

# Lyn Calitz in focus

The following is an excerpt from the article entitled 'The Shame of Apartheid' about Lyn Calitz, Librarian at the Children's Library, State Library of Tasmania, which appeared in *The Mercury* 21 April p.23. The article is one of a number commissioned by the LAA's Tasmanian Branch as part of a campaign to bring librarians in general, and their working lives and concerns in particular, to the attention of the public.

According to Lyn her early reading experiences while growing up in Pretoria were very similar to those of an Australian child growing up in the 1950s. She loved to read and Enid Blyton and the Billabong books were among her favourites.

'It is incredible to me that in what is basically a third-world African country, we behaved as we would in Australia — ostensibly oblivious to the fact that all around were third-world problems of poverty and suffering.'

She grew up with an 'uncritical acceptance' of apartheid. 'Our servants were there, part of life. My mother always cared for the children and the housework was done by the servants,' she said. 'The guilt and the confusion came later in adolescence and young adulthood.'

It was at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg that Lyn's sense of injustice was aroused. After completing her training in education, she sought teaching positions in black schools.

She found herself in an uncomfortable gulf: critical of and criticised by her white Afrikaner teaching colleagues and mistrusted by most of her black students and teaching colleagues as a result of her attempts to be friendly and sympathetic. She perceived herself to be continually watched and checked up on.

Lyn said it was hard for Australians to understand the strains imposed by apartheid. 'I am deeply grateful to Australia for giving me and my family the chance to live a normal life. . . to speak freely without fear and intimidation, to live without tension and social problems,' she said.

Lyn and her husband came to Australia 13 years ago. 'I am relieved to be free of the guilt and the fear and the sense of utter powerlessness to change injustice,' she said.

In Australia, Lyn's work as a children's librarian has exposed what she regards as another kind of injustice — the inadequate treatment of children's services. 'It is incredible to me, because surely children are our future and therefore should have our greatest investment in money and planning and



energy,' she said. 'Children are the responsibility of all of society.'

When Lyn took confinement leave for the birth of her daughter two years ago, her position remained unfilled for six months. Today, the Children's Library has a skeleton staff of two part-time librarians and a skilled technical assistant.

The staff pours creative energy into the work, but they have had to cut back on storytelling sessions, displays, films and their extension work, which includes visits to pre-schools and creches. Any research and development work is impossible.

The collection is extremely heavily used. Picture books, early reading books and reference books for projects are always in high demand. Lyn is critical of the borrowing system which allows children (and adults) to take out 10 books at a time, depleting stocks of reference books on particular subjects very rapidly.

In spite of the frustrations, Lyn projects an unshakeable enthusiasm for her work. Scrapbooks full of letters and drawings from satisfied children attest to the popularity and success of the Children's Library. She is excited by children's books and the high standards of illustration, production and design exhibited in so many.

Lyn believes Australian children are lucky to have an excellent range of books to choose from. 'We get the best of America, England and Australia and generally the quality is very good,' she said.

If the collection has a regional bias, then it is towards Australian literature. Most current Tasmanian titles go into the collection 'unless they are of very poor quality'.

Pat Hutchins, author of *Rosie's Walk* and other humorous books for young children, is one of Lyn's favoured authors. With hand-puppets and story-telling skill, Lyn is able to bring alive the magic and excitement of books.

She does not believe children are reading less. She said some studies have shown that many children who watch excessive amounts of television also read extensively and that the peak age for reading is also the peak age for viewing.

She is impressed by the heavy schedules of so many of her young users. 'Sometimes I wonder how many of us as adults could keep up the mental activity of school, the emotional strain of growing up and learning how to socialise, the discipline of sport and other cultural skills such as music and dancing, that children do,' she said.

It is important for children's libraries to be happy and relaxed, she believes. 'Our library is unlike a library at school,' she said. 'The atmosphere is informal and non-coercive. Children have to go to school, but they have a choice about the public library.'

Lyn believes children who make time to read creative literature recoup enormous pleasure and enjoyment.

'Stories have a profound ability to change children's ways of looking at the world, to help them come to terms with their world and to assist to develop the ability to "get inside" someone else's head and heart.'

## Introduction to Archival Practice and Management



The Hon. Janice Crosio with Prof Ian Jack (at lectern) and Mr Ron Lilley.

On 1 June the Hon. Janice Crosio, Minister for Local Government, opened a five-day course on establishing a local government inactive and archival records program. The course, the first of its kind in NSW, was arranged by the Action Committee on Local Government Records, the Records Management Association of Australia (NSW) and the NSW Government Industry Training Committee.

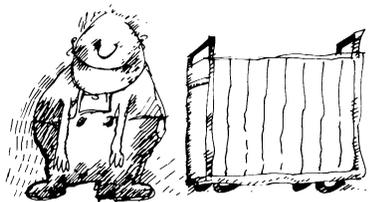
Thirty-nine participants from varying levels of local government, including three local studies librarians and one Council archivist attended. The course provided an introduction to archival practice and management, and aimed to promote an awareness of broader issues for councils in observing the new Ordinance Amendment on the preservation of records and preparation of inventories for the forthcoming disposal schedule. Visits to four Councils — Botany, Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai and Lane Cove — proved rewarding field work, with participants gaining an appreciation of the problems that most Councils faced with the accumulation of old records.

Patricia Ward

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