

# Real to Reel

Newsletter of Oral History Tasmania Inc.



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## NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE – Jill Cassidy

### *Oral History in Troubling Times*

What a suitable title we picked! As you already know, the national conference has had to be postponed until October 2022. It was a very disappointing decision to make after all the hard work, but it was clear that with the current Covid situation only a few people would be in a position to attend in person. Qantas and Virgin were cancelling flights too, so the few who’d already registered found they couldn’t arrive in time. And of course oral history is about interacting face-to-face with people rather than experiencing yet another meeting via Zoom.

The committee is still working out the exact 2022 dates when the conference will go ahead, but it will be around the middle of October. You will be informed of the precise dates when they are confirmed. In the meantime you can look forward to a stimulating gathering in twelve months’ time; our keynote speaker, Mark Cave, may even be able to be here in person!

### **Annual General Meeting**

The AGM was held on September 9. The President’s Report and the audited Financial Statement can be found on pages 3–4.

We were sorry that Jai Paterson decided not to stand for re-election after almost 3 years on the committee, but are delighted that Virginia Greenhill has agreed to join us. I welcome her to our deliberations.

### **Oral History workshop**

The next workshop will be held in Launceston on Saturday 21 May 2022. Further details will be released in the new year, but you can put this date in your diary now.

### **Call for submission for the 2022 *Studies in Oral History***

Oral History Australia’s journal *Studies in Oral History* is inviting papers for peer review for a special migration issue to feature in 2022. Alexandria Dellios and Maria Savvidis will jointly edit the issue (no. 44), which will focus on the theme ‘Migrant voices: Community collaboration and telling migration histories’.

Contributors considering submitting a paper for peer review in this issue should read the **Call for Papers** available at: <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/journal/cfp-2022/>.

The deadline for submission is **1 November 2021**.

## **The Value of Oral History**

You are encouraged to read the Statement of Value below. Sometimes the value of Oral History is questioned by non-practitioners and as a result the national committee has adopted this statement to which we can all refer when needed. The statement has been posted on the Oral History Australia website.

### **ORAL HISTORY – A STATEMENT OF VALUE**

Memories are living histories. According to an African proverb, 'Every old man that dies is a library that burns.' Over the past century oral history – neatly described by United States practitioner Ron Grele as 'the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction' – has transformed the practice of contemporary history in many countries.

In this Statement of Value, Oral History Australia summarises what makes oral history so special and so valuable.

- Oral history adds to the historical record the experiences of individuals and groups who are less likely to record their stories by other means and preserve those stories in permanent archives. For example, in Australia oral history has made significant contributions to the historical record of indigenous Australians, of workers and the unemployed, of young and old, of migration and cultural diversity, of people with disabilities and special needs, and of people with diverse sexualities, among others.
- Oral history adds to the historical record aspects of experience in the past which are less likely to be recorded and preserved, such as the history of family life, friendship or intimacy.
- Oral history records and preserves voice, and thus ensures that the historical record includes different languages and vernacular speech, accent and dialect.
- Visual oral history recordings capture not only what people look like and the significance of non-verbal communication, they also record the places and activities that are pictured in the recording.
- Oral history recordings capture the emotion of history, including both the significance of emotion in the past and the emotional resonance of that past in people's lives.
- Oral history provides invaluable evidence about the past, *and* it provides invaluable evidence about the significance and meaning of the past in the present life of the narrator and their society.
- Oral history can be empowering for people who have not had a chance to tell their story, whose story has been suppressed, denied or manipulated, and who are affirmed by public recognition that their life and their story is significant.
- Oral history can be an invaluable resource for advocacy by groups of people whose history has been suppressed, denied or manipulated, and who wish to tell their version of history and set the record straight.
- Oral history helps redefine and expand who can be a historian: anyone with appropriate training can record oral history, contribute to the historical record, and help to reshape understanding of the past.
- Oral history brings together community, professional and academic historians who share an enthusiasm for creating and using recorded interviews, and who learn and benefit from their different approaches to oral history.
- Oral history provides a rich resource of stories, voices and evidence which can be used in a diverse range of historical productions, ranging from museum exhibitions to podcasts, film, television and radio documentary, artwork and performance, history books and creative writing, websites and audio sound trails – and future media that we can barely imagine.
- Oral history can be so stimulating, and so rewarding, for the person telling their story, and for the person privileged to record that story.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2020–2021

Jill Cassidy

It gives me great pleasure to present the President's Report for 2020–2021. It has been a very different year from our usual ones because of the impact of Covid-19.

As noted in last year's report, our customary May workshop was unable to be held because of the Covid lockdown. We considered moving it online but fortunately restrictions were lifted enough for us to hold a face-to-face workshop in August. The Green room at Peacehaven proved to be a suitable venue with sanitiser made available and chairs able to be far enough apart for social distancing. Providing food on shared plates was not allowed but participants were happy to bring their own lunches. Lana Wall has to be particularly thanked for organising the use of the room.

In September 2020 we held another interesting seminar. Again we were unable to provide food so the usual format of three speakers with lunch in between the second and third speakers was changed to having only two speakers after lunch. Even so we had a good turn-out.

Debra Cardogan-Cowper from the Tasmanian Wool Centre in Ross spoke on the topic, '*Dial a Local*': *sharing our locals' stories* about Ross oral histories, excerpts of which have been incorporated into a historic phone box so visitors can 'dial up' to hear them. She was followed by Terrie Pollard and Kim Johnson talking about the book Terrie initiated, *When we were young*, publishing the recollections of Kentish residents about the first 20 years of their lives. Both talks were well received.

We asked those who attended which seminar format they preferred, either two or three speakers, and the vote was almost evenly split. If we looked at just members and again non-members, the result was the same. The committee decided to keep to the usual three speakers in future, Covid willing. No seminar was planned for 2021 because of the national conference.

As mentioned last year, our first online 'fireside chat' was successful so we scheduled another later in the year. However, there was no interest, perhaps because face-to-face meetings were now possible.

In 2021 we reverted to the usual schedule and held another successful workshop in Glenorchy in May. It's interesting to note that interest in learning how to do oral histories has remained constant over the almost 30 years that we have put them on.

The main activity this year of course has been planning for the biennial National conference, scheduled to be held at the Tramsheds in Launceston in October. The title was discussed at both state and national level and eventually we chose *Oral History in Troubling Times: Opportunities and Challenges*. The title proved apt. Our initial confidence that Australia's good record at keeping Covid at bay would allow a face-to-face conference gradually dissipated in the face of the rapid spread of the Delta variant of Covid which led to more lockdowns interstate.

Nevertheless we continued to plan in the hope that the conference could go ahead, either in person or online. We offered scholarships to attend the conference to university students and, for the first time, senior school children. Jeanette Thompson was successful with her application but we did not receive any applications from school students. In just the last few days we have decided to postpone the conference until 2022. It was a difficult decision but in the end clearly necessary.

Alison Johnston continues to take the minutes and Lana Wall keeps a steady eye on the finances. Jai Paterson has been an asset to the committee so we regret that she has decided to step down this year. I thank them for their contribution along with the other members Jon Addison, Karin Lê, Leonie Prevost and Cindy Thomas, especially in the last twelve months when more frequent and longer meetings have been required. And as always I would like to thank the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery for its continued support.

## STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS

Oral History Tasmania Inc <i>For the year ended 30 June 2021</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<b>2021</b> \$	2020 \$
<b>Receipts</b>			
Donations		-	110
Equipment hire and sales		200	-
Grant - Oral History Aust 2021 conference		-	2,000
Interest received		20	23
Membership		1,455	1,110
Sale of handbooks		347	156
Seminar/AGM		135	570
Term deposit interest		82	161
Workshop		<u>360</u>	<u>40</u>
<b>Total Receipts</b>		<u><b>2,599</b></u>	<u><b>4,170</b></u>
<b>Payments</b>			
Audit fee		100	100
Conference 2021		820	1,464
Executive expenses		240	68
Filing fees		65	63
Handbooks		293	-
Insurance - equipment		586	589
National conference		-	3,000
OHAA capitation fees		300	465
Seminar/AGM costs		165	442
Stale cheques written back		(10)	(7)
Website		430	110
Workshop		<u>161</u>	<u>55</u>
<b>Total Payments</b>		<u><b>3,150</b></u>	<u><b>6,349</b></u>
<b>Net (deficit) for the year</b>		<b>(551)</b>	<b>(2,179)</b>
<b>Accumulated funds at the beginning of the financial year</b>		<u><b>10,357</b></u>	<u><b>12,536</b></u>
<b>Accumulated funds at the end of the financial year</b>		<u><u><b>9,806</b></u></u>	<u><u><b>10,357</b></u></u>
<b>Represented by:</b>			
Commonwealth Bank - cheque account		3,638	4,271
Mystate Financial - term deposit		<u>6,168</u>	<u>6,086</u>
		<u><u><b>9,806</b></u></u>	<u><u><b>10,357</b></u></u>

I have examined the financial records and supporting documents of Oral History Tasmania Inc for the year ended 30 June 2021.

I report as follows:

I have obtained the information required.

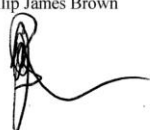
The attached accounts are properly drawn up so as to exhibit a true and correct view of the financial position, according to the information at my disposal and the explanations given to me.

The rules relating to the administration of the funds have been observed.

Date: 23 August 2021

Name: Phillip James Brown

Signed:



## **WHEN WE WERE YOUNG**

**Terrie Pollard & Kim Johnson**

*Talk given at the Oral History Tasmania seminar on 5 September 2020.*

*Terrie Pollard*

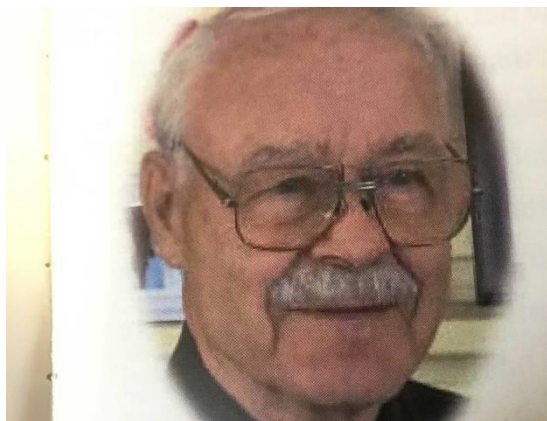
This project started out as just a personal interest. I am married to an Irishman who grew up in poverty. He's 84 now. His life back then was totally different to what it is now and he's a great storyteller. We went over to Ireland many times and where he came from is very beautiful, very much like Tasmania, especially Sheffield. That's why we decided to settle here because it was like him being back home and me going back to a place I really loved.

I decided that we really needed to have a record of his youth, his childhood. The part that interests me is the first 20 years so I asked him for his early childhood memories.

Then I got very curious about other people around Sheffield. We've only got a small community and they come from everywhere; a lot are from around the nearby farms, a lot from further afield. I used to do Meals on Wheels and met a lot of oldies there; I just loved talking about their earlier years. Then I went to Tandara, the old people's home there, and the same thing happened. I sat down with them and just listened to what they had to say about when they were very young.

What amazed me was that in many cases their families didn't know what had happened in their earlier years. They'd been busy or not interested and no-one had ever asked them what they had done in their early years, so I decided that I'd write about it. Then I got hold of Kim who did a lot of the transcribing. We went to Coffee and Fudge, one of the cafes in Sheffield, and we'd get a coffee for them. I'd have a tape recorder, fairly small, and I'd continue asking questions. We gradually got the stories and as you go along you get a little bit better at it of course. I've got some interesting stories – I think round about 20 or so – and I thought it'd be a good idea for those families to have their stories. Many of our friends and the Kentish residents said, 'Where can we find out about it?' That's what turned it into a book. So the book is not necessarily about Tasmanians as such, but it's about the people who decided to make Tasmania their home. Most of them, I'd say 99%, have lived here for a very long time. There are also many who are born here and raised here and still live around the same district.

So I thought that I'd tell you two stories and Kim's got two stories to tell you. The first one is about Wayne Mustalampi. Wayne was born in Finland in 1935, one of a family of about ten. The Russians were very close to Finland and decided to take over Finland. Wayne's mother was an only child so she had money, but his father wasn't good at earning money. So they ended up with a house that was only just the structure; then some relative worked in a place that just did the outsides of the walls, just the basic veneer, so their house was only veneer. The house next door was a good brick one.



*Wayne Mustalampi*

The Russians came into Finland and Wayne's parents and the rest of his family were away, leaving only Wayne and his brother. He was about four at the time. The house was bombed and he and his brother were by a chimney and survived. Earlier they'd been told to go into the house next door, but that had been bombed completely and also underground had been bombed completely. So he didn't know where his parents were, he didn't know anything about what had happened.

The authorities came round and picked up the children, about 1500 who they didn't find any parents for. Wayne and his brother were put on a train from Finland to Sweden. And as it stopped at various places – I'm going to get emotional here – people would come and say, 'That child, I'll have that child',

and Wayne's brother went. Wayne reckoned he wasn't good looking enough to be picked. Eventually a minister decided that he'd take him. So he went to live with the minister but he wasn't really wanted. He reckons Sweden is not the best place to live in many ways; he reckons they are more racist than anywhere else because they came from the Vikings and the Vikings were above other people, especially the Nordic people.

Wayne had to learn a new language and he wasn't treated very well. He was there for six years until eventually his parents found out where he was. His mother wanted him very much and cried a lot, but the father really wasn't interested. He never heard from the brother who came to Sweden with him. When he went back home he had to learn his first language all over again because he had been speaking Swedish. He had a lot of troubles in school because of the language barrier.

His father was a hard worker and eventually had a trucking business. Wayne would have to go out very early in the morning and put coals underneath the truck to get it warm enough so that he could start off the next morning. But he didn't get on with his father and wanted to get out. As soon as he turned fifteen he became a paramedic and also drove an ambulance for some years, then became a mechanic which is what he really wanted. Eventually he decided to go to Germany, and because Finnish is a little bit similar he was able to speak other languages. He met a lot of other people from around the world including Canadians, Australians and English and learnt English very well. He decided he'd try out Australia.

He did go back to Sweden at one stage, found a wife and then came back to Australia. He's still part of the community, quite a character and a very nice man. His surname Mustalampi is a weird sort of a name, but in those days your surname was more or less the town you came from. In Wayne's case that was Mustalam so that's how he got Mustalampi.

Now the person who started me off this in the very beginning was my husband Noel. We've been here twenty years now and he's become part of the community. He's quite a comedian.

He was born in Ireland in 1936 in a little hospital in Baltinglass. His father wasn't the best of people and his mother already had five children. When Noel was born, he tells me, his father was so drunk that he came in and fell down the stairs, and then he just went away. He only came home every now and again to get his wife pregnant; she had seven children. The oldest one lived with her mother. When the youngest child was born, his mother became very ill and was in hospital for six months, so the older children had to bring up the baby as well as Noel. Noel was quite a scallywag; he was also dyslexic so had a lot of trouble with school. He just couldn't keep up with it and decided not to go to school, so he got behind a fair bit. He was bright enough but just couldn't keep up with everything.

They were very poor and lived in – you know these little houses in Irish postcards, the little white cottage with the stone walls, all painted white and the straw on the top of it – that's what they lived in. It's not quite as nice and as cute as you think. It had two rooms, one window, a dirt floor and a big fireplace. Over the fireplace were the big hooks that bring the food backwards and forwards from a pot. There was always a problem in getting wood for it, so that was the kids' job, but they also just didn't have money. His father didn't really provide money. Every now and again he'd send something, but not much at all.

Noel loved the wildlife, and still loves animals. But he went out in the woods at night time from when he was about five. Ireland is like Tasmania in many ways: beautiful woods, beautiful and green, and wild in many ways. He used to go out with a battery-operated torch, and dogs; the dogs used to come from all over the neighbourhood. He'd go at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, throughout the year, winter and summer, catch rabbits and bring them home. They didn't have them for themselves; they sold them as meat and also sold the fur. That's how they got their money.

In those days – it's different now – the farmers got together to sell the cattle and pigs and go up to the crossroads. The crossroads in Ireland are very important; that's where they



*The young Noel Pollard (right)*

used to meet. They'd go up there with their various instruments and they'd dance until 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the morning. It was their social life. They'd also come home to the house. The house that I saw over there was very, very tiny and they'd have lots of people in there dancing, and his mother and all their family had various musical instruments that they played.

Noel had to work, and the others did too during the day, and they'd have to be ready for work the next morning. But I did find out that the shops never used to open till 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock. You'd be dying to get in there. You'd come from Sydney or here and you're used to things being on time – no, not over there. When they can't get up in the morning they'd be a bit late, so then you'd be there at 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock waiting for the shops to open. But it's a wonderful land.



*Noel Pollard*

Noel came out here when he was about eighteen or nineteen, but his mother didn't want him to come. He asked his mother to sign the form but she wasn't going to. Later on he asked again and she did sign the form and said, 'I'll never see you again,' and she never did. Because she died while we were on the boat going there, which was the cheapest way to go. She used to send letters in this shaky hand.

So Noel went up to Mount Isa for work and had his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday there. And as I'm only doing the first 20 years I won't tell you the rest of his life, but it was very interesting, and he met me which is important. He didn't have an education and because of his dyslexia he didn't really learn to read and write, but we finished up with our own business for 25 years in Sydney, quite successful. And then we came down and lived here, and he's back to his farming again on our own little farm. So that's the two people that I'm going to tell you about, and Noel's the one that started it all off.

We went to people's houses in some cases, or we went to Tandara the old people's home and talked to them. A lot of them hadn't had family photographs. So we took a photo of everyone and I gave them a little tape of their story so they could show their kids, and they all got a book each and their photos. That's how this book came about.

#### *Kim Johnson*

Terrie has told you something about our process. We'd have coffee and I've got to say sometimes it did involve cookies, so in the recording you're listening to the clink, clink of cups plus the chewing of cookies. I got into it through Terry who has been a friend for a long time, and it was part of a University of the Third Age (U3A) course. They had just started U3A in Sheffield and they were asking locals if they had any courses they wanted to offer, so we sat in the Town Hall signing up for courses. I knew that whatever Terry was involved in was going to be fun.

Until that time, while I had enjoyed the community and the older people in the community, it had never been a big part of my life. But when we signed up and started interviewing, the news got around. We started off with a couple, and then people would say, 'I think you need to speak to such and such', and soon it snowballed and everybody wanted to talk to us. I don't know if it was the cookies, or the coffee, or our personalities, but we had a lot of people wanting to talk to us. I was just so fascinated by everybody's stories. I wish that I had attended Jill's seminar beforehand, because as the previous speaker Deborah Cardogan-Cowper said, it's hard to get people talking without prompting them. We're chatterboxes ourselves, so we would often be saying, 'Well, this is what we did; how about you, what did you do?'

I found when we were transcribing it, sometimes it would be 30 or 40 pages of interaction because I tried to transcribe verbatim, and get the nitty gritty. At the end of the process we would try to condense it into just a few pages for each speaker, and that was the real challenge, condensing it so you didn't lose their character. We couldn't capture their accent in a book, but we tried to replicate the way they spoke as much as we could within their stories. You'll see that every story in the book has a different 'sound' to it. Because there were so many of them and only two of us, friends helped us condense them, so every story in the book is going to seem slightly different. It was a very heart-warming and rewarding process for me.

Because I wasn't born in Australia, but 'still call Australia home' like the song says, I was amazed at how many immigrants live in Sheffield. Sheffield itself has about 1200 people in it, so the percentage of people who are not from Australia was very interesting. We're in rural Tasmania yet people could find us from all over the world. Our wonderful Mr Mustalampi was just such a fun person; he had this terrible childhood but he didn't let it affect him. He was so funny, and you'd say, 'Oh you're Finnish' and he'd say, 'I'm not finished yet'. He was just so wonderful. I found that with so many of them. A lot of these people we interviewed were Tasmanian, grew up here. Fergus Hutchinson has never been out of Tasmania. He's 93, 94 now, and has never been off the island. He says, 'Why would I want to leave it?' And I'm with him. Why would you want to leave it?

So the process was interesting, the people were very, very interesting, and it did highlight for me how people remember an event very differently. Everybody remembers how they used to drive sheep and cattle through the town so they could get on the train, when it existed. Everybody remembers the time when an animal got loose and went through Slater's Country Store, but if you try to pin down whether that was a sheep or cow or goat, nobody can remember. They know an animal went through. Everybody remembers a different date for when electricity came to the town. But it all gels to form such a wonderful tapestry. We were interviewing one of the people who said that when she was nine years old she moved from one place to another. But when I was looking through the notes, she had moved three different times when she was nine, which I'm sure they didn't do.

A lot of people said, 'You know, I'd forgotten all about that,' so it helped the people we were interviewing to remember their childhood. I think that it wasn't just the coffee and the cookies that made them happy in that room, it was reliving their childhood. Through every story it was common that everybody did it tough; nobody was rich, nobody had a lot of money or food. Lollies were very special, and one old fellow talked about the corner store where they'd buy a block of chocolate, break it into the little squares and sell them individually; that was a huge treat to get one little tiny square of chocolate. So generally people weren't rich, but people were so happy. Every Boxing Day on the Bluff in Devonport, they would get there early in the morning and reserve a spot because all the families, all the Braids, the Duffs and the Febeys, they would have their own patches. That was a huge deal for them on Boxing Day to go to the Bluff and play cricket. It made their childhood sparkle, whereas here we are complaining that we haven't got wifi. It was a different era, but I don't know, were they happier? That was one of the things that I did find myself thinking.

It taught me a lot of things, terms I'd never heard of: Coolgardie, jinker, things like this that they had taken for granted were all new to me, so I learned a lot through listening to these people. It warmed my heart that we were able to capture their story and pass that on to their relatives. There's a percentage of them that are no longer with us. In fact one of them, a local icon, was so excited. We had a big presentation day with afternoon tea at Tandara when the book was released. It was really special and everybody in the book was invited and their relatives. So this was going to be Joyce's proudest moment and she got her hair done, got a new outfit; she was so excited. But on the day she had a heart attack because of the excitement and was taken to hospital. She passed away, I think the day after. She did get to see the book, but that she could have been so excited makes us proud that we were able to provide them and their relatives with something. I don't have any recordings of my mother and there's nothing on earth that I wouldn't give to have her there telling me how she grew up.

There were two stories that stuck with me because they stood out so much. We have quite a strong contingent of Americans in Tasmania including two sisters, Evie and Elsie. They have been in Tasmania a very long time. Elsie's moved away, but we interviewed Evie who was born and raised in Pennsylvania. Her father was a Mennonite and her mother was Canadian who had belonged to a very strict Brethren. I didn't know a lot about the Mennonites but they have similar roots to the Quakers and share beliefs in such things as peace, simplicity and community.

Her father and her grandparents were Mennonites, but when he married Evie's mother they moved away from the Mennonite faith into a more open Brethren. Her father was one of the first to get a car and he was very proud of that. But they were still raised in the Mennonite community and had generational farms. They had two stone houses on the property and their grandparents lived in one and the larger family lived in the next one. Then when the grandparents got too old they moved in and took care of the grandparents, which I think



is wonderful. I wish there was more of it. They looked after each other not just as a community but particularly as a family.

The houses were four storey. Pennsylvania gets very cold and very hot, so the basement was the cooler. When they butchered their own meat – they were self-contained – that went to the basement and it was cured and kept in there. They had ice delivered so that was their cold storage area. Then the next level was the living area with a giant fireplace that went all the way up through the rest of the building, so the next three storeys were very warm, especially the attic. The attic was where they dried their food and all their produce that they wanted to store to dry out, and their animal skins. So it was a very useful structure and that was common in the community.

They worked hard. It was a family of six children and they were very religious, but one of the most important thing for all the families was taught at school. They went to a one-room school, 20 or 25 feet [6-8m], full of children from first grade to the eighth grade. A big thing was singing which formed a huge part of their curriculum because their music was related to their faith. They weren't just taught to sing, they were taught to harmonise, and still in America the Quakers are known for their beautiful singing. Evie and Elsie played musical instruments as well; everyone could have their own instrument. They are known in our area for leading choirs and they're the ones that you ask to play the piano at different shows.

When they finished eighth grade they went to high school and this was the first time Evie had an experience of the rest of the world. She said there were people from all over there. There were some that weren't even religious at all, some that had no sense of faith and it really opened her eyes and broadened her horizon. She joined the marching band and took up the trumpet and they went around the country playing and competing. When she finished school she lived at home until she was eighteen and then got a job. Her two sisters had gone to Chicago, one to a Bible school and one to a nursing school, so she went for a visit. She enjoyed Chicago so she stayed for a couple of years and got a job in an insurance firm. She loved the excitement of being in a big city, but her sister met and married a man at Bible school who lived in Sheffield. Evie missed her sister – it was her closest sister – and came over to Tasmania and while visiting she met and fell in love with another fellow from Sheffield. So they relocated there and have had a wonderful life. They are both still very happy, both of them still a huge part of the community and it helps form the rainbow that is Sheffield. It was a joy to speak with Evie and I think she appreciated having her voice recorded for generations and for her relatives in the United States. So that was Evie Morse.



*Evie Morse*

The other person I found very interesting was one you won't find in the book because we had to condense it at a certain stage and we started setting criteria. After we had such a flood of people wanting to be interviewed, we started saying, 'Well, we were only publishing people who were over 70'. Because this next one didn't fit the category we didn't include her but her story was very interesting. Her name is Sonya Zao and some of you may know T's Chinese Restaurant in Sheffield. She is the lady who runs it; she, her husband and son are the cooks and make the most beautiful Chinese food. Their daughter-in-law is one of the waitresses there.

We interviewed Sonya which was challenging because English wasn't her first language, and I didn't know a lot about the area where she was from. I had to come home and do a lot of research. Sonya was born in Xinjiang near the Mongolian border, and it's had a very mixed history. It borders Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kurdistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. So it's a real melting pot and has suffered through many wars, civil wars and invasions. Both her grandmothers were Russian and her grandfathers were Chinese, because during the war a lot of the Chinese men went across to help the Russians fight. So her grandfathers had fought in World War II with the Russians.

The way Sonya told it, the Russians took all the money from the rich people. Her grandmother had been rich but was left with nothing, so she was happy to move back to China with Sonya's grandfather. They settled in Xinjiang and it was very poor there, but the government owned all the housing so people did have somewhere to live. In the cities, in Shanghai and Beijing, people were starving but because there were fewer people in Xinjiang they did have enough to eat. But they all had to work very hard. And there was constant unrest

because the Uigers had a huge influence; they were mostly Muslim as opposed to the Chinese. People could tell she wasn't fully Chinese, so she was discriminated against and called 'Russian'. It was really tough for her going to school and there were lots of arguments so she had a tough childhood.

Her father luckily had a gift for languages and was hired by the government to be a translator because there weren't that many people who could translate from the Uiger language into Chinese directly. He had a very good job with the government, although when Mao Zedong wanted to get rid of the intellectuals and the dissidents, her father was arrested and held for a time. But because of his capacity for translation they let him go so he could go back to work. So their life was slightly better than the average child because they were respected by the government and had a little more money, but there was an ethos of persecution and strife. The division that we are seeing today is something that they lived with, so she worked hard and tried to do the best she could. She met a fellow, Victor, and fell in love and their dream was to have a farm somewhere safe. One of the places that was open to immigration was Australia and through her father's contacts in the government they were able to migrate here.

They went to Sydney first because, although they wanted a farm, neither of them knew much about farming and he went into the building trade while she raised their children. It was only once their children were old enough that they were able to find a property in Tasmania just outside Sheffield where they grow their own pigs and lambs. They researched it and the son studied agriculture so that he would know what beasts to raise, so that was their story. Now they are very happy living in Sheffield, as are most of us. We're happy to be able to promote our little place as somewhere that is one of the nicest communities I have ever been in.

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### **Do you have a project to tell us about?**

We are always looking for items for the newsletter, anything from a few sentences to a lengthy article. All members are interested in knowing what is going on in the state, and you may make some good contacts through responses to the article. See contact details at the end of the newsletter.

### **WEBSITES**

**Oral History Tasmania:** [www.oralhistorytas.org.au](http://www.oralhistorytas.org.au)

**Oral History Australia:** [www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au](http://www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au)

**IOHA (International Oral History Association):** [www.ioha.fgv.br](http://www.ioha.fgv.br)

### **EQUIPMENT HIRE**

A **Fostex digital recorder** is available for hire to members. It comes with its own lapel microphones and *User Guidelines*.

Cost of hire: \$20 a week, plus transport costs if necessary. You will also be required to sign a form agreeing to pay to replace any part that is damaged or lost while you have the recorder, up to a maximum of \$250 for individuals or \$500 for groups or institutions.

To make a booking, contact Jill Cassidy on 0418 178 098 or email [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au)

THE OBJECTIVES OF ORAL HISTORY TASMANIA

promote the practice and methods of oral history  
educate in the use of oral history methods  
encourage discussion of all problems in oral history  
foster the preservation of oral history records  
pursue common objectives and maintain links with other Australian oral history  
associations through membership of Oral History Australia Inc.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Individuals	\$40.00	Households	\$55.00
Student/unemployed/pensioner	\$30.00	Institution	\$65.00

ORAL HISTORY TASMANIA EXECUTIVE

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*Real to Reel* is edited by Jill Cassidy. The next edition is due in December 2021. Contributions are welcome and should reach the editor no later than 30 November. They can be emailed to [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au)