



Play and Folklore

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This issue of *Play and Folklore* contains two articles from post-graduate students at widely separated institutions: Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia, and the Beijing Foreign Studies University in China. We are glad to provide these emerging scholars with a platform to present their research to a broad audience. We also publish a follow-up to the language rituals of a fading Christian family tradition in Australia – grace before meals.

In July 1998, in issue no.34, Judy McKinty wrote an important article describing her experience collecting information about the play traditions and practices of Aboriginal children in Victoria. In this issue the results of the Aboriginal Children's Play Project, accessible through the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria, are discussed by Professor Kate Darian-Smith, a historian at the University of Melbourne.

Gwenda Beed Davey and June Factor



The Aboriginal Children's Play Project¹

Kate Darian-Smith

During the mid-1990s, a unique and highly significant collection of almost 70 oral histories documenting the experiences of childhood, playlore and growing up in Aboriginal communities were recorded throughout urban and rural Victoria.² Known as the Aboriginal Children's Play Project, this collection is part of the extensive Australian Children's Folklore Collection located in Museum Victoria. From August 2008, following a lengthy process of clarification with participants about their preferred access arrangements for the interview materials, Museum Victoria has 'opened' this important historical resource to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and researchers.³

The Aboriginal Children's Play Project was initiated in 1991 by June Factor, internationally recognised for her scholarship on Australian children's play and co-editor of *Play and Folklore*. She obtained funding from the philanthropic Stegley Foundation to support the project's fieldwork and interviewing costs. Folklore researcher Judy McKinty conducted the majority of the interviews. With assistance from Aboriginal community leaders in establishing contacts, Judy found that her requests for interviews were greeted with generosity. A 'snowball' effect occurred as many of those interviewed suggested family and friends as potential contributors.

The project's aim — to compile an oral history collection that focussed on memories of play across time and in different geographical locations — marked a departure from (albeit limited) previous research into Aboriginal childhood experiences. Those interviewed for the project ranged from children aged as young as four years, through primary and high school age, to adults; the two oldest participants were respected elders aged in their 70s. In some instances, group interviews were conducted and these tapped into shared reminiscences across and between generations.

Interviews were conducted around Victoria: in Warrnambool (including Framlingham Aboriginal Settlement), East Gippsland (including Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust), the Healesville area in central Victoria and in suburban Melbourne. They were informal in structure, and were recorded in homes, workplaces, schools and outdoors. The majority of participants had grown up in Victoria, although a handful had spent their childhood years in New South Wales, in Sydney, at La Perouse and in rural towns.



Mud switch made at the Corranderrk Koori Co-Op in Healesville, Victoria in 1996 by a participant in the Aboriginal Children's Play Project

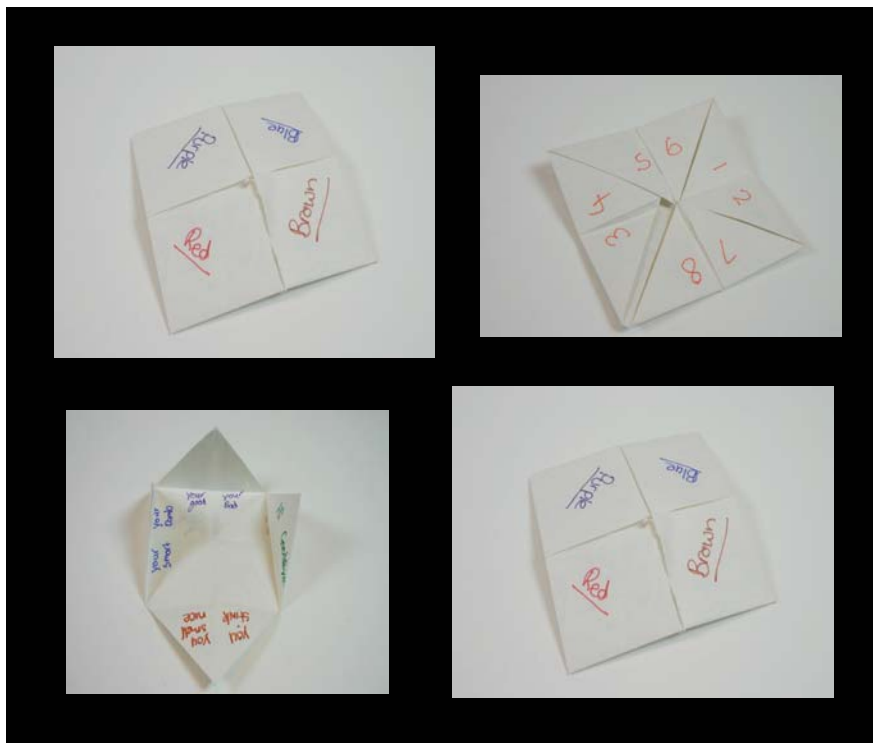
Photographer – Carla Pascoe
Source – Museum Victoria



The collection provides insight into childhoods from the 1930s to the 1990s, and spent in places ranging from Cummeragunja Mission to inner-city Fitzroy in Melbourne. The memories not only reflect on experiences of hardship and racism, but also attest to the strength of community bonds, the ties with Aboriginal culture and the centrality of family life. And because these are oral accounts, there are many fine yarns and stories about the pleasures and fun, and the occasional bewilderments and hurts, of childhood.

Participants recalled play in the different environments of school and home. Activities that occurred in the school playground included 'hanging out with friends', imaginative games and organised sports. Games mentioned that were popular include marbles, string games, skipping games and rhymes, yo-yos, hopscotch, chasey, clapping games and team games such as Red Rover, British Bulldog, What's the Time, Mr Wolf? and Cowboys and Indians. At home, games were taught to children by parents and older siblings.

Many older participants also recalled playing in the bush and swimming in rivers with other children as well as fishing, trapping rabbits and gathering food (fruit, mushrooms, grubs, eggs and so on) with adults. There are some accounts of using mud and stones for artwork, or painting bodies with ochre, as well as games with 'mud switches' devised from a flexible bough and a ball of mud. These times spent in the bush are seen — across the collection of interviews — as among the highlights of childhood, as are the stories that were told to children by adults.



Paper fortune teller, Orbost, 1996

Photographer – Carla Pascoe
Source – Museum Victoria



There is also much mention in the interviews of the objects that were incorporated into children's play. Older participants have strong memories of playing with homemade toys, including billycarts, dolls, little cars formed out of clay, shanghais constructed from saplings and old tyre tubes, tin rollers where a can is pulled along by a piece of string, and kites fashioned from brown paper and string. Younger respondents indicated that they liked to play with manufactured board games, electronic toys such as Nintendo and on computers. Pets, including dogs, cats, birds and even domesticated possums, are also remembered, across all ages, as companions and the source of amusing incidents.

In 2006, Museum Victoria received funding from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria to re-contact individuals who had participated in the Aboriginal Children's Play Project a decade earlier and to finalise the access arrangements for the materials. The original interviewer, Judy McKinty, was contracted to undertake this lengthy task. She has commented that during the 1990s, as well as a decade later, she asked individuals about their hopes for the future use of the interviews:

Unfailingly and unanimously, they replied that they would like the information to come back out in the community in some way, so that they can share it with their families, and particularly so that the children can learn about their own culture, and how childhood was in the past.⁴

Now that this remarkable oral history collection can be consulted by the public (in line with any access restrictions), this marks the first step in ensuring that Aboriginal children's playlore can be more centrally incorporated into the broader historical record — and that the continuity, change and adaptation so evident in these varied and engaging accounts of Aboriginal childhoods can be appreciated and shared more fully.

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Endnotes

1. I am grateful to the generous assistance of Judy McKinty in particular, and also of Deborah Tout-Smith (Museum Victoria) and June Factor in compiling this overview of the Aboriginal Children's Play Project.
2. The Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC) was donated to Museum Victoria in 1999 by June Factor, its joint founder (with Gwenda Davey). The collection is among the most comprehensive collections of folklore for and about children internationally. The ACFC consists of more than 10,000 files and documents listing children's games, rhymes and other kinds of children's folklore; photographs and other audio-visual materials; and play artefacts and specialist collections. It was the first Museum Victoria collection to be placed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World register. See <http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/Infosheets/Australian-Childrens-Folklore-Collection/>
3. For a more extensive discussion of the scope of the Aboriginal Children's Play Project, and the process in securing permissions see Kate Darian-Smith, 'Oral Histories of Childhood and Play: The Aboriginal Children's Play Project', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 32, 2008 (forthcoming).
4. Judy McKinty, 'Museum Victoria: The Aboriginal Children's Play Project Revisited, Final Report', internal Museum Victoria document, July 2008, p.3.



Children's Games: a Comparison of 12th and 21st Century Chinese Children at Play

Li Xiaoyan

Play is an important part of children's lives. It helps to develop their physical, cognitive and social skills. Both Western and Chinese sociologists and educators have linked the history of children's games to contemporary experiences of play. Within these studies, recent researchers have tended to focus on the question of whether children today are losing the art of playing games.

The major focus of this article is on a comparison of the games that children play in Beijing today with those recorded in the 'Hundred Children at Play' genre by the artists working in the 12th century Song Dynasty. This comparison centres around three questions: What games do children play today? How do these games compare with the games recorded in the 12th century in China? Does children's contemporary experience of play in Beijing contribute to their healthy development in the same ways that it did for children, portrayed at play, 900 years ago in China?

Even in the period of the Song dynasty, when children's education was dominated by Confucian thought that discouraged childish traits and playfulness, children managed to play in their free time (Limin Bai, 2005). The 'renaissance-like' revolution in art that occurred during this dynasty captured the naturalness and the humanity of the children of the elite as they were playing in gardens and courtyards.¹

One contemporary artist (Li Boshi, 2000) who is maintaining the tradition of the Song Dynasty 'Hundred Children at Play' genre, shows children playing with a frog, a cricket and other insects, catching butterflies, wrestling, playing Hide-and-Seek, Blind Touch, Tug of War, Chess, Hawk and Chicks,² Bamboo Horse, and mimicking adult processions, music making and scenes from famous court events from even earlier eras of Chinese history.

Xu Fizhen (1998), in his study of the Song Dynasty's extensive range of games and pastimes, classifies them under five categories:

1. Role playing: as in the games of Hawk and Chicks, pretend families, pretend processions.
2. Athletic games: including flying kites, playing handball and football, rope swinging, (Qiuqina), shuttlecock, tug of war, imitation horse-back riding (on wooden horses), playing on specially constructed children's slides and imitation castles.
3. Intelligence games: chess, making folded-paper birds, boats and kites.
4. Entertainment games: playing with insects and small animals, puppets, making snowmen, waving fireworks and just lying around in the gardens under the shade of the trees.



5. Musical games: these were usually played on festival days and imitated the adult rituals of praying for rain and harvest, and simply dancing for pleasure.

These 12th century paintings are usually portrayals of outdoor activities. Cao Zhongping (2001) has argued that this outdoor play permits noise and movement and greater freedom with raw materials, like water, sand, dirt and snow. Outdoors, children can run and shout, chase and climb. This increases their physical skills, their gross and fine motor skills, and their body awareness. Additionally, in these Song Dynasty outdoor games the children were mostly playing with others. When children play together they have to remember rules, act quickly and cooperatively and learn how to compromise in order to have the maximum fun from the games. So these outdoor games were also contributing to the development of the children's cognitive and social skills.

Generally speaking, although it is usually only the children of the elite who are portrayed, the research into games and play in the Song Dynasty emphasises the positive aspects of children's activities in 12th century China. In contrast, both Western and Chinese studies of contemporary play often take a more concerned and negative approach. These contemporary concerns focus on the impact of information technologies, rapid urbanisation and traffic on the loss (or shrinking) of outside play areas. In addition, the greater anonymity within cities together with the major economic changes Chinese cities have experienced have reduced much of the communality of earlier times. This means that children have fewer friends to interact with outside of school.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education launched a nationwide 'Sunlight Sport' campaign, requesting every school to guarantee children one hour a day in sports and games (Wang Ying, 9 May 2007). This followed an earlier request that all homework should be completed at school so that children do not have to take homework home (*People's Daily Online*, March 3rd, 2000).

These contemporary concerns that 'children no longer play games' prompted my research project. I wanted to find out what games children do play now in Beijing, at school and at home. Then I proceeded to compare the levels of skills development in these current games with those portrayed by the Song Dynasty painters 900 years ago.

Methodology

I conducted a pilot survey of 27 pupils at a weekend Beijing Language Training school. These children are from 19 different primary schools or kindergartens but they all live in the same, middle level socio-economic areas of the city.

The findings from the survey were supplemented with a small field observation of children at play and with informal interviews with the children and their parents.

Findings

I used Xu Fuzhen's five categories to interpret the data with these results (overleaf):



27 Children’s Activities and Games at School (Beijing 2007)

Categories of games	Activities and Games	% of Children
Role Play	Hawk and Chicks, Chasing Ducks, Cat and Mice, Sleepwalk	14%
Athletic games	Shuttlecock, Tug of War, Rope Skipping, Ball Games, Frisbee, Running	32%
Intelligence Games	Cards, Handcrafts	7%
Entertainment Games	Clapping Hands, Landmine, Making Trains	11%
Musical Games	Number Songs	4%
Others	Reading, Resting, Sitting and Chatting	32%

(NB Whilst most of the children played games in several of these categories, this table represents only their first preference)

The table indicates that children do have a variety of games that they play in their free time. Moreover, some are the same games — Hawk and Chicks, Shuttlecock, Rope Skipping — that Chinese children have been playing for over 900 years.

Children’s Activities and Games at Home (Beijing 2007)

Categories of games	Activities and Games	% of Children
Role Play	Hawk and Chicks, Gun Fighting, Duck across the River	14%
Athletic games	Rope Skipping, Ball Games, Running	18%
Intelligence Games	Cards, Chinese Checkers	7%
Entertainment Games	Peg-Top	4%
Musical Games		0%
Others	Reading, TV, Playing with Pets, Toys or Computer Games	57%



These figures indicate that children at home have fewer active and participant games. Moreover, they are more likely to play with pets rather than with their peers.

The two tables indicate that children have various games in their free time, but the rate of participation in games is higher at school than at home. This might be because educational institutions have recognized the importance of play in children's development and invest more funds in providing more playgrounds and better facilities. At the same time, the availability of peers also makes it easier to play participant games at school.

Conclusion

The results of this small pilot survey indicate that Beijing children in this middle level socio-economic section of the city have a variety of games, some reaching back for over 900 years, and some new. Overall, it seems there is a much lower level of social participation in games compared to the levels portrayed in the paintings of children at play in the Song Dynasty, and a much lower level of playing out of doors. It would be wrong, however, to say that Beijing children have lost the art of playing games.

The impact of modern life on children's access to play is a concern amongst parents and government departments. Although Beijing has many public parks, several with special facilities for children's activities, there is still some way to go in improving the public safety aspect of playing outdoors, especially in relation to the growth in urban traffic. Moreover, the 'pull' factor of the attraction of home-based electronic entertainment is contributing to the occasional social isolation of Beijing children, who now seem to have playmates who are pets rather than peers.

Li Xiaoyan is in the final year of her Masters Degree in Australian Studies at the English Department of the Beijing Foreign Studies University.



Chinese Chess set, circa 1990s

Photographer – Carla Pascoe
Source – Museum Victoria



Endnotes

1. A website showing several of the Song Dynasty images of children at play is <http://www.chinahistoryforum.com/lofiversion/index.php/t21614.html>.
2. The game of Hawk and Chicks: one child is chosen to be the Hen, the protector, one child is chosen to be the Hawk, the hunter. The Hen protects her Chicks by holding out her hands and moving trickily from side to side, with her Chicks in line behind her, each one holding on to the clothes of the child in front. The Hawk faces the Hen, trying to catch her Chicks. When a Chick is caught he/she moves over to stand behind the Hawk.

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MORE ABOUT GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Edel Wignell

Last year, Edel Wignell, a Melbourne writer and a subscriber to Play and Folklore since its inception 27 years ago, wondered whether any new 'graces' had emerged in children's folklore. Her report was published in Play and Folklore no. 49, July 2007. She had two responses to it.

Gil Hardwick, historian, anthropologist, researcher and writer, said 'Grace at dinner can be quite witty. I remember a few years ago we were sitting ready for dinner when someone asked who would like to say grace. The youngest daughter put her hand up and, with all reverently bowing their heads, she said, "Grace".'

Another brief anecdote came from a woman who lives in a country town. 'Most folk in our Historical Society are very conservative and at every special function, somebody is asked to say Grace. We have one lady who makes it up around something topical. However, one anniversary dinner (which is a very formal affair), a man was asked to do the honours. He stood up and said, "Ta Pa!" Some people were amused, and some were not impressed.'

John Fisher, MA, a speech pathologist, reported, 'My maternal grandmother was a mother hen who swept waifs and single Christmas people under her feathers, and so there could be strangers (to us) but "friends" to Nan at the Christmas dinner. Grace was never said throughout the year, but like the one reviving gin and tonic, Grace was flourished by Nan for the meal.

'The honour went to a dusty sparrow-woman, obviously old since she was Nan's friend. After the plated meals had been plonked on the table and Nan and Pop and all the family settled, Mrs Sparrow chirped, "Happy and Glorious / One Sausage between four of us / Thank God there's no more of us / God Save the Queen."
(I think it was the Queen).

'Silence while we stared at the heaped plate and then a frantic clatter of cutlery and bon-bon waving to hide the embarrassment for Nan. The one time of the year for proper gracing gone! Birdie didn't appear next year.'



The Dunne family at dinner in Hawthorn, 1915

Photographer – Joseph Dunne
Source – Museum Victoria



Reflections on story-telling among immigrant families to Australia

Reilly McCarron

This study examines storytelling within families who have migrated to Australia recently. The initial concept revolved around classical folk and fairy tales, and the changes their telling may have incurred due to settlement in a new land and culture. However, of the six family nationalities, only Latvian informants displayed a passionate conservation of traditional folkloric narratives. Family stories were cherished over classical tales in the other families interviewed. Christmas fables, offerings to the barn fairies and the tooth fairy were mentioned, and all those interviewed expressed some degree of delight at recalling and retelling the stories they remembered.

Participants in this study came from Latvia, Switzerland/Holland, Sweden, Bosnia, Greece and England. All but one interviewee were female. The one male, with paternal Swiss and maternal Dutch heritage, reported his father as the family folklore storyteller, whereas his mother read stories from books. In all other cases, mothers and grandmothers were the favoured storytellers in the family.

Questions were asked of each participant, or sent by e-mail, and discussed. Despite efforts to speak with individuals representing at least two generations in each family, this was not always possible. The Bosnian participant was only able to tell me her own recollections; participants from Switzerland/Holland and Greece were also able to tell me which stories they told their children in addition to this. I had a lengthy discussion, via e-mail, and phone, with one mother and adult daughter from England, and a briefer discussion in person with a mother and adult daughter from Sweden. Generous interviews were given by a Latvian great-grandmother and her daughter, who also reported her son's recollection of the tales on over-hearing him retelling them to his three-year-old son. In-person interviews were recorded in note form only.

Despite the quantity of material pointing towards family folklore as the primary type of family storytelling, this study focuses largely on one classical fairy tale which surfaced twice independently, and found resonance with another participant with minimal prompting. The reasoning behind this decision is twofold.

Firstly, family stories (personal narratives) are traceable only to those about whom it is told. Such stories, though vibrant and deeply meaningful to the descendants who inherit them, are of a personal, as opposed to an archetypal or universal, nature. Whereas a neatly formed folk or fairy tale is designed to entertain, inform, guide and generally provide some depth of insight into the human psyche, the personal story is told to include the listener into the fold of family, though it may well perform some or all of the functions described.

Secondly, the value of the classical folk and fairy tale lies in its ageless, borderless, deceptively simplistic and enchanting language of symbolism. It is available for inquisitive research, as are the telling variations upon its central theme.



It is also a template upon which personal stories can be measured, clarified, and better understood.

The classic fairy tale which emerged in this research was *The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids*, originally transcribed by the Brothers Grimm in the early 19th century. The tale was first triggered in conversation with this project's Greek participant, at the mention of the more popular *Little Red Riding Hood*. She slowly recalled the tale, piece by piece, stating that she had not thought of it since childhood, and realising with this that she had not retold the story to her own children.

The tale surfaced again, unprompted, in conversation with the younger of the two Latvian women interviewed. This participant recounted in full the version she recalled being told, undoubtedly mixed with the version, if changed, she had since told her son and grandson; and her mother told me her version in turn. I mentioned the tale to the younger of the two English participants, who also remembered the story.

A number of interviewees expressed an unwillingness to pass on any narrative material which could be frightening to their children. It seems this attitude is prevalent in Western society, if Walt Disney's sugar-coated animated versions of fairy tales are any true reflection. This approach to folk and fairy tales assumes that their primary or most worthy function is entertainment. In their true form however, these stories are a source of piercing insight and wise guidance, providing the cast and set for dynamic interplays between issues of right and wrong, love and loss, cleverness and silliness, fear and courage, life, death and rebirth. Folk and fairy tales, told in their full form, are like a gymnasium for ethical reasoning.

The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids is a cautionary tale. It contains frightening elements such as vulnerable kids and a clever predator. It also contains instructions for avoiding the ravenous beast, and when all else fails, it encourages us to rely on the ingenuity of the nurturing mother. If advice is learned best within the playground of story, where a listener has the chance to craft their own reasoning, what child does not deserve the right to own such good advice as is to be found in folk and fairy tales?

Why did this small project uncover so few classical tales? There are a few possible reasons.

In the case of three families — those from Greece, Bosnia and Latvia — the main reason for migration was a search for solace and a safer environment in which to raise children. Interviews with each of these families revealed tales of sorrow and injustice, as did the interview with another family who migrated from England in happier circumstances, yet with war-time memories. Understandably, stories of the homeland, and of relatives known and unknown, were bestowed often, and received with relish.

One mother spoke of telling her Australian-born Greek sons stories about a little girl who enjoyed various adventures in Greece, at the end of which they



would correctly guess the stories' factual nature. This mother also encouraged her sons to make up their own stories, and mindfully instilled in them a respect for people of all backgrounds. She has chosen to withhold certain family stories while they are still young, due to the prejudicial effect they had made on her as a child.

Another woman, with Bosnian heritage, recounted only family folklore. Her stories are rich with symbolism, and appear to fulfil many folkloric functions. The stories were true but 'for me they rival anything that Hans Christian Anderson had written' she stated. She remembered a noisy childhood, filled with conversation, and without specific storytelling times, places or rules. Believing that she was not shielded from sad or frightening elements, she asserted that she would tell stories in the same manner to any children in her future.

Storytelling within the English family seems to have been encouraged in many forms. War tales and amusing family anecdotes were recounted with equal enthusiasm. Bedtime stories were read to children even into their teens, by a mother who proudly declares her children were educated before they went to school. These examples of family storytelling practices, focusing on family folklore, could suggest a correlation between the disruption of cultural identification and the outweighing importance of continued knowledge of family history.

Interviews held with the family of Latvian heritage tell a very different kind of tale. Mother and adult daughter alike conveyed a living passion for stories of all shapes and sizes, as well as folksongs, Latvian mythology and folk religion, folk customs, proverbs and superstitions, along with a palpable love for living and lost relatives. A small number of young Australian-Latvians affirmed their cultural pride and eagerness to embrace all aspects of Latvian culture and folklore.

One suggested reason for this is the history of cultural repression in Latvia, which paradoxically appears to have helped preserve the culture intact. A nature-loving nation has preserved its culture like an amber jewel preserves forest life. Unique as this community may be, it displays something universally precious. A country where references to folksongs in political speeches inspire respect, and the steps of a folk dance are retraced on a loom to create a design representing a folk tale, sounds like a safe haven for the dark, enchanted woods, and the deep-knowing lessons of storytelling.

Of particular interest is the story of *The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids* as told by 92-year-old Australian-Latvian great-grandmother, Aina, together with her daughter. (See page 17)

Aina recalled early winter evenings in her childhood, spent by the hearth listening to her grandmother's storytelling. Some of those stories were read from a German book of Grimm's *Children's Stories and Household Tales* (first published 1812), which she would translate off the page into Latvian. The combined version of the tale retold here shows a distinct Latvian flavour, with the particular beginning and end, some sections sung and children's participation encouraged.

The origin of the tale, it has been suggested (Lang, cited by Velten, edited



by Zipes, 2001), is linked to the Greek myth of Cronos, who swallowed his children whole to retain power, but was tricked into swallowing a stone in place of his son Zeus, who later tricked Cronos into regurgitating all of his children. The fairy tale wolf however, is a step removed from the father figure in the tale, and is cast simply as a foreign predator (Tatar, 2004).

For an unstated reason, the father is missing from the tale, leaving the kids vulnerable in their mother's absence. This creates the dynamic for learning about boundaries, trust and the power of a safe haven for both the kids in the story and those listening to the story. Bettelheim (1976) suggests the folk and fairy tale form provides children with necessarily meaningful narrative, recognising the challenges of growing up, and offering solutions which empower children to think for themselves.

The fanciful 'once upon a time, far far away' format allows for harsh truths to be thoroughly pondered (Warner, 1994). Bogeyman-style stories, sometimes used by parents to discipline their children (Bascom, edited by Dundes, 1965), are designed to instill the boundaries which keep children safe from harm. While cautionary tales, such as *The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids*, are deemed acceptable for this reason (Zipes, 1999), this tale is not nearly as popular as another with interesting similarities, and differences.

Little Red Riding Hood was recorded by Charles Perrault in 1697, and the story ended when the wolf ate the little girl, having already devoured her grandmother. The story suggested that little girls steer clear of big, bad wolves, in whatever form they may appear. One translator referred to this version, understandably, as a frightener (Philip & Simborowski, 1993).

In light of the possible Cronos myth basis for the story, it has been suggested that Perrault recorded an unfinished version (Velten, edited by Zipes, 2001). Whether there is truth to this or not, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm seem to have considered it unfinished, for they retold it with two endings. In the lesser known version, the grandmother outwits the wolf, and neither she nor Little Red Riding Hood is harmed. In the better known version, the Grimms appear to have repeated the ending from *The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids*. However, it is not the mother/grandmother who saves the day, but a passing hunter.

Mother-as-heroine seems to have been lost in the woods. When asked about her favourite childhood story, the younger of the Latvian women, Vita, unhesitatingly recalled a tale she had asked her mother to tell every night, and every night that her mother agreed to tell it, Vita would cry. (Having lost her father when still a girl, Vita enjoyed a close relationship with her mother.)

Her favourite story was a traditional Latvian folk tale set in a forest of souls. Somewhere in the forest is a magical tree which, if touched, will transform a human being into a tree, though no one knows which one it is. One day a widow and her daughter venture into the forest to pick the rich grass for their cows. The mother slips, touches the tree, and begins to turn into one herself. The little girl tries to rescue her mother, but to no avail. She says a prayer, and decides to continue visiting her mother in her new form.



Vita explained that in the Latvian underworld, where souls go after this life, there are many mothers: of the forest, of the sea, and so forth. According to Latvian folk religion, motherly comfort can be sought from trees. Death is an accepted part of life for Latvians. In this sense, the tale about the girl who loses her beloved mother still offers hope. The mother can be visited in the magical woods.

Graham Seal describes a fairy tale as a seed within a multitude of memories to be regerminated each generation (1989, p 78). Despite a significant number of men choosing to study folk and fairy tale as a scholarly pursuit, it is women, in the traditional role of nurturing children, who have historically been the storytellers. Writing of the importance of a woman's relationship with her own mothering instinct, Pinkola-EstÚs suggests that to lose this bond would be to lose her own deep nature, the one with all the knowing in it, all the bags of seeds, all the thorn needles for mending, all the medicines for work and rest and love and hope (1992, p 181).

Despite social changes influencing whether classical tales are in or out, despite mass media coating 'light' versions in icing sugar, and despite being sometimes overshadowed by more pressing stories for a generation or two, the stories endure. The younger English woman realised during the interview that she had pushed *The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids* to the back of her mind. The first thing remembered, when gently prompted, was a storybook picture of the false white paw-print the wolf had made on the window — the last deception that finally tricked the kids into an unworthy, and near fatal, trust of the predator.

This English woman's childhood was full of books and stories. She was not easily frightened, as evidenced by her childhood belief that the first two of the *Three Little Pigs* deserved to be eaten for their stupidity. Yet the seeds of the story told here slipped through the cracks. Forgotten perhaps, but not lost. The wolf's clever trickery had imprinted on her psyche, and lay silent in the deep recesses of her memory, perhaps as a message of the importance of safe boundaries.

The functions of folklore have been categorised as education, amusement, group identification and socially acceptable expressions of frustration towards the official structures of society (Seal, 1989). Along with many other narrative forms, classical tales and family stories belong side by side under the banner of folklore. The personal narratives gathered for this study displayed universal themes, such as courage, injustice, kindness, pride, punishment and reward.

As might be imagined, this material covers a wide range of experiences, from child play to the worst of human nature. One woman fondly recalled the story of her father as a small boy, placing a bowl of porridge on his head and declaring he was finished. Another woman spoke of a relative who, having survived a war, died when he stepped on a mine while picking apples for children who could not reach them. Another recalled her grandparents' stories of losing siblings during exile from their homeland.

Such stories are not supplanted by folk and fairy tales. Yet they can surely



live happily in each other's company. In the case of Vita, who as a child was reliant on her close bond with her mother, folk tales provided solace and spoke directly to her very real fears. Her favourite story tells of a girl losing her beloved mother, yet understanding somehow that her mother was not altogether lost, understanding that she would somehow survive and continue to find comfort from the many mothers in nature.

The motifs of protective mother, trickery in the world beyond the safe haven, loss and grief, hope and ingenuity, justice and rejoicing, are not confined to the realm of folk and fairy tale. What the classical tale can offer, however, is a well-trodden pathway to a magical representation of life's real challenges, and often a well-trodden pathway back to psychological safety.

There are a number of possible reasons why folk and fairy tales did not feature more prominently for many of those interviewed. These include a sense of deeper connection with the teller during family stories; lack of ritual storytelling; lack of resources (books and clear memories); or perhaps the storytellers were never told the exhilarating full versions of the tales themselves. This, of course, remains in the fanciful world of guesswork. It is worth mentioning, however, that *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids* has been translated from the original German into English, French, Spanish, Danish, Italian and Dutch, at the very least. [Ed: Aarne's *Types of the Folktale* (1973) includes 39 different nationalities, including China and the West Indies.]

The importance of storytelling within immigrant families in Australia, whether of classical tales or family folklore, is deserving of further research.

The story of *The Wolf and the Seven Goat Kids* as told by Aina, a 92-year-old Australian-Latvian great-grandmother, together with her daughter

In olden, olden days, there once was a mother goat with seven little kids who lived in a pretty house in the woods. Every morning she had to leave the house to gather food, and she warned the children to close all the doors and windows and not to let anyone in, for there was a very bad wolf living in the forest. ('What did he look like?' the children might ask. 'He had a long, red tongue, and big yellow eyes,' the storyteller might say.)

One morning, before leaving for the day, the mother goat hid herself, and asked to be let in. The eldest kid opened the door, but she told him not to make it so easy. She told them they must ask for proof that it is really her, by asking to see her foot. When the mother goat returned at the end of the day, she sang to her kids, '*My udders are full of milk, my horns are full of hay*', and they asked to see her foot. She was pleased with this, and when they let her in they all ate and drank and were happy.

But the wolf was hiding nearby and saw all of this. Mmm, he thought, tomorrow I'll have those seven kids for lunch. So the next morning, after the mother goat had left for the day, the wolf



knocked on the door and sang in his deep voice, 'My udders are full of milk, my horns are full of hay'. But the kids cried out, 'Oh no, you are not our mother, her voice is soft where yours is deep'. Angrily, the wolf went off to the schoolhouse to get some chalk* to eat, to make his voice smooth.

The next day the wolf returned, and sang in his highest, sweetest voice, 'My udders are full of milk, my horns are full of hay'. The kids almost let him in, but then remembered what their mother had told them, and said, 'Show us your foot.' The wolf showed them his black paw, and the kids cried out 'Oh no, you are not our mother, her foot is white.'

Angrily, the wolf went off to the miller to cover his paw in flour. When he returned, the wolf sang in his highest, sweetest voice, 'My udders are full of milk, my horns are full of hay'. The kids asked to see his foot, and when they saw that it was white, they let the wolf in.

Well, those little kids had some surprise! They ran and hid. ('Where do you think the first one hid?' the storyteller might ask. 'Under the bed', the child might say. 'Where do you think the second one hid?' 'In the stove', the child might say, and so on, until it was time for the seventh little goat, for he always hid in the grandfather clock.) The wolf was so hungry he rumaged through the house and found one, two, three, four, five, six kids and gobbled them up whole.

After this, he felt so full, and so tired, that he had to lie down and sleep for a while. When the mother goat came home she found the door wide open and the place turned upside down, and began to cry for her children. Then the littlest came out of the grandfather clock and told her what had happened.

As the mother listened, she heard another sound: it was the wolf snoring in the bed. She told her little goat to quietly run and get her scissors, needle and thread, which he did. Then the mother goat cut open the wolf while he slept, and out popped one, two, three, four, five, six little goats.

She told them to quietly run and get some stones, and with these she filled the wolf's belly and sewed him up again. When the wolf awoke he felt so thirsty he had to go to drink from the well. But the weight of the stones made him fall in where he drowned! The little goat kids always obeyed their mother, and they all lived happily for ever and ever. Let's go and see if they're still living happily today.

** According to the Greek interviewee, the wolf ate eggs to make his voice smooth, and the younger English woman who recalled the tale mentioned honey-cakes.*

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Personal communication Vita Kristovskis; personal communication Aina Bormanis; personal communication Sabrina Lipovic.

Further Reading

The 2007 publication, *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes* has been compiled and edited by Simon J. Bronner, who describes this as 'a book that Alan Dundes should have put together...and probably would have done...had not death in March 2005 put a halt to his tremendous production'.

The Dundes' essays are arranged in three parts: **Structure and Analysis**, **Worldview and Identity**, and **Symbol and Mind**. The book includes twenty essays, several of which are anthologised for the first time. A full review of this classic publication will be included in a future issue of *Play and Folklore*.

