

# AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

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## NOTES AND NEWS



### VALE KENNY GOLDSTEIN

We are deeply saddened to learn of the death in November this year of one of the world's most distinguished and well-known folklorists, Dr Kenneth Goldstein.

Kenny Goldstein, as he was known to his friends, came to Australia several times. In 1982 he visited Australia on a collecting tour, and included the Australian Children's Folklore Collection in his travels. At that time the Collection was housed at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Melbourne, after its establishment there in 1979. The ACFN No.4 (May 1983) noted that

*We are particularly gratified that Kenny's only public address during his visit was given at IECD, where he spoke on Folklore as an Academic Discipline to an interested and diverse audience. We hope that the Philadelphia connection will continue.*

It did indeed continue, and the two ACFN editors were delighted to meet up with Kenny and his wife Rochelle in Philadelphia during the 1989 Centenary Meeting of the American Folklore Society. Before that date, however, Kenny Goldstein had been in Australia again, as an international guest at the First National Folklore Conference, which was held at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in 1984.

In 1995 Roger Abrahams edited a book, *Fields of Folklore: Essays in Honour of Kenneth S. Goldstein* (Trickster Press, Bloomington). This fine collection of articles by a number of distinguished scholars included 'A selected list of the works of an

unconventional scholar: Kenny S. Goldstein', prepared by Stephen Winick. Winick wrote of his difficulties in attempting to compile 'a complete list of the scholar's books, articles and other pertinent publications and productions':

*What is one to do, when the honoree is hardly conventional in any sense of the word? Kenny Goldstein is that unconventional honoree. Though he authored or edited a fair number of books, monographs, and articles published in scholarly journals, as well as notes, reviews, etc., he never allowed himself to be restricted to or limited by the typical media or genres of scholarly publication.*

Even the 'selected list' ran to six pages. But it was perhaps Kenny Goldstein's 'unconventionality' which made him such a delightful human being and outstanding folklorist, one whose 'primary goal', according to Stephen Winick, was

*informing, communicating about, and educating students of folklore, members of an interested general public, or any others he wishes to convert to what he acknowledges as his true religion and favourite cause: folklore.*

Kenny Goldstein was a great friend to folklore in Australia, not least to children's folklore and the efforts of those working in the field. For both editors, Kenny was the overseas examiner for our doctoral theses, and his pertinent comments were as much appreciated as the final, generous imprimatur. He will be sadly missed.

## FRANK STRAHAN

The University of Melbourne archivist, Frank Strahan, is retiring at the end of this year. The editors of the ACFN wrote to him, expressing our thanks for his support for the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, which is housed in the archive, and wishing him well in his retirement.

His response is typical of the man:

*It has been a pleasure to be associated with the Australian Children's Folklore Collection venture, and to be of some use. I class the ACFC as a sparkling, freshly artistic expression from the prose poem of life.*

Thanks, Frank. We hope the future offers you as much sparkle as ever.

## NOT TOO 'COOL' TO PLAY

by Fay Pollock

Some may say that our 'cool', computer-oriented Grade 6 students are too trendy to participate in playground games at school. Do Grade 6s just 'lurk' around the schoolyard in their baggy gear at recess time? Do they dare leave their computer screens?

During 1995 I have been documenting children's games for the Moe Folk Life Project, under the direction of Dr Gwenda Davey. Grade 6 students at Albert Street Primary School, as I have observed, do enjoy varied and vigorous recess and lunch times.

During the cold winter months, I observed the following games: Football (large group), Soccer, Basketball goal throwing ('Elimination'), Basketball games, Netball games, Skipping (long rope/groups), Skipping (Cross age/Preps), Yo-Ball (large bouncy ball on round platform), Remote Control Car Racing, Chasey/Tiggy, and adventure playground activities ('Equipment'). Occasionally a few Grade 6's just walk around (usually eating), but these students are a rarity.

When asked - 'What games do Grade 6's like to play during the year?' - some enthusiastic student groups have discussed Handball, Tiggy/Chasey (many and varied adaptations), Four Square, Stations, Poison Ball, Keepings Off, Hopscotch, P.O.G., Power

Rangers (from T.V.), T-Ball, Spiderman, 44 I see (Hide & Seek), What's the time Mr Wolf?, Freeze, Crocodile, Gladiators (adaptation from T.V.), Bowls and Cricket, as well as the activities already listed.

It would seem that Grade 6's are not too 'cool' to play well and enthusiastically in 1995.

*Fay Pollock is a participant in the Moe Folk Life Project 1995.*



# STILL MORE NEWS FROM MOE

## The Top 10 - Favourite Games in the School Yard - 1995

The Moe (Gippsland) Primary School students, when observed and interviewed during 1995, showed they had especially favourite school yard games. I had noted in a previous article that 'tiggy games' were definitely alive and well - they were certainly the most played and discussed of all school playground activities.

When collated, both the observed and interviewed ('informal chats') games lists were fairly similar - the

children's ideas and actual activities for their playtime games co-related. My lists showed preferences rated 1-10 for 1995. Students from Prep to Grade 6 were interviewed.

A new popular game was *44 I see* - adaptation of the hide and seek games of the past. Most other games were fairly traditional too. But just 'creeping' into the school yard activities were media/TV influenced games - e.g. *Gladiators* - already banned as too rough! *Power Rangers* is being played and also the newest of school play activities *Line Dancing* with children in large groups.

Fay Pollock  
Moe Folklife Project 1995

## THE TOP 10 PLAYGROUND GAMES - 1995

Albert Street Primary School  
Moe, Victoria - Students Prep - 6

Rating	By Observation with Students	By Discussion with Students	Rating
1	Tiggy/Chasey (various types)	Tiggy/Chasey (various types)	1
2	Adventure Playgrounds	Football	2
3	Basketball activities	Soccer	3
4	Football	Basketball activities/Skipping	4
5	Skipping	'44 I see'/Hidey/'Gladiators' (Banned too rough)	5
6	'44 I see' (specific Hide & Seek game)	Cricket	6
7	Sandpit play	Release/Mothers & Fathers/Crocodile/British Bulldog (Banned too rough)	7
8	Soccer/Ball bouncing	Adventure Playground	8
9	Cricket/Four Square	Four Square	9
10	Hidey	Playing Police	10

## TALLY SHEET FAVOURITE GAMES IN THE PLAYGROUND

Albert Street Primary School  
Moe, Victoria 1995

Games - Children observed	Total A	Games - Children interviewed	Total B
Tiggy/Chasey (various types)	46	Tiggy/Chasey (various types)	31
Adventure Playground (4 settings)	20	Football	14
Basketball Goal throwing	18	Soccer	10
Football	17	Basketball activities	6
Skipping	17	Skipping	6
'44 I see' (specific type of Hide & Seek)	12	Gladiators (banned - too rough)	5
Sand pit/play	11	'44 I see' (specific type of Hide & Seek)	5
Soccer	9	Hidey	5
Ball bouncing	9	Cricket	4
Cricket	5	British Bulldog (banned)	3
Four Square	5	Release	3
Hidey	4	Mothers & Fathers	3
		Crocodile/Crocodile	3
		Adventure Playground	2

List A = Games observed in playground

List B = Games children talked about



## CAJUN COUNTRY

by Gwenda Davey

The 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society was held in Lafayette, Louisiana, the heart of Cajun country. I was lucky enough to meet quite a number of the descendants of the French-speaking Acadian peoples now living in Louisiana. My immersion in Cajun music, food and Mardi Gras traditions was a highlight of my visit to the conference.

The Children's Folklore Section Annual Meeting was held on Friday 13th October, at 6.30 pm, and included election of office-bearers, etc. Reports were given on the Aesop, Newell and Opie Prizes, and it was disappointing to learn that the Opie Prize for the year's best publication in children's folklore has not been awarded for some time, due to lack of suitable entries. Perhaps this is a challenge to Australia! (June Factor won the Opie Prize in 1989 for *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia*). Nevertheless the Aesop and Newell awards seem to be flourishing. The Newell Prize is for a student essay in children's folklore.

This year's short-listed books for the Aesop Prize are:

*Fair is Fair: World Folktales of Justice*. By Sharon Creeden.

*Duppy Talk: West Indian Tales of Mystery and Magic*. By Gerald Hausman with illustrations by Cheryl Taylor.

*Why Alligator Hates Dog: A Cajun Folktale*. Told by J.J. Reneaux with illustrations by Donnie Lee Green.

*Coyote and the Winnowing Birds*. Based on a story told by Eugene Sekaquaptewa. Translated and edited by Emory Sekaquaptewa and Barbara Pepper with illustrations by Hope Children (of the Hotevilla-Bacavi Community School)

*The Gifts of Wali Dad: A Tale of India and Pakistan*. Retold by Aaron Shepard with pictures by Daniel San Souci.

*Giants: Stories From Around the World*. Retold by Paul Robert Walker with illustrations by Paul Bernardin.

*When the World Ended/How Hummingbird Got Fire/How People Were Made: Rumsian Ohlone Stories*. Told by Linda Yamane.

One session of considerable interest at the conference was the Forum on Ethical and

Methodological Issues in Children's Folklore Fieldwork. This session was sponsored by the Children's Folklore Section, and the invited speakers were Judith Haut, Amanda Dargan and Edith Fowke. Gary Alan Fine was the Discussant, and the session was chaired by Elizabeth Tucker. Unfortunately the noted Canadian folklorist, Edith Fowke, was unable to be present.

Amanda Dargan initiated a lively discussion on the ethics of using one's own child for research purposes, following her account of her observations of children's play in the lane behind her residence in Queens, New York. A particular issue was raised by Elizabeth Tucker: how to obtain proper consent - at what age? She also asked what happens if the child changes its mind - might the child sue later?

Some discussion took place about the role of adults as helpers or inhibitors of play. Amanda Dargan told of being chased by an irate parent (with baseball bat) after berating a child (not her own) for seriously dangerous behaviour. Ethical issues such as the role of the researcher as 'eavesdropper', and a researcher's involvement with an (illegal) graffiti gang, were also discussed.

Some of the great researchers into childhood were mentioned. Did Piaget's children consent to his questioning? Did B.F. Skinner's daughter, in adulthood, object to her father's use of her as a research subject during her childhood? Ruth Weir's use of the hidden tape-recorder to record her son's 'pre-sleep monologues' was discussed, including the proffered information that Anthony eventually discovered the tape-recorder, and asked for it if it was missing!

In his summing up, Gary Alan Fine cautioned against romanticism about childhood. He commented on the need for adult intervention when children are 'bashing each other' and argued that credit should be given to child participants in research projects. He opposed the study of one's own children.

My own contributions to the discussion focused on the undesirability of studying one's own children, mainly because of the impossibility of objectivity. (Anecdotes about being 'at the end of one's tether' with one's own children were shared.) I questioned Amanda Dargan's statement that the children in the lane 'didn't play before she came to live there', particularly as she described taking her toddler to the

lane 'to join the other children'. To me, this sounded too much like the myths about 'children not playing traditional games any more'. I also suggested that the Children's Folklore Section of the AFS might like to seek legal advice on the question of 'informed consent' by children.

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## HERBAL FOLKLORE OF CHILDHOOD

by John Meredith

I was born in 1920 and my sister Thelma was about two years older. Our childhood was spent in the New South Wales township of Holbrook, where among the pre-adolescent kids there existed a well-developed oral tradition about which plants were safe to eat and which were dangerous. This traditional herblore did not come from our parents, but was passed on to us by other kids of our age. Here I will discuss those with which we were familiar. Doubtless in other areas, such as the tropics, other such traditions existed.

### 1. MARSH MALLOW *Althaea officinalis*.

The seeds of marsh mallows consist of small disks, arranged in annular form to make a small 'cheese' or button, and we used to eat these. We did so on the advice of other kids who told us, 'Hey, you can eat them'. So, unquestioningly, we did, collecting them by the handful, peeling away the calyx and chewing them up. The English herbalist, John Gerard, writing in 1597 describes these as 'the knap or round button, like unto a flat cake...' Geoffrey Grigson (*An Englishman's Flora*, 1958) writes 'Children still eat these disks or "cheeses", as they are known from Cornwall to the Scottish Border'.

### 2. DANDELION. *Taraxicum officinalis*.

Traditionally we called this plant 'Milk Thistle'. Our dandelion was the common Capeweed, *Arctotheca calendula*. In France, the dandelion is called 'Pissenlit'; in England, 'Piss the Bed', because of its diuretic action. Around Holbrook there were two varieties of Capeweed, one, not so common, lacked the black eye and was entirely yellow. This we called 'Pee-the-Bed' and we used it in a sort of spell-casting game. You plucked a flower and shoved it down the back of somebody's neck, crying out 'Pee-the-bed, Pee-the-bed, ha ha

ha!', and it was supposed to make them wet the bed that night.

### 3. SOUR GRASS. *Oxalis acetosella*.

Grigson writes: 'Generations of children have bitten the sharp, pleasant taste out of the flowers of wood sorrel'. As kids, we chewed the stems of the flowers and sucked out the sour juice before spitting out the residue. If there were no flowers we used the thinner and less satisfactory stems of the leaves, and we did this because other kids told us about it. Was this nature's way of giving us our vitamin C, and thus warding off possible outbreaks of Barcoo Rot (Scurvy)?

### 4. SNOTTY GOBBLES. *Loranthaceae* sp.

In the summer, whenever they were low enough for us to reach, we gathered the soft, ripe berries of mistletoe. Squeezing the skin, we would suck out the glutinous glob of goo surrounding the seed. We chewed and sucked these until there was no more mucilage left, then spat out the seed with its coating of remaining fibrous matter we called the mistletoe berries, 'Snotty Gobblers'. In England, the berries of the YEW are called 'Snotty Gogs', 'Snotter Galls' or 'Snottle Berries'. The leaves and the seeds of the Yew are poisonous, but not so the red-skinned pulp enclosing the seed. Traditionally, English kids know this, and always are careful to spit out the seed after eating the pulp. Thus, with the Yew and the Dandelion, the tradition has survived, but in Australia has been transferred to other species.

### 5. ACACIA TREE FLOWERS. *Robinia pseudacacia*.

Here, we are not concerned with Wattles, but the Yellow Locust Tree, or Tree Acacia. Grigson writes: 'Of these the French make pancakes or fritters, taking the clusters by the stalk and dipping them into batter.' We kids did not worry about cooking them. When the 'Tree Acacias' were in flower we picked the bunches and devoured the sweet-tasting blossoms like grapes. They had a bit of a laxative effect, but we never worried about that!

### 6. PADDY MELONS. *Cucumis myriocarpus*.

In the summer there was a small, wild melon, a weed we called 'Paddy Melons'. The soft, very juicy spined yellow fruit were about 25 mm in diameter. The accepted tradition was that if the juice

got in your eye, it would 'send you blind', but this did not prevent us from playing a game with the Paddy Melons. You picked a ripe fruit, held it in front of a victim's face and squeezed it until it burst and sprayed his face with bitter-tasting, sticky juice! I never did hear of a case of blindness resulting from this prank.

#### 7. DEADLY NIGHTSHADE.

*Solanum americanum* and *Solanum nigrum*.  
The first mentioned is the Glossy Nightshade, or Huckle Berry and is not toxic; the second has a rough leaf and is poisonous. We called both of them 'Deadly' Nightshade and our children's herblore was backed up by parental warnings so we left them alone.

#### 8. MUSHROOMS AND TOADSTOOLS.

Each year Autumn was mushroom season, when, equipped with billies or baskets, we searched every available paddock for the rare delicacy. But we only gathered the common field mushroom. All other fungi were called 'Toadstools' and regarded by us as poisonous. Also, we considered raw mushrooms to be poisonous and would never eat them until they had been peeled and fried in fat, or stewed in milk.

#### 9. THE GOANNA.

Of course it is not a herb, but still it was part of our juvenile folklore. There were not many goannas about, but we had a well-entrenched superstition that if you were bitten by one, it would cause a nasty sore that would break out again at the same time every year.

#### 10. THE LATEX PLANTS.

Warts seemed to be more common in the 1920's and we all knew that the milky sap exuded by various plants was a sure cure. These included the Dandelion, Sow-thistle, the Spurge and the Orchard Fig. The milky juice had to be dabbed on every day until the wart dropped off.

#### 11. THE RED SALVIA. *Salvia coccinea*.

We had in our garden a number of perennial red-flowered salvia bushes and somebody told us, 'You can suck honey out of them.' You plucked a flower and in the white base, waiting to be sucked out, was a drop of clear, very sweet nectar. Occasionally you would suck out a small black ant at the same time, but that did not deter us. That was about seventy years ago, and since then I have seen numbers of kids doing just that same thing. And I still grow the same red salvia!

#### 12. GUM TREE ROOTS

During our dinner-time at school, half a dozen boys would scarper off into the bush at the rear of the playground to where there was a creek with steep, eroded banks. Here we would find dead protruding roots of the nearby gum trees. We would get those of cigarette thickness, break them into suitable lengths, peel off the bark, then light and smoke them. The porous root gave a cool, smooth smoke and we all preferred them to cigarettes which we tried and found to be too harsh and irritating. On our way back to school we would chew gum leaves to mask the smell of smoke on our breath!

We were attracted to these various activities because we were too poor to afford shop sweets, and I sometimes wonder if kids living in the present affluent economy carry on any of our old traditions, or if they have been totally replaced by bubblegum and the other pleasures of the lolly-shop.

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## PLAYING IN THAILAND

by Judy McKinty

Some of the most enjoyable memories of my recent, and first, visit to Thailand are of coming into contact with a few of the games children play there, and finding them to be familiar to me. Those of us who have an interest in traditional games already know that they are universal - they link the countries of the world through the common experiences of childhood and play. However, it was not the knowing but the seeing which left such an impression on my mind.

In Bangkok, we stayed on the outskirts of Chinatown, where the streets are crowded and busy. Motorbikes race through narrow lanes which are already crowded with people, food carts, stalls, piles of motor parts and other manifestations of the day-to-day activities in this section of town. Hardly a place for play, you might think, but there are other spaces - schoolyards and temple grounds, protected by walls, and the same narrow lanes at night, which ring to the sound of boys playing cricket.

Apart from the night cricket, I also saw two other games in the city. These were Elastics, played by two girls of about ten years of age (and someone's little brother who was reluctantly holding one end), and Hoppy-chasey, where a circle of children dodge and run to escape the person in the middle, who hops after them and tries to tag them. The children had school during the day, and disappeared into their homes of an evening (most homes, even tiny shop-front dwellings, had television), so the chances of being able to see them at play were limited in the city. There is also a shyness towards 'ferangs' (Europeans), which can stop a game in its tracks if they see someone watching them.

Moving north into the hills, where the pace of life is slower and more peaceful and where space is in abundance, there were more opportunities to see and interact with children. We spent each night in a different hill-tribe village, staying in the home of one of the villagers. Some of these villages did not have schools, so the children spent their days playing and taking part in the activities of the village.

Here, the games were played using materials which were easily obtained at little or no cost. I saw

marbles-type games being played with bottlecaps and plastic figures, like the ones in cereal boxes, and with the broken handle of a plastic spade. The only time I saw glass marbles being used was in a village which had its own school. This school was started by the Australian tour company, Intrepid, and receives supplies for the children via the tour leaders.

I was taught how to play the bottlecaps game by a small boy in a small village in which we stopped to have lunch. While we were eating, a group of children materialised. Soft drinks and bottled water were the only liquids available on the trek, and as each bottle was opened, the children retrieved the bottlecap, keeping a wary eye on us. It was a very serious business, this gathering of resources for play. I gave my bottlecap to the smaller of two boys.

As the fast game began I wandered over to watch, and when I had been watching for (as I thought) the required time, I asked, by gestures and expressions, if I could play too. The biggest and oldest of the boys (aged about 11) looked very disgusted and walked away, leaving the smaller boy and girl to deal with me. The smaller boy rose to the occasion and handed me six bottlecaps, which I scattered on the ground. Then, as I stood there looking foolish, he bent down and picked one up, indicating that I should throw it at the others, which I did, completely missing them. It seemed that each player only had one throw, although the bottlecaps were gathered up and handed back to me. I asked the boy if it was his turn now, so he took the bottlecaps, scattered five and kept one for throwing (of course!). After he had hit his target, the caps were gathered up again and given to me. The game proceeded like this, with the addition of the small girl, who, after shyly refusing at first, became part of the game.

At one stage, the older boy, who had watched the proceedings with a casual attentiveness, came over, picked up the bottlecaps and proceeded to demonstrate his accuracy before walking away again. When it was his turn again he was called, and he came down and joined in the game. Winning did not seem to be a part of this game. Everyone had one throw, and whether you hit or missed it was the next person's turn. There was no keeping the bottlecaps that were hit, as in marbles - they were all used again. The enjoyment was in the playing.

In another village, I watched as a ten-year-old girl played a jacks game with ten pieces of bamboo and a lime. This game required an amazing amount of dexterity, as the sticks had to be picked up a certain way, and sometimes threaded between the fingers or under the arm. The lime was thrown up, the sticks picked up and the lime caught again, all with the ease of the expert.

A local tourist magazine, "Welcome to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai", has been publishing a page of traditional games and pastimes in Thailand since earlier in the year. The page I saw featured Five Stones, another jacks game, and Top Spinning using a piece of string. I also saw a string trick, called 'handcuffs' in Australia, used by a Thai guide, who said that he had learned it in one of the other villages.

The play I saw was merely a brief glimpse of the culture of Thailand. The games were similar to those found in any Australian playground, so it was strangely wonderful to see them being played in such exotic settings: elastics played at a Chinese temple; chasey in the grounds of a Buddhist Wat; blind-man's buff along a dirt path, with dense forest and rolling green hills as the backdrop; marbles in the mud of a hill-tribe village; jacks played on the verandah of a bamboo hut; children catching butterflies in an idyllic floral garden beside a flooded river; home-made 'motorbikes', made from bamboo tubes with wheels, being driven through the tranquillity of small villages; and shanghais hung around the neck, ready to scare away stray dogs in both the roaring city and the peaceful hills.

I have often heard people say that music is the international language. To this I would add one other - the language of play.



A plastic bag on a stick - perfect for catching butterflies!



Blind Man's Buff at the edge of the forest.





Playing 'marbles' in the mud with little plastic men.



A lime for a ball and bamboo sticks

- demonstration by an expert.



A home-made motorbike - motorbikes are

the most widely-used transport in Thailand.

# ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S PLAY

*The Stegley Foundation has funded research into the play traditions of Aborigines in Victoria, present and past. We hope to publish material resulting from the research next year. As background to this project, we reprint extracts from the chapter on Aboriginal Children's Play written by June Factor in her book Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia (Penguin 1988).*

Ian Turner's opening line to the introduction of the 1969 edition of *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* reads: 'This is a collection of the play-rhymes of Australian children'. In 1978 when the second, enlarged edition of *Cinderella* appeared, the three co-editors saw no reason to change that line significantly: '*Cinderella Dressed in Yella* is a collection of Australian children's play rhymes'. In neither case was it felt necessary to attempt a definition of 'Australian', or even to apologise for the absence of material collected from Aboriginal children. Such material was not accessible, or familiar, to the three urban, white, well-educated editors: our sources lived in the main in the capital cities and large country towns of south-eastern Australia. We were, by the 1970s, beginning to enquire into the effects of post World War II immigration on the traditional Anglo-Celtic play ways of Australian children, but Aboriginal children's folklore was outside our frame of reference.

That was typical of most research and writing about Australian children; it still is. Ignorance and neglect, and later embarrassment and uncertainty have created a sharp division between those writers who have specialised in Aboriginal matters - the experts - and those historical, developmental and pedagogic recorders and analysts of Australian child life who focus on the general culture and mention Aboriginal experience only in passing.<sup>1</sup>

Dorothy Howard, the American children's folklorist [who undertook] pioneering work in this country, recognised this gap in her own research. She had no opportunity while in Australia to establish either acquaintance or familiarity with Aboriginal children. (It must be remembered that in 1954 there were no published collections of Australian children's folklore and little manuscript material to provide a base on which she could build her own research.) In a footnote to the monograph 'Marble Games of Australian Children' she remarked:

*No attempt was made to study aboriginal Australian children's play nor to assess the interaction, if any, that may have taken place between the English-speaking children and the aborigines. A visit was made to one government school in New South Wales (The LaPerouse School) where the children were aborigine or part aborigine.<sup>2</sup>*

She went on to offer, without comment the view of 'Mr C. P. Mountford, South Australian anthropologist, who had spent many years living with tribes in the Northern Territory':

*[he] held the opinion that there had been little, if any, play exchange between the two groups of children; that any possible exchange would have been the imposition of white children's play upon the aborigines, most of whom lived in the 'outback' away from city influences . . . No evidence of marble games or similar games was found among aborigine children.<sup>3</sup>*

Howard was a guest in this country, a stranger to the culture, with only ten months available for research here. Her own extensive knowledge of children's folklore makes it probable that she would have harboured doubts about the validity of Mountford's claim of the total separateness and difference in the play traditions of Aboriginal and white children and the dominance of white play over black. However, her discretion made her careful to stay within the limits of her observations. More than thirty years later, it is possible to assert with some confidence that Mountford's version of the 'dying pillow' theory - in this case *vis a vis* Aboriginal children - was mistaken.<sup>4</sup>

That theory, the supposition that the coming of European 'civilisation' to Australia in 1788 meant the inevitable decline and disappearance of the indigenous inhabitants and their culture, was widely held for the first 150 years and more after white settlement. The assumption of the superiority of white over black (and British stock over all others) was often linked with a variant of social Darwinism which declared that 'the lowest type of savages'<sup>5</sup> must inevitably dwindle and disappear before the

strength and superiority of a 'loftier race'.<sup>6</sup>

Such a view appeared justified by the ill-treatment, murder, impoverishment, exploitation and confinement of Aborigines which resulted from white settlement. Aboriginal numbers diminished through the nineteenth century; whole tribes were destroyed by brutality or disease; remnants, herded together on missions and government settlements, lost contact with their land, and struggled, sometimes vainly, to maintain their social and cultural traditions. There were fewer children, and one reason for this was given by the 'good' Aborigine, Derrimut, who as a young man of the Yarra Yarra tribe had warned John Pascoe Fawcner and his party of settlers in 1835 of a planned Aboriginal attack. (He is buried in the Melbourne Cemetery, with a headstone honouring this 'noble act'.) In 1858, Derrimut responded angrily to a query from a white acquaintance:

*I said, 'Have you no children?' and he flew into a passion immediately. 'Why me have lubra? Why me have piccaninny? You have all this place, no good have children, no good have lubra, me tumble down and die very soon now.'*<sup>7</sup>

Yet there were places, particularly those least affected by European settlement, where Aborigines continued to follow the cultural patterns laid down by generations of ancestors. Even on missions and settlements and outback stations, old people taught their young something from the past: rituals, rules to govern marriage and family life, secret and secular songs and stories, dances and drawings and games. Children watched, listened and learnt. They learnt from adults and from each other, inherited and adapted the play traditions of a people with a history of at least 40,000 years on this continent. Games and songs that Derrimut might have known as a child have echoes in the play ways of some Aboriginal children today. That is a measure of the extraordinary tenacity of child lore; it is also evidence of the remarkable survival of Aborigines and their culture.

.....

It is difficult to assess how much influence European settlement has had on Aboriginal children's play traditions. In scattered settlements all over the country, and later in country towns and certain city districts, continuing contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children was inevitable, so that we

can reasonably assume some interaction at the level of play. Rosa Campbell Praed, born in 1851 at Naraigin in Queensland, had an Aboriginal nurse and used to visit the Aboriginal camp to learn how 'to plait dilly bags . . . to make drinking vessels from gourds and to play the jew's-harp'.<sup>8</sup> Mary Gilmore, writing of her childhood in the 1870s in outback New South Wales, recalls: 'I could play in a blacks' camp all day'.<sup>9</sup> At about the same time, further north-east, the seven children of Charles and Fanny Chauvel had 'Aboriginal children as playmates, and Aborigines to teach them some of the age-old wisdom of their land'.<sup>10</sup> That pattern of connection must have occurred all over the country, although not always with the good-will evident in these examples. A century later (1976) Bronwyn Davies studied the friendships of a group of primary school children (including some Aboriginal children) at Armidale in New South Wales. She records the following dialogue with one of the white boys, Patrick:

*Patrick: Yeah, my Nan, my first day at school, she asked me who I was playing with and that, and she told us not to play with Aborigines, and I say, 'Henry and Roy [both Aborigines] and them,' and she said, 'Don't play with them.'*

*B.D.: Did she give a reason?*

*Patrick: No.*

*B.D.: Did it make any difference?*

*Patrick: I've been Henry's friend a long time.*<sup>11</sup>

The knowledge that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children played together does not tell us, however, what they played. Can we assume, as Mountford did, that the dominance of the European-based culture made inevitable the hegemony of the play forms of the children of European origin?

The skipping and hopscotch games collected by Dorothy Howard from the Aboriginal children at LaPerouse school in Sydney in 1954 are identical with those played by non-Aboriginal Australian children all over Australia: Dancing Dolly, Blue Bells, Charlie Charlie, Jelly on the Plate, Cowboy Joe, The Snail, Spider Web, Aeroplane, Horse Shoe.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this indicates the diminution of Aboriginal traditions in the cities, although there has been insufficient recording and observation of the play ways of urban Aboriginal children for there to be any certainty on this matter.

At Cummerooonja, a government reserve on the Murray River, children in the 1930s mostly played



European games such as Skipping, Rounders, Football, Marbles, Cricket, Hide-and-Seek and Hopscotch.<sup>13</sup> However, evidence from other rural sources suggests that in many Aboriginal communities traditional child pastimes have continued to the present, sometimes side by side with 'imports' from the whites. In 1949 R. Ravenhart, one of the many observant travellers whose tales have been a feature of 'non-professional' writing about Aborigines, described the play of youngsters on Mer Island in the Torres Strait:

*'What . . . do you play?' I asked.  
One of the older boys said something  
that brought forth shrieks of laughter,  
and was, I suspect, rude.*

*'String-game - but no string here  
now,' said Dick; 'oh, and shells-game,  
like marbles.'*

*'How do you mean, like marbles?'*

*Some of the smaller children started a  
game to show me. There was a ring  
traced in the sand, and cowrie shells  
laid out in it, and the kids in turn  
thumb-flicked other small cowries at  
these or at each other's shells . . . A  
spiral univalve that was very common  
in various colours and patterns often  
replaced the cowries, more suitably as  
being almost perfect spheres: the lust  
for winning did not seem at all  
decreased by the fact that losers could  
collect another score or more of  
'marbles' in a few minutes from the  
inexhaustible beach.*

*But rounders dominated, the girls  
throwing as cleanly and accurately as  
the boys...<sup>14</sup>*

Here we have an interesting illustration of the mixture of traditional and foreign games recorded by many observers: String-Game, an old game, is not being played (it is not clear whether this is because the children have no immediate access to string, or whether the game has lapsed altogether in this group); a game called Shells-Game is given its nearest English name, Marbles, and certainly resembles the Marbles games played by non-Aboriginal children; and then there is Rounders, clearly an import. (There is also the suggestion of a rude rhyme or joke in the Aboriginal language, an aspect of Aboriginal children's play that is all too rarely reported.)

Another instance of the integration of European traditions into Aboriginal children's play lore can be found in Margaret Kartomi's account of children's play songs among the Pitjantjara people in South Australia. Quite apart from the universal childlike qualities evident in the songs she collected in 1969 - 'brevity, repetitiveness, directness of sentiment and humour ... a contemporary quality ... straightforward, relatively unsubtle nature'<sup>15</sup> - she notes certain features of bimusicality and bilingualism. The children improvised songs as they played, selecting components from the traditions of both Pitjantjara and Western music. A favourite song, 'Wi:tpikspa', of which Kartomi records five variants, is about Weetbix, the breakfast cereal:

*the staple diet today is determined by  
whatever is cheapest to buy at the  
Mission store. White flour damper,  
porridge and commercial breakfast  
cereal are the foods which the  
children know best.*

*The most popular play song at Yalata  
in 1969, sung almost interminably by  
the children, was 'Wi:tpikspa', a song  
about the breakfast cereal weetbix,  
which is eaten after being dipped in  
an empty can or pannikin (panikinta)  
of tea. The main utensils used in the  
area are empty cans, and tea is the  
most common drink for all age  
groups.<sup>16</sup>*

The words of the song are very similar in all versions, and have the chanting, repetitive form beloved by young children everywhere:

Wi:t - piks - pa  
Wi:t - piks - pa  
Pa - ni - kin - ta na - ri - nji  
Pa - ni - kin - ta na - ri - nji  
Wi:t - piks - pa  
Wi:t - piks - pa  
Wi:t - piks - pa  
Pa - ni - kin - ta na - n - nji  
Pa - ni - kin - ta na - ri - nji  
Wi:t - piks - pa  
Wi:t - piks - pa<sup>17</sup>

Kartomi was observing, in this and other songs, a mixing of Aboriginal and Western melody, rhythm and subject matter. The children's bicultural experience was clearly reflected in their play.

A similarly flexible adaptation of play to take advantage of both traditional and imported materials is recorded by Diane Bell in her observations of children at Warrabri settlement in the Northern Territory:

'The main toy was a 'trickle-can', i.e. treacle can, with a wire handle which was pushed by kids. They made noises of various vehicles as they pushed. Some had wonderful additions like speedos attached to the wire coat hanger handle. Some changed gear!

The main game was 'knives'. Throwing a knife up and down with a flick and twist into the sand to land upright. When it landed flat, the next person had a turn.

Kids were involved with natural materials and always making 'little spears', little carriers, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Here, traditional Aboriginal games and games using European materials and imitating modern technology (cars and trucks) are part of the repertoire of contemporary Aboriginal children. Like all children they are skilled at adapting to their circumstances and adapting their circumstances to enhance their play.

# ENDNOTES

1. An exception to the general rule of neglect of Aboriginal child life in books about Australian childhood is *Children in Australia: An Outline History*, Sue Fabian & Morag Loh, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1980.
2. Dorothy Howard, 'Marble Games of Australian Children', *Folklore*, vol. 71, September 1960, p. 165.
3. Howard, *ibid.*, p. 165-6.
4. For a discussion on the 'dying pillow' theory and its function in Aboriginal-white relationships, see C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, vol. 1, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1970, pp. 102-5 and James Miller, *Koori: A Will to Win*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1985.
5. Walter E. Roth, 'On the Natives of the (Lower) Tully River', 1900, manuscript held by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
6. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, vol. 1, p. 68. Rowley provides a detailed account of white

attitudes and responses to Aborigines from the first days of settlement.

7. An extract from the 'Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines', 1859, quoted in Shirley W. Wiencke, *When the Wattle Blooms Again: The Life and Times of William Barak, Last Chief of the Yarra Yarra Tribe*, Shirley W. Wiencke, Woori Yallock, Victoria, 1984, p. 44.
8. Mrs Campbell Praed, *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches & Impressions of Bush Life*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1902, p. 66.
9. Mary Gilmore, 'White Sails and Dampier's Disease', Dymphna Cusack, T. Inglis Moore & Barrie Ovendon, *Mary Gilmore: A Tribute*, Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1965, p. 70.
10. Elyne Mitchell, *Chauvel Country: The Story of a Great Australian Pioneering Family*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1983, p. 16.
11. Bronwyn Davies, *Life in the Classroom and Playground: The Accounts of Primary School Children*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982, p. 111.
12. Dorothy Howard Collection, Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Institute of Early Childhood Development, Melbourne.
13. Merle Jacomas, cited in Bill Gammage & Peter Spearritt (eds), *Australian 1938*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Broadway, NSW, 1987, p. 90.
14. R. Raven-Hart, *The Happy Isles*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1949, p. 16.
15. Margaret J. Kartomi, 'Childlikeness in Playsongs - A Case Study among the Pitjantjara at Yalata, South Australia', *Miscellanea Musicologica*, vol. 11, 1980, p.207. See also Margaret J. Kartomi, 'Songs of some Aboriginal Australian Children's Play Ceremonies', *Studies in Music*, no. 15, 1981, pp. 1-35.
16. Kartomi, *ibid.*, p. 205.
17. Kartomi, *ibid.*, p. 188.
18. Diane Bell, Professor of Australian Studies, Deakin University, private correspondence, 3 December 1986. See also Robertson, *Sport and Play in Aboriginal Culture - Then and Now* Salisbury College of Advanced Education Occasional Paper, Adelaide, 1975.

## LETTERS

## STILL MORE ON POGS

POGS continue to make news. Michael Finn, who reports on trademark issues in the *Writer's Digest* (USA) wrote that the game has moved eastward from California where it took hold in 1993. First it spread to Texas and Florida, and more recently into Colorado and the Northeast (*Trademark Update*, June 1995).

A quick explanation for those who didn't see the last two Newsletters. POG is the word used for discs and other products used in a popular sidewalk game that originated in Hawaii in the 1920s. The game's earliest pieces were cardboard caps from milk and juice bottles. POG is the title used by a Hawaiian bottler for its mix of pineapple, orange and guava juice.

Already a trademark battle is threatening in the US. Michael Finn noted a headline: 'Firm says group's being a PIG over popular game title POG'. He wrote that the World Pog Federation (WPF) claims it has exclusive rights to the word POG for all products associated with the game. But competitive groups are protesting. WPF officials say that their claim goes back to an agreement with the Hawaiian bottler that first used the letters POG on its bottle caps.

Michael Finn says that the surprising thing about the controversy is that no one has registered POG as a trademark for a game, although the WPF has registered POG as a juice name.

The game was 'launched' in Australia at Albert Park Primary School, Victoria, by Doug McFadden, World POG Federation Managing Director, in 1994. He marketed Trivial Pursuit and Pictionary to the world, so doubtless we will hear and see more about POG in the future.

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Glen Iris, Victoria





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