

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This study explores my journey as the researcher in the process of a play's creation. The study examines the conscious choices made in the selection of raw narrative and documentary data and the factors that influenced those choices. As I am an experienced playwright, film and television script writer but an early career researcher, comparisons are made between the content and structural decisions made in the development of this particular work in relation to those made in writing fictional and formulaic drama for other media.

## 1.1 Research Question:

How is a verbatim theatre play about the Glenbrook Rail Disaster of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999, created? Implicit research questions in this process include:

What are the stories people tell about disasters in the physical world? What are the narratives around trauma? How do people remember a life-threatening situation? Does such a situation evoke similar or different responses? How do these narratives intertwine to make compelling drama?

## 1.2 Research expectation:

The expectation is that a verbatim theatre play on this subject will reflect the usual "Disaster" format, meaning that the experience of the disaster itself will be the major focus of the drama. In terms of narrative analysis the disaster is the obstacle that disturbs the world; physical escape triggers resolution and the denouement, the participants stories about closure, is brief. (Pavis, 2003)

## 1.3 Purpose of this study:

Using arts-informed/narrative inquiry as its methodology, this study inter-weaves participants' narratives and relevant documentary material to create a piece of verbatim theatre, which explores the Glenbrook Rail Disaster, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999. The play text, *Remembering One Day in December*, creates a virtual

reality using authentic testimony, where multiple voices are heard and multiple truths are told. Answers to the research questions, explicit and implicit, are embedded in the text and are intended to be illuminated by the text's performance.

The research is therefore a piece of Performance Ethnography further refined by its adherence to the rigours of the verbatim theatre form (Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007). Other than in the selection and presentation of the data the researcher does not have a voice in the performance of the work. The research participants have evolved into the characters; their names have been changed to protect their privacy in accordance with ethics. As *Remembering One Day in December*, the play, constitutes the research findings, I have permission from the Faculty of Education and Social Work to include it here in its entirety, as is customary with this kind of research. Consequently the word limit in this study has been exceeded.

## **1.4 Prologue**

### **1.4.1 About the researcher**

I graduated from NIDA with an Acting Diploma in 1976. I worked in theatre, film, radio and television as a performer and began writing drama for all media a decade later. By 2000 I was writing and editing television scripts for particular television series. This work involved ensuring scripts delivered by writers contracted to work on the program conformed to the house style, the schedule and location changes and, in terms of dialogue, that the regular characters' sounded authentic. I also had the privilege of working as a story editor on a particular series, which demanded much more input and creativity, as the role entailed devising story as opposed to dialogue.

I also took time out, when acting became available and continued to develop my own work as a writer. In 2002 I began work as a script editor on a very popular

medical drama. Six months into the job, after re-working scenes to meet schedule changes, I was told my scenes would need to be re-written, as “our characters don’t talk like that.” I had used the word “damn” as an expletive and the script producer felt very strongly that this was a middle-class word and would not be heard “on our ward.” After decades in the industry I had lost my grip on that particular fictional world and it mattered; it mattered that I didn’t know what would be heard “on our ward” and it mattered that I resented being corrected over such a small but significant thing. I felt trapped in someone else’s fiction,

Bowles (2006) describes representation in the media as the end point in a series of production choices; it has “some kind of relationship to something else we call reality”. (p.64) Furthermore Bowles suggests;

... as our real experiences of the world are necessarily more limited than the range of experiences presented to us in the media, we have no way of judging their accuracy and are more likely to accept them as realistic, adjusting our impression of the real world accordingly. (2006, p.66)

I knew the story resources I had acquired over time were the accumulation of other writers’ and editors’ impressions. In terms of people, characters, facing physical crises, I had no knowledge of my own. This research project is a way of gathering direct experiences and re-interpreting them into a dramatic form. It is a way of creating new knowledge and understandings of human experience in a time of crisis, a time so frequently mined for its dramatic potential. *Remembering One Day in December* adheres to the assertion that arts-informed inquiry is a tool to reflect an artist/researcher’s developmental process (Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Finley, 2003).

#### **1.4.2 The source material:**

The Glenbrook Rail Disaster was reported this way:

Seven people, including a five year old boy were killed and 51 other passengers injured, when an inter-city train traveling to Sydney ploughed

into the rear of the 400-metre long Indian Pacific after being allowed to proceed through a red stop signal one kilometre east of Glenbrook station on the Blue Mountains line. (Cook, 2000, para. 2)

The Judicial inquiry into the disaster concludes:

At 8.22 and 18 seconds the inter urban train W534 slammed into the motorail at the rear of the Indian Pacific. Given the reduced separation time, the slow speed of the Indian Pacific, its position in the cutting and the speed at which the inter urban train proceeded from Glenbrook railway station towards the cutting, a collision of some violence was inevitable. (McInerney, 2000. p. 15)

And both are true. But for the victims this was not the story at all; both statements ignore the human toll of the collision. However it is not the intention of either the News Media or the Justice System to deal with long-term suffering nor resilience, nor fortitude over time. So there is an intrinsic gap between public systems and private pain. It is this gap that *Remembering One Day in December* navigates.

### **1.4.3 The play's origins:**

The genesis of the idea to explore this particular disaster through the verbatim theatre form came in the course of a casual conversation with a close friend. As primary income-earner for her household, her partner's lack of aspiration, she implied, continued to frustrate her. "But," she added, as she often did, "He's never been the same since Glenbrook."

I knew she was referring to the train disaster. In fact the little Blue Mountains township of Glenbrook was significant for all three of us, for that was where we had all met, twenty-nine years before just after the Granville Train Disaster, which had killed 83 commuters and injured 213. The Granville Train Disaster is significant in this study, because its impact dwarfed that of Glenbrook in terms of scale. It remains the worst train disaster in Australia's history and it affected exactly the same geographical population.

In the light of the Granville statistics, Glenbrook ranks a very poor second. When my friend mentioned her partner's inability to "put Glenbrook behind him" I asked why; "Why did Glenbrook have such an impact?" My friend said that she didn't know; he wouldn't talk about it.

What was it then, that couldn't be talked about? And was it not talked about because there was no language to describe what took place or was it not talked about because survivors, such as my friend's partner, felt their stories were inappropriate, insignificant or irrelevant? These questions triggered the investigative process.

#### **1.4.4 Part of the landscape:**

My lived experience reinforced by initial research suggests that there is a strong sense of Blue Mountain identity and that this is based primarily on the nature of the landscape.

Because the country is rugged, with steep cliffs and narrow valleys and because the Blue Mountains is a vast, heavily timbered National Park, the population lives with the constant threat of bushfires. Living there is an active and conscious choice. The nature of the landscape restricts access to and from the mountains; the highway and the railway often run parallel to each other, both are like arteries to the city, there are no alternative routes. Because road accidents frequently closed the highway in the past, a massive up-grade has taken place. At the time of the Glenbrook rail disaster, the same could not be said of New South Wales Railways. Initial research indicated that train travel was regarded as risky but convenient. And train travel encouraged the development of quite particular relationships. People sat in the same seats going to and coming from work for years and this bred a familiarity and reinforced a sense of community that was quite independent from other areas of the passengers' lives.

"Martin", one of the participants in the project, elaborates on the train culture:

**Martin:** ...they know each other. And this one goes to sleep and they wake him up, so they don't miss their stop and get carried on and all that. Or someone is retiring from their job; they have a little birthday party on the train for them and all that.

The uniqueness of the commuters' relationships would heighten the dramatic potential, affording rich opportunities to plumb tension, I hoped, between the moment of impact and the process of escape. For it was in this period I anticipated that the play would sit. The selection of content however proved to be far more problematic.

### **1.5 Overview of the dissertation**

This chapter discussed the researcher's background and why that has influenced the research question, the research hypothesis and the execution of the research text. The following chapter, the Literature Review, explores the evolving status of performed research in qualitative studies and examines how its capacity to present multiples truths, as well as illuminate liminal moments of cultural change could contribute to this increasing interest. The chapter then examines the reductive nature of performed cultural content in a changing media landscape, when media conglomerates and technology reinforce globalism over regionalism, and suggests that this environment directly contributes to a growing resurgence of and public receptivity towards the verbatim theatre form.

Chapter 3, "Methodology", navigates the research theory in relation to self-study and arts-informed/narrative inquiry. The chapter then discusses how the research theory influenced the research practice in the creation of dramatic narrative from participant narratives. Data collection and data analysis for this study, which evolved into the research text, *Remembering One Day in December*, is then examined in the light of the initially unanticipated inclusion of documentary material from the Public Inquiry into the collision between the Indian Pacific and

the inter-urban train at Glenbrook, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999. The chapter finally addresses issues of validity, reliability and generalisability.

Chapter 4 is the third draft of *Remembering One Day in December* and Chapter 5, Discussion, addresses the play's content and structure, the relationship with the participants and how that influenced the play's development. The chapter also explores the challenges to writers and audiences presented by the verbatim theatre form.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, Conclusion, examines both my personal and professional journey in the creation of *Remembering One Day in December* and the factors that influenced its evolution. I conclude this research study with a discussion of the verbatim theatre form as an accessible and supportive scaffold for the dramatization of local stories. I suggest that this form also nurtures basic playwriting skills: the capacity to listen empathically, to create authentically and to distill theatrically. Finally I acknowledge once again my debt to the participants, whose stories, and the detail with which they shared them, remain compelling.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In terms of qualitative research verbatim theatre sits comfortably under the portmanteau term Performance Ethnography, which Alexander (2005) defines as: “the staged re-enactment of ethnographically derived notes” (p.411). Notes in the verbatim theatre form are distilled from personal narratives and documentary accounts, edited to fit theatrical constraints and then performed. Through the juxtaposition of different accounts, spoken data is presented in a theatrical form and multiple meanings are created, enhancing connectivity (Cheeseman, 2005; Mienczakowski, 2003; Paget, 1987).

This chapter addresses the literature on the dynamic relationship between Performance Ethnography and the nature of its contribution to qualitative research. The chapter then explores the ways in which narrative and performance contribute to cultural understandings through the writings of both theorists and theatre practitioners. Finally this chapter investigates reasons why verbatim theatre is currently resurgent through an examination of cultural representation in other forms of media.

It is not the intention of this study to examine trauma through the lens of psychological or medical research. The participants are both victims of a disaster and the authorities on their processes of recovery from the worst of its impact. The play text which evolved from their stories is based on the researcher’s relationship both to the participants and to the creation of dramatic narratives for other media.



## 2.2 Performance ethnography

### 2.2.1 The current crisis

The difficulty of separating knowledge from opinion and belief has undermined empiricism as the dominant philosophy and, with it, the assumption that researchers could observe and depict the world as it actually is, depending on their criteria and methodology. A representational crisis at present beleaguers qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) maintain that developments in theories of social science, associated with the critical, interpretive linguistic, feminist and rhetorical textualities have skewed the focus away from what is being observed to who is doing the observing and the constructs through which observations are evaluated and recorded. They suggest ethnographers can no longer be perceived to directly capture lived experience.

Thus fieldwork and writing blur into one another. There is, in the final analysis, no difference between writing and fieldwork. These two perspectives inform one another .... In these ways the crisis of representation moves qualitative research in new and critical directions. (2005, p.19)

Because cultural knowledge is now seen as depending on what is in the external world of human beings and what is the inner life or experiences, there has been in recent history an increased interest in hermeneutics, or the belief that understanding is conditioned and limited by language. Language here refers to all forms of communication: texts that are written and spoken; body language; the personal or subjective intention and the collective framework or shared system of beliefs and interpretations. Central to the hermeneutic point of view is that any interpretation of meaning must take place with a context. As J.K. Smith (1993) explains:

In the paradigmatic case of the interpretation of texts, ... to understand an individual part of a text requires that one understands the whole text; yet it is

equally clear that to understand the whole text requires that one understand the individual parts....this means that interpretation can only be pursued with a constant movement back and forth between the expression and the web of meanings within which that expression is lodged. (1993. p.16)

In this climate the role of the raw narrative assumes a greater significance. As Chase (2003) points out: the narrative is ubiquitous in Western societies and "...all forms of narrative share the fundamental interest in making sense of experience, the interest in constructing and communicating meaning" (2003, p.273).

Furthermore the narrative does not only explain the immediate, it has a temporality. Over time experiences are processed narratively: we tell our stories, re-tell them, re-live them, we reach new understandings through reflection. In terms of research, narrative inquirers Clandinin and Connelly (2000) are concerned with how stories are lived and told, for it is in the telling of lived experience that meanings are made and these meanings change with time: "... we are not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum" (2000, p.19).

Temporality, context and language are integral to Narrative Inquiry and therefore Performance Ethnography, which relies on narrative for data collection.

Meanings are made through stories told in specific environments, meanings that may then resonate to create broader social understandings and add to the body of experiential knowledge.

### **2.2.2 Narrative as data**

Chase (2003) stresses that the narrative does not equate to responses elicited in an interview and recommends that there is a change in consciousness and receptivity in researchers. If it is accepted that we make sense of our lives through stories, then participants should be allowed to tell them and that "in

depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories” (p.274).

There is then an implicit interdependency between culture and narrative. As Turner (1993, p.1) demonstrates, they co-exist in a symbiosis, as narratives are produced within a cultural context and therefore they become articulations of the values, beliefs and the ideology of the culture. Turner further extends his analysis of cultural ideologies and applies this to both the concept of identity and the creation of iconic cultural characters, characters that then tell our stories for us. In the Australian context specifically, Turner points out (p.87) that the literary convention of mateship depends upon a representation of character, which is ideologically opposed to the promotion of the individual at the expense of the collective. This reflects the white Australian’s relationship to the land is in direct contrast to other cultures.

....ours is not, like the American, a myth of the imposition of the individual on the land – of the politics of conquest; ...central to the ideology of the invented Australian ... is a myth of accommodation and acceptance, which admits the impossibility of conquering the land and merely recommends a manner of survival by learning to live in partnership with it. (1993, p.118)

Stories and conflict – inner, inter and outer – are the essence of drama. It is a small step then from collecting stories to performing them. The representational crisis in qualitative research has created and legitimized multiple criteria for evaluating findings. Just as there are multiple interpretive communities, there is no single interpretive truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.26). Performance offers the researcher the opportunity of presenting multiple truths. Mienczakowski (2001, 2003) also suggests that performed ethnography also offers clearer and more accessible research findings than is the case with written reports. He further suggests that:

The construction of ethnographic narratives into a dramatised form is, arguably, a logical extension of the current reinterpretation of ethnographic

practice and of the exploration of how ethnographic representations are constructed. (Mienczakowski, 2003, p.419)

Interest in what constitutes performed research is accelerating. Applications of theatrical and dramatic principles, particularly in relation to liminal performances of cultural narratives (Langellier, 2003), have mushroomed since the 1990s. Ackroyd (2000, p.1) points out that role play and simulation exercise are now used in the training of managers. Drama techniques are no longer confined to the empowerment of the poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized and the voiceless (Taylor, 2003).

Whether the audience remains a spectator or is encouraged to become a participant in the drama is a crucial evolution in performance ethnography. That audience members can become participants as well as spectators in multiple training situations reflects a growing confidence in our capacity to engage imaginatively with each other, as well as an increasing knowledge in the practice of structuring safe situations to explore and transcend our everyday lives. But theatre practitioners and drama therapists have encouraged audience participation for decades (Boal, 2000).

## **2.3 The cultural relevance of performance**

### **2.3.1 Showing and telling**

Audience members becoming active participants is a pivotal component in Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2000), in dramatherapy, drama in education, psychodrama and drama for workplace training (Taylor, 2003, p.6). Such theatre forms offer the audience or participant-observers the chance to experience the actors' catharsis and through that achieve new understandings. And this potential for an audience to act as agents of change is also being recognized by performance ethnographers (Alexander, 2005; Denzin, 2003; Mienczakowski, 2002) as adding a new and exciting dimension to social and cultural research,

enabling researchers to fully understand cultural meaning and social shifts. Because dramatic interactions can be constructed to occur economically in space and time, they can readily contribute to knowledge about when transformation can occur and how it can be sustained. Alexander (2005) sees information generated by the performance as having a universal dimension:

The power and potential of performance ethnography resides in the empathic and embodied engagement of other ways of knowing that heightens the possibility of acting upon the humanistic impulse to transform the world. (2005, p. 412)

Furthermore Alexander (2005) maintains that, as our culture travels in our stories, practices and desires, finding ways to display through performance the relationship between a culture and how it is experienced offers the researcher “a body-centred method of knowing” (p. 411). He advocates devising forms of theatre, which enable participants in and audiences of performance ethnography to engage with each other and suggests that researching such interaction uses performance as a tool and a method of understanding cultural awareness and social change. Participation by audience members in the dramatic scenario being presented means that they become agents of social change. They create new possibilities both through the imagination and through embodied engagement in the drama and thereby all the participants collectively have the potential to manifest other ways of knowing and being in the world. It is the principle of active engagement that is an essential component of applied theatre.

Dramatic narratives, Mienczakowski (2003) also maintains, can be developed to accurately and faithfully depict given social phenomena. Repetition of these narratives can then give a window to a culture’s complexity. Mienczakowski goes beyond presentation and suggests that interaction between performers, audience and a fluid text within a shared theatrical construct helps in the understanding of the multiple grounds on which cultural meanings are based. He believes that

ethnodrama, as an extension of forum theatre, a form of applied theatre, renegotiates its meanings with every performance:

It does this by intentionally updating its authenticity, repeatedly seeking validation from those about whom it is written, and responding to a consensus of informed opinion by changing the research report/script accordingly. The written research report and performances, therefore, represent the current stage of the research findings and are never a definitive, authoritative set of “fixed” social meanings.” (2003, p.422)

The degree to which innovative dramatic narratives inform a theatrical experience varies widely; mainstream theatre remains rigidly text based, interaction is formalized and controlled by the production. The movement of actors into an audience, for example, elicits a response but does not invite a shift in narrative ownership. However there is an argument that performance of any sort, in either mainstream or in an applied theatre context illuminates the culture, which created it.

But performance is always to some extent artificial; “a play is the imitation of an action, not the action itself.” (Aristotle in Hartnoll, 1968) This element of artificiality or heightened reality conditions the concept of authenticity. For an audience member, or commercial producer of entertainment, a play or performance might simply be a presentation of a dramatic narrative the physical world and its authenticity is a factor of its capacity to distract or entertain (Bailey, 1996); the play and its production are authentic, if they effectively distract and amuse. Other audience members, and theatre practitioners, demand a different experience. Spolin (2000) believes that the physical or known world is the medium through which artists access the unknown, the intuitive. Intuition, Spolin maintains, manifests in moments of spontaneity, when we can transcend limitation and become re-formed, as we freely engage in the world around us. A goal of the dramatic artist is to share these intuitive insights, perhaps by telling, perhaps by confronting, perhaps through satire. The concept of authenticity in this instance relates to the capacity of the play, the performance, to generate

new experiences, new understandings of human relationships both with the self and with others.

The perception of authenticity is complex and subjective; it relates to expectations of content and opportunities to engage in different dimensions. For some (O'Toole, 2006; Spolin, 2000) the artificiality of performance is simply a place where a journey inward begins; for others (Bailey, 1996) this journey should never happen. In the applied and verbatim theatre contexts authenticity is even more complex; it relates not only to the capacity of the work to initiate an inward journey but also to whether the work in the physical world genuinely reflects the specific environment that generated it.

### **2.3.2 Mainstream theatre & mindlessness**

Bailey (1996, p1) disputes the value of “cultural performance, or social drama, or ritual statement or theatre or narrative or text” because all metamodels, like those mentioned, simplify the real world:

A play – what occurs in a theatre – is a form of playing: activity that is not real, not serious, not work. A play is not real, because it is always a simplification of reality. People presented in a performance are not particular individuals but roles, parts to be played, ultimately stereotypes. (1996, p.2)

This suggests to me that there is an implicit assumption that all cultural performance content has distraction and entertainment as its primary value. While this might be true for big budget productions like *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *The Lion King*, entertainment value is not the primary consideration for productions of new work and classic revivals. Plays can be chosen for multiple reasons and all of them involve risk; repertoire can reflect, for example, a particular ensemble's skills or inform an audience of injustice or, through satire, illuminate a current political climate.

Bailey is not alone in his criticism of mainstream theatre; Kershaw (1999) maintains that performances in theatre buildings are now concerned with an “encroaching conformism” (p.33), where culture is commodified for consumption and “where the practice of citizenship... through the common critique of equality and mutual exchange ...is all but banished” (p.33).

This is an extreme view of repertoire in my opinion and a simplistic assertion that a building itself dictates the activities within it, rather than those activities being a reflection of the team that work and create in these spaces. It suggests that there is no differentiation in programmers’ choices, whether it is for commercial theatre or subsidized theatre. And even within those two groups of market players there are different variables constantly impacting on production choices; casting alone for example can provoke awareness of inequalities even within a most conventional drama. The emphasis on theatre buildings as being responsible for conformism is also misleading; in most subsidized theatres there are a variety of venues catering to different theatrical and audience communities.

However Kershaw does see cultural performance as having a significant contribution beyond theatre buildings.

...revealing how many established, ideas, theories, traditions and practices have been shaken fundamentally by tectonic shifts in the cultural, social and political disorder of the late twentieth century....I write about performances in the contexts of the global media circus (protest events), imprisonments (prison drama), the colonial nexus (blackface minstrelsy) in the heritage industry (heritage performance) in the retreat into old age (reminiscence theatre), and in the merry-go-round of international cultural festivals (performative mazes). (1999, p.19)

Bailey wrote his article condemning cultural performance for its limited applicability over a decade ago. It is perhaps an indication of the speed of the performative’s acceptance that in less than a decade interest in its applicability can shift it from “a kind of mindlessness” (Bailey, 1996, p.4) to “a research tool” (Alexander, 2005, p. 412).



Bailey's continued criticism of cultural performance encompasses what he regards as its failure to stimulate the intellect.

It is an enticement to feeling, to unquestioning belief; an implantation of values, and in that respect it is a form of diseducation. It is designed first and foremost to make people not-think, not-question, not-calculate, only to feel and ultimately to act on the "truth" that has been presented to them. (1996, p.5)

He then modifies his assertion that it has no cognitive component and suggests that a cultural performance must have a coherency: "There must be a perceptible logic between the parts .... It is the constructed and contrived quality of a performance that allows it to be persuasive" (1996, p.5).

Conveniently Bailey separates logic and intellect, yet he recognizes that there is some cognitive component involved in the process of observing and being persuaded or affected by a cultural performance. So long as that logic is not disturbed or challenged, according to Bailey, the emotions can take over and the diseducation can occur. Feelings, for Bailey, impair the intellect.

Bailey, it seems to me, examines his culture through pre-feminist textuality, where receptivity is purely an emotional response and truth is a construct that is unchanging (Taylor, 2003).

### **2.3.3 Empathic intelligence**

Arnold (2005) on the other hand celebrates the blend of thoughts and feelings. Situations which stimulate both

...enhance intellectual and emotional maturity. When thoughts (cognition) and feelings can be encouraged to interact in dynamic ways, better learning, communications and leadership can occur. (2005, p.13)

Arnold calls this interplay between thoughts and feeling “empathic intelligence” and characterizes it with the qualities of empathy, enthusiasm, the capacity to engage and expertise; it enables transformative learning to take place, where new meanings are created and new insights shared and the challenges of rapid change can be met. Arnold continues:

There has been a mistaken belief that rationality, an important indicator of intellectual maturity, necessitates the subjugation of feelings. Feelings have been regarded as unreliable indicators of mature human responsiveness, particularly in intellectual pursuits. ... However once we become interested in the interplay between feeling and thought, we move into a potentially creative and dynamic space in which deep reflective thought is possible.(2005, p.16)

### **2.3.4 Changing spaces**

This is the space Performance Ethnography seeks to explore – the space where a culture lives, adapts and changes. Performance enhances the multiple meanings of cultural narratives, harnesses the imagination and stimulates the intellect through content and the emotions through character arcs. Performed research has the potential to increase cultural understandings by opening up the researcher’s text to allow the researched to speak for themselves. Although the selection of the material gathered in the field is still subject to researcher-practitioner bias, its presentation using the performative offers the researcher the opportunity of reflecting levels of complexity and relationship in a dynamic and relevant context.

Although Denzin (2003) maintains that performance ethnography, like any play, is most effective when it focuses on crises and moments of epiphany, the ethnographic performance may not adhere to certain theatrical constraints – like the presence of the ticking clock or dramatic tension; skilled actors working without scripts; the use of stage design and technology to support and enhance the production for the audience, to name a few. A proliferation of research lenses

or applications of the theatrical form have evolved to marry research and performance. The term “applied theatre” has evolved to address this proliferation.

It is not in the scope of this study to suggest that verbatim theatre should be seen as existing within the portmanteau term “applied theatre” (Ackroyd, 2000). However these two theatre forms do share certain distinguishing features in relation to mainstream theatre. Perhaps more than mainstream theatre, they are concerned with transformation, taking an audience from one way of knowing to another. Verbatim theatre does this through interweaving of story; applied theatre may achieve this through audience participation and subsequent reflection. But both forms are concerned with locality, whether that is a specific place or a specific issue. Although their content might have much wider applications, the genesis of that content is grounded in specificity.

It is, I believe, significant in that these two theatre forms, verbatim and applied, have evolved in a period of radical cultural change (Anderson and Wilkinson, 2007, pp. 153 – 170). Forces that have contributed to this change are discussed below but it is my belief that they offer powerful connective pathways both to culture and to our capacity to understand its diversity and so consciously participate in the process of adaptation.

## **2.4 Cultural narratives and technology**

### **2.4.1 Two minute truth**

Three new forces have combined to irreversibly alter the way we experience and understand our culture: technology in the Information Age, the concentration of media ownership and the proliferation of reductionism, as the philosophical underpinning of all mass media representation.

Truth is sacrificed in the packaging of the two minute grab. Australian Senator John Faulkner (Faulkner, 2005) said in Henry Parkes Oration that democracy is under threat through the relentless pursuit of the latest “scoop”.

News now comes packaged, enhanced with manipulative sound and image. Stories that don't suit simplistic solutions are dropped. Stories about scandals boost circulation, and take priority over complex discussion on policy....The short attention spans of today's media “consumers” are trained by infotainment that seeks to reduce our political process to a more boring version of “Survivor.” (2005, p.1)

Current affairs content, Graeme Turner (2005) points out, is increasingly dictated by public relations departments and media releases.

Tracking the fate of government public relations media releases – determining their success rate in being published, uncorroborated or without any significant change – has revealed that.... in television 60% ...were taken up and used without any corroboration at all. (p.11)

Turner (2005) suggests that the take-up rate of uncorroborated media releases for newsprint is probably as high as 70% to 80% (2005, p.11). Surveys indicate that for business news 86% to 93% (2005, p11) originated from public relations departments. Current affairs programs have increasingly come to rely on the authority of the hosts, rather than the “guests”. Content skews increasingly towards sport, celebrity scandal and consumer affairs and “there are very few long-term investigations mounted and very little use of investigative research as a means of framing a political or social issue” (p. 15).

David Hare believes that the cult of reductionism and simplification has created a deep dissatisfaction with the portrayal of contemporary culture:

Contemporary consumer culture makes us feel that people don't run very deep. The whole endeavour of advertising, newspapers, television, cinema, is to make it seem that people are no longer very profound and mysterious. It is to make us seem all more alike.... We are reduced in some way to less

that what in our most searching moments we know human beings to be.  
(Boon, 2003, p. 163)

It is against this backdrop applied theatre and particularly verbatim theatre have emerged as potentially significant tools in the process of re-evaluating the world we live in.

#### **2.4.4 The big picture**

Increasingly fewer, increasingly richer global media empires – AOL/Time Warner, Murdoch's News Corporation and AT&T – deliver a decreasingly diversified menu of news, current affairs and entertainment. Corporatisation has shifted the media away from enriching cultural capital - the way we understand, relate to and participate in our culture (Turner, 2005) and towards increasing profit and shareholder return. Economies of scale have meant a simplification of information, a reduction in regional responsiveness and an increasing standardization of media content. As David Edgar (2005) points out: "The problem with a television industry run on exclusively commercial lines is not the homogenization of the product but the homogenization of the viewer" (2005, p.19).

The situation of homogenized television programming in Australia is further aggravated by the decline in local drama content. While in the USA local content forms 96% of screened drama product, and in the UK it's 91%, in Australia drama content has plummeted to 24% (Enker, 2005). In 2003 alone adult television series production dropped by 71 hours (McCrossin, 2004). Adult drama production at the ABC is down to 20 hours a year in 2005 from 102 hours in 2001 (Whipp & Warren, 2005). A recent OECD survey about the levels of public broadcasting funding in 17 countries ranks Australia 16<sup>th</sup>, spending the second least and way behind other countries like Belgium, Ireland and New Zealand. Yet despite the low support, the national broadcaster still provides two television stations, four national and sixty local radio stations, two digital radio stations, ABC online and Radio Australia (Whipp & Warren, 2005. p.4). This output level

does not suggest a lack of public interest but a hunger for news, current affairs, for local content and for access to narratives that reinforce cultural identity.

It is in this reductionist environment that nationally and internationally the verbatim theatre form is resurgent.

### **2.4.3 Verbatim theatre goes global**

Concerned with articulating and reinforcing regional identity, verbatim theatre as a form empowered communities through its re-telling of stories, stories unique to that community, stories of despair and survival (Cheeseman, 2005). Like journalism, it always had a disposable aspect. But fifty years on and in a new millennium the notion of community is changing. Turner re-examines the concept of the community in relation to the media, suggesting gossip and celebrity culture now form a common language and create links akin to community transactions (Turner, 2004). “Community” therefore could be re-defined to incorporate a community of interests. Shared, now global, “community concerns” extend beyond celebrity culture and into global threats, like terrorism, refugees, displacement, marginalization, political spin and war.

Recent verbatim theatre successes on global mainstream stages would suggest that this form is achieving a profound level of acceptance, supporting the notion that there are global community interests and concerns. From Moises Kaufmann and the Tectonic Theatre Project’s *The Laramie Project* (2001); to David Hare’s verbatim hybrids (75% verbatim, 25% derived by the playwright) *The Permanent Way* (2003) and *Stuff Happens* (2004); to Robin Soans’ *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) audiences and critics have been enthusiastic in their responses: “*Talking to Terrorists* opens your eyes and alters your attitude” (Brown, 2005, para. 6). “*Talking to Terrorists* takes a subject surrounded by fear and panic and offers progressive enlightenment” (Billington, 2005, para. 8). “Putting this material in a theatre, rather than on television or in a newspaper, makes it more focused. It allows the audience to concentrate harder and lend the evening a vital edge of

being an activity undertaken as a community. This is not so much verbatim theatre as imperative theatre” (Haydon, 2005, para. 8).

With centralized and homogenized media broadcasts diverse communities become physically unified in terms of consumer culture. Therefore understandings are forged through a common language and experiences shared and reductionism in news and current affairs have created a cultural sameness, a regional vacuum and a global unity.

Kate Gaul<sup>1</sup>, an Australian director with a 30-year career in verbatim theatre, sees the current resurgence in verbatim theatre as stemming from an increasing universality of themes. Gaul directed the Sydney production of *The Laramie Project*, for Belvoir’s Company B at Belvoir Street in 2001.

K.G. *The Laramie Project* was about a specific hate crime in small town America but it seems to have caught the imagination of white middle class people around the world. Mathew Shepherd looked like everyone’s son, friend or brother and things like that don’t happen to people like him. When the world went crazy about that it was because of a deeply held affront that the white middle class feel – they don’t feel like they are different, but that crime says you are different and how are we to cope with that. The play is about comparison and violence. It is about how those two things are deeply imbedded and wedded together in humanity. The show was also about discrimination. But it was speaking specifically to the nature of hate crimes and specifically about anti-gay and homophobic behaviour and how at that time there was no legislation or disincentive to stop it. The specific story probably doesn’t matter that much. It is a play of Greek tragic proportions... Verbatim theatre is basic story-telling. It’s about going out and finding a story and putting it in a room where lots of other people can hear it. If we are losing our way in the bigger world we go to something smaller and start there. Getting back to basics and telling the stories of the community. That’s at the heart of theatre really. (Gaul, 2005, lines 10-23)

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Kate Gaul relate to an interview with Kate Gaul at Sydney University, on June 29th, 2005, conducted by Dr Michael Anderson and Ms Linden Wilkinson.

The risk is that without questioning how we are represented in mass media, we become cynical: disempowered and disenfranchised by our own culture (Edgar, 2005; Mackay, 2005). But awareness of this possibility creates opportunities.

#### **2.4.4 Countering culture**

Just as Turner (1993) noted, our identity is intrinsically forged by the way we are represented through cultural narrative. Bowles (2006) elaborates on the hegemony of mass media's values and its success in constructing representation.

...the many sections of the Australian community know each other primarily by means of media images....It is also the case that representation is a practice with habits and preferences of its own that have very little to do with what is being represented....The distorted demographics of mainstream television's imaginary Australia aren't there to capture reality, so much as to represent a formula that satisfied other television market and brand objectives. (2006, p.67)

It is in this environment that applied theatre techniques are gaining acceptance; inter-play between issues and participants, those that are affected and that which affects them, is seen and increasingly understood as a way of creating change. Applied theatre as a form offers empowerment and connectivity, experiences denied by the dominant consumer culture. And it is in this macro-media landscape that verbatim theatre, as a legitimate form of applied theatre, has been catapulted out of small communities and on to global stages.

As Hare (2005) argues:

What we are witnessing is one of these moments at which theatre excels. Once again the art form is looking outside itself – and more profitably than any other – to try and expose the way in which we all, as individuals, are or are not connected to the great moments in history....And if this kind of work does appear even more necessary and affecting at this particular time, doesn't that tell us something about the time as much as the work? (p.113)



However in the creation of his hybrid verbatim theatre form in *Stuff Happens* (2004) and *The Permanent Way* (2003) – both plays part fact, part fiction; part interview, part supposition - Hare himself has contributed to what critics like Stephen Bottoms (2006) refers to as plays that are “both manipulative and worryingly unreflexive regarding the “realities” they purport to discuss” (2006, p.67). In experimenting with the authentic verbatim form, Hare has potentially contributed it to its relegation to a form of “docu-drama,” or a blurred fictional representation of fact.

## **2.5 Restrictions on the form**

Authenticity remains problematic in the verbatim theatre form. Unless characters identify themselves or are identifiable through the play’s action, they can be seen as agents of the playwright’s bias. Therefore diversity of narrative sources, that great strength of the theatre form, is undermined. However identification of characters can slow the dramatic action and potentially limit an audience’s opportunity to identify with multiple points of view. Detractors of the form, like Bottoms (2006), maintain that without representational clarity in dramatic characters, the audience is not reminded of the playwright’s own highly selective manipulation of opinion and rhetoric. Bottoms(2006) suggests that the form is only authentic if it parallels documentary drama, when all text used is in the public domain and the actors consciously step in and out of their roles as interviewers or researchers and characters in the drama, such as in *The Laramie Project* (2001).

Placing such restrictions on the form would also place restrictions on the form’s applicability. As the verbatim theatre form is currently free to use text from a variety of sources, it is able to harness the many cultural forces that impact on its audience and how they tell their stories. Limiting how verbatim theatre can be executed would be a regrettable development, in my opinion, at this time of the form’s renaissance.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Interest in performed research is accelerating (Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007). The verbatim theatre form is just one of the ways in which cultural narratives can be explored through performance. The form charts a course through an event using authentic narratives from people and institutions involved; it reflects and illustrates how cultures work to both empower and repress. Traditionally, as will be seen in the next chapter, it investigated the stories of the marginalized or unrepresented. In a world of spin and media culture committed to generalization, there is an argument that it is not only the play's characters that are the marginalized; the audience might be as well. Verbatim theatre allows us to connect to culture through the exploration of multiple narratives, told in the vernacular by characters with whom we identify.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the methodology used in conducting this study. Research theory concerned with arts-informed/narrative inquiry is examined in relation to the development of the verbatim theatre play, *Remembering One Day in December*, and the self-study entailed in that process. This is followed by an examination of the data collection methods and analysis, including details of participants and performances of the play text to date. Finally issues of reliability, validity and generalisability are discussed.

#### **3.2 Research theory**

The research in this study is qualitative in nature as it subscribes to the “socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints which shape inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.8). This study integrates multiple narratives about a shared experience and translates those narratives into a dramatic form. Therefore the interpretive paradigm which frames this study is that of constructivism, where “knowledge is regarded as being constructed by the individual such that the individual creates meaning of the world, rather than discovers meaning from the world” (Gale, 1995, p. xii). Constructivism therefore recognizes that there are multiple realities and the researcher and the participants are co-creating meaning (Neuman, 2003).

As this thesis includes a process of self-study in the selection and honing of the play’s text, it is an arts-informed inquiry, where “I” am the researcher and at times the researched. Therefore I will appear in the first person.

Currently the verbatim play presented here is in its third draft. Decisions on content changes have been made through an interactive process – the

researcher with performers, the performers with the text, the researcher with audience feedback. For this reason LaBoskey's (2004) differentiation between collaborative and interactive research process in self-study methodology is helpful in the analysis of co-created meaning, because it implies an inclusiveness of all experiences in the creative process. "Interaction within self-study for the purpose of studying our professional practice settings takes many forms, in addition to collaboration among researchers" (2004, p.848).

Although LaBoskey refers to other researchers in this instance as offering potential collaborative input, in the case of drama there are many players. Participant-performers are experiencing the text on an emotional level that is unique to the time and place of the performance. Therefore their contributions to the text are valuable but the researcher-playwright remains the arbiter. The final choice of material is the product of exchange or interaction, not collaboration.

This notion of the playwright-researcher being the final arbiter of content adheres to the idea that the research, in this case a play, represents the embodiment of one's learning, that it is a product of both learning and experience (Ewing & Smith, 2004; Waterhouse, 2000).

### **3.3 Self-study**

Self-study makes the relationship between learning and prior experience explicit. As a methodology it can be used by both novices and seasoned practitioners to study professional practice (Pinnegar, 1998; Wilcox, Watson & Paterson, 2004). It recognizes that current learning is filtered through a continual recognition of the influences of past experiences in multiple fields. This is where self-study departs from practice-led research; although certain kinds of knowledge are generated through the performative (Haseman, 2006), self-study embraces reflection and analysis beyond the immediate practice arena. Both methodologies however generate research studies that can be similar in form. In the *Remembering One Day in December* instance, the research hypothesis indicates that I anticipated

prior knowledge would strongly influence the selection of data. Departure from this prior knowledge was integral in the self-study process.

While a considerable proportion of self-study literature describes its use in teacher and teacher education research, (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 2004; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Diamond & van Halen-Faber, 2005; Hamilton, 2005; LaBoskey, 2004), it can also be applicable in other practice settings (Wilcox et al., 2004, p.274). In my own case I am an experienced drama writer but have never attempted to create a dramatic narrative from authentic story. Through the process of self-study from field work, to script creation, to performed readings of different drafts, I was able to continually re-shape and re-define my relationships to both the material and my craft.

Although any artistic creation is an entity in itself and the relationship between acquired expertise and intrinsic inspiration is ephemeral, the process of self-study through the exercise of craft enhances personal practical knowledge or “knowledge in action” (Schon, 1983, p.49). Furthermore reflective practice encourages the researcher to think in ways that can communicate craft. Although Ewing & Smith (2004) relate their research to professional practice in education, they support arts-informed inquiry as a means of developing research outcomes through a conscious navigation of the interface between personal and professional lives. Such a methodology opens the researcher up to different voices, both inner and outer, and generates a confidence by the act of connection. In the case of the drama practitioner it is possible through self-study to find ways of articulating context and structure (McGeoch, 2005), and thereby find a craft language informed by intuition, in “a complex and as yet fluid discipline” (O’Toole, 2006, p. 4).

As a discipline, drama is concerned with depicting and understanding human behaviour; the forces that change it, as well as the societies that different behaviours create. Behaviour is understood through story and yet these

understandings are multi-layered, they are both subjective and collective. Therefore drama research is well-served by arts-informed/narrative inquiry, because it illuminates differences; it “has enabled the location of new epiphanies within texts and people’s lives” (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p.22). “Arts-informed inquiry ... can provide a balance between rigour and creativity, imagery and accuracy, the individual and the collective” (O’Toole, 2006, p.59).

In *Remembering One Day in December*, the verbatim play that forms the body of this thesis, I regard the process of self-study as being influential in the evolution of the text, as choices were informed by my existing craft. However arts-informed/narrative inquiry as a methodology supported the research study from the outset, guiding the vision and providing a pathway to achieving it.

### **3.4 Arts-informed inquiry defined**

Arts-informed inquiry is also known as arts-based research (Barone, 1997), arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2003) and arts-based educational research (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Diamond & Mullen, 1999). It is a direct descendant of narrative story telling (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and educational criticism (Barone & Eisner, 1997), which have both helped to legitimate it as a research approach in the fields of education, sociology and social-psychology. (Cutcher, 2004, p.44)

There is no single definition of what constitutes arts-informed inquiry (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p.9) but the following elements are seen to enhance the artistic character of a research text: the creation of a virtual reality, the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the use of contextualized and vernacular language, the promotion of empathy, the presence of aesthetic form and the personal signature of the researcher/writer (Barone & Eisner, 1997, pp. 73-78). Aesthetic forms may include: novels, novellas, vignettes, fables, poetry, prose, plays, reader’s theatre, painting, collage, sculpture, quilting, batik, mime, film, music, dance, movement or video (Anderson, 2002; Bettio, 2002; Biddulph,

2005; Butler-Kisber, 2005; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Crotty, 2001; Cutcher, 2004; Eisner, 1996; Barone, 1997; Diamond & van Halen-Faber, 2005; Ewing, Hughes & McGeoch, 2007; Jongeward, 1997; Mortimer, 2001; Kilbourn, 1999).

Arts-informed inquiry acknowledges that what we need to know and how we present such knowledge cannot be solely dictated by or expressed in language or numbers, (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Cutcher, 2004; Ewing, Hughes & McGeoch, 2007) and arts based representations can transcend literal interpretation and conscious understanding to “speak even beyond their maker’s means” (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p.41; Lather, 1995). Arts-informed inquiry seeks to resonate experientially; as well as adding to the body of knowledge, it intends to cause what Fish (1998, p.252) calls a “shiver of recognition.”

Audience feedback after performances of *Remembering One Day in December* suggests that the play invokes a heightened awareness of disaster victims generally and there was some encouragement to develop this as a universal theme. This heightened awareness is a most desirable but not a predictable outcome: that this play should have resonances beyond the text and the characters’ journeys. Such an outcome confirms there is a shared voice in the work between the researcher, the researched and the interaction of the play and its audience. This finding reflects a distinguishing feature of narrative inquiry, which O’Toole (2006, p. 64) refers to as “a discrete methodology” in itself.

### **3.5 Narrative Inquiry**

Drama is embodied in cultural narratives, just as relationships are understood through the shared language of thought, word, feeling and movement. If arts-informed inquiry created the research product in *Remembering One Day in December*, narrative inquiry created the data. Narrative inquiry recognizes that research is three dimensional – inward in its focus on feelings, attitudes and moral dispositions; outward in the recognition of the external environment; and temporal in its understanding of the researcher’s journey over time. Narrative

inquiry is also a way of understanding experience, through “living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social....narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Narrative inquiry also acknowledges and supports the shift in researcher-participant relationships, recognizing that the relationship will evolve a tension as it swings from intense engagement to objectivity.

Inevitably, narrative inquirers experience this tension, for narrative inquiry is relational. They must become fully involved, must “fall in love” with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81)

This inherent tension in the researcher-participant relationship creates a compelling complexity in the evolution of the data into art, which must reflect economically and meaningfully multiple stories. In order to create a whole, parts must be lost. In the distillation of text for *Remembering One Day in December* wonderful stories that totally informed character had to be sacrificed in order to focus the drama – “Dave”, the Police Rescue Officer’s story about saving a burning girl; “Rita’s” story about her humiliation at dropping buttons from on top of a ladder as an adolescent shopgirl and how being made to climb back up the ladder to fetch more buttons has given her a mantra in a crisis: “Remember the buttons, remember the buttons”; “Dan’s” story about the girl he smiled at before the train crashed were lost or rendered unrecognizable in the scramble to create a workable draft. And losing the stories caused conflict between an inner sense of responsibility and gratitude to the participants and the rigorous demands of play-making for artistic clarity. Gaul describes these demands in terms of tension and time.



K.G. The thing I have learnt about Verbatim Theatre is that you need a good crisis and a dramatic clock. Marginalised groups are in crisis and it is a crisis where you can say well that's right and that's wrong and we need to get social justice for this. You should be able to make a play out of anything if the tension is there. Somehow the theatre won't let you get away without either of those things not being present. Something's gone wrong and the clock ticks and there is a problem that has to be solved. Without that the play just meanders and people get bored and it never comes off. (Gaul, 2005, lines 1-9)

What emerged to bridge the gap between story and play-making was a commitment to the integrity of the work itself or "ethical behaviour....the capacity to decide what is proper, positive, generative, even humane, to do in the creative act" (Reimer, 2007, pp.1226). Artistic decisions need to be made with sincerity and with a rejection of artifice and cliché; in the creation of drama this can mean going against learnt concepts of genre, of formulaic outcomes. It is the nature of the participant-researcher relationship that rings alarm bells, that keeps the artistic expression authentic. It is the act of "falling in love" that sparks the artistic inspiration; the intensity of the connection, however brief, fuels the creative process, helping to forge a work that is both unique and honest.

In short, narrative inquiry involves multiple emotional transformations from field work to finished research. Drama has always woven fiction from fact; where narrative inquiry supports the dramatist is in its ability to provide a reflective and reflexive tool through which the researcher/dramatist can question whether material feels "right" because it is truthful, and relates to the experience of data gathering, or because it is predictable, relating to the dramatist's experience of witnessing drama as it is presented elsewhere. As transformation is the essence of drama and performance, it is little wonder that narrative inquiry feeds into not only the creation of drama but also the shifts and changes in the dramatist as well.

### 3.6 Catharsis

Theorists (Ackroyd, 2000; Nicholson, 2005; Sternberg, 1998) stress that drama and the theatre have always had transformative intentions; intentions to inform, to heal, to amuse, to unify, to raise awareness and all combinations of the above. The theatre has always been a place where a culture – its ways of doing and being, its thoughts, feelings and beliefs - is examined through stories driven by conflict:

...conflicts, of every size, involving any number of people, based on every human emotion, desire and need. In other words....every conflict ever imagined or known to man. (Sternberg, 1998. p.142)

The actor or performer experiences the emotions required in the story's telling, they are trained within their specific cultural context to express these emotions vocally and through body language for their audience. And after the performance they, along with their audience, experience a catharsis or healing release. In mainstream theatre the playwright constructs the denouement and the characters travel towards the play's conclusion burdened or blessed with new insight. The audience, identifying with the characters and the dramatic execution of their story, simultaneously shares in this catharsis or "emotional unraveling" (Mienczakowski, Smith, Morgan, 2002, p. 42). This might be expressed emotionally as a heightened sense of communality, vulnerability, dignity or empathy. An aspect of what Spolin (2000) calls "the human spirit" (2000, p. 16) has been made conscious, allowing for the possibility of change. Playwright David Hare believes this transformative process also occurs collectively and intellectually: "People think more deeply when they think together. That's what theatre does" (Boon, 2003, p.154).

Identification with the character (s) is fundamental for catharsis to occur. From the origins of our drama this relationship between actors, characters and the audience was recognized and honoured. Aristotle believed that the essential passions purged through catharsis were fear and pity. Twentieth century

practitioners believe catharsis can be experienced through a range of emotions. Brook (1972, cited in Meyer-Dinkgrafe, 2001) suggests moments of transcendence are rare but possible, when actors, play and spectators merge into a collective experience, producing total theatre. "At these rare moments, the theatre of joy, of catharsis, of celebration, the theatre of exploration, the theatre of shared meaning, the living theatre are one" (p. 148).

Catharsis however was abandoned by the Theatre of the Absurd; its preoccupation is with the metaphysical anguish and senselessness at the heart of the human condition (Esslin, 1961). It ignored rational narrative devices and discursive thought, disregarding traditions like unity of time, consistency in each character and the need for a plot. Language is a crucial element but what happens on the stage may transcend and contradict the words spoken by characters.

Verbatim theatre on the other hand is based in the factual and is concerned with empowerment and transformation. It tells stories of events, which the characters may or may not have any control over. As the characters may or may not have a relationship to each other, dramatic relationships can be created through the production style. Proximity on stage suggests relationship, as does song, as does tightly interwoven text, where characters tell the same aspect of a story from different points of view and catharsis occurs within the shared narrative. From its inception, verbatim theatre sought to identify strongly with the communities that inspired its creation (Paget, 1987), so the audience's catharsis is supported both by the production and by prior but perhaps fragmented knowledge.

### **3.7 Narrative in verbatim theatre**

One of its first proponents, Peter Cheeseman, Director of the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent from 1962, was aware of a relationship between dramatic narrative, community identity and self-esteem. Using the documentary radio and

film techniques, developed in Britain from the 1930s, Cheeseman gathered stories, edited the authentic text and re-worked the narratives into complex and multi-layered scripts. The influence of Brecht and the European political theatre tradition is apparent in both production style and characterization; this tradition allowed actors to step in and out of role, to engage with the audience directly and it accommodated different narrative sources, from intimate personal reflection to state-based propaganda and spin. For Cheeseman language remains the greatest reservoir of creativity; “Listen, listen to people talking,” he remembers being advised by radio revolutionary, Charles Parker (Paget, 1987).

By his third production exploring this technique of developing text, *The Knotty* (1966), about the life and death of the local railway company, he had “found what I had sought for a long time: the muscular strength and unselfconscious flashes of imagery that characterized vernacular speech” (Cheeseman in Soans, 2005, p.106). By telling local stories, stories about trials and achievements, using local language, Cheeseman realized that his style of theatre brought “that sense of pride and self-confidence that every district outside London desperately needs – so you don’t feel a nonentity” (Cheeseman in Paget, 1987. p.322).

Cheeseman originally asked his actors to go into the community and tape interviews; these interviews were transcribed, edited and those same actors would portray the interviewees, now distilled into characters. In this instance the actor/researchers are pivotal in the nature and depth of the data collected.

Max Stafford-Clark’s Out of Joint Theatre Company, working in verbatim theatre for decades, also sends actors out into the community but rather than record anything, he asks the actors to improvise what they have discovered and present it for the writer, as if they were the person they had just interviewed. (Freeman, 2006). The data collected is already reflexive; what is retained is what is physically remembered and prompted by the actor/researcher’s awareness of the data’s performance potential. The editing process begins in the field and the

nature of the data accumulated is influenced by the performative lens of the actor.

Nicholas Kent at Tricycle uses 100% verbatim “testimony” in plays with subject matter spanning the Hutton Inquiry into the justification for the invasion of Iraq to *Guantanamo Bay* and to *Bloody Sunday*, an exploration of the deaths of thirteen civil rights marchers at the hands of the British Army in Northern Ireland in 1972. Kent, committed to ensuring his audience is engaged in what’s happening in the world, declares the current challenge of verbatim theatre is “to give a play dramatic shape without distorting the truth” (Kellaway, 2004, para. 9).

### **3.8 Footprints – following the steps of local practitioners**

Two Australian verbatim plays were particular influences for *Remembering One Day in December: Aftershocks* (1993) because of its content and *Through the Wire* (2004) because it was the product of a writer-driven process. Paul Brown and the Workers Cultural Action Committee’s *Aftershocks*, a verbatim play – and film – about the Newcastle earthquake in 1989 was triggered by conversations between staff, members and friends of the Newcastle Workers Club.

Brown (2001, p vii) describes it as a local story, however the play, Brown and critics acknowledge, touches on universal themes: how do people respond to crisis, assume leadership, deal with death; what language do these people use, when confronted with disaster, and what do all these answers tell us about our culture?

Director Ros Horin<sup>2</sup> (R.H) did not intend devising a piece of verbatim theatre, when she began visiting a detention centre in Sydney, Villawood, as a curious citizen.

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<sup>2</sup> All references to Ros Horin refer to an interview with her at Rose Bay, NSW, on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005, conducted by Dr Michael Anderson and Ms Linden Wilkinson.

R.H. I didn't come in with a point of view. I came in with a healthy degree of skepticism – how do I know these people are genuine refugees? I thought I had to go through that; I thought in order to convince an audience, I had to be really convinced myself. So I was rather forensic in my questioning: Why? What had happened? What got you into trouble? So what? Couldn't you have lived there with that? Why did you have to get out? What would have happened? What were the political ramifications? So I guess I drew out from them very detailed stories of that moment that changed their life forever - the event that made them have to flee. (Horin, 2005, lines 16-22)

Her play, *Through the Wire*, evolved over years of interviewing four refugees and three middle-class Australians, all women, who became professionally involved with them.

R.H. They were the only four refugees I interviewed. I did not do a survey of 30-40 refugees. I just followed my nose and got to know these four people and their stories were so gripping and dramatic and extraordinary that they were enough for me. *Through the Wire...* is a story about what individuals can do to make a difference. (Horin, 2005, lines 25 -30)

Horin describes her process as “cherry-picking”: “I thought: I will let the material reveal itself to me” (2005, line 36). From that position, she selected the material that resonated mostly strongly with her.

This provided a blueprint for my own *Remembering One Day in December* process, both in the sense of beginning the data collection process without a fixed point of view and by trusting that the material would ultimately provide the dramatic text.

But neither practitioner claims to be telling an absolute truth. Brown notes that by the time the truth has become a play, it is already “a fabrication” (Brown, 2001, p.xx).

### 3.9 What is true?

Processes to create text might vary but no one form can be without bias. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) recognise that:

The interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political. Multiple criteria for evaluating qualitative research now exist, and those that we emphasise stress the situated, relational and textual structures of the ethnographic experience. There is no single interpretive truth...There are multiple interpretive communities, each with its own criteria for evaluating interpretations. (2005, p. 26)

Taylor (2003) concurs with the notion of multiple truths:

Truths are constructed from within the circumstance that people find themselves in, and just as those circumstances may change at any given time, so might the truths...Evaluation reports that aim to present such a unitary version of a complex whole far underestimate the power of theatre to present wide-ranging and inclusive viewpoints. (2003, p.109)

Attempting to portray the participants' truths was pivotal in the structure and content of *Remembering One Day in December*.

### 3.10 Data Collection

Based on research into collection methods and in consideration of the time and resources available, I had anticipated that narratives gleaned through interviews and focus groups would provide sufficiently compelling material to evolve into a play. From the outset I wanted to use only testimony; that was the main challenge for me as an experienced writer of dramatic fiction. I thought creating a hybrid form of 75% research and 25% imagined would dilute the entire enterprise and detract from the play's authenticity. The participants all came from either personal contacts or two advertisements placed in the *Blue Mountains Gazette*.

Although initial research led me to believe otherwise, early in the data collection process I became aware that whole stories would not be told in groups. Often participants would comment that they had never told anyone what they were now

telling me, that they tried to dismiss it, as they felt no-one wanted to hear what they had to say. So what I detected in my first explorations must have been the truncated stories used to deflect attention from less palatable memories.

Most of the data that became play text was distilled from ten interviews, each one approximately forty-five minutes long. Of these ten participants, eight have developed into characters and some of the content of the other interviews has been shared between these eight characters where relevant. I relied on accurately transcribing every aspect of their language to give actors an idea of characterization; I included laughs, pauses, hesitations, repetitions and tears. These inclusions have proved reliable indicators and actors have seemed to comfortably re-create the people I met and spoke to and listened to many months ago.

I did not expect to seek data beyond the participants. However all of them expressed dissatisfaction with institutions they thought would help. All of them found early psychological help of no use; all of them regarded the Public Inquiry into the rail disaster as deeply disappointing. It was in the field then that I began to realize that the real play existed between how the participants felt and how they felt they were treated, hence the title of the play: "exploring the gap between Public Inquiry and private pain."

This was quite a fortuitous discovery, because the verbatim theatre form allowed me to include excerpts from the Public Inquiry, and the legal language, so dry and final, contrasts so well with the more emotional vernacular; the Inquiry refers to "a collision of some violence" whereas "Dave", the Police Rescue Officer refers to 7.5 metres being compressed into a space of about 50 centimetres; "Rita" describes the collision as being "just like a tin opener, it was just like pssschoooo!".



The inclusion of the Public Inquiry also influenced the structure of the play. I divided the play text into chapters; there are five chapters in all and the Public Inquiry is chapter three, right in the middle of the play. It provides the analysis of the rail disaster. But the heart of the play is in chapters four and five, the experience of the disaster as it happened and the aftermath. Each cast member plays at least two roles.

### **3.11 Data analysis**

The entire play in its third draft form is included in this study as Chapter 4. The play so far has had three public readings and participants have attended at least one of them. I initiated the first reading using actors that live in the Blue Mountains; a member of that first cast has arranged the following two. The play currently runs approximately eighty-two minutes and feedback after readings suggests that though the Public Inquiry material is complicated, it is a valuable inclusion. After the second public reading I edited the text, after comments from the actors that the final chapter, "Aftermath" went too long and some of them felt they were beginning to sound self-pitying. I felt listening to it that the same emotional note was being hit too many times.

The audiences have been small but enthusiastic, with one exception. This is discussed in Chapter 5. As stated earlier some audience members have undergone some kind of catharsis as they acknowledged their empathic response to the text. After the second reading cast members were met by two rescue workers, both of whom had been on site at Glenbrook recovering the deceased; neither of these workers had ever been to a theatre before, both of them found engaging with the play a powerful and positive experience. Although they did not stay for the feedback session, they waited for the actors after the reading to express their support for the project.

In my opinion the play is able to achieve a level of connectivity with audiences impacted by the Glenbrook Rail Disaster. Whether this connectivity can translate

to wider audiences depends on the play's ability to reach out with the more universal themes of courage and resilience and fear that are embedded in the text.

### **3.12 Validity, reliability and generalisability**

As arts-informed research embraces subjectivity and makes questions of objectivity and single truths irrelevant, the tenets of reliability, validity and generalisability cannot be applied in their traditional sense and must be reframed (Ewing and Hughes, 2007; Ewing and Smith, 2004; O'Toole, 2006;).

To ask about the 'accuracy' or 'reliability' of this sort of presentation of data is to ask the wrong sort of question. What we want to know is ... whether it rings true, whether it captures the dynamic form of something present in the experience of the whole. (Alexander, 2003, p.12)

Eisner (1996) uses the term 'referential adequacy' instead of reliability: "That is to say, if you went out to look at such places, whether you would see what in fact the person has described as existing there" (p.404).

The audience feedback that *Remembering One Day in December* has generated so far would suggest that it has 'referential adequacy.' Smith (2002, p.11) recommends replacing reliability with 'relatability', reflecting the extent to which the work resonates with its audience. Again feedback from audiences and cast for *Remembering One Day in December* would encourage the expectation that 'relatability' is present.

Validity in arts-informed inquiry can be measured in terms of trustworthiness (Mishler, 1990, pp.419-437). One way to improve trustworthiness is to triangulate the data by obtaining multiple perspectives on the event being researched. Such a process is inherent in the verbatim theatre form, as the juxtaposition of differing points of view both propels the drama and creates connectivity.

The question of particularisability and generalisability is potentially difficult in arts-informed research. However, although the research is particular in nature, themes usually emerge that may pertain to more than the case itself (Ewing, Hughes & McGeoch, 2007). Certainly in *Aftershocks* (1993), *Through the Wire* (2004) and *The Laramie Project* (2001) particular stories translated elegantly into the examination of universal themes.

### 3.13 Conclusion

This chapter examines the relationship between arts-informed/narrative inquiry as a methodology through which to execute drama research, which is both reflective and reflexive in nature. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology for data collection supported the deep relationships formed with the participants, as they shared stories, they acknowledged, for the first time. Narrative inquiry focused attention on the material, not the final product. The play was shaped after the data had been collected. This is in keeping with verbatim theatre practice (Paget, 1987), which is concerned with evolving drama from narratives, as opposed to constructing drama to confirm a pre-existing point of view.

The evolution of this study's verbatim play, *Remembering One Day in December*, is a piece of arts-informed inquiry; the collected data is re-shaped from raw narrative into drama, adhering to the demands of theatre and the verbatim theatre form specifically. Two local practitioners are acknowledged as inspirations for the *Remembering One Day in December*. Ros Horin's process of "cherry-picking" themes for *Through the Wire* (2004) gave me a direction for the process of shaping the content and Paul Brown and the Workers Cultural Action Committee's verbatim play about the Newcastle Earthquake, *Aftershocks* (1993), gave me the confidence that a play about a disaster, without access to all the special effects of film and television, could be both empathic and gripping.

The methodology's validity, reliability and generalisability are enhanced by the nature of the verbatim theatre form, where triangulation of data is a pre-requisite for the presentation of multiple points of view of the same event.

The third draft of *Remembering One Day in December* follows in the next chapter.

# Remembering One Day in December

*A Verbatim Play in one act.*

*Written by  
Linden Wilkinson*

© *Third draft, July, 2007*

# Remembering One Day in December

## *Characters*

<b>Martin</b>	a railway worker, mid 50s, a union man
<b>Stu</b>	a passenger, mid 50s but a boy at heart
<b>Chris</b>	a passenger, early 30s, sensitive, haunted, angry
<b>Susan</b>	a passenger, late 40s, English, reserved, polite
<b>Rita</b>	a passenger, vibrant, big personality, loves to connect
<b>Mitch</b>	a schoolboy & a passenger, his real feelings lie between his words
<b>Dan</b>	a passenger, gentle, protective, laughs when emotion surfaces to cover pain.
<b>Dave</b>	a Police Rescue Officer, mid 30s, family man, tough
<b>Lisa</b>	Stu's partner, mid-50s, intuitive, over-worked
<b>Justice</b>	the senior court official
<b>Mulholland</b>	a signal operator
<b>Sinnett</b>	a train driver
<b>Willoughby</b>	a train driver
<b>Browne</b>	a railway control officer
<b>Psychiatrist</b>	an expert
<b>Railway Dude</b>	a railway manager

## Remembering One Day in December

**Ensemble:** This play contains graphic details some people might find – disturbing.

### Chapter 1: Living there

*All cast sit along the stage on stools.*

**Martin:** What makes the mountains special is that it is a small country town. We see each other in the street, we've known each other for years. You've never spoken to someone but you know that person has lived in this area all their lives. You've seen that person for many years and you know each other to say "Giddy" to.

**Stu:** You get your wild cards, you get your ferals and your hippies, round Leura it's got a sort of large gay population .... You get a diverse cross section of people ....

**Dan:** I came up here once, when I heard it was snowing and I hadn't seen snow before and I came up and saw the snow and it was beautiful . A really beautiful place. It's quite laid back and hippy and leafy. And yeah, I like that. I came up bushwalking and I have to live here! So I did.

**Chris:** Well, I kind of moved here for the rock climbing .... And I just moved up and started working as a guide in the mountains, taking people climbing and that.

**Dave:** Bush, vertical and canyon rescues, yep, that's the majority of the rescues we do up here. There aren't many Police Rescue Squads around now ... The fire brigade started catching up and started taking over most of the roles. But Police Rescue retain all the big areas, like Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong. And up here, because of all the cliffs and bush rescues we do, the fire brigade just weren't interested into doing that sort of stuff.

**Chris:** So yeah, I just loved the outdoors, you know. Going climbing, walking, all the canyons, mountain bike riding, things like that. And obviously then you get sort of more involved in the community and that side of things....a nice community.

**Susan:** With Ladies' Probus. It's an absolutely fabulous club. I'm with the Leura Home Garden Club ...I also go to dog training. I train somebody else's dogs, I'm a Pink Lady at the hospital and I visit two Nursing Homes.

**Stu:** A refuge. You feel secluded up past Glenbrook. A bit. Because I was born in Penrith....and I was in cubs and scouts and we did all of our hiking up in the Blue Mountains...

**Lisa:** When I first came here I thought: Oh, Glenbrook, you know. I thought maybe a bit snobbish. You know, it's supposed to be a little village in the mountains. I thought nobody would throw rubbish over your fence or do anything wrong here.

**Dan:** They throw rubbish over your fence. They yahoo of a Friday night when they're coming home. They break bottles (*laughs*). They do all the same things.

**Lisa:** But I love it.

**Chris:** But the problem always for me is getting work that's interesting and enjoyable, I guess that's for most people really ...it hasn't got the well-paid jobs that Sydney has....

**Susan:** I used to be on that 10 to 6 train, because it's two hours, you see. It's more than two hours, if you count going from Central to Martin Place.

**Martin:** With the Blue Mountains commuters a lot of them get the same train, sit in the same carriage and in the same seat every day of their lives, going to and from work.

**Susan:** Because when you travel on the train like that, you're normally on the same train going down in the morning and the same train coming home at night.

**Martin:** And they know each other, they're work mates. And this one goes to sleep and they wake him up, so they don't miss their stop and get carried on and all that. Or someone is retiring from their job, they have a little birthday party on the train for them and all that. They have games of cards on the train or chat to each other and all that.

**Susan:** And you're complete and utter strangers on the train but you get on and everybody just says: "Good Morning" and smiles and waves. There are four other ladies, who were always on the same train going down and the same train coming home, so now we go out for dinner once a month.

**Stu:** We caught some of the mountains trains when we first started commuting....us young guys from Penrith. The mountains residents always looked so dignified, with their Heralds and things ....they were quiet trains, too....mountains trains.... Very quiet, dignified....

**Martin:** That's the main thing about Granville and the Glenbrook train disaster, the people on that train would have known each other for years and living there all your life you recognize people, and I recognized a number of people that were killed on that train.



**Dan:** .... I think that's definitely the thing about the mountains is that everyone knew someone that was in that crash....

**Susan:** I knew the lady from Leura by sight. I mean, we might say: "Hello" to each other.

**Martin:** I was one train behind. And I could have been on that train, if I'd done a bit of shopping at the Penrith Plaza.

**Rita:** I knew some people and I spoke to them and I knew people that knew other people, who were in it. But they wouldn't talk about it. That was the thing: nobody wanted to talk about it. And one lady told me a friend of hers said it never happened. I said: "Well, she'll never get over it." You have to admit it happened. You have to face it. It's the only way to overcome it. Because if you don't, it's always there and something else will come and trigger it off and goodness knows what it will do to you. At least when things happen now, I can face it. I just feel trauma is a strange thing, you don't know about it until you actually experience it. Why can't people pick themselves up, wipe their shoes and get on with their lives and that's it! You don't sit and dwell on things. Well - there's always trauma.

**Susan:** My thing has been the little boy.

**Dan:** I think he was going down to see his dad. He had a Mohawk, like this. And he was all happy.

**Rita:** I did meet a man after and we were talking to him and he told us he was in the first carriage and he said he just saw the people disappear. Disappear. He said there was a woman and a little boy and he said they just disappeared.

**Dave:** Just before midnight, I think, we got the last body out. My God, what a big day. As a result I lost about 5 kilograms in weight that day. Close to 5 kilos. I was drawn, gaunt, wasted from the day, just perspiring, the exertion of the day.

**Chris:** You can never sort of forget it. It just obviously kind of sticks with you and I think, you know: bastards...so why don't they run it properly. So, why did you have to have that experience that stays with you forever ....you know, even though I might be over it. I can sort of feel like I'm fairly over it, it's always kind of there. You see trains, the Indian Pacific especially....

**Stu:** Yeah....I haven't caught the train for a while ...

## **Chapter 2 – December 2<sup>nd</sup>. My God, we're running into the back of that train!**

**Martin:** Granville, Glenbrook, Waterfall. One of the things that has always stuck in my mind is that New South Wales railways has killed more people in train disasters than all the other states put together. I work at City Rail and being a railway worker I'm very interested in railway systems and I'd have to say that New South Wales railways is one of the worst in the world.

**Justice:** At 8.22 am on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1999 a State Rail Authority inter urban train collided with the rear of the Indian Pacific Tourist train.

**Dave:** The Indian Pacific was a long and heavy train. 17 wagons. It was due to arrive at Sydney central terminal on 2<sup>nd</sup> December at 9.15 am.

**Martin:** The Indian Pacific travels twice a week, so twice a week it goes down the Blue Mountains.

**Justice:** The accident occurred on the main western line east of Glenbrook railway station in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney in a cutting through a sheer sandstone rock face, on a 270 metre radius curve in the railway line, which was on a relatively steep grade of 1 in 60. The collision occurred in daylight hours on a fine clear morning.

**Dave:** The other train involved in this accident was an inter urban, designated W534.

**Martin:** It was known as a four car V-set. It'd commenced its journey from Lithgow at 6.39 am; it was supposed to be eleven minutes behind the Indian Pacific.

**Justice:** The inter urban train, which originated in Lithgow, was conveying commuters to Sydney.

**Stu:** Yeah. It filled up by Springwood and Blaxland, I think, because it picked up a lot of school kids at Springwood.... And the other group were mainly pensioners, early morning pensioners... and a few workers.... And maybe mums....with small kids....even though it was a commuter train, they weren't all going to work.

**Chris:** Yeah, yeah. It was packed. Yeah. I don't think it was quite to the stage where there was lots of people standing...It was generally kind of you know ... most seats would be taken. ...so.....yeah....

**Justice:** The rear wagon on the Indian Pacific was a car carrier wagon called a motorail.

**Martin:** The car carrier, the car-carrying carriage. It holds about 8 cars or 10 cars: four cars upstairs, four cars downstairs. And that was the heaviest end, because that was a solid steel rail carriage and that would have caused a lot of damage.

**Justice:** It penetrated the leading carriage of the inter urban train for a distance of approximately 7.5 metres.

**Rita:** It was just like a tin opener, it was just like psschooo!

**Dave:** You have the driver compartment guard area, the vestibule area into the train, then you had a short mezzanine level, which had a say one, two, three seats ...7.5 metres. ... From the initial impact that was all compressed into a space of about 50 cms - an area about that big...

**Rita:** It ripped that carriage.

**Martin:** Ripped through the fiberglass of the inter urban; and that solid steel of that car-carrying carriage. Whoa! Really ripped through it. It went like a knife through butter. Whoa!

**Rita:** It was really tragic.

**Justice:** There were seven passengers and the driver in that section of the train. All seven passengers were killed instantly. The driver of the train avoided serious injury, as he managed to flee the driving compartment and ran through part of the first carriage, when a collision appeared imminent.

**Chris:** I was sort of asleep and you heard the door bang – like it was a really loud sort of bang....That was apparently the driver running back through the train.... and he said, he just said: “Hold On!” “Look Out!” You know, something like that, shouted it, you know, kind of really loud.

**Susan:** We heard somebody shout: “Hold On!” or “Hang on! We’re going to crash!” And then a thump and that thump was him jumping down the three or four stairs to go down to the lower part of the carriage.

**Martin:** He sang out as he ran through the carriage: “Run! Run! Get to the back of the carriage! There’s going to be a train crash!”

**Dan:** He actually ran passed the little kid and he yelled, I’m sure he yelled: “Get out!” Or something. But he could have grabbed that little kid and just tossed him down the stairs or something.

**Rita:** We were told everybody thought he was mad.

**Martin:** ‘Cos um he would have been filled with fear and running through the carriage himself. Oh, is this a crazy person or what?

**Rita:** He’d come through screaming, you know: “Crash position! Crash position!” It probably wouldn’t have helped those poor souls.

**Justice:** Dozens of passengers on both trains sustained injuries. Fifty-one of those passengers required transportation to hospital by ambulance. There was extensive damage to both trains and considerable disruption to the rail network.

**Rita:** Well, I mean, it started off quite normally and it was just an ordinary day.

**Justice:** According to the timetable the Indian Pacific was to pass Lithgow signal box at 6.28 am leaving a gap or headway, in railway parlance, of 11 minutes between the trains. It appears that the Indian Pacific left Lithgow some six minutes earlier.

**Rita:** You don’t think about things like that, do you? I was going to visit my daughter in Bellingen and stay with her for a few days. And I had a friend, Trixie, who said to me the week before: “Oh, I’m going up to Port Macquarie.” I said: “Oh, I’m going up to Bellingen.” “Oh!” She said: “What date?” She said: “I’m going on the XPT.” I said: “So am I.” And she wanted me actually to catch the earlier train from Blackheath, and I said: “No, I had tons of time and I’m not sitting on Central Station all that time.”

**Susan:** I was going down to work on a later train than normal, because my boss was away and there was nothing really urgent to do. But another friend from Bonnet Bay rang and said could I have lunch with her. I thought I’d go into the office, do what I’ve got to do and then meet her for lunch and then come home. So I caught that particular train.

**Chris:** Yeah...it’s kind of a weird thing. I shouldn’t have been on the train. It wasn’t like the regular train I caught ...um, I was working in the city and I went out to a work function the night before and got home quite late and they said don’t worry about coming first thing; come in when you sort of feel like it....

**Dan:** I was doing like volunteer work, in a social welfare organisation in Bondi Junction and so I was going down to there. And I got on the first carriage that morning and I walked through the first carriage – I walked through the front bit of the carriage and then I sat down the bottom level. I actually made eye contact with one girl that was sitting just down here. And we smiled, (*laughs*) as you do when you see people quite often.

**Stu:** I was working on a...it was a puppet, a puppet construction. Had my little pad that I traveled with each morning, that I scribbled ideas in. I was working in Parramatta... I was making rubber stamps....ah....retail job, "Light Manufacturing and Retail" ....yeah, I think I was balancing the dead-end, low-paid work with the hope that the puppetry would go somewhere. I was in the first carriage. Rear of the first – on the mezzanine level.

**Rita:** And I said to Trixie, my friend: "I'll be in the first carriage." I always travel in the first carriage. And she said: "No, can you go somewhere else?" I said: "Look, there are only four carriages. Look, I'll go in the third one."

**Chris:** I normally got on at the front of the train, because I had to get to Circular Quay... so I had to get to Sydney, then transfer to another train. So being up the front, you could get ahead of the crowd and get to the next train kind of quick. I went in through the front, through the front door and went in through the mezzanine section, where you can go up or down ....so I went through the mezzanine section, sat upstairs, and just sat like in the first chair, next to the window....

**Susan:** What was uncanny for me and I think nothing short of a miracle, when I got on at Leura I went, I had like a briefcase and my handbag and I put the briefcase down on the outer seat, downstairs where all the people were killed, I went to sit down by the window and I looked and I thought: oh, that seat's a bit grubby. I don't need to sit on that. Picked up my briefcase and went upstairs and if I'd have stayed there I'd be dead. It was as close as that.

**Chris:** And um... I was just asleep in that kind of half-waking, dozing kind of sleep.

**Dan:** I was watching the Mum and the little kid.

**Susan:** Because he and his mother had Just. Walked. Through. The Carriage.

**Dan:** He was racing around and playing. His Mum kept calling him off the stairs and he was laughing. I think it was because he had a Mohawk as well, his Mum made him look quite funky and quite happy.

**Susan:** They were going swimming somewhere. They'd been at the rear but he wanted to move to the front, so he'd be closer to the door for when he got off. He was a lively little boy, chattering away. Absolutely chattering away and I thought: I wonder if he's going to chatter all the way. And to this day I regret thinking that. (Cries) But um...

**Dan:** So I was watching them...And there were Penrith High kids sitting along here in front of me and I was listening to them as well. I don't remember what they said. Um...yeah

**Rita:** I'd just finished reading the Gazette and we were going through a station and I said: "Trixie, what's that station we just went through?" And she said: "Glenbrook." And that's all she got out.

**Susan:** And um got to Glenbrook and we were held up there and then we were told by an announcement that um there could be a delay, because the Indian Pacific had gone through and that it had stopped at a red signal and um so off we went and um.... And then as I looked through the window, because we were on a bend, I could see the Indian Pacific standing there and I thought: My God, we're running into the back of that train!

### **Chapter 3 – The Signals**

**Justice:** Along the section of the track between Lithgow and Emu Plains there are signals which are designated by numbers, which correspond with their approximate distance in miles from Sydney Central terminal. For example in the section of track between Valley Heights and Warrimoo there is signal 46.6, indicating that that signal is approximately 46.6 miles from Sydney Central terminal.

As the signaling system was not functioning normally, control of the train movements through the area was therefore managed by the signaller at Penrith signal box and drivers.

The Penrith signal box did not have a train indicator board covering this section of the track. The signaller had to rely on timetables and information he received from drivers to assess the position of trains. The geographical features, together with the absence of a train indicator board, made this area hazardous. It is described as a "dark area" or "no man's land".

**Martin:** A "Black Spot"

**Justice:** The Indian Pacific arrived at signal 41.6 at Glenbrook and came to a stop at 8.04 and one second. Accordingly it was almost 3 minutes ahead of the timetable.

**Dave:** The driver of the Indian Pacific telephoned the signaller at Penrith on the signal telephone, situated at the base of the signal stand beside the track, and obtained authority to pass signal 41.6 in the stop position.

**Willoughby:** Driver of the Indian Pacific signal 41.6 at Glenbrook. The signal is in stop position.

**Mulholland:** You are okay to go past the signal at stop and can you please report back to me the indication of the next signal that you come across which is further down the track.

**Dave:** The Indian Pacific departed that signal at 8.11 and 15 seconds.

**Justice:** The Indian Pacific then proceeded at various speeds, the maximum being 18 kilometres per hour.

**Martin:** Being slow, which is also the rules and regulations. You can only go as far as the road is seen to be clear. So the section from Glenbrook down to Lapstone is a very curving area, including a tunnel. You can only see around the curve sometimes only 50 metres. So the Indian Pacific was doing the right thing...

**Justice:** This section of the track is controlled by automatic signaling. With automatic signaling the signals are controlled by electronic circuits designed to sense the presence of a train in a particular length of track. The accident occurred because a fault caused signal 41.6, just east of Glenbrook railway station, and 40.8, approximately 1.1 kilometres east of 41.6, to go to the red or stop position.

**Dave:** The signal lights had both turned to red, because a fuse blew.

**Martin:** Yes, that's called the fail-safe system. If some an electrical thing goes wrong, the signal will always fail in the safe position, which is the red position. It lets the drivers know there's a fault there and to ring up a signal box or proceed cautiously.

**Justice:** Evidence has been given that there is no definition of the speed at which a driver is required to travel at extreme caution.

**Martin:** The Glenbrook Train Disaster, a lot of railway workers say it was human error, the railway workers themselves, and because in that case there was a defective red signal, which happens every day on the railway system, it's so common. A cheap 20 cent light globe goes out and of course a signal goes from green to red. And, of course, being an automatic signal, the rules and regulations for passing signals are stop; the train driver just has to ring up the signal box and the signal man can tell him: oh defective signal and you're ok to pass it. So that's what happened on this occasion.

**Justice:** There is no single integrated system of communications between the various trains, signalers and controllers involved in operations on the rail network. In the case of this particular accident there were five different communications systems involved.

**Martin:** Permission to go through an automatic signal at stop could only be obtained using either signal telephones outside the train next to the track or the Metronet system, which the driver can use by pressing a button on a console in the driver's compartment. The Indian Pacific had to use signal telephones, the inter urban had Metronet.

**Dave:** 8.12 am:

**Browne:** West Control to the driver of W534.

**Sinnett:** Yes, mate.

**Browne:** I've just had a report there from the driver of the Indian ahead of you at 41.6 signal. Penrith side of Glenbrook platform is at stop.

**Sinnett:** Oh, right.

**Browne:** Are you around that area yet?

**Sinnett:** I'm heading towards Blaxland now, mate.

**Browne:** Heading towards Blaxland, all right, ok. Well, I don't know what – he just said it's failed, so I don't know if it's a red marker light or what the story is, it's only an auto.

**Sinnett:** All right, mate.

**Browne:** It's only an auto so just trip past it.

**Sinnett:** Thanks a lot.

**Browne:** Okay, thanks.

**Martin:** The driver on the W534 inter-urban thought he **might** have to stop at the 40.8, because the 41.6 was red but he didn't know the Indian Pacific was there.

**Rita:** The Indian Pacific was on a bend ...

**Stu:** You know that bridge, Glenbrook National Park? It was right under there.

**Rita:** But I tell you what, if that train had been just a little bit further on and run into the Indian Pacific, there would have been no survivors. That's where the ravine is. If that first carriage had gone over, it would have dragged everything. There'd have been no survivors and worse still if it had happened in the tunnel.

**Dave:** So what no-one knew, except the driver of the Indian Pacific, was that signal 40.8 was red as well.

**Justice:** At signal 40.8 at 8.19 and 3 seconds the driver of the Indian Pacific alighted from the locomotive to use the signal telephone to contact the signaller at Penrith.

**Susan:** And we also found out later that the Indian Pacific train driver had tried to use his mobile phone and it didn't work, because there wasn't a signal in the cutting. So he'd jumped off to use the telephone at the side of the line, and he couldn't get through to the – he could hear them but they couldn't apparently hear him - and we heard again afterwards, that it was a very old phone and you had to turn a handle to get the connection. And he turned it eight times but you had to turn it ten times for them to be able to hear you.

Two more cranks and he would have been able to tell them to alert our train.



**Martin:** It was really old technology. You had to crank a handle. Crank it ten times or so and a buzzer would sound at the signal box you were trying to contact. Penrith didn't hear it. The other bloke that should have been in the signal box had just gone off to get his breakfast.

**Justice:** At approximately 8.20 am and 49 seconds, Mr Sinnett, driver of the W534 inter urban, obtained authority from the signaler at Penrith to also pass the signal 41.6 at Glenbrook station in the stop position.

**Sinnett:** Yeah, it is 41. 41.6. I'm right to go past it, am I mate?

**Mulholland:** Yeah, mate you certainly are. What's that signal exactly showing, just red or ...?

**Sinnett:** Yeah, two reds, mate.

**Mulholland:** Two reds, no worries. All right mate, can you just let us know what the signal in advance says when you get to it, thanks.

**Sinnett:** Okay, matey.

**Mulholland:** Okay, thanks.

**Justice:** Mr Sinnett took the view that he could proceed with caution: a speed which would enable him to stop at signal 40.8 if that signal was at stop.

**Martin:** As the signaler Penrith hadn't heard from the driver of the Indian Pacific since 41.6, he assumed the Indian Pacific was on its way to Emu Plains.

**Stu:** We just pulled out of Glenbrook, that last little vestige of the mountains. The train started picking up a bit of speed....

**Susan:** At the Inquiry they asked him if he was speeding and he said: "No." And he told them that he was doing a much lesser speed than he actually was and they found that out. Somehow or other they can measure the braking or whatever they had and they found that he was going much faster than he'd said.

**Rita:** He wasn't going fast. About 40 kilometres? Oh, yeah. He definitely wasn't going fast. No way. Because if he'd been going faster, it would have been a bigger impact. I mean, it was an almighty bang, it really was.

**Justice:** In my opinion an impact speed of 37 kilometres per hour and a sighting speed in the vicinity of 50 kilometres per hour at 135 metres are the approximate speeds at which I find that W534 was traveling at those times.

**Susan:** Maybe if our driver had gone slower, you know...

**Note: Justice turns to Railway Dude:**

**Justice:** From your observations are drivers continually reminded about the desirability of on-time running?

**Railway Dude:** Most certainly. In a sense the issue of on-time running performance in a sense was king. It is up the front of everybody's mind, yes.

**Justice:** At 8.21 and 47 seconds, after the driver of the Indian Pacific tried unsuccessfully to contact the signaller at Penrith, the Indian Pacific slowly began to move off. At 8.22 and 2 seconds, it was traveling at 6 kilometres per hour.

**Chris:** Apparently the driver of the Indian Pacific had let that train sort of start to roll a little bit before the commuter train hit that train. And he doesn't know why but he just sort of thought the light was going to change and he just started to take the handbrake off, or the train equivalent, and let the train roll...and he reckons if he hadn't done that, it would have been obviously much more ...like many more people would have been killed. Like obviously I would have been killed ...yeah.

**Stu:** And when our driver came round the "s's", I guess he knew that he didn't have time to pull up.... Jumped out of his seat and ran through.

**Martin:** That inter urban had a hold down master controller braking system. So as the train was going along the train driver just had to hold that system down. So of course as soon as that driver left that compartment and let the master controller go up, the brakes would have come on. But of course the train was going so fast, 50 or 60 kilometres per hour of course going down hill, it would have taken a long while for that train to stop.

**Justice:** At 8.22 and 18 seconds the inter urban train W534 slammed into the motorail at the rear of the Indian Pacific. Given the reduced separation time, the slow speed of the Indian Pacific, its position in the cutting and the speed at which the inter urban train proceeded from Glenbrook railway station towards the cutting, a collision of some violence was inevitable.

## Chapter 4: Carnage

**Mitch:** I guess I mainly remember the noise...like really, really tearing, painful metallic noise, like a lawnmower running over rocks or something.....

**Dan:** I remember seeing the train kind of tipping up and going sideways. And seeing the ground that seemed to come closer and closer to the windows.

**Stu:** We were sort of thrown to our right hand side and I thought oh shit, that was a bit...you know sometimes on trains you get those lurches and bangs. And I thought that was a bit savage for a train just come out of Glenbrook...I settled down and oh, half a second, I don't know how long it was, there was – there was another really violent one, where I was thrown up out of my seat on to the

window, holding ... holding myself up from the window.....at this stage the train had lurched.. I don't know thirty...degrees, maybe more towards the other side tracks, so we could see the gravel come up at us and the train's lurching and this gravel's coming...

**Rita:** Even our carriage was tilted over.

**Chris:** ....it was like Godzilla had picked up the train, shook it, then threw it on the ground. Um....and ah....yeah, there was this black thing in the stairwell and I just couldn't figure out what it was ....what the hell is that? .....and then it kind of dawned on me. Well this is kind of like ....bad.... So there was this black thing in the stairwell.....it was this metal black thing in the stairwell....and ah (*begins to cry*) it was the Indian Pacific. Yeah. Squished everyone. Yeah. there was ah....(*breathing*) ....(*begins to cry*) Shouldn't be upset about it..... I didn't expect to be – to be upset. (*Laughs with unease*) There you go. Cool. So yeah...um (*recovering*) so obviously all the lights were out....and it was quite dark and there was a lot of dust in the air....so it was very dark, dusty, and like you saw people, you know, all one top of one another and bags and newspapers I mean, I helped people that were around me. No-one was really kind of that injured. Like you either had a bruise or a few cuts and what-not and I've got.....my first aid training, so I thought, well, I'd better go and see if I can help. So I went through the train and then got out of the train ...and I was actually the first person to go up to the window....

**Dan:** I remember everything that happened, I just can't hear it. I remember the other train coming through the front bit and just like that, it was really quite jolty. And um the train tipping up. And it happened quite slowly actually. But um there was no noise. I know other people heard really quite loud bangs but it was dead silent for me. Dead silent. I can't remember hearing a single thing.

And yeah, people getting thrown around and then um the Penrith High kids – the other train came all the way through and right up till behind them, pretty much to here, so they were forward like this. And afterwards they were just sitting there, shocked. Completely shocked. And you could see one of the people that were um killed...

**Chris:** ....this window ....was ....it was just like full of all the stuff and like people ..... there was two....I remembered there was two people, obviously - obviously dead that I could see sitting in the window of the train.....and it was awful.... it looked like a garbage compactor, you know...like sort of like the back of a garbage truck. I looked like that, just with people in it, you know, it was just horrific ....

**Dan:** ...I don't want to talk about that anymore. Yeah.

**Susan:** There was a boy opposite me that had knocked his head and he was bleeding quite badly. I had a new wad of tissues, so I handed that to his father and he had a baseball cap on and we said turn the cap around, so that the band of the baseball cap would hold the tissues on to his forehead. He was a brave boy really.

And then we just saw, well, you couldn't see....you saw just a little hand through the wreckage (*cries*). I suppose that's fate.

**Stu:** I think we were all just too stunned to move. I couldn't move. There was a couple of seats up ahead; an older lady had been thrown into the stairs. Some ladies went and helped her. I couldn't move. I thought, shit, you know? I should, I should get up and help but I couldn't move.

And the dust, the smell of the dust. No other sound, just the dust. And everyone just sitting there stunned.....

**Dan:** I was thrown forward into the next seat and my legs got caught under the seat in front and um I didn't feel anything at that time. .... The guy next to me helped me up. I can't really remember ... I think I was ... I ended up on the ground under the seat or something. It was just all in shambles, the seats all messed up but um –I remember him helping me up. And then um I gave him a cuddle and cried, then um I don't know what he thought (*laughs*). And no-one was moving for ages, it seemed like ages. But no-one was moving around or anything.

**Rita:** And we just sat there; we didn't know what was going on. Because our carriage was still on the line, you know. And a man was shot up, shot from the top floor down to the bottom one. Of course a lot of people said: "Oh, move on, move on." I said: "Don't touch him. Leave him." I'd done nursing and I said: "You never move anyone, because he could have damaged his back." And there was a lady, she just sat and screamed the whole time. That was really - I found that really very traumatic, just listening to this screaming, you know.

**Mitch:** There was this lady screaming hysterics that the train was going to tip over, because it was leaning over and you had to like get off the train quickly, before it tipped over and exploded and all this stuff....

I actually found out later that she worked in a shop, a pizza shop that my friend's dad ran and she actually hadn't been on a train for years ....I think, years... because she was absolutely terrified of them....terrified of getting in a train crash and it was the first train she had caught in years....(*laughs*) and she was in a train crash. Looking back on it I can sort of understand why she was so freaked out.

**Rita:** Eventually we got the man up and he wasn't too bad but he gave me his name and address. He said: "If I pass out, give them that. So they'll know who I

am.” So I wrote it down on the timetable because you’re so – you’re not with it. You really aren’t. You’re sort of – it’s happening but it’s not happening to you, you know? And I just wrote his name down and he started talking to me and I was talking to him for a while and he said: “I ran to catch this train.” And I thought: all these strange circumstances that create people to be in that place at that time.

**Dan:** And then a guy – it was very, very, very smoky and silent. Very smoky and silent in there. A guy down here started panicking, saying: “We have to get out. We have to get out – It’s on fire” or something he was yelling. It wasn’t on fire but um he was yelling. And then he started banging the window that he was standing next to. So everyone just watched him.

**Susan:** It made me feel worse because I was in the UK when the Reading/London train crashed and went up into flames, so, and to see that train, after it had been burnt and knowing that people couldn’t get out, was just horrific and then when somebody said: “I could smell burning.” I mean: that’s it. I nearly freaked out but I didn’t. I mean, I didn’t panic but my mind panicked and um there was a young girl next to me and she said: “Are you all right?” And I said: “Yes.” I’d knocked, I think it was my right shin, which it was bleeding and it had come up in a big lump. And my back was hurting, because we had obviously been flung forward, then we were flung backwards, because we had stopped and then we were flung to the right and you were hanging on for grim death really. Because otherwise you were going to be - I mean, people were flung all over the carriage.

**Dan:** I think there were people in the walkway. There was an elderly lady here in this section, where the seats are. I know I didn’t want to climb over her and there was – I think it was actually that girl that I smiled at when we came in and she was helping that woman. And so I sat back down, ‘cos I didn’t want to climb over her. She was bleeding. Then I think someone – yeah, it was a guy from a carriage behind us that came and opened the door from the outside. And then he came in and said that you could get out this way.

**Chris:** I went up to the Indian Pacific, the back of the Indian Pacific ....I remember banging on the door of it but no-one sort of came...and then, a little while later, someone sort of from the Indian Pacific sort of came along the track. And I said have you like called Rescue Police or someone like that or ambulances and they said they had.

**Dave:** On that day it was my second day of being acting sergeant. I was actually running round with books, checking things etc...and then our GSO, that’s a civilian, who answers the phone etc ....sort of came running up to me in a mad panic, saying oh, there’s been a big train derailment down in Glenbrook.

**Stu:** (*Laughs*) Next thing there’s just ... this really weird.....just sitting there and the door at the back... I could hear some voices....and I turned round, and it looked like two waiters came into the train. They probably were waiters, they

were probably waiters from the Indian Pacific. There was just sky out the back door and the two long waiters came through. Very weird.

**Dave:** I had one rescue truck and I told the GSO to recall the second rescue truck.... whilst we were on route, we had a highway control car, who had another rescue operator on board, call up from the scene and he indicated that there were some dead persons trapped in the train and a substantial number of injured persons.

**Chris:** I went back to the train and.... There was nothing you could do, I mean the people were obviously dead so that was....and then I think I just helped people out of the train... it was all sort of, you know, all over the place.

**Stu:** I was helping people and I was holding the train up (*laughs*) you know, bracing the train and getting the people out and the bloke says: "Aw, you don't have to do that, mate." Holding a train up! It was just natural, because it was leaning over. Afterwards we just gathered in the side of the track ....There were obviously people dead. There was one arm hanging out of ..... mezzanine.

**Chris:** That's where the people were killed, in that mezzanine.

**Dan:** I noticed a back packer guy before it all happened that was sitting up in – up the top there. Sort of looking at the sights.

**Stu:** He must have been pushed up, come up, been pushed up, because his arm was out the window. It was a high window...his arm was out the window about from there down...you could just see in.

**Dan:** And to this day, if I see an arm that's hanging out like that of a car that's going passed, I just get flashbacks all the time. I just start seeing - with him. I don't know why it affected me so much. I think it's because he didn't have any family or anyone here that saw or anything, like he was quite alone.

**Chris:** And then I think there was one other person that was in the driver's compartment as well.

**Susan:** Which apparently is not allowed but apparently it was done on a regular basis, especially from up here for some reason or other

**Chris:** Like a friend of the driver or something that didn't get out in time...

**Stu:** A retired train driver from the Lithgow depot. He was asleep. Didn't have enough time.... He was a bit older, a bit slower...

**Susan:** And we heard afterwards and I don't know how true that is, that it was actually the passenger that said to the driver: "Look Out!" Because whether the driver was looking towards him and talking, I don't know.

**Mitch:** Because I was back in the second or third carriage.... I got a bump, it was like a bump on my head, a sore neck for a few days ... I didn't really think it was that bad...I didn't realize .... I didn't realize that people had died and that we'd hit something. ...

**Dave:** We arrived a short time later on the bridge road side of the train, just near the ditch, I don't know if you've been to it? The bridge going over to the National Park, we pulled up just near there.

**Mitch:** Seven people, okay. So if I imagine a crash, where 7 people died, it would have to be a lot more dramatic and violent.....than what I experienced..... I knew that the train had crashed and I didn't see anyone really hurt.

**Dave:** That's what probably everyone commented on at the scene. It seemed a bit unusual. You'd hear the odd person moaning but there was deathly quiet. There wasn't that much noise. The birds were chirping away. Biggest noise you heard when you walked down there. It was a fairly eerie (*laughs*) type of scene. Yeah.

**Mitch:** I mean, I didn't realize people had died till that night because I just didn't go up ... I went walking back ...

**Dan:** I climbed over the seats and started going out. And um once I got out, I was just standing out there. It must have been a while. Standing on the other tracks (*laughs*) and that's when I walked up. I don't know, I must have been quite curious as to what happened. So I walked up the tracks and I just saw what had happened.

**Dave:** Right, fifty injured here, four dead, possibly more over there ....all the victims on that side had been pushed towards this window and there were several arms and legs and limbs and other torso out of this one particular window. I registered all of that. Fine.

**Stu:** Those girders just went through the front of the train like it was ...um, I don't know, ...so easy....It just went straight through...

**Dan:** And then someone raced up and said: "No, don't go this way. Go this way." So they helped me walk through. And then as I walked passed the other carriages, and they were all quite fine.... And then I just burst into tears. I just burst into tears and walked quite quickly. I had to get out. I just wanted to get out. And um – it was a long walk up to Glenbrook station.

**Dave:** All the passengers from the train were just walking up the tracks and walking off ... so I had to arrange for some other police to just round them up, mainly for what we call DVR, Disaster Victims Registration, because obviously people see this from the TV, my relative, hubby, wife was on that train, I need to call someone to find out if they're still alive.

**Chris:** A lot of people got there quite quickly...like sort of ambulances and police and fire and, you know, Rescue and there was like four helicopters just kind of circling around. We kind of had to walk up the train track. They recorded our names a couple times. And then it was kind of it; it was just like: "See ya, have a good day" ..... And they also gave me this tag, which I put round my hand. I had this tag which said "walking"...it was bizarre. And then I got interviewed by... ah... It was one of those shows after the news. I feel kind of strongly that people in that situation shouldn't be interviewed.... I kind of almost have no recollection of it... you know.... the things I was saying....

**Rita:** Eventually I just stood at the edge and waited and then these other men came and they actually made the fireman's, you know, the arms and they were tall enough for you to get in but it was still hard. They actually got me off. So I just walked along and nobody said what you were to do or where you were to go. We were just walking and there was railway people coming and then, when we got to this big gate, they said: "Don't go any further! Stay here!" And they said: "There's a bus coming for you." Well...I think I'd still be waiting for that bus. There were no buses coming.

**Stu:** The thing was ....people were passing their mobile phones around...a lot of people were on them, ringing ....and I just went up and stood in front of this guy and I didn't say a thing and he handed me... his phone and I rang Lisa....she was just about to leave for work ....I said: "I .... You need to come and get me..."..I don't know what I said. I said: "There's an accident...I can't .get to work by train."

**Susan:** I managed to ring my husband. I told him not to bother coming to Glenbrook. "I'm all right. I'm waiting to be assessed."

**Chris:** I called up my Mum...when I got out, I called up my Mum.

**Rita:** I rang my husband and he said: "Are you coming home?" And I said: "No." I said: "I'll be all right." I said: "I'll keep going." You know. "I get really bad, then I'll come home."

**Susan:** We were told to walk along the train tracks, back towards Glenbrook, where we'd be met by emergency services and ambulance people. They were assembled on someone's front lawn.



**Dave:** I think we managed to remove all those victims up to the triage area and get them out in fairly good time, in under an hour, I think it was at the end of the day, which is virtually unheard of in disaster terms, the speed with which we got those who were injured off that train and into a triage area. I think it was actually commented on during the actual inquest, the actual efficiency of how well we went.

**Susan:** People in the neighbourhood were wonderful. The RAAF personnel from the base at Glenbrook brought food and water, tarpaulins. It was their Christmas Party the next day, so they brought everything over. I believe they stayed for the duration. Along with the Salvation Army. I must admit they were fabulous. Can't say the same for the doctor at the hospital.

**Rita:** People said it was a lot easier than they had expected, because there was no people trapped.

**Dave:** Yep, yep. There was no big entrapments. Just after we got the last of the live victims out, we were split up into teams - two Police Rescue officers in charge of the team, supported by fire fighters. Yep, that's when it turned into what we call a recovery operation. A rescue operation is when people need rescuing, and then it turns into what we call a recovery operation, where we recover the deceased persons.

**Chris:** It was so kind of, you know, like traumatic, you know, the thought of, you know, dying just because you sat in that seat or that seat, you know....it totally seems like a kind of nothing decision that you make a million times a day, you know.

**Dave:** And er.... Yeah, at that point, shortly after that .... That's my team .... That's where we first discovered the major problem, which would be the major problem of entire rescue operation. None of our gear could cut the stainless steel body-work of the train.

**Stu:** Lisa came and picked me up .....in Glenbrook. As I came off the tracks off the road, it was .... I then remembered it was at the stop where Dave and I used to run out to the National Park. 8 ks. Dave was killed at Granville in '77 ... and here I was just getting off a train accident, where people had died and my old running mate died in another one. Sort of hit home, it all being at Glenbrook.

**Lisa:** At that stage he certainly looked a bit shaken. I took him to a doctor named Dino Faturi and we're in the surgery and I said, cos Stu's usually incredibly stoic about everything, I tentatively said: "Would you like me to go in with you?" And he said: "Yes." So I was amazed at that, that he wanted me to go in. And Dino was fantastic, because he had seen many people that day and he was shocked himself, because he was dealing face to face with casualties and he was

fantastic with Stu. And he said: "Look, part of your spirit is still back there on the train."

**Dave:** We just wanted to remove the top of the stainless steel carriage work, just to get better access to it and it was at that point we realized that ah none of the gear we had on our truck could cut the stainless steel bodywork. And that's what turned that into the thirteen odd hours of slow, painful, very tedious, frustrating work, just getting the deceased persons out.

**Dan:** So this friend drove down from Katoomba and picked us up. She picked a few of us up. She actually picked that girl up as well, the one I smiled at. And um she, on the way back up, this girl said um: "What happened to the little boy?" Because she was watching him as well. And then she said: "He must still be in there."

And we started – and I said it: "Those people are still there. What if they were still alive?" (*laughs*) She said there's no way they could be alive. And then, oh, it was just a (*laughs*) horrible feeling. That we'd just left them! And it could have been okay. But there's no way it could have been okay.

**Dave:** Just to give you some idea how frustrating it was, we spent an hour removing one bit of wood about that big and you'd be fairly ecstatic about that, because you'd managed to get something out. Virtually after hours of getting in, you get to a point, where you'd be able to have a victim in front of you.

**Rita:** We got in a bus and we went to Penrith station. My friend Trixie says (*laughs*) to me: "We'll go in the first carriage." I said: "You go anywhere, Trixie. I'm going as far back as I can."

**Dave:** So it's probably well over 40 degrees inside that first carriage, it was on an angle, which most of the people sort of felt like they were getting seasick, because what your eyes were telling you wasn't what your body was feeling, it sort of gave you that feeling of motion sickness and on top of that you had seven fairly badly dismembered bodies in the area. They were starting to sort of obviously decompose, become incontinent, I s'pose, so you can probably imagine it's a fairly ah horrendous smell and environment .....

**Rita:** And I said: Oh, I have to ring my daughter up, so I rang from Central. Had about fifteen minutes. She said: "Mum, are you sure you're all right?" And that was it. It was just as though ANGER hit me. And I sounded just like an idiot. "Course I'm all right, Course I'm all right! Don't be like that with me! I'm fine!" You know... I said: "I'm coming! I'm coming! Got to go!"

**Susan:** The ambulance took us to Nepean hospital. And then we were all examined by a doctor and my doctor was unbelievable. Ah: "What's wrong?" And I said: "I don't know but I have hurt my leg and my back and ah my knees"...were hurting. And he said: "That's just a graze. You can go back to work Monday." And

I said: "Well, I do have to travel by train" and it was like: So? And I said: "Do you understand I have just witnessed people dying?" And he just said: "Next."

**Lisa:** Stu only wanted to go to the pub. Why do you want to go to the pub, don't you just want to go home and lie down? "No," he said. "I've just got to, I've just got to look at the trains. I've just got to make sense of this. I've just got to go to the Royal and look at trains." So I took him to the pub and there were other people there, who had been in the accident.

**Stu:** A fellow came in that I knew. We had said "giddy" here and there...didn't know his name, he probably didn't know mine. But I knew he'd been on the train, he just had that look, you know, that shocked look about him. And um... had a little chat with him and um....Lisa joined us and he broke down and cried.

**Lisa:** This beautiful young man, with a tie sort of here and his shirt unbuttoned at the front, you know, a real mess. Such a sweetness about him, so concerned about the others. You know? And also his vulnerability and the shock that he must have ...you know, coming so close to death. Suddenly you're here then you're not. You know?

**Dave:** 'Cos the high friction thing leaves human remains generally fairly scattered in that area ...it took a fair while for me to sort of cope with that....being able to get in and rummage around bits of wreckage to get the victims out....working in the smell and the heat. A fairly unpleasant ... ah...a fairly unpleasant day....

**Stu:** Fuck! Fucking railways. Here I am sitting, going to work ...I was working really well, you know, on my stuff, I was really making headway on it and ...you know....interrupt my day?! With a train crash?! Shit! You don't die....well, you do. People die on the way to work.

**Rita:** I sat down and a lady sitting next to me and ah the train to Bellingham was pulling out. Well, the flood just broke and she said: "What's wrong? What's wrong?" I said: "I've just come off the Glenbrook train." And she said: "Oh, you poor thing. Where are you going to?" Do you think I could remember where I was going? I didn't have a clue. It had completely gone.

And the young – the lady that was in charge of the carriage that we were in, she kept coming and sitting with me. That young woman showed me so much compassion and humility; it made a great impression on my life. And I thought: there are people out there, who care.

**Susan:** There were hospital cars, volunteers' cars, whatever, and they had somebody already coming back up to Leura and would I mind sharing that car and I said: "No." Another lady from Leura as well. We didn't really talk about it in the cab very much. The driver just said: "You've been in the train crash?" and we said: "Yes." And he said: "Right. Well, I hope you'll be all right." And he was

lovely. Dropped me right off at the gate and um but we were in too much of a shock, I think, to discuss it too much.

**Chris:** I went home and I think I smoked like about two packets of cigarettes and then that was the last day I ever smoked, so it had some good ....you know....

**Dave:** And it was about midnight when we separated the inter urban carriage from the rear of the car carriage. We actually had one body, who was fairly well entangled in the actual wreckage of the train. He'd been right at the front. He was that badly trapped that we had to actually get the body out by separating the carriages. We actually thought he was two people at one stage, but he was obviously one person, who'd suffered fairly horrific injuries .....  
And that continued to just before midnight. After that we were just standing round, what do we do now? We go home now, I s'pose. I expect we just drifted away. ... Hmm, ... that was the day (*laughs*).

## Chapter 5 – Aftermath

**Rita:** In Bellingham the next day I went to a doctor. My back was completely bruised. It was a mess.

**Susan:** When we went to the right, I hit my ribs, my right boob and my right shin hit the bar of the seat in front and um I was absolutely covered in bruises that I didn't know I had them until a few days later. Even though I went to work on the Tuesday, I was still limping, because my shin was still very swollen and grazed. But I managed.

**Stu:** I just had to keep going because jobs are very hard to get in the mountains. Oh well, bit like getting on the horse, you know... the longer I leave it, the harder it's going to be. ....I took the Friday off work. In the those three days I went from Faulconbridge to Springwood.....That's as far as I'd go and I'd stood up all the time....and then I sat back in my old seat.....felt, well, chances are if I sit here and something else happens, it's going to be up the other end of the train ....

**Dan:** I haven't got on a train since. I've tried. I've tried. I try once a year, I suppose. But as soon as the doors open, I just burst into tears. I can't do it. I just can't. Can't do it. The train will pull up and I'll start getting quite nervous and the doors open and I walk up and I can't get in. I just can't take that step (*laughs*) into the carriage. I can't do it. I've tried with different people, family and friends. I just can't do it.

**Susan:** I said: If I don't get back on that train soon, I don't think I'll get back on. So I wanted to do it and um, Paul, my husband walked out on to the platform with me and the station master came out and he said: "Are you all right?" And I said: "Yes." Until I heard the train and I couldn't look at the front of the train at all, I just

broke down. I was terrified. Every time we - I thought was fast, I would just start. It was unbelievable. Unbelievable.

The person sitting next to me said: "Are you all right?" And I just said: "Yes and no." And they guessed. They said: "Were in the crash?" And I said: "Yes." And they – I had two or three people sitting by me – and one lady actually held my hand.

**Dave:** About a month after Glenbrook I got seconded for the night down to New Year's Eve celebrations just to patrol round the Rocks etc. And we had to catch a train down, past that area. And I found it (*laughs*) a very uncomfortable trip. I didn't realize how it affected me, until I actually got into it and it started moving off. I got this strange claustrophobic feeling. I wanted to get out. I just sat there and looked out the windows. Yeah. It was very uncomfortable. Surprising. Like the Pope getting on an aeroplane, I just wanted to get out and kiss the platform at Central, I'd made it.

**Chris:** I don't really catch trains anymore. For a while I caught trains but sort of like fare evade. I thought, you know, I'm not paying to risk my life; I'll risk it but I won't pay for the privilege as well.

**Mitch:** .... I tend not to sit in the front carriage of trains anymore... I don't think about it a lot..... I feel like I got off lightly.

**Rita:** I love train travel, I love plane travel. When I got on that first train at Penrith, I must be honest with you, it really didn't worry me.

**Dave:** We sort of didn't know how we were feeling. Still comprehending the day's events. It obviously affected me in some way and they announced that we were having a debrief, a psychological debrief, where the police psychology section come up and they have a chat. I was tossing up whether to go to it and decided: may as well. See if it helps.

The way in which the police up to that point did debriefs, was it was based on getting civilians round who don't know each other and sharing a common experience and you talk it through to see if anyone else was sharing common problems with what they'd experienced. But unfortunately it didn't work in a police environment, because I was sitting there and obviously superior officers sitting around me etc and they turned to the Rescue Commander on the day and said: "You want to start off?" And so, ah, "How did it affect you?" And he said: "I've been doing rescues for twenty years; it didn't affect me at all, I'm fine." And of course, so he said that and afterwards everyone said: "I'm fine, nothing at all, hunky-dory."

**Dan:** Then State Rail was um...they were quite keen to talk to people. To know what happened. And they said people are getting together at the Katoomba Community Hall or something. So I went there ...

There was lots of people. They were all sitting round in a circle. And um then everyone started talking about what had happened and um people were saying: I heard, I felt a bit of a bump and that was about it. And um... It started making me really quite (*laughs*) angry. Because that wasn't it. That's not what happened at all. And by the time it came around to me, I couldn't talk. I just couldn't say anything. And then afterwards this woman came up and she said: "You know, you should talk about it. It was really very rude that you didn't say anything." And I just lost the plot. I just told her where to go pretty much. (*laughs*) What gives her the right? And I just left. I couldn't be around there. It was just stupid.

**Chris:** I can sort of readily identify two things that the crash did for me and one was sort of like it had an immediate effect in that you kind of: what's the point of doing anything or planning anything ... And then the other side is, you kind of go, well: kind of make the most of it and everything you've ever wanted to do, do it, ...it's kind of a see-sawing between those two.....yeah....

**Rita:** When I came back home then, I thought: Oh, I'm fine. You know? And after about a day I just wasn't handling it. I was just going to pieces. Completely to pieces. And I was having these nightmares. I said to Don: "Give me the Gazette, I'm going to ring up the railways." I said: "I need help."

**Chris:** Yeah, yeah. They pretty much said, you know, you could go and see someone and charge that to them. They had contacts of people that was going to organize it, you just had to send the receipts to them and they'd pay for it ...and I took advantage of that at the time. I saw a counselor for half a dozen sort of sessions or so, yeah. So, yeah.

**Stu:** I think the SRA handled it pretty well....that's what the counselor told me, they wanted to do everything right on this one...that's why I got three sessions of counseling and I thought I was ...um....

**Lisa:** He had gone to counseling straight after the crash but he got nothing out of it. The counselor we went to later, to save our marriage, was bloody hopeless.

**Dan:** I went to the office or something above the shops in Katoomba and I think I saw them once. I don't know who it was. I can't really remember anything. (*laughs*).

**Susan:** One counselor that I saw was here in Leura. And I would certainly never go back to him again. I never needed nor had counseling before. I thought: me being me, if anybody can help me, it's me. Nobody else can really but – in hindsight I think if you have the right counselor, they can help.

**Dave:** I went to two or three more debriefs after that, after Glenbrook, and they did the same things, so it was a wasted exercise.

**Dan:** Not long after the crash, um....State Rail rang me and said this man is interested in talking about what happened. Would you be okay telling him what happened to his relatives, the little boy and his mother? And I said: "What?" (*laughs*) I mean I have to do it. I have to tell him what happened. And he came around and um it was the most horrible thing I've ever been through, just as bad as what happened in there. Um...because before he even walked up to the door I think he was in tears. And he asked very horrible questions: like how were they before it and I had to tell him that they were the most lively people in the carriage and the boy was just so happy, that everyone was watching him. His mohawk seemed to catch everyone's attention as well and: "Did they know what was coming, what was happening?" And no-one really knew what was happening, what was going on. And he wanted to know if they suffered. I told him: "I don't think so, it was pretty instant." And he said: "Did anything happen afterwards? Did you see anything? Anything at all?" And I think he must have meant spirits or ghosts or something. And I said: "I don't think so; I don't think I saw anything like that." And he left.

**Rita:** Then I decided I would definitely go to a counselor. I said: "I'm going mad, I'm going into shock. I'm crying. I want to run away. I don't want to be there." He said: "No, you've just got to be strong in yourself and deal with it." And I thought, well, I'll be okay. Six weeks later, I just wasn't coping. I rang the counselor. He said: "Rita it's going to take you months. It's only six weeks."

**Chris:** I had a lot of dreams ...just reliving it in a dream... it was just these horrific kinds of accidents and, you know, people injured ...

**Dan:** I was suffering from severe anxiety that I'd never experienced ever in my life. I would wake up in the middle of the night and be so anxious that I just felt sick, physically sick. And at the same time I would start feeling really depressed. And anxious. It's very strange.

**Lisa:** Every spare minute Stu spent lying on that couch watching mundane, inane, boring television. Day and night. My God! What's going on? As far as going out with me, well, forget it.

**Chris:** I've done a lot of climbing like around the world and ... I've been to some bad accidents....Glenbrook is not like some isolated case of some trauma....

**Rita:** I think I didn't feel in control. I felt on the outside looking in. I felt not there. Not in control. And I've never been like that.

**Dan:** Then State Rail said they would pay for me to see someone. So I did see someone. In Leura. He did help me, quite a lot. He would make me think of a nice, peaceful place where I'd think of walking through a nice garden with mango trees and very nice picking mangoes and (*laughs*) eat it, while I walked through the garden. So I was going to him for quite some time and he did help me.

**Dave:** It was probably a year after Glenbrook I started getting this unusual feeling, where I'd be feeling extremely tense and stressed out even though I didn't have anything particular to be stressed out about. Constant tension headaches and sort of getting some flashbacks. I'd sit back, just like this, and I'd start day dreaming and I'd just daydreaming about Glenbrook or that and soon the dream would get more intense. Yeah and I started sort of neglecting the family so to speak, I wasn't sort of much of a support for the wife or much of a father to the kids then, I was just sort of trying to survive this sort of stressed felling on a daily basis.

So that's when I went to the Police Psychology section at the Uni. I said I'm under a few issues dealing with all this. Unfortunately I caught the psychologist on a bad day. He was obviously a bit rushed on the day. I was sort of speaking a lot, as he was going round the room organizing things. He gave me a questionnaire to fill out, which I filled out. And he said: "I know what your problem is: you've got hyperventilation syndrome." breathing too much or something like that. Oh, okay. And he gave me some sort of action plan to deal with this, which I followed. It didn't do anything for me.

**Stu:** I didn't have a big social network at that stage. A little bit of talk down at the pub....guys being what they are and especially guys at a pub....they probably didn't know what to say. You know, place a hand on your shoulder type of thing. It was a railway pub, strangely too, Springwood.

**Lisa:** The unhappiness and the drinking and the inertia went on for some considerable time.

**Stu:** Lisa said it affected me for years.

**Lisa:** And somewhere along the line Stu started to become quite paranoid.

**Stu:** Some lawyers, Keddies, jumped on the bandwagon – wanted to set up a Class Action – generating work for themselves.

**Lisa:** He said; "People are following me." And I thought, well, that's feasible because of the claim. Class action thing, maybe they've got insurance investigators. Then he said: "Helicopters. There were helicopters, Lisa, and they were going right over our house and they were checking up on me." And I thought nah.... Helicopters? To investigate people that had been in a train accident? In a tiny little house ....I don't think so. But that gave me a terrible feeling; Oh, my God.

**Chris:** It's cheaper, you know, to pay compensation than to fix it. They fully expect there'll be another one.



**Dave:** I'm not going to weigh into that sort of debate. Probably could happen at any time. Be surprising if it didn't.

**Martin:** I've been working for the railways for almost thirty years now and I've seen a lot of unsafe practices from Management and Government down. They wait till an accident happens, people get killed and then they say: "Oh, aw gee."

**Chris:** I got summons to appear at the Inquiry....I couldn't tell you what they asked me. I can't remember ....

**Dan:** I can't remember what I said. I can remember the room the setting, waiting to go in. I can remember everyone had a computer ....*(laughs)* and I remember saying to someone: "They spent so much tax payers money on this."

**Martin:** All railway workers say the same thing about railway management. That they care about money and try to cut costs here and all that ...but they don't understand the railway safety, how accidents can occur.

**Chris:** So I sued State Rail. You know, when you screw up that bad, you should be sort of punished, I thought...so...they made me to go along to some psychologist to see if I was faking, you know, post-traumatic stress disorder or whatever.

**Psychiatrist:** He saw a man's body and a young boy's body hanging out of the window. He realized they were dead and did not take their pulse.

**Chris:** By the time the lawyers all took their cut, I ended up with like fifteen grand out of it.

**Psychiatrist:** He returned to the first carriage and saw the body of a woman lying in the stairwell.

**Chris:** Fifteen grand. It didn't feel proportionate to the sort of ... their fuck up.

**Psychiatrist:** My client developed insomnia and had frequent nightmares of the collision. He was punctual for the appointment and cooperative with the interview process.

**Chris:** Yay.

**Rita:** Anyway, that was when my sister said about this one in the paper, that lady, it was that girl that was doing the thesis on trauma. I had to talk to her about everything that had happened. Then they said to me I had to watch the train accident. She said beforehand you know my pulse, my blood pressure, everything was normal. When that came on, she said, it just skyrocketed.

The next day I had to go back and I went in the MRI. They had this beautiful, beautiful music. The Barrier Reef Rainforest and it was so lovely – it was so beautiful and then all of a sudden I had a train coming full blast at me. I could hear them saying: “Do you want to come out, Rita?” (*high-pitched*) “No.” And then they’d put on this beautiful music again and I’d calm down again, then they’d put the train on again. And all that. But I still think to this day that all that in, out talking about it, and getting it out of my system was healing.

**Dave:** So I eventually just went and saw the psychologist in Penrith, just paid for it, and I found just the simple thing of just getting that off my chest - I’d never really sat down and spoke to anyone about it, I probably didn’t really do that with my wife, I was probably adopting the macho image of big men don’t cry and trying to battle through it. It’s just telling someone how I felt about that and how it affected me. It all came in a big rush to this psychologist. It was like just a big weight lifting off my shoulders.

**Rita:** I went to Jim, the counselor. And he said: “Just talk about it, Rita.” And I did. “When it happened, how did you feel?” I said: “Shocked.” He said: “Then what did you feel?” I said: “Anger.” Then he said: “What did you feel?” I said: “Sadness.” And I sat there and wept. And I think that was good, he walked me through all the steps.

**Susan:** Two years ago I had enough and I went to my G.P. and I said: “I’ve got find out what’s happening with this pain.” I had it since the crash, lower back, into the hip and the knee, even though I’d had intense physiotherapy for a long, long time. I said: “I can’t go through life any longer like this.” So we had more x-rays done, when we looked at it there was arthritis set in the hip. So I saw an orthopedic surgeon and he said there was no choice but to have a hip replacement, which I did.

**Chris:** It’s kind of like your body doesn’t let you think about it - we’ll worry about it later, we’re just kind of going to do our thing, we’ll just kind of keep going forward....and um....And it’s not until a few years down the track and you can kind of look at it a bit more and it’s something that’s sort of quite traumatic ....

**Dan:** The anxiety stopped after a while. It did. Sometimes it still comes back, sometimes, but nowhere near as bad. Actually this year, for the first time, I went down. Put some flowers that I’d cut off from round the garden on the gate, where we came through. I burst into tears. A couple of days later I drove back down there to see if they still were there. And they were. And then I drove all the way down to the bridge that goes to the National Park and I saw other people had put more there. I didn’t know that they had done that; I thought I was almost the only one.

I don’t why it makes me sad but just other people are affected by it as well and it makes me sad that they are. It’s really a huge shame the whole thing happened really. A huge shame.

**Rita:** There was people, who were friends of mine, too, who couldn't come near me. And I found that sad. You know. And there were others that would just take me in their arms and that's all I needed. Tell you what; it was a strange thing to go through. And at the same time, I learnt that wonderful lesson: Compassion.

**Susan:** I think the human spirit is very strong.

**Lisa:** I was in the bathroom, and I just heard this intuitive voice and it said: "Be kind to him." And so rather than focusing on anger, frustration, whatever, I just started to be kind. And I think it all started to pick up from there. He then started to do things like, he'd join a little group and they'd draw and they'd talk about feelings and things like that. Now even though that wasn't a highly professional group, it did seem to do something for him... after that he got this little bit of momentum to go back out into the workforce.

**Dave:** At the end of the day, when it comes to the actual worst moment of your life, we're all the same. There are no big heroes amongst us, it's: Save me. Get me out of here. Let me live. You face your end you become a mess and hope you survive ...and when required there's people that can dig deep and really pull out the big ones and do what they have to do, when they have to do it.

**Susan:** I'm tougher than I thought I was, probably. It made me appreciate life, I think, a little bit more. And if you want to do something, do it. Because you never know what's round the corner. It's made me think that: Live life, if you can.

But everybody on that train, they were fabulous, I think. They really were. Just everybody was helping everybody else. Just brought everybody together. I think any disaster does.

**Martin:** They wait till an accident occurs and then they're forced to make changes after Special Commission hearings. The signals at the moment, a lot of them now have been replaced. So instead of just one cheap twenty cent light globe, you've got a large number of about 20 or 30 little globes in the red signals, so that has been changed lately.

The Communication Black Spot at the accident site has been addressed whereby the Penrith Signalling Box has this site monitored.

There has been improvement in training of all staff Health and Safety programs; risk management systems are part of the basement of functionality.

Train speeds have been adjusted reflecting safety.

When I read the newspapers afterwards there was one passenger on that train that was on the Granville train. So he was in two disasters, so you could certainly

be very unlucky or in his case very lucky that he'd been through two disasters and came out - unscathed.

***The End***

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

The overall finding in the narratives was that the experience of the rail disaster was isolating. Unlike in *Aftershocks* (Brown and the Workers Cultural Action Committee, 1993) or in *Through the Wire* (Horin, 2004) the participants did not know each other, nor did the accident bring them together. There were no entrapments; victims either died or got out. There were no displays of heroism in the *Aftershocks* sense. The stories that are relived and retold in *Remembering One Day in December* are about suffering and struggling alone and the consequences of that struggle. Heroism in the *Remembering One Day in December* sense is more subtly located; it's in the participants' refusal to obliterate the experience from memory; in their efforts to grow by facing their overwhelming sense of vulnerability and in their loss of innocence, by their proximity to sudden death.

So the challenge was to try to find a way to translate this lonely but, in my opinion heroic, journey, which was to be told by multiple voices, into compelling drama. The play, *Remembering One Day in December*, is presented here in its third draft form. Length is the only variable that has changed between the first and this third draft and even then it is a matter of a few pages. So the decisions that were made in regard to crafting the research data were made early and have so far proved enduring.

This chapter deals with the choice of content, the play's structure, the relationship with the participants and how that influenced content and lastly the challenge presented by the verbatim theatre form.

## 5.1 Recurring themes

In order to create dramatic unity, the structure had to emphasise a relationship that the content did not. The significance of recurring themes was apparent during the field work phase. In order to locate cohesion I learned to slant questions towards narratives that would involve shared events, even if the experiences of those events varied. Strongly influenced by Horin's process in *Through the Wire* (2004) of letting the material reveal itself, I used the recurring themes to encourage narratives but always remained mindful that contrast would create dramatic tension.

As stated earlier and can be seen from the text, the play's story is basically told by eight characters. Chapter 3, The Signals, is the anomaly, when the actors play multiple roles. Of the eight core characters, who represent ten research participants, three were not on the train: one, "Lisa", was the partner to "Stu", who was in the first carriage; "Dave" was the first Police Rescue Officer on the scene and "Martin" was a railway worker, traveling on the train behind the W534. "Mitch" appears only briefly, he was a schoolboy at the time of the accident and in the third carriage. Initially I thought his contribution to the drama was negligible, however his very obliviousness to the horror happening two carriages away provided small but useful juxtapositions with other narratives.

The most apparent recurring theme related to the collision itself. It was usually the first thing the participants spoke about and once that was out of the way, they could then go back to the day itself and their efforts to deal with the shock of it. All the participants involved indicated a similar emotional response, in that they suggested a kind of immediate helplessness, but they manifested this in different ways.

### 5.3 The moment of impact

The extracts presented below are from the full transcripts of the interviews. They give the detail of their first reactions and all of them seem to indicate they experienced a heightened awareness, an elongation of that particular moment in time.

**Dan:** When we hit the train, I think I was thrown forward into the next seat and my legs got caught under the seat in front and um I didn't feel anything at that time, only later. But um there was no noise. I know other people heard really quite loud but it was dead silent for me. Dead silent. I can't remember hearing a single thing.....Nothing. Nothing. Nothing at all. After it, loud bangs and things would startle me quite seriously and still I'm quite nervous around loud bangs and things. I think my subconscious or something has blocked it out but it's still there, so I know around big bangs and things I'm quite nervous and anxious. But I still can't remember hearing a single thing. No, nothing at all.

**Rita:** And within that time there was an almighty bang. And I just thought: Ooh! You know. But I was in crash position but it still threw me into the window. Hurt my face and my back got a bit. And I think it happened so quickly. And she (Rita's friend) said: What was that? I don't know, I think we hit something on the line. I don't know, I said. It has to be something on the line we've hit. Because our carriage was still on the line, you know. And we just sat there; we didn't know what was going on.

**Susan:** And then we had an almighty bang. And the noise... But um...we, we all more or less just sat there like we were told and um then somebody came from the back and from the front and said that if people wanted to get off they had – some other people from the back carriages had arrived and they were going to help us get us off.

**Chris:** And then it was...it was... just like a Bang! You know. Just the impact of the train. And um....It was kind of like it ....it was kind like someone picked up the train and kind of shook it around and everyone was everywhere and everything was everywhere. There was peoples' bags and people and the train was on its side, so the train was sort of going round a corner and it hit and um...it sort of pushed the two trains off their tracks and laid on its side so....and ah... (*laughs*) yeah, it was on its side and there was .....there was ah....(*breathing*) ....(*begins to cry*)

Shouldn't be upset about it.....I didn't expect to be – to be upset. (*Laughs with unease*) There you go. Cool. (*Continues*) That's okay.

**Stu:** ... so I went back to my book to write something and...(*urgent whisper*)...a big shudder and we were sort of thrown to our right hand side and I thought oh shit, that was a bit...you know sometimes on trains you get those lurches and bangs. And I thought that was a bit savage for a train just come out of Glenbrook...I settled down and oh, half a second, I don't know how long it was, there was – there was another really violent one, where I was thrown up out of my seat on to the window, holding ... Holding myself up from the window.....at this stage the train had lurched.. I don't know thirty...degrees, maybe more towards the other side tracks, so we could see the gravel come up at us and the train's lurching and this gravel's coming and the woman somehow, she was - I could see her - being thrown across the carriage, so I grabbed her. Must've been the same motion, I must have got up and looked and then I saw her and grabbed her ... and that went for a while and then it - that was bad....but then it stopped a little bit and oh, shit .... And then it started again; it was more violent and the gravel was closer to the window and that just stopped – just bang. ....so I pushed the woman back and I think we were all just too stunned to move. I couldn't move.

This level of detail about their experience of the collision gave me a sense of their characters, or rather them as characters and this influenced the personas they became in the text and therefore their transformations. For example, “Chris” was the most emotional, so his journey is towards containing his emotion with a more rational acceptance of the event, tinged as it is with regret. “Susan” was the most restrained, so her bursts of outrage around the doctor at Nepean are important to show what was really underneath. “Stu” was the most detached, so “Lisa’s” stories about his paranoia are crucial in demonstrating his fragmentation.

Distillations of these extracts appear in Chapter 4, “Carnage”, and even though the participants are all telling very personal stories, the links thematically are powerful and obvious. As a writer I have tried to complete their character arcs, as detailed above, in Chapter 5, “Aftermath”.

From sharing the collision, I then looked for and encouraged narratives about other events.



#### 5.4 Counselling and the action of the train driver

All the participants, other than “Martin”, sought and were disappointed by counseling. So again though they didn’t cross paths, their narratives did. They all had stories about subsequent train travel, about the curiousness of their being on that particular train in the first place, about feeling detached from formerly supportive social networks afterwards.

Moreover there were powerful connections forged by both recurring shared impressions and shared hearsay; the little boy with the Mohawk appears in six of the narratives; the driver running through the train appears in seven. In relation to the driver however no one person says he yelled the same thing. Even news reports of the time, that mention his actions, have him yelling something different.

“Martin”, because he was a railway man, created a vitally important contextual and cultural connectivity to the highly personalized passenger narratives. For example “Martin” knew the train driver personally and regarded his action of running through the carriage as positive and helpful, rather than self-interested. This is despite the fact that the train driver had an (illegal) passenger beside him, whose injuries were so horrific the Police Rescue squad thought he was two people. So Martin talked about the train driver’s action as...

**Martin:** ... It would have helped some people. Yes. To move back towards the carriage and all that. Of course, there was still seven people killed but he would’ve helped a lot of people. But he sang out as he ran through the carriage himself, ‘cos um he would have been filled with fear and running through the carriage himself. There was some reports from the passengers and: Oh, this person was running through the carriage at full speed, singing out: get back! Get back to the end of the carriage! There’s going to be a train crash! And one of the persons thought: Oh, is this a crazy person or what? So I s’pose he wouldn’t have known this was a train driver or wouldn’t have known what was going on. But um so he could have saved one or two people from that. But um course, seven people were still killed, yes.

Which became interwoven in the play text as:

**Chris:** I was sort of asleep and you heard the door bang – like it was a really loud sort of bang....that was apparently the driver running back through the train.... and he said, he just said: Hold On, Look Out, you know, something like that, shouted it, you know, kind of really loud.

**Susan:** We heard somebody shout: Hold On or Hang on! We're going to crash! And then a thump and that thump was him jumping down the three or four stairs to go down to the lower part of the carriage.

**Martin:** He sang out as he ran through the carriage, Run! Run! Get to the back of the carriage! There's going to be a train crash!

**Dan:** He actually ran passed the little kid and he yelled, I'm sure he yelled: Get out or something. But he could have grabbed that little kid and just tossed him down the stairs or something.

**Rita:** We were told everybody thought he was mad.

**Martin:** 'Cos um he would have been filled with fear and running through the carriage himself. Oh, is this a crazy person or what?

**Rita:** He'd come through screaming, you know, Crash position! Crash position! It probably wouldn't have helped those poor souls.

Just as "Martin" provided a different perspective, so too did "Dave", the Police Rescue Officer, who was able to say things the passengers couldn't, yet still be thematically linked to the play's narrative thrust.

### 5.5 The bodies

The passenger/participants were most distressed, when they referred to seeing the deceased. 'Dave' balanced their emotion with a welcome detachment, which in turn reinforced the passengers' horror and bewilderment:

**Mitch:** Seven people, okay. So if I imagine a crash, where 7 people died, it would have to be a lot more dramatic and violent.....than what I experienced..... I knew that the train had crashed and I didn't see anyone really hurt.

**Dave:** That's what probably everyone commented on the scene. It seemed a bit unusual. You'd hear the odd person moaning but there was deathly quiet. There wasn't that much noise. The birds were chirping away. Biggest noise you heard when you walk down there. It was a fairly eerie (*laughs*) type of scene. Yeah.

**Mitch:** I mean, I didn't realize people had died till that night because I just didn't go up ... I went walking back ...

**Dan:** I climbed over the seats and started going out. And um once I got out, I was just standing out there. It must have been a while. Standing on the other tracks (*laughs*) and that's when I walked up. I don't know, I must have been quite curious as to what happened. So I walked up the tracks and I just saw what had happened.

**Dave:** Right, fifty injured here, four dead, possibly more over there ....all the victims on that side had been pushed towards this window and there were several arms and legs and limbs and other torso out of this one particular window. I registered all of that. Fine.

**Stu:** Those girders just went through the front of the train like it was ...um, I don't know, ...so easy....It just went straight through...

**Dan:** And then someone raced up and said: No, don't go this way. Go this way. So they helped me walk through. And then as I walked past the other carriages and they were all quite fine. And then I just burst into tears. I just burst into tears and walked quite quickly. I had to get out. I just wanted to get out. And um – it was a long walk up to Glenbrook station.

However "Dave's" testimony gave me amazing material, which I thought, during the interview as I listened to him, that this content would be gripping. And I encouraged him to give me details.

**Dave:**... I couldn't tell you who they were but here was the retarded boy and he was sort of compressed into another lady ...so they were pretty much together, and as we first came in, there was a mother and son on the train and the mother had sort of been projected upwards, and was straddling the stairwell case area....here and we had a little Chinese, Asian girl compressed into the bulkhead on this side ... and the little boy was here, compressed up too. The other gentleman who was fairly elongated, had some other things pushing him along... but ah... if you hadn't seen that sort of thing, going in and seeing, 'cos the high friction thing leaves human remains generally fairly scattered in that area ...it took a fair while for me to sort of cope with that....being able to get in and

rummage around bits of wreckage out to get the victims out....working in the smell and the heat. A fairly unpleasant ah...a fairly unpleasant day....

But when it came to looking at the play as a whole, it was information we didn't need; information that would be so offensive to the participants and, I thought, repellent to an audience. Yet I knew both audience members and possibly participants live with this kind of graphic detail in video games, in horror movies, in animation. It was a situation, where I felt less was more and the decision not to include it was in complete contrast to my training, particularly in television writing.

Consequently this decision, I believe, reflects the evolving empathic relationship between myself, as researcher/playwright and the participant/characters. As Arnold (2005) maintains deep transformational learning occurs when thoughts and feelings interact. The editing of this the most graphic material most economically encapsulates for me the new learning that was taking place in the development of the play text. As will be seen in the following chapter, this decision was challenged even further and serves as a clear illustration of the multiple truths that can be exposed by performed research.

## **5.6 The Blue Mountains**

Because the stories of the crash were so powerful and those of the aftermath so painful, I knew I would have to invite the audience into the play on a cheerful note. And the most cheerful note, which all the participants shared, was their love of the Blue Mountains. At the end of every interview I asked why they lived where they did. It was their responses to this question that began the play.

Again there were delightful stories that had to be omitted because of time. Perhaps the most endearing was "Martin's", who so loved white cockatoos, he had statues of them in his garden.

## 5.7 Structuring the play text

The recurring themes: living in the mountains, catching that train, the crash and the aftermath, delineated the structure of the play, which is marked in the text by five chapters:

- Living there – about the Blue Mountains
- My God, we're running into the back of that train! – the journey towards impact
- The Signals – the causes of the disaster
- Carnage – inside the train
- Aftermath – dealing with disaster

These chapters did not become “scenes”. The text remains closer to the re-telling of memory than the story of one dramatic incident and it was my choice to honour that in setting the play structurally. In the performed readings the chapter titles have been included as play text. Somehow calling the chapters “scenes” might have suggested that there was more integration in the outcome; that the story fragments combined to make a whole. It was my impression that the experience of the rail disaster left the participants with a part of themselves that would always be separate from the whole people they once were. As “Lisa” says:

**Lisa:** I took him to a doctor named Dino Faturi ... and he said: “Look, part of your spirit is still back there on the train.”

So if Chapter 1, “Living There”, was designed to engage the audience with the characters, Chapters 2 and 4 tell the story of the disaster from the participants’ points of view. Chapter 5, “Aftermath”, tells the story of the years that followed the event. And Chapter 3, “The Signals”, is the chapter I never at the outset thought I’d include. As stated earlier in this thesis, understanding how the participants felt about the Judicial Inquiry was crucial to my appreciation of both

the extent to which they had felt betrayed by the system and the extent to which this sense of betrayal had prolonged the trauma associated with the disaster.

Most of the participants didn't go to the Inquiry; one testified, one attended but all of them felt it was an abrogation of responsibility; that it ignored the true nature of the disaster and it was an inadequate Railways cover-up. And this was despite the fact that the Inquiry found the Railways, or Railcorp, were at fault (McInerney, 2000)

### **5.8 The problematic Chapter 3**

The inclusion of the transcript from the first Glenbrook inquiry is a leap of faith and it reflects my interest in and experiential understanding of Arnold's (2005) work on Empathic Intelligence, where receptivity is enhanced by both emotional and intellectual content. I also felt impelled to include it, because it contributed to the understanding of the causes of the disaster and because it delivered a recognizable end to the story in terms of usual media coverage. However for the participants this was not their end at all.

Conscious I was about to make the departure from passengers and people associated with the accident to a courtroom, I introduced the character of "Justice" in Chapter 2. It is as if he is processing the information prior to the collision, while the passengers try and remember being there, with no knowledge of what was about to happen.

"Justice" refers to the leading court official, who conducted all three Glenbrook Inquiries; the text used by the "Justice" that figures in the play is edited content from the first Inquiry, the fact-finding mission. The language is precise, unemotional and its purpose scientific – to analyse, clarify, define, illuminate. By juxtaposing it with the passenger participants' narratives, it helps to contrast his rationality with their uncertain worlds just prior to the collision, a world of fleeting images, impressions and unfinished sentences.

The “Justice” figure dominates Chapter Three, “The Signals”, as he conducts the Inquiry. Fortunately the Inquiry report captured the crucial dialogue on the day between various railway workers – the signalman at Penrith, Mulholland; the interurban train driver, Sinnett; the driver of the Indian Pacific, Willoughby; and the central controller, Browne. These interactions helped to clarify the sequence of events that led to the collision and for a dramatist, they were a gift. It meant that the play could journey between the participants, the court room and the morning of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999.

And in this context “Martin” proved to be an invaluable link between the courtroom and the railway culture. His inclusion allowed me, I felt, to bring “Dave” into the text as the ticking clock. So I had four archetypal dramatic personae voices at the one time: “Justice” as the authority figure; “Martin” as the informed everyman; “Dave” as the time-keeper; “Browne” and “Sinnett” as the “actors” in the scene, rather than outside commenting on it.

**Justice:** There is no single integrated system of communications between the various trains, signalers and controllers involved in operations on the rail network. In the case of this particular accident there were five different communications systems involved.

**Martin:** Permission to go through an automatic signal at stop could only be obtained using either signal telephones outside the train next to the track or the Metronet system, which the driver can use by pressing a button on a console in the driver’s compartment. The Indian Pacific had to use signal telephones, the inter urban had Metronet.

**Dave:** 8.12 am:

**Browne:** West Control to the driver of W534.

**Sinnett:** Yes, mate.

**Browne:** I’ve just had a report there from the driver of the Indian ahead of you at 41.6 signal. Penrith side of Glenbrook platform is at stop.

**Sinnett:** Oh, right.

**Browne:** Are you around that area yet?

**Sinnett:** I’m heading towards Blaxland now, mate.

This allowed me to keep characters present, who might not be involved in the action. “Dave” particularly risked getting lost at this point. And I felt the formality of a courtroom enabled more fluidity with “experts”.

Just after this exchange between Sinnett and Browne, I used “Dave” to say one of “Martin’s” lines.

**Dave:** So what no-one knew, except the driver of the Indian Pacific, was that signal 40.8 was red as well.

This is one of the few times I changed the authorship of information. I was concerned the chapter was too confusing and I needed to make sure the basic facts were delivered a number of times. Without the benefit of visual representation, either through slides or film footage or even a chart that could be referred to, it was vital that the audience remembered where both trains were and what speeds they were doing prior to impact. By including “Dave” in this section also maintained his presence in the play, whereas in reality he was yet to arrive on the scene.

I then continued, trying to create the sense that Sinnett’s train, W534, was hurtling towards impact with the Indian Pacific.

**Justice:** At signal 40.8 at 8.19 and 3 seconds the driver of the Indian Pacific alighted from the locomotive to use the signal telephone to contact the signaller at Penrith.

The relaxed, colloquial language between the railway employees was referred to in the Justice’s summing up. It was a significant indicator of a culture of unsafe work practices and so played a double role in the hearing itself: it highlighted the inadequacies of the multiple communication systems and it demonstrated the employees’ failure to take into consideration potential faults in the signal phones, which operated using nineteenth century technology.



In terms of the play text “The Signals”, chapter 3, told the collision story; it gave a detailed account of all the factors that contributed to the disaster. In a practical narrative sense it got the technical details out of the way, so the rest of the text could focus on the core of the play: what happened to the people involved. But because the Inquiry also included the railway workers’ dialogue, it gave the actors an opportunity to create characters, albeit very briefly, which reminded the audience that this is all about people being unaware; that the disaster occurred because a number of things went wrong at the one time. Their language reinforced the reality that these employees were also part of the community. The detachment of the legal language, too, gave the remaining two chapters, the emotional and empathic heart of the play, a wonderful stepping-off point:

**Justice:** At 8.22 and 18 seconds the inter urban train W534 slammed into the motorail at the rear of the Indian Pacific. Given the reduced separation time, the slow speed of the Indian Pacific, its position in the cutting and the speed at which the inter urban train proceeded from Glenbrook railway station towards the cutting, a collision of some violence was inevitable.

The intention with the inclusion of this statement is to create a powerful irony. In comparison to what the passengers endured, not just on the day itself but for years afterwards, this statement ignores the human toll of the collision. And this toll is explored in the following two chapters.

### 5.9 “Carnage” and “Aftermath”

“Carnage” has remained the longest chapter in the play; it has the clearest story and is the most recognizable in terms of the disaster formula and is the most suspenseful. As explained by Aronson (2000) the disaster formula involves a three act structure, which deals with a group under threat and is a vehicle for one heroic figure to be seen as triumphant against the odds. In parallel story-telling, where there are multiple protagonists, they are all versions of the same character type. In two possible fictional adaptations of the Glenbrook as a formulaic disaster scenario: multiple victims are eventually freed from the carriage due to the heroic leadership of one of them or “Dave” manages to bring one out alive,

when all hope has gone. The main action is contained in the carriage and in the dénouement the survivors all go home. But *Remembering One Day in December* is not fiction.

I told the day chronologically, intercutting the passengers' narratives with "Dave's", an essentially filmic technique. They were going home; he was left getting bodies off the train. Should the play ever go into a full theatrical production, I feel that this chapter offers strong production potential to create action on stage and extend whatever moments have been achieved theatrically by the crash itself. As the readings in the research phase of this project meant that actors had scripts in their hands, there were no opportunities to discover a more physical dimension to the work but the text would support such an exploration through the rehearsal process.

All the participants talk about being physically thrown from their seats, they talk about bodies lying in passageways and their own cuts and bruises. With lighting and sound accompanying vigorous choreography this section could create powerful images that would enhance the audience's opportunity to share the participant/characters' shock and helplessness. It is also the chapter that would adapt well to radio, as the external sounds of the collision and passengers' distress could be effectively interwoven with the characters' inner voices of fear and bewilderment.

However it is a risk keeping "Aftermath" as long as it is. This section contains the most personal narratives, as participants share their frailties, their vulnerabilities and their anger. At the play's second reading it was clear that this was the chapter that needed trimming, which meant wonderful stories had to go.

As mentioned earlier, feedback from the actors suggested that they felt they were bordering on self-pity during this chapter. I definitely did not agree but did feel the lack of emotional development. Technically this is the most difficult chapter to

structure in terms of content – this is the chapter that examines the theme of the play, the participants’ stories are all about the gap between the public response to and their private experience of trauma. It is the chapter where they are most separate from each other. However it does come at the end of the play and there is a powerful urge to hurry towards the end to hold the audience’s attention. This is a challenging dilemma and the question that has to be continually asked is: what don’t we need to know? Depending on all kinds of factors: attention, performance, environment, the answer to this question can change.

“Aftermath” lost two and half pages between the second and third readings and it was mainly “Rita’s” narratives that went. I tried to share the cuts equally but couldn’t; I just have to hope that enough of her vitality remains in her MRI story.

### **5.10 Sharing the load**

Apart from keeping the play text strictly verbatim, my other prerequisite was that all voices should be heard equally; that no one character would run away with the story. The only character that could have done that was “Dave”, whose stories were so gripping and so powerful, all told in a language that was so understated, it was difficult to limit him to the narratives that remain.

Constantly referring back to the recurring themes was helpful in making sure all characters had a voice and telling the whole story chronologically meant that I could always ask myself what a particular character was doing now, if I felt they were disappearing. Keeping within the confines of recurring themes enabled long narratives to be intercut, which attempted to create the sense of a conversation told around a campfire, where characters share experiences, building on what has gone before, rather than entering a dialogue, which I, as writer, would have imposed.

This process of intercutting added an energy to the text but also, by opening the narratives up to my manipulation as writer, took away, I thought, from the

participants' integrity and could only be used sparingly. As *Remembering One Day in December* has only had performed research readings, I'm not sure that this not being too purist. In the execution of dramatic text, the voice is only one of the instruments an actor has to create meaning. Silence and body position are also powerful tools that convey nuance in text and subtlety in characterization. Utilization of these tools illustrates the discoveries an actor makes in rehearsal and in performance; the script informs the choices but does not dictate them. As my script development process for *Remembering One Day in December* has not gone beyond performed readings, I am not able to tell if the drama is strengthened or weakened with further editing. Nor should there be further editing whether this will enhance or dissipate the authenticity of the participants' testimonies.

Verbatim theatre is based on personal narratives gathered in situ, relationships other than a shared experience may not exist; yet as drama relies on relationship, character connections in performance may only be suggested artificially. The inherently static nature of the verbatim theatre form is a great challenge both for an audience and for a verbatim play's execution on stage.

### **5.11 Wordiness and dramatic tension**

Although increasingly welcomed on mainstream stages, the verbatim theatre form does not easily translate into theatre of action. Supported technically with audio/visual and design components, the truncated nature of its intertwined text can create the illusion that characters are impacting on each other, re-creating a sense of immediacy, a feeling that the character is actually undergoing in the present the experience they are talking about in the past. It is a theatre form where content is dominant over performance and that's where the trust has to be, in the material.

Should *Remembering One Day in December* have a full theatrical production that process would further the nature of this arts-informed inquiry. Instinctively I suspect I would fragment the script into smaller exchanges sometimes between characters, sometimes with the audience, to create vignettes. I made one such change between the second and the third drafts for “Stu” and “Lisa” in Chapter 5, which I felt was a positive development and the result of hearing it read. In the second draft “Stu” and “Lisa” talk about “Stu”:

**Stu:** I didn’t have a big social network at that stage. A little bit of talk down at the pub....guys being what they are and especially guys at a pub....they probably didn’t know what to say. You know, place a hand on your shoulder type of thing. It was a railway pub, strangely too, Springwood. Lisa said it affected me for years.

**Lisa:** The unhappiness and the drinking and the inertia went on for some considerable time. And somewhere along the line Stu started to become quite paranoid.

**Stu:** Some lawyers, Keddie’s, jumped on the bandwagon – wanted to set up a Class Action – generating work for themselves.

In the third draft this exchange became more about them as a couple:

**Stu:** I didn’t have a big social network at that stage. A little bit of talk down at the pub....guys being what they are and especially guys at a pub....they probably didn’t know what to say. You know, place a hand on your shoulder type of thing. It was a railway pub, strangely too, Springwood.

**Lisa:** The unhappiness and the drinking and the inertia went on for some considerable time.

**Stu:** Lisa said it affected me for years.

**Lisa:** And somewhere along the line Stu started to become quite paranoid.

**Stu:** Some lawyers, Keddie’s, jumped on the bandwagon – wanted to set up a Class Action – generating work for themselves.

Then “Lisa” continues ...

**Lisa:** He said people are following me. And I thought, well, that's feasible because of the claim. Class action thing, maybe they've got insurance investigators. Then he said, helicopters. There were helicopters, Lisa, and they were going right over our house and they were checking up on me. And I thought nah.... Helicopters? To investigate people that had been in a train accident? In a tiny little house ....I don't think so. But that gave me a terrible feeling; Oh, My God.

But because they might have connected more in this sequence, there might be other opportunities to build on that in "Lisa's" helicopter speech, which could really bring out the pathos of "Oh, My God..."

Such a slight change for me I think is the beginning of taking the play from a research text and into a performance draft. I am looking as a playwright for opportunities for actors to heighten their emotional journeys through action, through things that are not said, through the spaces between the words. Perhaps if I took this journey further, I would solve the greatest problem that I think currently exists in the script and that is the lack of a climax.

### **5.12 The final turning point**

There is no one event which propels all the characters into catharsis; each of them expresses their own turning point – "Dan" is able to put flowers on the gate; "Lisa" learned to be kind; "Susan" knows the human spirit is very strong; "Dave" knows people can dig deep; "Rita" learned that wonderful lesson, compassion; "Chris" has learned to accept it as part of the mix of his life. But none of them feel good about it; none of them can say: "Looking back I feel grateful." Or "I achieved closure". As "Rita" explains

**Rita:** Why can't people pick up themselves, wipe their shoes and get on with their lives and that's it! You don't sit and dwell on things! I just feel trauma is a strange thing, you don't know about it until you actually experience it.

I had hoped I could make "Martin's" last speech a final ironic twist:

**Martin:** When I read the newspapers afterwards there was one passenger on that train that was on the Granville train. So he was in two disasters, so you could certainly be very unlucky or in his case very lucky that he'd been through two disasters and came out - unscathed.

And so after all the revelations there is still the assumption that “walking” means “not wounded.” And perhaps without the support of a production – lights fading, theme music, perhaps the sound effect of a train crash or signals ringing – it feels as if I haven't captured the right story at the end. Or perhaps the play needs to find another end entirely.

So the play remains a work in progress, for every play needs to be re-created through production and performance; in drama change and transformation are the only constants.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the play, *Remembering One Day in December*, in terms of its text and its structure. It also examines the choices I made as a researcher/playwright and summarises my dissatisfactions with the current draft. Invaluable in this play-making process were the hours of solitude typing the transcriptions. I feel I gave myself this extra time with the participants, not just listening to their stories but also trying to capture each nuance of their expression – their repetitions, their emotions when and how they surfaced, their rhythms of recall, when memories came easily and when they didn't.

This was a crucial period, I think, in the play's creation, because it allowed me to hear imaginatively as opposed to supportively, to linger over expressions that were complicated, to absorb transitions that were unexpected. It meant I lived with the raw data in its detail, before I began to develop the play, I knew every subtlety of the participants' narratives, so on an intuitive level the participants became characters – I heard their voices, not just what they said but how they

said it – and on a practical level I had a thorough working knowledge of the data available.

In the following and final chapter I will discuss my observations in terms of the literature on the verbatim theatre form, the evolution of the play text and the verbatim theatre form's strengths and weaknesses in regard to other applications for community stories.



## 6 CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

The play, *Remembering One Day in December*, is my answer to my research question: How is a verbatim theatre play about the Glenbrook Rail Disaster of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999, created? Like Clandinin & Connelly (2000, p. 20) I have hoped to “show” rather than “tell” my process; and this research position is supported by arts-informed inquiry as a methodology, where “the representation and generation of knowledge are sometimes inseparable” (Cutcher, 2004, p.43).

Answers to the implicit research questions listed below are also embedded in the text.

- What are the stories people tell about disasters in the physical world?
- What are the narratives around trauma?
- How do people remember a life-threatening situation?
- Does such a situation evoke similar or different responses?
- How do these narratives intertwine to make compelling drama?

These implicit questions then fuelled the nature of the data, the personal narratives, collected and the shape of the play. As LaBoskey (2004, p. 817) argues, there is a “quite tight connection between the form of inquiry one uses and the type of knowledge one produces.”

The research expectation however, that the experience of the disaster itself will be the major focus of the drama, is contradicted by the play text. The play did not conform to my expectations. That there is a difference between the predicted outcome and the actual is a consequence, I believe, of the relational dimension to narrative inquiry and the narrow scope of current formulaic drama, which provided me with my working craft knowledge prior to the *Remembering One Day in December* endeavour. This aspect of the research study, the difference

between the predicted and the actual outcome, will be addressed throughout the following conclusions. These are divided into sections: the research: the theory and the findings; the play: from text to script? And thirdly the applicability of the verbatim theatre form.

## 6.2 The research: the theory and the findings

### 6.2.1 The nature of interaction

Although the verbatim theatre form does not encourage interaction with the audience, the evolution of the script is wholly concerned with the process of interaction. There is interaction with the participants, interaction with the cast and, in the case of *Remembering One Day in December*, interaction with an audience in terms of feedback. This reflects both Mienczakowski's (2003) and Alexander's (2005) support of research offering opportunities for cultural understandings, when presented as performance. The schism between the participants' experience and the Judicial Inquiry questions what we mean culturally as "Justice." The character, "Chris", expresses this most clearly in:

**Chris:** So I sued State Rail. You know, when you screw up that bad, you should be sort of punished, I thought...

Other false understandings are exposed by the participants. "Dave", "Chris" and "Martin" question what we understand as "Safety":

**Chris:** It's cheaper, you know, to pay compensation than to fix it. They fully expect there'll be another one.

**Dave:** I'm not going to weigh into that sort of debate. Probably could happen at any time. Be surprising if it didn't.

**Martin:** I've been working for the railways for almost thirty years now and I've seen a lot of unsafe practices from Management and Government down. They wait till an accident happens, people get killed and then they say: Oh, aw gee.

From the external world to the internal: “Rita” questions what we understand as “Friendship”:

**Rita:** There was people who were friends of mine, too, who couldn’t come near me. And I found that sad.

Both Mienczakowski (2003) and Alexander (2005) are arguing for Applied Theatre techniques to be used in performance ethnography, where the play text is fluid and audience members become participants. In such a collaborative process, as in Boal’s (2000) Theatre of the Oppressed, the audience members experience a catharsis and with this new experiential knowledge they can become agents of social change. However this does not side-line the verbatim experience as also delivering opportunities to trigger change. Ros Horin (2004) found that her verbatim play, *Through the Wire*, did exactly that.

R.H.: I... wanted to create a piece of ordinary theatre that can take this complex subject and can open it up to ordinary people, who don’t know much about it. .. theatre should have something to uplift and inspire...it has reaffirmed my belief in the possibility of theatre as an agent for social change. (Horin, 2005, lines 50-64)

And Moises Kauffman and the Tectonic Theatre Project’s *The Laramie Project* (2001) has created an awareness of homophobia that goes way beyond the small town origins of a heinous crime.

Cultural understandings can be achieved through the performative, no matter where the audience sits – or stands. And like mainstream theatre, verbatim theatre offers the players a fixed text. This can deliver a degree of certainty and transportability, when ideas are new and understandings are limited and audiences are, for whatever reason, inhibited.

### 6.2.2 Multiple truths

The question of multiple truths has been identified by qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) as being a factor of the different criteria used to evaluate the research. The ‘truth’ depicted in *Remembering One Day in December* is affected by my choices as a playwright/researcher, the participants that elected to become involved and the nature of the text to which we were all contributing. That my intention was always to create a verbatim play text is crucial to its content: I chose to look for material that would support relationship. As stated in an earlier chapter, the recurring themes were integral in the creation of dramatic relationships, when no actual relationships existed. Therefore areas in each participant’s narrative that were not echoed by another were not included. Also, again stated earlier, I began to seek responses to shared events while still in the field, as my own knowledge of the disaster increased. As “Rita” wonders:

**Rita:** ... and he said: I ran to catch this train. And I thought: all these strange circumstances that create people to be in that place at that time.

So I began to wonder what each participant was doing, when such and such an event happened or when the driver ran through the train or when they went home that first morning. And my questions tailored the responses.

Had the research study been exclusively about trauma, “Dave” would have figured much more prominently. He didn’t receive any counseling, as bad as it was initially, until he had pulled a young girl out of a wrecked car, who then died in his arms, and found himself first on the scene where an eighteen month old girl was suffering fourth degree burns. Glenbrook was between these two events but it was the event he shared with a particular group of participants, gathered for a particular purpose. So, as Brown (2001) observed in the creation of *Aftershocks* (1993) by the time the truth has become a play, it’s already a fabrication.

However the words are not fabricated. Everything that is in the play was said. This adheres to the verbatim form (Paget, 1987) and is the main reason I, as a playwright/researcher, was attracted to it. It both offered a discipline and it demanded a level of attention and responsibility that honoured the participants' time and contribution. Although the play text is changing between readings, the changes only involve edits. The performance medium influences both presentation and duration. Performed readings are a luxury for a writer in terms of length; for radio, for example, the play would need to be less than half the current duration in order to comply with programming schedules.

*Remembering One Day in December* had its third reading in August, 2007. The reading was attended by a number of friends, theatre practitioners and members of the public. It was also attended by a close relative of two of the victims. She did not stay for the discussion after the performance but shared her responses by email the following week. She expressed outrage at my inclusion of "Dave's" description of the first carriage after the collision and intimated that the material was exploitative and sensationalist. She strongly encouraged me to include a warning at the beginning of the play that audience members might find some of the material disturbing.

Although I concur with her recommendation that the play should contain a warning as a curtain-raiser and have now included one in the submitted draft, I do not feel compelled to remove the material she found most offensive. What happened in the carriage, what was left of the victims is enmeshed in the participants' minds; those memories triggered their choice to tell their story. I thought it essential text to include; it instills, I believe, an empathic audience response to the participants' trajectories from shock, to anger, to sadness. The multiple truths exposed by this dynamic between participant narrative, play text and audience reaction concerns the ownership of memory and censorship, of the self or of others. It also ironically illuminates the community attitudes the

participants found most difficult to live with – that because they were “walking”, they were “well”.

Her criticism of the play was both passionate and vehement and caused me to reflect deeply on the complexity embedded in Arnold’s (2005) process of transformative learning. Arnold maintains that: “While individuals bring their own biological history to their social encounters, they can together inhabit a shared, meaningful, psychic landscape” (2005, p.17).

As all the responses to the play had been favourable until this point, I had now become acutely aware that all choices, including writing the play in the first instance, involved shouldering responsibility and that all actions can be challenged for their integrity and their authenticity. Just as there are multiple truths, there are multiple psychic landscapes: as a story-teller condemned for my story, I experienced even greater empathy for the participants, who felt condemned, when they tried to come to terms with theirs.

And I drew great strength from an email sent by one of the participants (“Dan”), who requested that he be sent a draft of the play:

*Thankyou.*

*I received the draft of the play today & have read it entirely. I couldn't put it down actually.*

*I found it incredibly satisfying, I think that's the words, to read and understand the entire scope from start to finish of the whole event.*

*And to read many different peoples experiences of the same situation from beginning to end and to know exactly what they were going through, and that I wasn't the only one, felt overwhelming, but satisfying. I feel like I can get that little bit more of an understanding of the whole Glenbrook event.*

*Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to be able to understand that human behaviour is not all that different between us & that I was definitely not alone in the aftermath of that event.*

*I don't know if I could watch the play though. Just reading it bought up a lot of emotions.*

*Thankyou again.* (Received 21<sup>st</sup>, March, 2007)

Four other participants came to the first reading of the play, “Stu”, “Susan”, “Martin” and “Chris”. They all expressed similar sentiments verbally – that they were relieved to find they hadn’t been suffering alone.

### **6.2.3 Representation**

Being permitted to see into the participants’ complexity and vulnerability was one of the great rewards of this study; being required to reproduce that in the play and preserve their authenticity without slowing the dramatic action was one of the great challenges of the research methodology. Most of the participants expressed profound insights at some time during their narrative and usually in connection with the challenge of healing. All these I’ve placed in “Aftermath”.

Verbatim theatre pioneers like Cheeseman (in Soans, 2005) proved an invaluable guide, when heading out into the field. He stressed that the vernacular was the key to relatedness and identity and although we don’t have the regional differences he was working with in Britain, I tried to introduce the concept of community early in the play through “Living There” through the shared experience of the Blue Mountain grandeur on the one hand and the Blue Mountain’s fraternization on the train on the other

The depth expressed by some of the participants also powerfully echoed David Hare’s (Boon, 2003) lament that consumer culture makes us seem shallow and homogenous. For me and for, I hope, an audience, Susan’s “I think the human spirit is very strong” is manifested by the others as well as by herself. “Dan’s” support for the relative of the Mohawk boy, “Rita’s” refusal to come out of the MRI, “Chris’s” determination to find a way of accepting the event, despite his tears years later, help us to connect with specific struggles and simultaneously relate to them all.

#### 6.2.4 Self-study

It is here in this section that I would like to focus on my research expectation that what eventually became Chapter 4, “Carnage”, would form the central dramatic story. Influenced by *Aftershocks* (1993) in my choice of material to research, I assumed that a disaster would deliver great narratives; in our stories culturally it is the moments between life and death that the greatest transformations occur. But Glenbrook did not deliver entrapments; Glenbrook did not deliver “life in the balance” scenarios. The great narratives were in the recovery process and this is not the product of the “Disaster” genre.

Chapter 5, “Aftermath”, is the tale neither legal fact nor genre fiction tells; it’s the story about process of acceptance and the time it takes to get there and the experiences that help and hinder that journey. It’s a story that incorporates many great human virtues, like resilience, determination, reflection, optimism and patience but there is no quick fix, not for any of the characters. We know by the end of the play each one of the characters has recognized that the memories of Glenbrook will stay with them forever but at the same time they have made discoveries about themselves.

So although the experience of Glenbrook still made them feel isolated, angry and alone, they all expressed a realization that time and active reflection through psychologists, through art, through interaction with others, had given these feelings an added complexity. They could now genuinely express a greater appreciation of the nature of interdependency and community.

As a writer it was challenging to have so much valuable content at the end of the play. Would the audience remain engaged? The play runs for approximately eighty minutes, it felt like an imposition asking for so much focus and not offering a conventional happy ending as a reward. However not to include “Aftermath”



reduces the play's authenticity; the participants' struggle to come to terms with the accident was what prompted them to volunteer to share their narrative in the first place.

A solution therefore might have been to cut the chapters before it; omit "The Signals" Chapter 3 completely. As a dramatist this would have been my quick fix, as a researcher I could not. The legal language, the investigative voice is an imperative inclusion in the play; culturally it is this content, which is supposed to give us re-assurance: there is an Inquiry, a trial, someone is blamed, someone is accountable, therefore it will not happen again. But, as "Aftermath" shows this isn't "the real story" at all.

This choice was strongly supported by research theory, particularly narrative inquiry, which so empathically addresses the relationship between researcher and researched. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through reflection I have come to understand that "authenticity" does not only refer to "accuracy", it also encompasses the entire inter-relational research experience. Research is, as Ely et al (1991, pp. 198) describe, a transactional process.

### **6.3 The play: from text to script?**

#### **6.3.1 The performed readings**

Because of the nature – and budget – of the data collection process, I was not in a position to copy Cheeseman's nor Stafford-Clark's techniques and use actors to gather and then repeat the narratives. I had to rely on characters emerging through their testimonies; consequently I included their hesitations, their reactions, their repetitions and hoped that the actors would make every inclusion work. "Dan" for example laughed frequently, especially when he was most uncomfortable; "Chris" and "Martin" repeated phrases no matter what the emotional content was; "Rita" spoke very quickly with a noticeably frequent use of an upper register, that gave her a sense of inner energy.

I have been fortunate in the evolution of *Remembering One Day in December* that some members of the cast I asked to assist with its first reading belonged to a local Blue Mountains theatre group, called “Weatherboard Theatre.” The group has been together for a decade and is committed to supporting local writers, performers and directors. They receive a small grant from the Blue Mountains Council. One of the cast members of that first reading organized two more public readings, which has allowed me to work on the script with the cast’s input and audience feedback.

Between the first and second readings, the cast asked for character breakdowns. These are included as Appendix 2. This input, I believe, contributed to a massive gear-shift in performance level and consequently helped to clarify areas where the text could be honed, for performance delivers economy to the text. Such participant knowledge I would definitely share with actor/readers earlier in the performed reading process were I to repeat this exercise. Such input clearly supports the transition from text to script or, in other words, the transformation from “cherry-picked” narratives that tell a story to words that create character arcing through a cathartic experience.

### **6.3.2 Character doubling**

The journey into the courtroom means actors have to double. “Weatherboard” thought this confused the audience in the first reading and wanted to make it very clear for the second reading that they had multiple roles. Each one of the eight actors on stage introduced themselves to the audience and explained in their own words the characters they were going to be.

This definitely supported the text. As Bottoms (2006) insists, reflexivity creates a level of trust in the audience: that they are in charge of their own journey through the play and are not at the mercy of anonymous characters and a manipulative writer. “Weatherboard” also changed the doubling from my original suggestions

and theirs worked much better; they knew their strengths as a company of actors and were able to most advantageously fulfill the roles. Being able to introduce themselves in the beginning allowed for far less complicated transitions and made me appreciate the interpretive freedom that the performative brings.

### **6.3.3 The production process**

The preceding chapter mentioned possible theatrical elements I would introduce, should *Remembering One Day in December* ever go into production. Because it as yet does not have that opportunity, I do not consider the research text a performance script. In its current form I would consider it most suitable for a radio adaptation; I sense it is a long way from a theatrical play. However I am conscious that there are universal themes embedded within the text and with those there, anything is possible!

## **6.4 Applying the verbatim theatre form**

### **6.4.1 Community stories**

The verbatim theatre form offers play-makers of all ages tremendous opportunities to gather and distill material that tells local stories. It offers direct access to local language and local controversies; actual three dimensional people generate characters through careful multi-layered observations and the form thrives on juxtaposition of data sources, of points of view, of language. The form tells stories about events, about people and about culture. The characters and their stories ground the work in an era when so much of our culture is imported.

Deviations in to hybrid forms, like Hare's 75% verbatim: 25% imagined, as in *Stuff Happens* and *Permanent Way*, also suggest interesting opportunities for writers particularly. Two of the great limitations of the form can be the smallness of its scope and the material's potential to deliver static or predictable productions. The inclusion of imagined interactions might reduce the script's

authenticity but heighten the play's theatricality, plus deliver excellent opportunities for writers and actors to work together in improvised scenarios based on known fact.

#### **6.4.2 Final reflections on the form**

A narrow scope, predictable staging and the temporary significance of story are all limitations to the verbatim theatre form. However an awareness of these possible problems at the outset could deflect their impact on the quality and potential universality of the play that is produced.

In the execution of this research process I experienced a shift in focus from story or data gatherer to chronicler and confidante. In retrospect I began the field work looking for events, for anecdotes, for the poetry in everyday speech. But I quickly became engrossed in the people, in their struggles, their ways of looking at the world. I became a privileged custodian and in the formulation of the play in my mind I honoured that above story. In the selection of material to include I tried to have all their voices interweaving evenly, if not in amount then certainly in frequency. Their speeches are like a mosaic, independent of each other but an integral part of a whole.

I felt extremely fortunate that the participants, who stepped forward to contribute, had such rich and complex stories to tell. As a writer in other media the research project has made me acutely aware of the limitations we place on stories and character, because of the time we take to tell them and the formatting of drama and events to suit either advertising or program image. Not that I am suggesting a verbatim theatre format is preferable, simply that diversity is refreshing.

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