help'.*



*The new Whékenui schoolhouse in 1951. An ex-army hut had been converted into a very nice classroom.*

*a while. You just get to know them, then you're back home again. ...But we coped. And that was an education on its own, really, going from one environment to another.<sup>4</sup>*

The children's memories of school mainly centred on walking there, as most had a long and hilly path to follow, occasionally threatened by cows or bulls.

*I used to hate going over to the school, to Wbekenui, because we had to go through that bull paddock, and I was terrified of those big black poll bulls. It was quite a way for us to walk over the top of the hill, and it was terrible if it was raining and in the wintertime – and if we could see the bulls we'd have to walk further up the hill to get away from them, or further down the hill, wherever they were. But if it was low tide we could go around the rocks, and we used to love doing that. We quite often used to go when we shouldn't have, when the tide was sort of in too far, and get wet! Sit in wet clothes all day.<sup>5</sup>*

On the way home they would often stop and play on the gun turrets which were part of the Sounds defences left after the War.

*I never was a great scholar, right through to the end of my days. The only thing I could think about was getting out of school. No, I think the thing that sticks in your mind is sort of getting to school and coming back, you know, and how we used to play little games and stop at the gun turrets. Yeah, it wasn't a bad sort of a view, walking round the road, either, looking out. I think we just had a heap of fun. I'm sure we didn't learn a hell of a lot as far as normal schooling went!<sup>6</sup>*

In bad weather they would often be taken by boat in a whale chaser, and most remembered this.

*During the winter, if the weather was quite foul, which it quite often was, Joe Perano would come around in his boat, in his whale chaser, before he went to work, and picked us all up at the Station there. All lining up and go down and you'd jump on the boat. The boat's going up and down. ...But we got there – it was better than walking around the hill in the rain.<sup>7</sup>*

*I do remember that on very bad days we were taken to school on the whale chaser. A whale chaser would come over and we'd*



*Wbekenui School's first class in 1951*

*all be thrown like - you know, we were only little kids, of course - we were all picked up off the breastwork and heaved up to a guy on the boat and shoved down the hatch into the chaser. And the same thing happened when you got to the other end, down at Wbekenui. And then you'd get drenched going from the wharf up to the school at Wbekenui, because it's quite a way to walk!*<sup>8</sup>

One family of four boys had so far to walk to and from school that the teacher actually rearranged school hours on mailboat days to make it easier, although totally in conflict with the Education Board bylaws of the day.

For some pupils and teachers it was their first introduction to the plentiful kaimoana in Tory Channel: pāua and kina as well as fish.

*I can remember when we first went down there even eating raw pāua[s]. I don't know whether you'd get anybody to do it today, but they didn't worry about it, the kids down there. They used to go round the rocks, pull one off, munch into it raw. Also kinas and that sort of thing. A lot of seafood*

*was freely available: kinas and a lot of crayfish and fish. ... I didn't eat the blind eels, though!*<sup>9</sup>

Whale meat was also often eaten. Māori and Pākeha mixed together freely and according to several reports, not all the children were sure whether they were Māori or not - there were no barriers.

*As a child, because I grew up down there, and people got very brown in the summertime, we didn't actually think of them as being Māori people. Until I came up to Picton I didn't know really what a Māori was, although these families were all Māori. They were very fine Māori people but their colour was the same as our colour. I just didn't think of them as being Māori. And you know, as children in that era you had to be respectful to all adults, so it didn't matter who or what.*<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately the use of Māori language was very rare amongst the younger generations at this time.

*I was just wondering how far down the language had come. So your mother still spoke it? Yes she could, but she didn't speak it that often*



*Wbekenui School in 1951*



*after my great-grandmother died. It sort of died... Yes, well with a lot of older generation they didn't pass it down, you know. My age, I've had to go back and learn it.*<sup>11</sup>

A favourite hobby was collecting the shells of paper nautilus, which occasionally washed up on the beach. This led to various tricks and one very successful one, when one of the teachers constructed a huge shell out of paper and glue and planted it where Joe Perano would find it. He was very excited until he saw that his find was artificial, but fifty years later at the school reunion his daughters brought it out; it had been carefully saved to the delight of its maker.

Other activities mentioned by most were fishing and hunting, sledging on the hills and sometimes participating in the popular local shark hunts. The whaling world they lived in was also part of their school experience, and many can remember lessons stopping while teacher and class went up on the hill to watch the chase if a whale came into Tory Channel.

*We could see them coming in the Channel after this whale. You're looking from straight out here half-way out to Waikawa Road, you see, and it's just all there. You see exactly what happened.*

People have said that sometimes they'd stop the school lessons and go up on the point. Do you remember that?

*Yes, that's dead right. But I think the teacher was just as much excited, too, to see that at that time.*<sup>12</sup>

*If there was a chase on in the Channel itself - if a whale came in the Channel - the teacher always took us up to the top of the hill to watch it and see how it was progressing and things like that. We did get to do that.*

I guess the teacher wanted to see as well!  
*Yes, it would be a new experience for the teacher, being there. And we would be taken up to the point to watch. We were taken up there on a very bad day if it was very rough, to watch the Tamahine come in, you know.*<sup>13</sup>

Children also wandered through the very dangerous whaling factory to deliver their father's lunch or even to help the men in some cases, experiences which would never be allowed with today's OSH regulations.

Eventually I realised that to build a picture of the school I would need to operate as a traditional

historian and do some investigative research. The locally available records proved to be a few sheets of paper from the school's final year in a Blenheim archive, and a brown paper bag of rodent-nibbled letters and receipts from the Perano family. With persistent detective work amongst the very poor records in public archives, I was able to discover the names of the Whekenui teachers and locate some of them. I also had the good luck of hearing Fiona Kidman say that her husband had taught at Whekenui School as a young man.

There was a great difference between the teachers' and pupils' interviews. Perhaps this would be expected, but I was surprised by the teachers being the ones with very clear memories of one or two years they spent at a school over forty years before. My own primary school memories are far clearer than I would expect my teachers to recall.

The story of Whekenui School proved fascinating. When the Education Department finally agreed to the school opening in 1951, they were unable to find teachers for many of the remote schools, and Ian Kidman, a totally untrained 19-year-old, was offered the sole teacher position. 'They were desperately short of teachers - they'd have taken a three-legged dog off the street to teach if they could,' he said. At first Ian taught in a woolshed, until an ex-army hut had been converted into what he remembers as 'a very nice classroom. It might have been a fowl-house, but it was a very pleasant school by the time they put the windows in and got all the chicken-shit out!'<sup>14</sup>

There were six pupils in the first term, then up to about thirteen when the whaling season started. All ages and stages from Primer 1 to Form 2 were covered, a huge demand on an untrained teacher. Shockingly, Ian received no help or guidance at all from the Education Department, apart from a good supply of teaching materials. He received no visits from Inspectors or others and was not even informed of the school term dates. He became friendly with the penguins living under his hut, enjoyed hunting and mixing with the whalers, and reluctantly left at the end of the year to start his teacher's training. He summarized his year as follows:

*I didn't have any skills, I could barely read or write, and I couldn't spell, so you can imagine the education that those kids got! ...I had fun with the kids. It was easy to have fun with the teaching. We could go down the beach, we could do nature study, we could go out and play sport - physical education - and occasionally we'd read and write.*

The next teacher was similarly young and untrained, and was given a hard time by the whalers with their teasing and tricks. At this stage the school requested that the teachers be allowed to use correspondence lessons, due to their inexperience, but this appeal was denied.

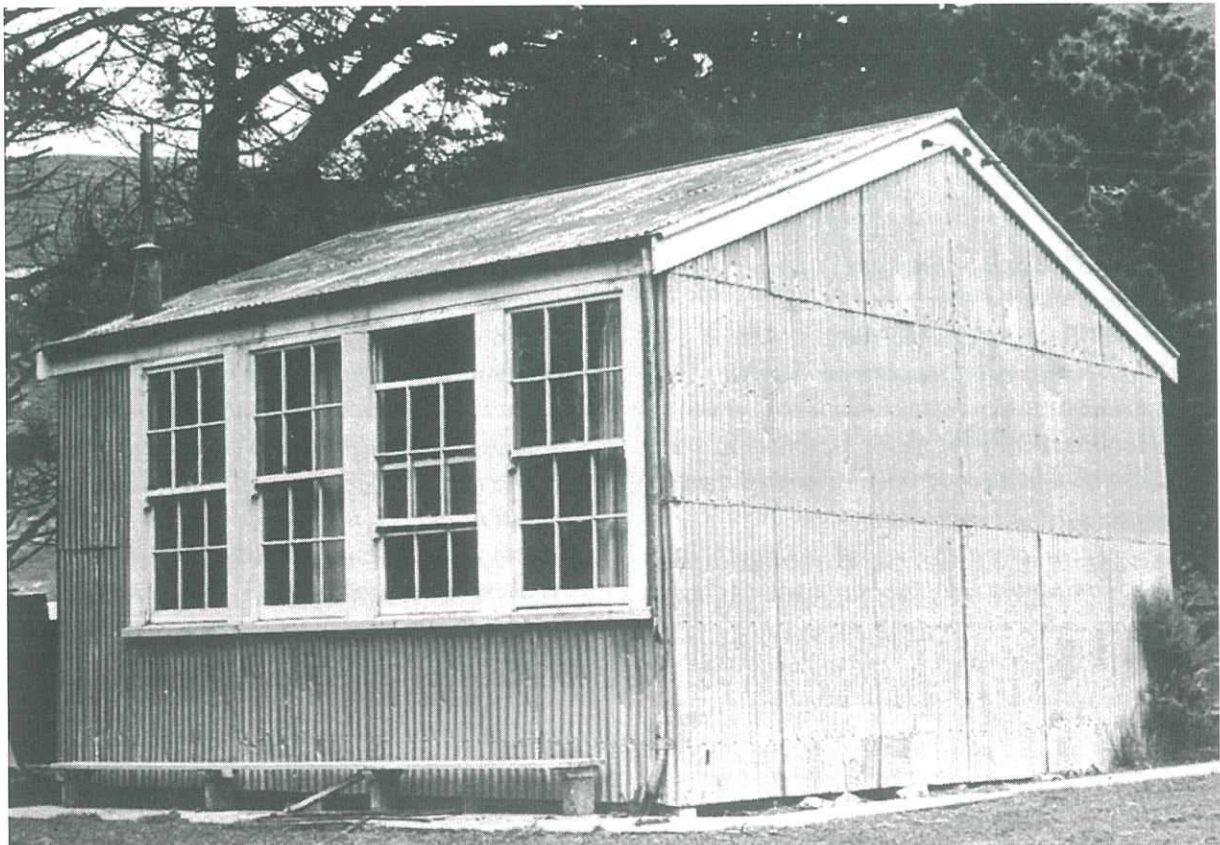
Further teachers were usually trained, but the school facilities were deteriorating and by 1959 a dismal school inspection reported, 'the present buildings are inadequate and have outlived their useful service. Proper drinking, washing and toilet facilities are required...' Jocelyn Davis remarked on the lack of hygiene:

*The kids always had terrible sores on their legs from the whaling station. I think it was because the beach they played on with all the whale and all that was very unhygienic. And those kids always had terrible boils and things on their legs, knees and things. I can't remember having anywhere to wash your hands. Imagine all these kids at school touching everything. Everybody seemed to get them. And the flu and the colds - everybody had runny noses and colds and things like that. No wonder we were always sick!<sup>15</sup>*

By the time Neil Breingan arrived in 1960, he found gaps in the floor and windows which couldn't be opened. He described the stick used to rattle on the corrugated iron of the toilet to disturb the blowflies. For years it had been the habit of boys to throw stones at the iron to frighten girls who were using the toilet. Neil also remembers the District Nurse arriving on the mail boat, racing up to the school and inspecting the children in time to race back and catch the boat again after it had delivered the mail and supplies at Okukari, a few minutes further around the bay.

Finally in 1961 a contract was signed for relocating an unused classroom from Waikawa School and a teacher's bach from Pine Valley, as well as installing a new toilet block, cloakroom and other facilities. Alan Hall was the new teacher, and he was to be the last. He found it difficult sharing a room and bunk beds with one of his pupils until his new hut arrived, but gradually the school became better equipped and was running well.

*We thought it was just marvellous, because we had two flush toilets - one for the girls, one for the boys, separate. And it had a little foyer, like these old schools had, where you hang your jacket. They put in an old pot-*



The 'new' school. An unused classroom relocated from Waikawa School.

*belly fire in it, and we got a radio to listen to Broadcast to Schools.<sup>16</sup>*

However the 1962 whaling season was very poor, and Alan was anxious to move to another job before pupil numbers collapsed, so he requested an inspection in the winter term. He described the way Sounds people warned him of the Inspector's approach, with their typical mistrust of bureaucracy. He had phone calls from the launch company, the Picton hotel, and various Sounds residents as the Inspector got nearer. The school gathered at the wharf to meet him, and in the rough weather as the man attempted to step ashore from the tossing launch, the children shouted, 'jump!' at the right moment.

There was already at least one underage child on the roll and there would soon be only four or five pupils left, so Alan was reassigned for the remainder of the year and Whekenui School closed for the last time on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1962. It had operated for less than eleven years. Those remaining worked on with Correspondence lessons for a while, but most moved into town to complete their education.

Although the New Zealand Correspondence School is a wonderful institution and has done great service to remote families over many years, it doesn't suit everyone. Many of these parents had minimal schooling themselves and were insecure in the position of supervisors. People who remember little of their classroom days in Whekenui School have detailed stories about their exploits while Correspondence pupils. Some tell how they would escape outdoors and disappear for the day while mother took the scones out of the oven.

*I think it must have been one of the hardest times, because I had to do it by myself. Mother helped me, but her patience wasn't very good! It was like never-ending homework. But I used to listen to Broadcast to Schools, back then. I used to tune in to the radio and listen to Doctor Paul first then go and start my work!<sup>17</sup>*

*I never really did any good at school, and Mum would say, 'The mail boat's coming today; you've got to do it! You've got to do it!' And she'd sit and do it! That's not very nice, is it? No, I was never what you call a scholar at school.<sup>18</sup>*

*My brother, he figured out that if he got out quickly after breakfast while Mum was getting the washing on, and he got out in the dinghy, she wouldn't be able to call him.*

*So she'd be standing on the beach waving a tea-towel saying, 'Come in and do your schoolwork, you little devil!' So it was pretty difficult.<sup>19</sup>*

By 1977 a new generation was growing up and there were requests for the school to be reopened, due to the families of local fishermen and boat-builders who preferred not to use Correspondence. However nothing came of this, and the buildings passed into private ownership.

Without doubt the existence of Whekenui School and its survival for eleven years was mainly due to the Perano family's efforts and persistence. Many of the costs were borne by the family although their own children used the school for only a short time. Having a school nearby gave whaling families an additional option during the season and saved parents who were not at ease with the education system from the worry of supervising Correspondence lessons.

It was mentioned by several that schooling seemed less important in those days.

*People would probably frown on it a bit today, when you're splitting schools and that. I think there wasn't so much pressure on education to achieve, in those days. People just got on with life, went to school, and done those sorts of things. But today there's a lot of pressure to achieve and have something, to do something more.*

Pass exams and get bits of paper. Is that what you mean?

*Yes, I think so. There was a much more casual attitude.<sup>20</sup>*

I wondered if this was a characteristic of the whaling community, and perhaps of Picton itself, where there was always plenty of work for unschooled labour. However Alan Hall believes it was more widespread:

*That was a national kind of thing. In those days - I've thought about it a lot recently - it was acceptable for kids to fail at school. It just meant that they were limited in what they could do, but there were jobs for people who could swing shovels, so that was that. In fact there were parents there who couldn't write. But there were some parents who did appreciate education. The other thing was that when you tried to do anything, parents would get right in behind and raise money for things. They were supportive of the school, even though it was often a bit of a puzzle to them what the significance of it was.<sup>21</sup>*

If I had not been able to locate the teachers and collect reminiscences from three of them, no understanding of the mechanics and running of Whekenui School would have been possible. The responsible adults and parents have all gone, and written records are thin. While one or two pupils had detailed memories which were interesting and useful, it was the teachers who remembered

and explained the difficulties and intricacies of operating a school in this remote bay. It must always be a conscious effort to cast the selection net as widely as possible when choosing informants for an oral history project. The most enthusiastic or articulate do not necessarily transmit the most information.<sup>22</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Reported in *Oral History in New Zealand*, vol.19, 2007, pp.1-8

<sup>2</sup> The Whekenui School and Whalers' Families project was supported by a Sesquicentennial Oral History Award.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Huntley, interview, 19 April 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Gardiner, interview, 22 February 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>5</sup> Jocelyn Davis, interview, 13 June 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Pascoe, interview, 11 December 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Huntley, interview, 19 April 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>8</sup> Rita Hall, interview, 18 October 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Gardiner, interview, 22 February 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>10</sup> Toni Halliday, interview, 30 December 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>11</sup> Ria Wilson, interview, 31 August 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Huntley, interview, 19 April 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>13</sup> Rita Hall, interview, 18 October 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Kidman, interview, 9 October 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>15</sup> Jocelyn Davis, interview, 13 June 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>16</sup> Ria Wilson, interview, 31 August 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>17</sup> Ria Wilson, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Beverley Thompson, interview, 16 March 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>19</sup> Toni Halliday, interview, 30 December 2006, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>20</sup> Ken Gardiner, interview, 22 February 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Hall, interview, 12 May 2007, Picton Museum archive.

<sup>22</sup> The booklet *Whekenui School, 1951-62, 'A Very Remote School'*, Picton Historical Society, 2008 was published following this project and in time for the first school reunion at Easter 2008.

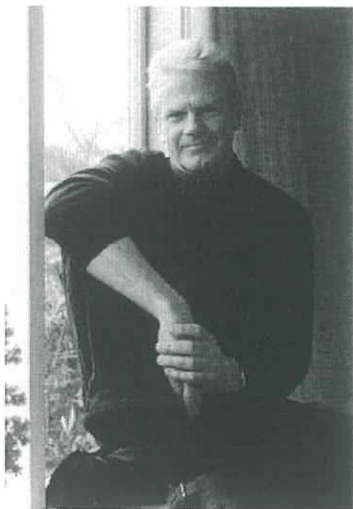
<http://whalingstation.co.nz/history/>

# Stitching up the past

ANN PACKER

We record oral histories not always knowing how they will be used. But when I sat down in 1995 with textile artist Malcolm Harrison to tape his life history, I certainly hoped I might one day be able to use the information in published form. Malcolm had already lodged his journals in the manuscripts section of the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL) – although with an embargo – so while I was adding to the record I trusted that at some stage I could also access that other information.

Now, two years after the accidental death of the man who has undoubtedly been our most visionary textile designer, the time seems right both to abstract the recordings and access the manuscripts and other resources within ATL for my planned biography of Malcolm Harrison, stitcher extraordinaire.



I met Malcolm Harrison not long after I became a community arts advisor in Wellington in 1985, when we moved to the capital with our teenaged family. My job then involved publicising the city's mostly amateur arts organisations – there were no newspaper listings in those days – and to plan and run the Wellington Community Arts Council's annual summer arts school.

As well as the visual arts traditionally offered, the school offered an embroidery workshop, and since quilting was in vogue and I had a keen personal interest, I was determined to add a quilter to my tutor team.

I had read a *Next* magazine feature on Harrison, a textile artist who had created a series of quilts based on the diary of a woman who travelled around the Pacific by steamer in 1889 – she recorded the famous episode in Apia Harbour when HMS Calliope

escaped a cyclone that sank 12 other ships. (I now own the quilt inspired by this entry.) He was regularly exhibiting with Janne Land Gallery, one of the dealer galleries on the What's On list I published each fortnight and had had the first of several major exhibitions at The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt.

I didn't know the lanky blond had not taught before but that wouldn't have stopped me. It was the beginning of a new career for him – he went on to teach at several of Wanganui's summer schools (much bigger than Wellington's) but tried out his ideas on us first for several years – and we became good friends. Whenever Malcolm came to the capital from Auckland we'd have a day out together catching up on galleries and trawling the secondhand shops.

In 1993 Harrison put in a proposal for the art project that was to be a feature of the refurbished Parliament House. It became the largest New Zealand public artwork ever commissioned, with combined multimedia works depicting earth, sea and sky involving more than 700 embroiderers, flax weavers and technicians from around the country.

*These are matters of pride*, in the Galleria, is indeed a monumental achievement, soaring above an atrium between office wings and, as the architects had envisaged, acoustically softening a space that was big on marble and glass. The smaller – but in many ways more emotionally loaded – work, *Whanaungatanga*, hangs on the 'Stair 7' landing, an area not always open to the public.

Harrison moved to the capital in 1994 to work on the project, but it took its toll – details of which are documented in the diary now in the ATL. In late 1995 he told *New Zealand Quilter* magazine that although he felt a sense of pride in getting “a whole range of outstanding craft” together in a public building, the project had destroyed something in him.

“The work had to get done on time and within budget,” he said. “To achieve this I had to become more rigid in my thinking. Only the work counted. I had to manipulate people and in so doing one sacrifices part of one's creative flexibility and spirit –

part of the inner person.”

He reflected artistically on the often fraught process of dealing with bureaucracy in the 1997 exhibition *Exquisite Mysteries*, 19 richly coloured and symbol-laden needlepoint works with such titles as *The House is Sitting* and *It Looks Like Upside-Down To Me*.

After a lifetime of rented accommodation, Malcolm Harrison bought his first house in Wellington, a one-bedroom classic built for bookseller Roy Parsons, down a pedestrian path in Wadestown with foot access only. He kept fit walking to town and the project’s studio in the former Courtenay Place Post Office in Cambridge Terrace.

In 1999, at Malcolm’s dining table, over many pots of tea, we recorded 10 hours of tapes, covering all the childhood details I already knew to be significant – the childhood years as the fourth in a family of five children growing up in the working class suburb of Linwood, with his beloved builder father, a mother prone to mood swings – who sewed all night when an occasion called for it – and a granny who kept the kids occupied with wool, threads and a tin of sparkling trinkets on wet days.

With his younger brother Graeme, Malcolm led the kind of wild childhood kids could in those days, yet he was already “drawing with thread” at the age of seven, when he stitched a black stocking into a doll that looks remarkably like a prototype for the 35 characters known collectively as *The Family*, first exhibited at The Dowse in 1989.

Malcolm wasn’t allowed to go to art school; instead, leaving school at 15, he became a window dresser at Christchurch’s DIC department store. He quickly found himself dressing the front window – a task normally reserved for more advanced apprentices – until his draping of models with yardage became so convincing that customers came in wanting to buy the ‘garments’. It also aroused jealousy in his seniors – the first instance of the bitchiness he seemed to attract throughout his adult life.

When the family moved to Auckland, Malcolm went too. He studied pattern-drafting at night class and moved into dressmaking, taking second prize in the Gown of the Year in 1962 with the strapless beaded olive satin gown *Scheberezade*. He worked for couturier Colin Cole until he became fed up with “the seething pit of fashion snakes” and opened his own boutique, called – for no reason he ever cared to explain – Jasper Johnson’s Jamboree. But he gave away all that to make work to hang on walls, where “it couldn’t be argued with”.



*W'hanaungatanga: Relationships. This work hangs in 'Stair 7' in Parliament Buildings.*

"You'd come up with an idea, and then brides and mothers would set about changing it all," he told Janne Land's husband, Peter Kitchin. "I couldn't bear it!" Harrison's first works, at Auckland's Denis Cohn Gallery in 1979, reflected fabric art trends of the time – traditional American quilt techniques depicted subjects including Kiwi aviation pioneer Richard Pearse and later the Pacific diary series.

Later, he ranged the textile field from quilts on a grand scale down to smaller needlepoint canvases and spare, simple stitchery on cloth. Yet while much of his later work grappled with monumental themes, such as migration and annihilation, one of his best-known quilts, *A Quiet Meal at the Chez*, recalls happy nights in Nelson, where he held several artist residencies.

Some public works from the early 1990s survive – *Oceania*, in Auckland's BNZ Tower; the untitled work in the council chamber of North Shore City, where



he was living when the work was commissioned; and his tribute to Little Barrier Island, in Auckland Museum's decorative arts gallery.

Harrison's work was shown at most major public galleries from Auckland to Invercargill, where *Open and Closed Spaces*, the Te Manawa-commissioned tribute to his late father, was exhibited shortly after his death at the end of a two-year tour.

Formal recognition of Malcolm Harrison's achievements finally came in 2004, with the award of the inaugural \$65,000 Creative New Zealand Craft/Object Art Fellowship, when the artist's peers acknowledged his "extraordinary

skill and mastery" across genres, including embroidery, quilt-making and drawing, and commended his "impeccable craftsmanship, exploration of new territory, generosity and contribution to the sector, and the wit, content and clever use of colour in his work". His last exhibition, in February 2008, was *Fifty Years' Journey through a Flower Market*, a retrospective planned with Janne Land before his death.

#### WHANAUNGATANGA

Following on from the collective success of New Zealand embroiderers on the hangings for Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, the *Stair 7* piece – open to the public when the House is not in session – was planned as a work that would bring together the skills of embroiderers throughout Aotearoa with flax weavers – all pouring their creative skills into interpreting our own stories. Following cartoons drawn by Harrison, guilds around the country worked on diamond-shaped pieces that demonstrate many quirky aspects of our heritage and culture – ladies a plate, the sheepdog, Chinese immigrants drying fish on a clothesline, the use of a gin bottle box as a baby bassinet. And every iconic detail can be attributed to either a Radio New Zealand Spectrum item or an ATL Oral History Centre reference. Nobody will ever be able to challenge Harrison on the authenticity of his subject matter; it's all a matter of record.

*Above: Completed artwork for the kaka embroidery*

*Left: Malcolm Harrison joining rata border embroidery*



# Book Reviews

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Damian Skinner, *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century*. Auckland University Press, 2008; 224pp

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Reviewed by Paul Diamond

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This book is based on a doctoral thesis by Skinner, a Gisborne-based art historian and curator.

Writing in the preface, Skinner describes the book as 'a historical account of Māori art in the twentieth century', structured as 'a fairly straightforward reflection of my journey as a researcher ... the book is best understood as an attempt to comprehend the relationship between the carver and the artist in the twentieth century, and to identify some important individuals whose work complicates our picture of Māori art and, more widely, modernism in Aotearoa'.

Among the individuals featured in this beautifully-produced book are Tuti Tukaokao, a carver from Ngāti Ranginui and Ngāitamarawaho; and Arnold Manaaki Wilson, a sculptor and art educator from Ngāi Tūhoe and Te Arawa. For Skinner, Tukaokao represents the carver identity in the book's title, and Wilson the artist.

The relationship between these two identities is explored in the book, with reference to two key concepts: Māoritanga

and modernism. The first of these ideas is linked with another key character in the book—the Ngāti Porou leader and politician, Sir Apirana Ngata. Ngata's 1940 definition of Māoritanga is quoted by Skinner:

*What then broadly speaking is meant by Māoritanga? It means an emphasis on the continuing individuality of the Māori people, the maintenance of such Māori characteristics and such features of Māori culture as present day circumstances will permit, the inculcation of pride in Māori history and traditions, the retention so far as possible of old-time ceremonial, the continuous attempt to interpret the Māori point of view to the Pākeha in power.*

Skinner argues that Ngata laid down a blueprint for traditional forms of expression, which artists would later react to. The Rotorua School of Māori Arts and Crafts, established in 1927, is an example of an expression of Māoritanga. Hone Taiapa, who joined the school as a student and then as a teacher, is another key character in this book. Together with his older brother Pine, Hone Taiapa was one of the major teachers of carving in the twentieth century. Hone Taiapa was also Master Carver at the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute in Rotorua.

Positioned against Māoritanga is 'Māori Modernism', Skinner's description of the art which emerged from the 1950s, produced by Arnold Wilson and

other artists including Selwyn Muru, Paratene Matchitt, and Buck Nin. When asked for his opinion of a 1967 exhibition of Māori art, Hone Taiapa was quoted as saying 'I think of attempts to create new forms in that way as a prostitution of Māori art.'

Over time, Skinner maintains that this gap between artworks and society was bridged by contemporary Māori art, which followed Māori modernism. 'By 1984 it was plausible to speak of a continuum of Māori cultural production in which customary and contemporary sit comfortably alongside each other, sharing ideas and values, while each remaining distinct and valued for differences of audiences and practice.'

For Skinner, Tuti Tukaokao, Hone Taiapa's first assistant at the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute, is an example of a carver able to 'leave behind the restrictions of Ngata's model of Māoritanga as received from Hone Taiapa and pursue an individualistic, expressive artistic statement'. As an example, Skinner cites Tukaokao's 1981 carvings for the Rotorua McDonalds' Rotorua Restaurant. The twin poles of tradition and innovation come together in Ihenga, a whare whakairo carved by Lyonel Grant for the Waiariki Institute of Technology in Rotorua, between 1993 and 1996. So, by the end of the book, what had started off as opposing forces, come together: 'In Ihenga, Grant reconnects Māoritanga to modernity.'

Haruhiko Sameshima's large-scale colour photos of Ihenga and the other works cited are a particular strength of this book. The photos are also an



opportunity to see less well-known works like *Te Aroha o te Iwi Māori*, a whareniui opened at the Polynesian Cultural Centre in Hawai'i in 1963, and carved under the direction of Hone Taiapa.

The Carver and the Artist also makes interesting connections between art and social history. One of the ways this is achieved (and of particular interest to oral historians) is through the use of oral history interviews. Seven interviews are listed as oral sources in the bibliography and 18 other interviews are mentioned in the acknowledgements.

An interview with Bardia Taiapa, Hone Taiapa's son, reveals that Apirana Ngata crossed Hone Taiapa's name off the list of men going to war. 'He was extremely angry because he was a man. He wanted to express his manliness and to defend and fight for the country... But Api wanted Hone Te Kauru to stay home so that in the advent of any disaster the art would be perpetuated through somebody being here'. This remarkable insight into the careers of both Ngata and Taiapa is an example of how oral history complements the secondary sources consulted by Skinner, adding to the richness of the book.

Overall, this book is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about some of the Māori carvers and artists of the 20th century, alongside examples of their work and deft (and accessible) analysis from Skinner. Much more than an art book, *The carver and the artist* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of recent history in Aotearoa-New Zealand and its impact on the future.

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Maureen Birchfield. *Looking for answers: A life of Elsie Locke* Canterbury University Press, New Zealand, 2009. \$69.95, 560 pages

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Reviewed by Margaret Long,  
Otaki

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This is a brilliant biography by one of New Zealand's most interesting and controversial women - to some an idealistic and effective campaigner and to others a dangerous leftie (for the record, Elise Locke joined the Communist Party in 1933 and left it in 1956).

Over a long life (1912-2001) Elsie was heavily committed to matters of social justice including Māori welfare, the Peace Movement, women's health issues, living a green lifestyle and making history relevant and interesting for children. Despite much poor health, very little money and four children to raise, she continues to work for her causes to the end of her life.

The author, Maureen Birchfield, as well as spending hundreds of hours reading minutes, speeches, journals, newspapers and letters, also taped interviews with some fifty people associated with Elsie in her wide range of interest. She uses these to lighten and enlighten the massive research behind her text. They breathe life into the historical narrative. When she had almost completed the book, her appeal to the Ombudsman to have declassified information from the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) released, was successful. She spent several more months incorporating information from this into her text.

Birchfield undertook this biography at the invitation of Elsie's children. She consulted them frequently as she wrote. They read the manuscript as it progressed and made comments, but the final decisions lay with Birchfield. It was a fruitful partnership.

The book is beautifully produced, the photographs relevant and plentiful. My only quibble is the light orange colour of the captions - difficult for older eyes to read. All in all this is a fascinating story, enjoyable to read and an enjoyable book to own.

# 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.

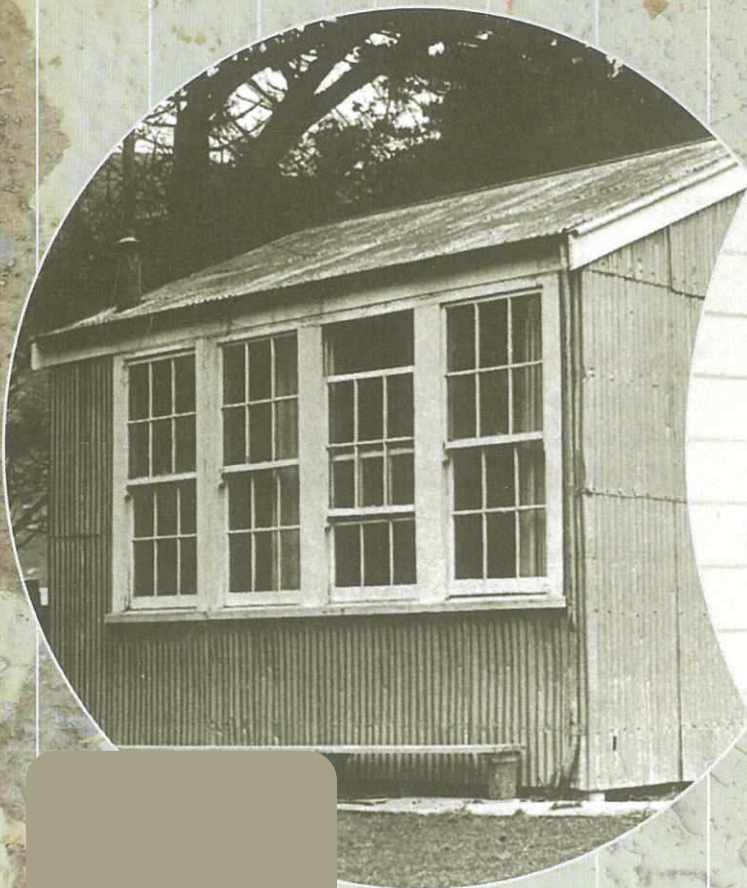
## INTERVIEWERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING RESPONSIBILITIES:

- 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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