



# Play and Folklore

**UN Stands Up for Children's Right to Play**

**Extracts from *Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke***

**Recreation in the 40s**

**Beach Bums, Bloodsuckers and Ice-cream Jellies**

**Reflections on the Adult's Role in Children's Play**

***International Journal of Play*: call for papers**



## From the Editors

### ***Play and Folklore* no. 59, April 2013**

Congratulations to Australia's first National Children's Commissioner, Ms Megan Mitchell, who was appointed by the Prime Minister on 25 February 2013. Megan Mitchell is currently the New South Wales Commissioner for Children and Young People. She will promote public discussion and awareness of issues affecting children, conduct research and education programs, consult directly with children and representative organisations, and examine Commonwealth legislation, policies and programs that relate to children's human rights – a topic discussed in this issue of *Play and Folklore*.

We also welcome the recent announcement of the acceptance by the United Nations of a General Comment on Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the child's right to play. It is interesting to note that the only two nations that have not ratified the Convention are the USA and Somalia.

Much of children's play, including rhymes, jokes, riddles, play terms and other verbal lore, and the knowledge and game skills that pass from child to child in the playground and elsewhere, can be classified as Intangible Cultural Heritage under the United Nations definition. Currently, Australia is not a signatory to the UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Perhaps the National Children's Commissioner might find a way to rectify this.

**Gwenda Beed Davey, June Factor and Judy McKinty**

### ***Play and Folklore***

Editors: June Factor, Gwenda Beed Davey and Judy McKinty

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Editorial address: Dr. June Factor, Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia.

Phone: +61 3 9499 6151 Email: [j.factor@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:j.factor@unimelb.edu.au)

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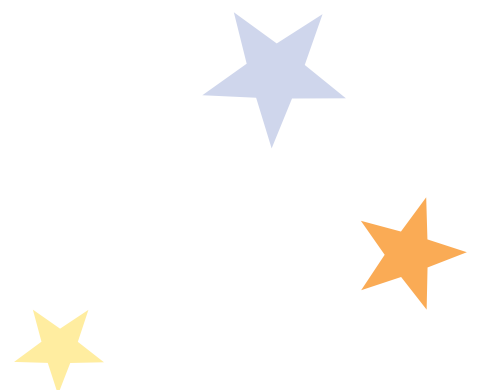
GPO Box 666, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone: +61 3 8341 7378. Email: [playandfolklore@museum.vic.gov.au](mailto:playandfolklore@museum.vic.gov.au)

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## UN STANDS UP FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PLAY

On 1 February 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child announced the adoption of a General Comment, an official document that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention).

### Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 31 has long been considered 'the forgotten article' of the Convention. The General Comment adopted on 1 February, however, will right that wrong by clearly defining for governments their obligations and responsibilities that are implicit in the Article.

### The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Built on varied legal systems and cultural traditions, the Convention is a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards and obligations to protect children's human rights. These basic standards set minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be respected by governments and are founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each individual. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, the Convention is the first legally-binding international

instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights for children – civil, cultural, economic, political and social.

The Convention is an acknowledgement by world leaders that children have human rights and that people under 18 years of age often need special care and protection that adults do not. By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention, governments across the world have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children's rights and to hold themselves accountable for this commitment before the international community. States Parties (signatories) to the Convention are obliged to develop and undertake all actions and policies in the light of the best interests of the child.

The Convention sets out these rights in 54 articles and two Optional Protocols. It spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have:

- to survival
- to develop to their full potential
- to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation
- to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

The four core principles of the Convention are:

- non-discrimination
- devotion to the best interests of the child
- the right to survival, development and protection
- respect for the views of the child.



Children in traditional clothing playing a game with knucklebones, Mongolia. Photographer – Margaret Taylor

In a statement in 2000, Nelson Mandela described the Convention on the Rights of the Child as ‘that luminous living document that enshrines the rights of every child without exception to a life of dignity and self-fulfilment.’<sup>1</sup>

### General Comments

General Comments are the United Nations’ interpretation of the content of human rights treaties. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child publishes General Comments in relation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

General Comments are directed to the governments of those countries which have ratified the Convention. Their purpose is to deepen understanding of a particular aspect of the Convention, and to reflect the changing conditions under which children grow up.

General Comments vary, but generally contain a description of the significance of the article, definitions, legal analysis, links to other international treaties or protocols and guidance on implementation of the Convention.

The UN requires that governments report every five years on the progress made on children’s rights in their country (that is, on implementation of the Convention). The Committee makes ‘Concluding

Observations’ (recommendations) to governments in response to these reports. General Comments are referred to frequently in these Concluding Observations.

General Comments can be used by national and local governments to guide implementation, and by non-governmental organisations and individuals to advocate for children’s rights.

There are currently 13 General Comments relating to children’s rights. These address:

1. The aims of education
2. The role of independent human rights institutions
3. HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child
4. Adolescent health
5. General measures of implementation
6. Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin
7. Implementing child rights in early childhood
8. The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment
9. The rights of children with disabilities
10. Children’s rights in juvenile justice
11. Indigenous children and their rights under the UNCRC
12. The right of the child to be heard
13. The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.



To date, the only two nations that have not signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are the USA and Somalia.

And now, at last, it is time for a General Comment on Play, Recreation and Leisure (Article 31).

Since 2008 the International Play Association (IPA) has led an international group of co-signatories to the request for a General Comment, and has been closely involved in its development. A global survey in 2009 conducted by IPA and regional supporters in eight locations worldwide identified significant barriers to children's play. The Global Consultation was integral to establishing the need for the development of the General Comment on Article 31. Theresa Casey, President of IPA, warmly welcomed the adoption of the General Comment:

Play, recreation, rest, leisure and involvement in cultural and artistic life are all interrelated and critical to a happy, healthy childhood. Problems arise when such activities are considered luxurious or frivolous. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are all fundamental rights of children and IPA will do its best to continue supporting policy makers and practitioners who turn these rights into concrete actions. We are delighted by the Committee's decision to emphasize the importance of Article 31 in a General Comment, and are honoured to have assisted in the effort.<sup>2</sup>

*There isn't an age to stop playing because playing never dies inside us!*: child participant in IPA consultation in Brazil, 2011.<sup>3</sup>



Girls playing Jacks with stones, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea  
Photographer – Malcolm McKinty



Children playing blindfold chase at the edge of a jungle, Northern Thailand. Photographer – Judy McKinty

*Governments have to remember that you were children and you had dreams to play freely in the past: child participant in IPA consultation in Lebanon, 2011.<sup>4</sup>*

Perhaps readers of *Play and Folklore* would like to contact the governments of their own countries and ask how they are implementing Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Article 31 General Comment is available for downloading at: [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC-C-GC-17\\_en.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC-C-GC-17_en.doc)

#### REFERENCES

UNICEF, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>  
*Children's Rights are Human Rights: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, leaflet published by Network of Community Activities, NSW  
 International Play Association, *UN Stands Up For Children's Right To Play, Recreation And Leisure In A Landmark Moment For Children*, Press Release, 1 February 2013, <http://ipaworld.org/>

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Nelson Mandela, *Building a Global Partnership for Children*, Johannesburg, 2000  
[http://www.oneworldpeople.org/articles/mandela\\_children.htm](http://www.oneworldpeople.org/articles/mandela_children.htm)
- 2 International Play Association, *UN Stands Up For Children's Right To Play, Recreation And Leisure In A Landmark Moment For Children: United Nations adopts in-depth interpretation of 'forgotten' children's rights*, Press Release, 1 February 2013, <http://ipaworld.org/>
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 *ibid.*



Children making a bush cubby, Hepburn Springs, Australia  
 Photographer – Gwenda Beed Davey





## Extracts from *SHORT CRUISE ON THE VYNER BROOKE*<sup>1</sup>

Ralph Armstrong

*In Play and Folklore no. 48 (October 2006)<sup>2</sup>, we published a memoir about childhood play in an internment camp in Tatura, Victoria, during World War II. In this issue we have an account of the experiences of a young British boy who spent three years in several Japanese civilian internment camps in Sumatra, from 1942 to 1945. The death rates in the camps were enormous, and included Ralph Armstrong's mother and two sisters. Despite their dire circumstances, the British, Dutch and Australian children continued to play.*

*These extracts are taken from Ralph Armstrong's memoir, Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke. The Vyner Brooke was a small passenger vessel attempting to evacuate civilians from Singapore when it was bombed and sunk by Japanese aircraft in February 1942. Ralph was a young teenager at the time.*

In this Internment Camp there were, I believe, about four to five hundred women and children of various nationalities – Australian, British, American, Eurasians and others. There were even Ambonese interned here due to their fierce loyalty to the Dutch. The predominant nationalities were English, Dutch and Australian.

A committee was formed, to which each household elected a person, known as the house captain, who was answerable to the authorities. The Dutch had lived here before internment, so had most of their possessions with them, whereas the British and Australians were all survivors of shipwrecks and had lost nearly everything. But the Dutch were very generous to us.

I remember in this environment we children made quite a few friends. I remember boys and girls of around my own age – Ade de Konig (pronounced Ahdai), and his sister, Theo, James Reid, Kenny Boswell, Dirk Reid, Katje Tekelenburg, Derek Woodford, Maisie and June Boswell. The Colijn girls were slightly older.

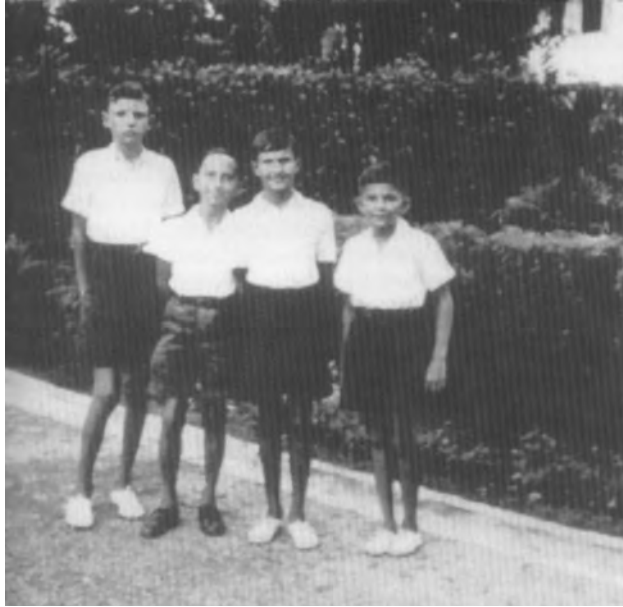
The younger children, like [my nephew] Marc, also had their own circle of companions. Everyone found many others to play with. I began to feel my old self, finding humour and interest in things, being able to see the funny side of the many weird situations...

Even imprisoned as we were, nothing stops the children playing games amongst themselves. Occasionally I was called 'the Professor'. Someone would wander in and ask 'Where is the Professor?' 'Who, me?' I did not think I was any more learned than anyone else...

I noticed the absence of small lizards, *chichaks*, like those visible on the ceilings in Singapore. Instead there was a larger species, called *ghekos* or *tokays* after the sound that they made, which remained hidden above the ceilings.

Hans Schoenburger, one of my friends, had tamed one of these *ghekos*. He would call it down from the roof rafters by imitating its sound, and it would approach him and drink a little milk from a saucer on the ground.





Ralph (far right) and friends

We saw Japanese lorries driving around. They were marked *Dai Nippon* at the top in front of the cab. This became the source of a joke (Die Nippon! Ha-ha). The lorries were Datsun or Nissan.

The year was changed from 1942 to the Japanese year 2602. Even the clocks had to be reset to Tokyo time. We heard that Singapore had been renamed Syonan, and the English language newspaper *The Straits Times* had been renamed the *Syonan Shimbun*. I felt deprived at not being able to see the Sunday *Tarzan* colour comic strip anymore. (Or any other comic strips for that matter.) I used to look forward to that...

Through our own camp information centres, and by checking with friends, we picked up the beginnings of Japanese numerals:

1. *Ich*i, 2. *Ni*, 3. *San*, 4. *Shi*, 5. *Go*, 6. *Roku*,  
7. *Shichi*, 8. *Hachi*, 9. *Ku*, 10. *Ju*, 11. *Ju Ich*i,  
12. *Ju Ni*, and so on.

*Memory jog ditty: 'Itchy knee, sang she!'*

One night a couple of us boys strayed down the road to where there was a large forty-foot high silk cotton tree about twenty feet beyond the barbed wire fence. We saw a shadowy ghost-like figure at the bottom of the tree. We had heard the local Malay stories of *pontianaks*. These were ghosts who had the appearance of beautiful women who

beckoned men towards them. If a man embraced such a one she would turn into a hideous, evil, cackling fiend bent on his destruction. The man had to struggle to free himself. She would laugh like a witch while he fled in a terrified and shocked state.

According to the legend, if you were able to knock a nail into the back of the head of the *pontianak* it would end this frightful and hideous transformation, and she would revert to being a normal and beautiful woman. The problem was to get close enough to hammer the nail into the back of her head.

We stared at the figure. *Pontianaks* were supposed to frequent cotton trees. The ghostly figure moved from time to time so we debated between ourselves as to whether it really was a *pontianak*. It was already late at night and most people were sleeping. The other boy said 'Well, there is only one way to find out – let us give it a shot with our catapults. If it is a *pontianak* the pellets will go right through it'. So we both loaded our catapults and fired at the figure. The result was surprising. A thunderous roar filled the air as the figure shouted '*Kurrah. Ku r a a g h.*' It was a Japanese guard who had been leaning on the tree half asleep. Two astonished boys bolted for dear life. We ran into the nearest bottom house, through the house, nimbly over the sleeping bodies, out the other end, through the next house, and so on until we arrived at our own houses at the top of the hill, where we dived into our beds, hearts pounding.



Extracts from *SHORT CRUISE ON THE VYNER BROOKE*



The commotion that ensued as a result of our exploit continued for a while, but fortunately for us the culprits were never identified. God knows what the Japanese would have done had they caught us. They might have been a bit lenient with young boys, but then again they might not. People had been tortured and killed for less than this...

We boys would slip through the fence at the back of the houses near Ade de Konig's place and wander a short distance through the woods. A few metres on we came upon a Chinese graveyard. There was one large grave in a sort of a 'U' shape made of concrete, which we used as our meeting place. We lads would sit around on this for a while, and then return to the camp when the Javanese guard's beat took him to the furthest point away from us...

Another meeting place for us boys was on top of a tree near the fence. There was no objection from the guards and we would climb it, and sit three-quarters of the way up where we talked for a while. It was here that we decided to have a war game amongst ourselves. I was the leader of one of the teams (the White Triangle), and we carved into the tree a white triangle symbol. Our motto 'Never Surrender' was chosen by me. The leader of the

other team was James Reid.

The boys' war game was planned among ourselves to take place in the vacant scrubland behind the 'L'-shaped layout of the houses, but still within the perimeters of the camp boundaries. There was no real animosity in the game. It was just competitive, like a game of Monopoly or tennis or football. We did not think of the teams as Dutch or British. As far as my memory serves me there were British and Dutch boys in both teams. James and I were both British. To the rear of the scrubland we had already made cubby houses where we used to go and play sometimes. This was where the teams had their headquarters.

One day James and I were under a tall fruit tree. We discussed the rules of the game and how the points were to be awarded. Using handsaws, we made weapons in the shape of rifles from packing-case wood. To these we attached strips of inner tube rubber, nailed to the front. The rubber could be drawn back to the trigger near the butt. The rifle catapults were less accurate than ordinary catapults. This was all right with us, as we felt we would not do much harm with them. We planned to use clay balls about three-quarters of an inch thick as pellets, instead of stones. We started production of the baked clay balls about two weeks before the



Birthday card made by Ralph in 1943 for his young nephew Marc

date planned for the game...

Some of the team were selected to bake and stack the ammunition. My team's stockpile was kept at the rear outside our place, and one day I was shocked to find a large quantity missing. It had been raided during the night. This was a setback – but we redoubled our efforts and changed the hiding-place for the pellets. Other members of the team had to be called upon to help with the production of the pellets to make up for the loss. Some of the girls enrolled on both sides as nurses.

We strengthened our cubby houses in the bushland and called them forts. James called his 'Fort William Henry' after an existing real fort somewhere in the US or Canada. I tried to find an original name for ours.

The day came for the battle. Our fort was nearer the houses, and James' was further downhill. The battle raged back and forth for a while, and our team captured quite a bit of ground. I found myself at a spot on the far right where there was a little rise from which I could survey the situation. I felt we were already winning, and became somewhat over-confident.

It was at this point, while I was standing there with

my hands on my hips, that a pellet came hurtling out of the sky and struck me directly in the left eye. The effect was unbelievable. The whole sky seemed to explode. I saw flashing lights everywhere, like hundreds of kaleidoscopes, and then came the intense stabbing pain. The first aid group did their best, but it did not help. The excruciating pain continued unabated.

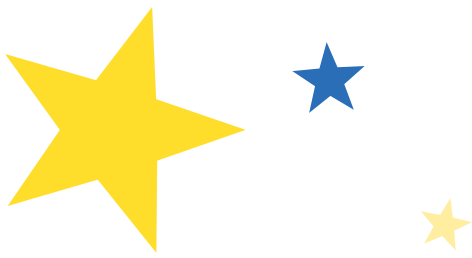
I was taken to our room in the front corner house. My sleeping place was near the end. I could still see out of my right eye, but the pain in my left eye was so bad that most of the time I kept both eyes closed. I think Katje and some of the others came to see me. The next thing I knew, I was being transported to the Charitas Hospital in Palembang town. [My eye did recover.]

Photographs previously published in *Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke* by Ralph Armstrong and used with permission.

#### ENDNOTES

1 Ralph E.H. Armstrong, *Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke*, with a foreword by Patricia, Countess Mountbatten of Burma (Maidstone, George Mann Books, 2003). Extracts from pages 65–71 used with permission of the author.

2 Bruno Werner Weinmann, 'Play in an internment camp', *Play and Folklore* no. 48 (October 2006), 4–5



## RECREATION IN THE FORTIES

Edel Wignell

My family lived on a farm in northern Victoria. When I was a kid in the 1940s, most of the recreation was locally based and few people in our district travelled far. (Petrol rationing kept most people at home.) Kids accompanied their parents to tennis matches, dances and euchre nights, and played games together. They attended Sunday school activities and outings, and were taken to the pictures occasionally.

As we belonged to a fundamentalist Christian sect and didn't play or watch sports or participate in 'worldly entertainments', our outings with the members of our group were our main recreation.

Occasionally a family invited everyone to Saturday afternoon tea. Most of the fathers played rounders or cricket with us kids while the mothers and the elderly chatted indoors. The afternoon teas were enormous. Mum warned us, 'Mind your manners, say "please" and "thank you", and be ladylike', but it was hard to be ladylike while eating fast enough to try everything.

When we had an evening get-together we kids played hide-and-seek outdoors in the dark. As I couldn't examine my chosen hiding place, the game was terrifying. Perhaps it was bristling with spiders; perhaps Hobyahs<sup>1</sup> and other bogies were sneaking about.

When we had an evening 'sing', we sat in a big circle as we did for Sunday Fellowship Meetings, and someone played the piano. After singing three or four hymns in unison, our parents took turns to

stand at the piano and sing duets. Those who could 'sing parts' did. Dad sang tenor in his duet with Mum. We also had quartets, with members offering to sing soprano, alto, tenor and bass. We children took a turn, too, group-singing 'Jesus Loves Me' or 'God make my life a little light'.

After a while conversation began and the hostess left the room, followed by the other women. Someone asked, 'Tea or coffee?', and everything was brought in on trays. As Mum had warned, 'Be ladylike!', we were specially careful not to spill anything. Hardest of all was 'wait to be asked'. Why wait to be asked when you could reach out and take?

We celebrated birthdays with a special dinner. Gran chose the oldest hen – one she knew had stopped laying. She caught it, took it to the wood heap and held its neck firmly against a log. She brought the sharp blade of the axe down expertly, and let the hen go. The head fell to the ground and the hen danced about for a minute or two, blood spurting. Horrified and intrigued, I looked at the eye – still bright, but sightless – and felt the rubbery red comb. Gran tied the hen's feet together over the clothes line and left it until the blood stopped dripping.

To loosen the feathers she dipped the hen into a bucket of boiling water. The sickening smell of hot, wet feathers turned my stomach as we helped her to pluck the chook. 'Now I'll take the innards out,' said Gran. She cut the stomach open and told us which ones were edible as she dragged them





The farm at Wharparilla West (seven miles west of Echuca, Victoria), where Edel grew up

out. 'This is the crop.' She cut it open. 'See, it's full of gravel and shell grit to grind up the wheat. We can't eat that. Now the giblets.' She pulled out the gizzard, heart and liver and put them aside in a bowl.

Sometimes Gran made a disquieting discovery. 'Tch, tch! This hen's a layer.' She shook her head. 'I'm so vexed!' She showed us two or three eggs, all soft-shelled, gradually increasing in size. I liked seeing the eggs at different stages, soon to be laid. 'This hen's not ready for the pot. What a waste – it may have gone on laying for a year or two.'

Next Gran cut off the feet, scrubbed them and added them to the giblets. 'I'll make jelly later.' Mum or Gran stuffed and roasted the hen and we ate it with plenty of gravy and vegetables at the birthday tea. Next day Gran gave us a dish of 'chookie jelly' which contained the chopped giblets and feet set in gelatine. It was delicious on toast for breakfast or at lunch time with salad.

Both Empire Day (24 May) and Guy Fawkes Day (5 November) were special because we celebrated with fireworks. Dad's birthday was on Empire Day so, as a kid, he always had a holiday. I liked the attention we received at school on our birthdays, so I thought this must have been a disadvantage for him. After Dad's birthday dinner came the special, shivery part of the night – the fireworks. My favourites were the Catherine Wheel, which Dad nailed to a veranda post, and the Jumping Jacks, which leapt about, popping. I was dying to be old enough to light them.

We lived on a farm, so fireworks weren't magical for our dogs, the noise hurting their ears. The oldest, being experienced, crept away to his kennel as soon as the fireworks bag was opened. 'Once a dog panicked and ran miles away', said Dad, so he chained the dogs up for the evening. If we had a young pup, it jumped about excitedly for a few moments but soon hid in its kennel, confused and afraid.

On Guy Fawkes night we had a bonfire as well as fireworks.

*Please to remember  
The fifth of November,  
Gunpowder, treason and plot,  
I see no reason  
Why gunpowder treason  
Should ever be forgot.*

It was a mad nursery rhyme but I liked saying it, and Gran, who had been the teacher at the local rural school before she married farmer Pa Pa in 1900, told us its history.

In our spare time during the preceding week we dragged dead branches and laid them on top of logs which Dad or Pa Pa had brought as a basis for the bonfire.



Edel and her sisters playing on a raft in the farm dam (Edel far right)

We believed that everything in the Bible was true, but Guy Fawkes Night provided a test of my faith. How did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo<sup>2</sup> walk in the burning, fiery furnace and come out without a hair of their heads being singed? I couldn't go near *our* raging, fiery bonfire.

Regularly in our family and, occasionally, with Uncle Jim and Auntie Lil, we played parlour games – though we didn't know them by that name. We played Chinese Checkers and Draughts with adults, and Snakes and Ladders, Ludo, Tiddly-winks and other simple ones, such as Hide the Thimble with little kids, calling 'Warm!', 'Cold!', 'Freezing!', 'Boiling!' to indicate nearness. When I was a teenager, we bought Monopoly. Ern Randell, a member of our group, had played Chess as a boy in England, but it remained a mystery as no-one else was interested in it. We didn't play card games for we regarded them as sinful because 'worldly' people bet on them.

Often on Saturday afternoons I took the Chinese Checkers into the sitting room (which was used only by Mum for sewing and for Meetings of our group)

and played a game for six. If I played fair, the board soon jammed up and the game became boring, so I favoured one player and let the other five do stupid moves to increase her chances. Soon I found that a game for four was perfect as each player could move intelligently without jamming.

Annually, when the circus came to town everyone went – except our group. The kids talked about it at school for days. C.J. Dennis' poem, 'The Circus', in one of the readers, began, 'Hey, there! Hoop-la! The circus is in town!' I was curious about 'the acrobats on the dizzy swing', 'the tumbling men', 'the circus troupe', 'the educated dog', 'the lady Blondin', 'the lad upon the ladder', 'the india-rubber man' and 'the boy who loops the loop'.<sup>3</sup> Who were these people, and what were they doing? I wanted to go to sort out the confusion of images in my mind.

As my mother's parents lived in Bendigo, we usually went to see the annual Bendigo Easter Parade. Standing behind the barricades, we watched the great red-and-gold dragon snaking forward on its black legs. As it wound left and right, its head reared and bowed and swooped. Nearer and nearer it



Edel Wignell reading her book *Sprouts* to Great-nephew Charlie  
Photographer – John Fisher

came, until I could see the gold decorations on the red fabric and the great lolling eyes and tongue in the fearsome face.

A pervasive memory is of swimming in the dam which was close to the house. Arriving home from school, from October to April, we ate a snack then stripped, donned our 'togs' and ran to the dam. Its base was thick mud, and toes often encountered something alive, wriggling, tweaking, which was scary, encouraging us to swim. We enjoyed paddling around on a raft which Dad built. He also installed a diving board at the deepest side, and I perfected a routine there.

Although we were constantly busy with school, piano practice morning and evening and farm chores, there was time in our sheltered lives for fun and recreation, and an occasional outing.

Edel Wignell is a freelance writer, compiler, journalist and poet, who writes for both adults and children: fiction, non-fiction, picture-stories, short stories, scripts and verse. She has 100 published books, including *Christina's Matilda*, ill. Elizabeth Botté (ages 10-adult) and *Bilby Secrets*, ill. Mark Jackson (ages 5-10), which was shortlisted for both the Children's Book Council of Australia Information Books Award, 2012 and the Wilderness Society Environment Award, 2012. (<http://www.edelwignell.com.au/>)



#### ENDNOTES

1 Editor's note: Several generations of Victorian primary school children were scared by the story of the wicked hobyahs in the Second Grade Reader (*Victorian Readers: Second Book*. Government Printer, Melbourne, 1930). More horrifying even than the gruesome story was Elsie Jean McKissock's chilling illustration of the hobyahs creep, creep, creeping, run, run, running and skip, skip, skipping on the ends of their toes. Even the happy ending didn't completely cure the fear.

2 *The Bible*, Daniel 3

3 Editor's note: 'The Circus' by C.J. Dennis was first published in 1921 in *A Book for Kids*. It can be viewed at <http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/denniscj/bookforkids/bookforkids.html>



The Hobyahs



## Beach Bums, Bloodsuckers and Ice-Cream Jellies

Judy McKinty

Marbles as playthings have a long history – smooth, round ‘game stones’ discovered in Egypt<sup>1</sup> and elsewhere suggest that marbles, as we know them, have been used in play for at least 5000 years. Archaeologists routinely uncover clay, stone and glass marbles during their investigations of the ruins of cities and civilisations, but this evidence can only give us a very small picture of the game. Missing is the ‘life’ of the game itself, the intangible elements the players bring with them – the knowledge of how the game is played, how to flick for accuracy, which marbles are the most valuable for swapping, the words to call out to stop a player from gaining an advantage and the name of each different kind of marble.

In the editors’ notes in this issue of *Play and Folklore*, reference is made to the fact that much of children’s play can be classified as Intangible Cultural Heritage under the United Nations’ definition<sup>2</sup>. Marbles lore is a good example of how important the intangible elements of a game can be – how they give the game its shape, its life and its passion.

I have, for some years, been researching and collecting marbles, and one of the richest areas of research concerns the amazing variety of names children give to the different types and sizes of marbles. Children have special names for different types of marbles, but not everyone calls them the same names. It depends on where they live, which school they attend and who they play with, although one name – Cat’s Eye – has been used since the marble first appeared in the early 1950s, and can

still be found in several countries. The names are based on the marbles’ appearance – usually the colours and patterns – and are an indication of children’s acute, and sometimes humorous, observations and experience of the world. For instance, in Australia, opaque, khaki-green coloured marbles, often known as Army Balls, are also called Snots or Snotballs, black marbles with red patches are Redbacks, named after the poisonous spider found in Australia and New Zealand, and shiny white marbles with coloured speckles on the outside are sometimes called Speckled Eggs or Birdshits.

The terms for marbles sizes are comparatively constrained as there is a limit to the number of different sizes manufactured. I collected names for 10 different-sized marbles from one Victorian school – from smallest to biggest: Peewee, Joker, Normal, Junior, Semi, Tombowler, King, Grandpa, Emperor and Whale’s Eye. In Western Australia, a Peewee is a Tiddly, a Semi is a Tom and a Tombowler is a Super, and there are other variations from place to place throughout Australia and in other countries.

The names for size and type are combined to give a full description of the marble. For example, the smallest clear green marble might be called a Peewee Froggy, a white Tombowler with red swirls could be a Tom Bloodsucker and the largest transparent marble, with an air bubble inside, would be a Whale’s Eye Bubble. There can also be Grandpa Oily Specks, King Vampires, Semi Galaxies and Junior Pearl Beach Bums – the names are only limited by the children’s imagination.





Marbles have traditionally been named by children as part of their own lore of the game, but there has been a development in the marketing of marbles which is changing this tradition – children can now buy marbles which have already been given a name by the manufacturers. They come in little bags with a colourful label marked ‘Bengal Tiger’, ‘Cockatoo’, ‘Pterodactyl’, ‘Tidal Wave’, ‘Rooster’ and ‘Stardust’ among scores of other ready-made names, which children have picked up and are using in their games. It will be interesting to see how long it will take, for instance, for a blood-red Rooster to become a Zombie’s Eye or something similar.

The following marbles names have been collected in Australia, from children and adults, since the 1990s. Marbles with manufacturers’ names have not been included unless there is also a different child’s name for the marble. Each marble shown is just one example of the type – there are several combinations of colours and patterns for each name. The diversity of these combinations adds to the appeal of marbles as collectible objects and makes the contents of a contemporary marbles bag so attractive.

It is interesting to note that in 1996, the marbles players at one school had names for three types of old marbles (Claypots, Olympics and Moons), two of which were manufactured in the late 1800s and one with a much longer history. Those types of marbles had disappeared from school playgrounds around 50 years before and, at the time, were more likely to be found in the hands of adult collectors.

*Marbles images by Judy McKinty.*

*Judy McKinty is an independent children’s play researcher and cultural heritage interpreter, an Honorary Associate of Museum Victoria and a co-editor of Play and Folklore.*

*If you are/were a marbles player and know of any other names for the marbles shown, you can contribute to this research by sending them to [judy@pixeltech.com.au](mailto:judy@pixeltech.com.au)*

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Andre Dollinger, *Ancient Egyptian games: Children’s games found and described by W.M. Flinders Petrie*, viewed on <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/games1.htm>
- 2 For the UN definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002>
- 3 Everett Grist, *Big Book of Marbles*, (Paducah, Collector Books, 1993), 35.
- 4 *ibid.* 36.
- 5 *ibid.* 18-21.

## Beach Bums, Bloodsuckers and Ice-Cream Jellies

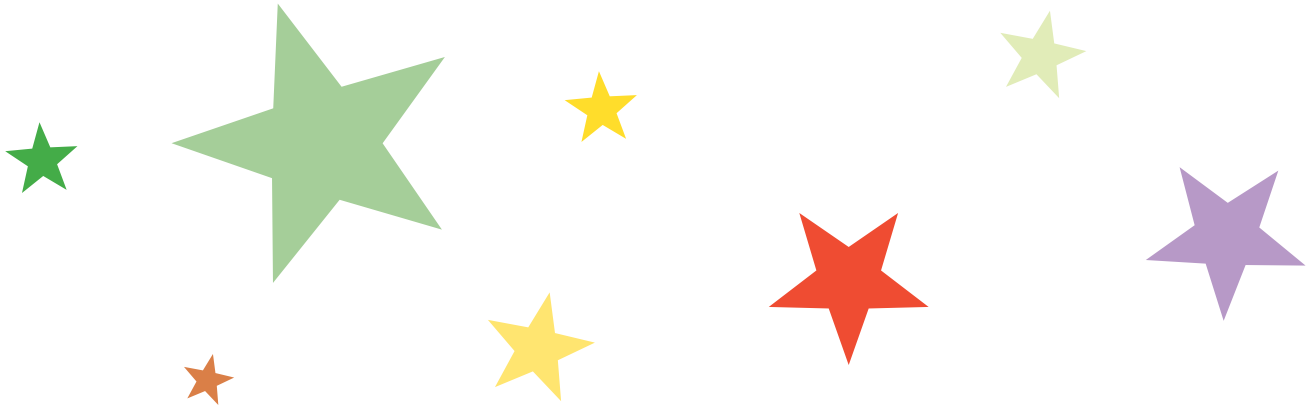
TYPE OF MARBLE		NAMES COLLECTED SO FAR
Army Ball		Army Balls, Snots, Snotballs, Greenies
Beach Ball		Beach Balls, Beach Bums, Queenslander (Colac, Vic. 1960s), Beachies, Gelatis, Mint Lollies, Parrots (Nth Qld), Americanos (Kenya, 1960s), Creamies (Bahamas), Chineesje (Netherlands)
Black Jet		Black Jets, Knights, Cannonballs, Black Pearls
Bloodsucker		Bloodsuckers (Ballarat, Vic. 1950s), Swirls, Whirlpools, Blood Alleys (England), Candy Canes, Spaghetitis (Nth Qld), Swirls (Bahamas)
Blue Moon		Blue Moons, Clearies, Glassies (Kenya), Dolphins, Blue Oceans, Blue Gels, Blue Genies, Sapphires
Broccoli		Broccolis, Eagle Eggs, Bloodspots (red specks)
Bubble		Bubbles, Clears, Ghosties, Lemonades
Butterfly		Butterflies, Starfish, Twisters, Cat's Eyes (Bahamas)
Canary		Canaries, Yellow Jackets (manufacturer's name)
Cat's Eye		Cat's Eyes, Flickers, Dazzlers, Dibs (Sydney), Cat's Eyes (Bahamas), Aggies, Devil's Eyes
Claypot		Claypots (Plain clay marbles like these have been around for thousands of years. In the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century children in Australia called them Commonies <sup>3</sup> .)
Coke		Cokes, Beers, Clearies, Brown Genies
Fireball		Fireballs, Speeders, Red Devils (manufacturer's name)
Flag		Flags, Beach Balls, Agates, Americanos (Kenya 1960s), Chineesje (Netherlands)
Froggy		Froggies, Green Genies, Frog's Eyes, Lollies, Emeralds, Clearies, Moonies, Glassies (Wollongong, NSW), Zeleni (Yugoslavia)





TYPE OF MARBLE		NAMES COLLECTED SO FAR
Galaxy		Galaxies, Jaffas, Dinosaurs, Specks, Spotted Moons, Speckled Eggs, Planets, Volcanoes, Milky Ways, Speckled Moons, Bird's Eggs (Nth Qld)
Gumball		Gumballs, Lollies, Pearls
Hawk's Eye		Hawk Eyes (yellow flash – USA), Tiger's Eyes
Ice-cream Jelly		Ice-cream Jellies, Toothpastes, Galaxies (Nth Qld).
Jaffa		Jaffas, Speckled Eggs, Planets, Volcanoes, Milky Ways, Galaxies (NSW), Bird's Eggs (Nth Qld)
Lightning Bolt		Lightning Bolts, Lightnings, Thunderbolts, Thunders, Dragon's Eyes
Moon		Moons (These glazed and fired clay marbles were made during the late 1800s, and are known to adult collectors as Benningtons <sup>4</sup> .)
Oily		Oilies, Argles, Silver Swans (Tasmania, 1989), Moonies (Nth Qld), Metallics, Genies, Eagle Eyes (blue ones, USA), Bloodsuckers (red ones), Champagne Charlies (pinky ones, Tasmania, 1989), Mirrors
Olympic		Olympic (These marbles were made during the late 1800s, and are known to adult collectors as Transparent Swirls <sup>5</sup> .)
Panda		Pandas, Swirls, Stripies, Magpies
Pearl		Pearls, Bindis (green ones, Brisbane, Qld), Shinies, Frog's Eyes (green ones). Also by colour, for example Red Pearls, Blue Pearls, Yellow Pearls
Phantoms		Phantoms, Ghosties, Bottle Tops, Smudgies, Tor Bots, Fuzzies, Dusties
Redback		Redbacks, Spiders, Snake Eyes (USA)
Ribcage		Ribcages, Birdcages, Cagies, Floweries, Ferris Wheels
Sky Blue		Sky Blues, Toothpastes, Tidal Waves



## Beach Bums, Bloodsuckers and Ice-Cream Jellies



TYPE OF MARBLE		NAMES COLLECTED SO FAR
Snowball		Snowballs, White Pearls, Pearls
Spaghetti		Spaghettis, Brains, Mazes, Honey Suckers, Swirlies, Storms, Spiders (W.A.), Onions (Nth Qld), Spaghettis (Kenya)
Spearmint		Spearmints, Swirls
Speck		Specks, Speckled Eggs, Scrambled Eggs (Tasmania), Birdshits, Pizzas, Speckles, Spotted Craters, Speckled Moons, Moonies (black ones – Tasmania 1989), Speckledys, Duck Eggs, Crystals (Frankston, Vic.), Polka Dots, Stardusts, Disco Balls, Dinosaurs
Steely		Steelies, Ball Bearings, Barbarians, Silver Moons, Shots (Cairns, Qld), Steelies (Bahamas), Marios, Metals, Cannonballs (USA)
Swirl		Swirls, Swirlies, Swizzles
Tarzan		Tarzans, Swirls, Lightnings
Tiger's Eye		Tiger Eyes, Spiders, Half Moons
Turtle Shell		Turtle Shells (manufacturer's name), Melons, Spiders
Vampire		Vampires, Draculas, Lavas, Bloodsuckers, Red Eyes, Bloods, Raspberry Ripples, Red Genies, Red Rubies





# Play Time: Reflections on the Adult's Role in Children's Play

Robyn Monro-Miller

I sat in the garden of my childhood home recently and reflected on what had changed about this space – the space where much of my childhood was spent and where I engaged in myriad different forms of play with other children who shared my world. Perhaps like me, I mused, it had just grown up?

Like the children who once tore down fence palings between the backyards, and chased tiny lizards to proudly claim their detachable tails, the neighbourhood has grown up. The passage of time has swept away the last visible remnants of my childhood experiences, and those of the other 12 or so kids who shared the neighbourhood with me. The wooden fences with their palings missing have been replaced by slick aluminium fences, the trees where ropes and pulleys and cubbies once existed have become pruned to resemble stylish icons to modernity – and of course the lizards these days all have their tails.

But with the passage of time comes an appreciation that what made my childhood so special was time. Time to explore. Time to discover. Time to start play experiences and then spend days playing out each individual story with changing characters, costumes and environments. These play stories often resulted in the play spaces we used being uninhabitable by adults for days and sometimes weeks. These were the same adults who chided me for not going outside and 'having a play', who packed up their picnic baskets and collected the children and then headed out for time in a new space, where adult conversations mingled with the sounds of children's play.

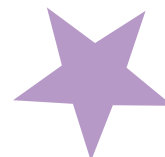
So what was the most important role that these adults played in my childhood experience in the 1970s? As a parent today, what is the role of adults in my child's play life? As a play worker, what was my role in children's lives? And, most importantly, as a member of my community, what role do I have to play for the children who live in it?

If I reflect on the role of adults in play, it could take many forms – facilitator, catalyst, defender, champion... But it all comes down to one singular concept, and today, as I sit and reflect in my childhood kingdom of play, it resonates. The experiences each adult provided for me, the things I do for my child and the most fundamental role I had in working with children are all based on the concept of time. Perhaps that is why we call it 'play time'?

## **Adults can create time where no time exists.**

Adults must be proactive in ensuring that children have time to play. It is the human right of every child. However, in today's world it is not always adults who restrain the opportunities for play.

The range and availability of adult-led, organised activities in our modern communities are immense. Couple that with a child's natural curiosity, energy and quest for new and interesting experiences and you have a combination that is potentially a more destructive, child-led force against free play than any that adults can provide. We, as adults, need to ensure that we quarantine time for children to engage in free play, even when they themselves are too consumed in seeking out the best and latest in classes and clubs.



### **Give time for the play process to have a beginning, a middle and an end.**

Like a good story, the process of play can take days to enact, and can enrich us and leave us with a new perspective. The importance of children being able to extend their games across days and weeks is rarely acknowledged in a world that is frighteningly negative about disarray. Adult directions to pack up play spaces each day destroy the natural pattern of children's play. Play is not always a short process finished in an afternoon, and yet the need to confine play to such strict parameters restricts and inhibits children's development. Adults should ensure children have regular spaces that do not need to be interrupted, and which fulfil their function as part of a play story. The cubbies, the dens and the props that children use to create their play spaces allow the story to develop, and so children have the opportunity to create their own world in their play space.

### **Commit time to finding places for play to occur.**

Adults can be wonderful resources who enrich and expand children's play. A child-focussed adult continually sees play opportunities in myriad places and spaces, offering them up to children as gifts. Adults can share their own childhood play spaces with children and work with them to find and develop new ones.

The reality of children playing 'unhindered by adults' – roaming the streets and parks from early morning till late and not returning till dinner time – is a historical oddity for many communities. The myth has been perpetuated that children in days gone by had an amazing level of freedom, which was enjoyed by all. Yet in speaking with different generations, their experiences of play vary and, in most cases, are not this model of playful freedom.

If we are truly to encourage a worldwide movement that supports play for children, we need to create a more realistic view of where play can occur and how adults can facilitate that play. An appreciation that play can and does occur anywhere children are found needs to be supported and promoted. Whether these play spaces are institutions or the natural environments, an appreciation of what happens in these spaces must outweigh the location.

As supporters of children's play in the community, we can use our influence as constituents to challenge our community leaders to include play in their own political agendas and in their vision for their communities. Places that will provide play opportunities for children within their own community should be viewed as fundamental to society. We should never take for granted the premise that play will be considered by our leaders, without the constant presence of a vigilant community.

### **Give time to challenging community practices that rob children of play time.**

Being a champion for children's play is an adult's way of repaying the debt for their own childhood play experiences.

Like environmental campaigners of the 1970s we need to engage not only hearts but also minds, and move play out from the field of adult memories into an economic and global imperative. Adults' hearts are already engaged in play – we now need to engage their heads. As champions for play we need to take the time to measure the impact on the economy, the impact on the environment and the consequences for society when children are not



Children enjoying a spontaneous slide during a bike ride along a bush track, Upwey, Australia Photographer – Judy McKinty

given opportunities to play. It is these arguments that will build a case for play provision more strongly than those based on reminiscences from a mythological utopia.

The role of adults in children's play cannot be relegated to the one filled by the traditional play worker – *all* adults must be responsible for facilitating play.

As is the natural order of life in the western world, the children in my neighbourhood have now grown up and left home. My childhood play space has become a stylish garden – the pride and joy of my retiree parents. However, as I watch my mother hanging the washing on the line while her grandchildren commence building cubby houses around her garden, I appreciate that she, like the other grandmothers in the street, are still champions for children's play, facilitating play time in the most unlikely places; and she, like the rest of the community, just does not know it.

Robyn Monro-Miller is the Chief Executive Officer of Network of Community Activities (<http://www.netoosh.org.au/>) and Vice-President of the International Play Association.

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## International Journal of Play Announcement and Call for Papers

The third issue of the *International Journal of Play* in 2013 will be a special issue devoted to the role of play in human wellbeing. This topic is broadly construed to include ways in which play is connected to biological or physical health, mental health, spiritual health, or healthy shared relationships of people of all ages. We are interested in papers that enlighten our understanding of how play adds to human resilience and functioning. Authors of these papers may work in monodisciplinary or interdisciplinary paradigms, and may approach play from a theoretical, empirical or applied perspective. Since play is a topic of interest across a broad spectrum of contexts, we welcome papers drawn from any cultural or social setting. Authors throughout the social sciences or from medical fields (public health, nursing, child life, occupational therapy, nutrition, medicine, clinical psychology, etc.) are encouraged to submit manuscripts. If you work on issues of play relevant to other applied fields (sports, media, social work or another play-related area) your papers are also invited.

Manuscripts should be 7000 words or less, written in English and should be submitted by email to [cdellclark2@gmail.com](mailto:cdellclark2@gmail.com) no later than 1 May 2013. All papers will undergo a peer review process. Please conform to the manuscript preparation instructions set forth on the journal website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rijp20&page=instructions>

### About the International Journal of Play

*The International Journal of Play* is the official journal of The Association for the Study of Play. It is an interdisciplinary journal focusing on all facets of play, providing an international forum for papers and scholarly debate on topics of play theory, policy and practice worldwide. The journal is currently edited by Pat Broadhead, June Factor and Michael Patte, and is published by Routledge.

### About Cindy Dell Clark

Cindy Dell Clark is Visiting Associate Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey. She studies and teaches about children and culture, including a focus on health-related issues. Her publications include a book-length, child-centered ethnography on how children and their families cope with asthma and diabetes: *In Sickness and In Play: Children Coping with Chronic Illness* (Rutgers University Press, 2003).

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