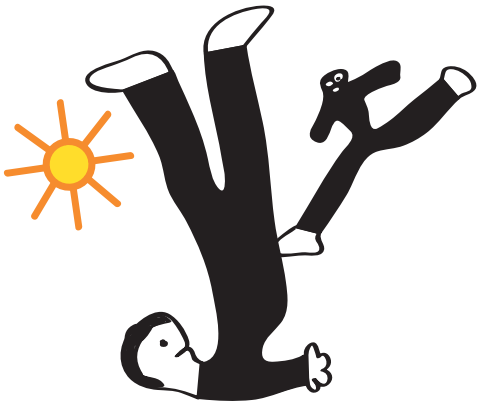
Play and Folklore no. 57, April 2012



Play and Folklore

Embracing spontaneity helps make holidays child's play

'Cherry Bobs', 'British Bulldogs' and going down the drain

'Barley', 'barleys' and 'BAR-lees': truce terms among children and adults

War, reality and fantasy: Belfast children

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Book launch: *Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered*

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From the Editors

***Play and Folklore* no 57, April 2012**

This issue of *Play and Folklore* introduces two recent publications – Carla Pascoe's *Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered: Childhood in 1950s Australia*, and Nadia Wheatley's *Playground: listening to stories from country and from inside the heart*. Both books are about children's sense of place, but the environments in which the children have grown up are vastly different: one explores the relationships between children and their environments in 1950s Melbourne and the other relates the stories of Indigenous adults and children and their connection to their traditional country from the early 1900s to the present.

Other articles describe the effect of war on children's imaginations, the rewards of playing with children in the holidays, truce terms used by children and adults, memories of Dunedin, New Zealand, and memories of childhood games in the Melbourne suburb of Coburg.

The editors welcome contributions to *Play and Folklore* from far and near. Please email your articles to June Factor [j.factor@unimelb.edu.au].

Gwenda Beed Davey, June Factor and Judy McKinty

Play and Folklore

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Embracing spontaneity helps make holidays child's play

Damon Young

Between me and my kids there is, to paraphrase Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, a string: knotted in my chest to another string in their little ribs. Too far apart, for too many days, and it may snap – leaving me 'bleeding inwardly', as Rochester puts it, with Brontë's usual drama. Standard parental love, really.

But with children, too short a string is also a trial: it avoids injury, but causes madness. Better locked alone in an attic than trapped with a six-year-old and his three year-old sister, squabbling over Tinkerbell's plastic wings. French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal once quipped that mankind's problems arise because we cannot sit quietly in a room. Show me a quiet room, Blaise, and I will try.

Parenthood is a condition of ambivalence, and nothing brings this home – quite literally, into my study – like the school holidays. It is hard to find a parent who does not recognise the value of intimacy with children. But it is also hard to find parents not maddened by weeks of yelling and crying; by unceasing nagging and unexplained mess. ('Where is my Dora doll?' 'In my new running shoes, Sophia, where you tucked her in with the last of the tissues.')

With my school-aged son, in particular, I am in two minds. I miss him: his hunger for the Homeric epics, his articulate but pause-arrested talk, his swings between bookish reverie and grimy dirt construction. But I also miss adult conversation, long sunshine jogs, and the momentary aeons between uncapping the pen and unleashing the ink. I don't want the best of each to be distracted by thoughts of the other.

Yes, my lifestyle is different to many fathers' in that I work from home, and only part time – my wife and I both juggle writing, child-wrangling and domestic chores. But the holidays make the basic ambivalence clearer for all parents: a continual existential tug-of-war between generations, and often between spouses.

For me, one cure for the endemic disease of holiday ambivalence is commitment to the child's world: to really play. To put away all thoughts of work and domestic labour, and leap into what's called *ludic*, from the Latin *ludus*. This does not magically meet deadlines, cook dinner for four, or ease pointless family tiffs. But it does make the most of the holidays' domestic intimacy. It is healthy – not only for kids, but also for adults.

Most obviously, much children's play involves exercise. Many parents are spectators of play, but not participants – they are physically there, but mentally elsewhere: on the mobile, into gossip, or reading a book. Understandably so: kid-wrangling is a tiring job. But sometimes it pays to play: to pick up the water-pistol and blast with the best; to chase, to climb, to wrestle. The 'rough and tumble' play is good for children's social and motor skills, but it is also healthy for parents: getting the blood pumping, the endorphins flowing.

Another benefit is explanation. Much of adult life is implicit: ideas, impressions, values. When playing,

children often ask us to explain ourselves. Fudging regularly fails because of the child's Excalibur of truth: 'But why?' The colour of the sky, the meaning of 'irony', the importance of fighting etiquette – putting these into simple, clear language is helpful for my kids, but also for me: it consolidates and distils my knowledge. Mastery is demonstrated by aphoristic simplicity. Their questions can also prompt exploration: I learn as they do.

Play also promotes innovative impulsivity. Lego, for example, is best when off-the-plan: taking the basic bricks and making something new. Working alongside my son and daughter, the constructions change as we work: a palace for Odysseus, planetarium, ninja trap. Likewise for the sandpit, cardboard-and-sticky-tape or woodwork building: a play of artful whims. Obviously planning is vital in life: caprice is a poor survival strategy. But for adults dealing with invoices, deadlines, nutrition, midnight feeds, it is a welcome dabble in spontaneity; in the strange discipline of creative uncertainty.

Play can also reveal the wonder of things. It is a cliché that children have a naïve amazement. But as we climb trees, count clouds or build a space shuttle, we can go a step further: their awe reveals how much we take for granted. Not this technology or that Guinness Book feat, but the sublime basics: biological life, the quirks of physics, the fact of existence itself. A small lesson in reverence.

None of this can overcome ambivalence: parenthood entails what author Rachel Power calls 'the divided heart'. Life is too short, limited and vague to be neat. Play simply makes the most of parenthood's precious burden: something that can be savoured weekly, not just in the holidays' carnivalesque madness.

If we cannot cut the visceral strings, we might knot them more artfully.

Dr Damon Young is a philosopher, and the author of Distraction: a Philosopher's Guide to Being Free. *For more information: www.damonyoung.com.au This article was first published in* The Age *on 23 January 2012 and has been reprinted with permission.*

Rod Quantock
Source – Rod Quantock

‘Cherry Bobs’, ‘British Bulldogs’ and going down the drain

Rod Quantock

This is another in our series of ‘Talking Chair’ interviews from 1988, when Gwenda Beed Davey recorded the childhood recollections of a number of people from different walks of life for the ‘Talking Chair’ exhibit in the Children’s Museum’s ‘You’re IT!’ exhibition in the Museum of Victoria. In this interview, Gwenda is talking with Rod Quantock, a well-known Melbourne comedian, writer and political activist who grew up in Coburg, one of Melbourne’s northern suburbs. Rod’s first performance role was at the age of six, when he was the Guiding Star in a church Nativity Play. He is now a regular performer at the Melbourne Comedy Festival, the Adelaide Fringe Festival and in theatre, television, radio, cabaret and corporate events. This is an edited extract from the original interview, published with Rod Quantock’s permission.

GD This is Gwenda Davey, interviewing Rod Quantock for the Children's Museum, on the 18th of November 1988.
RQ And I'm Rod Quantock, and I was born in August 1948 and grew up mostly in Coburg.

GD Rod, I would like you to tell us what you can recall about playing as a child?
RQ Oh, well apart from rude interruptions from schoolwork, play was all I ever did. I was one of those fortunate children who had no television in my formative years, so I did everything from ball games to board games and 'Cowboys and Indians' and typical male youth violence games – oh, and 'Kiss Chasey'. At school I played all the games that school kids played from 'Cherry Bobs' to 'Hoppo Bumpo' and 'British Bulldogs', football and cricket, the traditional games that existed in my childhood.

GD Where did you go to school?
RQ West Coburg Primary School in Reynard Street, Coburg. There must have been five or six hundred children in a very big two-storey brick school, and a gigantic playground, all gravel and asphalt. There were lots of skinned knees. We had a peach tree so there was a lot of throwing peaches at people, in season. It was a wild and unruly school as I remember it. Supervised playtime was not really a concept that the Education Department had come to terms with, and it was a large enough schoolground with peppercorn trees and a vacant block down the back and places behind the toilet block and shelter-sheds where you'd go and have fights. Not that I ever fought much – I was a bit of a frail type of a lad.

So our days went with the seasons: football in the winter, cricket in the summer, 'Cherry Bobs' when cherries were about and 'British Bulldogs' when it was cold enough to expend a lot of energy knocking other people over and jumping on them. 'British Bulldogs' involved 50 or 60 boys charging from one side of the schoolground to the other while those in the middle tried to catch them, in which case they stayed in the middle and caught the rest. And I have this wonderful image of a boy named Bruce Ivy, who should really become one of the 200 great Australians I think, who could go from one side to the other through 50 or 60 boys and never get caught, and he was always my hero. And quite bizarre games, the names of which I don't remember but were really all about young boys exposing their physical strength and prowess to other young boys – jumping on their backs and the one underneath had to shake you off before you crumpled him to the ground, those sorts of things.

'Brandy' was very popular – pain-inflicting games were very popular with boys. 'Brandy' involved chasing people with a tennis ball, preferably wet, and throwing it at their bare legs.

I was just one of those follow-the-pack sort of boys. The people I admired most were the strongest boys who survived in 'British Bulldogs', and were the last one to get caught.

GD You mentioned 'Cherry Bobs' – what sort of things did you do with 'Cherry Bobs'?
RQ I can't remember the rules or why ever we did it, but it was just [that] cherry 'bobs' were around and you insisted your mother buy cherries so you could get lots of cherry pits – it wasn't a passion for me to eat cherries but it was a necessity to get the 'bobs'. It started with scooping out little hollows in the gravel and covering them with icy-pole sticks to make caves. It took a lot of time to build. And then we used to flick the cherry 'bobs' like alleys but the rules are beyond me now – it was just one of those wonderful things we did.

GD Did you also play 'Alleys'?
RQ Yes I played 'Alleys', all sorts of 'Alleys', the sort of 'Alleys' where you draw a circle and try and knock the other fella's alleys out, and we had one very complex game that involved five shallow holes being excavated. There was a central hole and four holes at the corners and it wasn't big – oh, perhaps two foot square at the most – and again I've no idea why we did it or what the rules were, but you had to progress round the holes and end in the middle.

And there were 'Tom Bowlers' [large marbles] dropping from great heights trying to smash other people's alleys – as I say, a lot of violence involved in our games.

My father used to regale me with stories of when he was young, of a boy who had three four-gallon tins full of alleys, and this was again one of my great hopes – to become *such* a good 'Alley' player that I would corner the alley market. But fine-motor coordination and manual dexterity eluded me: I was a gangly, awkward sort of lad.

GD Did you have a lot of marbles though, yourself?
RQ No, I never could do that. I lost a lot, but I always maintained enough to be able to participate. There was a lot of alley stealing and black market alley dealing, and then there'd be a lot of tearful little boys with their little homemade alley-bags empty, wandering round the schoolyard crying. Tough, very tough.

GD Did your alleys have special names, apart from the 'Tom Bowler'?
RQ There were 'blood-reals' and 'taws' and 'cat's eyes'. 'Blood-reals' were pretty popular and my favourites. 'Cat's eyes', with the swirl of colour through them – I always got the impression that they were a relatively modern invention, and I don't think my father, for instance, probably would have had 'cat's eyes' the way we had 'cat's eyes', but then I may just be being precious about that. Some kids used to bring ball-bearings to school and they would crush a 'bullseye' or a 'blood-real'.

GD What do 'blood-reals' look like?
RQ They were just a white marble with swirls of surface colour. They weren't transparent, they were opaque, and they were the ones that I preferred. I still don't like 'cat's eye' marbles.

GD They're not real marbles?
RQ Not by my way of thinking, no. Actually, some time ago, just in some little tiny op shop, I found some very, very old marbles, perhaps 100 years old. There's nothing flashy about them, they're just spheres of stone. They had their origins in the old-fashioned way of sealing glass bottles with a marble. My heart really goes back to first causes and I prefer those sorts of things to this flashy new glass technology.

GD Rod, what sort of things did you like doing best when you were a child?
RQ Oh what did I like doing best, what did I like doing best? Look, there were so many things I liked doing. As I said, it was seasonal and it was also dependent on the weather. One of the great things was for it to rain very, very heavily, preferably on your way home from school, so you could get unbearably wet in your mother's terms, but very sweetly wet in your own terms, and float twigs and leaves and icy-pole sticks down the gutter and have races.

Where I was in Coburg we had access to the storm-water drain system of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, who, in their wisdom, made them big enough for children to run up and down. We used to go down there for hours and miles and pretend to be all sorts of things and have wonderful adventures in the drains.
There was no traffic around and people didn't worry about what their children were getting up to because there weren't any nasty strangers about so we could be gone all day and no-one would worry.

In the drains we were out of sight and under everybody's feet in the dark. We had candles because we couldn't afford torches. The drains were lined with slogans from different gangs – signs saying, 'The pirates were here' or 'Keep out. The pirates'. It was a popular place to be. But that was dry weather, obviously – in the wet weather we were above ground floating sticks.

GD Who did you pretend to be?
RQ I don't know, spies or bank-robbers, that sort of thing. Things like 'Cowboys and Indians' were very popular. Movie-inspired role-playing. To get a Davy Crockett hat and a rifle and perhaps an Indian tent, if you were lucky, for Christmas, was the best.

We had an old chicken coop in our backyard *sans* chooks – the chooks had all been eaten by then, so the chook-house became a submarine or a Lancaster bomber or a cavalry fort and the Indians lived in our apricot tree. I was literally hung by the neck one day from the apricot tree because I chose

to play Geronimo. We were intense about it. It had to be done properly because you saw it at the pictures every Saturday afternoon. I’d still be there if my mother had not come looking for me for lunch.

Oh, and we had up the street a derelict house, and once it was pulled down that became a sort of adventure playground, and the bits and pieces of the house that were left were used to make cubbies and things, and I can remember it had two enormous palm trees, those date palm trees, and one of them, I guess 30, 40, 50 foot tall, very big, big old palm tree, and one of our favourite games was to go down there with an axe and chop a bit of it away every day, and take turns ‘til we couldn’t hold the axe any more, and we actually felled it, with no thought of the house next door which was only six feet away. Oh, just one of those things that you did. And then once we felled it we chopped it up into bits and rolled it round and put galvanized iron over it and we used to throw bricks at one another. That was a good game too.
There was a lot of potentially lethal stupidity. How any of us survived is beyond me really, and why we aren’t scarred and battered I really don’t know.

Football always was popular and cricket, all forms of cricket from ‘French Cricket’ in the backyard to playing cricket with a pencil. You’d scratch the six faces of a lead pencil and write 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, which were the runs, on one end of the pencil. On the other end you’d write ‘no ball’, ‘out’, ‘LBW’ and ‘caught’ for the bowling. It was a variation on that commercially-available Test Match game where you’d slide the little disks around and come up with runs and numbers and wickets. We’d play that on a rainy day in a bedroom somewhere for ages.

‘French Cricket’ in the backyard and then cricket in the street with an orange box or whatever there was, always with a home-made bat and a tennis ball. A tennis ball was the most prized possession after a football. Anybody who had a proper leather football was pretty much king of the castle. And thinking back you can see why that expression ‘taking your bat and ball and going home’ has such implications for people, because there was invariably only one tennis ball, the rest were up in the guttering of houses or down drains or over the fence of the lady who we all knew was a witch, and if we went in there we’d not only not get our ball back but we’d probably be turned into mushrooms.

I was eight when the Olympic Games were here and we staged our own Olympic Games every year. We’d do things like run around the block 20 times for the marathon and four times for the mile, and we’d build our own high-jumps and get old cushions and things to land on and there was the long-jump and the javelin and discus and shot-put and all sorts of things. This was just in the street with perhaps six or eight kids. We’d have gold medals made out of milk bottle tops.

I kept a scrapbook of the Olympic Games, and we had a pantry off the kitchen and I would sit in the pantry for three or four hours a night going through the *Women’s Weekly* and the *Herald* and the *Sun* and the *Sporting Globe* and the local paper and everything and getting tickets from people who’d been to events and putting all those things in the scrapbook. We also dabbled a bit in theatre and puppet shows.

Oh, and what else did we do? Shoplifting was very popular too as a child, and the creek. We had the Moonee Ponds Creek, I guess a mile and a half or two miles away. It’s now a concrete drain, the great triumph of man over nature. But in those days it was scrubby and not necessarily polluted but muddy, and a bit of a guttery sort of creek. And people were capable of drowning in there. I fell in once and everybody laughed at me while I went under for the third time, but I can remember carving my own yacht and building a yacht from a piece of balsa wood and taking that down there and sailing a yacht on the creek. And yabbying with a piece of meat and a piece of string. I never caught a yabby but we knew they were there.

We were able to roam around a fair bit, and yes, my mother was pretty freewheeling about those sorts of things. I can remember other kids being whacked

with a jockey-whip from the top of the street when we got home late all the way into the back door of the houses, and they had terrible times. I used to go and hide between the back shed and the back fence and nobody could get me in there, and I felt safe.

Oh what else did we do? Ludo and Snakes and Ladders and Draughts and Checkers and cards and Monopoly, all those sorts of indoor, rainy day or when you're sick, those sorts of games.

GD Were there indoor games that were homemade, or that you invented yourself, that you can think of?
RQ Oh, that I invented myself?

GD Well you or...did you have brothers and sisters?
RQ Sawing through the leg of the kitchen table? Yes I did. Well, one of the big games was teasing your sisters – that was very popular. Oh yes, I had an older brother and two younger sisters, but my older brother was seven years older than me, so he was always sort of removed from me in relation to game playing and interests, and sisters being sisters, well you just had nothing in common with them at all and no point even discussing that.

I was a very solitary child at home in a lot of ways. I read a lot. I used to read all those junior encyclopaedias and the History of Man in one volume. I read and read and read.

The only games I can remember inside the house were either card games – there was a lot of social card playing in my family – and things like 'Hidey' and pencil cricket.

Oh, and one of the other games was a game called 'Fly', which was played with five sticks that were placed slightly more than the width of a foot apart to begin with, and the object was to put your alternate foot between each stick and then as you exited the last stick you leapt as far as you could, and then you had the option to move one of the sticks to the position where you'd landed. And so through that process the sticks got further and further and further apart, and the contest was to see who could stretch out and be able to leap all the sticks, and sometimes they seemed to go from one end of the street to the other, and I was second best at that in the school. In my street I was best at it, so I really liked that game very, very much. It was one of those things that I could succeed at, and other things like football and cricket I was just terrible at.

‘Barley’, ‘barleys’ and ‘BAR-lees’: truce terms among children and adults

Graham Seal

A truce term is a word or short phrase used primarily among children to signal that a respite from play is necessary for one (or more) of the players. Such terms are found throughout the English-speaking world (and elsewhere) and include *fainites*, *crosses*, *kings* and *pax* (United Kingdom),[1] *pegs* and *nibs* (New Zealand),[2] *exes*, *kings*, *kings exe*[3] and, more recently, *time-out* (USA).[4] The use of a truce term may also be accompanied by a gesture, such as crossing the fingers, or holding up one or both thumbs. Reasons permitting temporary suspension of play may include being out of breath or otherwise incapacitated, and having to go to the toilet. A special location in which to either call for a truce and/or to go to when granted may also be a feature of this custom, and there may also be a time limit as to the duration of the truce.

One truce term that is especially widely used in Britain and Australia is ‘barley’ or ‘barleys’.[5] In the findings of the Australian project *Childhood, Tradition and Change*,[6] for instance, ‘barley’, or one of its many variations, appears as a place of safety and respite, such as a particular location or section of a location, commonly agreed among the members of a children’s play community. A special section of playground fencing was the ‘barley place’ in one school. Sometimes a limit of one minute was the agreed time for a truce. The custom seems to have been restricted to chasing and hiding games, such as ‘Scarecrow Tiggy’, ‘Octopus Tiggy’, ‘C C Lock Forever’ and ‘Tips’. Further research is needed, but there is sufficient evidence in the project to indicate the continued use of a 500-600 year-old British term in modern Australian children’s play traditions.

Folklorists and linguists have long been interested in the longevity, persistence and diffusion of truce terms, and their use, though much more research needs to be conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of their significance. The remainder of this article looks primarily at the use of ‘barley’ and its variants as a truce term in Australia, with some comparisons elsewhere. It also looks briefly at the use of the term by adults who may employ the term learned in their childhoods to indicate that they have had, heard or seen enough of something – usually something unpleasant.

‘Barley’ is used throughout mainland Britain in many variations, including *barley-bay*, *barley-bees*, *barlow* or *barrels*. The earliest literary reference to its use appears to be a 14th century poem, highlighting the well-documented longevity of children’s traditions. Lexicographers and other scholars have traced the continual existence of the term and the customary behaviour that accompanies it since then. Given its wide provenance in Britain and the nature of Australian settlement, it is reasonable to assume that ‘barley/s’ and possibly its variants arrived here with the children of British convicts and settlers and so is likely to be among our earliest linguistic continuities with the British origins of modern Australian society. Folklorists and other researchers have noted the use of the term and its variants[7] in various parts of Australia,[8] particularly, it seems, in Western Australia

where there is a high proportion of British and British-descended people in the population.

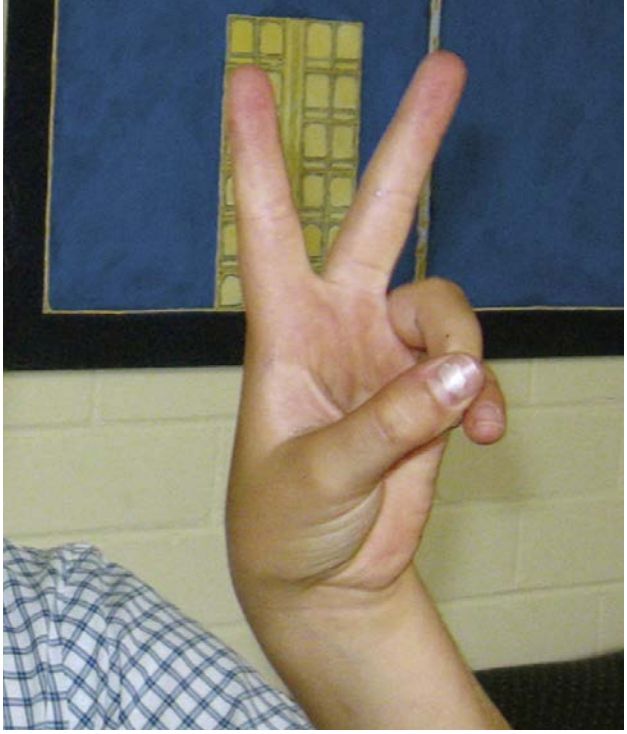
However, in Western Australia one sometimes hears the term – usually as 'barlees' – in the conversation of adults. In these contexts, 'barlees' (with no accompanying gesture) and pronounced 'BAR-lees', with an additional emphasis on the final syllable, may be used to indicate that the speaker has 'had enough' of something, usually something that they consider to be excessive, irritating or otherwise unpleasant. Another use for the term is to indicate that the speaker considers something to be too difficult to contemplate or to carry out.

I have experienced a number of instances of these usages employed by one adult male Western Australian when recounting occupational experiences he felt were excessive enough to be worthy of communication, usually ending with the formulation, or some variation of it: 'BAR-lees, mate, that was enough for me.' On other occasions, the same person would deploy the term more generally as an indication that he was disgusted with a particular situation, person or dialogue. This particular speaker also used the term in both jocular and serious conversations.

I have heard other male and female West Australians of approximately the same age group (40s-50s in the year 2000) occasionally use the term in similar ways, so it does not seem to be simply an idiosyncrasy of one individual's speech.

The obvious difference between the childhood and adult uses of the term is that the adult uses are extensions of the truce notion, rather than truce terms in themselves. No behavioural modification takes place among the adults involved in the conversation in which 'BAR-lees' occurs, unlike the children's practice which involves communal obedience (ideally) to an unwritten rule of play. In regard to genre, the adult use of the term is restricted to speech and does not involve any designated customary place, action or gesture (apart from the occasional throwing of the hands into the air in disgust and/or amazement).

This is an interesting and, as far as I am aware, previously unnoticed transfer of a childhood term



Hand signal for 'pause'
Photographer – Judy McKinty. Source – Judy McKinty

and its essential meanings into adult folklife and discourse. It seems to be a relatively unusual occurrence. Can others throw any further light, or should we just call 'barleys'?

Graham Seal is a folklorist and cultural historian who has conducted fieldwork and research in various parts of Australia and Britain. He is Professor of Folklore and Director of the Australia-Asia-Pacific Institute at Curtin University, Perth.

FOOTNOTES

1 Iona & Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); K. & S. [Kate & Steve Roud], 'Truce Terms in Croydon, Surrey, 1988', *Talking Folklore* 7 (1989), 15-20; Peter Trudgill, *Dialects of England* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999)

2 Winifred & Laurie Bauer, 'Playing with Tradition', *Journal of Folklore Research* 44, no. 2-3, May 2007), 185-203

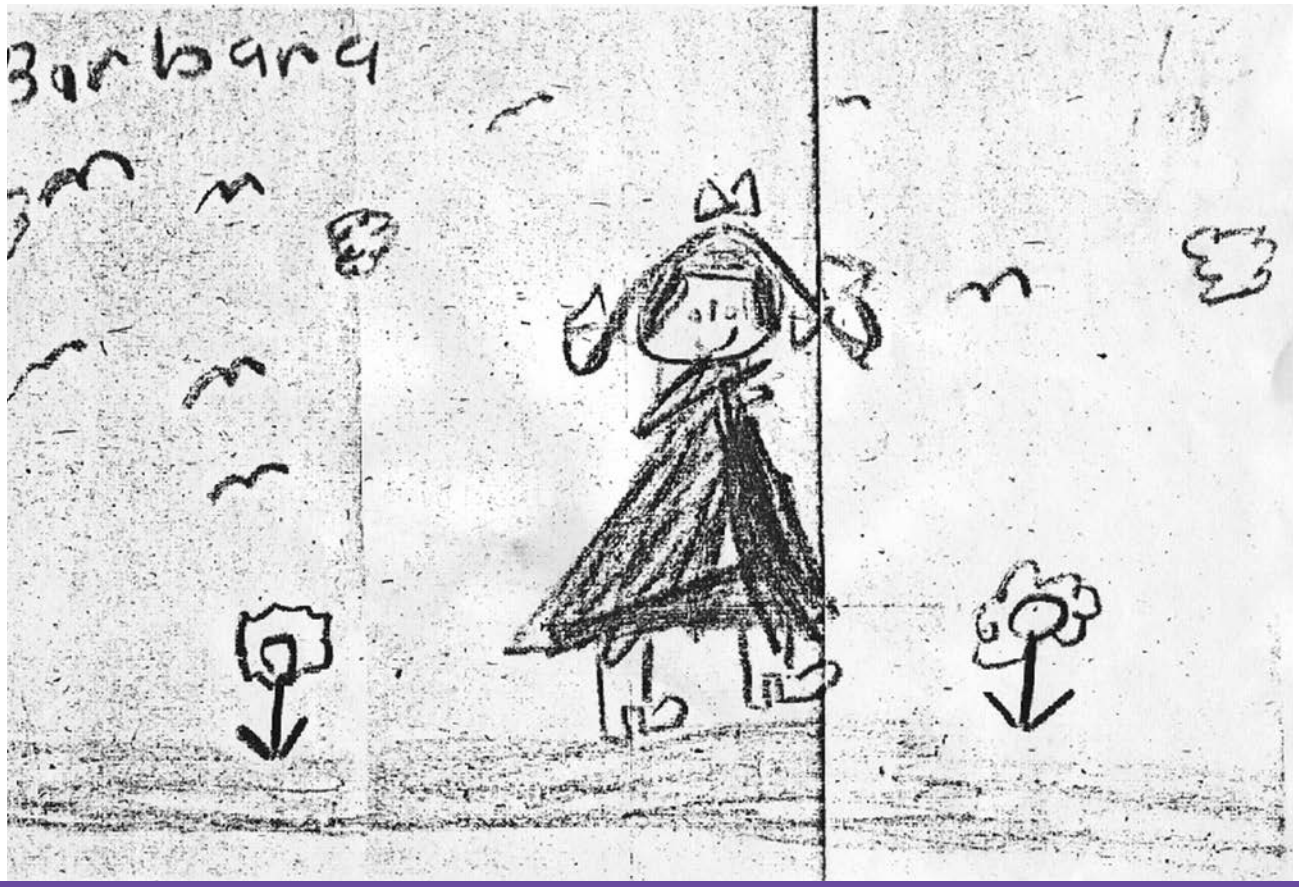
3 Herbert & Mary Knapp, 'Tradition and Change in American Playground Language', *The Journal of American Folklore* 86, no. 340, (University of Illinois Press on behalf of American Folklore Society) (April–June 1973), 131–141

4 In a similar updating process, the Australian *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project documented the use of 'pause', as on a DVD player, replacing 'barleys' at one school

5 Also confirmed by miscellaneous weblog entries

6 See http://ctac.esrc.unimelb.edu.au/resources.html for the project report, 2011, and access to the public database of the project

7 June Factor, assisted by Siobhan Hannan, *Kidspeak: a dictionary of Australian children's words, expressions and games* (Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2000) page 9 includes, as well as the (presumably) primary term 'barleys', 'bar', 'barred for life' and 'on bar'



War, reality and fantasy: the imagination of Belfast children during the Troubles of the 1980s

Valerie Yule

Dr Valerie Yule has worked extensively as a child psychologist in Australia, Scotland and England. The following is an extract from her manuscript *Inside Children's Minds: Children's Stories Told (Not Written) about their Drawings (2011)*. Children's storytelling is an important aspect of their imaginative, playful lives and often recreates and transforms the everyday life of the storyteller, however disturbed. These stories were transcribed by Dr Yule and are reproduced verbatim.

An Environment Of Terrorism

There's the smoke, the house could go on fire then it blows up.
A bomb, a bomb go into the house and everything is starting to blow up and they have to go to another house.
It blows up and they have to go, and their other one doesn't blow up.
There were four bombs, then there was black grass.
Our house blow up
and this was the dead grass, and that was the cross writing.
Story by Colin, aged 5, Protestant school

When children have grown up never knowing anything but insecurity and violence, there must be concern about how they are growing up and how they are affected.

A collection of stories was told to me and my student, Cathy Lonergan, by 74 children in Belfast in Northern Ireland in the 1980s. A quarter of these children, both boys and girls, talked directly in their stories about bombing or the military. While the war stories by English, Scottish and Australian boys tend to be just like big football games, with no awareness of pain or aftermaths, the Irish boys' war stories tended to detail what happened afterwards, too, and what happens to people.

Asked to draw anything they liked, most children drew the sorts of pictures children draw all over the world – houses with flowers and gardens and birds, and smiling little girls, and cars and planes and ships. Sometimes, however, the birds turned out to be bombs and the stories told about the pictures might be rather different. Their observable real-life experiences were mixed with what might be recognised as their psychological experiences of that world and what they tried to make out of it.

You see, there's cars and buses and a wee lad walking across the road and there's birds and a helicopter and a searchlight – It's the army, and…mm… there's a caravan and…mm… There's a house and gunmen and wee lads throwing stones at the buses and burnin' them and the Brits come and there's birds and a school…
Then the rain's gonna start and there's gonna be a helicopter that crashed in the building…A man owns the helicopter.
Story by Eamon, aged 6, Catholic school

He is walking along the street and there was a bomb scare, and everybody was running away from it, and he ran with them, and he is just getting out of the area when it exploded, and he was suffering from shock and he had to get brought by the police to the ambulance so they could get away from the crowd and he had to stay in hospital for a long time in a special ward of his own so he wouldn't disturb any patients.
And he was quiet and could get all the sleep he wanted, and there was only a few visitors allowed in. When he was allowed out, he had hardly any fear left in him about the bomb that went off, and went about doing his business as usual…(And what happened then?)
Might be he felt very strange, and when he woke up might be shouting out and would need all the quiet he could get.
Story by James, 10, Protestant school

(Why should children know what it is like to be shell-shocked?)

The wider world tends to interest boys, but little Irish girls brought war scenes into their stories because for them they were part of the ordinary domestic environment. However, the 10-year-old girls avoided direct references – although they had an unusually high proportion of violence in the adventure stories they made up. Small children's narratives could be disconcerting in their mixture of their own everyday with the stock features of fairy-tales.

There's these bombs coming down from all over the sky, and there's people standing in the rain, and then the wicked

witch came and said, 'I'll get you'. And the sky was ready to fall, and there were people in the house…and…mm mm… the grass grew bigger and bigger, and then the sun and the clouds grew black
(And what happened then?)
mm mm…then the stars went away… and mm…then the trees started to fall and the children ran into the house and the chimley fell and tumbled down over the children and mm mm…then, then, the stars came out and the wicked witch flew away…And that's all.
Story by Ursula, aged 6, Catholic school

You see, there was this…mm…they were…mm…See, they had a car and they were getting it fixed an all cos it blew up, And they went to the garage and get it fixed up like it was bran new an all and then they went home and had something to eat and then they went to collect their wee girl from school
And then they all went back home…(And what happened then?)
mm…and then the wee girl left school… and that's it.
Story by Anita aged 5, Catholic school

Sometimes the events of the story were added into the picture as the tale was told – the bombs or the smoke or the soldiers were added to the original drawing of house or figure, but not always. The way that things happened in Belfast could seem to grow out of the picture, or they could break into a story, or be part of the way that a common theme for children was treated by a Belfast child. Ten-year-olds like stories about smugglers and secret plans. When an Irish boy told such a story, first the victims called the police, and then the police called the army. At all ages, boys tell stories about car crashes; boys in Northern Ireland may automatically associate cars with explosions.

These are cars. They're gonna crash. They're not working.
They break. The cars'll blow up
And the army'll come and put them in a lorry and take them to the factory.
The people are dead
And the ambulance comes. That's all.
Story by Peter, aged 5, Catholic school

Anything could lead on to explosions.

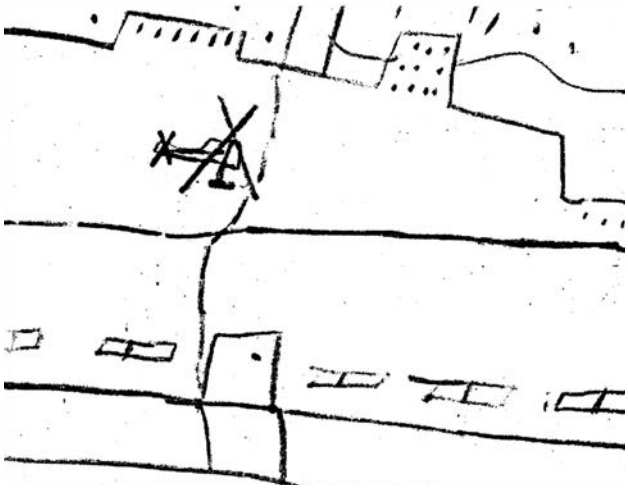
I wanna draw you.
It has a head and feet and you and legs and feet and things…hair…
(Tell me a story about the picture.)
She went out and she made her tea and her had a medal on – I don't know what else.
Do you know whose house blew up? Teresa Kennedy's, and all the potatoes were thrown everywhere and they couldn't find them
And the army came…and…That's all.
Story by Harry, aged 5, Catholic school

Nightmares

The next two stories show how for five-year-olds real events might transmute into dream-like versions under the pressure of intense anxiety and feelings of insecurity. In Mairead's story, she can invoke the family and try to feel secure again, but in Sinead's story, the disaster extends and becomes cosmic, even though apparently the fireman came and put out the fire. Australian children suffering from family disruption or with their own intrapsychic disturbances can also tell stories like hers, where the disaster can reflect personal unhappiness or anger that is more dangerous than a real event that is faced with inner and family resources.

This is me down here in the grass, and up here the sky and the sun.
I'm here, and mammy's in here…and I forgot to do the windies in the house and all the birds is here.
Mammy is in the house, and I saw hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of birds in the sky
And they all came down, down

and attacked, and all the people ran and screamed,
and then a man came and…I thought it was Daddy but it wasn't Daddy,
and Mammy was in the house calling me for dinner
and then my Daddy came and then my Aunty came and we had a party.
It was really awfully nice of her to come you know,
and then it started to rain…
and I have to go home now.
Mairead, aged 5, Catholic school



The house is getting blew up.
The firemen come. They all put out the fire.
And the trees are burnt as well
And the flag's gettin burnt and the chimley and so is the door gettin burnt
and the sky is getting burnt
and so is the sun getting burnt
and the apples are gettin burnt. (And what happens?)
The walls of the house are getting burnt
And the roof's getting burnt and it's blazing with fire…I…
(How does your story end?)
The smoke's getting burnt.
Sinead, aged 6, Catholic school

Destruction

Forty per cent of the Belfast children told stories about destruction – 85% of the 10-year-olds. This is an exceptionally high proportion of destruction stories. Their stories also had more themes of crime, and references to policemen, firemen, doctors and ambulances, which to them were as much a part of the Belfast Troubles as the bombs and the killing.

Small children tended to talk about destruction of household gear and things that were not working in the house. Older children were even more likely than boys in other Western countries to talk about crashes and smashes in the cities, and these themes were general, and often quite apart from the socio-political scene.

I've drawn a tap. (Tell me a story about your picture.)
The tap broked down and you can't work it, and the water's not running.
And the woman had to phone up the plumber,
and he went to see what happened on the roof and couldn't get the big black thing – I think it's called a water tank, isn't it?
And he couldn't get the wires out and he called the fire brigade an all,
and they all came and climbed on the roof, and pulled it out and put a big white thing in,
so the tap was working again…I think that's all.
Michael, aged 6, Catholic school

I forgot to make up a story…mm mm…
That's a boy called Tommy. I'll draw a black house, no, green – this doesn't work, I'll use red, and the windies are gonna break, all the windies and the door handles broke. and he comes to this cottage and there's no-one there – just a wee windie and a pool, and he swims, and there's a ditch full of frogs and then he comes to muck and no sooner has he walked in the water than

he sinks…That's all. (And then what happens?) *That's all.*
Enda, aged 5, Catholic school

Irish children did not only write about destruction

Like disadvantaged children in Australia, the Irish children amid war had a higher proportion of magic fantasy in their stories than other children, taking developmental stages into account. An unreal world can supply alternative satisfactions as well as symbols to express anxieties.

It may be too, that whereas the rest of the Western child-world seems over-full of monsters, in Ireland there may still be fairies. Although rare even in young Australian's stories, fairies were still popular with older Irish girls.

When my mammy and I went to a castle and we saw a princess. The princess was at the door, and I was picking apples from a tree near it. I saw a bird on the ground and picked it up and threw bread for it. Then Daddy came and we went for a walk and a picnic outside with Daddy. And I picked a flower for my mammy outside…and that's all. It was brilliant so it was…It was so sunny.
Mardy, aged 6, Catholic school

Once there was this wee girl…and her garden was really nice. And she used to play an all, and she used to go out and pick flowers. And one night she dreamed a really good dream about the good fairy. The good fairy told her about the fairies in the land and how good they were to her. And the queen was rich and the king was rich, and mm… All the fairies and princesses were very happy…and mm…mm…One day they went to the park and they played games and there was a roundabout so there was, and they all went on it, and they all had great fun, so they did…and mm… They all went back to fairyland and had their supper and then they went to bed, And when they woke up, they felt powerful great, so they did.
Clara, aged 6, Catholic school

There were two elves in Elfland. One was called Elfy, and there is a King and Queen fairy, and there lived a King, and each year he tells them to make something useful. And there is a toad, and he is very ugly, and he doesn't know what to do, and everyone else is busy making things, and some of the elves, such as Elfy, are making scarves out of spiders' webs, and the toad makes nice blue paint for the Queen's carriage to be painted with something useful, and he drops it, and he is trying to think of something else. And there is nothing else in his house but a big toadstool, a one-legged stool that he uses for his seat, and wooden table, And he asks his friends, and all the elves and pixies, what he can take with them, and they say, take something from the house. and so he goes and takes the toadstool up. And the King looks at everyone's things, and he looks at the toadstool, and the toad tells him it's for all the elves and fairies, when they have a picnic, they can have a stool for a shelter in the woods, And the King gives him a crown, the prize for the best and cleverest idea, the useful idea.
Nicola, aged 10, Protestant school

Some memories and customs of Dunedin, the capital of Scottish Southern New Zealand, 1938 to 1942

John Ryan

I have been out of the country of my birth from young manhood, but my early years there seem to remain even more clearly, despite the passing years.

I still have many sharp memories from when I was a child at primary school in Dunedin, just before and at the beginning of World War II. I remember the primary school yard and the behaviour of my peers there, and certain distinctive characteristics of the society of the time stand out clearly:

> the almost total and deadly public silences at the weekends in a still formally Presbyterian city, for Dunedin was a Church settlement from 1848, despite the roistering days that had come in the last third of the 19th century with the rich discoveries of gold not so far inland;
>
> the continual, powerful and haunting sound of the bagpipes from high hills and open spaces, particularly in the early mornings and in the twilight evenings in warmer weather;
>
> the ribbing and other difficulties that Catholic and Chinese children experienced in largely Protestant state schools;
>
> the arrival of so many American servicemen in 1942–43, and especially the way in which the Other Ranks on battleships had strange trousers which were laced up at the back, with no front unbuttoning possible: how they relieved themselves much intrigued us; and the way in which 'first-footing' – the arrival of the first person after midnight on 31 December – varied in the hill suburbs overlooking the large harbour. There was the traditional piece of coal brought by the stranger, and the cup of wine or glass of beer for the tall, dark first visitor to the house. There was also the practice of what one of my peers called 'collectin' gates', a custom duly explained to my mother by one who practised the art with much glee. It consisted of noting houses' front gates that could be somehow lifted off their hinges, and then moving them from a wealthy house to another, more modest house and replacing them with the gates from the modest house. This change was the occasion of much scurrilous mirth.

Another recollection is the singing of a jingle about Mussolini:

There's a war in Abyssinia
Won't yer come?
All you'll need is ammunition
And a gun.
Mussolini will be there,
Firing peanuts in the air.
There's a war in Abyssinia
Won't yer come?

While I did not understand the reference to the Italian raiding campaigns in Eritrea-Somaliland before my teens, the words are as clear in my ears as though I had heard them yesterday. I have never been able to find the jingle in works on childhood or folklore in New Zealand.*

I also heard the poor singing the English jingle about putting Tony Eden in a 'thirty shillings suit', although I did not understand that derisive verse of 'Munich times' till much later.

The last and more general recollection is of the strange way in which older men who had fought in World War I enlisted and were accepted – usually for 'Home Service' – after lowering their age and dyeing their hair. Then, entry to the armed service achieved, and perhaps back from the 'Islands campaign', they would suddenly look much older and more drawn as they 'put up' their old campaign ribbons on their battledress jackets. I also imagine that they were then content for their hair to be the grey it should have been, without the suspicious inky blackness of hitherto.

These constitute some memories of Dunedin – random, but authentic.

* Editors' note: In her childhood recollections for the Children's Museum's 'Talking Chair', Gwenda Beed Davey sang a version of this ditty which had Mussolini throwing bombs up in the air.

John Ryan is Professor of Folklore and Heritage at the University of New England, NSW and editor of Australian Folklore

Celebrating 30 Years

Last year we celebrated 30 years of *Play and Folklore* (see *Play and Folklore* no. 55, April 2011). On 22 October a gathering to mark the occasion was generously hosted at her home in Ivanhoe by Mary Featherston, a leading designer and a founder of Melbourne's first Children's Museum, in Museum Victoria. The gathering also recognized the on-line publication of the final report of the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project, a four-year, nationwide study of children's playlore funded by the Australian Research Council.

Dr June Factor speaking at the celebration
Photographs courtesy Judy McKinty

Play and Folklore

Backyard cubby house built from wood offcuts, Orbost, Victoria, 1955
Source – Judy McKinty

BOOK LAUNCH: CARLA PASCOE

Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered: Childhood in 1950s Australia

On 17 November 2011, a new publication exploring some of the special places of childhood in the 1950s was launched at the University of Melbourne. The book was written by Dr Carla Pascoe, who was closely involved with the Australian Children's Folklore Collection as assistant curator while researching this topic for her PhD. The following are edited speeches from the book launch – the first presented by Dr Richard Gillespie, Head of the History and Technology Department of Museum Victoria, where the Australian Children's Folklore Collection is held, and the second by Dr Pascoe. Both extracts describe places where children play and some of the changes that have occurred there.

Richard Gillespie

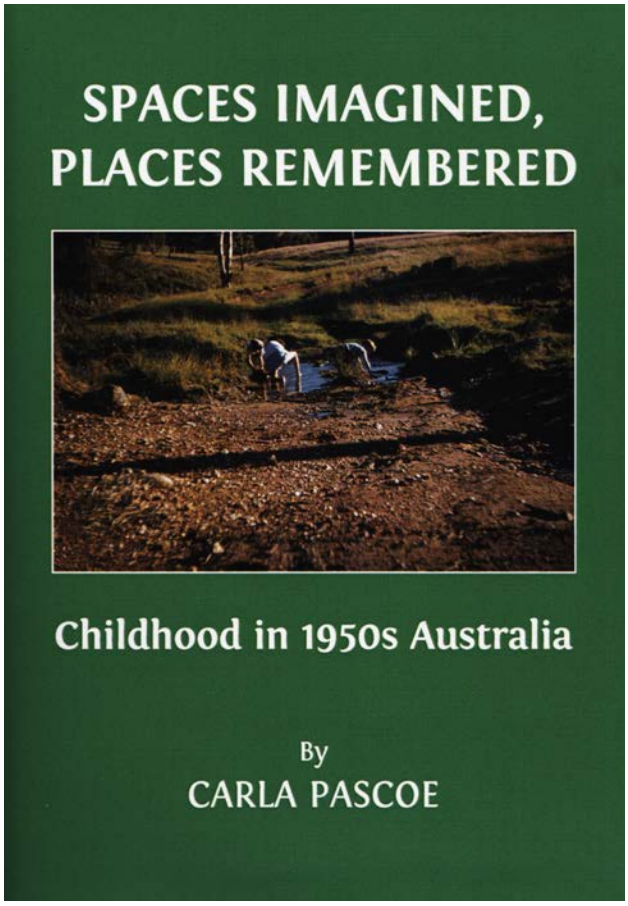
I am very pleased that Carla asked me to speak at the launch of her book, *Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered: Childhood in 1950s Australia*. Carla's book is an outcome of her PhD research, which she completed in 2009.

Carla's research area arose from a PhD scholarship jointly offered by the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne and Museum Victoria. The Museum and Australian Centre have collaborated on several research projects over the past decade, including some with a strong interest in the history of childhood and children's folklore.

In talking to Carla about her research, I made the mistake once too often of talking about my own experiences in 1950s North Balwyn, and before I knew it I was an interview subject. North Balwyn was then on the edge of the eastern suburbs. A creek worked its way down the end of our street and was a great place to catch tadpoles, and a few years later have a surreptitious cigarette. A mile or so away were the Bulleen floodplains of the Yarra, where we could test out a friend's air rifle or swim in the Yarra.

The creek was replaced with concrete drains and filled in while I was still at primary school, becoming tennis courts. The Bulleen flood plains are now the sports grounds for several private schools: both clear examples of the closing of wild places and the formalisation of play that Carla observes in her book.

Children could make the neighbourhood their own, creating a childhood space that often only had minimal adult or parental control, that worked within the gaps and avoided oversight by parents, school teachers and watchful neighbours...



Carla Pascoe

Take yourself back to the middle years of childhood, roughly primary school age. When you see yourself in your mind's eye as a child, where are you located? What were the places that were significant or special for you? What was your favourite place to be in? It might be indoors or outdoors. It might be a place to play or a place to be alone.

Human geographers and environmental psychologists have asked scores of people this question, and interestingly, their answers are often similar. People talk about cubbies, bedrooms, tree houses, closets, attics, beaches, forests and parkland. Many of the examples people give are natural places. Almost always they are places where children can have some sense of control of their environment. Sometimes these places might appear dirty, messy or dangerous to adults.

The other interesting thing to note is that we can often remember the special places of childhood with startling clarity. Childhood memories are the basis of our sense of self and the places of childhood act like containers for those memories.

It was these kinds of observations that snagged my interest during this project, and retained my fascination throughout the long years of research and writing. This book began when I received a PhD scholarship funded by Museum Victoria and the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne to study childhood in the 1950s.The scholarship grew from the research notes of Dorothy Howard, an American folklorist who visited Australia in the mid-1950s to study children's play. Howard carefully noted the hopscotch patterns chalked on pavement, the secret language of playing marbles and the intricate designs woven in string games. But the thing that fascinated me most in her archive (which is housed in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria) was her discussion of the ways that space influenced games. She noted, for example, that 'Playways in Australia are changing as play space becomes more and more congested and disappears in city areas, and as open paddocks for unsupervised play become well-groomed playing

fields for organised athletic activities...'[1]

From these observations I determined to retrieve from the past the environments of 1950s children. But I was intrigued by something else as well. There seemed to be a sudden explosion of discussion amongst post-war adults about what were ideal environments for children. This generation of parents had grown up in the shadow of the 1930s Depression and suffered through the fear and deprivation of the Second World War. They longed desperately for a peaceful, prosperous future for their children.

Urban planners of the fifties tried to protect children from the perceived dangers of the city by creating playgrounds and schools, rebuilding older neighbourhoods seen as slums and designing spacious streets and quarter-acre blocks in suburbia. Architects turned to modernism, believing that the space and light of open planning would create more harmonious homes for families and better learning environments for students. Yet the world in which they sought to realise these ambitions was not as stable or as comfortable as we tend to think. More decisively, post-war adults were battling to make concrete these ideals in the context of a housing crisis and a population boom.

In the midst of these pressures urban planners struggled to keep up with providing adequate parkland, transport, shopping and schools to Melbourne's burgeoning population. With construction materials and labour in short supply, post-war houses were often smaller and humbler than desired. Education authorities were forced to shelve their model school designs and use prefabricated classrooms in a desperate attempt to keep up with the growing school age population.

When I interviewed baby boomers who grew up in the 1950s I discovered something even more interesting. Often what children valued was very different to what parents, teachers and planners thought was good for them. Inner-city children relished playing in laneways and factories, whilst suburban kids created games in and around creeks, construction sites and streets. Despite the

Contemporary cubby made from bushes on a vacant allotment, Dawesville, Western Australia, 2009
Photographer – Judy McKinty Source – Judy McKinty

dedicated play areas created by adults inside and outside the home, children seemed to prefer the secret places they created themselves, up a tree or behind the back fence. Similarly in the school ground, the most memorable places for children were behind the shelter shed or the terrain that beckoned just outside the school boundaries.

Whilst my project is historic, its findings have implications for how we plan spaces for children today. In general terms children most appreciate environments which they can in some way discover or fashion for themselves. Places which are presented as completely prepackaged by adults deny children the opportunity of creating their own meaning.

But this is not a nostalgic argument in favour of the good old days. One of the striking things my research revealed was that adults have been worrying for a very long time that childhood isn't the same as it was when they were growing up. A 1956 magazine article worried that 'even the best informed parents can be guilty of cheating their children of their childhood'.[2] And Howard noted in the 1950s that Australian adults were certain that the variety and complexity of children's games had decreased since their youth.[3]

Anxiety around childhood is not new and I don't think we can claim that the spaces of postwar childhoods were somehow more appropriate than today. However, I do want to suggest that children are much more adept at creating their own spaces than we give them credit for.

FOOTNOTES

1 Dorothy Howard, 'Australian "Hoppy" (Hopscotch)', in *Child's Play: Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children*, eds Kate Darian-Smith & June Factor, (Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2005), 82.

2 June Johnson, 'Are you pushing or Guiding Your Children?', *Everywoman's*, September 1956

3 Dorothy Howard, 'Folklore of Australian Children [1965]', in *Child's Play: Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children*, eds Kate Darian-Smith & June Factor, (Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2005), 181.

Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered: Childhood in 1950s Australia
Carla Pascoe
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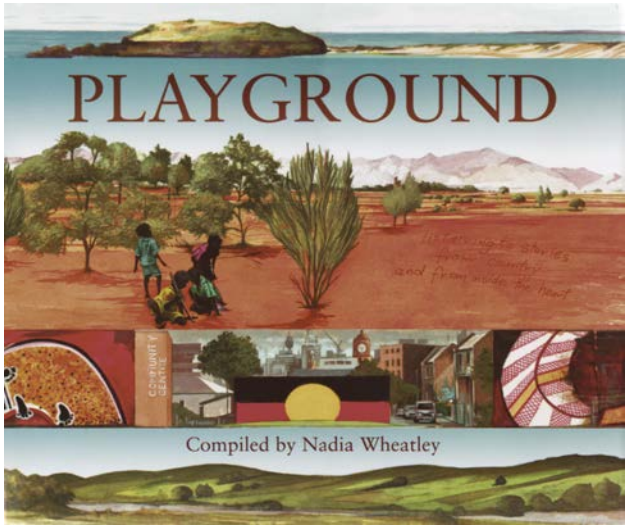
REVIEW:

Playground: listening to stories from country and from inside the heart

Compiled by Nadia Wheatley
Reviewer: Judy McKinty



This is a beautiful book. The design, illustrations, high-quality production and abundance of first-person stories make it a great pleasure to hold and to read.

Playground is an anthology of stories about childhood, told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and compiled from memoirs written by them or recorded as oral histories. Eighty Elders, both past and present, including many prominent community leaders, have contributed their stories and/or art to the book, and 20 Indigenous secondary school students have contributed their own stories of growing up in the 21st century.

The name of the book comes from the words of one of the many people who tell their stories of growing up, living on and caring for the land: 'We use the bush as our school and as our playground.' (page 7)

The stories have 'been loosely arranged to follow the stages in a child's learning journey', beginning with 'Where babies come from', and continuing through chapter headings such as 'Homes', 'Mother tongue', 'First lessons', 'The right way of learning', 'Getting bush tucker', 'Cubbies and toys' and 'Learning through song and ceremony' to 'Growing up'. There are 18 chapters between the Introduction and the Conclusion: open the book anywhere and the words, photos and illustrations on each page instantly engage the eye and the mind. The Conclusion is followed by a section of Notes on the contributors. There is also a short Glossary, describing the meaning of Aboriginal expressions and concepts such as 'country', 'language group', 'law' and 'skin group'. 'Country' is explained as 'the area that is the traditional homeland of their language group. The country comprises all the plants and creatures and people who have lived in that area since the beginning of time. As well, it is the soil and the water and the sky overhead.' (page 97)

The book is essentially about the land as a classroom and playground combined: 'The whole country was a vast outdoor classroom, which contained everything that the First Children needed to know. The land was also their playground. As kids journeyed with their families from place to place, it was often impossible to tell the difference between playing and learning. School was home, and home was the traditional country where the family had been living since the Law began. The teachers were parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins, sisters and brothers.' (page 6)

The stories tell the childhood experiences of people whose lives span the years from the early 1900s to

the present. Within the stories are descriptions of everyday life, beliefs, customs, traditional practices and the way knowledge was passed on both to and by the children. 'Just as there was Law for every aspect of adult life, so children had their own Law, which was passed down from generation to generation. While this set out the rules of the games that they played and the words of their songs and stories, the Law also said that big kids had to look after little kids and show them what to do. Because children cared for each other and knew their own country, they could be given a great deal of freedom to go off and play, without adult supervision.' (page 6) There are descriptions of what seems an idyllic life for a child, with the freedom, space and surroundings that enabled them to play what they liked, uninterrupted by adults. 'In the bush there were trees to climb and creeks to swim in. There was great cover for games of hide-and-seek, and plenty of open space for ball games. Cubbies were built at every campsite, and kids lit their own small fires if they wanted to cook themselves a snack. When the family moved on to a new home, the toys went back into the playground, to be ready for the next visit.' (page 6)

Throughout the book, respect for Indigenous cultures and their connection to the land is evident – there is the sense of a close and lengthy collaboration between the compiler Nadia Wheatley, the illustrator Ken Searle, their Indigenous consultant, advisor and 'critical friend' Jackie Huggins, and the contributors, their families and the various organisations involved in the project.

The book concludes with a list of 'some of the things that the children of this land have been doing for generation upon generation, and which they are still doing today':

Respecting the Elders...
Observing the Law...
Learning from the natural world...
Helping each other...
Sharing the resources...
Giving back to the community...
Having fun together...

Judy McKinty is an independent cultural heritage interpreter and children's play researcher based in Melbourne. She was closely involved in the Aboriginal Children's Play oral history project for the Australian Children's Folklore Collection and has conducted string games workshops in Museum Victoria's Bunjilaka Aboriginal Gallery.

PLAYGROUND: listening to stories from country and from inside the heart
Nadia Wheatley
Illustration and design: Ken Searle
Indigenous consultant: Jackie Huggins
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