



# Play and Folklore

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## CONTENTS

July 2007 ISSUE NO. 49

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. Umbrella Feet – Gwenda Beed Davey                    | Page 2  |
| 2. Grace Before Meals – Edel Wignell                    | Page 5  |
| 3. Stars of the Playground and Screen – Janice Ackerley | Page 7  |
| 4. Children and Crabbing – Lee Anne Abdo                | Page 12 |
| 5. What is a Joke? – Evelyn Goode                       | Page 16 |
| 6. ARC Project outline – Editors                        | Page 17 |



This edition of *Play and Folklore* includes two articles from somewhat far afield, although still in the Southern Hemisphere. Janice Ackerley, our New Zealand colleague, has written on links between children's traditional rhymes and movies, and Lee-Anne Abdo has taken us to Bunbury in Western Australia, to write about children and the pastime of crabbing in Bunbury. Lee-Anne is one of the first graduates from the Open University course in Australian folklife studies. The Grad Dip Folklife is coordinated from Curtin University in Perth by Graham Seal. Graham is not only Australia's first Professor of Folklore, but has recently been made a Member in the Order of Australia (AM) for 'service to the preservation and dissemination of Australian folklore, particularly through a range of academic, editorial and research roles.' Both Graham and the Graduate Diploma are flourishing – the latter with 40 enrolments, including some from overseas. Our heartiest congratulations go out to Graham Seal on both counts.

*June Factor and Gwenda Beed Davey*

## UMBRELLA FEET: CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE AND THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Gwenda Beed Davey

The intriguing phrase 'umbrella feet' seems to me an image worthy of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Such feet might well be possessed by the Houyhnhnms or the Brobdingnagians, or at the very least by one of Dr Seuss' characters. In fact it comes from one of the many children's traditional counting-out rhymes held in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria. This collection is one of the world's largest repositories of its type and, in August 2004, was honoured by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) with placement on the Australian Register of the Memory of the World (see National Library News, November 2005).

The Australian Children's Folklore Collection includes more than 10 000 card files and other documents listing children's games, rhymes, riddles, jokes, superstitions and other kinds of children's lore, together with photographs, audio cassettes, video tapes, toys and some specialist collections of children's folklore. Outstanding among the specialist collections is the Dorothy Howard Collection.

Dr Dorothy Howard was an American folklorist who spent 10 months travelling round Australia as a Fulbright Scholar in 1954–55, documenting more than 1000 children's games and other lore dating back to the 1870s. All her original field research is now held in Museum Victoria, and her 10 scholarly articles on Australian children's traditional playlore were reprinted by the Museum in 2005 as *Child's Play: Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children*.

The National Library also has an extensive collection of sound recordings of Australian children's rhymes and games, and I prepared a guide to this collection called 'Fish Trout, You're Out', a phrase from a wonderfully economical counting-out rhyme collected by Helen O'Shea. The Library is currently preparing the guide for use on the internet, and aims to show all the recordings of children's folklore held in the Oral History and Folklore Collection. It lists recordings from a large number of separate collections, such as those of John Meredith, Wendy Lowenstein, Norman O'Connor, Alan Scott, Helen O'Shea and Chris Sullivan. Although most of the recordings are in English, there are substantial numbers of recordings in other languages from the collections of Peter Parkhill, Gwenda Davey and others.

One of the biggest challenges for both the National Library and Museum Victoria concerns the need for continual updating and refreshment of their collections of children's folklore, and there are many questions to be asked. Do children still play the same games as they did a generation ago? Or the same games as the children depicted in Pieter Brueghel's famous painting of 1560, *Children's Games*, where more than 80 games are shown? Has the popularity of television and computer games affected the amount of time today's children spend in active play? Have hand-held electronic toys affected the activities of the school playground? Only research will enable these questions to be addressed. Yet no nationwide survey of children's games has taken place since Dorothy Howard's work in the mid-1950s, more than half a century ago.



This survey is now to take place. On 6 July 2006, the Australian Research Council announced a major grant to enable national research into primary school children's playground activities. This research was proposed by a consortium of three universities, Melbourne, Deakin and Curtin Universities, together with the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria. The project is entitled 'Childhood, Tradition and Change: a national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's playlore'. It will last more than four years, and aims to revisit Dorothy Howard's Australian schools, plus many more.

The National Library's Oral History and Folklore Collection has been carrying out for several months what was in effect a pilot for the Australian Research Council's project. A team of experienced interviewers visited primary school playgrounds in Victoria, and sound recordings have been obtained in two Melbourne locations, Warrandyte (rural fringe) and Preston West (inner north suburban) as well as at Harcourt Valley Primary School, in a rural area near Bendigo, in the heart of Victoria's apple-growing region. After it is processed, this material will be Fish Trout, You're Out.

The Library's project has already exposed some additional problems beside the need for simply recording current games. Today researchers working in schools with children are required to undergo police checks, and ethical issues such as parent consent and approval for the project need to be considered carefully. Ethical issues are not always simple, and the Library withdrew one school from the project after a school committee chairperson demanded unworkably strict conditions for observation and documentation.

Another project at Deakin University in Burwood, Melbourne, aims to provide contemporary information for the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria by asking all final-year Bachelor of Education (Primary) students to collect playground games during their teaching practice periods. The project has received enthusiastic support from the Education Faculty which recognises the importance of play for children's social, intellectual, physical and language development. One good example is the well-known children's rhyme, 'A Sailor Went to Sea', which usually accompanies a handclapping rhyme, and involves feats of memory, verbal fluency, motor coordination and breathing skills!



Harcourt Valley Primary School  
April 2006

Source – Geordie Dowell,  
for National Library of Australia



*A sailor went to sea, sea, sea,  
To see what he could see, see, see;  
But all that he could see, see, see,  
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea*

It has been proven that traditional games are of major importance for children's physical development and wellbeing. Two physical education lecturers, Peter L. Lindsay and Denise Palmer, carried out a study in Brisbane, published in 1981 as *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*. It showed that in many respects traditional games were more beneficial to children's health (for example, their cardio-vascular endurance) than formal syllabus games. Traditional play provides a wealth of information about childhood and children's abilities. The games and pastimes not only involve memory and linguistic facility, but also a sense of rhythm, knowledge of rules, and organisational and mediation skills. It's not for nothing that the American folklorists Mary and Herbert Knapp described children's games as 'legislatures and courts of law', where decisions must be made, arbitration carried out, rules observed or bent in the interests of a good game, and 'fair play' observed all round. A recording made at Warrandyte Primary School with two boys gave the interviewer a long and elaborate explanation of how to play the running and chasing game they called 'Stationary'. This game requires the nomination of a King, a Messenger, the selection of a 'Category' unknown to the King (such as a favourite dog) which the King has to guess, and the explanation also included prohibited behaviour which constitutes 'cheating'. The counting-out rhyme (or 'dip dip') used to begin this game shows how playground rhymes can satirise and challenge adult sensibilities, in terms of their frequent vulgarity and delight in puncturing adult taboos about bodily functions of various kinds. Uga Buga Hairy Legs has provided the title of this article:

*Uga Buga Hairy Legs Umbrella Feet,  
Went to the movies and couldn't find a seat.  
When the movie started, Uga Buga farted,  
Uga Buga Hairy Legs Umbrella Feet.  
When the movie stopped, Uga Buga popped,  
Uga Buga Hairy Legs Umbrella Feet.*

In this current era of anxiety when many adult voices are lamenting obesity in children and expressing concerns about issues such as violence and bullying, it may be salutary to consider that we adults do not have all the answers. A careful study of children's own traditional folkloric culture might suggest that many of the answers are indeed, child's play. The fresh data provided by the sound recordings collected for the National Library's pilot project and by the more elaborate research for the major, four-year Australian Research Council project will greatly assist such careful study.



Harcourt Valley Primary  
School, April 2006

Source – Geordie Dowell, for  
National Library of Australia

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## GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Edel Wignell

*Edel Wignell, a subscriber to Play and Folklore since its inception in 1981, wondered recently whether any new 'graces' had emerged in children's folklore. Here is her report.*

From my childhood I have known:

*Two, four, six, eight  
Bog in, don't wait.*

It was included in *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* in the 1978 enlarged edition, though not in the first edition in 1969. Yet it was popular at rural school when I was a kid in the 1940s, and I'm sure my Dad knew it when he was a child in the 1910s.

Other entries in *Cinderella* are:

*Through my teeth, over my tongue  
Look out stomach, here I come.*

and:

*Four, six, eight, ten  
That's all, amen.*

When two nieces stayed with me in the seventies, they introduced me to:

*Heavenly Pa  
Ta!*

I have mentioned it regularly since then, and haven't found anyone who is familiar with it. My nieces attended Princes Hill Primary School in Melbourne. Surely this grace wasn't confined to one school!

I wondered whether any new prayers before meals have emerged, so I queried in *PIO* (*Pass it On* e-newsletter), and received a reply from the writer Kesta Fleming: 'A variation on the 'Heavenly Pa, Ta' grace known by your nieces is simply, 'Ta Pa', which I've heard said more than once, but I can't provide a source, I'm afraid. Another reasonably well-known one that my children say is:

*God bless this bunch  
As we munch our lunch*

When I was a teenager in the late 1980s, my uncle was visiting from England and, on hearing us say the above grace one lunch time, he replied:

*God bless us sinners  
As we eat our dinners!*



whereupon the entire family set to creating all sorts of weird and wonderful new graces for use at meal times. (Unfortunately I only managed to retain the sinners one!)

A week later, in a letter published in the *Good Weekend Magazine* (part of *The Age* newspaper), Jean Morton of Sandringham, Victoria, wrote that she loved columnist Danny Katz's advice about saying grace. She said that, as a devout atheist, she overcame a problem when asked by her very religious uncle to say grace by saying, 'Heavenly Pa, Ta'. 'This amused my aunt and uncle and overcame my problem succinctly', she said.

I checked Danny Katz's 'Modern Guru' column where the problem appeared:

*A friend has kindly invited me to her family home on December 25. Out of deference to her mother – a devout Christian – grace will be said before dinner. As the oldest male present, tradition demands that I should speak it. However, I am a total non-believer and it would be completely hypocritical; also I have no idea what to say. But to decline, either in advance or at the time, would be acutely embarrassing. What should I do?*

J.E. Mona Vale, NSW

Danny Katz's reply is hilarious, but it doesn't include any folklore, so it isn't relevant here. Meanwhile, I have found several more people who knew 'Heavenly Pa, Ta' in the 1970s, so it appears to have been widely known. Anyone who is able to contribute on this topic to *Play and Folklore* is welcome to do so.



Lantern slide, Francis Collection  
Source – Museum Victoria

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## STARS OF THE PLAYGROUND AND SCREEN: An examination of the links between children's traditional rhymes and movies

Janice Ackerley

The ideas of searching out movie and children's playground rhyme connections came to me recently while watching the chilling final scene of the movie *Elephant* (2003), a fly-on-the-wall depiction of a type of Columbine High School massacre. The final scene shows the teen-killer Alex taunting his victims, Nathan and Carrie, who are trapped in a school cafeteria meat-locker. The words of the traditional counting-out rhyme, beginning Eenie, meenie, minie mo, fade out as they plead for their lives and Alex selects his victim. The viewer is left uncertain of the final outcome. This scene became especially significant as I considered the long history of this rhyme, along with the speculation of possible links with Anglo-Cymric counting systems and the selection by the Druids of victims for human sacrifice.

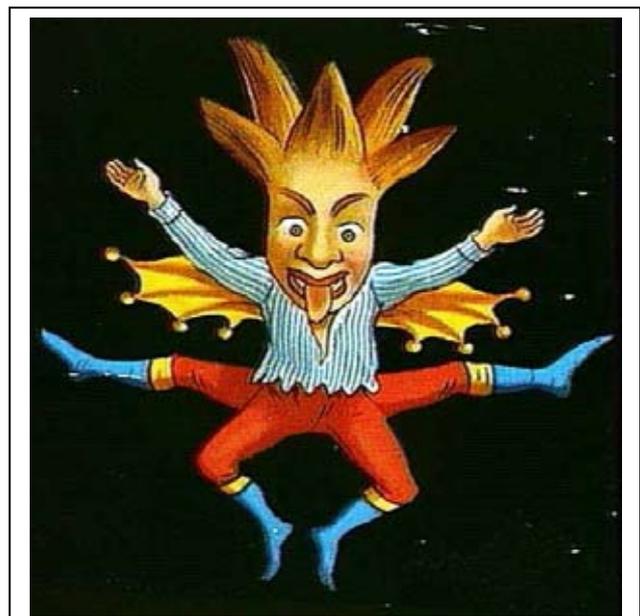
Another movie that includes this rhyme as a counting-out ritual is Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). In this instance the character Zed was deciding whether a white boxer or a black crime boss would be the first to be raped. The controversial word 'nigger' was used in the rhyme. In the editing of this movie for television the 'n' word was replaced by 'tiger'. It is rumoured that in Tarantino's final script of director Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), the offending word was changed to catch a red-neck by the toe. Similarly, in the 1966 *Dr Who* series, *The Celestial Toymaker*, the voice of Peter Pervis is used to mask the offending word in the 2001 audio release.

The technique of juxtaposing the 'innocence' of children's rhymes with scenes of horror can be seen in a variety of movies, including Alfred Hitchcock's thrillers and the terrors of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). In the latter, the signature-warning tune for the arrival of Freddy Krueger is:

*One, two, Freddy's coming for you,  
Three, four, you better lock your door,  
Five, six, get your crucifix,  
Seven, eight, you better stay up late,  
Nine, ten, never sleep again.*

This is a parody of the rhyme beginning One, two, buckle my shoe / Three, four, knock at the door. This rhyme is a constant thread throughout the eight movies based on this character.

A master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock employed elements of children's folklore to great effect in some of his well-known movies. In the 1945 movie *Shadow of a Doubt* the kid sister, Ann Newton, can be heard to say, 'Step on a crack, break your mother's back.' In the film *Marnie* (1964), the opening and closing scenes show Marnie, clasping an 'alligator' skin



Lantern slide, Francis Collection  
Source – Museum Victoria



purse, on her way to visit her mother, and the children in the street singing:

*Mother, Mother, I am ill,  
Send for the doctor from the hill.  
Call for the doctor, call for the nurse,  
Call for the lady with the alligator purse.  
Mumps, said the doctor,  
Measles, said the nurse,  
Nothing, said the lady with the alligator purse.*

Speculation as to the symbolic associations includes the doctor and nurse being significant in the healing process for the psychologically unsound, compulsive thief Marnie, and the alligator as representative of her predatory nature. In the film, *Rear Window* (1954), we catch a passing glimpse down a side alley of a group of children playing hopscotch, perhaps representing the freedom of childhood in contrast to the secluded life of wheelchair-bound voyeur and photographer L. B. Jefferies.

In *The Birds* (1963), the suspense caused by the vicious attack of the birds on the school children of Bodega Bay is heightened in a sequence in which the birds mass outside a schoolhouse while we listen to the children singing. The song is in the nature of a folk ballad (*The Wife Wrapt in a Wether's Skin*) and has the cadence of a children's playground rhyme. The cumulative nature of the song matches the accumulation of crows outside the schoolhouse:

*I married me a wife in the month of June  
Risselty-rosselty now, now, now !  
I carried her home in a silver spoon  
Risselty-rosselty, hey bom-bosselty  
Nicklety, knacklety, rustical quality  
Willaby-wallaby now, now, now !  
She swept the floor but once a year  
She swore her brooms were all too dear  
Risselty-rosselty...  
She combed her hair but once a year  
At every rake (stroke) she shed a tear  
Risselty-rosselty...  
She churned the butter in dad's old boot  
And for a dash she used her foot  
Risselty-rosselty...  
The butter came out a grisly grey  
The cheese took legs and ran away  
Risselty-rosselty...  
The butter and cheese are on the shelf  
If you want any more, you can sing it yourself.*

Teases and taunts have long been part of playground banter. The 1990 sci-fi thriller *Flatliners* (1990) includes many flashbacks to early childhood. The playground rhymes in the film include the taunts Cry baby cry; Last one home is a rotten egg; and Step on a crack, break your mother's back. *Cry Baby* (1990) is also the title of a romantic musical comedy starring Johnny Depp and features the very popular playground teasing chant, Cry-Baby and Allison, sitting in a tree, K. I. S. S. I. N. G. In the recent movie *North*



*Country* (2005), based on America's first sexual harassment court case against Eveleth Mines, Josey Aimes endures much abuse, both verbal and physical, including the parody, Mary, Mary, quite contrary, Kiss my arse it's really hairy.

Two cult classics that feature traditional nursery rhymes as a key element are the movie *The Wicker Man* (1973) and the television series *Sapphire and Steele – A Crack in Time* (1979). *The Wicker Man* contains many folkloric elements based on the beliefs and rituals of ancient Britain. As well as the climactic May Day ceremony, we see a variety of chants associated with childhood. These include Britt Ekland's enticing rendition of Baa Baa Black Sheep, sung from the bath tub, a naked candlestick jumping sequence reminiscent of Jack be Nimble, and the more sinister ritual of Oranges and Lemons. The *Sapphire and Steele* television series entitled *Assignment One: A Crack in Time* follows the plot line of children controlling time through a series of nursery rhymes, including Little Miss Muffet, Ring-a-Rosies and Goosey, Goosey Gander, the last being used to connect with the time of the Roundhead soldiers.



Lantern slide, Francis Collection  
Source – Museum Victoria

A reverse trend in more recent years has seen songs and chants 'borrowed' from teen movies becoming part of playground rhyme practices. These rhymes have been combined with clapping and body movements and also blended in with existing rhyme sequences. The rhymes often have sexually suggestive lyrics. The movie *The Hot Chick* (2002), involving a male-female body switch, includes the song *Boys are Cheats and Liars*, which is now widely used in New Zealand playgrounds. It follows the tradition of avoidance rhymes that depend on 'the listener's knowledge of the taboo word to replace the very similar one given by the apparently innocent performer' (Factor, 1988: 163).

*Boys are cheats and liars, they're such a big disgrace,  
They will tell you anything to get to second base-ball,  
Baseball he thinks he's gonna score,*



*If you let him go all the way then you are a  
Hor-ticulturist studies flowers, geologist studies rocks,  
The only thing he wants from you is a place to put his cock—  
Roaches, beetles, butterflies and bugs nothing makes him happier  
Than a giant pair of jug-glers and acrobats  
And a dancing bear named Chuck  
All guys really want to do is—  
Forget it, no such luck.*

The chant in the movie *Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star* (2003), beginning Brick wall, waterfall, can be heard in New Zealand playgrounds as a hand-clapping chant:

*Brick wall, waterfall,  
Dickie thinks he's got it all.  
But he don't, and we do,  
So boom with that attitude  
Or Reese's Pieces, Seven-Up,  
Mess with us, we'll mess you up!*

The cheer-leading chant from *Bring It On* (2000) has similarly become part of the playground culture of pre-teen girls, beginning with the lines:

*I'm sexy, I'm cute! I'm popular to boot!  
I'm bitchin', great hair! The boys all love to stare!  
I'm wanted, I'm hot! I'm everything you're not!  
I'm pretty, I'm cool! I dominate this school!*

Children's rhymes and games are often used to cross barriers, whether between generations, between cultures, or just to act as a means of communication. An example occurs in an episode of the Western television series *Deadwood* (Season 1, Episode 5, 2004), where a hand-clapping game bridges the gap and opens lines of communication between a semi-mute girl, Sophia Metz, in shock over her family's massacre, and a prostitute named Trixie.

In *Fairy Tale: A True Story* (1997), of Cottingley fairies fame, young Frances communicates with World War II soldiers by creating a cat's-cradle string pattern. The parting of sisters Celie and Nettie in the movie *The Colour Purple* (1985) is sealed poignantly with a hand-clapping ritual, ending with the words, You and me will never part. David and Judy in *Wondrous Oblivion* (2003) confirm their friendship with the sharing of rhymes. David recites the rhyme:

*Hitler has only got one ball,  
Goering has two, but very small,  
Himmler has something very similar,  
But poor old Goebels has no balls at all.*

And in return little Jamaican Judy sings:

*One little, two little, three little golliwogs.*

In the family comedy *Big* (1988), a thirteen-year-old boy is transformed overnight into an adult. The adult character, played by Tom Hanks, uses children's rhymes to convince



his best friend that he is really is a child in an adult's body. The rhyme is the key link to his childhood:

*Down, down baby, down, down the roller coaster  
Sweet, sweet baby, sweet, sweet, don't let me go  
Shimmy, shimmy, cocoa pop. Shimmy, shimmy, rock  
Shimmy, shimmy, cocoa pop. Shimmy, shimmy, rock  
I met a girlfriend – a triscit. She said, a triscit – a biscuit  
Ice cream, soda pop, vanilla on the top  
Ooh, Shelly's out, walking down the street, ten times a week  
I read it. I said it. I stole my momma's credit  
I'm cool. I'm hot. Sock me in the stomach three more times.*

Homer Simpson cowers in anticipation of taboo words in the episode entitled *Fat Man and Little Boy* (*The Simpsons*, Season 16, 2004). In this scene, Lisa and her friend Janie sing and clap to a version of the popular rhyme *Miss Suzy had a steamboat*.

*Miss Suzy had a steamboat, the steamboat had a bell  
Miss Suzy went to heaven, the steamboat went to –  
Hello operator, give me number nine  
If you disconnect me, I'll kick your big –  
Behind the 'frigerator there was a piece of glass  
Miss Suzy fell upon it, and cut her big old –  
Ask me no more questions, tell me no more lies  
the boys are in the restroom zipping up their –  
Flies are in the meadow, the bees are in the park  
Miss Suzy and her boyfriend are kissing in the D. A. R. K.*

Fast food advertising has resulted in children chanting the action rhyme:

*MacDonalds, MacDonalds,  
Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut.  
I like food, I like food,  
Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut.  
You like food, you like food,  
Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut.*

This rhyme is also featured in the introduction to *Super Size Me* (2004), a documentary that examines the connections between obesity and the fast-food corporations in America.

Why do scriptwriters and directors include children's rhymes in their work? Sometimes it is used to create a contrast or juxtaposition between the horror of a situation and the innocence of childhood. This may serve to heighten the horror and can create an additional element of suspense. Or the sub-culture that exists within childhood, often revolving around the



Lantern slide, Francis Collection  
Source – Museum Victoria

games and language of the playground, can be used to create cross-generational or cross-cultural links. The proof that an adult was once a child exists in the knowledge of these traditional games and rituals.

This exploration of television and movie links with children's traditional rhymes is ongoing. If readers know of other examples, please contact me.

Janice Ackerley teaches at Christchurch College of Education, New Zealand, and has compiled a database of New Zealand's children's playlore. She can be contacted at [ackers@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ackers@xtra.co.nz).

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## CHILDREN AND CRABBING IN BUNBURY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Lee-Anne Abdo

Between Spring and Autumn, children in Bunbury can be observed hunting for Blue Swimmer crabs. Catching crabs can be as simple as donning gloves and snorkeling down to catch the creatures from the ocean floor. The next level of sophistication involves wading in the inlet and catching the crabs with scoop nets (wire baskets on a wooden pole). The most elaborate method involves the use of bait, usually along with nets that are tied to a jetty or a float.

Since the 1960s, Koombana Bay, the Leschenault Inlet-Estuary, Collie River and Preston River have been substantially modified, in order to accommodate roads, train tracks, a harbour and flood controls. While many people lament the physical changes to the environment, the crabs have endured and crabbing has remained an important part of the community's heritage. A number of locals are able to recall hours spent crabbing as a child. They continue to crab as adults and they involve their children in crabbing activities.



Source – Leanne Abdo

Dave, now in his forties, was born in Bunbury after his parents emigrated from Wales. His earliest childhood memories include crabbing outings, with his Dad rowing the



family around the inlet, while the children dangled meat-filled stockings in the water, in order to catch crabs. They would haul the stockings back into the boat, usually with a full-sized crab tenaciously clawing on. The crabs were shaken loose into a drum in the boat. Sometimes they'd miss the bucket and the barefoot children would be nipped by the scuttling crabs. Dave recalls: 'Dad would get mildly angry with us because when he was fishing we would sometimes be catching crabs and the bin would be overflowing and there'd be crabs in the bottom of the boat and he'd be saying, "That's enough crabs, that's enough crabs!"'

By the time Dave was around eight, the family had an outboard motor and wire-drop nets for their crabbing. There were four children in Dave's family and his uncle also had four children. The two families would often go crabbing together. They would light an open fire on the bank and cook the crabs in a kerosene drum filled with estuary water. He recalls the kids sitting in the water with their cooked crabs, just pulling them apart, eating them and dropping the scraps in the water. Once, after an evening of crabbing, the older cousins had a mammoth 'fish fight', throwing the leftover bait from one boat to the other. As the youngest, Dave used to tie a toy yacht behind the boat, as he would get bored after hours of crabbing. His father would have to rescue the toy boat on the occasions that it broke free.

Any crabs that were taken home for eating were boiled in an old laundry copper on the backyard barbecue. The guts and shells were buried in the garden. Sometimes Dave's older brother would take him snorkeling for crabs at The Cut (a channel of clear, deeper water joining the estuary to the bay) They would dive down and grab the crabs by hand from the sandy bottom. Welding gloves were worn to avoid being injured, as startled crabs would attack fiercely.

The prospect of being nipped by a crab seems to be part of their allure for children. Dave says: 'As a young kid you can never resist sticking your finger in where crabs are, and to this day my own kids still do the same thing, and you can warn them about the effects of being bitten by a crab and all that sort of stuff, but until you've been bitten by one you don't really appreciate it. I do recall being told by the parents to be careful, be careful, but...invariably, now and again, you'd end up being bitten by a crab and it's quite painful too I must admit.'

Dave's parents are in their eighties and believe that crabbing is a great activity for young families because it is relatively cheap – they used to use old food scraps as bait. Dave believes that crabbing is good for children because it requires team work and an adventurous spirit. He says: 'It would be lovely to think of kids growing up here still being able to go and catch a few crabs... It is essentially a good fun thing, it's not about putting food on the table, it's not a life and death experience – it's more of just a very pleasurable and rare experience that we can enjoy a long time, if we conserve it. Fortunately I think, for my children, when we go crabbing there isn't an expectation that we will get a lot of crabs. I know some people do work on that idea that they won't go unless there's a guarantee, virtually, that they will get crabs. My kids have sort of come to terms with the idea that it's fun to look for them. I remember, for a while there with my son Michael, we'd go every day for an hour, for about a week for a scoop and often you wouldn't even see a crab, and then there were times when we would have some very good adventures. [It's] quite scary in some ways for a young kid, because you're wading through the mud and weed and there are little stingrays and all sorts of things popping up, and it leads to some serious good laughs – falling over in the mud and running away from stingrays and



running after crabs, treading on crabs in the mud, having them run through our legs and scare you, so yeah, that's probably some of the best fun we've had crabbing in recent times.'



Source – Leanne Abdo

Graham is another Bunbury local with a strong crabbing heritage. He is in his seventies and his family has lived in the area for generations. From his childhood in the late 1930s he remembers families gathering on the banks at dusk. 'We'd all go out with our scoop nets, big kerosene tins or babies' baths, whatever you had tied behind you and just scoop and you'd come in with just kerosene tins full of crabs, absolutely, just unbelievable. One family had the milk delivery contract, so on weekends they used their truck to collect dozens of children, who would all go for a picnic and a crab.'

By the time he was 11 he was ready to take over his brother's 'little business'. He and a friend would catch crabs (by dangling pieces of meat on string at the jetties), cook them and walk around to friends' places, selling their catch for 2/6d. However, Graham's brother omitted to tell him how long to cook the crabs, so a number of customers were lost when their first catch was delivered half-cooked.

People's cooking methods vary, from immersing crabs (dead...usually) into boiling sea water for 3-5 minutes until shells turn from blue/brown to orange, to bringing crabs to boil and removing them immediately. Adults usually take on the cooking role. They also normally perform the messy task of cleaning the crabs by removing the entrails and rinsing the carcass in salt water.

Eating crabs requires some skill. For Graham, 'the rule still goes in the family, if you haven't learnt to get the meat out of the crab by the time you're four years of age you go hungry!' Some children dislike the taste of the meat. Those who do like the flavour require patience to pick the shell of its contents, plus strength to crack the claw shells open.

My father, Edwin, is in his late fifties. As a young boy he was taught how to get crabs on camping trips with his Dad and uncles at the muddy river mouths along the east coast of South Africa, and he has always loved the taste of crab flesh. He immigrated to Australia and settled in Bunbury in 1988, and was drawn to the area because he knew he could continue the crabbing customs that he had enjoyed since childhood.



Source – Leanne Abdo

He has subsequently taught his sons how to crab. He says: 'They used to love going out on their own eventually, because they could always please me by bringing crabs home. They enjoyed just the feeling of being on the water and it was always exciting to catch crabs and avoid being nipped when you got them out of a net and measured them. They used to go in the inlet here, I used to bring them here with the box trailer, they'd take the boat out, they would spend the whole afternoon crabbing during the school holidays.'

Over the generations, crabbing has been an important form of folklife for a number of children in Bunbury. Indeed, crabbing is an important food source for many coastal communities elsewhere in Australia and worldwide. In Bunbury, with its array of supermarkets and fish shops, catching crabs as a source of food is a subsidiary reason for the custom. Instead, crabbing is practiced mainly as a valuable means for children (and adults) to interact with friends and family in a cheap and exciting activity, develop an awareness of their natural environment, and to gain a sense of local community identity.



Blue Swimmer crab, *Portunus pelagicus*  
Source – Museum Victoria

Originally from South Africa, Lee-Anne Abdo now lives in Bunbury, WA, where she works as an art teacher. She is a graduate of the Open University's Graduate Diploma in Australian Folklife Studies (Curtin University).

## WHAT IS A JOKE?

Evelyn Goode

*An early twentieth century view of Australian children's notions of a joke*

Small said he knew a joke.

'What's that?' said Rod, sitting up.

'Well', said Small, putting a fat little chin within a grubby palm and looking meditative, 'we might has dress up like black-fellas an' has knock at ve door...'

'Silly little kid!' said Rod, spurning the suggestion; 'that ain't a joke, it's a lark.'  
'You couldn't has make up a joke, neiver', said Small.

'I can', said Rod sharply, and turned on his face, chewing a dry pine-needle. 'What's... what's'... he lifted his head and gazed about for an inspiration, wrinkling his forehead. 'What's the diff'runce between a gum-tree-ee, and... an... a shiny beetle?'

What?' asked Small simply.

'Well what?' returned Rod impatiently.

'I dunno', Small's bright, golden-brown eyes looked pensive.

'What is it?' said Polly, incisively.

'I had the answer just now', said Rod vaguely, yet with an air of disarming candour. He already regretted his rash excursion into the difficult region of conundrum.

'Things with differences between them aren't jokes, neither', Polly said. 'They're on'y riddles. A lark', she explained, 'is something what makes people cross, an' they say, "D'ye think you're funny?"' Polly's drawl and scornful inflection were inimitable. 'A riddle is always something you have to tell the answer to, after you've asked it, an' people say, "That's good". A joke is just something that you laugh at.'

'You make one then', said Rod bluntly.

'On'y a few people in the world can make up a joke', said Polly solemnly, slipping past the suggestion, 'but their joke isn't sort of finished until some of the other people in the world laugh at it.'

Evelyn Maria Goode (1877-1927) was born in South Australia, and became the wife of the Premier of that State. Her novel *Days That Speak: A Story of Australian Child Life* from which this is an extract, is an affectionate, though typically slightly condescending representation of Australian children's language, thinking and play. (London, Ward, Lock & Co., 1908)



*I has hurt my nut when I  
turned a lot of times*

Source – *Days that Speak*  
by Evelyn Maria Goode



Editor's note: In the last issue of *Play and Folklore* we celebrated news that the Australian Research Council is providing funding for a four-year project to collect and study Australian children's playlore across the country. We can now provide more details about the project.



**Childhood, Tradition and Change: a national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's playlore 2007-2010**

**A four year research project, funded by the Australian Research Council**

**Chief Investigators**

Professor Kate Darian-Smith, University of Melbourne  
Professor William Logan, Deakin University  
Professor Graham Seal, Curtin University

**Principal Researchers**

Dr Gwenda Davey, Deakin University  
Dr June Factor, University of Melbourne

**Partner Organisations**

National Library of Australia  
Museum Victoria

**Administering Institution**

University of Melbourne

**Project Officer**

Dr Nikki Henningham (n.henningham@unimelb.edu.au)  
<http://www.australian.unimelb.edu.au/CTC/index.html>

**The Project**

A multi-disciplinary research team will produce the first comprehensive national analysis of the range, continuity and variation of Australian children's playlore from the 1950s to the present. In the first instance, fieldwork documentation (involving written observations, still photography, and sound and video recordings) will be collected from primary schools around the country. This material will be studied and compared with previous playlore research to construct longitudinal cultural maps of children's play within the school communities' wider demographic, social and cultural contexts. The documentation will be lodged with the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria to augment and strengthen their existing children's playlore collections.



The fieldwork program will draw upon experience gained in earlier research projects. Practised fieldworkers will spend a week in each of the 30 schools selected for the project, observing and recording children at play. These schools include a majority where fieldwork has been undertaken in the last 50 years, giving researchers the opportunity to compare and contrast children's playlore over time and changing social and cultural circumstances. A number of schools in places where no previous research of this kind has occurred will also be observed, filling in gaps and ensuring a variety of types of schools and school communities.

The research team will also invite submissions from schools that are not visited by fieldworkers, and from people in the general community. An information pack, including questions about experience and memories of children's play practices, will be distributed to schools for teachers, parents and children. The project website will provide an interactive section to enable members of the public to contribute (via the site or by mail).

As well as enriching existing cultural heritage archives such as the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria, research outcomes will include publications, professional conferences and public symposia. The enhanced knowledge and understanding of Australian children's play practices and traditions will be of particular value to the Australian Government in identifying significant intangible cultural heritage in Australia, in accord with the 2003 Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Australia, and to UNESCO's Memory of the World Program.



Professor Kate Darian-Smith, The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, with Dr Richard Gillespie, Head, History & Technology, Museum Victoria, in the History & Technology Store at Melbourne Museum

Source – Paul Richiardi, Uni News, University of Melbourne

More information on this project can be found via the following web link: <http://www.australian.unimelb.edu.au/CTC/about.html>

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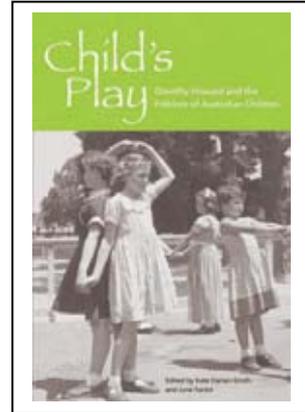
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