

# NOHANZ Newsletter

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[www.oralhistory.org.nz](http://www.oralhistory.org.nz)

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

R.A.Selby@massey.ac.nz

who is looking forward to receiving your contributions.

## NOHANZ news

**Newsletter** In 2006 we intend to decrease the number of issues of the newsletter from four to three. This was discussed at the AGM in July and members there agreed to the proposal. Rachael Selby will continue to be responsible for editorial content.

**Auckland meeting** Early in the New Year, Local History Services, Waitakere Libraries and NOHANZ are hosting a get-together for anyone working with oral history in the greater Auckland region. This is an opportunity to network and get focused on your 2006 programme. An informal affair, people can report on projects and raise issues. In addition to learning of oral history projects in the area, we hope to develop a list of people willing to mentor beginners. The get together is open to anyone interested in oral history and is not specifically for Aucklanders, so if you are in the city for the day, it would be great to see you. All are welcome including people interested in getting started.

We are meeting on Tuesday February 7th at 6 – 8 pm at the Kelston Community Centre (corner Great North Rd & Awaroa Ave). Mary is organising a group that will head-off later for dinner.

Contact:  
Elayne & Ian Robertson,  
Phone 09 826 5157,  
email: [ian.elayne@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ian.elayne@xtra.co.nz)

Or  
Mary Donald, NOHANZ, Auckland,  
Phone 09 846 4429,  
email: [mary.don@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mary.don@xtra.co.nz)



## Reports

### ***Cook Strait whalers project***

The Seahorse World Science Heritage & Education Trust (based at the aquarium in Picton) received an Oral History Award this year to record the surviving whalers in the district, and has hired me as the oral historian for the project.

As the Tory Channel whaling station, then the last whaling operation in New Zealand, closed in 1964, the men who worked there are now in their late sixties or older. They are a good-natured bunch of chaps, but very difficult to pin down and interview, so I have privately christened the project 'CATCHING WHALERS'.

This winter when a number of them assembled at a lookout to count whale sightings in Cook Strait as the whales migrated north (an annual conservation project) I was able to hitch a ride on the DOC boat and visit the lookout to meet the whalers. When I came into their little shelter they glanced around briefly from their binoculars and the only comment was, 'Did you bring any cake?' I decided then to make the bringing of cake a feature of my interviews – so far this has been received well but with chuckles. The whalers' interviews are full of stories about practical jokes and tomfoolery during their working days played on their mates and innocent visitors.

I was fortunate to ride out into the Strait with DOC observing a chase boat trying to get a skin sample from a passing whale. Fortunately it was a very calm and beautiful day, and I could get some feel of the thrill of the chase as the whale made their job very difficult, diving and resurfacing apparently at random. It was good to

observe that useful whale research can be done without damaging the animal.

As the project proceeds I am being informed of more ex-whalers than had been realised, and also I'm finding out about the various factions, feelings, and status levels amongst the men who worked in this unique industry.

Loreen Brehaut

### **Oral History Association (US) *Voices of Dissent, Voices of Hope* November 2-6 2005**

When we first read the OHA conference theme we were immediately captured by the idea of going there. With the generous assistance of an AUT faculty grant and an OHA scholarship the idea became a reality. We took the Auckland Sexual Abuse HELP oral history, and Jackie Gunn's AUT Midwifery oral history project, to add a New Zealand herstory of dissent and hope.

We were told by those who had been before that OHA did meetings big. And BIG it was – close to 500 participants, over 4 days, with up to 10 concurrent sessions running at any one time, key note speakers, plays, tours, and book signings – the lot! We often had the feeling that we were missing out when we chose each day to go to one session rather than another.

Our papers were placed in the first morning of the conference, so as we anticipated, we did not have a huge audience. We did however have a quality audience, and our papers were well received and acknowledged. While we attempted to solve some visual technical difficulties, Betsy Brinson shared with the audience something of her impressions of oral history in New Zealand; and, Ruth Greenaway took the opportunity to talk about *Breath of Peace* (which had a screening opportunity later in the conference schedule). It was lovely to meet

colleagues from home, and we enjoyed checking in with each other over the four days.

Unfortunately we did not manage to get the data projector working, so we simply just delivered our paper audibly, including playing our sound files from the project. This was a treat for the audience. For us it seemed obvious and normal that one would honour the voice of the participants by allowing them to tell a part of the story in the presentation, but we discovered that this was a rare thing amongst the other OHA presenters. The culture of fully transcribing interviews seems to result in people engaging with their material only in a written form; rarely going back to the source in a way that abstracting demands that we do. This is an interesting debate and I did engage a few people on the issue, including challenging those who had delivered papers on pedagogical use of oral history, to the benefits and limitation of abstracting or transcribing.

Kirsty and I tried to plan our conference days strategically so that we could share impressions and notes from different concurrent sessions. We were fully engaged and challenged by the variety and depths of projects. Of particular highlight for me was a session chaired by Mary Marshall Clark titled 'Homeland Insecurity: The Official Version vs. the Human Voice'. The session included Efrat Ben-Ze'ev talking about stories she is gathering of the 1948 war, which Israel refers to as the 'War of Liberation', while Palestinians called it 'The Catastrophe'. It was fascinating to hear the raising up and beginnings of a voice of dissent, as given by older Israeli soldiers, (and Palestinian elders of course) to the Israeli official version. This session also included the stories of homeless in Ohio and of Canadian Indians whose voices of reality versus the official version. I also attended

'Biographies of Prominent Dissenters' and really enjoyed David Dunaway's presentation on Pete Seeger – which saw many in the audience soulfully singing "If I had a hammer".

The presentation, *Crossing the BLVD*, a dramatic presentation of the stories of immigrants and refugees living in the Queen's Boulevard area, was an absolute winner. Warren Lehrer and Judith Sloan have created a wonderful example of how to creatively bring to life an oral history project. Judith superbly acted out the characters interviewed – while a slide show of images played – and Warren told the story of their meetings, of places and other events connected to the project.

There were so many people to meet, and so much work to enjoy. We had a wonderful time. If given the opportunity again in the future I would certainly go again and thoroughly recommend the experience. Linda Shopes and Anne and Don Ritchie send greetings to those that know them, and look forward to the Sydney IOHA meeting next year.

Sue Berman & Kirsty McCully

### **ArtStore @ Taieri Court 25/25 Mural**

The people who live and work at Taieri Court with community artist Janet de Wagt and oral historian Helen Frizzell completed the *ArtStore @ Taieri Court 25/25 Mural* late September. Participants were introduced to various art forms (e.g. painting and printmaking) and ways of sharing aspects of their life stories over a four-day period. They created 25 colourful, lively and innovative panels which celebrate Taieri Court Rest Home's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and its place within the heart of the Mosgiel/Taieri community.

**ArtStore** is an arts and reminiscence programme which looks for creative ways to celebrate the lives and

identities of older people. The programme was initiated by **ArtStore** tutors Janet de Wagt and Helen Frizzell in response to requests from older people living in the community for creative programmes that are affordable and accessible. Highly successful programmes have been run before at St Andrew's Home & Hospital

in Dunedin and Elmslie Home in Wanaka.

The *ArtStore @ Taieri Court 25/25* mural project was funded by Presbyterian Support Otago and the Dunedin Creative Communities Scheme.

**Helen Frizzell**



