

FOUR BEAUTIFUL SEASONS TWELVE FANTASTIC MONTHS ONE VERY BIG YEAR

Robyn Archer Launches *One River* in Goolwa

Creative Director of the Centenary of Canberra, Robyn Archer AO, officially launched the *One River* project at an address which was part of the first One River symposium held at the Regional Arts Australia national conference, *Kumuwuki*, in Goolwa, South Australia. The panel was convened by the *One River* Curator of Stories, Malcolm McKinnon. Also on the panel were writer and journalist Asa Wahlquist, artist Ken Orchard and Ngunnawal Caring for Country Ranger from Canberra, Adrian Brown. This is an excerpt from Robyn's address.

20 Oct 2012, Uniting Church Hall, Collingwood Street, Goolwa

Thanks very much Malcolm. I want to pay my respects to the Ngarrindjeri people and also express my delight that Adrian Brown [a member of the One River Reference Group who spoke earlier during this forum] is here from Canberra.

The theme of the river seems so fertile and I'll just start with my connection. [Slide]This is the bit of the river I am most familiar with – the Cadell side of Cadell - Morgan. This is a picture of my Mum and her sister Beryl and they are standing where they were born on the edge of the river. That was on our last trip up there a few months ago, me being the delegated family member who takes the ladies on this run. [Slide]This picture is them a little closer to when they were born. In the middle is my grandmother, Agnes, on the right my mother, Beryl in the middle, next to them Lorna their sister and their young brother Teddy and that's exactly on the sandy banks where they were born. Agnes was brought there as a young bride to a tin shed on the river. They went through the Depression there. Mum says that all they had to eat during the Depression, because they clearly had no money, was lobster and butter for breakfast [laughter]. This was fished up out of the river, the pots that Papa dangled in the river – the lobster was boiled in the same pots they washed their clothes in. [Slide]This picture is Agnes' parents, so my mother's grandparents and my great-grandparents, Agnes McFarlane, a Scot, and Charlie Shell, my great-grandfather, whom I knew as a child when he was in his nineties. Charlie was born under the wagon, with the pioneers coming out here from Germany, with vines on the wagon: he became a coach driver for Hill and Co coaches and then went up the river. [Slide]That's them again, Agnes, Charlie, Aunt Louisa and my Mum who was named for her, Mary Louisa Wohling. That's Charlie in his young and stronger days in their property. They were in Morgan, across the river. And that's their house today, my great-grandparents' house, still occupied in that state up in Morgan. That's what the river up there looks like at the moment.

[Slide]This is what the ferry, or the punt looks like today. The reason all the family were there is [slide – older pic]] the man in the slouch hat with the nice lean is my grandfather Ted Wolling who ran the punt. When he came back from the Light Horse Regiment at the end of World War 1, instead of taking up a fruit block, he was advised that it was government punt money and poison, don't take it, so he didn't take a fruit block and the family was poverty stricken even since [laughter], and he just ran the punt. Malcolm was telling me about members of his family who couldn't swim. Ted ran the punt for many years and couldn't swim either.

We went up last time because the South Australian government was threatening to close the Cadell Ferry and so I thought that I would take Mary and Beryl up there to have a look around. These were some of the signs that we saw on our drive into Cadell. "All Cadell wants is our Ferry", signs on the bus, and "Save the Cadell Ferry". That night I took Mary and Beryl to the

One River is a Centenary of Canberra project, proudly supported by the ACT Government and the Australian Government.



pub, we had a country and a few beers – they had, I didn't – and they signed the petition, and they won. Because of the activism of the Cadell community the government put back the decision for at least another five years, so the punt continues to run. This is probably my favourite photo. [Slide: Mary and Beryl striking a revolutionary fist-punching pose in front of a sign that reads "Save the Cadell Ferry!"].

So that hundred mile run up from Adelaide and back in the one day to see the rellies and enjoy the river has also been part of my 'unreasonable love of the river' (referencing Asa Wahlquist's comments earlier in this forum) and this is a wonderful phrase that I will continue to use, Asa.

I've been interacting with other parts of the river as well. Here [Slide] is Echuca where the PS Canberra is tied up. There is a wonderful story that the Captain tells and we'll see that in a moment in one of Malcolm's films. The Centenary of Canberra has been enabling me to explore stories like this at Echuca, at Mildura, where I mentored the festival there for a few years, in particular Helen Healy, who I'm glad to say is now looking after our other big national project apart from One River, and that's the whole of the Indigenous Program for 2013. [Slide] And Big Bend, I always stop to take a snap on the other side of the river, always a pleasure to go through beautiful countryside like this. [Slide] And Goolwa where my late Auntie Lee Duller, was the Mayor for many years, and my Uncle Ned still lives down here. So I've managed to cover quite a bit of the riverland.

This is why, when I was trying to plan the Centenary celebrations, the idea of doing something along the length and breadth of the Murray Darling came to me. I wanted a project where we could link up all these communities, in the belief that despite the continuing divisiveness about water, we could still share positive stories about river life. It seems to me that we've already started this morning.

I'm elated to hear that this project, even before I say, "it is launched", is already launched, because the conversation has already started. I'm delighted to find some similarities between Malcolm's story and mine, to hear that Asa had family who were blockies up in Barmera. We had relations in Berri, in Barmera, in Renmark. My Mum's best friend was in Waikerie. To find these links, and Ken to see the kind of work that you've done [Ken Orchard who spoke earlier in this panel session]; it's miraculous to know that Eugene von Guerard, the first Director of the National Gallery of Victoria and the beginning of the school which is now the Victorian College of the Arts, came down here to sketch. To understand that tomorrow, Adrian [Brown], you'll be able to talk with Uncle Moogy and Tom [Trevorrow] and be able to share the stories, that sharing of stories has already begun and I love that about the project.

In addressing the question, "Why should One River be part of the Centenary of Canberra?" the simplest answer is that Canberra is the largest city in the Murray-Darling Basin. One of the tributaries to what becomes the Murrumbidgee, flows through Canberra. Lake Burley Griffin is there because there is a water source. When you go up into the mountains near Canberra, you see the Murray and the Snowy starting from a couple of kilometres apart, on either side of these tall mountains. So, the national capital, despite all the accusations about it being remote from the rest of Australia, would be more remote if it were anywhere else. It links four states and a territory. You could indeed walk it.

If Canberra is the largest city in that system, we ought to be able to do a project, that, through its sharing of stories, its optimism, its heartfelt family connections we can create a dialogue, a conversation which is worth a lot more than just the embattled mentality we see reported in the press. Maybe this is the positive stuff that will get a profile, and maybe out of that sense of sharing stories between communities all along the river, what we'll get is something more productive than we have had till now. We'll get a better image of what river life is like.

When I said to the Captain of the PS Canberra, Peter Garfield, "Do you think the Murray is a little bit like the Ganges is to Indians, that everyone at some point would like to see the river, or dip their toe into the river to say they have?" and he agreed with that. He thought that was a fundamental shared story of all Australians.

Do have a look at our whole program, it's enormous. There are many ways you can get involved in the Centenary of Canberra and One River sits right in the middle of that program. You get a sense of the dimensions of the Centenary program when you realise that One River is one of about 80 projects that are being run throughout the year, it's

absolutely massive. There is another way that you can get involved and it comes up today with the sharing of stories. We've got a project called the Canberra Diaspora. If any of you have a Canberra story, good or bad, we don't mind, upload your Canberra story. Put a camera on yourself, or get your nephew to do it, they'll know how to do it, and upload a story on the website, a story about your connection to Canberra. If you go to that website, you'll see a fascinating web of stories that create a different picture of the national capital, and that's what we're about in 2013. We're trying to get people to reimagine the capital. In these days when democracy is said to be at risk, and I've just been in Eastern Europe talking about exactly that ;;when despite enormous passion and protests and riots about democracy in some parts of the world, we understand that many young Australians think that another system would serve us just as well. We need strong symbols of democracy. We think Canberra can be one of those, so we'd like people to get involved next year and see if they can think differently about the way we relate to the capital and all it has to offer.

Today with Adrian here, the conversation with Canberra and the rest of Australia is not simply about Federal Parliament, it's about an Indigenous man talking to other Indigenous people thousands of kilometres away and yet linked by a river. So that's the change in conversation we'd like in Canberra.

The One River project is simply about connecting the river. We're already aware of so many things that are going on along the length and breadth of the river and just this morning we have the new Director of the Australian Experimental Art Foundation coming up to me and saying, "Well we already have a project running with the Murray Bridge Regional Gallery," and we'd love to link that with the One River project. We're aware that the Riverland Youth Theatre upstream are doing another project, we're aware that Goolwa's the Regional Community of Culture this year, we know that Uncle Moogy has been doing stuff way up in Queensland to link stories of Indigenous culture, so there are already dozens of things going on. We're starting to explore the stories particularly through the arts but not always just through the arts, through science, through policy, through a whole lot of other things. This dialogue will culminate in August next year in Canberra when we bring all those stories together and have another symposium. It's great to see that the project begins today with such a rich conversation. And today we announce that there are 10 commissions available to join the project – so please check the website and encourage artists you know to apply – the applications close in about a month. Let's have a look at what Malcolm's already done.

[Screening of one of Malcolm McKinnon's films made for the One River project and available to view at www.oneriver.com.au

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Lindy Allen 0439 999 248 executiveproducer@oneriver.com.au

Malcolm McKinnon 0427 462 946 recklesseye@bigpond.com