

Oral History Basics Workshop

Suzanne Mulligan



Last Sunday 25 June we had an Oral History Basics workshop to learn how to do oral history. The workshop was facilitated by Suzanne Mulligan who has a lot of experience in doing oral histories and was keen to share her knowledge and enthusiasm with the workshop participants.

We had two people from the Redland Museum who were keen to capture the stories of the elderly residents in the area. Another lady had a similar interest in community history and she will be collecting stories in West End. That suburb is experiencing rapid change and it is important to record the stories of those who have lived there before the suburb began to change.

Another participant was from the Annerley Stephens History Group which had recently won the John Oxley Award for community history for their work on the Frank Corley Project. In the 1970s Frank Corley used to drive around Brisbane in a pink Cadillac taking photographs of houses and then sold many of them. The history group has been working to identify the location of the photographs and their efforts have been rewarded. While doing this work there is often an opportunity to record an oral history to learn more about the house and the area.

One lady is looking at oral history from a family perspective as her family will soon celebrate being in Australia for 200 years. Another lady is a member of the Sacred Heart Church Catholic community at Rosalie and is looking to gather some stories of the congregation as the church is soon to celebrate its centenary.

A volunteer from the Museum of Australian Military Intelligence came to further his oral history training. Their ongoing project is very specific with the stories they collect. They interview former intelligence personnel about their work on specific operations. Also as the people who visit the Museum are mostly civilians, they need to make their exhibits interesting for them.



An artist who works with communities collects stories to inform her art. She is working on a project looking into her family history. Her female ancestors were taken from India to South Africa and had few choices in their lives. There is a sense of urgency as she seeks to collect as many of her family stories as possible before they pass away.

Another lady from the Sunshine Coast is working with the historical groups to collect oral histories. They have many tapes which were recorded from the 1970s to early 1990s. She is also working on a sports history project, specifically rugby union history in Queensland from the late 1920s to 1950s.



A member of the Richlands/Inala History Group is doing a thesis which is a generational study of south-west Brisbane. She plans to interview three or four different families with three different generations. She will also use her own family history and reinforce her learning of oral history by attending the workshop.

One attendee has a very interesting project capturing the voices of people who experienced the Bjelke-Petersen era. She is a journalist and she was interested to learn how to do oral history interviewing rather than journalistic interviewing.

It was great to see such a diverse range of projects being undertaken using oral history. It reinforces the position of oral history as an important component in telling our stories.