

INTRODUCTION

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WWII saw the unprecedented mass movement of more than one million war brides and fiancées to join their partners in new lands. 'Bride ships' transported more than 100,000 wives and fiancées of American servicemen alone, from over 50 countries including the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, Africa, China, Japan and others.¹ At least 50,000 women from the United Kingdom married US servicemen. In addition, 40,000 brides – mostly British – followed their husbands to Canada; thousands of women from Britain and Europe married Australian and New Zealand servicemen; and many Australian women sailed to the UK, having married British servicemen they met in Australia.² A significant part of the female migration to the United States included an estimate of up to 15,000 Australian war brides and fiancées of American servicemen.³ Despite this being the largest contingent of Australian women ever to migrate,

¹ Elfrieda Shukert and Barbara Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*, Presidio Press, Novato, California, 1988, pp. 1, 2, and 7, also see Appendix A, p. 265; Marion F. Houstoun, *et al*, 'Female Predominance in Immigration to the United States Since 1930: A First Look' in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Special Issue: Women in Migration (Winter, 1984) p. 920.

² David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, pp. 420-22; also see Jenel Virden, *Good-Bye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1996, pp. 54, 65; Veterans Affairs Canada website [www.vac-acc.gc.ca] accessed 28 April, 2008.

³ Estimates vary as follows: Geoffrey Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia*, Vol. 5 (Oxford University Press)

Melbourne, 1991, p. 17, states 'more than 10,000 Australian brides were seeking admission to the United States'; John Hammond Moore, *Over-sexed, over-paid and over here: Americans in Australia, 1941-1945* University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1981, p. 161, states: '15 000 Australian women married US servicemen' Potts, E. Daniel & Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under 1941-45: the American impact on Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 362 states it was 'the generally accepted figure of 12,000'. Annette Potts and Lucinda Strauss, *For the Love of a Soldier. Australian war-brides and their GIs*, ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Crows Nest, NSW, 1987, p. 47 state 'up to 12,000 girls married...and probably a further two or three thousand travelled to the US as fiancées', and on p. 14 they state the figure of '12,000-15,000 Australian girls married Americans'. This variation in numbers is due to the fact that no complete records were kept in Australia which clearly identified women travellers as 'war brides'. The main archival resources on this subject were incomplete copies of outgoing shipping lists for the American 'bride ships' which sailed between February 1946 and January 1947. Shipping lists for other vessels which transported war brides did not identify them separately from other passengers. Search of the National American Research Archives (NARA) in Maryland, USA, with the assistance of Naval and Army specialist researchers, did not uncover any record of arrivals in America which identified passengers as Australian war brides, who in any case, quickly dispersed across the country upon arrival, making this a challenging if not impossible research task.

there has been no in-depth study of their experiences and little scholarly research has been done on this subject in recent years.

This thesis traces the history of some 60 Australian war brides who made the journey to America in the period 1943-1947. Although Australian war brides have occasionally been the subject of some historical interest, for the most part their stories have remained untold. This thesis addresses the omission of any in-depth analysis in previous studies, by drawing directly from recent oral testimony of 60 Australian WWII war brides of American servicemen, recorded and transcribed between 1999 and 2007.

Due to the lack of historical evidence regarding Australian war brides of American servicemen, the main objective of this thesis has been to establish an original archive of taped and transcribed oral history interviews, from which to explore firsthand accounts of their memories and experiences. There is no similar archive of its kind in the world, and this unique source reveals the particular circumstances encountered by the Australian women who married American servicemen during the social upheaval of WWII. It highlights the way in which the war brides met their future husbands in the 1940s, the manner of their courtships and weddings and the subsequent challenges they faced in travelling to their new country of adoption. It will document for the first time how it was for this group of women, sixty years ago, to leave their families and friends for a new life in an unknown land. Their testimony highlights the significance of their protracted voyage to the US; the way in which they adjusted to living in America; how they dealt with decisions regarding citizenship; and how they have nurtured and valued continuing links with Australia over six decades. Analysis of this archive presents a new window through which to view the realities of their experiences as young

Australian women in wartime. While this thesis complements the findings of previous studies of women on Australia's home front, it also complicates our understanding of the impact of WWII on Australian women, through a detailed analysis of the experiences of this particular cohort.⁴

THE WAR BRIDES

All the women who participated in this study grew up in the aftermath of WWI, and most were young children during the difficult years of the Great Depression.⁵ Yet in spite of this shared experience, the composition of the cohort was complex and diverse. The ages of the war brides, for example, cover a wide range. The youngest, Colleen Halter, was born in Cairns, Queensland, in May 1927, and was only 12 years old at the outbreak of war. She met her future husband, Jerry Lydle, when she was 17 and she married a year later in November, 1945 at the age of 18. Some girls were barely out of school, as in the case of young Ivy Diers who was 16 when she first met Paul from Omaha, Nebraska, and the couple married three and a half years later in 1945 when Ivy was 19. Ten older women in this group, born between 1913 and 1919, were children during WWI and had reached their mid- to late-20s when the war came to Australia in 1942, their ages ranging from 24 to 32 when they married. Most of the women interviewed for this study, however, were born in the early to mid-1920s. At the outbreak of war their ages ranged from 12 to 25. By 1942, when thousands of American troops arrived in Australia, to be welcomed and initially hailed as 'saviours' and 'heroes',

⁴ Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1984; Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990; Kate Darian-Smith, 'War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War' in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (Eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994; Darian-Smith, Kate, 'War and Australian Society', in Joan Beaumont (Ed), *Australia's War, 1939-45*, Allen & Unwin, 1996.

⁵ Detailed statistics regarding the war brides interviewed for this study can be found in the Appendices at the end of the thesis.

No. 1 – Childhood in the twenties and thirties



Colleen HALTER (Neé MOORE) aged 11 years.
Born in 1927 in Cairns, Qld, the youngest of
8 children, Colleen grew up in Brisbane.



Dorothy THOMPSON (nee LEISHMAN) (left)
was born in 1921 in Brisbane, Qld.
Photographed with mother and 3 siblings.

their ages ranged from 15 to 29 with most being around the age of 19.⁶ Their ages when married ranged from 17 to 32, with most being around the ages of 20 and 21.⁷ These figures indicate that the women who married American servicemen did so at a slightly younger age than other women in the general population. Official statistics show that in 1940 the median age at first marriage in Australia was 23.7 for brides, with this figure steadily declining in the post-war years, falling to 20.9 as late as 1974.⁸

Once a couple had decided to marry, the ceremony was usually delayed by a mandatory waiting period of six months after permission was granted, before the wedding could take place. In many cases it was a much longer time before the couples could marry due to the re-deployment of the groom to the war zone, his return to America for further training or at the end of his war service. Given these conditions, the time lapse between meeting and being married varied significantly for this cohort, the shortest periods being two months in one case, and three months in another, both of which weddings took place before the mandatory six month's waiting period was introduced. The longest period between meeting and marriage was six years. The majority, however, married within three years of meeting their future husbands. This evidence, gleaned from the war brides' oral testimony, indicates that marriages between Australian women and American servicemen were not generally made in haste, and challenges contemporary stereotypes which categorised these women as 'good-time girls'.

⁶ Appendix 2 (1), Profile of War Brides – Ages; also see Campbell, Rosemary, *Heroes and Lovers. A question of national identity*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, pp. 58, 64; Beaumont, *loc. cit.*, p. 72.

⁷ See Appendix 2 (1), Profile of War Brides – Ages.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, 1997*. [ABS On-line <http://www.abs.gov.au> Accessed 4 May, 2008.] See Appendix 5, Marriage & Divorce Rates & Ex-nuptial Births.

These young women came from cities as well as suburban and rural locations across Australia and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Their fathers' occupations ranged from 'shearer', 'tram conductor', 'carpenter' and 'goldminer', to 'teacher', 'journalist', 'banker', engineer' and 'chamber magistrate'.⁹ Their origins clearly crossed class boundaries, but all were affected in some way by the years of the Great Depression. Some participants in this study were the only children in the family, while some had only one or two siblings. However, many came from large families, despite the plummeting marriage and fertility rates of the 1920s.¹⁰ While most grew up at home, in some cases they were sent as children to live with grandparents or aunts, to ease financial stress or to be closer to schools. Aware of the hardships their parents experienced during the 1930s, this particular generation of young women grew up in households that generally practised frugality out of necessity, where it was a matter of course to wear home-made clothes, to help look after younger children and to be delighted with the smallest gifts at Christmas.¹¹

Three quarters of this group left school at the junior level in their early teens, at around 14 or 15 years of age, to earn a living.¹² Some then took courses to prepare for office work. Among this group of women a very small number enrolled at university or embarked on a professional career, and few had ever travelled outside Australia.

⁹ See Appendix 2, (2) Profile of War Brides–Socio-Economic Background.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2, (3) Profile of War Brides–Size of Australian Family; and Appendix 5, Marriage and Divorce Rates & Ex-Nuptial Births. Also see Australian Bureau of Statistics – 4102.0 *Australian Social Trends*, 1997, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Interviews with Marge Andreatta, Denver, CO, 7 September, 2001, and Helen Leirer, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001; also see Judy Mackinolty, 'Woman's place...' in *The Wasted Years*, George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd., North Sydney, 1981, p. 107.

¹² See Appendix 2, (6) Profile of War Brides – Education.

The waiting time for transportation by ship to the US also varied significantly. For some war brides it was from six to eighteen months, but for most brides who sailed at the end of the war during 'Operation War Bride', it was between two to four years since they had seen their husbands. Those who were engaged to be married waited longer. In the case of Patricia Law, who met her future husband in 1942, it was five years later that the couple was married in America, six weeks after her arrival in 1947.¹³ The details of the war brides' experiences, through analysis of their oral testimony, reveal the extent of the diversity of this cohort.¹⁴

Once settled in America, very few war brides returned to live permanently in Australia. Despite evidence of strong pangs of homesickness and difficulties of cultural adjustment, most marriages survived and divorces were well in the minority. Among those women interviewed, the longevity of their marriages was remarkable given the circumstances of their wartime liaisons. Only six of the 60 war brides in this sample finally divorced their husbands, but not for some years, and not before their children were teenagers or much older. Most of the women in this study took up US citizenship within the first ten years of living in America, their oral testimony highlighting the reasons which motivated them to do so. Dual citizenship was not available for these women and a very small number (three in a sample of 60) chose not to take up US citizenship, in order to avoid the necessary forfeiture of their cherished Australian citizenship.

MEMORY AND ORAL HISTORY

Over the past sixty years, oral history has transformed the practice of contemporary history in many countries, its most distinctive contribution being to

¹³ Interview with Patricia Law, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

¹⁴ See Appendix 4, Profile of War Brides

uncover 'the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been "hidden from history"'.¹⁵ Conventional history, drawn from archives, books and other paper sources, is both challenged and complemented by oral history which is drawn from the narratives of living memories, and offers valuable insights from new perspectives with subjective interpretations of history. These are mostly omitted from official documentary sources. Through the process of remembering and reinterpreting the past, oral history has empowered individuals or social groups who have previously not had the opportunity to tell of their experiences.¹⁶ This is the case in the study of Australian WWII war brides of American servicemen, who for the first time are able to record their experiences from their own perspectives.

In recent decades, with shifting paradigms in oral history, many fierce debates have been generated about the validity and reliability of oral history which is based on narrated memories. In *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edition, 2006), editors Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson highlight 'the complexity of the oral history relationship' (between narrator and interviewer); 'the richness of oral testimony'; as well as 'the extraordinary variety of ways of interpreting the past and making histories using oral sources'.¹⁷ Rather than arguing that there is a particular 'right' way to do oral history, they believe that the variety of oral history is its strength rather than its weakness. Oral historians such as Luisa Passerini, Ronald Grele, and Alessandro Portelli, have increasingly challenged researchers 'to treat the subjective, textual quality of oral testimony as unique opportunities' rather than as 'obstacles to historical objectivity and empirical rigor', which was the

¹⁵ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), Routledge, London, 2006, p. ix.

¹⁶ Paul Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past. Oral History', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), Routledge, London, 2006, pp. ix, x.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. x.

manner in which oral history was viewed by an earlier generation of practitioners.¹⁸

Oral history, according to Portelli, is different in that it 'tells us less about events than about their meaning'.¹⁹ Similarly, Valerie Yow maintains that the subjectivity of oral history research, for both narrator and interviewer, is useful for a deeper understanding of social history because 'events are invested with meaning'.²⁰ Paul Thompson claims that oral history 'can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place'.²¹

Oral historians have sometimes been seen to treat theory with little enthusiasm when conducting and interpreting oral testimony.²² It is claimed this could be due to 'the directness of the genre, the apparently self-evident status of the communication and knowledge produced in oral history texts', which 'has a powerfully doxic effect, compounding the traditional claims of orality to provide unmediated access to self-knowledge and knowledge of another'.²³ During my research for this study, I was wary of taking too literal an approach to 'evidence' presented in oral testimony. When recording and analysing the interviews, various factors were considered which might affect the interview: the influence on the narrative of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee; the expectations of these two parties; the reliability of the recall of events from the

¹⁸ Daniel James, 'Listening in the Cold. The practice of oral history in an Argentine meatpacking community', in Perks and Thomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁹ Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes Oral History Different', in Perks and Thomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²⁰ Valerie Yow, "'Do I Like Them Too Much?'" Effects of the oral history interview on the interviewer and vice-versa', in Perks and Thomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²¹ Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past. Oral History', in Perks and Thomson (Eds), *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 26.

²² James, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²³ *ibid.* Note: 'Doxic' originates from *Doxa* (δόξα) a Greek word meaning common belief or popular opinion, which denotes a society's taken-for-granted, unquestioned truths, and the sphere of that which may be openly contested and discussed. Source: Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doxa> [Accessed 8 December, 2010].

distant past; as well as the importance of pauses, silences and figures of speech, all of which may indicate a subtle subtext to the narrative. The intonation of the voices themselves and in some cases changes in body language, absent from the written transcript, provided valuable nuances in the telling of the war brides' stories and added a depth of understanding to their meaning.

During my research, I became aware of the experiences of other oral historians and their work, where various theoretical concepts had been developed regarding the conduct of oral history. At the end of the late 1970s, Alessandro Portelli, for example, wrote in defence of the 'peculiarities of oral history'. This new approach accepted memory to be:

partial and selective, and shaped into meaningful accounts, affected by the subjectivity of the speaker and the audience for the story, and influenced by the passage of time and by 'collective' memory.²⁴

This new model saw memory as 'an active process of creation of meanings' rather than a 'passive repository of facts'.²⁵ Oral history was now seen to add 'life' to the sometimes 'dry bones' of conventional history.

British historians, Penny Summerfield and Alistair Thomson, both employ the concept of 'composure' as a model for interpreting oral history testimony. Developed by historian Graham Dawson, the term 'composure' plays on the

²⁴ Perks and Thomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), *op. cit.*, p. 211.

²⁵ *ibid.*

double meaning of the verb 'to compose'.²⁶ Thus the meaning can be 'to create' and at the same time 'to calm down' or 'feel comfortable'. When dealing with oral histories, the concept of composure explores the 'twin processes of creating accounts of experiences and achieving personal composure, or equilibrium, through constituting oneself as the subject of those stories'.²⁷ The purpose for the narrator is to produce both a coherent narrative and 'a version of the self which can be lived with in relative psychic comfort', enabling subjective composure to be achieved by the narrator.²⁸ Summerville points out that sometimes the narrator cannot achieve composure, and her exploration of 'dis-composure' demonstrates that this is likely to happen when interviewees tell a personal story which does not have a place in the dominant culture.²⁹ As will become evident, although these concepts were taken into consideration, they proved not to be applicable in interpreting the major part of this research.

Oral history, the principal source of data for this thesis, is a time-consuming and exacting methodology, described by Summerfield as 'demanding'. She maintains that it 'raises complex theoretical issues', some of which focus on the use of oral history as something 'other than a colourful adjunct to histories based on more conventional sources' such as historical and archival documents.³⁰ Through the process of transcription and indexing, however, oral history itself becomes a text. Once analysed, interpreted and utilised by the researcher, it is

²⁶ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, UK, 1998, pp. 16, 17.

²⁷ Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Culture and Social History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004, p. 90; also cited in Gabrielle Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives': World War II War Brides of New Zealand Servicemen', PhD thesis, The University of Auckland, 2005, p. 18.

²⁷ Summerfield, *Reconstructing*, *loc. cit.*, p. 17.

²⁸ Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', *op. cit.*, p. 90; also cited in Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives', (PhD Thesis), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁹ Summerfield, *Reconstructing*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28.

³⁰ *ibid*, p. iix, x.

often deposited in archives as part of the collection. Thus oral testimony can be used in the same way as more conventional sources, and is similarly subject to the historian's interpretation. One difference, as Summerfield points out, is that 'the researcher has a more salient place within the construction of oral history narratives than in the production of a document from the past'.³¹ It is therefore crucial that oral historians employ a professional approach to the whole process of recording and interpreting oral testimony, and that they be aware of possible limitations and advantages of oral history as a research methodology.

When dealing with any form of historical evidence which records the past, as historian Paul Ashton observes, 'oral testimony must be interpreted and set in a broader historical context'.³² Although the principal source for this thesis is the collection of taped interviews with war brides, other archival resources have been utilised to underpin the narrative and to set the war brides' memories in the broader historical context of the time. For example, military correspondence relating to wartime policies throws light on the motivation behind certain legislation and red tape which affected the war brides. Also, where available, detailed shipping lists from the 1940s support oral testimony regarding transportation on 'bride ships' to America in the immediate post-war years, confirming the name of the ship, the sailing and arrival dates, and the numbers of war brides and children on board. It is interesting to note that there was little divergence between the oral sources and the written records, which indicates that details of such a momentous occasion, as they embarked on a journey to a new life in a new land, were firmly imprinted on their memories and so were recalled later with some accuracy. In this context, however, it must be noted that factual data, such as dates and

³¹ *ibid.*, p. i.

³² Paul Ashton, *On the Record. A Practical Guide to Oral History*, North Sydney: North Sydney Municipal Council, 1991, p. 5.

numbers were not so important in the process of interviewing, as was the gaining of access through subjective narrative to the memory of the participants, to uncover their personal journeys and to reveal the meaning of events in their lives. The capturing of memories through oral testimony is especially significant where, as in this instance, no other documentation survives.

Individual memories, however – particularly of the distant past – have been claimed to be unreliable, distorted, supplemented and influenced by historical memory, and shaped over the years by visual media and publications.³³ It is also claimed that being able to create, omit and accentuate memories of the past offers an opportunity to present an ‘imagined construction’ of the past.³⁴ These claims must be considered when conducting oral histories. In examining the question of the effect of increasing age on memory (as the interviewees were mostly born in the 1920s and are now octogenarians), Paul Thompson’s ground-breaking work on memory in older persons is particularly pertinent to this thesis.³⁵ Thompson’s findings are that memory decline starts by the age of 30, but its progress is slow and ‘never drastic before either terminal illness or senility is reached’³⁶ Thus, he maintains the problem of ‘memory power’ is not much more serious for interviews with normally healthy older people than with younger adults.³⁷ As it is the recent memory and the recall of recent events which is first impaired in the process of declining memory, Thompson states: ‘Interviewing the old, in short, raises no

³³ Ashton, *loc. cit.*, p. 5; Darian-Smith, Kate. ‘Remembering Romance: Memory, Gender and World War II’, in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Eds), *Gender and War. Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 117-29; Lisa Featherstone, ‘Sexy Mamas? Women, Sexuality and Reproduction. In Australia in the 1940s’, in *Australian Historical Studies*, 2005, p. 238.

³⁴ Featherstone, ‘Sexy Mamas?’, *loc. cit.*, p. 238.

³⁵ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, (3rd Edn), Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 136.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

fundamental methodological issues which do not also apply to interviewing in general'.³⁸ This is in accord with the present study.

Public historian Paula Hamilton and oral historian Linda Shopes have more recently explored the relationship between oral history and broader public memories within the context of recent work in memory studies, claiming that the latter asks broader questions about the social and cultural processes at work in remembrance, without attending to nuances of the individual voice.³⁹ In this study, however, it is the personal experiences of the female narrators, complete with nuances of the individual voice and self-representations of their experiences, which are the focus for the creation of a valuable, unique and informative archive.

In Kate Darian-Smith's study of stories from the home front in Melbourne during WWII, she notes concern about the 'penetration of popular culture in the remembering process' when people's memories are influenced and shaped by 'what they see on television'.⁴⁰ Citing television dramas such as *'The Sullivans'* and *'Come in Spinner'*, both set in Australia during WWII and produced for TV during the 1970s and 1990s respectively, she argues that these have 'shaped the way in which the war is remembered' and 'leave a residue of mental and visual images that fertilise the collective rememberings of the past'.⁴¹ However, most of the respondents in this study have lived in the United States for over 50 years, and consequently have not been regularly exposed to such television programs, which portray what was purported to be the Australian experience. For this cohort,

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, (Eds), *Oral History and Public Memories*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2008, p. xi.

⁴⁰ Darian-Smith, Kate, 'War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War' in *Memory and History*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

circumstances were different. At least half of these participants had no contact with other Australian war brides to recount or compare their experiences. Some women belonged to organised groups of war brides (who came from various countries) in the early days of living in America, but most groups disbanded long ago. The WWII War Brides Association, only established in 1995, is still an active group and growing. The membership, of over 400 war brides, included only a small number of Australian women when this study was commenced, although the number has more than tripled in the last few years to reach 72 Australians at the end of July 2009.⁴² Despite the fact that the group has met annually since 1995, when being interviewed the individual Australian members spoke spontaneously, but thoughtfully, of their experiences. Their testimony, in response to the questions asked, did not seem rehearsed or to have been shaped or influenced by others' stories. In fact most expressed genuine gratitude for the opportunity to tell and record their individual stories for the first time.

An oral form of record undoubtedly has drawbacks as well as advantages. The need for transcription is a disadvantage, as it makes this method more time consuming. Also, the nuances suggested in pauses, audible sighs and laughter are often lost in transcription, unless specially noted. On the positive side, Thompson argues that in oral testimony the actual words used are captured as they were spoken, and contain 'social clues and nuances' not always included in a written account of the same happening.⁴³ He also highlights the importance of listening to 'what is not being said' and 'to consider the meaning of silences'.⁴⁴

⁴² Email from Erin Craig, Past President and Membership Maven, WWII War Brides Association, dated 27 July. 2009.

⁴³ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, (3rd Edn), *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

Diversity is central to an interpretation of this cohort, as Australian war brides originated from different socio-economic backgrounds and from a variety of geographic locations across Australia, before settling in disparate locations scattered across North America. Their encounters with other women in shared circumstances during the sea voyage, where they were commonly identified as 'war brides', was a bonding experience – if only temporarily – for many of these women. Even then, depending on their individual temperament, expectations, health and emotional state, their experiences were differently self-interpreted. How they perceived their experiences, as well as their expectations of what their future might hold, was influenced by various factors. As Jeannie Douglas states in her study of women's travel narratives of the 1950s, 'the restructuring and retelling of these memories accords with how each woman defines herself' and 'their memories have structured the events of their travels into narratives that give them meaning'.⁴⁵ In this study, the way in which each woman's own journey was experienced and remembered, from different personal perspectives, is demonstrated in their recorded oral testimony.

In the early 1990s, I had first conducted oral history interviews which were essentially 'community' histories, where the female participants lived in the same regional location or 'community'.⁴⁶ Given the diversity of the cohort in this study,

⁴⁵ Jeannie Douglas, 'Women's Travel Narratives of the 1950s' in Darian-Smith and Hamilton (Eds), *Memory and History*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Other oral history projects referred to are: Carol Liston and Robyn Arrowsmith, 'From Farms to Freeways', UWS, Werrington, 1993, (unpublished); Carol Liston, Deborah Chambers, Chris Wieneke and Robyn Arrowsmith, 'Private and Public Images of Women', Women's Research Centre, UWS, 1993. (See Deborah Chambers, *Representing the Family*, SAGE Publications Ltd., London, 2001, p. xi, and pp. 75-91 for references to this oral history research project where I am acknowledged as Research Assistant, p. 91. The project was funded by a seed grant from the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, 1992. Taped discussions were held with ten women album owners, aged 60 and over, who were in their early twenties during the 1950s.); Christine Wieneke and Robyn Arrowsmith, *When I'm 65 or 70 or 75: women and the abolition of the retirement age for women*, School of Ecology, UWS, Hawkesbury, Sydney, 1993 (In-house publication by University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, copy in possession of the author.)

however, it did not at first appear to constitute a 'community', but rather these women were seen to be individuals, many of whom had never met. When interviewing this cohort, I found that more than half the participants did not attend war bride reunions, or even have contact with other war brides. Initially, therefore, it seemed that a more individual approach for this study was necessary. It quickly became obvious, however, as the research progressed, that I should approach this group of women, not as a community in the sense of location, but rather as a 'virtual community' of women sharing the common identity of 'war brides'. Despite the differences of perspectives and self-interpretation, it became unmistakably clear that a common thread of events involuntarily bound these women together, and that their shared identity as 'war brides' propelled them into a virtual community.

During my fieldwork, I saw the emergence of this cohort as a unique 'community' into which, through my close involvement, I was also drawn. During the period of this research, with numerous visits to America, I have been invited to visit their homes, and some have visited me in Australia. It is inevitable that with such interaction over an extended period, that a personal relationship develops between the participants and the researcher. During this time, the women have become more aware of their war bride 'sisters' resulting in the natural expansion of the parameters of this community. It is important to note that this inter-relationship has grown in the period following the taping of interviews, and therefore did not influence the narration. More recently the relationship has become one of support for my work with regular enquiries as to its progress, showing the women's keen desire to sight the finished thesis. A certain amount of pressure emanates from this, as the war brides are now either octogenarians or

nonagenarians, and in recording and interpreting their oral testimony I fully appreciate the inherent responsibilities resulting from the special relationship which has developed.

My approach to record previously 'hidden voices' fits with earlier models of oral history, but the theoretical concepts discussed in more recent debates have also been considered when interpreting the oral testimony. During interviews with these older participants, some questions asked of them triggered related memories, and generated thoughts from long ago which had freshly risen to the surface of their minds. Thompson discusses this phenomenon, known by psychologists as 'life review'.⁴⁷ This occurs when older people retire or undergo trauma such as the loss of a partner, and they experience a sudden surfacing of memories along with a desire and increased willingness to remember. This causes the interviewee to become less inhibited and the interviewing process becomes easier for both parties. While some facts and figures contained in oral testimony can be checked against other historical sources, much of the detail cannot be verified. Generally, however, the war brides' clear recall of times and dates from many years ago was impressive. Most participants clearly remembered the circumstances of their departure from Australia - a major event in their lives - and the name of the ship on which they sailed, this information almost always proving to be accurate when checked against archival records of the original passenger lists. Most could give the exact day of the week as well as the date that the ship sailed, and sometimes even the time of departure and the music being played as the ship pulled away from the wharf. Often the participant presented

⁴⁷ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, (3rd Edn), *op. cit.*, p. 184.

photographs of various events in their lives, inscribed with names and dates, which assisted to confirm the accuracy of their testimony.

Gabrielle Fortune in her study of brides of New Zealand servicemen, cites examples of other oral history studies where women have been reluctant to take part for various reasons such as deferring to men to be interviewed; thinking their stories would not be of interest; or considering their lives to have been too ordinary and that they had nothing to tell.⁴⁸ Fortune, however, found that her interviewees 'had an expectation of their ability to supply information and an understanding that their war bride experience might be significant'.⁴⁹ In this study of Australian war brides, there was little reluctance on the part of the participants to share their stories, and only one case among those approached, where a woman of a very private nature declined to take part. In fact many commented that they had been waiting for years for someone to ask them about their experiences, which they felt were a significant part of women's wartime history which had been overlooked. The enthusiasm of the participants to have this opportunity at last to tell their stories was very evident when recording their interviews, as was their awareness of the historical value of recording their testimony. The act of remembering for the most part was personal and spontaneous, and while guided by the interviewer's open-ended questions, other related memories were articulated adding depth to the understanding of the subject matter. The women interviewed for this study were all keen to record their stories to be chronicled for

⁴⁸ Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives', (PhD thesis), *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 18; also see Fleischmann, Ellen L. 'Crossing the Boundaries of History: exploring oral history in researching Palestinian women in the Mandate period', in *Women's History Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1996, p. 356; Kate Darian-Smith and Rachel Jenzen, 'Memories from America: Australian War Brides and US Marines Remember the Pacific During the Second World War', in Martin Crotty (Ed), *When the Soldiers Return: Refereed Conference Proceedings*, University of Queensland with RMIT Informit, 2009, pp. 343-359.

⁴⁹ Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives', PhD thesis, *loc. cit.*, pp. 17, 18.

the benefit of historical research and for the information of their grandchildren and other generations to come.

The value of oral history testimony in this study is that it allows the participants to relate, in their own voices, the ways in which they understood their own experiences of the war and its aftermath. Their memories link them to 'place, to time and to nation' which enables them to 'place value' on their own social experiences, allowing them to 'inhabit their own country, wherever they may reside', be it Australia or America.⁵⁰ Historian Glenda Sluga suggests that 'memories can be a mediator between the experience of migration from an old world and the public non-recognition of that experience in the new one'.⁵¹ For the women in this study, memories of their lives in Australia, of their journey by sea or air, and their arrival in a new country, are certainly most important factors which influence their sense of place and personal identity in a new land.

Their experience of migration to a new country and its impact was not publicly recognised for forty years, when the first nationwide reunion of war brides in America was organised. This event took place on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, California in April, 1985, and was recognized by dignitaries in the United States and abroad who sent congratulations to the war brides. The President of the United States at that time was Ronald Reagan who sent a letter of greeting from the White House which read:

The approximately one million European women
who married American servicemen and came to the
United States after the Second World War have

⁵⁰ See Darian-Smith and Hamilton (Eds), *Memory and History*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁵¹ Glenda Sluga, as cited by Darian-Smith and Hamilton (Eds), in *Memory and History*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

played a significant role in the life and history of our nation. They have contributed to many fields and developments since that time and made a great impact on their adopted homeland. America has indeed been fortunate to have had the benefit of the strength and ability of these citizens and I proudly join with so many others in saluting their impact and their continuing gift to this great land.

Nancy joins me in sending best wishes for this occasion and for the future. God bless you.

(signed) Ronald Reagan.⁵²

Australian war brides were overlooked and not specifically addressed in this, or in other letters and speeches which congratulated the war brides on their accomplishments. Although Australian women were present at the reunion, the focus was on the arrival of 'European' war brides from countries where they experienced 'the ravages of war first hand', and on the role they played in the 'peace and reconstruction of new relationships between countries'.⁵³ It was to be another twenty-two years, until a special tribute was given specifically to the Australian WWII war brides at a reception at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC, in May 2007, in conjunction with Anzac Day celebrations. These women had waited 60 years for this recognition and were proud at last to be officially acknowledged as ambassadors for good relations between Australia and America over the last 60 years.

⁵² Letter from US President, Ronald Reagan, dated April 5, 1985, quoted in Shukert and Scibetta, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁵³ See Shukert and Scibetta, *op. cit.*, pp. 260-61.

METHODOLOGY

Firstly, an original archive was created of transcribed oral history tapes containing interviews with 60 Australian women who married American servicemen during and just after WWII. Oral history has special appeal to me, having successfully employed this methodology before in several research projects.⁵⁴ Due to the notable absence of historical records regarding these women, however, this recording of first-hand data from the war brides in the form of oral history, as other oral practitioners have found, constitutes a necessary methodology to recover the past.⁵⁵

Completed questionnaires returned from 150 Australian war brides in America, while not so nuanced or expansive, support the accuracy of the rich material in the taped interviews, particularly details of names, dates, sequence of events and places. Extracts from the diaries and journals kept by war brides, as well as correspondence, newspaper clippings and archival material offer contemporary records to enhance and fortify the oral testimony. In addition, secondary sources, including some autobiographical works, assist in strengthening the analysis of the more recent oral testimony.⁵⁶

The initial task was to locate a reliable sample of Australian war brides, now living in America, and to approach them as prospective participants in the study. Letters were written to major newspapers in the capital cities of each Australian

⁵⁴ See footnote 46 on p. 15.

⁵⁵ See Fleischmann, *op. cit.*, p. 353: 'Because the voice or even the presence of ordinary women is so rare in the written documents, oral history is sometimes the only means by which their past can be recovered.'

⁵⁶ Diaries of war brides Allie Rudy, Shirley Tronic, Kathleen Feehan Babin extracts (in possession of author); Journals written by Lola Atkins and Joan Byer (copies in possession of author); and more recent email correspondence from war brides Hazel Walker and Jackie Hansen, have supported information contained in war brides' oral testimony; see also autobiographical publication by war bride Ruth Frost, *Pavlovas to Popcorn*, Community Books Australia, Darling Heights, Qld., 2007, is based on contemporary diary entries. Archival records include sources of data useful in confirming official wartime legislation; shipping lists confirm dates of departure, arrival and names of passengers, and other useful data. (See Appendix 1, List of Participants.)

State, seeking contact with war brides, or with anyone who knew of an Australian WWII war bride in America who might be interested to participate in a university research study. An excellent response brought replies from people related, or in some other way connected, to an Australian war bride living in America. References to a variety of 'mothers', 'aunts', 'grandmothers' or 'old school friends' who were Australian war brides were received. A comprehensive database was then developed, using FileMaker Pro software, to assist in organising the data. Some respondents offered to make initial contact with the war brides, to ascertain whether or not they would be interested to take part in this study, before I corresponded with them.

Letters on Macquarie University letterhead were sent to those who indicated interest in being a participant, to introduce the researcher and the project and to formally confirm their willingness to take part in the study. An ethics clearance for this method of research was obtained from Macquarie University's Ethics Office and each participant was sent a questionnaire accompanied by an official consent form and copyright clearance to be completed, signed and returned in due course.⁵⁷

Sourced in this way, the participant sample was random, but the initial search embraced all Australian States through their newspapers, as described above. Responses to the newspaper advertisements continued to arrive over several weeks, most coming from Queensland and Western Australia (locations which saw the largest numbers of visiting American servicemen), with some from

⁵⁷ See Appendix 3A, Questionnaire, and Appendix 3B, Consent form.

Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. Initially, no responses came from Tasmania, although some were received much later.⁵⁸

Once contacted, the war brides in America often knew several other war brides who also were interested to take part in the study. Thus, the sample 'snowballed' and contacts were made with Australian WWII war brides across the United States: from Anchorage, Alaska in the north to San Diego, Southern California and Palm Beach Gardens, Florida in the south; from San Francisco, California on the west coast to Naples, Maine on the east coast, and many locations in between.⁵⁹

Of 200 questionnaires sent out in 2000, there was a high return of 75% indicating the enthusiasm of the war brides to participate. An initial visit to a reunion of the WWII War Brides Association in Reno, Nevada in 1999 resulted in taped interviews with the seven Australian war brides who were in attendance.⁶⁰ Interviews were subsequently recorded with another seven Australian war brides at a reunion of the same Association in Denver, Colorado in September, 2001. Following this reunion, pre-arranged visits were made to Australian WWII war brides, (not members of this Association) living on the West Coast, between Seattle, Washington in the north and San Diego, Southern California in the south. These women generously provided accommodation in their homes and organised

⁵⁸ See Appendix 4A, Map of Australia showing original locations of war brides.

⁵⁹ See Appendix 4B, Map showing US Locations of Participants in Study; also see Appendix 4C, Map showing distribution of Australian members of the WWII War Brides Association in America.

⁶⁰ This visit to the reunion in Reno was arranged while I was research assistant to Professor Jill Roe at Macquarie University, in order to interview Australian women in America for a large project she was involved with at the time. Professor Roe subsequently encouraged me to embark on my postgraduate studies and generously offered these interviews as a 'pilot study' for my current work. See Jill Roe, 'Australian Women in America' in Harold Bolitho and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Eds), *Approaching Australia: papers from the Harvard Australian Studies Symposium*, (Harvard University Press) Cambridge, Mass., 1999; also Jill Roe 'Cut in Half? Australian war brides in the US since World War II', Schlesinger Library Visiting Scholar Project: Progress Report, 13 December, 1999, (in author's possession).

luncheons, to which they invited other war brides in the area, or offered transport to interview other previously contacted war brides who lived nearby. In 2004, at another reunion in Washington DC, time was spent talking to war brides as well as visiting others in Maine on the east coast and Oregon on the west coast. Over this period more war brides were interviewed, and their details added to the growing database of participants. This research work, conducted in a part-time capacity, has spanned a period of just over nine years and in this time, through attendance at reunions and through word-of-mouth and media publicity, new participants have come forward who were keen to take part in the project, and the database has continued to expand to over 220 war bride contacts. Annual newsletters are sent to the war brides who have been interviewed to keep them in touch with the study's progress, and to let them know their valuable contribution is being put to good use.

In 2007, at an historic event at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC, attended by 95 Australian WWII war brides from all parts of the US, the Australian Ambassador gave special tribute to these women and much media publicity was generated. I was invited to speak about my research as part of this event, and afterwards was approached by several war brides who pressed envelopes into my hands whispering 'This is my life story', or 'This is for your research', as they trustingly gave me unpublished copies of their stories and also some diary extracts. Due to publicity emanating from this event, several more war brides have made contact, keen to make a contribution to this study. Daughters of deceased war brides have also made contact to share their mothers' stories, and some have supplied old photographs. More recently, short telephone conversations with war brides in America have had to suffice, to enable the necessary cut-off point for

gathering information. Undoubtedly, there are still many war brides scattered throughout the United States who would be interested to have their stories recorded for future generations; similarly there is most likely to be useful material held by the sons and daughters of Australian WWII war brides – known as ‘war babies’ – who also have interesting stories to tell from their perspectives which reflect on their Australian/American origins and the fact that they have an Australian mother. The ‘war babies’ could be a valuable source of information for further research by historians.

The time-consuming process of conducting oral histories, for both the interviewer and the interviewee, necessitates careful preparation and draws on the interviewer’s skills of organisation for smooth execution and understanding of the joys and pitfalls of recording oral testimony. Interviews were conducted in a professional manner, based on various published guides for oral history as well as experience gained in conducting several previous oral history projects.⁶¹ First contact was made with the respondent, either by letter or telephone, to organise a time and place to meet, in her own home where possible. Brief outlines of the areas to be discussed were given to the participants in advance, in order that thoughts, memories and memorabilia, could be gathered in preparation. Pre-interview telephone conversations were kept as brief as possible, due to a tendency for the respondent to launch enthusiastically into an anecdote as soon as a topic was mentioned, thus diminishing the spontaneity of their response when repeated during the interview.

⁶¹ Louise Douglas, Alan Roberts and Ruth Thompson, *Oral history: a handbook*, Allen & Unwin, 1988; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, (3rd Edn), *op. cit.*; Robert J. Mitchell, *1,001 life story questions*, Robert Mitchell, Engadine, 2006; Perks & Thomson (Eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edn), *op. cit.* For list of previous oral history projects see footnote 46, p. 15.

Punctuality was observed when arriving to conduct the interview, in order to help establish a good *rapport* with the respondent, and to make her feel as relaxed as possible. The quality and usefulness of oral history interviews rely to a large degree on the quality of the memory and recall of the interviewee, as well as the manner of the interviewer, the subjectivity of whom automatically has some influence on the way the interviewee responds to questions. Summerfield highlights the importance of establishing a good relationship between the narrator and the interviewer when producing oral history, as the process of collecting 'memory stories' is always conversational and inter-subjective, which she argues is a 'necessary and inescapable part of the production of memory'.⁶² Often the participant would offer a cup of tea or some refreshment before the interview began, which gave an opportunity to 'break the ice' and to allow the two parties to become more comfortable in each other's company. This fostered a good inter-relationship which was beneficial to the process of recording oral testimony. Important to the establishment of good rapport was also the fact that the interviewer was Australian, and that the research was for a university-based project which gave the process some credence.

After setting up the recording equipment, the prepared questionnaire was used as a guide for interviewing.⁶³ Open-ended questions were asked as much as possible to allow for fuller responses, rather than monosyllabic answers of simply 'yes' or 'no'. Short digressions by participants were allowed to continue briefly to see if the reminiscences triggered by other memories were relevant to the research project. If not, the discussion was gently guided back to the relevant topic. Most interviews were of approximately an hour's duration, but in the case of

⁶² Summerfield, *Reconstructing*, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 23.

⁶³ See Appendix 3A, Questionnaire.

group gatherings – in one case there were 16 war brides invited to lunch - individual interviews were reduced in length, in order to interview everyone in the time available. In group situations, interviews were conducted individually, in a private room separated from the other guests.

Few problems were encountered with the interviewing procedure. On one or two occasions, although not encouraged, another person was present – usually a husband or daughter of the war bride – who wanted to add something or sometimes to correct what the war bride was saying. Although this caused a slight disruption, the intervention was usually positive. Occasionally the interviewee began to tire and responses slowed down, an indication that the interview should be concluded or that a refreshment break was needed, which the interviewer also appreciated.

During the process of the interview, some questions were noticeably circumnavigated by the respondent, or not answered in full, which prompted the use of the concept of 'composure' when transcribing and analysing the oral testimony. Sensitive issues sometimes resulted in some gaps and omissions, usually to do with dates of birth or previous marriages and divorces, due to memory lapses or perhaps a reluctance to relate these details. At the time of structuring the questionnaire, no direct questions regarding sex education or sexual activity were included. Although I became conscious of this during the interviewing process, it did not seem appropriate to intrude into the private realm of memory with questions regarding possible pre-marital sex, especially when meeting women, then in their late seventies and early eighties, for the first time. As the thesis progressed, however, I realised that this was a missed opportunity

when speaking with these women. The need for some direct questioning, regarding attitudes towards sex in the 1940s became apparent, and subsequently this was achieved during correspondence with a few participants with whom contact had been maintained over a period of time, and who were happy to answer questions on the topic of sex education and sexual activity.

On the technical side, apart from a faulty tape malfunction resulting in some of an interview being missed, the process was successful. Occasionally, there were requests to 'please turn off the tape' while an interesting anecdote, usually of a personal, political or slightly risqué nature, was related. On one of these occasions a war bride admitted 'off the record' that the reason she married so young and followed her husband to the US was just because of 'the sex', and interestingly this marriage did not survive. Often there was nothing very private, sensitive or embarrassing about these 'unofficial' anecdotes, told in hushed tones. In most cases, if requested, the interviewee did not object to repeating it on tape.

The taped interviews were labelled for identification and transcribed in verbatim style to capture, where possible, the nuances conveyed by intonation, pauses, various emphases, humorous asides and laughter. The transcripts were typed in a format allowing 'keywords' to be entered in a side margin to highlight names, dates and place-names and other relevant data for easy reference. The original audio tapes, as well as a computer file copy on CD and a printed hard copy of each transcribed interview has been set aside for safe-keeping with the intention of future lodgement with a suitable archival repository, such as the Australian War Memorial Archives located in Canberra, the national capital city.

The principal aim of this thesis is to document the experiences of Australian WWII war brides, previously overlooked in official histories of World War II, and to enable these accounts to take their rightful place in the larger national wartime arena by depositing the tapes and transcripts in a suitable public repository.

WAR BRIDES AND WAR HISTORY

Although subject to some media interest in the immediate post-war period, following their departure to other parts of the world, popular interest in war brides declined. Post-war fiction utilised the excitement of wartime romance in works such as *Come in Spinner* (1951) and *Soldiers' Women* (1963) but did not differentiate between those women who made their lives with American servicemen and those merely 'out for a good time' during the war.⁶⁴ Although quite a sympathetic evocation of wartime Sydney told through the eyes of a group of women, *Come in Spinner* nonetheless highlights the sleazy and squalid side of life in a big city during wartime. While it undoubtedly focuses on women's wartime experience of falling in love – sometimes with dire consequences such as abortion, prostitution and arrest – its racy qualities ensured that women in the novel conformed to contemporary stereotypes of 'good-time girls', even as it sought to critique these. Although the female characters in this story are wooed by 'Yanks', significantly none end up married to them. Less sympathetic accounts such as *Soldier's Women* portrays Australian women in wartime as immoral, hedonistic, and out for a good time. Although 'war brides' were not the subject of these fictions, such novels and their more recent dramatisations such as the TV mini-series *Come in Spinner* (made by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1990) also contribute to the perpetuation of wartime stereotypes. These generally

⁶⁴ Dymphna Cusack and James, Florence, *Come in Spinner. The Lives and Loves of Women in Wartime*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1954 (first published 1951); Xavier Herbert, *Soldiers' Women*, Panther, London, 1963.

represented Australian girls, who fraternised with servicemen – particularly Americans – to be sexually promiscuous, purely fun-seeking, gold-diggers, unfaithful and without moral constraint.⁶⁵ Other works of fiction were also published in the 1980s, including Lois Battle's novel *War Brides* and Robin Sheiner's novel *Smile the War is Over*.⁶⁶

Historical interest in the 'home front' during World War II did not arise until the 1980s, and was initially shaped by such racy accounts of the wartime experience. When women were mentioned in historical works, they conformed to contemporary stereotypes of young women as 'good-time girls'. Although the title to John Hammond Moore's book, *Over-sexed, over-paid and over here: Americans in Australia, 1941-1945* (1981), suggests the inclusion of accounts of romantic and sexual encounters between American GIs and Australian girls, its focus, is predominantly on the American troops.⁶⁷ There is scant mention of Australian war brides except for general accounts which are contained on just two pages.⁶⁸

The new women's history that emerged in Australia at this time offered possibilities for documenting the experiences of women in wartime, but these works too gave scant detail to the experience of war brides. Patsy Adam-Smith's book, *Australian Women at War* (1984) was the first detailed study of women's wartime roles on the home front, and gives the reader a comprehensive picture of

⁶⁵ Cusack and James, *op. cit.*; Herbert, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*; Lois Battle, *War Brides*, St. Martin's Press, New York, N.Y., 1982, (a fictionalized account loosely based on her mother's experience as a war bride); and Robin Sheiner, *Smile, the War is Over*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1983, (set on the home front in Western Australia).

⁶⁷ 'GI' is a colloquial term for a soldier, usually other than an officer, in any of the US armed forces. Originally it was an abbreviation in US Army bookkeeping for items made from *galvanised iron*, then by association with *government issue* it stood for the full range of articles issued, and finally referred to the soldiers themselves. See David Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, *op. cit.*, p. 62; also Ann Atkinson and Alison Moore, (Senior Eds.),

Macquarie Australian Encyclopedic Dictionary, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW, 2006, pp. 494, 495.

⁶⁸ Moore, *Over-sexed*, *op. cit.*, pp. 161 and 160.

women at work and their contribution to the war effort, however the only mention of American war brides is in the context of the work done by Australian Red Cross women who helped them travel by train to board the ships to America.⁶⁹ A short chapter on 'The Bride Ships' discusses only the British brides of Australian servicemen who sailed to Australia.⁷⁰ In contrast, Rosemary Campbell's historical work *Heroes and Lovers. A question of national identity* (1989), discusses the American servicemen's pursuit of Australian girls, their courtships and marriages. In its examination of the American presence in Australia and the complex relationship between sex, nationality and war, the book's emphasis is on the presence of Americans troops and how they influenced the questioning of national values.⁷¹

The American presence in Australia was first studied in depth by Daniel and Annette Potts, in their book *Yanks Down Under 1941-1945 .The American Impact on Australia* (1985). This work addresses and utilises extensive sources including archival documents from both Australia and the United States.⁷² It draws on interviews, letters and diaries, to examine the relationship between Australians and Americans. While it includes the discussion of relationships and some marriages between American servicemen and Australian women, the experiences of the war brides are not the subject of in-depth analysis, and the book's primary focus is on both the military and social experiences of the American servicemen. Author Annette Potts was also the consulting historian for a documentary film, produced in the mid-1980s by Lucinda Strauss, entitled *For the Love of a Soldier:*

⁶⁹ Adam-Smith, Patsy, *Australian Women at War*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1984.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 84-86.

⁷¹ Rosemary Campbell, *Heroes and Lovers. A question of national identity*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

⁷² Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*

*Australian war-brides and their GIs.*⁷³ The use of images from newsreels of the 1940s, as well as more recent images, helped to create an important visual contemporary record of the experiences of a number of Australian war brides. Based on this ABC-TV documentary, Potts and Strauss subsequently co-authored a book by the same name which draws on transcripts of approximately 18 interviews to examine the story of Australian war brides.⁷⁴ It tells their stories from when they met their future husbands, mostly covering the war years in Australia, and following half of this group to America, some up until the 1970s. This thesis builds on the work of Potts and Strauss, but draws on an original archive of in-depth oral testimony of a much larger cohort of Australian war brides. It also spans a longer period of time and examines their origins and family backgrounds, their childhood days, and the war years, through to their recent lives in America.

Published in 1990, historian Kate Darian-Smith's book *On the Home Front. Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945*, is the first detailed study of the home front in Australia during the upheaval of the war years. Drawn from over one hundred interviews, but focussing mainly on the experiences of women based in Melbourne for the duration of the war, this work discusses the impact of war on work, housing, the family, entertainment, sexuality and morality.⁷⁵ A chapter is devoted to 'The Americans' who were 'a transient force', only stationed in Melbourne in 1942 and early 1943, thus having less impact there than in Brisbane, Mackay and Townsville.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, war brides did hail from this southern capital city and its suburbs. Darian-Smith discusses generally the liaisons between the GIs and Australian women and the obstacles they had to face in order to marry. Her study

⁷³ Potts and Strauss, *For the Love of a Soldier*, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Potts and Strauss, *For the Love of a Soldier*, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 228.

examines the social issues that were important to the people living through the war in Melbourne and challenges the popular mythology that the Americans 'indiscriminately seduced Australian women, who were willingly bribed by gifts'.⁷⁷ Darian-Smith argues that these myths were as indicative of the contemporary perceptions of Australian masculinity and femininity as they were about the Americans. At the same time, she highlights the gap between the private memories of her interviewees and the public memories of the war in official sources.⁷⁸ Darian-Smith's adept use of oral history offered women the opportunity to articulate their own understandings of their experiences on the home front during the war, and allowed for the development of the useful concept of gendered memory to enrich women's history. The war brides are not specifically studied in this scholarly work, however, and although it draws on women's memories of their wartime experiences, it is restricted to the city of Melbourne in providing a contextual background against which the oral testimony of the participants in this thesis, who came from numerous locations across Australia, can be located. More recently, Darian-Smith has also drawn on interviews with US ex-Marines to contribute to the historical understandings of the interactions between US servicemen and Australian civilians during the Pacific War and how these have been remembered.⁷⁹ In this study, she finds that the ex-Marines' memories of their time in Australia and their close friendships with Australian civilians, have assumed a particular importance in old age.⁸⁰ The ex-Marines' oral testimony also offered an 'evolving understanding of Australia's place in American culture.'⁸¹ My research shows that this is true also of the women in this study, now in their late 80s and 90s, who have a keen sense of the value of their memories of this time on

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ Darian-Smith and Jenzen, 'Memories from America', *op. cit.*, pp. 12-25.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 1

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 13.

the home front, when they first met their future American husbands. The war brides' memories also add a trans-national perspective to the understanding of their experiences in America, where they simultaneously adjusted to the new American culture while maintaining solid links with Australia.

Similarly, in the 1990s, historian Marilyn Lake examined the impact of war on Australian women on the home front, to highlight the changing nature of femininity during WWII. Lake has argued that femininity by the 1940s was 'increasingly defined in terms of (hetero)sexual attractiveness'.⁸² She describes young Australian women during the war years as 'a generation of pleasure seekers intent on excitement and adventure'.⁸³ Major influences on the changing nature of femininity, according to Lake, were advertising, magazines such as *The Australian Women's Weekly*, the accompanying rise in consumerism, and romantic Hollywood films at the cinema. On the home front, Lake asserts, women 'were invited to step into an alluring and exciting future' and were offered the 'adventure of sexual romance'.⁸⁴

Both Darian-Smith and Lake set out to deconstruct the gendered mythologies of war, and their works have dominated the history of the wartime experiences of Australian women during the last decade. Through analysis of the war brides' stories, this thesis shows that initially their experiences were similar to other women on the home front, reflecting certain generic conventions about romance and war. The similarity shifts significantly, however, when the war brides

⁸² Marilyn Lake, 'Female desires: The meaning of World War II', in *Gender and War. Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Eds), Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 63.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 62, 63, 67, 70; Marilyn Lake, 'The desire for a Yank', in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1992, pp. 621-633.

decide to marry American GIs. The logistics of wartime and official constraints which applied to marriages with US troops, made their experiences more complex. This thesis reveals that the experiences of fiancées and brides of US servicemen differed substantially from other women. Analysis of their narratives offers a new perspective, and challenges Lake's thesis that women 'avidly pursued sexual pleasure' and that they stepped into 'an alluring, exciting future' rather than returning to their old traditional roles after the war. In drawing data from the war brides' oral testimony, the specific factors which shaped their experiences are revealed, and complicate Lake's argument that the sexualisation of women was influenced by consumerism, magazines and the cinema's silver screen.⁸⁵

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw more public interest in WWII war brides with a number of publications on the subject of the women, mostly from Britain, who married Canadian, American and New Zealand servicemen.⁸⁶ Commemorative studies are often published around particular anniversaries, and from the mid-1990s on, war brides, like other participants, sought to have their stories told. Around the 50th and the 60th anniversaries of the end of the war, there was an upsurge in public interest which saw more publications on war brides, again mostly from Britain, who went to Canada, America and New Zealand.⁸⁷ At this time also, an industry emerged as war brides in America, originating from various countries, began to recall their experiences in memoirs, biographies,

⁸⁵ Marilyn Lake, 'Female Desires', *op. cit.*, p. 62; Lake, Marilyn, 'The desire for a Yank', *op. cit.*, pp. 621-633.

⁸⁶ Peggy O'Hara, *From Romance to Reality: Stories of Canadian War Brides*. Highway Book Shop, Cobalt, Ontario, 1985; Pamela Winfield, *Sentimental Journey: The Story of the GI Bride*, Constable, London, 1984; Vera Audrey Cracknell Long, *From Britain With Love: World War II Pilgrim Brides Sail to America*, Vienna, VA., 1988; Val Wood, *War brides: they followed their hearts to New Zealand*, Random Century, Auckland, NZ, 1991.

⁸⁷ Jenel Virden, *Goodbye Piccadilly*, *op. cit.*; Winfield, Pamela, *Melancholy Baby: The Unplanned Consequences of the G.I.s' Arrival in Europe for World War II*, Bergin & Garvey, Westport, CT, 2000. Linda Granfield, *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes. Stories from Canada's British War Brides*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, Canada, 2002.

collections of interviews, letters and media extracts.⁸⁸ The romantic nature of the subject has lent itself to more popular genres and for the most part, studies of the experience of war brides are written as memoir or family history, often with the focus on the more romantic qualities of such experience, although some tell a traumatic tale of tragedy and personal unhappiness.⁸⁹ A website specific to war brides in America was established in May 2000 and its host, Michele Thomas of St Louis, Missouri, daughter of a Belgian war bride, has been instrumental in encouraging war brides to communicate through this active site and to share their thoughts and stories.⁹⁰

In Canada, there has been much recent public interest in WWII war brides, and 2006 was declared the 'Year of the War Bride' with a commemorative envelope issued by Canada Post as a tribute. A burgeoning interest in the war brides in Canada has been assisted by the establishment of an active website by historian Melynda Jarratt who has worked on numerous war-bride initiatives, completed a PhD thesis, and published two books on the subject of war brides of Canadian servicemen, most of whom were British.⁹¹ Between 2006 and 2009 exhibitions across Canada displayed many photographs of war brides and large

⁸⁸ Mathilde Morris, *Dreams and Nightmares of a German War Bride*, Cambridge Writers Press, Auroro, Colorado, 1998; Valentina Rushbrook, *A Russian War Bride's Story*, 2003; Jeannine Ricou-Allunis, *Memoir of a French War Bride*, Authorhouse, 2004; Michael J. Forrester, *Tsuchino: My Japanese War Bride*, American Book Publishing, 2005; Maria Leonardi-Lamorte, *Maria: The Life Story of a World War II Italian Bride*, iUniverse, Lincoln, NE, 2006; Jane Leder, *Thanks For The Memories: Love, Sex, And World War II*, Praeger Publishers, London, 2006; Maya Torngren, *Maya. The Story of a German War Bride*, iUniverse Inc., New York, Lincoln, NE, 2007; Hilary Kaiser, *French War Brides in America. An Oral History*, Greenwood, London, 2007; Elfi Hornby, *So This is America*, 2007; Barbara Friedman, *From the Battlefield to the Bridal Suite. Media Coverage of British War Brides, 1942-1946*, 2007; Sheila Love, *Memoirs of a War Bride: World War II*, 2007; Susie Pelz Grant, *The True Story of a German War Bride*, Publish America, 2008; Leni Grehl, *Love, War and Curling Irons*, 2008; Melynda Jarratt, *Captured Hearts. New Brunswick's WarBrides*, Gooselane Editions, New Brunswick, Canada, 2008.

⁸⁹ See Morris, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ The American War Bride Experience: GI Brides of World War II, http://www.geocities.com/us_warbrides/ [Accessed 29 July, 2009]. Note: At 29 July 2009 this website had recorded 48,243 visitors since May 2000.

⁹¹ Melynda Jarratt, 'The War Brides of New Brunswick', Master of Arts Thesis, Department of History, University of New Brunswick, Canada, 1987; 'Canadian War Brides' <http://www.canadianwarbrides.com> [Accessed 2 May, 2009]; Melynda Jarratt, *Captured Hearts. New Brunswick's War Brides*, Gooselane Editions, New Brunswick, Canada, 2008.

portraits in oil on wood, the work of Canadian artist Bev Tosh, herself the daughter of a war bride.⁹² In a country which clearly has brought the war brides into the limelight, other publications, some with a new gender twist such as *Canada's War Grooms and the Girls Who Stole Their Hearts*, have been published in the last few years.⁹³

Australia has been slow to acknowledge its 'foreign' war brides, but in 2001 the Overseas War Brides Association first published the stories of women who married Australian servicemen and 'followed their hearts to Australia'.⁹⁴ Recently two books about Australian war brides of British servicemen have nurtured a growing popular interest in the subject of war brides. Both books detail the voyage of Australian war brides on the same aircraft carrier, HMS *Victorious*, bound for England. Author Jojo Moyes' novel was inspired by her grandmother's experiences when she traveled as a war bride on HMS *Victorious*. Catherine Dyson's book is a collection of stories drawn from interviews with 26 women who sailed on the same ship.⁹⁵ More family history and fiction than scholarship, such works only focus on the memory of early romance and have very little to say about the lives of the Australian war brides beyond their arrival in England. Published in 2003, *Michi's Memories: The story of a Japanese war bride*, is a translated autobiography which tells of the poignant experiences of a Japanese bride of an Australian soldier, and the challenges and heartache she faced when coming to

⁹² CBC Arts, 6 March, 2006; Canadian War Museum website www.warmuseum.ca [Accessed 16 October, 2008]. Note: Bev Tosh's art work also included portraits of several Australian war brides of American servicemen.

⁹³ Judy Kozar, *Canada's War Grooms and the Girls Who Stole Their Hearts*, General Store Publishing, Ontario, Canada, 2007; Jarratt, Melynda, *Captured Hearts*, loc. cit.

⁹⁴ Overseas War Brides Association, *Overseas War Brides Stories from the women who followed their hearts to Australia*, Simon & Schuster, East Roseville, 2001.

⁹⁵ Jo Jo Moyes, *The Ship of Brides*, Hodder and Stroughton, London, 2005; Catherine Dyson, *Swing by Sailor*, Hachette, Australia, Sydney, 2007.

terms with a new culture in Australia.⁹⁶ Ruth Frost's autobiography, *Pavlovas to Popcom*, published in 2007, is a rare and lively account which tells of her experiences as an Australian bride of an American serviceman, and is based on her personal diaries kept at the time.⁹⁷ More recently published in 2008, the novel *Tomaree* by Debbie Robson is a 'GI war bride romance' set in Port Stephens, New South Wales, and belongs to the romance genre.⁹⁸ These recent publications indicate a continuing and current interest in the war brides' stories, and highlight the need for a broader and more in-depth study.

A recent academic study in New Zealand by Gabrielle Fortune focuses on the brides of New Zealand servicemen, originating mostly from Britain and Canada as well as European and Asian countries. Fortune's thesis employs useful archival sources and interviews with war brides to analyse their experiences, and is the first in-depth study of WWII war brides migrating to New Zealand which throws light on the experiences of these previously overlooked immigrants.⁹⁹

Fortune examines the impact of migration to New Zealand on war brides from countries as ethnically diverse as Britain, Canada, India, Poland, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, and Japan. A strong interest in race and exogamous marriage situates this study alongside anthropological, sociological and other social science studies of war brides. In her study, Fortune also draws on the works of historians Graham Dawson, Alessandro Portelli, Alistair Thomson and Penny

⁹⁶ Keiko Tamura, *Michi's Memories: The story of a Japanese war bride*, Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, Canberra, 2003.

⁹⁷ Frost, *op. cit.*

⁹⁸ Debbie Robson, *Tomaree*, Trellech Press, Lake Macquarie, 2008

⁹⁹ Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives', (PhD Thesis), *op. cit.*

Summerfield, who utilise concepts of composure and dis-composure (discussed earlier in this chapter) to analyse oral narratives.¹⁰⁰

In the case of Australian war brides of American servicemen, however, their migration experience to the US was significantly different. Unlike many subjects of Fortune's study, the Australian war brides were all of the same nationality, from an English-speaking background, with shared national cultural values. They had to acculturate to the American way of life, which had been historically shaped by generations of immigrants from many different countries. Their in-laws, with whom many had to live initially, were themselves sometimes immigrants from Europe and spoke little English in the home. This cohort, however, saw their experiences as critical to the understanding of women's history, and they were very keen to have their stories told, whether their experiences were happy or otherwise. They clearly saw their input as important to this academic study, and were pleased to have the opportunity to tell their stories with as much accuracy as possible.

While memories of home front Australia offered 'a respite in the men's recollections of combat and its traumas',¹⁰¹ as observed in Darian-Smith's study of US ex-Marines in old age when reviewing their past, for the war brides of these US servicemen, their experiences of wartime Australia were different, more complex and multi-layered, once they decided to marry. These women had to wait for their husbands and fiancés to return from the battlefields, hopefully unharmed; to arrange their weddings at short notice in times of rationing; to wait anxiously, some

¹⁰⁰ See Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure. Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London, 1994; Penny Summerfield, *op. cit.*; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Melbourne, 1994; Allesandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Albany, 1991; Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson (Eds) *Gender and Memory: International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories*, Vol. IV, Oxford, 1996; cited in Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives', (PhD Thesis), *loc. cit.*, pp. 17, 18.

¹⁰¹ Darian-Smith, 'Memories from America', *op. cit.*, p. 12.

with offspring, for passage to join their husbands; to suffer the grief of separation from families and friends; to endure the discomfort of the sea voyage; and to adjust to acculturation in a new country.

Despite these challenges, analysis of the war brides' testimony uncovered little evidence of attempts by these women to achieve composure by telling 'a story or myth composed to accommodate discrepancies, loose ends and uncomplimentary facets of their lives in a way they found acceptable'.¹⁰² They did not gloss over the less pleasant aspects of their experiences, but recounted them as an essential part of their story. There were some instances where the concept of 'composure' was useful when interpreting the oral testimony, but for the most part this was not applicable when analysing the rich material drawn from these women's interviews. Archival and other supporting evidence, such as original diary entries, used in this study underpins much of the oral testimony of the participants, thus challenging the idea of composure in these instances. Being aware that this was a serious study, and that the transcripts of their interviews will be deposited in a public archive for future research, this cohort understood the need for reliable accounts to inform women's history and they seemed happy to recount their experiences, albeit from their own subjective perspectives.

There is a significant gap in our understanding of the experience of the many Australian women who married American servicemen and of their lives following their departure from Australia. This omission has motivated the focus of this study to be directly on the war brides' experiences. The oral testimony of this cohort reveals much new information about the lives of these Australian women,

¹⁰² Fortune, 'Mr Jones' Wives', (PhD Thesis), *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 18.

spanning a period of over six decades from childhood to the present day. The methodology employed allows for nuance and greater understanding of their experiences, and importantly captures the unique perspective of their individual self-representations as they narrate their lives, from their wartime experience to their old age in a foreign land. This thesis covers not only the lives of the war brides while in Australia, but also follows their journey to America and examines their adjustment to life in a new country. It looks beyond the scope of previous research, and for the first time enables the voices of Australian WWII war brides of American servicemen to be heard in the national arena of wartime and beyond, and in doing so, significantly adds to existing knowledge.

In recounting their stories, the war brides reveal insights into their wartime experiences, which complicates Lake's thesis about the sexualisation of women during this period, as well as presenting a new perspective from which to view women's wartime lives.¹⁰³ Analysis of their oral testimony, also presents a new understanding of the trauma of the protracted journey by sea, the quasi-military experience of being a war bride, the historical experience of homesickness, the ossification of Australian culture among war brides in America, and the gendered nature of citizenship, all of which complicate our understanding of Australian women's wartime experience.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Note: In her article 'The Desire for a Yank', *op. cit.*, Marilyn Lake makes extended reference to a book, viz. Maureen Meadows, *I Loved Those Yanks*, Sydney, 1948, to analyse the meaning of the 'frenzy of sexual activity occasioned by the American invasion, the significance of the desire for a Yank'. The book's author lived and worked in Brisbane during the war and 'wanted to fall in love with a Yank, badly'. However Meadows did not become a war bride, and her narrative was not necessarily representative of these women, or from the same perspective as those who married American servicemen.

¹⁰⁴ See Marilyn Lake, 'The Desire for a Yank', *op. cit.*, p. 625; Note: Citizenship for the Australian war brides was a more complicated process than Lake describes. These women did not lose their Australian citizenship upon marriage, but it was forfeited automatically when they took up US citizenship. So while they were treated as 'aliens' in America until becoming US citizens, up until this time these women still held a British Passport. (See this thesis, Chapter 8.)

The Australian women who married American troops and went to live in America have thus rarely been considered within the broad context of the history of the home front during World War II, nor has there been a detailed scholarly study of the lives of Australian war brides of American servicemen. This thesis, which challenges contemporary myths and stereotypes regarding those women who fraternised with 'Yanks' during wartime, is the first and only large-scale study of the experiences of these women, and reveals the unique circumstances peculiar to these war brides.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

The following outline shows how this thesis has been organised; it is both chronological and thematic in format, in a natural accompaniment. Chapter 1 examines the circumstances surrounding the first meeting of the war brides with their American boyfriends, their courtships and the obstacles affecting Australian-American marriages, highlighting the myths and stereotypes of wartime. Chapter 2 describes the preparation for the wedding and the ceremony itself, and examines the way in which the war brides overcame obstacles they faced due to the government policy of austerity, wartime rationing, legal restrictions and red tape. Chapter 3 tells of the long wait for passage to America for the brides and fiancées of American servicemen to join their partners. Chapter 4 examines the moment of departure and the long sea voyage to America. It draws on the war brides' oral testimony, as well as diaries and journals kept on board ship, and uncovers the significance of the voyage for these young women. Chapter 5 explores the oral testimony to describe the war brides' first impressions of America, and the nature of their reception by husbands, fiancées, and in-laws and examines the immediate cultural adjustments they had to make in a new land. Chapter 6 looks at the way in which the war brides adjust to life in a new country, their initial struggles with

homesickness, and their later involvement in education, paid and unpaid work, community and church activities. Chapter 7 reveals the way in which the war brides have maintained strong links with Australia over the past sixty years. Chapter 8 examines the dilemma faced by the war brides when deciding whether or not to become American citizens and the factors which motivated them. It also discusses the historical background of Australian Citizenship law and the impact of recent changes to the legislation. The Conclusion draws together the salient points from the chapters and formulates the findings of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

Meeting and falling in love: myths and romance

A shy young girl from W.A.
A worldly man from the U.S.A
They met at a party, ignited a spark,
Then walked next day in a wooded park,
She already betrothed to a Navy man,
He a C.P.O. in the U.S.N.

(Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', November 2001.)¹

This chapter draws upon the oral testimony of Australian WWII war brides of American servicemen to examine the circumstances of their meetings and courtships. The hardships and obstacles that these young women encountered are taken into consideration to present a more complex understanding of the mythology surrounding wartime romance. While some of these young women engaged in 'whirlwind courtships' with the American visitors, the reality of wartime regulations and restrictions meant that marriages were not often made in haste, and protracted courtships often at a distance, were more likely to be the norm. Romance was frequently tested by the many obstacles facing would-be war brides, and their stories highlight the keen sense of commitment and determination that was required to overcome the challenges which confronted them. These obstacles were sometimes initiated by parents, ministers of the Church, the army and/or the US government. In the face of these restrictions and challenges, which had an enormous impact on their lives, this cohort of Australian war brides was adaptable and resourceful, displaying loyalty and stoic determination in the face of wartime upheaval.

¹ Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', in *Albany Writers' Circle No. 19. A Collection of Short Stories and Poetry by the Writers of Albany*, November Issue, Denmark Printers, Albany, WA, 2001, p. 36. Also see List of Abbreviations.

‘YANKS’ IN AUSTRALIA

The first American troops arrived in Brisbane in December 1941, to fight the Pacific war and especially to hold the Philippines against the Japanese. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed the build-up of US forces in Australia, which was to be used as a military base for any subsequent operations in the South-west Pacific.² In January 1942, the US headquarters moved from Brisbane to Melbourne, and in March, under the command of General MacArthur, thousands of American GIs arrived in Melbourne aboard their troopships for an extended stay.³ The visiting ‘Yanks’ were generally perceived by Australians to be saving the country from Japanese invasion. The threat of the ‘Yellow Peril’ – invasion by Asiatic hordes to the north – was symptomatic of xenophobia, alive in Australia since colonial days, which now posed a real threat with the bombing of Darwin in the north and the east coast of Australia.⁴ In July 1942, MacArthur’s headquarters moved once more to Brisbane.⁵

At first the great influx of American troops into Australian cities was seen as the ‘friendly invasion’, but before very long Australian attitudes changed. Most young, eligible Australian men had enlisted and were fighting the war in Europe and New Guinea. In their absence, thousands of US servicemen were seen to be taking their girls away from them. American men drafted into the US Army in the early war years were typically single. They were much better paid and generally

² Annette Potts and Lucinda Strauss, *For the Love of a Soldier. Australian War-Brides and Their GIs*, ABC, 1987, pp. 18-20.; E. Daniel Potts & Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under, 1941-45: the American impact on Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 5-7.

³ The term ‘GI’ originated in the 1930s denoting equipment supplied to US forces, and is an abbreviation of ‘government (or general) issue’. In WWII it came also to be applied to the personnel, especially enlisted men. See Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *loc. cit.*, p. xvi; and Catherine Soanes & Angus Stevenson, (Eds), *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th Ed., Revised, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006; also see List of Abbreviations.

⁴ See David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australian and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Qld, 1999.

⁵ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

had twice the spending money of their Australian counterparts, so they could afford to woo young women with gifts of scarce commodities.⁶ The Americans appeared more exotic, bearing gifts in wartime, looking more glamorous in better fitting uniforms of better quality cloth than those issued to the Australian troops, and speaking with a 'soft American accent' only heard before in Hollywood-produced films at the local cinema.⁷ Naturally, being so far from home, the Americans were lonely and sought companionship in a society where, as Rosemary Campbell points out, 'the courting of a woman' was not 'an art which the Australian man had generally sought to cultivate'.⁸ Undoubtedly there was jealousy on the home front and, in time, the description of the American troops as 'heroes and saviours' changed to echo the British cry of 'over-paid, over-sexed, and over here'.⁹ Campbell observes 'how quickly the perception of American servicemen moved from a type of celluloid hero to a real threat to the sexual status quo'.¹⁰

The superbly tailored uniforms of the American GIs gave their wearers a certain style, and were the subject of endless comment.¹¹ Historian Marilyn Lake contends that these uniforms 'established their difference and group identity and lent the wearers a certain sex appeal'.¹² Women, as spectators, took pleasure in looking at the Yanks and, according to Lake, 'their gaze stimulated a desire for

⁶ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op.cit.*, p 331; Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1984, p. 294. (An Australian Army Private received 6s.0d. a day, or £9.15s.0d. a month. The American private received £17.0s.0d. a month.)

⁷ 'Disturbances Between Australian and American Troops'. Appendix 'E' to Advanced HQ Allied Land Forces Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 18, 4 December 1942, NAA Series BG121/3 Item 282M [NAA, Melbourne]

⁸ Campbell, Rosemary, *Heroes and Lovers. A question of national identity*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 5.

⁹ John Hammond. *Over sexed, over-paid and over here: Americans in Australia, 1941-1945*: University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Brisbane, 1981; also see David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, Harper Collins, London, 1995.

¹⁰ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹¹ Marilyn Lake, 'The Desire for a Yank', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, No. 4, April 1992, pp. 627.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 628.

gratification and possession', the uniform being the 'major stimulous to women's voyeurism' and the objectification of the American servicemen.¹³ The second factor in the objectification of the Yank was the influence of pre-war Hollywood films in portraying American men 'as lovers, as sexual and as objects to be looked at'.¹⁴ In time, however, these glamorous Yanks in Australia generally became less popular, especially with Australian males, as contemporary wartime stereotypes generated myths of wartime whirlwind romances which saw young Australian girls swept off their feet and caught up in 'romantic fantasies' leading to unwise liaisons and hasty marriages.¹⁵ Tension grew as the well-paid Americans also seemed to assume the starring role in the Pacific theater of war in their leading thrust against the Japanese, and Australian men felt 'economically disadvantaged', 'acutely dispossessed' and 'sexually impotent'.¹⁶ Lake observes that Australian men 'attempted to assuage their sense of emasculation by stigmatizing [sic] the women who went with Americans as prostitutes'.¹⁷ These attitudes helped to create the powerful stereotypes which spread during the war and continued long after.

Contemporary accounts in the press, as early as March 1942, highlighted the relationships between Australian women and American servicemen with images showing Americans in uniform walking, dancing and picnicking with Australian girls.¹⁸ Later in the same year, the cover of the popular *Australian Women's Weekly* prominently featured a romantic picture of a starry-eyed young Australian woman with a US Navy Lieutenant. These images are some examples of liaisons between Australian women and the better paid and better dressed

¹³ Lake, 'The Desire for a Yank', *op. cit.*, p. 627.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 629.

¹⁵ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁶ Lake, 'The Desire for a Yank', *op. cit.*, p. 625.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 625.

¹⁸ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

American servicemen, which caused jealousy and ongoing resentment among Australian men, both during and after the war. As Campbell points out, the better financial position of the Americans led to the belief that only women interested in money went out with the 'Yanks', and they were 'collectively seen as morally suspect'. Thus, any women who kept company with the American GIs, was generally labelled a 'gold digger' or 'good-time' girl and was targeted in the press as 'empty headed and without any ideals whatsoever, and a disgrace to Australian womanhood'.¹⁹

Some women who fraternised with the American servicemen were to become their brides and fiancées, and the conflation of war brides with 'good-time girls' was commonplace during the war years. Women who kept company with the 'Yanks' were also seen to be unpatriotic, particularly by Australian servicemen.²⁰ These stereotypes continued into the post-war years as well. For example a colourful comic, *G.I. War Brides*, published in June 1954, contained stories with such titles as 'Bride by Mistake', 'Married in Haste', 'Kisses Warmmed Over' and 'My G.I.'s Secret', such sensational material contributing to the perpetuation of wartime myths and stereotypes well into the 1950s.²¹

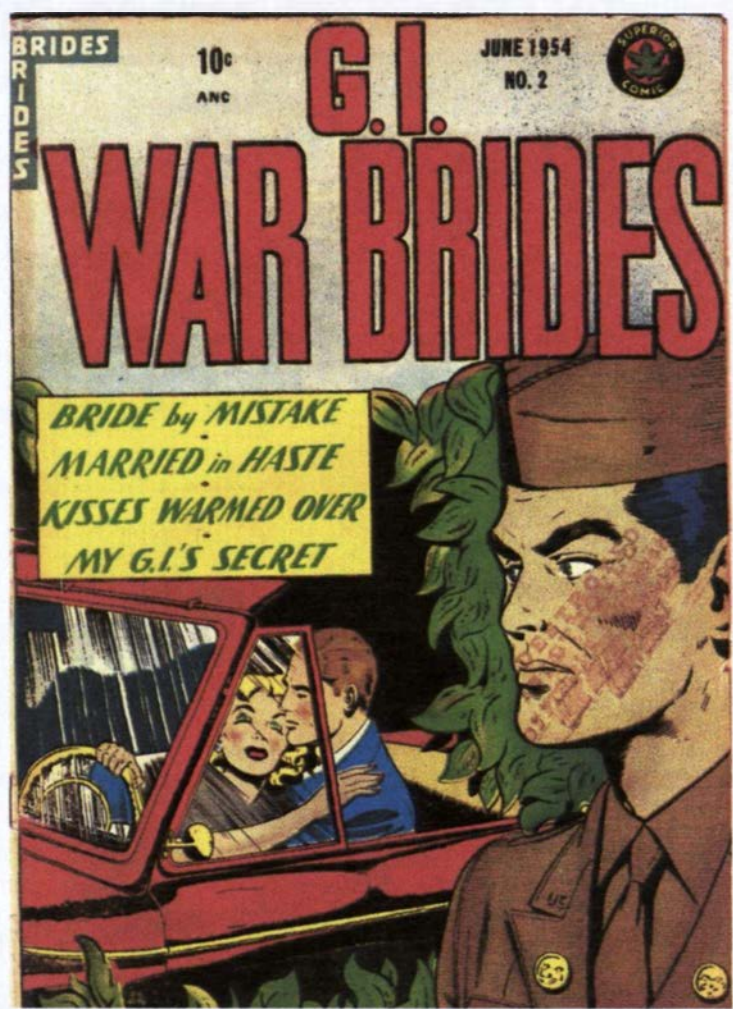
This study, however, challenges such myths by drawing on evidence from the oral testimony of this cohort, to demonstrate that these women were often targets of persistent pursuit by the GIs, and it also reveals the long interval between their first meetings and their marriages, to contradict the notion of unwise

¹⁹ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 73, 158, 159.

²⁰ Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front. Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 223.

²¹ *G.I. War Brides*, No. 2, Superior Comic, June, 1954. (See Illustration 1)

No. 2 – G. I. War Brides, June 1954.



Sensational publications such as this comic, *G.I. War Brides*, published in June 1954, contributed to the perpetuation of wartime myths and stereotypes.



and whirlwind marriages being the norm. The war brides' testimony not only challenges the contemporary myths of wartime, it also complicates recent studies of women in wartime and reveals more enlightened understandings of the experiences of women who fraternised with Americans and became their brides.

WELCOMING THE AMERICAN TROOPS

In the early 1940s Australian women were encouraged, as part of their unpaid work, to welcome the American troops. Organisations such as the Australian Red Cross and other volunteer hospitality bureaus were set up in major capital cities under the auspices of the Australian Comforts Fund to extend hospitality to the American servicemen who were far from their homes, families and friends.²² In 1943 the Australian Women's Charter, drawn up by 90 women's organisations, called upon all Australian women to take their 'full share in the war effort by either enlisting in the defence forces, undertaking work on the land or in industry, or enrolling as a voluntary worker, and by subscribing to war loans'.²³ The American Red Cross was designated as the civilian agency to provide recreational and welfare activities for the US Army in Australia, and on 24 June 1942, the American War Department issued orders that permanent service clubs were to be installed in the larger cities.²⁴ It was at some of these clubs that Australian women were able to volunteer their services to the war effort.

Many young Australian girls, encouraged to volunteer to entertain the visiting troops, attended dances which were organised specifically for this purpose.

²² Potts and Strauss, *For the Love of a Soldier*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

²³ Marilyn Lake & Katie Homes (Eds.), *Freedom Bound: Documents on women in modern Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 94.

²⁴ Orders from the Commanding General, Headquarters, United States Army Forces in Australia, 24 June, 1942. [National Archives of Australia, Series MP508/1, Item 245/701/252.]

Dancing was a popular leisure activity enjoyed by Australian girls, and was justified by wartime society as a patriotic obligation to aid the war effort by welcoming the troops and boosting their morale. The city of Melbourne 'went all out to help the war effort' according to Allie Rudy who, as a 19-year-old, found it an exciting time. She would look forward to dancing weekly at the Trocadero 'just over the Yarra River Bridge', and at the Palais de Dance on St. Kilda Road.²⁵ She remembers:

These dance halls were filled to capacity seven days a week. There was music and laughter with men in uniform and lots of Australian women who loved the 'Yankees'. Their salaries went a whole lot further than the Aussies' pay and they were more than generous with it.²⁶

In the city of Sydney a dance hall, also named Trocadero, provided a popular venue for those like Sydney war bride, Nancy Lankard, who loved to dance. She recalls the night clubs in Martin Place, Pitt Street and Castlereagh Street, which were downstairs and not visible from the street. She remembers the excitement and how she 'loved dancing' to the music of 'big bands' and says: 'We had really good times!'²⁷

Although wartime stereotypes portrayed Australian girls who fraternised with American servicemen as 'good-time girls', and adolescent girls having sex

²⁵ Allie Rudy, 'The Story of My Life', November 13, 2006. (Unpublished journal, excerpts supplied to author in May 2007 in Washington D.C.)

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Interview with Nancy Lankard, 14 November, 2004, by telephone.

No. 3 – Dancing with Americans



**American soldiers at one of the nightly socials run by the staff of retail organisations in Australia.
[Photographs AWM 012266 and AWM 012271.
Courtesy Australian War Memorial, Canberra.]**



with soldiers were the subject of frequent reports, young women were expected as part of their patriotic duty to volunteer at clubs, dances and canteens to wait on tables, wash dishes, sew buttons on to uniforms and they were encouraged to dance with the servicemen. This was often in addition to their normal paid day-time work as shop assistants, bank clerks and secretaries. In fulfilling this wartime obligation, these women often became the romantic targets of attentive, lonely young American servicemen, looking for companionship in a foreign city.

The opportunity to dance and have fun with young men while serving their community in wartime gave these women a new sense of freedom. Being valued for their war effort instilled in these young women a feeling of worth and independence. However, any sense of freedom was quickly countered by the introduction of restrictive 'red tape' which constrained the development of relationships with the Americans. Rules were set up to prevent girls leaving the clubs with any servicemen, and strict screening policies were adopted. In this way even dancing became regulated in an attempt to avoid liaisons which might lead to hasty marriages between Australian girls and the American servicemen.²⁸ In spite of these restrictions, the huge presence of American troops in Australian cities saw the mingling of soldiers, sailors and marines with civilians when off duty, resulting in many liaisons being formed.

MEETINGS, ROMANCE AND COURTSHIPS

It was at the Dugout Club, staffed partly by women from the Myer Emporium, Melbourne's largest department store, that Jean Fargo* met her

²⁸ Interview with Jean Fargo, Reno, NV, 30 September 1999; Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

* [Jean Fargo was tragically killed in a road accident in May 2004, near her home in Virginia, a few days before a reunion of the WWII War Brides Association in Washington, DC, which she had planned to attend.]

No. 4 – 'The Dugout'



Section of the 'Dugout' canteen for servicemen in Swanston Street, Melbourne. (Pen and ink and watercolour by Tony Rafty, 1943.)
[ART25127 – Photograph courtesy of Australian War Memorial, Canberra.]

No. 5 - Australian Women Volunteers



Australian women serving US servicemen in the cafeteria of American Red Cross Service Club, 16 June 1942. [AMW 136536 – Photograph courtesy of Australian War Memorial, Canberra.]

husband. The Club was open seven days a week, providing a place for servicemen to eat, shower, have a hair-cut, clean their clothes and have their shoes shone. At night there was dancing after eight o'clock.²⁹ Jean tells how she and her sister were volunteers at the Club where they were engaged in traditional female roles:

once a week we'd...clean up the tables, wash
dishes or sometimes...dance, or just stand and
sing around the piano and be friendly.³⁰

One afternoon Jean and her sister stayed for the evening dance:

someone was playing the piano...I was standing
there in the chorus line and all of a sudden...there
was this navy guy...he said 'When the music
starts will you dance with me?' So I did, and I
danced with him quite a bit that evening.³¹

Jean declined his offer to take her home, but the American's persistence led to their meeting at a later date. Jean invited him to the home of an older couple, who had two sons fighting overseas, and who had opened up their house to the servicemen. This couple 'just loved him' and they met there every Sunday. Jean didn't dare to tell her mother as 'she would not have approved' of her going out with an American. In establishing this system of 'self-chaperoning', Jean displayed her strong moral character, despite the opportunities for personal freedom offered by wartime conditions. This friendship was by no means a fast and short-lived infatuation, and refutes the stereotypical view of 'war brides'. The couple's

²⁹ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, op. cit., p. 99

³⁰ Fargo, op. cit.

³¹ *ibid.*

relationship developed over a long period, and it was a year and a half after first meeting that the couple married.³²

Joan Byer, who was born in Adelaide, South Australia, was 19 when she joined the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, (WRANS) and trained at Fremantle Naval Base in Western Australia.³³ Her future husband Raymond was in the US Navy and was stationed at Fremantle on the submarine repair ship, *Pelius*. Joan tells how they first met:

The band from the *Pelius* used to play down on the wharf during lunch time. I was in the Women's Australian Navy and...seven of us girls...used to come over occasionally to listen to the music, and that's where I first met him.³⁴

Raymond asked Joan for a date but, reluctant to mix her social life with her working life, she said 'No'. They were to meet again, however, and Joan recalls the 'dance that changed my life!' Joan and her friend Rona regularly went to the Embassy ballroom in Perth to dance as hostesses. They double-dated occasionally and she recalls that they had 'the time of our lives'.³⁵ There was no shortage of dates and, according to Joan, she and her friend 'turned down more invitations than we could possibly handle'.³⁶ It was there that Joan and Raymond met again. She remembers:

³² Fargo, *op. cit.*

³³ Interview with Joan Byer, at Vista, CA, 24 September, 2001.

³⁴ Joan Byer, 'The Dance That Changed My Life', 'Reminiscences', Unpublished journal, c.1996, p. 53. (Extract in possession of author).

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

At that time I was not interested in a serious relationship, and when a date did become serious, I immediately broke it off. I was not ready for anything permanent; I was having too much fun.³⁷

Joan and Ray danced during the evening and he asked to take her home. From then they 'dated regularly, but not exclusively at first'.³⁸ As the couple got to know each other, Joan started introducing him to all her friends. During 1943 and 1944 Joan and Ray spent their free time together enjoying such pastimes as 'dancing, visiting friends, hiking, going to the beach or movies, attending various Navy Submarine parties, or just lazing around the house'.³⁹ Joan's narrative clearly evidences that not all war brides fit the stereotypes which perceived them as 'one-night-stands', 'gold diggers' or 'good-time girls', simply seeking sexual pleasure in their involvement with American servicemen.⁴⁰ At the time of Joan's interview for this study, she and Ray had been happily married for almost sixty years.

Lola Atkins grew up in the small country town of Northam, Western Australia. The US Government had leased some land at Seabrook, which belonged to one of the Northam farmers, to construct Quonset Huts and some above-ground concrete bunkers for ammunition storage. Lola remembers, in June 1942, the appearance of 25 Americans in her hometown, which soon became 'a very lively place'⁴¹. She recalls that the 'Australian version of the USO'⁴² was in full swing' and she did her bit to volunteer for the war effort by helping out there and

³⁷ Byer, 'The Dance', *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 60

⁴⁰ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴¹ Lola Atkins, 'A Mystic Journey', (unpublished journal), p. 37 (In possession of author)

⁴² United Services Organization [USO] was similar to the Australian Comforts Fund which co-ordinated programs run by Australian church groups, the YWCA and YMCA. USO clubs provided off-camp facilities, dancing and other forms of recreation. See Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, pp. 105, 106.

also volunteering at the 'Win-the-War' tea-room, which was 'run by philanthropic ladies of the town'. Lola found that 'life was interesting despite the war, and perhaps even because of it'.⁴³ It was at a dance at the Lesser Hall that she was to meet Tom who was in the US Navy. After the dance they had refreshments at a nearby tea-room and he later walked her home. She was surprised the next evening when he appeared at her door, 'twirling his pure-white "gob-cap" in his hands'.⁴⁴ This was not a brief encounter as the couple's relationship developed over time, and they married one and a half years later. Lola and Tom remained happily married for more than sixty years until Tom died in 2005 at the age of 93.⁴⁵

Dorothy Hammon had never been out with an American and readily admits that she wanted to do so before they all left town. She tells how she met her future husband at an ice-skating rink in Sydney:

I saw this young man and we were sitting there tightening the laces on our skates and he was making silly remarks. I said, 'Why aren't you skating yourself?' He said 'I've just had my appendix removed and I'm not allowed to do anything'. He said it was two weeks ago and I thought, 'Oh the poor thing'. I found out later that was a lie – it had been six months ago! He just wanted someone to talk to.⁴⁶

Despite the 'white lie' Dorothy found him to be 'very quiet and polite' and she liked

⁴³ Atkins, 'A Mystic Journey', *op. cit.*, p. 36

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Correspondence with Lola Atkins, 2005.

⁴⁶ Interview with Dorothy Hammon, Garden Grove, CA. 19 September, 2001

No. 6 – Romance in wartime



Dorothy (Mary) COOK met Herbert BOURNE when she worked in her brother-in-law's 'Lolly Shop' in Albany, WA.



Colleen MOORE and Jerry LYDLE were introduced by her nephew in Brisbane, Qld.



Iris CRAIG's USO Badge.



Iris ADAMS met James CRAIG at a dance in Sydney, NSW.



Val BALLARD met Ben SMITH at a party, in Sydney, NSW



Irene COWIE, a nurse, met Alfred PERUCCI on a blind date in Perth, WA.

the fact that he didn't smoke. He invited Dorothy out for a cup of coffee and asked if she would write to his mother, as 'in those days the letters were all censored'. It was only a week later that the couple made the decision to marry, although it was a long two and a half years of letter writing and waiting to join him in America, before they could do so. Dorothy explains the quick decision to marry:

We just hit it off. He was just the type of person I wanted. I don't think we were madly in love, either one of us. I think we just saw something in each other – and here we are! Fifty-four years later! ⁴⁷

The circumstance of this meeting, during the urgent atmosphere of war, demonstrates the new freedom and independence of a young woman keen to meet an American GI. It also gives an understanding of the loneliness of the young American soldier seeking companionship. However, the story of this couple's meeting and the long courtship by correspondence does not fit the wartime stereotype of the 'good-time girl' or the 'gold-digger'. While it was unarguably a 'whirl-wind romance', it was not an over-night infatuation, but was tempered by the exigencies of wartime which caused separation and delays, strengthening the commitment of both parties before they could formalise their relationship with marriage.

Across the land couples met at dances, skating rinks, clubs and cafes; on blind dates through friends and relatives; at work; on public transport and simply in the street. Away from home and family, in a foreign land, the American boys actively sought companionship and someone to talk to, often about their own

⁴⁷ Hammon, *op. cit.*

families back home. They were keen to visit family homes to share a roast dinner, to play the piano and to experience a little 'normal' home-life amidst the uncertainty of wartime.

Rosemary Smith met her husband-to-be when visiting a hospital in Sydney's western suburbs where he was recovering from being badly wounded at Buna. She tells how they became friends:

I invited him over to the house... just kind of friendly to give him a place to go. We had a piano and he loved to play it. I would just take off doing what I was doing, and I'd come home and there he'd be - and it just happened like that!⁴⁸

Joan Moran*, from Fremantle, met her future husband at a dance at the local Catholic Church. She recalls how when the dance ended 'he whipped out that little white hat and said "I'll walk you home"...I felt like he was just a good, nice person...we talked about our families all the time.'⁴⁹

The American presence was very noticeable in Australian cities, and the oral testimony of war bride Hazel Walker captures the scene in Brisbane. She recalls:

there were hundreds of Yanks wandering around
the streets downtown, looking lost and lonely.
Waiting at the tram or bus stops, they

⁴⁸ Interview with Rosemary Smith, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September 2001.

⁴⁹ Interview with Joan Moran, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001. A white Navy 'gob' cap was standard issue for American naval recruits. *The author was notified on 24 April 2007 of Joan Moran's death which occurred some months prior to this date.

would...ask the girls if they'd like to go to the movies. Brisbane parents showered them with friendship, invitations to our homes, and fed them meals.⁵⁰

Hazel explains: 'We were grateful to have them there because I knew the Japs were coming to land one day, and most of our troops were in the European Theatre or Malaya.'⁵¹

I carried a ball pen hammer in my purse to hit the Japs on their heads when they invaded. Is it any wonder everyone in Brisbane welcomed those Yanks?⁵²

Some families, however, were not happy for their daughters to go out with Americans and were aware of growing criticism in the press and from the general community who believed Australian girls should reserve their affections for Australian soldiers and not succumb to 'Yankee charms'.⁵³ Also, the rape and murder of three women in Melbourne by a US soldier in May 1942, followed by ten more American servicemen being charged with rape and attempted rape by the end of the next year, had also spread fears that Americans were sexually aggressive and predatory.⁵⁴ Other families, however, were hospitable and empathised with the young American men and their loneliness in a foreign land, recognising in their fate, the fate of their own menfolk who were serving overseas.

⁵⁰ Email from Hazel Walker, AZ, dated 19 September, 2008.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 95.

The women participating in this study were without exception attracted to their future husbands either by their good looks, good manners, soft accent, quiet demeanour, lovely smile, good personality, or a combination of these attributes; thus fitting some of the stereotypical characteristics of the war brides who were thought to be swept off their feet by the glamorous American visitors who resembled romantic Hollywood heroes. The Americans undoubtedly presented favourably in their well-cut uniforms, and were described in the contemporary press as 'loose-limbed casual young Allies, whose military tailors were artists', and they excelled at giving compliments and displayed chivalry and good manners. They seemed 'smoother, wealthier and more sophisticated' than the average Australian male.⁵⁵

Having more money to spend, Americans delighted their Australian girlfriends with taxi rides and also with flowers.⁵⁶ Marge Andreatta, originally from Rockhampton in Queensland, recalls her American boyfriend's generosity:

every day that he was in town he bought me a corsage! Our refrigerator looked like an undertaker's... and my mother said 'You're going to have to get rid of some of those flowers – we haven't any more room for food!'⁵⁷

The reputation of the Americans as being well-paid and very generous with tipping was seen across the continent. In 1942, Edna Lewis was eighteen and working as a waitress in Fremantle, Western Australia, for thirty shillings [\$3]

⁵⁵ Damousi and Lake, (eds), *Gender and War. Australians at war in the twentieth century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 12; *Herald*, 18 March, 1942.

⁵⁶ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p.67-8

⁵⁷ Interview with Marge Andreatta, Denver, Colorado, 7 September 2001.

a week. She thought the one pound [\$2] tips from the Americans were 'a fortune'.⁵⁸ The generosity of the Americans sometimes manifested itself in gifts of an unusual nature. For instance, Joanne Patterson does not recall receiving silk stockings from her American boyfriend, but she does remember that he brought cigarettes for her father, and she was given a bicycle. Growing up during the Depression, she had never had a bicycle as a young girl. One year she remembers asking for a bicycle for Christmas, but she received a dog or a cat instead. She recalls how her American boyfriend found a bicycle when travelling north. It had small wheels which required her to pedal twice as fast to keep up with her friends, but she says: 'his heart was in it!' ⁵⁹

Hollywood productions encouraged perceptions of the American visitors as romantic heroes. War bride, Nancy Lankard, remembers that 'the Americans treated us very special'.⁶⁰ Her husband-to-be always offered to carry her purse, which she found 'very strange!' Australian women were not used to such displays of chivalry from their Australian boyfriends. Nancy recalls: 'He was blond and pretty good looking – he was plain-talking and had no airs about him and I liked that!'⁶¹ Nancy worked as an usherette at Sydney's Prince Edward Theatre and particularly remembers the romantic Paramount film 'Going My Way', starring Bing Crosby, which was 'so popular that it ran for five months!' The commentary of the contemporary press referred to the 'milieu of the silver screen' when describing the American visitors, bestowing on them many of the characteristics displayed in romantic films by popular Hollywood heroes.⁶² The Americans were portrayed in

⁵⁸ Betty Goldsmith & Beryl Sandford, *The Girls They Left Behind*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1990, p. 34.

⁵⁹ Interview with Joanne Patterson, Reno Nevada, 1 October, 1999.

⁶⁰ Interview with Nancy Lankard, Mission Hills, CA, 13 November, 2004, by telephone.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 62

cinemas and in the press as 'articulate, courageous and persistent in the pursuit of the woman they desired', and they won them over with 'wit and their own style of charm'.⁶³ This description was very similar to the representation of the American servicemen visiting Australian cities in huge numbers.

In the mid-forties, other films produced gave a less romantic perspective. One example is a British film titled *G.I. War Brides* (1946), which tells the story of an English girl, Linda, in love with an American Captain Roger Kirby. Linda takes the name and place on a US war-brides' ship of another English girl, Joyce, who no longer loves her American husband, Steve Giles. Linda arrives safely at Los Angeles and prevails on Steve Giles to sign the necessary form receipting the arrival of his wife. When Linda finds that Kirby no longer loves her, Steve offers to take his place and marry her as soon as his marriage to Joyce is annulled. A review in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1946) comments that while the film is fairly entertaining, 'the ease with which the leading characters transfer their affections is not a good advertisement for Anglo-American romantic relations'.⁶⁴ The review suggests that 'perhaps it is not meant to be and succeeds in its purpose',⁶⁵ which seems to be to caution both parties before marrying in haste, and is more in line with the reality of the time.

Australian girls generally had more realistic views of the Americans they met. These young women enjoyed social activities and the popular pastime of dancing, well-justified as a patriotic obligation to boost the morale the American troops. There was a never-ending supply of young American men to dance and

⁶³ Campbell, *op.cit.*, p. 62

⁶⁴ 'G.I. War Brides', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 13:145/156, 1946 p. 124.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

have fun with, but many of the girls had no intention of marrying at that time, let alone marrying an American and settling down. They were having too much fun! In the words of war bride Sunny Sansing, 'We had no intention whatsoever of coming to America you know! That wasn't in our minds at all!'⁶⁶

Sunny was a Wireless Telegraphist in the Australian Air Force, stationed at Garbutt Field in Queensland. When her grandfather died, she needed a trip from Townsville to Sydney to attend his funeral. Her Signals Officer and 'boss' was the Australian actor, 'Chips Rafferty' who was responsible for her meeting her future husband. He sent her over to the American side of the base, normally out of bounds, to ask the Base Operations Officer for transport to Sydney. Major Sansing arranged this in return for her promising to go to dinner with him on her return. Although Sunny initially thought he was 'a smart Alec Yank' and never meant to keep that promise, she recalls on her return:

as we landed, there was a jeep right alongside the runway and then the plane stopped and the door opened. He walked up and he said, 'You! Out!', and I had my first date with him then.⁶⁷

From then on, Major Sansing carried a special permit in his pocket so they could continue to see each other, as she was enlisted and regulations did not allow her to date an officer. Sunny believes that kindness and thoughtfulness were typically important and appealing attributes of American servicemen. Her American boyfriend treated her 'a little differently to what the Australian men did'.⁶⁸ Sunny recalls how he would bring bags of fruit which were impossible to get in Townsville

⁶⁶ Interview with Sunny Sansing, Reno, NV, 28 September, 1999.


⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*


No. 7 - Contributing to the war effort



World War Two Service



AIRCRAFTWOMAN NEA MINNA DORIENNE WOOLARD 108735	
SERVICE	ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
DATE OF BIRTH	9 SEPTEMBER 1918
PLACE OF BIRTH	CHATSWOOD, NSW
DATE OF ENLISTMENT	11 FEBRUARY 1943
LOCALITY ON ENLISTMENT	DOVER HEIGHTS
PLACE OF ENLISTMENT	SYDNEY, NSW
NEXT OF KIN	WOOLARD, GEORGE
DATE OF DISCHARGE	20 MARCH 1945
POSTING AT DISCHARGE	RAAF STATION GARBUTT



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Nea Minna Dorienn WOOLARD (known as Sunny) was a Wireless Telegraphist in the Australian Air Force. She was stationed at Garbutt Field in Queensland when she met her future husband, Major James SANSING.

at that time. It was difficult to get ice in the tropics and he would take Sunny somewhere where she could get iced water to drink. She recalls, 'It was just a lot of little things.'⁶⁹ Sunny explains that Australian men 'took us for granted and felt like they should walk one step ahead of us', whereas 'the American men, if anything, put us ahead of them – they opened car doors for us – it was just that little difference, you know'.⁷⁰

Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Queensland became an important base for American forces. Over just six days, the city of Brisbane saw a massive influx of 45,000 American troops, which transformed it into a garrison city.⁷¹ Hazel Walker, born and raised in Brisbane, remembers:

after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Brisbane became the center [sic] of US military operations for many years. The US Navy established a submarine repair base on the Brisbane River...General MacArthur lived in the city at Lennon's Hotel...his War Room was on the third floor of a ten-storey AMP building...Brisbane was overflowing with Yank servicemen. They were everywhere. While waiting for the bus or a tram, it was common to be asked by several of them if we would go to the movies with them. I think they

⁶⁹ Sansing, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ National Archives of Australia, 'Fact sheet 234 – United States forces in Queensland, 1941-45', <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs234.aspx>

were all pretty lonely.⁷²

It was on her first day working as a secretary in the US Fifth Air Force Service Command Adjutant General's Office that Hazel met her future husband. She recalls:

This red-headed young Yank soldier from the next office came by my desk, winked at me and said 'Hullo'. I later told one of my fellow workers: 'That red-headed boy from the Message Center winked at me, and I haven't even been introduced to him'.

She said, 'Don't take any notice of him. He winks at all the girls'.⁷³

This meeting took place in January 1943 and the couple married sixteen months later, on July 4, 1944.

FALLING IN LOVE AND MORAL PANIC IN WARTIME

A sense of social and moral panic developed during the course of the American occupation and by early 1943 newspapers reported a high incidence of venereal disease among young Australian women. Double standards employed in vice squad raids saw young women blamed for the spread of the disease, with attacks on their morality by assorted male authorities sometimes for seemingly innocent acts. For example, in January 1944, *The Canberra Times* reported that at Sydney Central Court:

Rita Payne, 19, was fined 10 shillings for sitting on

⁷² Email from Hazel Walker, dated 18 August, 2007.

⁷³ *ibid.*

a kerb-stone in Little Riley Street, Surry Hills, last night, cuddling a US sailor. According to the police, the sailor and the girl had their arms about one another. The girl said she had recently come from Canberra and had met the sailor a few days ago at Luna Park.⁷⁴

This newspaper entry was found recently by an urban researcher and reported as an item of interest to 'Column 8' in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in October 2009. Several readers subsequently suggested 'the girl in question may have been up to something more intimate than a "cuddle"'. They referred the *Herald* to 'illicit business conducted in Surry Hills back lanes at that time, described euphemistically by the newspapers as "cuddling" which may explain the heavy fine.'⁷⁵ Column 8 was then surprised to hear from a woman in Santa Ana, California, who had been told of this story. She wrote to the *Herald*:

Well, that lady was my mother, and she married that sailor in 1946 and then moved to America. I have three brothers and a sister here in America and dad, that US sailor, went on to become a commander before retiring in 1989 and now, at the ripe old age of 84, he and mom have a nice little property in Florida, where they are happily retired. Mom laughed when I told her you had repeated the story, and she told me that she was labelled as a street walker by the charging officer.

⁷⁴ *The Canberra Times*, 13 January, 1944, and reproduced in 'Column 8', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October, 2009.

⁷⁵ 'Column 8', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October, 2009.

I hope that helps you solve the mystery of the couple who outraged Sydney all those years ago.⁷⁶

The above account demonstrates how contemporary perceptions of female immorality shaped powerful wartime stereotypes which have prevailed long after the war ended, and contributed to a sexualised image of the young women who fraternised with Yanks during this time.⁷⁷ According to Darian-Smith it was because of their liaisons with American servicemen in particular that women were perceived as “saboteurs” who spread VD, ignored family duties and encouraged industrial absenteeism.⁷⁸ However, viewpoints such as these were largely created from male-authored sources in newspapers and medical publications as well as visual representations of women in the press, rather than being informed from direct experience.

Interviews undertaken with war brides for this thesis suggest a conservative approach to sex, demonstrated by examples of self-chaperoning, including dates with boyfriends within group outings, occasional mention of sexual abstinence before marriage, and sometimes an emphasis on the fact that their first child was born more than nine months after they were married. While marriages between Australian girls and American servicemen sometimes took place a short time after their first meetings, and often after hurried preparations at short notice, these young women were not well informed about sexual relations. Sex education was almost non-existent for this generation of women, and as a result, ignorance about

⁷⁶ ‘Column 8’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *op.cit.*

⁷⁷ Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal. The history of Australian feminism*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1999, p.199; also, Lake, *Female Desires*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁷⁸ Kate Darian-Smith, ‘Remembering Romance; Memory, Gender and World War II’, in Damousi and Lake (Eds.) *Gender and War*, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

sex was the norm. Sexual experience was also limited before marriage. According to surveys conducted in Australia in the early 1950s, while women were experienced in kissing and 'petting', most young unmarried women at this time had not had sexual intercourse.⁷⁹ Surveys conducted with 100 young Australian women in 1950 and another 100 in 1954, concluded that those under 24 are more likely to abstain from sexual activities, while those 24 and over generally have sexual experiences.⁸⁰ It was also concluded that virginity before marriage depends upon the age of the girl when wed.⁸¹ The findings from such surveys support the oral testimony of the war brides, of whom two-thirds were under the age of 24 at the time of their marriage, that it was common at that time for young women to abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage.⁸²

Evidence from the oral testimony of war brides confirms that there was great ignorance about sex. War bride, Hazel Walker, recalls when she was a young girl that 'Nothing was ever said about sex'. It was about 1930 when she first asked her mother where babies came from, and she was told that 'a stork brings them.' Her mother continued to give the same answer each time Hazel asked, even when she told her mother that she knew it wasn't so. She was fifteen in 1936 when her periods started, but her mother gave her no explanation: 'She just said I would bleed every month, but don't worry about it, it was normal'.⁸³ Like many young women at that time, Hazel was ignorant about sex and the anatomy of reproduction. She remembers:

When I got engaged, one of my close friends,

⁷⁹ Survey conducted by Dr Lotte Fink, cited in Lake, 'Female Desire', *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ Lotte Fink, 'Premarital Sex Experience of girls in Sydney', in *The International Journal of Sexology*, . 8, Issue 1, 1954, pp. 9-11.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.* Also see Josephine May, 'Secrets and lies: sex education and gendered memories of childhood's end in an Australian provincial city, 1930s-1950s', *Sex Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1, February 2006, pp. 1-15.

⁸³ Email from Hazel Walker, Phoenix, AZ, dated 8 February, 2009.

Heather, did almost at the same time (1944). We began to wonder what would happen after we married, and we went together into a book shop and bought a book explaining all about sex. Our mothers wouldn't tell us anything.⁸⁴

A typical young Melbourne woman, Patricia Murphy, now in her eighties, was married at the age of 22 in 1950. At the time, she knew very little about sex, although she accepted that for males it was different, demonstrating the gendered double standard which prevailed at that time. In her experience, she says:

I never discussed sex with girlfriends, and sex before marriage was a big no-no. My mother would have killed me. My father would have killed *him*. Sex never came up with Joseph before we got married. He wasn't a virgin, but that didn't matter. He'd been in the navy.⁸⁵

In the 1940s, most young Australian girls were ignorant about sexual activity or its consequences. War bride Nancy Lankard recalls her teenage years:

We were very moral, very Catholic, very young and innocent. At 16 you thought you could become pregnant from kissing! That's what we thought in the 40s!⁸⁶

Nancy was a Sydney girl who was having a lot of fun in the 1940s, despite having

⁸⁴ Hazel Walker, 8 February, 2009, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Nikki Barrowclough, 'Talking about my generation', *Good Weekend*, May 3, 2008, p. 38.

⁸⁶ Lankard, *op. cit.*

a very strict father. She was one of seven girls and she loved dancing at the Trocadero and other nightclubs. She danced with a lot of 'Navy men – Aussies, Brits, and French' and had dates with many of them. She recalls:

There were six of us who were friends and who all went out with Americans who were all very well mannered – we just kissed and that was all! There was only one out of the six of us that we suspected *might* have gone further than a kiss, but really, we were all very innocent and we all came home together from the night-clubs...We had *really* good times – but never did anything bad.⁸⁷

Nancy maintains that there were many more 'good' girls than 'bad'. She and her future husband met in July 1942 when she was 17 and he was 19. She wasn't 'too thrilled' about him at first as she had plenty of boyfriends, but the couple corresponded during the next nineteen months and she felt that he was 'a good person, dependable and reliable'.⁸⁸ When he returned after 18 months in February 1944 on a 30-day leave, they married. The couple had not been formally engaged, and Nancy remembers that she was going out with someone else at the time he returned from duty.

I was in a taxi going out with a Marine and others in the group when I got the message that my husband-to-be was in town and wanted to see me. So I got out of the taxi and the Marine went off with

⁸⁷ Lankard, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

the others.⁸⁹

Nancy's future husband never formally proposed to her, but she recalls 'he was more sure than I was that we would be married – he had the rings ready and knew that he was going to marry me, even though he hadn't proposed!' In fact, Nancy's beau had planned ahead by asking his aunt in America to send both engagement and wedding rings to Australia in readiness for the wedding day. As if swept along on a romantic tidal wave, Nancy thought to herself when the rings arrived, 'Oh, I must be getting married!' She readily admits that had it not been for the wartime atmosphere, she probably would not have married so quickly, and she most likely would have married an Australian boyfriend she had been going out with since she was 15.⁹⁰

The above narratives suggest that the combination of the urgency of wartime, the perceived need to establish a 'normalcy' of permanence and certainty, as well as the romantic persistence of American beaux in their pursuit, persuaded Australian girls, some initially reluctant, to marry American servicemen.

At first, Dorothy Thompson was not keen to go out with her American boyfriend, Leroy, when they met at the Trocadero in Brisbane. Although attracted by his 'good dancing and politeness', she claims she wasn't interested in Americans. She went out with other boys while she and the 'little Corporal', as she jokingly called him, went out 'on and off'. It was much later he told her that from the very first time they met, he had made up his mind to marry her, but Dorothy said that at that time 'I didn't want to get married until I was 25...and least of all

⁸⁹ Lankard, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

No. 8 – Meeting and falling in love



Dorothy LEISHMAN holidaying at Coolangatta, Queensland, in 1943, not long after meeting her future husband, Leroy Ferdinand THOMPSON.



Dorothy and Leroy enjoy shopping together during their courtship in Sydney in 1944.

marry an American'.⁹¹ Dorothy was reluctant to accept the notion of romantic love displayed by her American suitor. Claiming disinterest in his original attentions and continuing to go out with other men, she initially refused to wear his engagement ring, and seemed almost to be willingly deterred by obstacles surrounding the eventual arrangements for her wedding. Dorothy appeared to resist the inevitability of fate. Katie Holmes claims in her study of women's diaries, 'to set or reject the terms set by men' was a prerogative which women could claim, and to employ this right or privilege was one way in which they had some say and could exert control over a situation.⁹² Perhaps Dorothy had already realised her reluctance to leave Australia; her seeming disinterest may have been caused by fear of the unknown. Dorothy's rebellion against accepting Leroy's serious advances, possibly was a natural response, and in fact the 'very stuff of romance'.

Similarly, Betty Paukovitz 'wasn't wild about' Ski. She was seventeen and he was eleven years her senior when they met at the 'old-time dance' at North Fremantle Town Hall. She purposely didn't tell him her new address when she moved house with her mother, but through sheer persistence he found out. It was three or four months after they met that they decided to marry, and then it took six months for their papers to come through.⁹³

The examples above clearly evidence that rather than being 'good-time girls' who virtually threw themselves at Americans, some war brides recall initially resisting such liaisons and being actively pursued by their husbands-to-be, some confidently deciding on first meeting that this was the girl he would marry. It can

⁹¹ Interview with Dorothy Thompson, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

⁹² Katie Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day: Australian Women's Diaries of the 1920s and 1930s*. Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1995, p. 13.

⁹³ Interview with Betty Paukovitz, San Diego, CA, 23 September 2001.

be argued that the reinforcement of contemporary gendered stereotypes, which saw the powerful military male as hero and saviour, and the passive young female waiting to be wooed, created an atmosphere of heightened romance rather than simply one of physical pleasure. Sometimes, finding their Australian dates reluctant to go out again, the Americans refused to take 'no' for an answer and pursued their romantic targets, wooing them with flowers and other gifts.⁹⁴ The very persistence they displayed in their romantic quests sometimes paid off when they won the hearts of their Australian girlfriends.

Many wartime romances between Australian women and American servicemen developed into permanent relationships over a period of time, often through letter-writing which proved to be a significant part of wartime courtships where young couples had few opportunities to be together. The experiences of women in Australia during wartime reflect many commonalities during an extraordinary time for women throughout the world. However, the war brides' decisions to marry an American serviceman literally hoisted this cohort of women into another category of female wartime experience, where special circumstances, specific legislation and red tape, to a large degree dictated their futures. The consequence of being the wife or fiancée of an American serviceman compelled these young women to discover or develop their inner resources of patience, commitment, resourcefulness and stoicism. By drawing upon these qualities, they overcame many challenges which faced them after their decisions to marry and to courageously embark on a new life in a land they knew little about.

Telling their stories as older women, the war brides naturally remember

⁹⁴ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

their first meetings and courtships as a romantic period in their lives. While it can be argued that this element of romance in their narratives led to circumstances of 'composure' in some cases, there is much evidence to the contrary. For example, the reluctance of some brides to be courted by an American, the urgency of wartime, the difficulties and red tape which confronted them once they became engaged to be married, in some cases opposition from family, and the very real fear of losing their American boyfriends on the battle field, were factors not excluded from the narratives which provide a window through which to view the reality of their experiences. There was little awareness among most of the war brides of any hostility towards them on the home front because of their connection with the American forces; therefore it is unlikely that their stories were purposely constructed to contest wartime stereotypes. The Australian war brides were honoured to tell their stories and even allowing for a little nostalgia - a natural part of memory recall - their oral testimony was for the most part remembered and told much as it was experienced.