

Stories of working with community in Western Australia



Transcript

Interviewed and recorded by Dave Palmer & Jennie Buchanan

Lekkie Hopkins

Murdoch University, Perth WA

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Lekkie Hopkins pictured at Murdoch University, 21st October 2003

DP It is lovely to see you and welcome to Murdoch University Lekkie Hopkins.

LH Thank you.

DP It is the 21st October. I think I can smell the change in season in the air. Can I ask you to begin by telling us something about your involvement in this thing called Community Work?

LH Well I suppose the first thing I want to say is what I said to you earlier. That is that I don't consider myself to be a Community Development Officer per se at all largely because that is a label that I think probably other people wear and they are probably other people who have more formal training in community development I suppose. But that is not to



say that I don't appreciate working with lots of different communities of people. I mean I think I do and I guess a lot of my professional life, and a lot of my personal life, both as a child and adult has been sort of very much in being involved in communities of various sorts.

I guess one of the major experiences of community, working on the margins of mainstream education, was my involvement in the Community School in Fremantle in the mid seventies. Is it appropriate for me to talk about that now do you think so?

DP Oh I would love you to.

LH OK. Well it is interesting because one of the things I just thought of then was that I specified that my involvement in community work was on the margins of sort of mainstream stuff and I think that is probably very much one of the features of the kinds of communities that I have been involved in. They seem to be just trying to nudge the mainstream along somehow and sitting on the edges there. Part of the joy of being involved in any of the communities has been the support that one gets from other people in this whole process of trying to nudge along mainstream thinking, or shift thinking or something.

But anyway back to the Community School. It was a really exciting kind of adventure being part of that Community School. It was a high school that had been established in Fremantle by Gary Burke, and his then partner, Janet Leivers. And it was more than two years old by the time I arrived in Fremantle or in Perth. I had been involved in education over east, I had done a bit of teaching in Sydney and a bit of teaching in Brisbane. But I decided that what I was ready to do now was to start my own Community School, to start my own alternative school. So I really wanted to do this and I knew that in Brisbane it just wasn't going to happen because it seemed that

every good idea that people on the margins had in Brisbane was squashed. It just fell into a hole.

We came to Perth, my partner and I, and I was really interested in pursuing this sort of education business. But on the way to Perth we had gone to Indonesia, we had spent six weeks in Indonesia and there, in the middle of Java we met a woman who knew about this fabulous alternative school in Perth and who said to me, "You should really get in touch with the Fremantle Community School as soon as you get to Perth because they are just the people you are going to want to meet." And so it felt almost sort of 'pre-ordained'

DP That Burke character, it doesn't matter where you go on the planet, people know him.

LH That is absolutely right. Yeah. Yeah. So there he was sort of hovering over our whole sort of arrival in Perth. So I went down and made contact with that School and within six months I was working at the school and it was a really wonderful experience. Not least because it was the kind of setting that just sort of took up a whole lot of the ideals that I felt that we had been working with informally for the last five years or decade or something. This was the mid-seventies. But from the late sixties it seemed that a whole lot of my university colleagues and I had been trying to do things very differently. And one of the things that we were doing was actually actively respecting kids who were high school students as full human beings. This might sound to be really kind of, "Oh. A bit off the planet." now as a new idea but at that stage it was really quite an extraordinary concept and as a sort of indication of the ways that sort of stuff happened.

I will tell you the story about my interview for this position, all right? I went along and I had been living in Perth for six months and decided not to take on any work first up. But then it was time to get a job, so I applied for a whole lot of jobs and I got five interviews in a week. So for the first of those four



interviews I dressed in my sort of fairly formal public service gear and went and sat opposite a desk and had a terrific sort of interview with whoever it was. And then on the fifth day, on the Friday, I had my interview at the Community School and so I

dressed in my most beautiful hippy gear and (chuckles) and went to the school and walked upstairs in this beautiful old house that the school was in there in High Street and walked upstairs and found a room full of thirty kids and two teachers. And I walked in there and they said, “Well this is your interview room.” So we sat on the floor and we talked for at least fifty minutes about me, and about my passions, and about the sorts of irritations I might have, and the ways in which I relate emotionally to people, and what kinds of things I was interested in intellectually, and why I lived in Subiaco and why I had come to Perth in the first place, and all these sorts of things. And it was kids who were firing these questions and it was just such a delight. I mean it was, I am not quite sure if I can explain how liberating it felt. It felt absolutely wonderful and it seemed that here was a group of kids who were actively participating in the hiring of staff, and of course I knew that they could also participate in the firing of staff, and they did. And so from that moment, I mean I just loved that experience, and so I began to work at the school. And from that moment I began to, I suppose, see a whole lot of the community development principles, that we might name now, working in practice.

Every week, for example, we had what was called a town meeting where the whole school came together and sat in this big meeting room. And we would make administrative decisions and we would discuss really difficult issues like about what kids had been anti-social and what we should do with them as a group, and whether they should be booted out or suspended, or whether they should be just sort of hugged and reprimanded at the same time. All those kinds of things. And

often the meetings were very intense, they were very emotionally difficult.

As one of, I suppose, seven or eight teachers at the school I felt that the onus was certainly on us to be as grown up and as mature as we could possibly be at the same time as working with great respect with these kids that we were sort of engaged with. So it was a full time and a difficult time and a time I wouldn't have missed for quids because it was just so rich. It was a sort of experience I suppose, teaching in that environment, that absolutely consumed every moment of one's life. So it wasn't just a job that you did and then you just went home and forgot about it. It was a job that absolutely sort of took up every moment of time and people who were teaching there shared houses and all that sort of stuff too. So we had some of the people who were teaching there staying with us from time to time. Moving into our house and things. It was a really amazing experience.

One of the things that was different from other schools was that the kids could decide whether or not they were going to attend classes. So in order to have even anyone in your class you had to make sure that you were pretty spot on and that you were delivering the sorts of things that they wanted to. So to a teacher it was also a very real and very great challenge. It felt like it was really gutsy, it was really honest. It was also difficult. Yeah. But I suppose one of the things that I feel that I got from that whole experience is an understanding of the struggle and the delights of working across difference. In this case, a difference of age more than anything else, but working with respect across difference.

That was the hugest kind of experiential event for me I suppose. There are all kinds of other ways of theorising about it but that was what I embodied I think from that whole experience. Just the kind of the understanding of the cumulative effect of daily interactions that were respectful. And I suppose



also insights about the impact of connections that you might make on the long-term, playing-out of ideals that you might be carrying.

So I think because I was at this school for two years, I could see how the connections I had made with kids at the beginning, that were really quite intense and intimate, kind of played out into the later sorts of things that we were able to do and able to achieve as groups of people and that was really hugely significant.

And also I was able to observe the ways in which the other people around me also worked with respect. I am thinking still of some of the teachers now but there were inevitably situations where, for example, beautiful young adolescent girls would fall in love with lovely, young mid-twenties, just past adolescent male teachers (laughter) and watching the ways that these people dealt with that kind of situation, often with such respect and such tenderness, and also with a bit of the ego thrown in. But still kind of having respect for some kind of process really embedded in the activities that were occurring. That was really important.

Now don't forget that this was a time when a lot of us were being very hippy and very 'un-product' focussed. I remember for example in the first week that I was at the school I had been given the task of helping the kids to edit the school newspaper. This was an annual event, the production of the newspaper. Kids had been working on this for some time and it was my role to just be with them to see this through to the conclusion. Because it was the sort of school that it was, we could spend the whole day just doing this so we had the front room of the school set aside as, I suppose, the magazine room, the newspaper room, whatever it was. And we had kids sort of sitting there doing art work and other kids typing up their things and other kids running around, it was really terrific. It was like a newsroom, it was full of buzz. But towards the end of the time that we had set as our goal for the actual outcome,

the production of this, there was just a lot of activity and we had stayed at school, we had all stayed at school until about 7:30 or 8:00 on the Thursday night. I think we had also set the Friday afternoon as the time when we had to have this thing together. And I remember one of the teachers coming down at about three o'clock on Friday afternoon and seeing everybody just still really, really, intensely engaged but looking absolutely exhausted too. He just said to me, "You know Lekkie, sometimes it is better if you just let things go." And I was absolutely gob smacked because I could not; it wasn't in my lexicon to even begin to imagine that it was possible to let something go. So on reflection now I understand that I was very much outcome driven as well as being respectful of process at that time.

And so for me I suppose, one of the lessons that I really did learn very, very fully and deeply in that two years at the Community School was how important it is to be able to place a focus on process. But for me not to let go of the outcome too. And I had to decide and to acknowledge that outcomes were really significant but processes were also really, really important.

And it is not as if it was a new idea or a new practice for me in my personal life but rather actually naming it as a professional practice in a sense, not that we were calling anything professional practice in those days either. I mean it was all just sort of "far out" and "wonderful" and "groovy" and all of that stuff. But still naming that focus on process as a professional practice and understanding that for myself in my own professional practice I do, I need to have outcomes of some kind even though they might be quite different from the ones that we had set out heading towards. That was really important.

DP How would you describe a community school? What are some of the features of these kind of schools?



LH The features. Well OK this particular school was based on Summerhill in England and that was a school that had been established by A.S. Neill. Now because it was the early seventies and because of the sorts of thinking I was doing I was enchanted

by the idea of alternative schools. I really loathed the mainstream school system with its rigidity and with its respect for hierarchies and with its lack of respect for students and with its focus on outcomes and results and that sort of thing rather than focusing on nurturing the individual child. I had worked inside a high school in Sydney in my first year of teaching and oh that was just a really terrible time. I have written about that and talked about that but it was a time that I simply did not enjoy.

And a couple of years later I went back and had a wonderful experience in a private school in Brisbane. But still it was the alternative school experience that I was really hankering for, and the features of that alternative school that were different from mainstream, either of the mainstream schools that I had experienced, were that the kids were considered to be responsible human beings. So, as I have suggested, they had a great role to play in the administrative side of the school, the running of the school but at the same time they were also, in ways that were not possible in mainstream schools, they were encouraged to really develop their thinking without limitations and so where mainstream high schools were still at this, they were very much at this stage, preparing kids in year eleven and twelve for their final exams The Community School was running all sorts of fabulous programmes on say, poetry, or physics, or maintenance of bicycles, or building cars, or artwork, or something like that. And the idea that sort of informed both Summerhill and the Community School was that kids themselves were responsible human beings who were able to work out what their needs were. So just as a parent feeding a child you might sort of provide a smorgasbord of food and say to that child, “Well you eat what you need to eat because you are

the person who has got the appetite.” So at the Community School we would lay out a whole range of alternative activities for the kids and say, “Well just take what you need and do what you need. So if your needs are, if your desires are, that you spend the next two years just in the art room making some fabulous work of art and, as you go along perhaps investigate the history of this practice or look at all the other sorts of alternative ways of doing this or whatever and develop all kinds of skills then go for it.” So I suppose the school really, really encouraged kids to explore to the max their own potential and their own way of thinking through certain ideas.

Now when I arrived there I was appointed to teach English and whole lot of other things. The kids had already had a wonderful poetry teacher and so some of these year twelve kids were reading Yeats and T S Elliot and it was just fabulous. I mean we had the most wonderful conversations from the very beginning of my time with them and they were beginning with the poetry of Elliot I suppose and really just exploring all kinds of philosophical and mystical ideas that were associated with that in ways that were deeply fulfilling. Now this was not the sort of stuff that they would be able to do at a mainstream school. So they were learning broad and then when it came time for them to sort of narrow their focus and to sit for a public exam at the end of the year, they were able to do that because they had such a fabulously wide and broad kind of education, I suppose, or way of thinking.

DP It’s really interesting that an alternative school opens up and draws on the classics.

LH Yeah well it wasn’t just opening up and drawing on the classics it was also drawing in all kinds of new things. For example, at that time, video and video production was really new and so we would have regular kinds of sorties down to a place in Fremantle called ‘Free Video’. This was the time in Fremantle too when there was lots of free stuff happening. There was a Community Education Centre and there was free video



and all sorts of stuff happening that was community based resources. And the kids had access to that so they were encouraged to really embrace new technologies. So I suppose what the difference was, was that the kids thinking was loosened and they were

not channelled into narrow ways of thinking but rather they were allowed to go broad, well allowed to, encouraged to really, in a celebratory way, enabled to go broad and deep in whatever they were doing so. We just had all kinds of fabulous explorations and classes happening and things and they would write play scripts. Oh year nine kids would write play scripts about Henry VIII and his wives and we would have stories being told about that period of history and all sorts of really lively stuff was occurring there. Yeah I can't think of any other specific examples except to say that if any of us, kid or teacher, had an idea then we would never, ever squash it. We would say, "Hey what's say we do ___" and likely as not it would be acted on if it was a great idea.

We had lots of excursions, we had lots of sorties into the community. We also took the kids away on lots of different camps and explorations. Some people went up to Aboriginal communities in the Murchison area for two - three weeks at a time. Other people went on long hikes. Sometimes we went down to Albany, various places to do all kinds of things. With a group of kids I investigated writing of Australian Lit at Wooroloo sitting under gum trees (laughter). It was all very wonderful.

DP You talked about alternative schools. How was it a Community School?

LH OK. I suppose one of the ways that you would say it was a Community School was that there was very much a sense of people collectively taking responsibility for something. So at that micro level inside the school everybody was seen to be in connection so there was a tremendously significant focus on

relationship and relationship building and this notion of collective responsibility. At a broader level the school drew on a community of people who were considered to be like-minded people who were themselves interested, either as parents or as a sort of support group, interested in alternative education. And this meant education that was sort of breaking the boundaries of what was considered to be respectable, acceptable, whatever in terms of educating kids. Mmm.

DP And so that was a two year period?

LH Yeah.

DP That wasn't the end of the Fremantle Community School was it?

LH Oh no, no, no, I was there from '75 to '77 and the school lasted for another eight years or something until '82 something like that. So it's life was a ten-year life from, I think, '72 to '82. Something like that.

DP Do you have any knowledge of what happened to bring about the demise ... perhaps I should just say the end of the school?

LH I think it probably was a demise. I think other people associated with it would call it that too. I don't know Dave, it was interesting because I think one of the things that seems to have happened was that the school probably attracted a whole lot of kids who were what one might call anti-social or something. I mean clearly it was a wonderfully rich environment which was welcoming to kids who were either exceptionally bright and who wanted to be able to learn in different ways and they were absolutely focussed and they were going to fly wherever they went but they just wanted to sort of be harnessed in additional directions, And/or it was a place that was really wonderfully accepting of, and nurturing of I suppose, kids who were con-



sidered to be anti-social in mainstream school environments for all kinds of reasons. And so at the time that I was there I would say that there were probably up to 25% of the kids, there were 120 kids in the school in the two years I was there, and proba-

bly 25% of those might have been kids who really just needed to sit on the back steps and smoke for six months or something. But I think what the school community felt, and (I can't speak for them, but this is my memory of conversations I have had with Gary and other people about the demise of the school), once the proportion of kids who really needed to be there to have time out got beyond about 30% then there was a kind of drain of energy away from what was happening there. So rather than it being a place where good ideas were acted on and everybody was kind of lively and were able to carry the kind of emotional and energetic drag, it became a place I think where it just wasn't possible to get ideas off the ground. And that was really quite devastating for the people who were trying really hard to make sure that it kept going because it was such a fabulous idea.

But I would suggest too that we shouldn't forget that it fell apart in the 80's and the 80's were quite different times from the 70's. There was a different kind of political and community based energy. I mean the seventies, when the school began, was the time of the Whitlam government. It was a time when everything that anyone could possibly dream up was being enabled if it was an idea that was coming from the margins if you like. Whereas by the early 80's the political scene and the sort of cultural and social environment for the school, both within Fremantle and sort of within the broader sort of community in Perth and nationally was quite different. And perhaps the sort of interest that a lot of parents and kids had in alternative education by then had sort of shifted. So it is probably a combination of those broader social and political things and internal micro politics of the school. Mmm.

DP Gary has described this in his book.

LH The Jojoba Bean. Well that was a lovely book because it was a collective book and Gary put it together in the end. But it was an attempt to get a whole lot of people who had been involved in the school to write about it. So a lot of us did and there were lots of wonderful accounts from probably about sixty members of the school community or something would have gone into that book.

DP Oh really?

LH Oh yes. So that was lovely. Yeah.

DP Nice reading and in the Murdoch Library.

LH Oh. Good. Good.

DP ... OK. So that was a part of your community school experience. Did you have any other involvement in community work?

LH Yeah. Look one of the things that I think I would like to talk about, and this is something that I have been on the edges of rather than in the centre of but that is what I see to be the kind of, the practices used in the environment movement in Perth. Is it relevant for me to talk about that?

DP You betcha.

LH The environment movement. Yeah. Well I suppose I want to try and avoid speaking for Angus Hopkins, my partner, but nevertheless I have spent the last thirty years watching the ways in which he has been involved in conservation issues and the whole voluntary conservation movement and I suppose I consider myself to have been periphery of that and some of the insights just might be interesting in terms of the ways in which people work.



DP It will be interesting.

(laughter)

LH Well I hope so. When we first arrived in Perth in 1975 I had an objective, and that was to become involved in alternative education and as I said, to set up my own school. Angas had an objective and that was that he wanted to become involved in the voluntary conservation movement because he was what might be called a sort of pre-greenie. I mean he was very interested in conservation issues and he had just finished his academic work, his honours degree in Queensland and had come here specifically to a job inside what was then Fisheries and Fauna as a botanist, as an ecologist. So he was one of the first ecologists doing the kinds of linking scientifically that community development workers might model in their understanding of the ways in which community operate. So he was looking in biological communities in that same sort of way.

Now it is interesting because one of the groups that he became involved in first up was the Campaign to Save Native Forests. It had had a couple of meetings before we arrived here but not very many and he became one of I suppose, four or five people who were centrally involved in doing a whole lot of the community education that went on there. And it was just fabulous to sort of be on the periphery of that but to watch it all happening. I mean the ways that things happened that I can remember now were that there was a whole lot of research and writing that had to go on and a whole lot of talking that had to happen. And so we would have these sort of four or five people at our house having conversations that went on for days. I mean people would come around and we would eat together and then we would sit around and we would talk and talk and talk and talk and do all this stuff that one did in the 70's as one talks and talks and talks. And then we'd sort of all just kind of fall about and go to sleep and then we would wake up in the

morning and have the breakfast and start talking and talking again and then there would be the writing. And so there was writing of all kinds of pamphlets and leaflets and things. And then there would be the campaigns to distribute all this material so we would, I mean I didn't do the writing but I was certainly involved in a whole lot of distribution of material and we'd go to car parks like Coles car parks in all kinds of various suburbs and just put information under people's windscreen wipers and/or we would put up posters all around the city advertising public meetings.

These were the days when people still had public meetings and in order to get an issue brought to the attention of the public it seemed to be one of the processes that one of the systems for doing it was to give people information in the form of leaflets and also hold public meetings so that people could come along and be provided with information and then have a sort of big discussion. And so Perth Town Hall, for example, was the site of several of these public meetings that were specifically designed to give people information about what was happening in the forests and what was happening with wood chipping and this sort of whole campaign got established I suppose, launched there. And it has been really interesting to reflect on the ways in which the people who were involved in that sort of stuff seemed not to be doing it with an awareness, with a conscious awareness of the process but they knew what they had to achieve. But it just seemed that the practices emerged almost intuitively rather than consciously. But looking back on those practices I would say that they are the kinds of practices that I now want my students to model.

When I talk with my students about working with the community and working with the whole notion of changing people's ideas about something, educating people into different, extended ways of thinking, whatever and some of those practices were simply that it is never enough to impose an idea but rather it is the whole process of talking and talking around ideas was very, very much part of the process of them creating the pamphlet and the information that would go to starting this



additional process of talking in public meetings and then going back to the stage of sort of getting people to re-think, re-educate, clarify their ideas. So I suppose a process going around in circles talking a bit, having some sort of outcome, going back into little

huddles, coming back again and so and doing it in a repeated way, not so that, as I said, not so that anyone was necessarily even conscious of it but it is almost as if there was a sort of a cumulative impact of that sort of stuff where, not before we knew it, but within a year or two or three or four, having a group like The Campaign to Save Native Forests was not something that mainstream people were frightened of. In fact mainstream people seemed to think, "Oh yes. Oh of course we have got to do something about this." and so the shift in community attitudes was really kind of important. Now at the same time as that was happening there was of course a whole lot of stuff happening in the women's movement and I have just begun to really think about that so shall I talk about that now.

DP Yes please.

LH How can I start? My own engagement with feminism I suppose happened from the early seventies. I was living in Sydney for a couple of years in 1970 and '71 and so I was living in Glebe at the site of the very first meetings of the Women's Liberation Movement. It was called the Women's Liberation Movement and I almost went to one of those meetings. One of my housemates did. That was a time that was very exciting. That was a time of course of the Vietnam Protest Movement and it was a time of intense political activity on the Sydney University Campus and it was a time when all kinds of alternative ideas were being explored and exploding into all kinds of ways of re-thinking who we were and who we wanted to be and how we wanted to change social processes and

DP The Aquarius Festival?

LH Yes. I was certainly at the Nimbin Festival. Oh yes. I am a Nimbin girl. (laughter) and that was really wonderful too but that was a bit later. The Nimbin Festival was in 1974? I think that it was when I was living in Brisbane rather than when I was in Sydney. So we came down, a group came down from Brisbane to that. But in Sydney at this time there was a whole lot of thinking, of course, about how women simply were re-thinking their place in the world and there was an enormous emphasis from the beginning about a different kind of way to operate and make decisions. And so the sort of consciousness raising that we know about now, and the collective decision making practices that we also know about now, had their origin I suppose, in my experience, in the early kind of meetings and sort of processes of the women's movement.

My own engagement with the women's movement sort of happened through, I suppose, through particular activities. I became involved in doing abortion counselling in Brisbane with a group called Children by Choice. This was in 1973 and '74 I suppose so that had just started when I moved to Brisbane and we got some training in how to counsel. I felt that this was some really significant kind of contribution I could make to the whole notion of women's sexual choice making, reproductive choice making, so that is what I did for a couple of years as a voluntary kind of thing just in addition to all the other stuff that I was doing. But by the time I came to Perth I became very much aware of the sorts of extensions of that kind of practice that were occurring here. I began to do that here too and became involved with a group of people who were very, very carefully and in different ways from the Brisbane group teaching people to do just such counselling.

But as well as that I became peripherally involved in the establishment of the Women's Health Centres that were being created here. And one of my good friends was very much involved in the Glendower Street Centre which was the Women's Health Centre. And from time to time I would go



along to meetings and see the sorts of things, and experience the sorts of very intensely, emotionally charged sorts of experiences that people were having there. I mean this whole process of doing collective decision making was extremely intense and extremely

fraught, and sometimes anguished. And the women who were involved in making decisions around that were very much sort of aware of, and embodying the whole kind of, the feminist call it “the personal is political”, so some of the women for example who had decided that they had to identify as radical feminist separatists were becoming so personally, ah what, idealistic I suppose, and so personally ethical in their own terms that they figured that not only could they not take men as lovers any more. But they could no longer live with their male children and so some of them simply left those male children to the male partner and went and lived elsewhere. And these were huge, I think it is an indication of the very deeply felt, very astonishingly rich and, in some senses, very deeply ethical practices that people were trying to live. That they were able to make these decisions and that they made them in spite of against all the other discourses, impulses that might be leading them in other directions. And so out of the intensity, I guess, of that gut wrenching honesty that these people displayed, a whole series of working practices emerged, and a whole series of probably very deeply felt understandings of the ways in which it is, and is not, nourishing, acceptable, useful to bring the deeply felt personal into the political arena and to sort of bridge those gaps. The ways in which that is a good practice. All of those things were discussed and experienced there.

DP What were some of the new kinds of practices?

LH OK. It is probably difficult to think of this stuff as being new but before that time, people hadn't talked to each other in big groups about ways to make decisions. I mean they hadn't had a kind of collective decision-making process. Decision-

making had happened by people who were bosses who simply passed the decision down the line and it was considered to be the way to make decisions.

But the Women's Movement was definitely and very consciously exploring a collective decision making practice. And so instead of people taking a vote, as they would have done previously, then the conversations went around and around and around and around until a consensus was achieved. Now interestingly enough, this sort of terribly anguished intense, also joyful kind of practice that was occurring in the seventies then was, in my experience, refined enough and named enough as a really sort of skilled and desirable working practice by the eighties, sort of ten years later, that when I came to do a whole lot of interviews of women in the Peace Movement in the eighties, in say 1984, what I found and I wasn't at all surprised about this, but what I found was, with Jo Valentine's election campaign, that she actively and consciously embarked on in 1984, the first thing that group of people who'd gathered together to try to elect her to parliament, a group of twenty people, the first thing they did was they employed someone to teach them consciously, collective decision making practices. All right so it emerged in that decade from being something that was absolutely fought for and struggled for, to something which was named, packaged, able to be taught in workshops and I don't mean it was glib and I don't mean that it was no longer fraught either but it was certainly a practise that had emerged and it was quite knowable and nameable by then. So interesting.

DP Other practices that you can think about?

LH There is a whole way of acknowledging the everyday and bringing the everyday into the work-a-day arena I suppose. Bringing the everyday, bringing the momentary experience into the sort of more formal work arena. That was also very much a part of that whole early Women's Movement stuff. I suppose so that the consciousness raising activities that we



might sort of hear about, and read about, now really did happen around people's kitchen tables. As with the environment movement stuff that I spoke about earlier so with the Women's Movement. So instead of people holding a suite of ideals that might be different from, and divorced from, their everyday practices, people began to try to live their everyday, to live their ideals and so the ideals were fed by the everyday and the everyday was fed into the ideals. Now this seems to me now to have given rise to a whole different way of knowledge making. Now we have sociologists, like say Dorothy Smith in 1989, writing about everyday practices and their significance in terms of ethnography and sociological investigations and I think that is like the early Women's Movement stuff.

The other thing that was very, very apparent at that time was the significance of collective action. The significance of interaction, and I suppose we might call it community, but collectivity it was thought of in those times in terms of forming pressure groups to make changes. And one of the remarkable things that I think certainly, there was a feature of the women's movement in the seventies, both in Perth and throughout the rest of this country, was the ways in which we had different kinds of expressions of collective action. For example we had the activists who were the people who got onto the streets and did all the protesting and positioned themselves as being far more radical than a lot of their sisters. But we had women who were also prepared to don the shoulder pads and go into the bureaucracy. Marion Sawer's named them as Femocrats. And that is an Australian term that has been acknowledged as something that is a political and social phenomenon. But the combination of feminists, well women, we weren't calling ourselves feminists then I suppose, but women who were activists on the streets, women who were femocrats and women who were academics making new knowledges and new ways to consider women's place in society was a terrific combination I think and was born of, I think, a kind of respectful for

and acceptance of difference that we probably weren't even really aware of at that time. But I know that in Britain, for example, the struggles were very much more bitter and intense and women who wanted to make inside the bureaucracy got a beating from their feminist sisters outside. Whereas that didn't happen to quite the same extent here. I think there was perhaps just more respect for different ways of working and different agendas being able to work in parallel.

DP **One of the contributions I gained from feminists writing was that community can be both, or potentially both, a dangerous place, particularly if you were women involved in domestic violence, but also potentially a place of immense support. What is your experience of this?**

LH Yeah. Yeah. They're really important issues that you are raising Dave and they haven't gone away of course. It is still absolutely current that communities can provide well, I suppose we can think about them in terms of communities and discourses that communities adopt can be both very restrictive places and very enabling places. I suppose I have been talking mostly now about the ways in which I saw communities that supported me, and other people around me on the margins, having a very sort of liberating and freeing value but one of the things that very much comes to my mind when you talk about the restrictions of community is my own experience of growing up in a small country town. I mean there I feel as if I probably developed my understanding of the ways that communities can operate I mean as both absolutely nurturing and safe places but as profoundly limiting places as well and places that are terrifyingly restrictive. So you know my parents were both very active in the community in the little town that I grew up in, in North Queensland, and they were both what one would call, "Good Citizens." And they were also people who were very much prepared to act on their own ideas. They were independent thinkers, they were very much respected and so they had what I consider now to be really delightful working practices where they did work with respect across all kinds of differences of class and culture and edu-



cational standard, all that kind of stuff but at the same time they were, and consequently we children were, also embroiled in this community that was very, very restrictive so that if one had ideas which sort of attempted to transgress the boundaries of what was

considered acceptable then one was just completely kind of wiped out or restricted. And for me, as an adolescent, I found this restriction to be very, very difficult. So I suppose in the back of my mind now when I think about community as being enabling, the kind of community that I feel is enabling, is not the kind of community that I have experienced as being very restrictive but rather it is the kinds of community processes that I am recalling and wanting to harness and wanting to reinvent and relocate are those that are very supportive and enabling.

Having said that I think it is obvious that there are also very restricting and restrictive dimensions of any kind of community and negotiating one's way through that tricky territory is very much part of whole engagement with any group of people I guess.

DP **So perhaps if you could move towards your most recent involvement in 'community', particularly in your research and academic work?**

LH Yeah. Ok. Well one of the things that I am really interested in researching is now I suppose the ways in which discourses conflict with each other I suppose. I am a feminist academic and one of the things that I am very passionate about is attempting to prepare the undergraduate students I teach to work with women in the community. This is the big emphasis of the teaching that we do and there are just a few sort of very basic principles that attach to that I suppose.

One of the things that I really feel is very important for them to understand is both the theory and practise of working with

respect across difference in all kinds of ways and that is theorised by all kinds of people but actually coming to terms with the practical experience of that is something that I think takes a lot of learning and a lot of insight I suppose and so I am very, very keen for students to develop that capacity.

One of the other things that I speak a lot with students about is the ways in which we can think about the relationship between the individual and the broader community and the individual sensibility and the broader community, the individual's whole suite of practices and the ways in which they might interact with the broader political, social community and to that end something that I try to work with students around is the notion that every woman and man, but we work with woman, every woman sits as the centre of her own story and by that I don't mean that, I don't mean to adopt an essentialist position at all but what I think is really important for people who are working with people in the community to understand is that from where each individual sits there is a kind of, even a pin-point location which means that they are working from that point out into the wider world and developing respect across the boundary between, say my pin-pointed centre of my story and her pin-pointed centre of her story, can require all sorts of empathetic connection and also a kind of understanding that it is never possible to stand in someone else's shoes. There has got to be a kind of respect for difference so that I will never be the other, nor will I ever actively try to other the other in terms of othering discourse but rather if I can respect the other then I don't try to make her into something that she is not, nor do I try to make myself into something that I am not in order to bridge the gap between me and her but somehow we can stand side by side and work with respect for each others differently centred positions I suppose. Am I making sense to you?

OK. This kind of stuff is really interestingly theorised and in the PhD writing that I did, one of the things that I was very interested in exploring was the whole notion of how one can write the self and write the other. So the whole question of how one sets about creating a biography and/or an autobio-



graphy at the same time was something that I sort of explored in a lot of detail and it is just a really lovely kind of academic extension of what I see to be the basic working practice of working with respect across difference and understanding that space

between the self and the other or the self and the group of others is a very fertile, fecund space which should never be, which can't be elided and can't be ignored.

OK. Having said that I suppose what I can do now is reflect a little bit on some of the research that I have done in the last couple of decades. In the, what towards the end of the eighties in 1986 I was doing a masters degree in Women's Studies at UWA and for the thesis that I did then, I did an oral history of women in the Peace Movement in Western Australia and I really, really enjoyed doing that because it was my first oral history really but I had been an archivist in an earlier life and so I was very familiar with archival records and was passionate about history and also very passionate about the idea that if we want to build up a history of a community and the way that it works then perhaps we have got to talk to individual people about their own experiences and so build stories from those individual stories rather than writing history which is top down.

So this in itself sort of taking on an oral history in 1986 was a little bit of an unusual research practice I suppose. Not really but enough to make it kind of, "Oh very interesting." to people who had heard about it. And so I talked to 25 women who were involved in the Peace Movement in Western Australia and one of the things that, there were all sorts of really fascinating insights that I think I will just talk a little bit about there because I think they also relate to the sorts of different forces that might be impacting upon people in 2003. But one of the things that I did was interviewed five women of those twenty five who were then about sixty years old or more and so they were women who had been involved in the 30's, 40's and 50's

in some way in the Peace Movement and another whole sort of cluster of women were people who were probably at that stage in their mid to late 30's and then there were some people who were even younger than that. So 20 years on now we have twenty five women, most of whom are still alive, living somewhere in Western Australia who are now aged in their eighties and in their seventies and perhaps in their fifties or something and I am actually embarking on a process of re-interviewing those twenty five women now which is just terrific. It is a really lovely project.

But one of the things I wanted to say before I talk about that was that the older women that I interviewed in 1986, women like Joan Williams, Elsie Gare, Bernice Ranford and another woman called Margaret Davis, Mary Blair, they were women who each in her different ways had been intensely involved in community development practices or what we might call community development practices during the thirties and forties and fifties not so that they were naming them as community development practices but so that they, the impact of their work meant that they actually kept this idea alive that peace might be possible or working towards peace might be possible or women might be able to be activists inside the peace making arena so that when, for example, the time became right for the Women's Movement to re-burgeon then it was Joan Williams who had been a peace activist, and a member of the Communist Party, and a tremendously activist journalist in the thirties and the forties and the fifties, when the time became right for the Women's Movement to be re-born it was Joan Williams who gave birth to it with other colleagues in 1970 in Perth. She was one of the women who established women's electoral lobby and the Women's Liberation Movement both because she had seen, "Oh it is working in Sydney. We will have to bring it over here." She knew from her contacts and from her sort of active political engagement with the margins I suppose of the Left that there were ways of working that would mean that a Women's Movement could be born. And so



she had carried the story of the possibility of subverting mainstream practices and discourses with her through three decades of activist practice and then saw it really come to life again.

So what I am trying to say in this discussion now is that my research really alerted me to the ways in which certain ideas and ways of working can be kept alive even while it seems that the society is dormant or the activist practice is dormant. Now Joan was a woman who was on the Left, Elsie Gare was a woman who, with her husband Cyril Gare, started the Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Perth. They were Quakers, they had gone to America, they had seen some of the civil rights marches, they had seen some of the anti-war protest stuff there and they said, “We’ve got to do something here.” And so they did. They had been living on the margins in terms of their allegiance Quakerism and in terms of their kind of pacifism, that was born of their Quaker allegiance for three decades and so for them it was just a kind of natural, next step but they had been building community just in very natural, unassuming ways. They had a sense of entitlement I suppose to do this because they knew that they had been living with integrity and then suddenly, “Whoosh.” The whole thing gets born again. Bernice Ranford was someone who had been involved in the international movement called The Womens International League for Peace and Freedom and she had joined that in the 1940’s I think, early forties during the second world war. She had been alerted to that by the existence of a group that Katherine Susanna Pritchard had established in Western Australia called the Modern Women’s Club. Now the Modern Women’s Club was an organisation that could be joined by any woman who wanted to have conversations. Any woman who wanted to be considered to be an intellectual. They met every Friday lunchtime in the Padbury buildings in central Perth, in the basement of those buildings, and they talked ideas. They talked all sorts of really radical and exciting ideas so people like Bernice Ranford who had wanted to be a Pacifist but couldn’t find a way to do it came to

that, met Katherine Susanna Pritchard, met Joan Williams, met Irene Greenwood, all these people and thought, “Oh there is a way for me to do this here.”

DP When was this?

LH This was in the early forties all right? So I interviewed these women who had been doing all this pacifist, activist practice in their own quiet little ways, and not so quiet ways too, for several decades. And I will just tell you one more story before I start to talk about the ways in which those women also worked with younger women during the eighties.

Joan Williams tells a wonderful story about a group of people called the Union of Australian Women who were women on the Left, they were, I think, aligned with the Seamen’s Union and with the Communist Party and they were women who were very interested in banning the bomb. Ban The Bomb was one of their crusades. Now in the 1950’s in Perth it was illegal to carry a placard in a public place without permission so this group of women wanted to have a demonstration, and in 1956 it wasn’t heard of to have a demonstration but, they wanted to do a Ban the Bomb demonstration and so they really wanted to create a media fuss so that they could draw attention to the need to have some discussion about this and so, instead of carrying placards they decided they would make signs, “Emblazon signs on their apparel.” is the expression that Joan Williams uses so they made aprons and they had Ban the Bomb printed on those aprons, they all donned these aprons and they walked across the Horseshoe Bridge, in Perth, in 1956. This was a demonstration that had profound kind of implications for discussion of this whole topic in Western Australia. It was an action that was really radical in its time and it was just something that they did.

So, the point that I am trying to make is that someone like Joan Williams knew from her engagement with the Communist Party and with other sort of pacifist organisations in the thirties that it was possible to keep these ideas alive. They just



sort of kept on re-surfacing as she kept on finding ways to do it. It all sort of really exploded I suppose in the early seventies and then, by the eighties, she was still working very actively towards peace. In 1984 she was one of the people who organised

the Women's Peace Camp that occurred at Point Perron. That Suellen Murray was involved in organising and a whole lot of other sort of women who were active in a group called FANG, Feminist Anti-Nuclear Group. That was the group that I was involved in too, but I wasn't involved in the Peace Camp, but I had been involved in an earlier manifestation of that group I think. Anyway all of this sort of practice was very much part of people's lives by the time that Joe Valentine came to be elected to Parliament as the world's first single issue Peace Politician.

Now I started talking about this research because one of the things that intrigues me now from 2003 is to think about the ways in which those women, who were actively involved in the Peace Movement in Western Australia in 1986, thought about what they might be able to achieve and the kind of optimism and idealism I suppose that they had that also seemed to me to be paralleled by the optimism and the idealism in the environment movement and in other sort of movements on the margins I suppose. The ways in which all these ideals were carried into the 90's. It seemed to me, at the time that I did these interviews, that if you wanted to introduce social change then what you were doing was introducing social change that was informed by a perspective from the left. There wasn't the notion of introducing social change that was conservative and fuelled by really extremist right wing discourses, as we have seen during the nineties, so people who were interested in social change in the eighties felt that if only they worked hard enough inside their communities, and worked collectively enough, then we would shift the mainstream, we would bring it more towards to what we thought would be an idealist kind of leftist, socialist, interactive place to be.

But it seems to me now from the time of the late nineties when I really began to reflect on this, and maybe I am just a slow learner but, it took me a long time during the 90's to understand that the full force and the impact of those very right wing, narrow, economic rationalist discourses that we began to see emerging from successive national governments, so that by the time that we arrived at the late 90's, the early new millennium, the social change that was most profoundly occurring in Australia, I think we could probably say, was certainly coming from the right. But it is very difficult if you have been embedded in, sort of saturated with an understanding that social change occurs from the left and from those margins to understand quite the nature of the impact of these discourses.

So a lot of the research that I have been doing, both in terms of my own teaching practices, and my own sort of preparation for people to go out to work in the community with women, and looking at the work that they might be doing in those agencies, a lot of that research has been wrestling with this idea of how you even begin to find a voice as someone who is wanting to make change from the left when all of the practices that might have been enabling previously have been cut across by very right wing, rigid disabling economic rationalist discourses. So it is how to sort of recognise the collision of trajectories I suppose. On the one hand you have got this wonderfully, what appears to be a wonderfully liberating trajectory and it is just completely cut across by that. So at the moment I am engaged in re-interviewing the twenty five women, or however many of them are still around, that I interviewed in the 1980's to talk with them about their activist practices because I think I am going to uncover a whole lot of really interesting stuff there. I have done only three interviews so far and all I can say at this stage is that it is going to be a really interesting project because it is not often I suppose that we get twenty years of practice to reflect on in terms of a research project.



DP They are interesting questions.

I sometimes wonder whether there is a danger that the word ‘community’ can be used by all sorts of people including those you described as right wing, economic rationalists. It might be a bit of con-

troversial but the first thing that students and I explore together is whether the most successful twentieth century community workers were people like Mussolini and Hitler. What do you think about the idea that community is not always a good thing?

LH Well I mean one of the examples of the overtaking of the vocabulary I suppose is the notion that Federal Government is using at the moment in terms of their reforms. They have got these reform agendas and reform has been a term that has been used by the Left in the past and it has just been completely appropriated of course so we know that there is a lot of discussion that is sort of suss at the moment.

DP **I noticed in the Higher Education Reform, the Crossroads document, they were talking lots about universities ‘engaging with community’ When I look a bit closer I noticed that they meant universities need to make their teaching and research more relevant to the needs of two groups, ‘business and farmers’, the constituents of the two coalition parties. What do you think about this?**

LH Yeah. Having said all that Dave I think that is really interesting at the moment that we see, well I see in Western Australia a playing out of those two trajectories. I mean on the one hand sure we have got the economic rationalists discourse cutting across a whole lot of stuff that we would otherwise be doing, but at the same time I think that there are legacies of, what I would consider to be very useful community development practices, showing up in all kinds of odd places now. Odd places, well, perhaps just sort of slightly unusual places. One

of the research projects I’m involved in at the moment is introducing a discussion of the impact of domestic violence into work places and one of the processes that we are using in doing that research is (using), or attempting to use, is a sort of bottom up working with people inside work places to devise a suite of policies and practices to respond to evidence of domestic violence in the work place, I mean as it affects people in the workplace. So that something which is as removed from the domestic and the personal as the work place is, in a sense, through this research project being infiltrated by practices which are very much born of an understanding that the personal is political and that policies and practices will probably have most relevance and efficacy if they are devised by workers themselves rather than imposed on them by hierarchies that consider they have got the right to impose these policies. So that is one example of a place, it is a fairly unusual place perhaps for community development practices to be being used.

Another is again from Angus’s working life and that concerns some work that he is doing in the Gascoyne-Murchison area, biological work through CALM where he has set up this project that is helping graziers to, or pastoralists really, to begin to read their land differently in terms of systems that are similar sorts of systems, that you might consider are interactive systems, that one might use in exploring the ways that interactions of people can work but once again this is biological systems and they are a little team of people who are going to speak with pastoralists and really engaging them in community development process and practice, so that not only they can learn to read their own pastoral property as an interactive system, but they can also share those kinds of ideas within their very sparsely populated community and come together for workshops and exchanges of ideas and all sorts of things so there is a sort of community development process happening on multi level there and this is being recorded on video by our good friend Gary Burke as well who has been involved in this project.



DP The phantom Gary

LH Yeah. The phantom Gary Burke. And I think another example of the ways in which there are almost spot legacies of these community development practices, that are being

used legitimately, are within a political and social environment that is no longer as necessarily as accepting of community development practices I suppose or as welcoming of community development practices in some arenas and yet here this is working in a way that is magic and it is almost because it is harking back to processes and practices that these people might feel, “Oh yes.” they could almost recognise from a couple of decades ago that it is able to work now. Something that is almost a safe working practice. You see what I am saying? I don’t know whether this sort of fits with the kind of understandings that you have about a burgeoning of community process here. I don’t know whether it is part of that or whether it is quite a different kind of manifestation.

DP I’m interested in trying to understand how community work from the past is shaping things today. I am also interested in looking at the features that are new or stand in contrast to the work of the past.

LH Yeah look I don’t know whether this is going to fit with the kinds of things that you are already telling your students or not but it seems to me that a lot of the ways of thinking about community development are re-packaging, using acceptable language practices that are drawing on the kinds of traditions that I am talking about. For example the notion of social capital is surely a piece of vocabulary that gives status to something that communities in country towns and in all kinds of places have been aware of and using for a long time but it is a way of naming and a way of making visible that kind of series of practices I suppose. And similarly capacity building is one of the buzz words so it is almost as if the language, the vo-

cabulary has to be bureaucratised for the funders of research to be able to recognise its value in order for bureaucrats to be able to build in a recognition of the need for this. If we look for example at the whole sustainability strategy we see that there has just been released by the current West Australian government I think that certainly the ideas that underpin notions of sustainability and sort of consequence, desire, need for community responsibility and practise and ways of living what one might idealise those ideas are ideas that can be found in all sorts of community development practices that we are talking about too but they are packaged differently. They are probably also practised differently, it would be foolish to suggest that the ways of practising are quite the same.

Some of the most interesting work that I know about that is being done currently in terms of community development that straddles both we might see to be practices that have been evolving through patient practise over decades and decades that are still sort of contemporary now and able to be sort of packaged in contemporary ways is the work that our mutual colleague Anne Ingamells has been doing, particularly in Brisbane. She and other people have engaged in any number of community development projects but one of the things that she is beautifully able to articulate, in ways that are much better than I can, is the ways in which Foucaultian understandings of engagement with power, and operations of power, can be read into organisations that are trying to use community development practices to keep themselves afloat. And recently at a conference in Portugal that we both went to I was privileged to hear her give a paper on the ways in which she has been working with an Indigenous Housing Co-operative in Brisbane and the ways in which she is able to reflect on the kinds of working practices that occurred there. So I would refer students, who are interested in finding out more about this, to the papers that she has written about that.

One of the other things that I have talked only briefly with her about, but it seems to be a very impressive and wonderful kind



of project, is that she and a group of colleagues at the moment are organising a conference embedded within the Sandgate Community, which is the community that she lives in Brisbane, that is a conference about how to enliven Sandgate. But it is going to be a

conference that happens on the streets rather than in conference venues, in conventional conference venues, and it is going to be a conference that happens in the cafes, and in the shops, and in the shopping centres, and all those kinds of places and it is already being formulated and worked on by a group of people who are representative, well not representative necessarily but who are from all parts of the community and it just seems to be a very organic process which is being used with full awareness of all the kinds of strategies for community development that you can use in 2003 but it is also really tying back, linking back, into all those sort of patient working practises that we might know about as well and it is not absent of the conflicts and the tensions and the exclusions and all those other things that happen inside communities but it seems to me to be a very lively and wonderful, idealistic, but practical way to play out notions of community.

DP Are there any cautionary comments that you might offer a novice?

LH Mmm. Well there are so many pitfalls and dangers I suppose but I think perhaps one of the most difficult things for people who feel very strongly or very passionately about something to understand is the distance between their own vision and the ways of seeing that other people might have, and so the desire to impose one's vision onto other people, the desire to just make assumptions about the ways in which people think or the ways in which people can move from where they are sitting to where you are sitting. The need to be able to walk around one's own ideas in a way that is quite dispassionate to try to view them from the outside and to see then from that perspective how one's own ideas might be able to be communicated to

someone else. Perhaps that is something that is really necessary for people of passion because I think perhaps one of the characteristics of people of passion is that it can become difficult to see from the outside what your own suite of ideas might look like and you know, mea culpa, that is often sort of one of the difficulties.

DP So are you saying that in order to do good work in community you need to be able to step outside of its boundaries?

LH Absolutely. Yeah. You need to be able to step outside the boundaries of the community you want to work with but also of the limits of your own ideas.

DP So good community development involves moments of community disengagement?

LH Absolutely. Yeah. And I think that those moments can be just absolutely fleeting too and we can do them on the run. I mean people like Jan Fooke and Karen Healey are people whose work I enjoy and have used and they, I am not sure which one of them that says, probably both of them, talk about doing theory on the run and this is a term that I use a lot now too. I think it is just important to be able to do that. To be able to reflect on one's practise while you are embedded in it but being able to absolutely step outside it and to say, to look dispassionately, to walk around say at meeting. Say for example you are having a meeting, let's use a concrete (example)

(End of Side Two of Tape Two)



Side One Tape three

LH People and there are a group of people who are trying to work out how to, what to ensure that some projects get ongoing funding and there are five of you in this meeting.

There might be a whole lot of cross currents of desires and ideals and working practices and things occurring in that meeting but you come to some sort of understanding at the meeting that this is the way you proceed. But, in the process you might just have some thought Barbara over here wasn't quite comfortable with the way that this process occurred and so, and also Rosemarie on the other side seemed to be saying that it was something quite contrary to what you were thinking but those kinds of little moments of hesitation have been overridden in the whole process of arriving at some decision. What I am suggesting is that it is probably very necessary for you to be able to step outside that whole sort of decision making process and actually walk around it and stand behind Barbara's chair metaphorically and say, "What did it look like from where she was?" and then go around to Rosemary's chair and say, "But hang on what was that like too?" so that you actually get some kind of reading of the interactions and the cross currents and the tensions that are there so that these can then be seen as points of sort of, not moments to be swept away but rather moments to be looked at really carefully for what they can reveal about what's the possibility here. So using moments of tension and conflict and discord and really lack of comfort to explore the fecundity of what lies under there. I think it is important and I guess I was talking within terms of being able to disengage from your own involvement and walking around it.

DP Any other hurdles or words of counsel for those keen on community work?

LH I suppose one of the other things that is something that is always going to be on the agenda but it is now more apparent than ever is that it is all very well to be using community de-

velopment practices and to be changing things at what is often a very micro level but how one then straddles that, the distance between that community engagement and the wider public political and decision making arena, that is really a big one and I think that people have to be very strategic about doing that. I think people have to be very aware about knowing the limits, understanding the sort of limits of what it is that they are trying to achieve but also understanding that it is necessary to begin to read how to move from that sort of grass roots level into the decision making level, that is a political level, it takes, I think very astute and very skillful people to be able to do that, understand that one can't do everything themselves is also really important, but knowing how to make those connections between the community sort of level stuff and that wider policy making and decision making arena is really crucial.

DP Another contribution of feminists involved in community work has been the suggestion that it is too easy to put all of your attention into targeting the community as the place where changes should occur ... perhaps implying that a community ought to just simply pull their socks up.

LH Yeah. Janice Raymond talks about 'two sight seeing' and that is something that I think is just lovely. I mean it is an observation from probably the seventies, she was one of the radical feminist writers but she talks about the vision that we can have which is the idealistic vision that we sort of keep up here so it is sort of looking at the light in her eyes but also the double seeing that we have to do when we look at the materiality, the nitty gritty, the sort of micro stuff, so it is just that old thing of keeping the wider political observation and agenda sort of open at the same time as one is still very clearly able to see what is right there in front of them.

DP Just before we end, can I ask you to talk about what makes community work in WA unique?



LH That is a very interesting question and can I start with earlier decades rather than the present? When we first came to Western Australia in 1975 we had been living in Queensland under a very conservative government there and it seemed to us

both that, well it was absolutely clear to us both, that in Western Australia if you had a good idea you could run with it. There would be support for it. Whereas in Queensland if you had a good idea people seemed to think, “Well what is the point in acting on that? Someone in Sydney will do it. Or someone in Melbourne will do it. It will happen down south.” So it seemed to us to be something about the geography of this place, the isolation of Perth specifically that meant that if people in Perth had a good idea, or in Western Australia had a good idea, then everybody in the community seemed to implicitly understand that, “OK it was worth acting on that idea.”

So when we arrived there, there was all sorts of counter cultural stuff that was happening here that was very lively considering that the city was only the population size that it was. And the research that I had done into the life of Katherine Susanna Pritchard, you know this is different stuff, and also into women in the Peace Movement and the oral history stuff that I had done suggests precisely that too that too that there is something about the isolation of Perth that seems to have actually been an enabling factor in permitting, within what is still a very conservative society, these sorts of fringe movements to occur. Now having said that I suppose it is possible for me then to construct a story about how the community development practices that seem to emerge out of the feminist movement and to sort of grow with the environment movement and the peace movement and so on during the seventies and eighties I can construct a story about how it was possible, Perth people were tolerant of that kind of different way of organising so that a kind of permission was given for these kinds of practices to be used.

DP Is there something about the fact that WA can be quite parochial?

LH Absolutely.

DP We are agin’ the rest of the country.

LH So it is a process of ‘othering’. So is there something in that?

DP We seem to think we have to fight against the established, West Australia is the alternative?

LH Dave that is really interesting but I think there is something more happening here too and I will tell you why. I have had experience of growing up in North Queensland which was isolated in a different way from the ways in which Perth was isolated. There were a series of small communities right up the coast but the isolation I experienced and still experience in North Queensland is one of ideas as much as of physical location in that it seems to me still, the North Queensland communities are incredibly conservative, very, very restrictive in their thinking.

Whereas, for whatever reason, the kind of isolation that has occurred in Perth, even though it is a sort of, it is informed by a kind of parochialism, also seems to be informed by something which is much more free than that and in the work that I did in the eighties in looking at women and the peace movement, one of the things that I hypothesised was that people here were able to sort of keep alive their desires to work from the margins and live on the margins by being aligned to international movements that were sustaining their activist practice.

So the Communist Party for example, the International Communist Party, The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the Quaker movement, all of those movements were world wide movements and gave people a kind of sense of connection and identity. Now the question that one could obviously ask is, “Well why weren’t there people in North



Queensland doing the same sort of thing? And perhaps there were and perhaps they have just sort of been hidden from my view but I don't think so, I think there is something that is quite special and different about Perth and Western Australia in

terms of having a tradition of tolerance, of difference somehow even while the overriding discourse is certainly still about us and them. So there is a lot of sort of disruptions of that overriding discourse here I suppose.

DP I immediately start thinking about Fremantle and its place as a port, a place where different people come together.

LH Well Joan Williams gives wonderful stories about being a reporter in the thirties in Perth and she paints a picture of the incredible isolation of Perth by reminding us that the road between here and Adelaide was sort of very difficult to navigate, it was a very long train journey and it was a plane flight that very few people have because there simply weren't planes flying between here and the east so it was an eight day sea voyage or something between here and the east and as reporters what they used to do was they would go down to Fremantle wharves to meet every incoming ship and so she, for example, went down and met Igon Kisch the wonderfully radical communist European peace activist when he arrived in Perth, and he actually jumped ship, well she went to Victoria and he jumped ship, but there but she met him when he came here too so her point was that they got to see Fremantle and the Fremantle wharves as the site of their connection with the outside world both nationally and internationally and I think perhaps it could be that Fremantle has evolved this kind of space of being, I don't know, almost the, I am thinking of it in terms of a boundary between the outside world and the gateway to the outside world from Perth, the sort of the place, the space of the in between, between the one and the other. Who knows but it seems has as a location, as a space, I mean there has probably work already been done on this but in terms of space and its

connection with political activism I think Fremantle is a very interesting study.

DP Mmm. Any other sort of features of Western Australia that add a different sort of dimension to community development?

LH You are going to have to prompt me Dave to think about some other things that I might think about. I can't think of stuff right now.

DP A person that we spoke to in the Kimberley talked about the kind of necessity that comes out of isolation. He was obviously talking about a different part of the world but he says being isolated enriches and broadens the range of skills than you might otherwise have.

LH Mmm.

DP One of the unique things about West Australia is it has a huge expanse. I regularly travel to the Kimberley and often think that iff you did a similar run in Europe you'd cross many countries.

LH Language boundaries and, yes, yes, all of that.

DP What do you think?

LH No I just think back to my earlier point about how we notice the profound difference between living in Brisbane and living in Perth and one of the things that was just very clear there was that if you wanted to do something here, yes you would have to do it yourself. You couldn't depend on people from Melbourne or Sydney to do it for you because it was too far and perhaps that is the legacy of those times. I mean we do have more sort of interaction with the world now. The advent of the aeroplane. (laughs)



DP That was only quite recent.

LH It was recent. Yes. Yes and even the advent of email. So suddenly all of that kind of stuff has made connecting with people very different. Actually that is probably

something that has been profoundly different in my life in the last few years, and in the lives of us all I suppose, but when I think of community now, a lot of the communities that are important in my life are virtual communities, for example I did my PhD with a virtual community of intensely, incredibly supportive co-students, post grad students who are scattered around the world, but particularly around Australia and the exchanges that we had as we all sort of worked with our supervisor who was in North Queensland and we were all sort of around the country were really wonderful and so I think about that as a community. I think about the communities of connection that I have with other academic colleagues around the world. And those kinds of connections are sustaining, as sustaining as the connections that I might have with my physical neighbours. So ways of being activist have certainly changed in the last couple of decades and this has an impact on all kinds of ways of doing protest, on ways of enlivening communities so that is certainly something that is very much worth thinking about.

DP That will be interesting. That would be something interesting to pursue over the next ten, fifteen years, the extent to which the new technologies are shifting and shaping our practices in different ways.

Our time for the moment has almost ended. I want to thank you for your generosity and your profound wisdom.

LH Oh it is just such a delight to spend time with the people I have spent time with in talking about their activist practice yeah.

DP Thank you again.

LH Thanks Dave.

(end of tape)

End of Interview