

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

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NOTES AND NEWS

PHIL BURROWS: The scent of victory

Readers of *ACFN* will recall the stories in the last three issues about Phil Burrows, the Western Australian teacher cleared by a magistrate of 'indecent dealing' for his photographs of children's playground games but still under investigation by the Department of Education under the controversial Section 7C of the Education Act (WA).

Phil Burrows ended his hunger strike on its hundredth day, February 15th. Although continued legal action is still being vigorously pursued by the Teachers' Union on his behalf, Phil Burrows has advised *ACFN* that his case has already achieved permanent gains for Western Australian teachers. Whereas Phil Burrows was initially suspended for six months without pay, the WA Education Department has now stated that suspension without pay will no longer take place. In addition, the Industrial Relations Commission, for the first time, ordered a stay of investigation by the Teachers' Tribunal.

Phil Burrows is now on sickness benefits, and regards himself as the 'unofficial spokesperson for teachers injured or oppressed by Section 7C'. He has written a book called *Indecent Dealing: the Nightmare of an Innocent Teacher*, which can be obtained from Phil Burrows, 10/650 Stirling Highway, Mosman Park WA 6012. The cost is \$10 plus \$2 postage.

MORE ON POGS

Our regular correspondent Edel Wignall has sent the following extract from the Melbourne suburban newspaper Southern Cross of 2nd November 1994, headed Little games are big business:

'POG has arrived. We're told it's a kids' game from Hawaii, but we think it means Publicity On a Grand scale. The press releases are being pumped out on what is claimed to be a craze sweeping Northern America - little fruit juice caps (POG stands for Passionfruit, Orange and Guava) which Hawaiian kids have stacked and knocked down since the 1920s, but became big business only two years ago. Five billion POGs later, World POG Foundation managing director Doug McFadden has launched the 90s version of marbles on the Australian market with a tryout at Albert Park Primary School, Vic. It might just catch on - Doug marketed Trivial Pursuit and Pictionary to the world.'



TIGGY IS ALIVE AND WELL

Many people know and remember playing the game Tiggly at school.

You remember? - If you were called *He* or *It* you enthusiastically chased the other children in the group, trying to tag or catch them and turn them into *It*. If 'the chased' were in need of a rest, they could call *Barley*, and thus could rest and go untagged for a while. Remember? Yes! It was instantly organised, vigorous fun.

Tiggly is still alive and well in the schoolyard as I have observed during my research work for the Moe Folklife Project at Albert Street Primary school in Moe (Gippsland). In a school of 400 pupils the expected games of football, netball, goal-throwing, cricket and skippy are being played. So is Tiggly - and not just regular Tiggly, but quite a number of versions. There is *seat tiggly*, *bob down tiggly*, *alien tiggly*, *tyre tiggly*, *post tiggly*, *gang tiggly*, *world tiggly*, *off ground tiggly*, *barrel off ground tiggly*, as well as other tiggly games such as *Buzz* and *Colours*.

World Tiggly is an interesting adaptation. It is played on a huge map of the world which has been painted on the asphalt. The *It* person can go on the asphalt and the blue (sea on the map). The other players can only go on the coloured parts (countries of the world). If the player gets tagged by *It* or 'falls' into the sea they are now *It*. Educational as well as exhilarating!

Agility, balance and strong nerves are needed to play *Barrel off ground Tiggly*. The *It* person is ground level and has to try to tag the foot of persons jumping from one concrete barrel pipe to the others (barrel shaped drainpipes are one and a half metres high and grouped in the playground). If they are tagged or fall off, the person is now *It*. 'Off Ground' is quite nerve wracking to watch, too!

Although these Tiggly games all have the basic rules of play, each uniquely named game has specific details - eg:

Alien Tiggly - person must be tagged near the heart and two fingers held out horizontally signify *Barley*.
Gang Tiggly - played by signs, thumbs up and 'V' for victory sign.

Seat, Bob Down and Post Tiggly - persons need to be in specific positions to be safe/not caught.

Off ground Tiggly - only *It* person is allowed on the ground.

World Tiggly - persons must not 'fall into the sea'.

Yes, Tiggly is alive and well today in the school yard.

Fay Pollock, Moe Folklife Project - May 1995.



It is hoped that the following brief extracts from John Evans' challenging article will spur readers to seek out the full original in the International Play Journal, Vol 3, 3-19 (1995).

WHERE HAVE ALL THE PLAYERS GONE?

The question of whether play has disappeared, declined, or in fact remains alive and well, is both an enduring and very disputed one. While the major arguments centre around the influence of sport and television and the extent to which they might have 'displaced' play, numerous other factors, such as the trend toward early education programmes and the changing nature of the physical and social environment in which children live, now have to be considered. The paper examines the various perspectives in a critique of the question: is children's play disappearing?

INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting discussions I had recently was with an elderly person who recalled for me his childhood play experiences. Initially he said he had very few recollections about how he spent his playtime after school and on weekends as a child. When he was not at school he seemed to recall always being required to do many jobs around the place for his father. But the more we talked the more vivid and animated became his descriptions of the games he played alone and with friends after school hours. No-one had ever asked about what he did when he played as a youngster but now the question had set in motion a whole series of memories which he enthusiastically recalled and related to me...

[Yet] like many others, including my own father, this elderly citizen believed that the children today do not appear to play as their parents did in yesteryear. 'You don't see kids out playing in the streets and backyards now. They are too busy watching television or playing sport', was his parting comment. The regret was obvious. The implication was clearly that children today live quite different lives. If they don't play less then, from his vantage point at least, they appear to play differently.

This paper reviews the contrasting arguments about whether or not play has disappeared, declined, or in fact remains alive and well.

PLAY HAS DISAPPEARED

Sport

Edward Devereux (1976) was one of the first to draw our attention to the possibility that the proliferation of youth sports may have resulted in a consequent decline in children's spontaneous play. In an article which brought widespread attention to the issue he argued that 'Little Leaguism', as he called it, was threatening 'to wipe out the spontaneous culture of free play and games among American children, and that it is therefore robbing our children not just of their childish fun but also of some of their most valuable learning experiences' (p.37)...

The concern about the effect of organised sports on children's play is not just based on the idea that it is now consuming time previously devoted to spontaneous games. There is a point of view that children's play has become very game oriented because of the popularity of sport in our society. So when we see children playing in the streets, parks and playgrounds, they are more likely to be engaged

in some form of 'major' game (albeit in a modified form) such as basketball, football, netball, and so on rather than hopscotch, marbles, elastics, skipping, Red Rover, and so on. The sport-oriented play tends to be characterised by complex rules, carefully defined roles, the formation of opposing teams, competition, and explicit goals which generally relate to the outcome of the game. In other words these games replicate the adult model of competitive sport.

Television

Numerous studies in various countries have produced some fairly startling statistics which reveal just how much time children spend watching television. Moore (1986), in his study of English children, found that it was quite common for them to watch up to 2 and 3 hours each day and considerably more on weekends. Medrich *et al.* (1982) examined the out-of-school activities of over 750 American sixth graders and concluded that television viewing occupied more time than any other single activity. Writing about the viewing habits of Australian children Burns and Goodnow (1985) reported that 'by the time the average child, watching an average amount of television, reaches the ripe old age of twelve years, about twice as much time will have been spent in front of the screen as in the classroom (11960 hours as against 5250 hours)' (p. 101-2).

... Television, it is argued, has undermined children's capacity for self-initiated play. Winn observed that in households where television was withdrawn (due to a breakdown of the set etc.) parents found that children amused themselves in creative and imaginative ways. In other words, they went back to play. Einon (1985) described how she tried for some years to live without TV but 'when we found our son was spending all his time in other people's houses watching all the worst programmes, we decided that it was better to have the set under our control' (p. 209).



apple



THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Let me describe what happened when a normally busy street near where I live was temporarily blocked off for road works. As though from nowhere children emerged on bikes, roller skates, skateboards and billy-carts. Ramps to ride bikes over were quickly erected with materials scavenged from backyards or from the road works. Various forms of ball games took place as the middle of the street suddenly became accessible again. Suddenly, right outside their house, children had a large play space at their disposal. Parents were happy because the children were occupied and in full view. The piles of sand and screenings that has been deposited by the council workers were enthusiastically used for digging and tunnelling.

The excavating equipment left behind each day was carefully explored and admired. For a short period of time the neighbourhood street was transformed into a hive of activity. Boys and girls of all ages and sizes, who might normally have had little to do with each other, played together. But not everyone was happy. For a few residents the road works were a considerable inconvenience because access to their homes was restricted. They were not so receptive to children playing in front of their houses and occasionally retrieving balls from their front yards. For them the whole week was a major disruption to their normal routine.

Once the road works were completed and the traffic again took over the children retreated. They had no choice. Their temporary playground was lost.

... The issue of social safety is now perhaps the most pervasive factor in restricting children's play. Australia, for example, is no different to other countries in that we are witnessing an increase in

crimes against children. Disturbing headlines such as 'Kidnap Nightmare' and warnings from police to 'keep a close eye on kids' appear regularly in the media (Evans, 1992). Parents react accordingly by keeping children indoors or severely restricting their outdoor play. Part of the popularity of television and computer games is that they occupy children indoors and often under the watchful eye of parents. Regrettably, for many children, explorations into the back streets, parks, creeks and other distant but fascinating playgrounds, are already a thing of the past.

GETTING A HEAD START

Another of the changes that bring into question the opportunities children have to play is the increasing pressure being placed on children to begin their formal schooling at an early age. For example, kindergarten and pre-school programmes generally have been a fairly playful entry into formal schooling but now they appear to be taking on a far more academic and instrumental approach complete with formal curriculum, homework and even tests. All this is happening with the encouragement of parents keen to see that their children get a head start or at least keep up with other children of the same age. The implication is that time is too precious to 'waste' playing. As one kindergarten teacher said to Winn (1983), 'kids in our kindergarten can't sit around playing with blocks any more. We've just managed to squeeze in one hour of free play a week' (p. 81)...

CHANGED MAYBE BUT PLAY HAS NOT DISAPPEARED

According to the Opies (1969) the belief that traditional games are dying out is a tradition in itself. If we believe Turner *et al.* (1978) and Roberts (1980) then children have adapted their play to suit the changed environment in which they live. Einon (1985, p.180) is of the same opinion.

'So elusive are children at this age that adults often think that today's children do not play the games of their youth, or live by the rules of childhood as they knew it; that the culture of childhood is dying. They forget that as children they believed that they alone knew the games and rhymes; that they chose to play in the woods and backstreets, on the vacant lot and behind the church hall. On wet days it would be the cellar, attic, or even the bus shelter. Even in this age of computer games and television, children play a great deal on the streets just as they always have.'

...While at first glance the figures on the number of hours children spend watching television are alarming, it cannot necessarily be assumed that they consume time children might otherwise have spent playing. For example, it may be that activities other than play, such as homework or household chores, are left undone in order that television can be watched. It is a fairly natural inclination for children (some might say adults as well) to try to get out of tasks that are onerous or boring. My experience is that children will choose to play outdoors rather than watch television if they have something they want to do, if they have someone to play with, and if they have somewhere to play. For the most part they watch television if they have none of these options or if there is a particularly favourite programme on that they want to watch.

... As Ward's (1978) excellent study of life in large cities reveals, even city life, with its limited space and constant traffic, has not eroded children's enthusiasm for play. It certainly takes different forms because the physical and social environments are so different to that of yesteryear, but play has not disappeared. Even within and under the high rise buildings which dominate the skyline of most of the world's capital cities children play. Often it is in ways which annoy and disturb adults but then perhaps this is children's way of getting back at a society which has overlooked their needs. Lacking space and resources children make their own fun out of whatever limited opportunities arise. According to Ward (1978), in one housing estate children took to riding on the roof of the lift, placing themselves in considerable danger and scaring the occupants of the lift.

... The 'struggle' to play is no more evident than in the towns and cities that are today ravaged by civil unrest. The tenacity of young children in war-torn Northern Ireland was graphically described by McKee (1993). Twenty three years of disturbance in the form of bombs, explosions, assassinations and riots have failed to deter children in cities such as Belfast from engaging in highly creative and imaginative play.

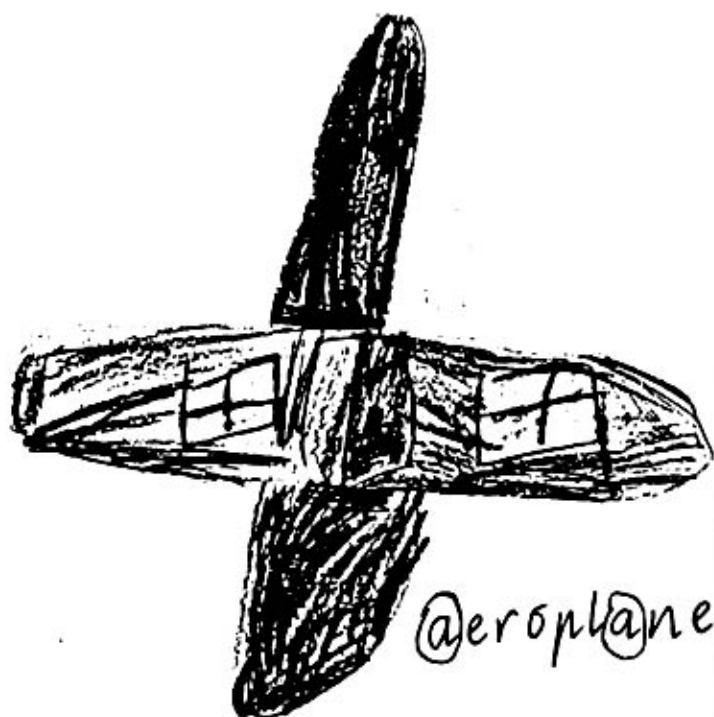
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There is a temptation for those of us who value play to join my elderly friend in claiming that 'children just don't play the way we used to', but we need more research before we can say with any certainty whether or not children play less or play differently today. Hopefully this paper might be a catalyst for such research. There is little doubt that the

international play community is concerned about the trends identified in this paper. Even if the evidence is mainly anecdotal, it can't be dismissed. It is difficult not to believe that the rapid social and environmental changes that we see taking place are not influencing children's play in a fairly negative way. In this context preserving the right to play will require a high degree of energy and commitment. It will mean extensive education programmes aimed at encouraging the adult community to think much more about the needs of children. In particular we need to educate parents about the value of play and of playing with their children. We need urban planners to pay much more attention to the provision of an ecology which allows children to play in a variety of ways. We need schools to preserve playtime in the face of mounting pressures to increase the academic curriculum. Perhaps most of all we need to elevate and promote the study of childhood and children's play so that we can move beyond speculation to a point where we can speak with some confidence and authority about the sort of issues raised in this paper.

Biographical information

John Evans PhD is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University where his teaching and research interests focus on children's play in school and community settings. He is a parent, a coach, a teacher and still a keen participant in the neighbourhood street games with the kids.



SOME INSIGHTS ABOUT CHILDREN'S PLAY OBTAINED FROM AN ANALYSIS OF A NUMBER OF ORAL RECORDS.

by Amanda Bate

(continued)

Marbles

A continual favourite of young children, especially boys was marbles. After some discussion with a gentleman who had Italian parents and from discussions with a male who was born in Australia and was a fourth generation Australian and a gentleman who was brought up in Wales, I found there was some variation in the way the game was played. The gentleman of Italian parentage told me he played marbles like 'Bocce'. This is a game Italian adults play. He told me when he was little he wanted to be like the 'big people' and played this game with marbles. 'First you stand up and flick a marble across the ground, and try and get as close as you could to the first one flicked and whoever got most beside it won. Aim was to get closest even if it meant knocking (opponents') others out.'

Another variation of the way marbles is played was told to me by a 75 year old male. This involved firstly drawing one ring 'and put(ing) a dozen or 20 marbles (in the circle) and whoever knocks the most out wins.' A 46 year old male who spent his childhood in Wales (1951-58) gave me the following version of marbles. First you draw a circle and divide it into four (if there are four playing). You draw a smaller circle in the middle. You put the marbles in the centre and flick other marbles to knock them out. Whoever knocked the most out won. This game illustrates how a game can have many variations in its rules and the way it is played. Of the individuals I spoke with, those who were children after 1978 did not play marbles at school; they did, however, play marbles at home. (Marbles is traditionally a boys' game, none of the females interviewed said they played it).

Rhymes and Fortune Telling

Children frequently adopt rhymes and games to pass time if things are getting monotonous or boring. A well-known game is 'I spy with my little eye, something beginning with...' These games help to pass the time and offer a challenge to the participants. Passing the time was done by a 69 year old lady at Avalon in her childhood (1928-35) by counting magpies:

'On our way home from school, we used to count magpies...

One for sorrow,
Two for joy,
Three for a letter,
Four for a boy,
Five for a wish,
Six for a kiss,
Seven for a wish that'll never be told,
Eight for gold.'

As cited by the Opies, 1967, p333, '... the rhyme is one which country people have long recited when a company of magpies is observed.' Variations of this rhyme have been applied in different places for such things as working out loves using bus or tram tickets in the United Kingdom from as early as the 1920s (Opies, 1967, p333), and counting sneezes in Victoria in approximately 1928-30 (Turner et al, 1978, p108). This supports the theory that the environment plays a major role in determining how folk lore is used. The rhyme was used for the traditional counting of magpies - and telling one's fortune - by children living at Avalon in about 1925-1935, while in other places it has been adopted and varied for very different purposes.

Another game played by children at Avalon, was the following told to me by a 69 year old woman:

'Ring a ring a rosey,
Pop down a posey'
(The one who popped down last went out.)

This version is cited in (Turner et al, 1978) where it is said to have been used in Sydney in 1926 and 1929 (p66).

This version is recited by people who were (and are still) children between 1962-92 (of those interviewed):

'Ring a ring a rosey,
a pocket full of posey,
a-tishoo, a-tishoo
We all fall down!'

This rhyme is said to have originated from a disease and its symptoms, and this version considered to be the original one (Turner et al, 1978 p66). This is an example of how children may have adopted current events in their community: 'Its origin is thought to be c.1660 during one of the bad plagues in Europe (where 150,000 people were said to have died). Children would form a circle and dance around

together - in a macabre imitation of the people dying around them.' (Turner et al, 1978 p66). However this 'origin' is not supported by the Opies. See their discussion in *The Singing Game*.

The transmission of child folklore is a fascinating element of humankind. Rhymes, jokes and games are passed from child to child and from adult to child every day, all over the world. Without even realising it, children are gaining skills in socialising with others, observing rules and learning that words can have more than one meaning. Their games have structure, organisation and rules to abide by. Traditions from previous generations are passed on and added to, and changed to suit new environments. For folklore to survive it will constantly undergo change as the environment in which it is being transmitted alters. '...oral lore is subject to a continual process of wear and repair, for folklore, like everything else in nature, must adapt itself to new conditions if it is to survive' (Opies, 1963 p9).



LETTERS

From Keith McKenry, Canberra, A.C.T.

In January Jenny and I went to India to attend the 11th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, in Mysore [and] I found the Congress massively worthwhile. The papers were of varying quality, some indifferent others excellent, but there was so much that was good, with four concurrent sessions for four days, that it was impossible to take it all in. And the hospitality! The Indians were determined to show the Scandinavians, Germans, Central Europeans, Brits, Irish and Yanks that the third world could (!) put on a good show, and every night there was a reception in this ex-palace or that. Mysore has lots of ex-palaces...

In centralish New Delhi I went for a wander behind the office block where I had to do business with our tour company. What happened was this: I walked along a main road from the business district for about a kilometre, during which time I passed a squatter area occupying a wide strip between the road and the built-up area. I then came across a marked out square for a hoppy game. Soon a group of kids appeared, and on seeing my camera

determined to get their photos taken. I obliged, indicating I wished to photograph the game in progress. Hence the several photos of this, although I'm not too sure how 'genuine' was their playing, as they had always one and a half eyes for the camera.

Seeing I had come to a housing estate, I headed 'inland', and came across an empty paddock where teenage boys were playing cricket. (Cricket is massively pervasive in India, in every town, village and city, wherever there are kids, there are games of cricket aplenty.) I photographed this - and had a bowl, being grateful not to be hit for six - I'm sure he was trying! - in a short space of time to more hoppy and cricket games, as well as to a kid playing by himself a game I recalled being taught in childhood. It involves sharpening a stick at both ends, placing it on the ground and hitting the end with another stick sending it spinning into the air whereon you hit it again - in the case of the Indian kid, as far away as possible.

I also came across games of marbles, and spinning tops, the boys being very proud of being able to pick up the spinning top and getting it to spin in the palm of the hand.

Interestingly, despite the interest in soccer and basketball - if the sports on Indian TV are any guide - during my entire two weeks in India I didn't see a single game of either being played. Perhaps - and this is just my guess - the balls are too expensive for poorer kids to procure.

So there you have it. My wander was anything but systematic or scientific, but it was fascinating, and extremely enjoyable.

Keith McKenry

from Sue Thomas, Noonkanbah Community, Fitzroy Crossing W.A.

Feb 2 1995

I am back for another year at Kulkarriya School and thought I might share with you some folklore I collected from the Children (Azmen & Jaswin Grade 2's).

ink
pink
purple
stink
I can smell a great big shit from
Y./O./U.

Ineey meeny miny mo
Catch a Nicka by the toe
If you wanta let em go
The Queen said pack your swag
and off you go.

20 horses in the stable one jumped out.

Donald Duck
had a fuck
underneath the Army truck.

The variations on words such as 'Nicka' are probably attributed to the fact that all these children have KRIOL as their first language.

I am teaching Grade 1 and 2 and am very interested in the acquisition of literacy. Considering these children are from non literate backgrounds there is a lot to consider. The relationship between interest

in rhyme and playground chants would be a good Masters Project?

March 6th

Well how time flies when you're flooded in. We have had the longest wet season in years. It is early March and I still haven't been to town yet. Getting out to do some shopping and meet with others is a real thrill at this time of year. The river is right up so Noonkanbah is an island at the moment.

I intend to make you a video of an interesting gambling game which is rampant in the playground at the moment. It is called 'the hole game' and is played with coins. The children make a hole in the ground and using their index finger flick the money into the hole. Whoever gets all the money in wins it!

A Karitya (white person) male from Melbourne told me he used to play a similar game but throwing the coin at a wall.

In the last issue of ACFN (No 27) we mentioned the grant awarded to the Australian Children's Folklore Collection from the National Library of Australia. This grant was to enable the documentation of the work of Dr Dorothy Howard a post-doctoral Fulbright Scholar who collected children's folklore in every Australian State during 1954 and 1955. The following is one of the many letters sent to Dr Howard at this time:

Mont Albert
7th July, 1954.

Dr. Dorothy Mills Howard,
The Education Department,
University of Melbourne.

Dear Dr. Howard:

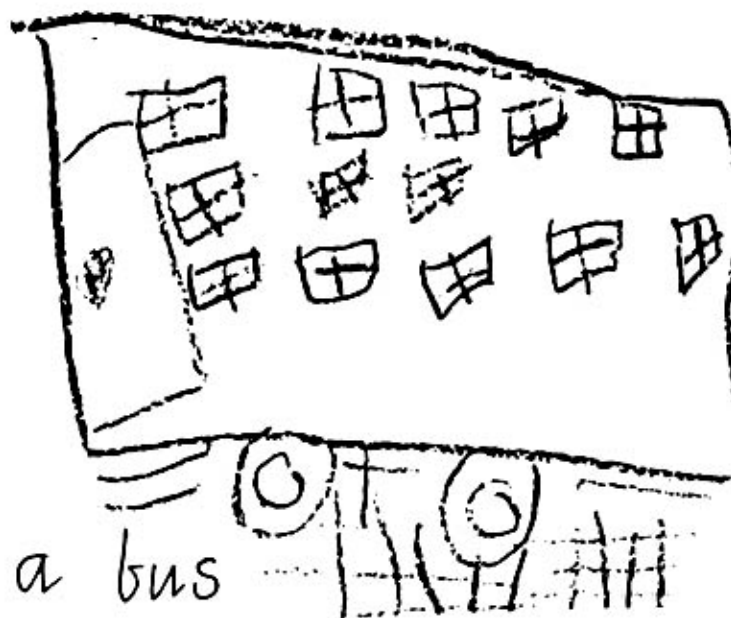
In the 'Age' of July 7th, I read with particular interest of your intention of carrying out research into Australian children's folklore. It seems to me that some of the games and language of my

childhood - lived forty odd years ago in Melbourne - had a distinctively Australian flavour, and I wonder if I may proffer some memories.

There was an idiotic game called 'jumps' that came into season periodically and was played fanatically until squelched by parents, teachers or the laws. No one *jumped*. Two players held a rope between them, stretched taut, at a height. Another player approached with mincing, fancy steps, often as varied and perhaps unconsciously imitative of the approach of the slow bowler at cricket until within kicking distance of the rope. The maiden then stopped abruptly, whirled about, tossed her legs frantically like a goat leaping backwards over a chasm. If she brought the rope down, she was still in the game and got another go. 'Front-ways' jumps were absolutely tabu; but there was allowed a still more elaborate something called the 'American back-kick.' (I think the 1914-18 war brought the Americans into our provincial ken.) The American back-kick was rather like the original 'jump', only taken at cracking speed and finishing in a whirl-cum-spring that lengthened the casualty lists and tended to cause the intervention of authority - ostensibly on the grounds that we were making unlady-like display of 'great legs.' Traffic must have been incredibly light and passers-by tolerant, for I remember this game played usually with a rope that stretched half-way across a suburban road.

Marbles - alleys, to us - was informal enough then; and played by both sexes, though in strict segregation. Girls played girls; boys played boys. (A forerunner of adult behaviour? We are frequently charged with huddling into male and female groups at social gatherings, and showing an ineptitude for more general mixing.)

Again it was the public footpath, or the 'ashfelt' garden path, or even your mother's dining-room carpet if you could get it - any smooth surface - that did. Every child owned a Tom Bowler, a large blue bowling alley; a dozen or so firing alleys - 'commonies'; and an agate taw. During the First World War we had a particular 'moz' - jinx - that we employed against opponents. If you were mentally guarding a particular alley that seemed in danger you swung your hand over it in small arcs, and chanted: 'Under the Kaiser's hoo-oof!' You felt reasonably safe after that. Why we chose the Kaiser in preference to Kitchener or the King remains a mystery. As far as I know there was not a drop of German blood in the district. Towards the end of the war we developed another 'moz', this time against the said Kaiser. Three times a day you were



expected ominously to mutter:

'The poor old Kaiser's dead!
He died for the want of bread!
They put him in a coffin,
He fell through the bottom,
The poor old Kaiser's dead!'

(Ersatz coffin bottoms even then!)

I had a most obliging male parent. I remember his thumping the breakfast table heartily each morning as he pronounced this with me.

A surf-free, sharkless beach and hot summer climate developed good swimmers pretty young. I don't think I remember any healthy child who could not swim early in his life. On our beach we felt a terrible contempt for the 'foreigners'; poor, misguided creatures from suburbs on the other side of the Yarra who came on public holidays, hoping to spend a pleasant day at the sea-side.

We showed off hatefully, rushing into the sea to show our paces in the dog-paddle, our endurance in the deadman's float, 'Look at me doing the over-arm', we screamed in extreme cases. We were (we believed) smartly attired in 'Canadian' bathing-gowns - two piece affairs that would have wrecked the proportions of a Helen - and frilled rubber caps with a gap cut out in the frontal pleats to

facilitate vision. We laughed openly at the foreigners who, with naivete, often sent their children into swim attired in a holey old singlet, fastened at strategic points with unsightly safety pins. 'Y' silly galoots' we hissed at these unfortunates, if they separated themselves sufficiently far from their parents.

After a swim everybody bought a piece of gingerbread, leathery in texture, atrocious in flavour, but by some unwritten law, to be preferred at this moment above greater delicacies. There was some theory that it 'sustained' you better after sea exercise. The sexes were sufficiently emancipated to swim together in the 'open'. But if you wanted to go into the baths you found there were hours for 'ladies' and still longer hours for 'gents'. You made yourself hideous with witch hazel cream that turned, under the influence of salt water, to a white paste across your nose and cheeks. This in deference to your already ruined complexion.

Mussel-gathering from the piles of the baths was popular and profitable. Mothers and aunts were ready buyers of a good haul. Billies and other crude utensils for boiling mussels were handed down in families like old grudges..

At the first breath of the 'change' - the switch of the scorching northerly to a cool southerly wind - the entire child population streamed away from the beach. 'Ghosts from an enchanter fleeing ...' were not in it. Sunburned, cheeky, indomitable at one minute, we scurried off the next in droves, with shrunken egos and lips rapidly turning blue. That race for home and mother must have been caused by something more than the dramatic drop in temperature. Some buried tribal memory perhaps.

Any stomach ache, from that caused by acute appendicitis, to mild indigestion, tended to be blamed on the 'tiger's claw'. The 'tiger's claw' used to be called in by children to cover symptoms of a guilty conscience. The remedy for this was senna tea, drunk to the dregs; or, incredibly, powdered charcoal blown down the throat.

We 'struck our breath' to prove veracity, and swore the unbreakable oath by placing together the tips of our middle fingers. We said 'me' for 'my', and called our dinner 'tea'.

There were some 'counts' that I think may have been an Australian variation on familiar themes:

'Eena-meena, ming-pong,

ting-tong!

Yousa-vousa-vackatoo,
Vee, Vie, Vack!

and

'Lady, lady touch the ground,
lady, lady, turn around,
Lady, lady, point your toe,
Lady, lady, out you go!'

You went, too. You were 'he'. Never 'it' or 'she'.

Forgive me if all this is redundant. May I wish you all success in your research?

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs.) Isabel McLennan



Illustrations for this issue are by Madeline Lemar

eds June Factor and Gwenda Davey
Published twice a year since 1981. Australia's only regular
publication devoted to children's games, rhymes, and other
folkloric traditions.

PLAY AND FRIENDSHIPS IN A MULTICULTURAL PLAYGROUND
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