



## **Book Review**

### **Legacy of occupation: stories of occupational therapy in New Zealand 1940-1972 (2009).**

**Researched and compiled by Beth Gordon, Sunny Riordan, Rowena Scaletti and Noeline Creighton.**

#### **Reviewed by Linda H Wilson**

This delightful book and the accompanying CD, will be of particular interest to those who were or knew students at the New Zealand occupational therapy training school (later known as the New Zealand School of Occupational Therapy), historians or history enthusiasts curious about health services and health professions, and occupational therapists with an interest in changes within the profession, and changes in women's lives.

For students from 1940 through to 1972, every page turn will trigger memories of friends, of student placements, and of practice not current but maybe still legitimate. Although a great book for dipping in to, a reading from cover to cover is certainly warranted. The numerous photographs and individual reflections especially from the early days give a real sense of the complexity of factors that shaped the development of occupational therapy, the educational programmes, and the people involved. Careful cross referencing enables readers to trace memories from particular people across time; where a photo may spark a recollection, it can likely be further explored.

The book will make a valuable contribution to people's understanding of the history of occupational therapy in New Zealand. The information is primarily a series of oral histories and there are some located documents and resources that verify the anecdotes and connections made. Of particular interest is the way in which occupational therapy education and practice has been the cornerstone for later lifelong interests, careers and hobbies for many of the women.

The data on the CD is reproduced in the format in which it was retrieved, and may even amuse younger therapists, being a reminder of the pre-digital era - a world before computers and

databases made recording information comparatively simple. To have easy access to the short movie produced at the time of the 50th anniversary is especially valuable, as it catches the personalities of the three principals in ways that would otherwise be difficult. The group photos from 1940-69 are not accompanied with names but the editors have nevertheless done a sterling job in capturing the breadth of records and detail that they have.

The book is organised in chapters using themes largely related to distinct chronological periods. Understandably the amount of detail increases in relation to the accessibility of the participants. Because the work was undertaken voluntarily and through largely informal professional snowballing networks there are occasional inaccuracies and omissions however these are acknowledged, such as when Gordon records that the school staffing list (p293) is made up from a range of sources, some of which are unverified or unverifiable. The book has been well designed with black and white and colour images, and there are clear differentiations in the text between reported stories, extracts from other documents, and the descriptive history.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a country where understanding one's whakapapa is an essential part of understanding one's own identity and this book records the day-to-day origins of the profession in the experiences of those within it. Not only relevant for those whose memories are part this social history, it also provides an important resource for the future for those wishing to understand the development of this profession in this country. "Told largely in the voices of those who were there", this legacy belongs in family bookcases, in community public libraries, and in academic and health libraries throughout this country and internationally.

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Copies of the Book and CD are available from: the Legacy of Occupation Research Group, PO Box 32-326, Devonport 0744, Auckland, New Zealand at \$62.50 plus \$5.00 p+p