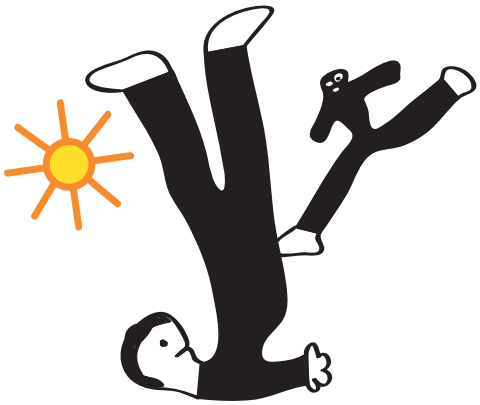
Play and Folklore no. 53, April 2010



Play and Folklore

Recollections of Bendigo High School in the 1950s

Yabbying

Playground Games for the Nintendo Generation

Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth: 20 Years On

Kids Keeping Games Alive

Childhood: Extract from The Prose of Edward Thomas

From the Editors

***Play and Folklore* no. 53**

This issue of *Play and Folklore* focuses on recollections, reviews and reprints. We thank all contributors, and especially thank the Brisbane journalist Michael Lund for donating to the Australian Children's Folklore Collection the original material on games contributed by the Queensland schools who answered his request in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* in June 2009.

Play and Folklore offers heartiest congratulations to Dr Karl Neuenfeldt, whose recordings of Torres Strait music for children were featured in our last issue. Karl Neuenfeldt has been awarded the National Film and Sound Archive's Award for Sound Heritage, for his work in recording traditional music from a number of Torres Strait islands. The award is to be presented in Canberra on 30 April.

Gwenda Beed Davey and June Factor

Play and Folklore

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AT RIGHT Illustration of the Matchbox Game from *Parlour Games for Modern Families*
Illustraor Joe McLaren / Source Scribe Publications

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Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth: 20 Years On

IN MEMORY OF DOROTHY RICKARDS

Judy McKinty

This year marks the 20th anniversary of a remarkable experiment to introduce children's own culture into one of Australia's leading paediatric hospitals. 'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth' was an interactive exhibition of children's traditional play, based at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. The project was supported by a number of organisations, including the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne and the Children's Museum at the then Museum of Victoria. The planning and operation were carried out by an innovative group of people led by Dr June Factor, and volunteers from the Storytelling Guild of Victoria, the Country Women's Association, tertiary colleges and other places came to read stories and play games. Dame Elisabeth Murdoch officially launched 'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth' on 10 April 1990, and it was open during weekdays for a month.

DESIGN OF THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition was located in a disused lecture theatre on the ground floor of the hospital, in an area undergoing renovation. The ceiling had been removed, revealing concrete and brick walls, plumbing, wiring and metal framework.

Designer Mary Featherston transformed the ugly room into a pleasant, informal space – comfortable, welcoming and non-medical – where patients, visitors and hospital staff could play games, read books, listen to stories or just rest and relax away from the clinical environment of the wards. It was

a place where people could forget, for a while, the reasons why they were in the hospital.

> *There's something positive about getting out of the ward.*
> (teacher at the hospital)

Bright red and yellow balloons covered the ceiling. The walls were hung with calico panels, which muted the sounds in the room in contrast to the echoing corridors outside the door. The furnishings were flexible and easily moved to accommodate wheelchairs and trolleys, and adaptable for visitors with different physical capabilities – tables and trolleys with raised edges allowed children in wheelchairs to play with spinning tops, jacks and marbles at a raised level, rather than on the floor. Along one side of the room stood a display cabinet full of traditional toys and games on loan from the Australian Children's Folklore Collection or donated by embassies.

In the centre of the exhibition was a red carpet, with long cushions at the sides, inviting people to sit on the floor. In this soft space, full of interesting things to explore, a two year-old boy crawled for the first time since the accident which sent him to the hospital, interrupting the development of his motor skills. He returned several times and continued to improve in his movement and the use of his limbs. A video of his achievements was borrowed by the hospital and shown to physiotherapists.

TRADITIONAL GAMES

One of the purposes of the exhibition was to introduce children's traditional games and storytelling as a way of bridging the lives of the children inside and outside the hospital. Children in hospital miss out on the day-to-day happenings in the school playground – the latest craze or 'in' joke, the games, lively banter and shared secrets that are part of the culture of childhood. They are isolated from their friends in a clinical environment designed for adult use.

The games available in the exhibition – traditional games like marbles, jacks, string games, paper and pencil games, and spinning tops – were particularly suitable for the purpose. They adapt to different ages and abilities, and patients who visited learned a new game or gained some new skills, which raised their self-esteem and, instead of returning to school feeling they had missed out, they could bring something from hospital to share with their friends. The play activities also allowed children to exercise control and freedom of choice in an environment where these are often taken away from them.

The exhibition was popular with adult visitors too, as traditional games remain in the memory and can often bring back pleasant memories of childhood.

> *I'm surprised I still know how to do it – it's been 30 years! To child: Bet you didn't know I could do that, did you!*
> (parent playing string games)

Hospital staff from different countries shared their childhood versions of the games and loaned toys for display, and a Vietnamese mother demonstrated how she played a game of Jacks with chopsticks and a ball.

The hospital Play Specialists were given specially-developed 'games baskets' filled with traditional games and activities for children who were restricted to the wards. The baskets were donated by Melbourne retailer David Wang. Each day exhibition volunteers and staff visited the wards to share the games with children who were bedridden or otherwise unable to visit the exhibition. The baskets also allowed parents to play with their children and provided interesting and enjoyable activities to help pass the long hours spent in each other's company. Many children do not bring anything from home to do while they are in hospital, or they get bored doing the same thing all the time. Some children told us they were lonely during the day.

The traditional play activities also provided a way of reaching patients who were withdrawn or traumatised. A patient from the Psychiatric ward who had very low self-esteem was reluctant to participate, and needed a lot of encouragement to help make a paper fortune-teller, or 'chatterbox'.

After watching the others for a while she began to join in, and soon took over the writing of playfully rebellious messages under the numbered flaps. She made her own fortune-teller and later learned how to make some string figures, which also helped to build her confidence.

Making friendship bands was a good way to involve some of the adolescent patients who felt they were too old to play the games. It seemed that while their hands were busy they were less self-conscious, and they enjoyed talking while they worked. Several of the older patients made friendship bands for friends, family and other people in the hospital.

Christine Bowen, one of the Play Specialists, when asked what our visit had meant to her, said that it had broadened the scope of activities she would be using with patients, but, more than that, she found it had made her realise that 'these games mean something special to children. They come from within the child. They're not just games, but something basic that children understand. They're simple, and it's this simplicity that makes them so important'. She said that in the hospital they try to keep up with the latest toys so the children won't feel as if they're missing out, but 'the traditional games seem to connect with the children in a way that the others don't'.

READING AND STORYTELLING

Reading and stories were considered to be very important for the patients because they could be temporarily freed from the reality of their illnesses. There was a lot going on in the wards and very little privacy. Reading allowed the children to withdraw into a private world when they needed to. Storytelling was also a good way to involve younger children and those who couldn't play the games. Children's books were donated by publishers and were read eagerly by all ages. In the exhibition, a listening post with headphones and a selection of story tapes was available for complete absorption in a story, and in the wards volunteers read stories to individual children in bed, in intensive care or, in one case, to a girl in a coma.

Puppets were used to tell stories. Finger puppets enabled a volunteer to reach one girl who was quite withdrawn. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was a special favourite, particularly when Dorothy Rickards and June Epstein presented the story to an audience of patients, family members and visitors, illustrating the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly with Dorothy's specially-made puppet. The puppet was also a great favourite among the volunteer storytellers, who used it to tell the story several times. Children also made simple puppets from materials available in the exhibition space.

SURPRISE VISITOR

One of the fourth-year Primary Teaching students from Victoria College, Toorak Campus, brought her pet bantam, Penny, to the hospital. There was great excitement! Everyone took turns at feeding Penny with millet, and Penny obligingly pecked from each little (and big) hand. One boy, about 10, didn't believe there was a chicken in the hospital and thought it was going to be a puppet or someone dressed up. He wheeled his chair up close to the chicken to listen to the story of *Henny Penny*. Penny also visited the wards, and everywhere she went she left little grains of millet on the beds. She left a special gift on one bed – a tiny feather, which was pasted into a little girl's diary.

PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

People heard about the exhibition from radio, television and by word-of-mouth. The transformed lecture theatre became a sort of information exchange with the sharing of games, ideas and childhood memories, the collection of games descriptions and the borrowing of books. The exhibition coordinators also gave short talks to hospital staff on traditional games, storytelling and the importance of play for children's wellbeing.

The hospital Play Specialists were vital to the success of the program, and they were involved from the outset. They brought patients down to the exhibition and used the baskets of games in the wards. Other hospital staff called in to talk about the display, the games and their own childhoods – medical staff and students, administration, catering, domestic services, teachers and workmen involved in the hospital renovations. One painter sneaked

TOP OF ARTICLE (previous page) Amy Saunders and friend making 'Cat's Whiskers' with string
Photographer Judy McKinty

. . .

ABOVE A patient tries his skills with the diabolo, watched by exhibition volunteer Sean McKinty and a young visitor
Photographer Judy McKinty

in every day to try and master the diabolo, and an impromptu marbles tournament took place between a group of fifth year medical students, painters and builders.

It was important to keep faith with the children, to follow up requests and keep promises. In hospital things are always changing – staff rosters, patients being admitted and others leaving – so there was a need for something in the children's lives that was constant and continuing. A boy had one chapter of a serial read to him each day, and we also had 'regular' children who visited often, picking up where they had left off the day before.

NEED FOR SUCH A PROGRAM

Apart from the positive influence on patients' wellbeing, there were a number of common situations where our presence in the hospital was found to be beneficial.

While children are usually sent home from hospital as soon as possible, we found a great need among the longer-term patients and their families to have a place away from the wards where they could relax and talk about the ordinary things that children talk about. The canteen was being used for this purpose – parents took their children there and bought something to eat and drink to fill in time. They were usually pleased to find there was somewhere else to go, and expressed surprise and delight when they entered the exhibition space.

In hospital, the time spent just sitting around and waiting is an ongoing issue for patients and their families. One family of seven children from country Victoria had spent long hours sitting in a waiting room while their parents were with their baby brother:

> *We waited for five hours on Monday.*
> *We got so bored we rearranged the furniture.*
> (12 year-old visitor)

These children, too, were sharing a family anxiety and needed to relieve the tension and boredom of long hours spent waiting in the hospital. They became daily visitors to the exhibition, making themselves at home and borrowing books on overnight loan to fill in time in the evenings at their accommodation nearby.

When family members had to go home and leave a child in the hospital, it was reassuring to them to know that there was someone who would visit in their absence. There were numerous requests from children to 'please come back again.'

One of the nursing staff commented that it was beneficial for patients to have the 'one-on-one' time the volunteers were spending with them, as the nurses had no time to do this, despite recognising the need. Nursing staff began requesting visits from the storytellers and Charge Nurses began asking if we could sit with specific patients. We drew up a visiting list each day, and despatched volunteers to the wards to visit children with particular needs, either for a story, a game, someone to talk with or sometimes just to cuddle them.

The need for such a visiting program within the hospital was mentioned by Dame Elisabeth Murdoch in her speech at the exhibition opening. Dame Elisabeth had herself started a program of games and visits to patients many years earlier but, she said, 'it was swept aside by a wave of professionalism'. One of the Charge Nurses commented that the regular hospital volunteers used to visit the children to read and talk, but they did not do this any more, although the need was still there.

CONCLUSION

Apart from the joy of shared play experiences, 'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth' provided a link between patients, their families, hospital staff at all levels, visitors and the exhibition workers. It was a bridge between the lives of the patients inside and outside the hospital and helped to provide a focus for the children and their families, to relieve the tension of the long hours spent waiting. Having opportunities to make choices, follow their own interests, learn new skills, interact with other people and engage in their own culture positively affected the patients' wellbeing and their experience of being in hospital. The positive benefits were clearly evident in evaluations written by nine of the hospital's Play Specialists at the time.

The exhibition space was informal, non-clinical, child-friendly and child-sized. Apart from being welcoming and uplifting, the soft space was shown to encourage movement and exercise, and the playing of traditional games provided enjoyment, introduced new skills and raised self-esteem. Using the tactile games materials stimulated actions which were beneficial to the patients and exercised muscles, hand-eye coordination, concentration and memory. The materials were suitable for all ages and most physical capabilities.

'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth' was an indirect approach to treating the child, which dealt with the *whole* child and the family, and as such could be considered to have real therapeutic value. Twenty years ago the benefits for children participating in this experience were recognised by a wide range of people, including medical staff. Perhaps the time has come to revisit it. ★

Judy McKinty is an independent children's play researcher and cultural heritage interpreter based in Melbourne. She was a joint co-ordinator of 'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth' with Dorothy Rickards. Together they wrote an earlier article entitled 'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth': Children's Traditional Play in a Paediatric Hospital' (Play and Folklore *no.18, July 1990, 4–6).*

References

'Tops, Tales and Granny's False Teeth' diary (unpublished) – notes, observations, personal thoughts and information written at the time by exhibition staff and volunteers. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, reg. no. HT 8476.1, Museum Victoria.

Recollections of Bendigo High School in the 1950s

Peter Ellis

In the September 2004 issue of *Play and Folklore*, Peter Ellis wrote about his memories of Quarry Hill State School, Bendigo, Victoria, in the 1950s. In this issue, he continues his recollections of high school days.

I was in Grade 6 at Quarry Hill State School in 1957 and commenced at Bendigo High School the following year. The children of my era were of the 'baby boom' generation, a population rise as a consequence of the end of World War II in 1945. This population explosion was something that my generation and certainly my schools from primary to tertiary were to experience. There was not enough room for us in the main school at Quarry Hill at commencement of our first year in 1951. Some of us were located in the wooden Methodist Church hall in Russell Street, a block from the main school, until Flora Hill State School was ready for occupation half way through that year. All of my friends moved to the new FHSS and I was transferred across to the main 'bubs' grade classroom at Quarry Hill to flounder through 'John and Betty' with which all the others were well versed. It was similar in my first two years at Bendigo High School. Everyday some of us in Forms 1A and 1C had to catch trams or ride bikes all the way out to California Gully State School from Quarry Hill to attend classes, there being no space in the main school in Rosalind Park. You could get a term pass on the tram for 7/6d which was really very reasonable. The tram trips were great and every now and then there'd be a bit of fun as they passed at the 'links'. The technical school boys would be on the outgoing tram as we headed for home, and there'd be lots of jeering at each other, sometimes throwing water that had been secreted in our drink bottles. All fairly harmless really.

Occasionally I'd ride my bike, but often enough I'd get a puncture and have to walk all the way home, about five miles I think . . .

One friend, Margaret, tells how difficult it was for the girls who had to ride their bikes into the main school passing the Junior Technical College where the boys (referred to as 'Jumbo's tin soldiers' – Jumbo being the nickname of the headmaster) would be lined up in parade or ambush. They'd all be wolf whistling and cheering while the girls had to keep one hand on their skirts to stop them flying up, or hand on hat and keep the wheel out of the tram track. Then on arrival they'd face the peril of 'Fanny Anderson', the head mistress who would line them up to measure skirts and socks were correct height and measure . . .

Commencing at the High School was held somewhat in trepidation by the boys as we were aware as 'new chums' we would be captured by older students at the entrance to the school. You were seized upon and hauled across to the gully trap to be 'dunked'. Some were really drenched. My friend Robert had the idea we would wet and mess up our hair before entering so as to appear as if we'd already been initiated. It worked for me but Robert got dragged across to the tap. We were only at the main school for a few days or a week or two at the most, maybe only one, time enough for assemblies, acquiring new books and learning rules and procedures. From then on we travelled out to Californian Gully State School and occupied the front two rooms . . .

We played in the front of the school as well as in the side outside block which was very large, the smaller back area reserved for the main primary school. Earlier at Quarry Hill the boys played marbles apart from the usual football and use of the merry-go-round, slide, swings and monkey bar. We didn't have that facility as far as I recall at Cal. Gully, but then again these may have been in the primary school area where we weren't allowed. One of the marble games was called 'Poison'. Three cup holes in a row were ground into the earth with your heel and a 4th to the left of the 3rd hole. I can't remember the whole game precisely but you would be dying for lunch time to race out to your favourite site, which seemed to be handed on from year to year. Anyway you had to fire your marble into first hole, then knock it out with your second marble, and keep going till you got to the 4th hole when you then sang out 'poison'. From there you returned along the course and could knock any oncoming opponent's marble out of the hole and as far away as possible. The winner of course was first back to base. I'm not sure if we played Poison at Cal Gully, but some games of marbles were certainly pursued. However that year small wooden spinning tops became popular. They were solid wood, cone-shaped and burgundy or maroon red or green with a small metal tip at the base. You drove a small nail into the top and looped the string over this and then wound it round the top to enable it to be spun as you flicked it down on the ground. As it hit the ground you gave the string a back tug and on releasing this straightened the top. Some of the boys were very accurate with their tops and could land them on the marbles splitting them in half. That put an end to any marble games from then on. Yo-yos became popular at that time with all the tricks such as circling overhead and 'Walking the Dog'. Hipping the hula hoop for girls had also become a favourite pastime between Grade 6 and Form 1, and possibly caused a loss of interest in Skippy and Hopscotch.

There was a 'secret society' known as the 'Eaglemen' while we were at California Gully. Those of us from Quarry Hill State School who had stuck together as a close knit group of friends were invited to join the Eaglemen by the one surviving local of the group, who was also in either Form 1A or 1C. It was a harmless cult that had secret hideaways under peppercorn trees on the mullock areas that ran from the school back along Tayling Street (now named Speedy Street) towards Eaglehawk Road. This area was riddled with filled in mine shafts or prospectors' holes. Rival groups could never find us until suddenly we discovered our hideaways had become known: one of our group was betraying us. We never spoke or associated with him after that as this was the utmost sin within a group of loyal friends . . .

TOP OF ARTICLE (previous page)Wooden spinning top, 1950s
William Boyd Childhood Collection, Museum Victoria

The William Boyd Childhood Collection includes most of the childhood possessions of William (Bill) Boyd, who was born in 1947 and raised in the Victorian town of Maryborough.
Photographer Carla Pascoe / Source Museum Victoria

. . .

RIGHT Peter Ellis, Form 4 student, 1961
Source Peter Ellis

At primary school we learnt to write in 'running hand' or copperplate, introduced in second grade. We were only allowed to use pencils and divided the lines into regular letter size intervals and then ruled diagonal lines between the vertical to use as a guide in keeping a regular running hand slant. By Grade 4 we had pen and nibs and ink wells in the desks, and were taught to vary between the downstroke and upstroke in writing so as to create broader and thinner lines respectively. With a new nib you had to lick it first to get it to work well. In Grade 5 a new glass pen came out with bubbles through the centre of the handle or shaft. These were considered dangerous and banned from school use. They re-appeared in coloured plastic some years later. You were allowed to use fountain pens by Grade 5 although they were not encouraged. Frequently the bladders perished and they leaked. Indelible pencils were sometimes used – you had to keep licking these to make them write, and they were purple and left your tongue purple. Later they were found to be toxic and disappeared from use. Biros (ball point pens) came out by the time I was in Grade 6 but these were not allowed at school – I guess because the old pen and nib slowed your writing down and you would be much neater. By high school a pen and nib was not to be seen and it would have been impossible to keep up with notes without a ballpoint or at least a pencil. This was a particular change to be endured by Forms 3 and 4, particularly in history: the volume of class notes was enormous and it was very difficult to keep up and record everything – neat hand writing impossible, just scrawl . . .

Two of our teachers taught us ballroom dancing in preparation for the school socials. This was generally held on the excellent floor in the Supreme Court House, but it was sometimes also in the James King Hall. We were taught the rudiments

of waltzing, then progressive Barn Dance, Parma Waltz, Evening Three Step, Pride of Erin and simple basics of the Foxtrot, Quickstep and Modern Waltz. There were also two novelties, the 'Oh Johnny Oh!' Square Dance and the Mexican Hat Dance, and we were told the latter dance was the traditional end to the social. Rock 'n' roll of course was just on the scene but this did not get an airing, although at a Church social the progressive Jive was taught. I never went to the socials: far too shy for that sort of thing.

We also had music in the Supreme Court House and our poor teacher had her hands full keeping order and trying to maintain interest. I remember once she asked if anyone had heard the wonderful rendition of 'Ebb Tide'. Few had, but I put my hand up as my grandfather had it on a 78 record. So my big moment was to bring this in to be played for the class. Peter and the Wolf was another we listened to. Singing got a better airing than any theory or musical history, but now I can only remember a few apart from the school song 'Qui Patitur Vincit'. The class seemed to like 'Guadeamus Igatur' and 'Stand up and Fight like Hell'. I don't recall there being instrumental music and a school band in the way that has become established since the mid 1980s, but I think some of the musical kids did have get-togethers. I was a closet harmonica player and would never have owned up to this at school. I first taught myself a xylophone when only about eight or nine, then learnt recorder which again was self taught as well as mouth organ . . .

In the very early years of primary school in summer we wore 'Jungle Jim' hats when walking to school. These were similar to a pith helmet with a choice of duck egg blue, light grey or light brown colour. Beyond the Jungle Jim days, if caught in the sun without a hat, you'd tie a knot into each corner of your handkerchief and put this over your head. The Jungle Jim hats were not kosher by the time we started high school and I don't recall we had caps, although the girls had straw hats in summer and felt berets in winter. The uniform for the boys consisted of either a light blue or a white shirt. By Form 3, after a show of hands at assembly in the quadrangle, the uniform was standardised to white shirts for boys. Pants were grey, long in winter, short in summer, and black polished leather shoes and white socks with long trousers. Some started wearing black socks, I think: one was for 'rockers' and the other for 'jazzers'. The boys used to roll the legs of their shorts up as far as they could into the crutch. You wore 'short shorts'. We had school blazers, navy with the light and dark blue and gold striped border and embroidered lion emblem with the Qui Patitur Vincit logo (He who perseveres conquers) and grey jumpers with the same border on the neck and sleeve ends. Long socks were grey with the school colours on the rim.

At primary school we wore braces and these were buttoned onto your shorts. By about Form 1 at the high school, new clip-on braces arrived as probably did zips as before then you had button-up flies. During Form 1 and certainly by Form 2 you'd try to avoid wearing braces if possible, as the other kids would grab them from behind, stretch them out and let go. It probably didn't really hurt, but was unpleasant. By then braces were rapidly disappearing. It took a bit of getting used to zippered flies and one had to be careful not to get caught with painful consequences . . .

Health was something that was regularly monitored at both primary and secondary level – I suppose little different to today. There were injections for whooping cough, tetanus, scarlet fever and diphtheria. Other things like measles and mumps most had already caught. Polio was one inoculation on high priority and in those days we were all aware of how debilitating this disease could be. Treatment was often shown on the films displaying use of the 'iron lung'. There were occasionally children to be seen that had the misfortune to have caught polio: there was one in our class who had a withered leg and arm and required leg braces to assist in walking. Many of the children feared injections and might be in tears. The TB (tuberculosis) injection came up in a puss pimple in a few days and it was meant to be left alone to heal, simply leaving a scar. Some of the boys took delight in thumping you on the arm trying to burst the pimple. One boy (not from BHS) recalls the following regarding injections:

I'll never forget being a W on the roll for the polio injections. They used the same needle on everyone and just 'sterilised' it by running it through a Bunsen burner. It was very blunt by the time it reached the W!!!!

Other health checks were held for testing hearing and eyesight and then occasionally you had to strip right down to your underpants for a more detailed investigation.

Although you only bathed once a week, usually Sunday night with scalding hot water from the old chip heater, most kids were nevertheless very clean and of course you washed every morning. Sometimes there was an old-fashioned shower above the bath, but generally people didn't have them until the sixties when modern installations became popular. Only one or two might have created the unclean speculation and sometimes it might have been simply due to smell as a result of stale milk from spillage. I was accused of smelling: I frequently suffered from chesty colds and my grandmother sewed a little pouch to hold camphor around my neck hanging at chest level under my shirt and this of course gave off an aromatic chemical aroma.

Sport was not something my friend Esmond and I were into and we generally just sat on the perimeter and watched. We were often taunted with names such as Cecil, Cyril and Merv because we reneged on sport. On Wednesday afternoons we 'wagged', riding our bikes out through the side gate and off for the afternoon, sometimes playing golf but never getting caught out. My dad had acquired an old set of gold clubs for me. They had wooden handles and I eventually broke every one on the Quarry Hill Golf Course. We did join in the long distance runs and the swimming – that was about all. The interschool sports were great to watch and there was one held at St Arnaud. We were all transported there by train, changing at Castlemaine I think for Maryborough then St Arnaud. There was a lookout tower on a hill where we spent some time . . .

The Sixties saw many changes: the Twist arrived at the end of Form 4 and not long after followed by Go Go or 'Mod' dancing and 'Beatlemania'. Hippies and protests, peace rallies, equal rights for female pay, and the Vietnam War, as well as 'Sputniks' (satellites) and landing on the moon, gradually heralded the new decade. On hot summer nights you'd sit out on the lawn, sometimes even sleep there, no air conditioning apart from a fan in those days. There was great excitement if you spotted a Sputnik moving across the stars. Pizzas were soon the latest food sensation. My grandmother thought Kentucky Fried Chicken was the best thing since sliced bread. Many new things had arrived with special catchy names, such as 'instant' puddings or cakes, coffee and even tea, then 'drip dry' and 'permanent press' clothes, 'mini' things, 'takeaway' foods, etc.

On reflection, reading back through my notes on school days, I wonder whether the modern generation with their ipods, mobile phones, the horror films, nightclubs and the scene with drugs and binge drinking, really have as much fun, primitive as it might have been. Is the pressure in schools with performance and achievement really that much more advanced? Are the three Rs still relevant? I believe we were well taught, well educated and could hold our heads high, and we didn't need it to be 'performance-driven' although you always strived for good marks as tests and exams could be a trial. We were not faultless, nobody is, but it was a reasonably relaxed yet switched-on society when being switched-on wasn't a known criteria. Have we really progressed? Technologically yes, socially no! I think life for the young today is far more pressured and stressful, and bound to cosmetic and material gain. ★

— From an elder man's dreaming

Peter Ellis is a musician and folklorist from Bendigo, Victoria

Yabbying

Cliff Green

Cliff Green, one of Australia's foremost screen and television writers, began his working life as a country school teacher. This short extract comes from his book *The Sun is Up: Memories of Country Schooldays* (East Melbourne: Drummond Publishing, 1978).

Our School Committee Secretary and his wife wanted to go to the Royal Show (in Melbourne around 1961) and we offered to look after two of their children. This proposition brought untold joy to the children concerned, for the novelty of living on the premises made them the envy of their school-mates . . .

One evening after school the boy suggested that we 'have a go at yabbyin' in the school dam,' which he thought would yield a fine harvest 'as it hasn't been worked much'. I agreed, and after obtaining lengths of string and a supply of high meat we set forth. Soon we had half a dozen lines in place along the bank and we sat back to watch results.

In a few minutes one of the sticks to which a line had been fastened began to twitch and the boy, with his boots and socks off, waded a few inches into the water. Kneeling down, he commenced pulling the line cautiously with one hand and muddying up the water with the other. When the yabby, clinging desperately to the meat, reached the cloudy water he was blinded and the boy threw him deftly up on the bank. No net was used, but so swift and sure were the boy's actions that the girl and I accepted the role of merely watching for twitching lines and left the rest to him.

Within an hour or two we had a four gallon drum almost full of the crustaceans, most of them over six inches long. We tipped them into the boiling water, and when they had turned a beautiful red we drew them forth, cracking the meat from tail and legs and dipping them in vinegar and sprinkling them with salt before devouring the delicious morsels. Jack Hyett wonders if the ambrosia of the Olympians might not have been yabby meat. Our two young visitors wouldn't have known what that means, but one of them remarked, 'I'll bet Mum and Dad ain't havin' a feed like this at the Victoria Palace!' ★

Kids Keeping Games Alive

Michael Lund

Traditional fun and games are still being played in schoolyards across Queensland. At a time when computers rule (or even ruin) our lives, a simple ball and a play area are all that are needed to keep youngsters entertained.

Handball is still a big hit, according to a random poll carried out by the *Courier-Mail* of state-run schools from primary upwards. So popular is the game that Tewantin State School on the Sunshine Coast says it has four handball grids, with another three improvised by the students. Seville Road State School, at Brisbane's Holland Park, is also painting new handball grids for the pupils.

But other traditional games also make the list of favourites, with schools saying electronic and computer games are either banned or discouraged.

It's all friendly touch footy, basketball and chase about on the oval with a soccer ball and handball at Alexandra Hills State High School, southeast of Brisbane. Ballandean State School on the Granite Belt says teams sports such as soccer are popular along with handball, Hopscotch and Chasey – with or without balls – but the pupils also love the jumping and stepping game called 'Fly'. It's 'Fly' too at Smithfield State High School in north Cairns, where it's considered one of the 'games of games', along with Touch Footy and 'Tiggy'.

South of Cairns at McDonnell Creek State School, pupils play handball in an undercover area, 'Hide and Seek', 'Red Rover' and skipping. At Sarina State School south of Mackay, deputy principal Glenn Hankinson says elastics, skipping and various hand clapping games are among favourites.

North of Rockhampton imaginary play comes in at St Lawrence State School where some 'interesting dialogue' from the pupils can be heard. South of Rockhampton at Bajool State School, 'Piggy in the Middle' gets a mention.

It's handball again at Rainbow Beach State School south of Fraser Island, but soccer and 'Tiggy' score a run. At McIlwraith State School in Gin Gin, principal Jane Desmarchelier says 'Stuck in the Mud' is played religiously every day. Down the Lockyer Valley at Mount Sylvia School, the tennis and basketball courts get a workout with plenty of ball work and shooting practice, even cricket on the tennis courts.

Geebung Special School in Brisbane's north says games with complex rules are not popular but the pupils love kicking a ball in the odd game of soccer. 'The most favourite area is the sandpit' principal Peter Blatch says. 'It is large and always full and we have great stories coming out of the play activities there'.

Helensvale State High School on the Gold Coast is one of many schools that reports anything outdoors

is popular, with principal Cate MacMillan saying Touch Football, soccer and basketball are always popular. At Darra State School in Brisbane's west, pupils are being taught Hopscotch.

Physical games outnumber activities indoors by five-to-one, says Suzanne Jolley, principal at Eagleby State School, south of Brisbane, where soccer and tennis join the ever popular handball.

Across the Cape York area, a favourite among youngsters is a game called 'E-door'. It's two teams on a football field in a reverse-tig sort of game, and each team has to get one of its players across the opposite goal line without being tagged. At Pormpuraaw State School on the western side of the cape, principal Gordon Herbertson says: 'The children can run back and forth for up to 20 minutes before someone gets over the line, so they have to be fit or prepared to get fit quickly'.

That traditional games are still so popular is a delight to researchers who say the lessons pupils learn from such games are vital for later in life. 'They learn rhythm and rhyme, language and vocabulary, they learn how to negotiate, how to organise things: huge amounts of learning takes place in the playground,' Dr Gwenda Davey says. Davey is a principal researcher on the four-year Australia Research Council-funded project 'Childhood, Tradition and Change' that's looking at how children play today compared to studies dating back to the 1950s. 'The main thing that is coming out is that kids are still playing the traditional games', she says. 'Even though at home they might spend a lot of time watching technology, they might be watching television or playing on the computer, they still do play traditional games and they make up their own games, too'.

Davey is also a co-founder of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria that documents more than 12,000 games, puzzles, rhymes and other children's favourites. Some are proving timeless. 'Really all the ones that you might as well think of', she says. 'Hopscotch, marbles, skipping, hand clapping, the ball games of various kinds such as 'Four Square' and 'Down Ball'. Then there's the more complicated theme games, things like 'What's the Time Mr Wolf?' and 'Red Rover'.'

However, a concern for the researchers is that some rough and tumble games can be discouraged – even banned – in some schools. Townsville's Belgian Gardens State School sparked outrage last year after pupils were banned from doing unsupervised cartwheels. It later emerged that a number of parents in Queensland had lodged lawsuits seeking compensation for injuries they claimed their children had suffered at school.

Education Queensland says it's up to individual schools to determine what games pupils can play, with no state-wide policy banning any particular games. But Davey says any school ban is 'really quite ludicrous'. 'These are things that kids have done forever, yet doing handstands and cartwheels have been banned in some schools for fear the children will hurt themselves', she says.

What games do you (or did you) play at school?

'Childhood, Tradition and Change' study – www.australian.unimelb.edu.au/CTC/index.html

Australian Children's Folklore Collection – http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/infosheets/australian-childrens-folklore-collection

This article was first published in the Brisbane Courier-Mail *on 10 June 2009. It is reprinted here with permission.*

Playground Games for the Nintendo Generation

Institute of Education, University of London

Clapping and skipping games that are popular in the school playground are to be converted into Wii-type computer games as part of a unique collaboration between three universities, the British Library and Nintendo.

The ambitious project, which involves the universities of London, Sheffield and East London, will generate prototype games similar to the Wii sports games played with handsets that take the place of tennis racquets or golf clubs.

The development of Wii playground games, directed by Grethe Mitchell of the University of East London, is only one strand of a £600,000 project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Beyond Text programme.

The centre-piece of the project is the important collection of playground games and songs at the British Library: the sound archives of the renowned collectors Iona and Peter Opie. Researchers will convert these into a digital format under the supervision of Jonathan Robinson of the British Library. They will then create an interactive website for the Library so that children, parents, educators and members of the public can access the digitised archives.

The project's third strand will be a two-year study of playground culture in two primary schools, one in London, the other in Sheffield. The London school is in the multi-ethnic King's Cross area, close to the Library, while the Sheffield school serves a primarily white, working-class community.

This strand, supervised by Professor Jackie Marsh of Sheffield University and Dr Rebekah Willett of the Institute of Education, University of London, will reveal how playground games, songs and rhymes are being influenced by comics, TV, film and computer games. Children from the two schools will help to create the prototype computer games and design the library website. They will also co-curate the website, helping to select, describe and present its contents.

The project is being backed by the former Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen, who is a member of its advisory panel, and by Iona Opie, whose archive at the British Library is central to the research.

Dr Andrew Burn, the project's leader, says that the development of the Wii-style games will be technically challenging. 'We will 'record' movements from particular playground games and incorporate these into playable computer games, ideally with songs and words,' he explains. 'This will require us to adapt existing hardware and design new software.'

Dr Burn, who is based at the Institute of Education, emphasises that the Wii games will help to record and conserve playground games rather than replace them. 'In any case, we are already seeing a migration of school playground games and songs

into new media, such as YouTube, the video-sharing website,' he says. 'The oral games of the playground are a form of folklore and, as the Opies said almost 50 years ago, folklore, like everything else in nature, must adapt itself to new conditions if it is to survive.

'Gaming platforms such as the Wii are designed for physical play and are therefore ideal for producing games involving movement. They also appeal to a wide audience of casual gamers, with an emphasis on family-friendly content.'

Playground rhymes are not, of course, always 'family friendly', a point that Dr Burn acknowledges. 'Playground culture does have a subversive aspect and sometimes the rhymes are a little more streetwise than some adults might expect,' he says. 'One clapping game currently being sung by primary girls begins:

I'm sexy, I'm cute I'm popular to boot…

'So we are also interested to see how this element of playground culture can be represented on a library website,' he adds. 'It is going to be a fascinating project.'

Nintendo will offer the researchers advice but has no commercial involvement in the project. The intellectual property will be retained by the university partners.

This media release is reproduced with permission of Dr Andrew Burn, Institute of Education, London, 10 June 2009

PROJECT UPDATE MARCH 2010: DR ANDREW BURN

We are now halfway through the project. We have digitised and annotated about half of the Opie sound archive at the British Library. We have found much interesting unpublished material there: for example, more games and songs related to media culture; more variants of tunes and songs than appear in, for example, 'The Singing Game'; and more variety of scatological material collected on housing estates in London.

We have collected a considerable amount of new material on the two playgrounds, confirming that the 'traditional' genres documented by the Opies and others still exist as a robust culture; but also that new kinds of game, especially fantasy play related to children's media cultures, is appearing.

We have produced early iterations of adaptations of clapping games for the Nintendo Wii. User tests suggest keen interest from the children in this, although it is too early to be specific about the cultural outcomes.

We have begun work with the Bodleian Library to match up material there in the Opie manuscript archive with material from the British Library sound archive, filling out the picture.

We have held an interim conference, attended by folklorists, children's media specialists and computer games scholars. Our main respondent was Professor Kathy Marsh from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, author of *The Musical Playground*. ★

Further information on the project is available from David Budge email: d.budge@ioe.ac.uk

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Appendices

1. 'Children's Playground Games and Songs in the New Media Age' will run for two years. The study will be based in the London Knowledge Lab, a research institution shared by the Institute of Education and Birkbeck College. The project will involve researchers from the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media at the Institute of Education; the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth at the University of Sheffield; and the School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of East London.

2. The Arts and Humanities Research Council's Beyond Text programme is supporting a range of other projects looking at the part that different kinds of text play in different cultures. See www.beyondtext.ac.uk.

3. The researchers will be supported by an expert advisory panel of academics, game industry representatives and specialists in children's oral culture.

4. The project will culminate in a series of high-profile events: a children's conference in Sheffield, a conference for researchers, educators and policy-makers at the British Library, a demonstration of the Wii prototype at the BETT (British Education and Training Technology) show, and a book presenting the research.

5. The website to be created for the British Library will also provide access to parts of the collection of the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition in Sheffield and the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture.

6. The Institute of Education is a college of the University of London, specialising in teaching, research and consultancy in education and related areas of social science and professional practice. The Institute conducts over one-third of the educational research in the UK and last year's Research Assessment Exercise judged that 35% of the work it had submitted was 'world leading', while much of the remainder was of international significance.

7. The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom. It provides world-class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. Further information is available on the Library's website at www.bl.uk.

REVIEW: KATHRYN MARSH

The Musical Playground: Global Tradition & Change in Children's Songs & Games

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Gwenda Beed Davey

Kathryn Marsh's book is a landmark in folklore scholarship, and has been recognized as such by the Folklore Society (UK) in awarding the Katharine Briggs Folklore Award for 2009 to *The Musical Playground*. It is also a landmark in children's folklore scholarship.

This book is based on 15 years of the author's field research in Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom, Korea and the United States. It is the work of an ethnomusicologist and music educator – Professor Kathryn Marsh is Chair of Music Education at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, and she has a doctorate in ethnomusicology. The book is accompanied by a website containing field recordings and musical transcriptions, which can be accessed using a password printed inside the book's copyright page. It also contains an index, a bibliography and an Index of Playground Singing Game Genres from International Field Sites, 1990–2004.

The Musical Playground is divided into five sections:

- *Children's Musical Play and Creativity: Adult Views*
- *Into the Field*
- *Transmission Processes in the Playground*
- *Composition in Performance*
- *Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications*

This is not an easy book to read. It is as complex as children's musical play itself, and in fact one of Kathryn Marsh's major conclusions is a critique of the simplistic nature of much classroom music, where both rhythm and melody fall short of – or differ markedly from – the richness of the playground. In this respect, her findings accord with the seminal study carried out in Brisbane in the 1970s by Peter Lindsay and Denise Palmer, both physical education lecturers, who found that on a number of criteria, including rhythm, playground games were more beneficial to children's well-being than formal syllabus games.

Kathryn Marsh begins her book with a reflection on 'a myriad of vivid images' of children's musical play in locations as varied as Korea, Central Australia and Los Angeles. Not only the places are varied, so too are the children themselves, in the many multicultural school communities which make up the global play village. She writes on page 4:

> *The musical play of children at school . . . encompasses many different forms. All of these forms are owned, spontaneously performed, and orally transmitted by children and usually involve text, movement, and rhythmic elements.*

This study begins with a review of 20th century music education practices, and in particular the legacies of Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodaly and their use of children's musical games. Both methodologies, according to Marsh, 'make assumptions about the relative simplicity of children's musical play' (page 12), and it is Marsh's brief to challenge these

assumptions. She also challenges the postulation of the ethnomusicologist Constantin Brailoiu about the universality across cultures of 'childlikeness' in music, and argues against the dependence of these and many other researchers on 'decontextualised, "product-based" analysis' (page 20).

Of particular importance to Marsh's study is the question of transmission, and in particular 'children's abilities to manipulate and change musical materials in the context of their play' (page 23). Her Chapter 2, 'Children's Musical Creativity and Oral Transmission', is a scholarly review of theories and studies in these domains, with reference to both adult and child performance. She summarizes her review by stating her intentions:

> *I have attempted to provide a detailed, contextualized account of transmission processes and the factors that affect oral transmission, creation, and performance of musical play forms by children in a range of schools in international location.* (page 39)

The second section of Global Tradition and Change, 'Into the Field', moves from theory into the world of the playground. Here, Marsh discusses her field collection practices and accompanying issues of philosophy and ethics, as well as the socio-cultural contexts of children's playgrounds in Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States and Korea.

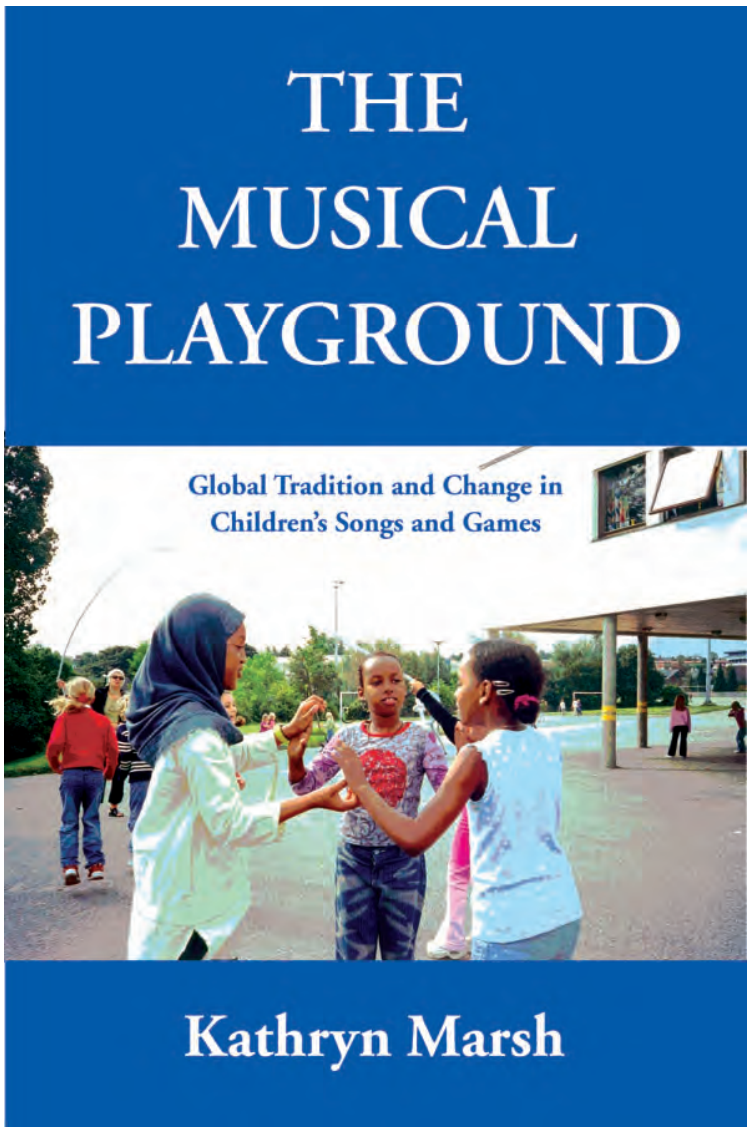
One of the philosophical – and practical – issues highlighted by Kathy Marsh resonates with the experiences of researchers working on 'Childhood, Tradition and Change', the four-year Australian project studying primary school children's playground activities. An adult, Marsh writes, 'by nature of her adultness, or "otherness", cannot be a participant observer' (page 45), and she quotes the statement by Gary Alan Fine (1999) that 'all data collected from children by adults must be examined for effects arising from their presence' (page 130). Any desires of the CTC fieldworkers for 'cinema verite' recordings in the playground itself were quickly dispelled, when the first appearance of microphones and recorders would create a near riot – everyone thought they were going to be on television! It seems that Kathy Marsh overcame some of these problems by long-term research and observation – in the case of Springfield Public School in Sydney, over six years (page 46), an enviable practice to the 'Childhood, Tradition and Change' project, which had only one week in each school.

The detailed account of the fieldwork for *The Musical Playground* makes fascinating reading, and of particular technical interest is Marsh's use of synchronized audio and video recordings. Her six year project between 1990 and 1996 at the multi-ethnic Springfield School in Sydney recorded 618 performances of singing games by 139 children, principally clapping games, and this experience sparked her desire to investigate other, international, socio-musical contexts in a variety of languages.

Between 2001 and 2004 Kathryn Marsh carried out fieldwork in primary schools in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Norway and Korea, and her Chapter 4, 'The Playing Fields', provides detailed descriptions of the schools visited in these countries. What is notable is her commitment to reciprocity, to give back to the children and schools material she had recorded. This commitment was developed particularly during her research in Aboriginal communities in central Australia, research which also widened her focus on what music was important to children.

In the third section of *The Musical Playground*, 'Transmission Processes in the Playground', there are three chapters which discuss respectively 'The Influence of Social Grouping', 'Teaching and Learning in the Playground' and 'Changing the Tradition'. Particularly interesting is the discussion of 'crossing the boundaries' (pages 116 – 135), in which 'these games appear to enable children at some schools to cross social boundaries . . . of gender, age, and ethnicity' (page 117). The chapter on 'Changing the Tradition' is also challenging, where Kathy Marsh examines

> *. . . the ways in which the singing game tradition*



COVER *The Musical Playground: Global Tradition and Change in Children's Songs and Games*
Source Oxford University Press

> *in a range of playground localities is changed through the influences of interethnic transmission, audiovisual and written media, classroom transmission, and material from other sources external to the school*
> (page 156)

The fourth section in this book, *Composition in Performance*, begins with Marsh's statement that

> *while some variation is inadvertent, it is clear that children also use deliberate processes of innovation to vary game material for a range of different social and aesthetic purposes, in some cases creating entirely new compositions . . .*
> (page 199)

I was particularly interested in the reference to aesthetics, as I think it is one of the few weaknesses in *The Musical Playground* that the beauty of some of the texts is not much considered. The author has already quoted Elizabeth Grugeon's critique of the Opies for 'their concentration on text' and for their 'search for literary gems' (1988, pages 13–15). It's fair enough that Kathy Marsh wants to redress the balance of childlore research in favour of contextualization, but I think some children's songs, games and chants do contain literary gems, which are part of their everlasting appeal.

Section Four is where *The Musical Playground* discusses in considerable detail Sar Macka Dora,

the item which many of her folklore colleagues and friends most closely associate with Kathy Marsh, and as she says, it is 'the most frequently occurring game that I recorded over the complete fieldwork period' (page 222). In Chapter Nine, she provides a detailed musicological analysis of 'attributes and forms of variation' of the Springfield (Sydney) children's performances and compares them with selected schools from Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. Chapter Ten, 'Style and Cultural Idiosyncrasy in Musical Play', is a very interesting account of features such as children's subverting adult notions of poetics and musicality, and as challenging themselves individually in feats of memory.

The fifth and final section, *Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications*, contains valuable ideas for teaching and learning by drawing lessons from the playground. It also expresses Kathryn Marsh's anxiety about 'deskilling' of children through overly simplistic classroom practices. She writes joyfully about 'outbreaks of play' in highly controlled settings such as a Buddhist temple in Korea, and cautions teachers that

> *to disregard them is to lose a vital opportunity to enrich our pedagogical conceptions (whereas) to allow an outbreak of play to permeate pedagogy is to infuse it with exciting possibilities.*
> (page 318)

It has been a privilege and a humbling experience to have reviewed this encyclopedic book, and I hope it will remain a key resource for many years to come. I am not sure about its target audience, though, apart from musicologists, as much of its terminology is unfamiliar, even to an experienced folklorist such as myself. I'd like to see a shorter, simpler version written for classroom teachers. Our research for the 'Childhood, Tradition and Change' project over the years between 2006 and 2010 has shown that primary teacher education programs are seriously lacking in play content of any kind, let alone musical play. It is hoped that Kathryn Marsh's great scholarship and authority might help to fill these gaps. ★

Gwenda Beed Davey is a Principal Researcher for the Childhood, Tradition and Change *project. She is also a Research Fellow in the Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific at Deakin University, Melbourne.*

REVIEW: MYFANWY JONES & SPIRI TSINTZIRAS

Parlour Games for Modern Families

(Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2009)

Gwenda Beed Davey

Myfanwy Jones and Spiri Tsintziras have just published a book which will probably be simply known by the delightfully old-fashioned title of *Parlour Games*. But its full title *Parlour Games for Modern Families* puts it firmly into the present day. And what a joy it is: to read, to dip into or to search for favorite games or for those you've often wondered about. I've always wanted to know how to play the card game 'Strip Jack Naked', and was somewhat disappointed that it doesn't involved being stripped of your clothes (like the legendary 'Strip Poker') but rather being stripped of your cards to pay a tax on picture cards (jack, queen, etc.) when turned up by your partner.

Card games are only one of the many categories of games described and discussed in this book, and one of the very few which require any commercially produced equipment. Most of the 140 items listed in the index require nothing more than household items such as paper, pencils, foodstuffs – and your brains. You might also need a watch with a second hand, or a stopwatch, for games that involve timing, such as the 'Memory Tray', also known as 'Kim's Game'. Did you know that this name comes from Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel, where the central character Kim played it during his training as a spy?

Parlour Games has a lot of interesting historical anecdotes of this type. Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, merits two pages. This brilliant mathematician was 'fascinated by puns, acrostics, anagrams, riddles, and all sorts of mathematical games and puzzles' (page 56). He invented a number of games which were published in his time, and some still are, such as Word-Links or Doublets. How quickly can you change MORE into LESS, or MICE into RATS, or SLEEP into DREAM?

You might know this favorite by another name, but what wonderful names they are! 'Fan Tan', 'Whist', 'Pontoon', 'Gin Rummy', 'The Minister's Cat' and 'Pig Dice'. Apropos of which, I think my only complaint with *Parlour Games* is the insistence (correct) that the singular of 'dice' is 'die'. Pedantry! Can you imagine Nicely Nicely Johnson asking Nathan Detroit to 'pass da die', or for that matter little Jimmy complaining that 'Julie's pinched the die!' during a game of 'Snakes and Ladders'? As the kids would say, 'get over it!'

I particularly liked Jones and Tsintziras's assurance that 'we have played every single game in this book' (page 6), and I think this accounts for the clarity of the explanations. Some games books are as hard to understand as the instruction manual for my Japanese sewing machine, which advised me when threading the needle to 'thrice circumnavigate the feed-dog'. There are games here for littlies (three and four) up to teenagers and adults, and instructions for complex pastimes such as 'riffling' playing cards – one of the spectacular shuffles used by every card sharp in the business. TV addicts might be intrigued to find how many television

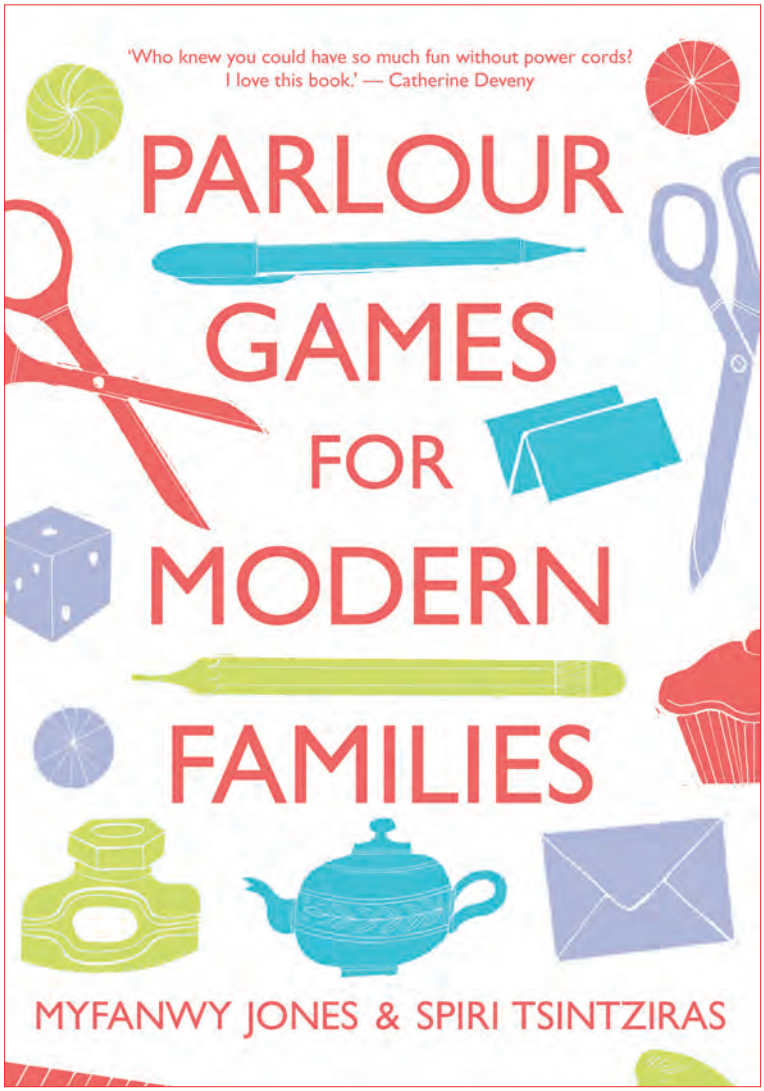
game shows are based on ancient traditions, such as 'Twenty Questions' and 'Celebrity Heads'.

As an oral historian, I really liked the inclusion of a reminiscence from 91-year old Mr George Perry, about growing up in the Depression years and his 'bloody tough' childhood, playing football with a rolled-up newspaper, and knucklebones from the legs of lamb (or mutton, I would think). You can play Knucklebones, or Jacks, with commercially produced items, but there's nothing like the real thing, so congratulations to the authors of *Parlour Games*, and to their marvellous butchers Ross and Damian at the *Macelleria Salumeria Italiana*, the Australian-Continental Butcher in North Carlton, for their valiant efforts.

One of my own favorite bits of oral history isn't about a parlour game, but about skipping in the street, around the time of World War I. It's a sound recording from the National Library's Oral History and Folklore Section, of Mr Bernie Johnston who was born in 1906, and who was interviewed by the Library in 1987 for the New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection. And although skipping is usually thought of as a girls' activity today, it wasn't so in earlier times. Mr Johnston spoke of doing 'a lot of skipping' during his childhood in the inner Sydney suburb of Surry Hills, probably just before World War I:

> *We'd cross a long rope across the street and I used to have a dozen kids skipping down there. Even Mrs Munro came out – seventeen stone, and she had no shoes on. She'd come out and skip.*

Parlour Games has sections dealing with many different types of games. There are Games of Writing and Drawing, Games of Motion, Mystery and Make-believe, Games of Cards, Dice, Marbles, and Knucklebones, and Games Spoken Aloud. I think among my favourites are the games without any equipment at all, such as 'Wink Murder', 'Dead Fish' and 'It Could Be Worse'. And what a fascinating book it is. There's some history, some literature, some cooking (how to make a Queen of Hearts jam tart and a perfect pot of tea), lots of humour, and some very droll one-liners. I especially liked their comment on page 79 that 'some of the games are unruly, but all fit comfortably indoors'.



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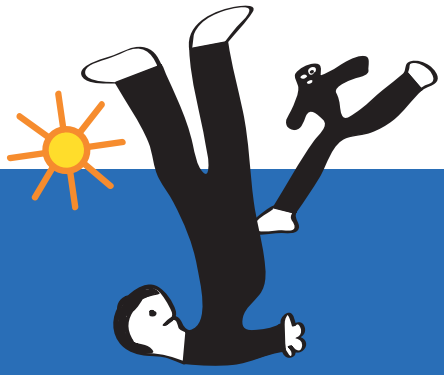
Source Scribe Publications

Parlour Games for Modern Families will be an invaluable resource book for rainy days, heat-wave days, impossibly windy days, and all Melbourne's usual weather surprises. It's a book that every family should own. ★

Dr Gwenda Beed Davey is a Research Fellow at Deakin University Melbourne. She is co-founder of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria.

This review was first published in the English edition of Neos Kosmos, *Melbourne's Greek-language newspaper, on 7 December 2009. It is reprinted here with permission.*



Childhood

Edward Thomas

This is a short extract about his childhood from his notable memoir, *The Prose of Edward Thomas*, published posthumously in 1948 (London: Falcon Press). Edward Thomas, a Welsh-born poet and writer, was born in 1878. He was killed in World War I.

When I think of school I smell carbolic soap. I see the caretaker by the wall of one room ringing the bell. I deposit my weekly fourpence on the master's desk. I go round, as a privilege, filling the scores of inkpots from a tin with a long thin spout…

In the hard asphalt playground we played rounders and egg-cap and games with tops, marbles and cherry-stones. Going home, we spun our tops or two of us helped ourselves along by bowling hoops or by playing a progressive game with a marble or a stone each, called Buckalong. We used to exchange things and ratify the deed by touching the iron with which our heels were shod, saying 'touch cold iron can't change back'. We used to make fun of a solitary boy, probably of a better class than ourselves, who used to live in the same street and walked about with a snake around his wrist. We called him 'Soppy', prepared to run away. But he never retaliated or took any notice of us. My friends were chiefly boys of our street; if other boys harassed us we used to say 'My father's a policeman' to frighten them. But only one grievance remains in my mind, that an older boy, not of my acquaintance, once lured me to drink urine by offering it to me in a bottle as ginger beer. Some time later on a Sunday I pointed out this boy standing with others by the Three Island Pond, and my father clouted his head. ★


Notes


Notes