



## **President's Report for AGM August 2016**

This is my last Report for the 2015-6 year as I have been President of Oral History Association NSW for three years and it is time to pass the baton to others.

So in writing this address I ask myself what have I learned and what have I contributed to this not for profit organisation with 200 or so members? Intellectually I have tried to place the remembering more at the centre of oral history practice, rather than the interview itself. Memory as we know, 'refers to the past as it is lived' and my own research over a number of years has been so enriched by the study of memory and how it works as an act of imagination, interconnection and is conjured through the senses – smell, taste, touch, sight and most of all sound. The vivid memories connected with sensory triggers are produced almost entirely through chance associations, so there is that wonderful sense of happenstance that infuses the purposeful interview.

I have also aimed to link the practice of oral history more with how it is used, by asking metaphorically: who listens, and how?

Practically I have aimed at expanding our reach; Not just to focus on basic workshops held regularly at our Sydney base but to get out there and both teach oral history and spread the word to a variety of groups – so over these years myself and others who give workshops, launched books and talked, have been to Riverina, Wagga, Young, Wollongong, Captains Flat, Grafton, Dubbo, Kandos, Newcastle. Part of this has been expanding the capacity of local studies library collections for the state library regional co-ordinator Ellen Forsyth through educating them about oral history projects and preservation of them as records. Of the Sydney suburban areas we have also given talks at Ashfield, Lane Cove, Camden, Callan Park.

Second, I have tried, with the help of digital savvy members of the committee who know better than I about the potential of new media platforms for oral historians, to encourage stronger engagement with different ways of using oral history for communicating with people, beyond the website and the book, particularly our digital storytelling workshop, podcasting, and radio. I would like to see more exploration about what is possible in different forms and how it varies. Can you tell more and better stories from an oral history tourist-type listening post or kiosk in the street? Or is it more evocative to make podcasts along waterways or country town walks?

I have also aimed to develop better access to collections of oral histories that are already in existence, assisting the Dictionary of Sydney project digitisation of the Liverpool oral history collection, a project started by Virginia Macleod before me; and the major project to which OHNSW contributed both money and time that was to survey the state library collection of oral histories over 770 tapes/digitising data again with my colleague Virginia MacLeod. Our report to the library has helped librarian Bruce Carter to build a research guide to the oral history collection which is ongoing.

What I take away is a renewal of faith in the humanity of people at large – no matter what goes on in politics, the vast bulk of people I meet are keenly interested in the past, have great stories and are just decent good people who want to understand and find out about the past and its meaning on a personal, local or national basis.

Over the three years working with a shifting members of a committee and been on several trips I have also made new friends. They say if you put two oral historians in a car together for 4-6 hours travelling to workshop destinations, then they will know each other's life story at the end and this is true; I have learned insights from those in different walks of life on the committee and valued their ideas and contributions. We have had some very good discussions on occasions, as a sideline to the business of committee work. We are now also in the throes of organising the next national Oral History Australia conference to be held in Sydney in September 2017. After a reluctant start from your committee it now seems to be going very well and we want to hold the best event we can with our resources.

I have not always been successful in my endeavours but I would like to give heartfelt thanks to everyone who has assisted along the way. (Much of the work of a committee like this and a newsletter is hidden). Raphael Samuel, a British historian is famous for saying that producing History in any form is the work of many hands and we all know that is the case as more of our efforts become formal collaborations with different organisations. I know any improvements will be carried on by those who succeed me with ideas for different directions that will keep the future of Oral History NSW safe. So keep in mind : when the replicant in the film *Blade Runner* says that 'experience is washed away in time like tears in rain' he clearly had not met any oral historians!

**Professor Paula Hamilton**

**President, August 2016**