

STORIES OF *experience*:

learning from the environmental experiences of older Australians

Background

The Stories of Experience project has been developed as a partnership between the Council on the Ageing (NSW) and Real Options with assistance from the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust. COTA is a peak body providing leadership, advocacy and education for older persons in NSW.

The stories in the book were written by people who attended writing workshops held at public libraries in NSW. Most, but not all of these people were seniors. The workshops were around three hours in length and, owing to the Environmental Trust grant, provided free of charge by Real Options.

From the outset the aims of the book were to promote learning from older people's experiences and to encourage more sustainable living. However it is apparent that there is enormous value in people writing their stories and seeing their life experiences acknowledged and valued.

The book was launched in Sydney on the 28th March 2008. We were delighted that seven of the contributors were able to attend the launch, along with three people who provided reviewers.

What we did

Initially we contacted adult and community education colleges, writers groups and Universities of the 3rd Age as well as older persons groups through local government. We provided information about the project along with material to help guide stories. However, very few stories were forthcoming.

We then contacted the public libraries network in NSW and offered free workshops at libraries. Librarians immediately saw that this was a great way to diversify their activities and provide a service to their clients and users. Over the next few months seventy three stories were submitted.

Authors ranged from first time writers to people who had previously published work. The stories covered the full gamut of creative writing and ranged from personal life recollections to fictional work to poems. They are great reading, both professional and entertaining as well as inspiring.

Feedback from workshop participants

Attached is my contribution from the workshop at Singleton, Dec. 2006. I had fun remembering. I will run it by my 92 year old mum, later.

I enjoyed your workshop at Mudgee Library very much. I went from thinking that it was the usual kind of talk to thinking I agree with this, maybe I actually can write something of interest. Enclosed is my effort, don't be too critical when you do your editing!

Enclosed herewith is my contribution to helping to enhance the environment. I hope you find it suitable for publication. I thoroughly enjoyed your seminar. It was a pleasure working with you. Please come back to do more work with us.

Reviews

The editors have succeeded in producing a book of great diversity of older Australian's environmental experiences. The young can learn much from the very different world in which these people lived.

Jack Mundy, Instigator of the Famous Green Bans in the 1970s

This collection of delightful, candid stories demonstrates the many incarnations of living sustainably ... Inspired by each story, the editors have provided readers with practical actions for living more sustainably ...

Helen Scott, NSW Environmental Educator of the Year, 2006

... an unput-downable gem of practical, gossipy and humorous information of yesteryear ... an enjoyable read and a social history of a bygone era as sustainable and relevant today as it was then ...

John Hockney, Story Teller and Writer

Stories of Experience costs just \$10 – including postage

Future Stories of Experience

We have considerable experience in partnerships and seeking funding. We are exploring the possibility of similar projects which will include offering writing workshops with the aim of producing books based on people's experiences in other areas/ issues or themes. The range of possible themes is almost endless – sport, immigration, contributions to civil society, travel ... Should you be interested to consider a possible project please contact us.