

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

December, 1990

NO. 19

ISSN 07285531

Editors

June Factor and Gwenda Davey

Published from: The School of Early Childhood Studies,
University of Melbourne
\$6.00 in Australia, \$8.00 including postage outside Australia



Editorial

*Here's to remember the Fifth of November,
Gunpowder, treason and plot:
I see no reason
Why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.*

It seems that Guy Fawkes Day on the fifth of November has been 'forgot' in Australia, within only one generation. Today's parents and grandparents might remember the bonfires and fireworks, usually known as 'cracker night', which celebrated this seventeenth-century piece of British history. Both adults and children joined in the celebration of the defeat of the Gunpowder Plot, in which the Catholic activist Guy Fawkes and some colleagues attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London. On 'cracker night' a 'guy' was sometimes constructed from old clothes and stuffing, and taken from house to house asking for 'a penny for the guy', although it is our belief that this practice was more common in Britain than in Australia. The effigy would, of course, be ceremonially burned on the bonfire.

Perhaps it is just as well that Guy Fawkes Day has been forgotten, along with the sectarian bitterness which used to lead children to chant about Catholic dogs (or Proddy dogs, depending on your religion) jumping like frogs etc. etc. Some folklore can well be consigned to history, and it is self-evident that changes in folkloric practices do occur, including celebrations. Will Halloween become a popular celebration in Australia? It is acquiring some popularity with primary school teachers in Australia, and certainly it is an opportunity for children to dress up and to have some good spooky fun.

Our impression is that the promotion of Halloween by teachers and commercial interests has declined in popularity in Australia in the last year or two, perhaps due to alarmist reports in the media about poison etc. being placed in sweets given to children 'trick or treating' from house to house. Our North American informants assure us firmly that these reports are contemporary legends ... and the noted folklorist, Linda Degh, reported to the recent American Folklore Society conference in California that the same police in Bloomington, Indiana, who are distributing warning leaflets about Halloween have never had a single reported case of adulterated candy.

The American connection grows apace; particularly valuable is the contact with the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society. (But do they HAVE to have breakfast meetings at 7.00 am? See above re folk customs which can happily enter oblivion.) Our heartiest congratulations go to Simon Bronner, who won this year's Opie Award for the best publication in children's folklore. A review of his book is included in this Newsletter. It is also a source of excitement that the Smithsonian Institution is proposing that Australia should be the guest foreign country at the 1993 Festival of American Folklife in Washington. We hope that Australian children's folklore will be well represented.

There is also some good news on the home front. The BBC has released the film *All Our Children*, which took a comparative approach to children's play in the United States, Kenya, Colombia and Australia. And the Australian Children's Television Foundation has provided script development funds for the English expatriate filmmaker Martin Weitz (now resident in Adelaide), for a film project on Australian children's

traditional play, featuring the work of ACFN editor, June Factor.

Both editors were happy to have been in Toronto for Halloween!

THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVE

Established in 1985 within the Centre for Australian Studies at Curtin University, the Western Australian Folklore Archive (WAFA) now has extensive holdings of mainly, though not exclusively, Western Australian folklore.

The core of the WAFA consists of student fieldwork projects and self-administered questionnaires undertaken as a component of study in the folklore units offered as part of the university's BA in Australian Studies. As well, the archive contains a good deal of material from other sources. These include the Bicentennial oral history project *'The Other West Australians'*, tapes and transcripts of the *'Foothills Connection'* community history and folklore project and material relating to the ongoing *'Chinese-Australian Folklore Project'*.

The formats in which the collections are held include written reports of various kinds, questionnaires, audio and video cassettes, photographs and other graphic materials.

Emphasising contemporary folklore, the archive also covers all aspects of folklore and folk, within the limits of its resources and facilities. Some examples of the WAFA holdings are a copy of a nineteenth century book of folk medicines, a study of 'brothel-lore', various studies of urban and rural occupational folk groups, surveys of folk belief, collections of folk narrative and of children's lore, and examinations of folk

customs and festivals.

The WAFA will continue to expand its holdings and to function as a significant repository of regional and national folklore. Currently the archive is used mainly by undergraduate and post-graduate students, academic staff and local researchers. However, the archive is generally accessible to anyone who wishes to use it (dependent upon access restrictions occasionally placed by informants).

A copy of the basic WAFA data-base printout (collector's name, brief description and accession number of each collection) is available for a processing and mailing fee of \$4.00. Full data-base printouts and copies of WAFA holdings are also available for purchase at individually negotiated fees.

For further information contact Graham Seal, Western Australian Folklore Archive, Centre for Australian Studies, Curtin University of Technology, Box U1987 GPO, Perth, WA 6001 - Telephone (09) 351 7072 or 351 2253.

Note on 'Pedro of Tonala'

Readers who wish to obtain a copy of Dorothy Howard's fascinating account of the childhood of a Mexican boy (reviewed in the last issue of the ACFN) can do so by ordering through:

**Hispanic Books Distribution,
1665 West Grant Road,
TUCSON,
ARIZONA, 85745. USA**

(\$US9.00 plus postage)

CHILDREN'S RHYMES

The following skipping rhymes were collected by the late Ian Turner in Melbourne between 1956 and 1957, and were included in some of his papers acquired by the National Library of Australia in 1987 as part of the O'Connor Collection of Australian folklore.

I picked out these few as ones which intrigued me, as I haven't heard them lately. Can any readers say if they are still in transmission? (They were all included in *Cinderella Dressed in Yella*.) It's also an opportunity to recall just how great was Ian Turner's contribution to children's folklore. He was Associate Professor of Australian History at Monash University in Melbourne, and produced the first definitive publication of children's playground rhymes, *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* (Melbourne, Heinemann Educational, 1969).

Gwenda Davey

SKIPPING RHYMES

Old Mother Moore
She lived by the shore,
She had children three and four,
The eldest one was twenty-four,
And she goes around with
Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor,
Rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief.
Is she going to marry him?
With an H O T Yes ... No ... Yes ... No ...
What kind of ring will she have?
Emerald, diamond, silver, gold, copper,
brass ...
What shall she go in?
Coach, carriage, wheel-barrow, dogcart ...
What shall she get married in?
Church, steeple (?stable) ...

Heather, Rex Street, 1956

CABBAGES

My father's cabbages
Growing higher ... higher ... higher ...
My father's cabbages
Growing lower ... lower ... lower ...
(skipper crouches)

Carey Prescott, Melb., 1956

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

Christmas crackers a penny a packet,
When you light/pull them they go bang

(On 'bang' skipper tries to catch rope
between straddled legs)

Deb Turner, Melb., 1956

Many verses e.g. Easter .. Anzac ..
Empire .. Birthday .. each verse the price
increases one penny.

J & P Michell, 1953-6

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

TWO FOUR

Two, four,
Touch the floor,
Six, eight,
Eating cherries off a plate,
Nine, ten,
Do it all again.

Coll A. Turner, Ringwood, 1956
J. & P. Michell
various extempore versions
Canberra, 1950-56

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

HOUSE TO LET

House to let, apply within,
The ladies upstairs are drinking gin;
Drinking gin is a very bad thing,
And I must call my neighbour in.

Jane Stone, Melb., 1957

Cf/1: Chilton, 'Folk' (Eng.) 1955 :

This house to let,
No rent to pay,
Knock at the door
And run away.

Cf/2: Evans, Jump Rope Rhymes,
San Francisco 1954 :

House to rent, inquire within,
As I move out, let ... move in.

Room for rent, inquire within,
Lady got put out for drinking gin.
If she promises to drink no more,
Here's the key to Miss ...'s door.

Cf/3: Rolland, in New Masses
(New York) 1938 :

House to let, inquire within,
A lady got put out for drinking
gin.
If she promises to drink no more,
Here's the key to Mary's door.

DANCING DOLLY

Dancing dolly has no any sense,
She bought four eggs for eighteen pence.
The eggs went bad and dolly went mad,
And this is what she said:

A ... B ... C ... D ...

David, David, will you come to tea?

David, David, will you marry me?

David, David, will you kiss me?

David, David, what will it be?

Yes ... No ... Yes ... No ...

Sue Blackburn, Adelaide, 1957

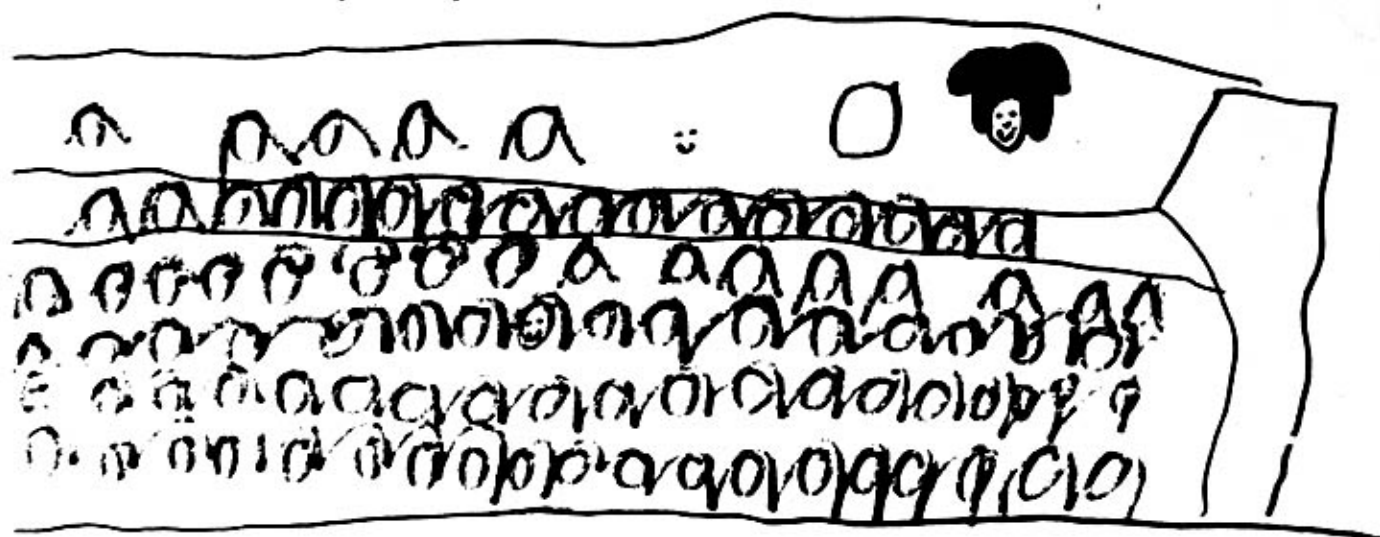
Cf/1: Chilton, 'Folk' (Eng.) 1954 :

Dancing dolly had no sense,
Bought a fiddle for eighteen pence,
But all the tunes that she could play
Was 'Over the hills and far away.'

V/1: Dancing dolly had no sense;
She bought some eggs for fifteen
pence;
The eggs went bad and dolly went
mad,
With a dizzy-dizzy one,
With a dizzy-dizzy two ...

Deb Turner, Melb., July 1957

~~~~~



# KITCHEN

Mary/mother was in the kitchen  
Doin' a bit of stitchin',  
In came a bogey man and pushed her  
OUT.

A. Turner,  
heard Ringwood, Melb., 1956  
P. Mitchell,  
Canberra 1954 & Melb., 1956

V/1: Granny in the kitchen  
Shelling all the peas;  
In came a burglar and pushed  
granny OUT.

Judy Smith, Adelaide, 1957

XRef: FLEA

Cf/1: Evanesc: Jump Rope Rhymes  
San Francisco, 1954 :

I was in the kitchen doing a bit of  
stitching,  
Along came ... and pushed me  
OUT.



## THE INTERNATIONAL DIFFUSION OF THE JUMP-ROPE GAME 'ELASTICS'

Andy Arleo, Institut Universitaire de  
Technologie (Saint-Nazaire) Université  
de Nantes (France)

*This is the first of a two-part article on  
Elastics, written for the ACFN by the  
noted French children's folklorist, Andy  
Arleo. The second part will appear in  
the next issue together with a complete  
list of footnotes and references.*

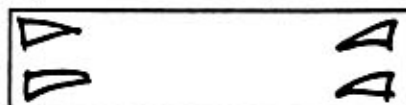
The game known in English as 'elastics' or 'Chinese jump-rope' (among other names) has attracted the interest of folklorists since the 1960s (Ritchie 1965, Jones 1966). The present article aims to document the spread of this game in more than twenty countries in Europe, Asia and North America. Most of the data was contributed by childlore specialists in response to a questionnaire sent out in 1987. It is hoped that this information will allow other folklorists to develop further research into this apparently recent tradition that is currently popular among children around the world.

### 1. An Introduction to Basis Elastics

Ritchie (1965:121) describes a simple variant of the game as 'played in Scotland:

"A long length of elastic is looped round the ankles of two girls who stand opposite each other:

Fig 1 (after Ritchie 1965)





'The girl that's off her end (isn't holding the elastic) stands side-ways to the two elastics, puts her foot in the middle, brings it out again, then carries the near elastic over the second elastic with the point of her toe, and brings it out again without touching the second elastic. You do that ten times with your right foot, then on the other side you do it ten with your left foot. Then from each side you do it with both feet together.'" Ritchie comments that "Since 1960 the complications of American Ropes have escalated. Generally, it's called 'Chinese Ropes' and very often 'Elastications' ... the loop is now raised in four stages, 'Ankles', 'Knees', 'Waisties', and 'Headies'."

The diagram below shows an elementary 8-step jumping pattern used in France (the blackened triangles represent the jumper's feet and the empty triangles represent the "elastic-holders'" feet):

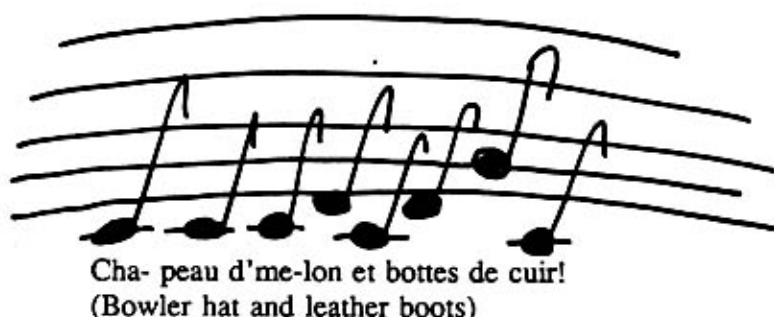
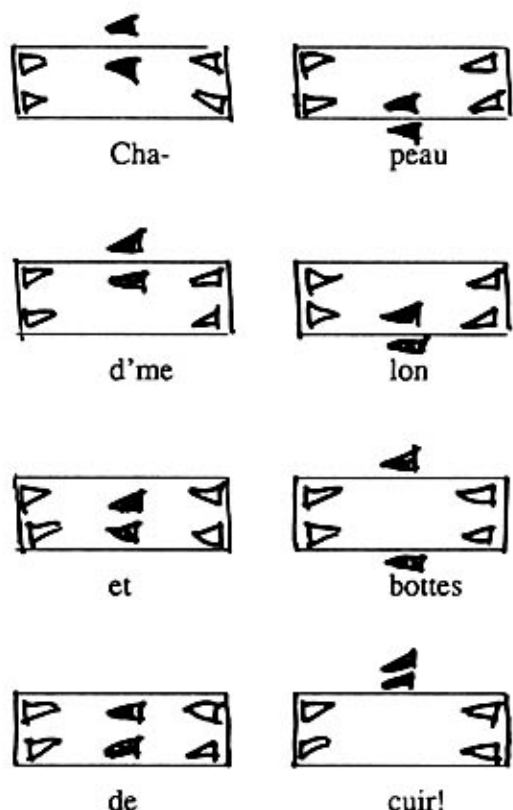


Fig.2 (Collected by A.Arleo in Saint-Nazaire, France from an 8-year old girl, July 1981).

The text which accompanies this pattern comes from the name of a popular television serial.

## 2. A Survey on the International Diffusion of "Elastics"

A questionnaire on various aspects of the elastics game was drawn up and sent to twenty-four childlore researchers. I received twelve replies concerning the following ten countries: Australia (AUS: June Factor), Belgium (BEL: Erik de Vroede), Czechoslovakia (CZ: Milos Zapletal), Denmark (DK: Charlotte Bøgh, Erik Kaas Nielsen), England (ENG: Gillian Bennett, Steve Roud), Japan (JP: Hiroyuki Ikema), Spain (SP: Jeanine Fribourg), Switzerland (SWIT: Paul Puhl), Wales (Tecwyn Vaughan Jones), West Germany (WG: Rainer Wehse).'

Additional information was gathered from the publications listed in the bibliography and also through fieldwork carried out in Saint-Nazaire (Loire-Atlantique Department), France. The responses to the questionnaire are summarized below.

**Question 1:**

Is "elastics" or a similar type of game played in your country or culture?

All of the correspondents replied "Yes" to this question, and some added that the game is also played in neighboring countries. According to R. Wehse (WG), elastics is also played in Austria and in Switzerland. E.K.Nielsen mentions Swedish and Norwegian versions that are different from those that he collected in Denmark. Jones (1966) and Knapp (1976) provide data on "Chinese Jump-rope" in the United States and Ritchie (1965) describes some Scottish variants (see above). An important study in French on elastics (in Grand, Puhl & Tagini, 1983: 78-85, 262-264) includes an international survey which shows the existence of the game in twenty-one countries or regions: West Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France (Auvergne), Western France, Great Britain, Italy (Latium), Italy (Frioul), Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia (Belgrade), Yugoslavia (Ljubljana), Canada, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand. In total, then, there are reports of elastics-playing in twenty-three countries in four continents. This does not imply, of course, that the game does not exist elsewhere. It would be interesting to obtain data for other countries within these continents (Soviet Union, China, the Middle East, etc.) as well as for Africa and Latin America.

There is a wide variety of native terms for the elastics game:

AUS: Elastics, Chinese elastics or High Jump

CZ: Hra't Gumu ("to play rubber") or Skolka s gumou ("classes with the rubber ribbon")

DK: Elastikhop

ENG: Elastics or sometimes French elastics

FR: l'élastique

SCOTLAND: American ropes, Chinese ropes or elastifications

SWIT: l'éastique or gummi-twist (in German-speaking sections, literally "elastic-twist")

US: Chinese jump-rope or sometimes Indian jumping

WALES: Twang

It may be noticed from this list that elastics is often perceived as being a foreign or "exotic" game.

**Question 2:**

Can you say approximately when elastics appeared (in your country)? Have you any idea as to its origin?

Correspondents from Europe generally estimate that elastics appeared in their countries in the 1960s, which also matches up with the conclusions of Grand, Puhl & Tagini. However, these authors reckon that the game was introduced in Eastern Europe at a later date, in the 1970s: this is invalidated by an eyewitness account by M. Zapletal (CZ), who observed three girls playing elastics in Prague in May 1964. E.K.Nielsen (DK), who filmed the game near Copenhagen in 1962, believes that elastics was introduced into his country through the English-speaking world. In Scotland the game - often called "American Ropes" - was also played around the beginning of the 1960s. About the same time, in 1962-63, "Chinese Jump-rope" was considered a new creation in the United States, at least in the Midwest (Jones 1966). As for France, informal questioning reveals that the game has been well-known since at least the 1970s. I have not yet come across accounts of elastics-playing in France in the 1960s. All of my informants who grew up in the 1950s claim that the game did not exist at that

time.

The earliest reports that I have found come from Asia. An Australian woman remembers playing elastics in India and in Burma in the 1940s<sup>2</sup>.

According to J. Factor, the game was probably not known in Australia before 1960. New variants have been introduced there by recent immigrants from Indo-China. H. Ikema (JP) believes that elastics may be derived from the similar Japanese "jump higher game", which was played in Japan some eighty years ago.

In conclusion, from the information that is presently available to me, elastics may have been an Asian game which later spread to certain English-speaking countries (Australia, Great Britain, United States) and very rapidly or perhaps simultaneously to other countries. Of course this remains a "working hypothesis" that may be modified or even invalidated by further research.

### Question 3:

Can you describe the elastic that is used? Are elastics specifically designed for this game commercialized?

Usually, "sewing elastics" are used, but there are also reports of rubber bands being knotted together (ENG, AUS, US). None of my correspondents mentioned the commercialization of special elastics designed for this game. In France four-meter long elastics have been sold since the late 1980s under the name "tresse élastique jeu" (elastic braid game). Some children use them, but many continue to make their own.

### Question 4:

Is the game played mostly by boys, girls or both sexes?

Everywhere elastics is considered as mainly a girls' game, but several correspondents (AUS, ENG, DK, FR, SP) mention occasional participation by boys.

### Question 5:

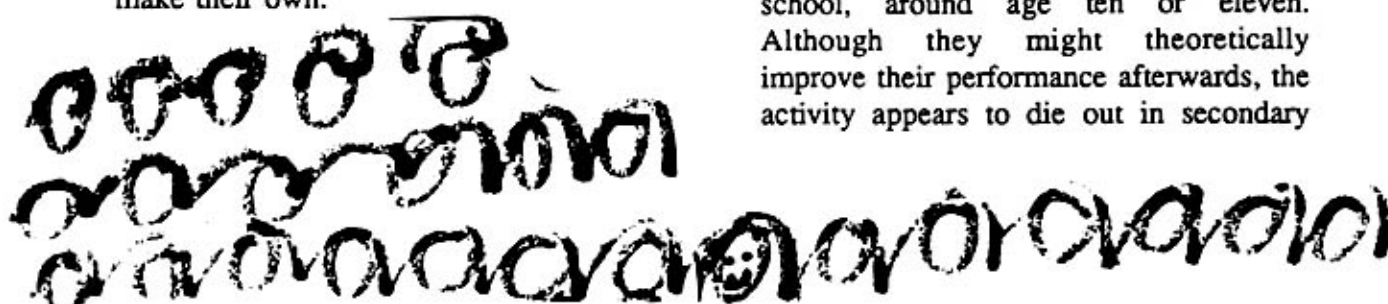
At what age do children usually begin playing elastics? At what age do they usually stop?

The chart below sums up the answers to this question:

|                    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|--------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Start around age:  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  |    |
| Number of replies: | 4  | 4  | 1  | 2  | 1  |    |
| <hr/>              |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Stop around age:   | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Number of replies: | 1  | 3  | 1  | 3  | 0  | 1  |

*Fig. 3: Age of children playing elastics*

The widest age range (five to fifteen) is reported by M. Zapletel (CZ), who adds however that elastics is a favorite game between seven and eleven years old. P. Puhl (SWIT), who indicates a range of seven to thirteen years old, notes that younger children also try to play. From my observation in Saint-Nazaire (FR), it seems that after a somewhat awkward "training" period, children generally reach their peak in elastic-playing ability towards the last year of elementary school, around age ten or eleven. Although they might theoretically improve their performance afterwards, the activity appears to die out in secondary





school. For E.K.Nielsen (DK) as well, elastics is very popular around ten or eleven. The general trend corresponds to J.Factor's comment that elastics is a game mainly associated with elementary school.

#### **Question 6:**

**Where is elastics usually played?**

Eight correspondents mentioned the school playground. Other responses included sidewalks, streets, play areas and yards. Although elastics is primarily an outdoor game, it is occasionally played in school corridors between classes (DK) or in the vestibule (SEIT). As Nathalie, an eleven-year old girl quoted by Grand *et al* (p.85), says: "We can play elastics indoors, especially if we have neighbors who like to hear elephants jumping!"

#### **Question 7:**

**Is there a special time of the year, or season, when elastics is played? What time of the week and day is elastics usually played?**

Out of twelve correspondents, six had noticed that elastics is played mostly during the warmer seasons, especially around springtime. As for the time of day, the answers varied: during recess (SP, SWIT, WG), at lunchtime (WALES) or before bedtime (SP). I have noticed that elastics is often used to "kill time" while waiting for some other activity, such as dance lessons, to begin.

Andy Arleo  
(to be continued)

\*\*\*\*\*

### **KIDS TALK**

*In an earlier issue of the ACFN, mention was made of a project to collect, collate, and ultimately to publish a dictionary of Australian children's vernacular and colloquial language use.*

*This project is now underway, and readers of the ACFN are invited to contribute. Please feel free to photocopy the Collection Sheet at the back of this newsletter as many times as you like. It is hoped that the dictionary will include the language of childhood remembered by adults, as well as that of contemporary children. Below are some suggested categories which may nudge your memory (and that of your students, if you are a teacher).*

**Places and situations where you might use special words:**

#### **AT SCHOOL**

Do you have special words for:

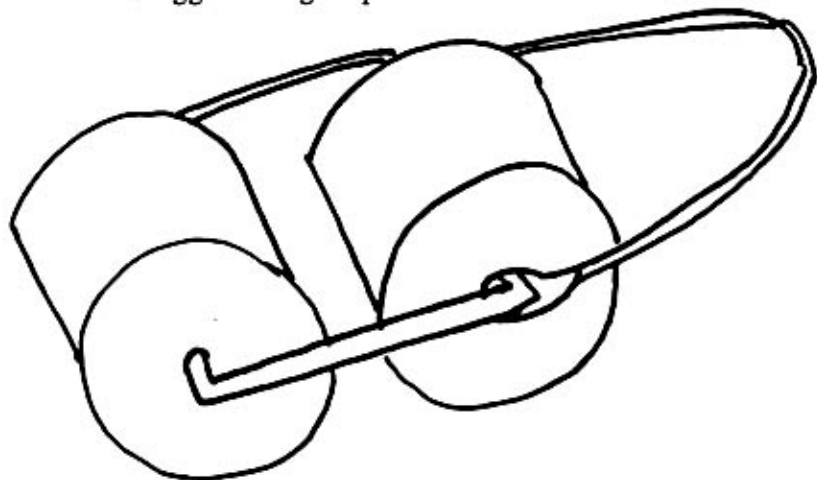
- \* Good students, poor students, popular teachers, unpopular teachers, school subjects like Art, Music, P.E., homework ...
- \* Recess, lunchtime, adventure playgrounds, games and rules in games, swapping, collecting, names for different marbles ...
- \* Your lunch e.g. sandwiches, pies, sausage rolls, the tuckshop, chips, lunch money ...
- \* Best friends, enemies, cheats, girls, boys, children from different ethnic backgrounds e.g. Italians, Greeks, Asians, different physical features like blonde hair, black hair, curly hair, brown eyes ...



## ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S GAMES

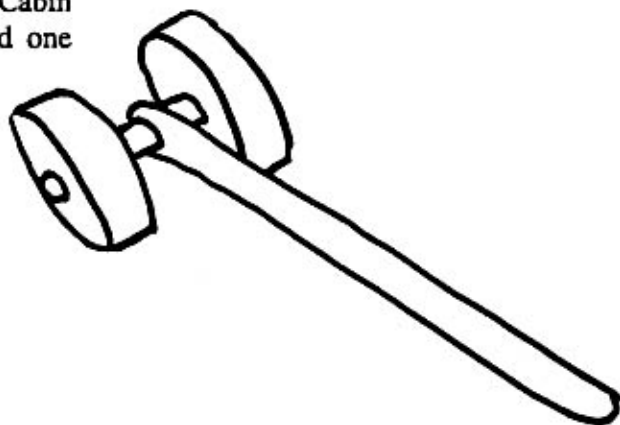
*Sue Thomas, a graduate of the Institute of Early Childhood Development, spent 1988 and 1989 teaching in Halls Creek, W.A. We publish some of her impressions of the game of the Aboriginal children in the area.*

Children made trucks out of old Sunshine milk tins (billys are also made out of these). They put two holes in them and thread wire through - wire as thick as coat hangers - so that the tins can be dragged along or pushed in front.



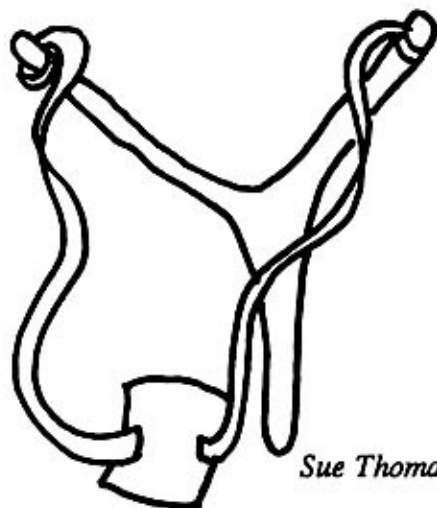
I had some two litre plastic lemonade bottles in the water tub for the children to float. Instead, the girls took them out and used them as babies. Just the right shape.

A friend told me that boys make a pushing-pulling toy out of two Log Cabin tins and sticks - one large stick and one small stick.



I have also seen a game where children toss money into a hole. The game is called 'Holey-Holey'. Whoever gets the most money in the hole wins the game.

I have seen two boys using homemade sling shots. These were used to kill birds, and were ingeniously made. Wood was used for the V part, the wide bit for the stone to rest on was the thick part of the bladder from a football, and the stretchy strip was made from the rest of the football bladder.

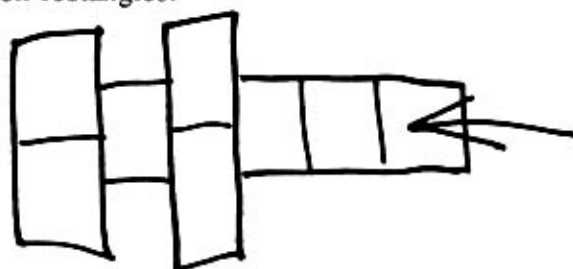


*Sue Thomas*

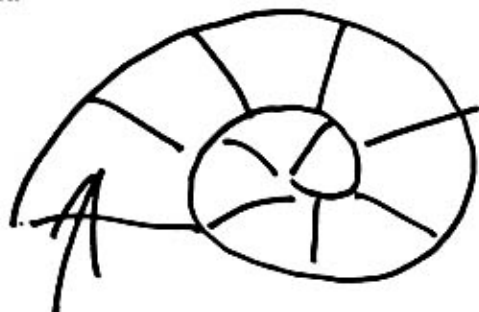
# MEMORIES OF GAMES IN BAIRNSDALE, VICTORIA, IN THE EARLY 1940s

*A memoir written by Beatty  
Blennerhassett*

We used to play Hoppy. One was based on rectangles:



There was also a Snail Hoppy where you threw a 'tor' and hopped around and then back.



It was all of a sudden time for Marbles or Skippy, and we used to play a lot of skipping, with the long rope and at least three playing, two to turn and the others to skip - Pepper, (turning fast) over and under - running in from the side and out, or going in for your turn to skip. And the songs of skipping, *"Once you get in, you can't get out unless you say your boy's name"*, with lots of giggles, and *"red hot jolly pepper"* skipping as fast as you could.

We played games in the shelter shed too. Steps and Stairs - where one person stood on one seat and called out all sorts of things and the first one to get over the other side had next go - giant steps, fairy steps, umbrellas - where you whizzed round, cherry stones where you had to spit as far as you could and go to the furthest spit you could find.

Letters was another shelter shed game where you again had the person on one seat calling out. This time it was letters - you took one step for a small letter in your name and two for a capital letter and of course double letters meant two steps. You took the biggest steps you could naturally so you got next go, and if you were friends with someone you called out letters from their name so they would get across quickly and if you didn't like anyone you didn't call out their letters - it was as simple as that. Zs were not very popular as not many people had them in their names. Of course you were at an advantage if you had three long names like Elizabeth, Margaret McDonald instead of Mary Jane Smith.

We also played a game of throwing a tennis ball over the shelter shed and everyone running round the other side. It was a team game.

And there was fighting with the Catholics as you went to school. If you were scared of the Doolans this week you went round the block the other way, and if you were warring with the Zagamis you went the other way - *"Catholics dogs, sitting on logs, eating maggots out of frogs."*



There were also other games: Poison Ball, Brandy, Tiggy, Hospital Tiggy, Simon Says. It was girls' games and boys' games, never mixed, and at our school it was separation between the little side and the big side and you graduated when you got into the big grades - grade four.

As a teacher I played many games with my preps - number games for teaching skills - skittles, knock down the skittle and do the sum; catching fish with magnets on string to get the paper clip on the fish and doing that sum; flash card games; games outside - "What's the time Mr. Wolf?" and the shrieks of the little kids when Mr. Wolf said "dinner time" and they had to run. The anticipation must have been terrible. Drop the Hanky, In and Out the Window, Keepings Off with a ball, Oranges and Lemons and having to make the decision between a gold ball or a silver apple and going behind that person and then the Tug-o-War between the two sides.

Beatty Blennerhassett



## **BOOK REVIEW**

### ***American Children's Folklore* by Simon Bronner**

Reviewed by Gwenda Davey

Simon Bronner's *American Children's Folklore* (August House, Little Rock) was first published in 1988 and was awarded the 1990 Opie Prize by the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society for 'an outstanding contribution to the understanding of the folklore and folklife of children'. Bronner's book also deserves some kind of award for the length of its sub-title:

*A Book of Rhymes, Games, Jokes, Stories, Secret Languages, Beliefs and Camp Legends for Parents, Grandparents, Teachers, Counsellors and all Adults who were Once Children.*

*American Children's Folklore* is a most valuable addition to the field of children's folklore documentation and scholarship. It contains ten chapters which deal with Speech, Rhymes of Play, Autograph Album Inscriptions, Song Parodies, Riddles and Jokes, Tales and Legends, Beliefs and Customs, Non-singing Games and Toys and Constructions. The book is well illustrated with photographs and diagrams, and includes an Introduction by W.K.McNeil who is from the Ozark Folk Center, Mountain View, Arkansas, and is also the General Editor of the American Folklore Series of which Bronner's book is a part.

Simon Bronner introduces his ten chapters with an introductory Overview in which he elaborates his objectives in producing *American Children's*



**Folklore**, a book which aims to 'bring children's folklore up-to-date'. Bronner writes that:

*... my purpose in this book is to present and preserve a representative, but not comprehensive, sample of children's folklore in modern American life. This collection reports what children really have to say, and not necessarily what we like to hear. No, children's folklore is not all the sweetness and light of 'Ring Around the Rosies'. And no, it is not stuck in a past golden age. Yes, it thrives in the city as well as the country, in our modern times much as it did in pioneer days, among rich children and poor, girls and boys, of all ethnic groups and religions. It adapts to changing times and comments on them. It works hard for its living.*

Bronner has collected children's folklore for 'more than a decade' in Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New York and Pennsylvania, and has added to this collection 'well-documented examples from folklore archives around the country'. Most of Bronner's examples were collected from children themselves, although he has also included in his book some adult recollections to cover the period immediately after World War II. In his Overview, he also considers 'what the future holds for children's culture'. He discusses the important issue (frequently raised in this Newsletter) of the growing adult regulation of children's play and free time, and cites the growing restrictions on children's participation in Halloween as an example (see also this Editorial). Despite his obvious regrets in this matter, Bronner is no Cassandra; like all good folklorists, he knows that children 'will likely find, or create, some other folk practice to satisfy the same

needs'.

**American Children's Folklore** commences with an Introduction by W.K. McNeil which is an interesting historical account of the collection and documentation of children's folklore in the United States, beginning with Newell's *Games and Songs of American Children* (1883). McNeil also comments on the scholarly beliefs and preoccupations of the early American collectors, especially their emphasis on origin theories and on the likely demise of children's traditional culture which, as part of 'the vine of oral tradition ... is perishing at the roots' (Newell).

I must, however, take issue with McNeil's unfair evaluation of Mary and Herbert Knapp's *One Potato Two Potatoes: The Folklore of American Children* (Norton, New York, 1976). McNeil is more critical of the Knapp's methodology than that of any other work he has reviewed, and mentions the lack of data given about informants, including the place of collection, even though the Knapps have more place attributions for individual items than (for example) Bronner, who has none. Furthermore, McNeil criticises the Knapps' analysis as 'naive or simplistic', a statement with which I strongly disagree. As a practising collector and teacher of children's folklore, I have found some of the Knapps' analyses to be both penetrating and useful, for example their description of children's games as 'legislatures and courts of law' and as 'stages or laboratories', and their discussions of the formulaic nature of children's lore and its significance in terms of prestige and power. McNeil has certainly raised the importance of contextual information, an issue which should be noted by all field

collectors, but he has done an injustice to Marry and Herbert Knapp in singling them out for particular odium.

Much of the content of **American Children's Folklore** bears great similarity to Australian children's folklore, in type and function, if not always in detail. The types of folklore described by Bronner which I believe are not common in Australia are insults about mothers, dozens, Mary Jane jokes, grosser than gross jokes, Mary Worth rituals and Halloween figures. Ring games were common in Australia, up until the First World War, but now are largely obsolete. Bronner's book has provided invaluable source material for comparative study, whether with Australia or elsewhere.

In his Overview, Simon Bronner discusses in detail the function of folklore in children's lives, and in the life of society as a whole. He concludes the Overview with words which have much wider than American significance, and with which I heartily agree:

*The collection of American children's folklore, often neglected because of the preoccupation of adults with the study of other adults, broadens our understanding of the nation from the events that influence us to the culture than inspirits us. With children's folklore, we anticipate our future by realising our legacy.*

Gwenda Davey

|                          |                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ORDER FORM</b>        |                                                                                                                        |
| <b>NAME:</b>             | .....                                                                                                                  |
| <b>ADDRESS:</b>          | .....                                                                                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Annual Subscription (2 issues) ACFN. \$6.00 (in Aust.) \$8.00 (airmail)                                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Specimen Copy ACFN \$3.00                                                                                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Play and Friendships \$7.10 (Vic.) \$7.60 (other states) \$10.00 (airmail)                                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Children's Folklore Bibliography \$5.00 (Vic.) \$5.50 (other states) \$8.00 (airmail)                                  |
|                          | Ring-A-Rosy \$15.00 (Vic) \$16.50 (other states) \$25.00 (airmail)                                                     |
| <b>SEND to:</b>          | Australian Children's Folklore Publications<br>School of Early Childhood Studies,<br>Private Bag 10,<br>Kew, Vic. 3101 |

## eds. June Factor and Gwenda Davey

## PLAY AND FRIENDSHIPS IN A MULTICULTURAL PLAYGROUND

by Heather Russell

**CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE IN AUSTRALIA: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

by June Factor

## RING-A-ROSY

by Gwenda Davey and Heather Russell

**AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE COLLECTION**

Australia's largest children's folklore archive, housed at the University of Melbourne Archives.

Contains children's rhymes, chants, riddles, jokes, etc. (over 10,000 entries), photographs, audio and video recordings and play memorabilia.

**Welcomes public donations and visitors.**

**Director: Dr. June Factor**  
**Australian Centre,**  
**University of Melbourne,**  
**Parkville, Vic. 3052.**  
**Phone: (03) 3445358 or**  
**344 7235**

## KIDS TALK: COLLECTION SHEET

Please only use one sheet per word or expression:

**WORD (or expression):**

**MEANING:**

**USE:** Please write a sentence or two which shows how this word or expression is usually used.

.....  
.....

**How did you first come across this word or expression?**

.....  
.....

**Is this a word that you use now?**

**Yes/No**

**If no, when did you use it?** .....

**To give me an idea of how this word sounds, write down a word that rhymes with your word.**

.....

Please fill in the following details:

**AGE:**

**SEX:**

**TODAY'S DATE:**

**Which suburb, city and state do you live in:** .....

.....

**Which school do you go to? (Give the suburb, city and state)**

.....

**Where were you born? (Give the city and country)**

.....

**What is your family language?** .....

**Name (if you want to be acknowledged)** .....

Please return to:

Dr. June Factor,  
Australian Centre,  
University of Melbourne,  
PARKVILLE. Vic. 3052