

Oral History Workshop in Mackay

Ariella Van Luyn

Thanks to a Gambling Community Benefit Fund grant and the support of Lara Clarke at the Mackay library, facilitators Bryan Crawford and Ariella Van Luyn were able to travel to Mackay on 7 and 8 July 2012 to run an oral history workshop. This is her story:



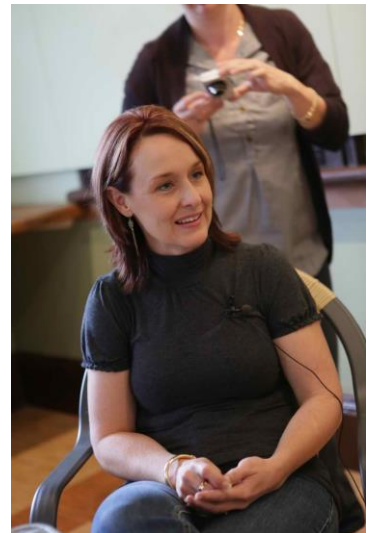
Workshop in Mackay Old Town Hall

We arrived in Mackay at 8.30 on Saturday morning to find a keen participant already waiting outside the Old Town Hall for us to begin. Lara let us in through the big wooden doors at the entrance. The workshop was held in the arts space on the second floor. To get there, we climbed up a flight of wide wooden stairs with spherical decorations on the railings worn thin from contact with hundreds of hands over the decades. The

workshop space was a square room skirted by arched windows that let the soft light drift through, and a verandah hemmed with iron balustrades. Below us was the visitor information centre. Throughout the workshop, participants shared their local knowledge with the tourists that wandered through.

Eight participants attended. Ruth Wegner from Walkerston and Janette McGrath from Mackay hoped to learn more about their family histories. Ruth wanted to interview her Father-in-Law about his time on the Kokoda Trail. Brian Osborn and Julie Worldon were from the Greenmount Homestead, five kilometres West of Walkerston. The Greenmount Homestead ‘contains a number of buildings including a 1915 Queenslander homestead, which houses intact a collection of more than 20,000 historical items’ (see:

http://www.mackay.qld.gov.au/community/arts_culture_and_heritage/greenmount_homestead/). Brian and Julie hoped to collect oral histories documenting the rich history of Greenmount and surrounds. The Mackay library planned to launch the second phase of its ‘Mackay through the Decades’ project. In the first phase, Mackay community members donated over 200 images of the region to the library from ca. 1950s onwards (for more details on this project, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jZEX_aEBSA&feature=youtu.be and http://www.mackay.qld.gov.au/about_council/newsletters/content/council_connect_april_2012/). Now, staff members plan to gather oral histories around particular images, capturing the rich and personal history frozen in the snapshots. Others came to simply learn more about oral history.



Lara with lapel mic.



The workshop took participants through the steps in an oral history project, discussing budget, ethics and permission forms, equipment needed, using audio recorders, stills and video cameras, conducting preliminary interviews, designing questions, outcomes and evaluation. The participants had a chance to design questions, conduct and record a practice interview. By the end of the workshop, participants were enthused and hope to start an oral history group in the Mackay region.

Brian during his interview.

[All images by Bryan Crawford.]