

## Porirua Hospital Museum / Resource Centre Oral History Project

Recorded: 12 September 2003  
Interviewer: Helen Reilly  
Abstractor: Helen Reilly

2 SIDES  
**SUSHILA FERNANDO**  
**Dr THAKSHAN FERNANDO**

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- 027 SUSHILA'S BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS: arriving in NEW ZEALAND, living on PORIRUA HOSPITAL campus with family, starting work in the library, gaining her qualifications.
- 045 Describes START of LIBRARY in 1975 (and role of multi-disciplinary committee) with purpose of providing medical staff with information. Describes how they acquired books + work of the 2 part-time librarians in running library and cataloguing the books. Describes how she became the full-time librarian in 1978.
- 103 Explains what DIFFERENTIATES A SPECIALISED LIBRARY in a PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL from a general medical library.
- 131 Describes difficulties experienced in adequately CLASSIFYING SPECIALISED BOOKS ON PSYCHIATRIC BOOKS using the NLM (National Library of Medicine) classification system. Explains how NLM needed to be adapted.
- 158 Describes PATIENT VOLUNTEERS WORKING IN LIBRARY AS AN EXPERIMENT: very successful, linked to occupational therapy and rehabilitation. Describes how this led to training programme for other patients.
- 188 Describes POPULARITY OF LIBRARY AS PLACE FOR TRAINING. Gives details about Social Welfare Department, + the outside community and schools using it. Recalls the satisfaction she felt.
- 210 Describes WORK PATIENTS DID IN LIBRARY. Explains how she as librarian negotiated jobs individually with each patient. Explains why patients enjoyed working in the library, the payment and training they received which enabled them to get jobs when they left PORIRUA HOSPITAL. Describes support she received from medical profession for scheme.
- 274 Explains about the valuable MEDLICOT COLLECTION in PORIRUA HOSPITAL LIBRARY: Professor MEDLICOT (Professor of Psychiatry at OTAGO MEDICAL SCHOOL) retired from medical practice in DUNEDIN, then came to PORIRUA HOSPITAL. THAKSHAN'S voice heard in background. Explains donation of 600 books from MEDLICOT'S personal collection: SUSHILA had these acid-proofed, and a special cabinet made.
- 304 Describes HOW PORIRUA HOSPITAL LIBRARY BECAME A CENTRE OF LEARNING: bibliographies she produced and role of multi-disciplinary library committee in developing collection of specialised books. Makes reference to bibliographies, indexes, MEDLINE. Explains how PORIRUA HOSPITAL LIBRARY concentrated on Australasian material not covered by standard medical journals. Became highly regarded mental health library.
- 340 hiccup in tape.
- 343 Recalls HOW SHE CAME TO WORK IN PORIRUA HOSPITAL LIBRARY.

- 354 Describes her SATISFACTION IN DEVELOPING THE LIBRARY and WORKING WITH PATIENTS.
- 363 Describes LIVING ON CAMPUS WITH FAMILY. Explains: glad they first had experienced culture of SRI LANKA, how the children experienced no problems, how 1975 PORIRUA was a safe place. Narrates anecdote about Police looking after her son. Children attended TAWA COLLEGE: suffered no stigma about living at a mental hospital, had holiday jobs in hospital.
- 404 THAKSHAN joins in discussion about HAVING OFF-DUTY CONTACT with PATIENTS. SUSHILA refers to children playing tennis with patients and her teaching one music. Mentions community aspect of living on PORIRUA HOSPITAL campus.
- 425 End of SIDE 1

## SIDE 2

- 008 SUSHILA describes FAMILY SOCIAL LIFE they had when they both lived and worked on campus. Refers to her daughter who used the library professionally.
- 048 Describes what led to her work on DEVELOPING NEW SYSTEM FOR CLASSIFYING specialist books on different aspects of psychiatry. Explains how she solicited advice from local experts about modifying categories. Refers to Dr HELEN BICHAN (Medical Superintendent 1986 – 1988) and PUKETIRO CHILD PSYCHIATRY DEPARTMENT (opened in 1980). Resulted in library being used more effectively.
- 104 Explains IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECT HEADINGS for CLASSIFYING BOOKS. Describes how she wrote a learned paper on this called 'The classification of library materials in psychiatry at the Staff Library, Porirua Psychiatric Hospital' which was published in *New Zealand Libraries* vol.44, 6, June 1984.
- 131 Explains that many PORIRUA HOSPITAL LIBRARY books are now at WELLINGTON HOSPITAL: unsatisfactory lack of space, mostly unused. Describes her concern about their safety, including MEDLICOT Collection, and how they should be looked after by knowledgeable people.
- 168 THAKSHAN describes LOSS OF PROF MEDLICOTT's COLLECTION OF PATIENT PAINTINGS. Refers to a similar archival collection of paintings by an Australian psychiatrist (CUNNINGHAM DAX?) in MELBOURNE. SUSHILA suggests that that PORIRUA HOSPITAL MUSEUM/RESOURCE CENTRE may be successor of the library, wonders if the MEDLICOTT painting collection could be retrieved.
- 200 Describes work of THOM VAN ARENDONK and NGAERE THOMPSON IN SAFEGUARDING PORIRUA HOSPITAL HISTORICAL MATERIAL. Explains FRIENDS OF PORIRUA HOSPITAL MUSEUM established to organise and present the material more systematically. Mentions work of CLARE ASHTON and Dr DURNING (?) with the dental material.
- 225 SUSHILA and THAKSHAN discuss the POTENTIAL FOR PORIRUA HOSPITAL MUSEUM / RESOURCE CENTRE and its role in educating people about mental health.

- 250 Explains further about FORMATION OF FRIENDS OF PORIRUA HOSPITAL MUSEUM: reasons, concern for museum, public meeting, PORIRUA general public against closing museum.
- 262 THAKSHAN describes AMBIVALENCE in PORIRUA about MUSEUM and problems it has. SUSHILA mentions funding help from PORIRUA CITY COUNCIL. THAKSHAN suggests that it is not the role of (KAPITI COAST?) DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD to fund museum.
- 290 SUSHILA and THAKSHAN both explain IMPORTANCE OF MUSEUM and the LIBRARY COLLECTIONS IN FUTURE for teaching people about mental health. THAKSHAN queries what should happen to the archival material and exhibits if MUSEUM / RESOURCE CENTRE cannot survive. Short discussion on funding by both SUSHILA and THAKSHAN.
- 343 End of SIDE 2