

HISTORY COUNCIL OF WA / NEDLANDS LIBRARY 5 APRIL 2014
USING EVIDENCE IN HISTORICAL FICTION WRITING
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The difficulty as a novelist, and especially for me as a historian who writes historical fiction, is to ensure that, as far as is possible within the confines of an entertaining novel, the picture that is presented to the reader is an accurate one. You need a strong story line, but your depiction of the period in which it is set must be accurate as well as entertaining.

Historians are, and readers of historical fiction should be, sensitive to errors of anachronism—that is, putting events in an “incorrect” order, or having historical characters speak, think, and act in ways inappropriate for the time in which they were living. Reading the past in terms of a writer’s own present experience can also create problems. So it’s important to use evidence with attention to “context,” to specificity of time and place.

I’m used to collecting and dealing with evidence and in using that evidence to support an argument in law or history. So when I start to think about writing a novel, it is second nature to me to begin with collecting the evidence I will use to ensure that my novels don’t contain errors of anachronism, that my dates are correct, that my characters speak, think and act appropriately for the time in which they live.

So, what evidence do I use, and how do I use it? My novels *A Stranger in my Street* (2012) and *Taking a Chance* (2013) both published by Pan Macmillan Australia are set in Perth during World War II. In the books I wanted to describe not only the events, but also the emotions of that time in Australian history – the sense of fear and excitement, of taking chances and living in the moment. While a mystery – a “whodunit” – provides the main narrative drive in both the novels, there is a strong romantic narrative too, and all of this happens within a historical setting which I’ve tried to make as accurate and authentic as possible.

Balancing the different elements can be a difficult and demanding task. Too much history can produce a novel that reads more like a “cut and paste” job from Wikipedia and it will quickly lose its narrative momentum. Too little history, on the other hand, can make the setting seem perfunctory and lacking in believability. So an author faces a major challenge in selecting and including just enough historical detail.

The evidentiary bases I use when I write my novels are as follows:

Family history – my mother’s stories about her life as a young woman in the war and her life generally, together with her stories about my father's experiences;

Personal experience – what I’ve personally experienced about the places or events that form the backdrop to my stories;

Oral histories – from people I have met, from books, from documentaries such as *The World at War*, or *Girls’ Own War Stories*;

Contemporary sources – these include newspapers, novels, films, newsreels, music, letters, photographs, my father’s war diary;

Secondary sources – books, articles, websites, dictionaries, documentaries that were not written or made at the time but are about that period of history.

As you can see, when I write I draw on an extensive range of sources – especially newspapers and oral histories – but I try to use them in ways which are unobtrusive and advance the plot.

Family history

The main driving force behind my wanting to write my first novel, *A Stranger in my Street*, which is set in World War 2 Perth, was growing up hearing the stories of my mother. She lived in Perth throughout the War from the age of nineteen to twenty-five.

Mum loved to tell stories. She spoke about coping with blackouts, and casualty lists, and rationing, and identity cards, and censorship of private letters and news. From her I got a sense of what it was *be* a young woman living an ordinary life in extraordinary times. Mum spoke about the thousands of allied troops who flooded into the city for R&R, but as Western Australia had the highest enlistment rate of any state in Australia, Perth she made it clear that Perth was missing its own men. “We danced with Americans,” she said, “because there weren’t any Australians to dance with.”

Like any human being, a well-rounded character has to have backstory. Mum’s stories were useful there, too. I heard about her childhood in Kalgoorlie, and the effect of the Great War and the Great Depression on her and those around her.

World War I had ended only twenty years before and it had taken the lives of 60,000 Australian men. My mother’s father had fought in that War and her uncle had been killed at Gallipoli. She told me about her friends whose fathers had been gassed and maimed on the battlefields of France and Belgium, and of seeing shell-shocked

ex-soldiers. For Mum, as with probably every other Australian at that time, the shadow of World War I loomed large. I tried to include a sense of that long history in *A Stranger in my Street*, when I include a family story told by my mother, but put it into the words of Meg, my heroine:

“My father was a casualty of the Great War, even though he didn't actually die until 1922. He'd joined the Australian Army in 1916, after he'd learned of the death of his younger brother in France. He said it was his duty to go off to war, but it meant leaving a wife and two small daughters behind in Kalgoorlie. On the sideboard in the dining room was a photograph, taken just before he left, of my father standing stiffly in his uniform next to his wife and daughters. My sisters Joan and Mary, who were five and three, regarded the camera with blank, confused stares, and Father appeared grimly determined, like a man who was tired of arguing the point of why he had to go away to war. Ma hated that photograph. ‘I look so sad,’ she always said when she saw it. ‘Because I was so sad.’”
(pp.9-10)

That’s almost exactly as my mother told it to me, except that her father was a forty-three year old accountant who had lied about his age to join up, his brother had died at Gallipoli, not in France, and he had left behind four daughters, not two.

Mum also told me about the hungry years of the Great Depression, about living in straightened circumstances with a widowed mother in Kalgoorlie and seeing first-hand the misery of those years, in which up to a quarter of the population of WA was out of work. I use the stories she told me in *Taking a Chance*.

And Mum gave me an insight into other, more personal issues. She topped the state in the Junior Shorthand Typing exam, and was always top of her class at school, but she left school at 14 and a half to work as a secretary in a legal office. Many girls left school at that age in those days. Mum was smart and I’m sure that if she'd been born forty years later she’d have gone on to University like I did. But, in a time of Depression, people simply couldn’t afford to keep children at school, no matter how intelligent they might be, if the children could work and earn money for the family. So, from Mum I also got a sense of the limitations imposed on women at that time. In *Taking a Chance*, Nell is well aware of the sacrifices her uncle makes to allow her to go to university, and of the opportunities given to her by the shortage of men during a war.

Many little details in my novels were taken from Mum's stories. She took the trolley bus or a parlour car into Perth city, just as Meg does in *A Stranger in my Street*. She joined the Red Cross and learned first aid, and she packed comfort parcels for the troops, just like Meg.

My mother spoke of the sadness of the death of friends and relatives, of the horror Perth people felt on learning of the sinking of the HMAS Sydney, of the surrender of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin and Pearl Harbor. I knew from Mum that was a time of fear and of worry about those who were in danger. But she admitted it was also a time of excitement, of challenges and romance, when Perth was 'occupied' by Americans, who were handsome and well-dressed and whose manners made Australian men seem crude in comparison.

The first idea for *A Stranger in my Street* came from my mother's account of returning to Megalong Street each night from work, after she left the trolley bus at the Highway. She told me she'd always run through the pocket of bush between Park Road and Stirling Highway, where St Catherine's College now stands, because it was dark and scary in the blackout. I imagined her fear in that dark and deserted bit of urban bushland, and I thought how easy it would be to murder someone there in the darkness...

So that was my starting point.

To hear Mum's stories of Perth in the war, for her, it had been a time of excitement and fun, but she told me other stories, too. Stories about my father's war. My parents didn't meet until 1947, so they were both single in the war, and their experiences of that time were entirely different. My father was a member of the 2/2 Independent Company, a small group of Australian Commandos who were trapped in Portuguese East Timor when the Japanese invaded on 20 February 1942.

They retreated to the mountains, where, with the support and assistance of the Timorese people, this small group of men conducted a very successful guerrilla campaign against the Japanese.

It was an extremely difficult time, both physically and emotionally for my father, who had his twenty-first birthday in Timor. The 2/2 was distinguished by having had more contact against the Japanese than any other Allied unit during the war and my mother was enormously proud of my father's wartime exploits. So she made sure that my brothers and I were made aware of what he had done. She'd recount his stories of training at Wilson's Promontory in Victoria, and in Queensland, and his stories of the

fighting in Timor. I used some of those stories in my new novel, *A Time of Secrets*, to be published in January 2015.

But the price Dad paid for his service to Australia was high. On Timor he suffered Beri-Beri, dysentery, malnutrition and recurrent malaria. After the war he suffered what we now know as post-traumatic stress. My mother told me he'd suffer terrible bouts of malarial fever, that he'd shake uncontrollably and drench the bedclothes with sweat, and that he'd wake up screaming, night after night, re-living his experiences in the war.

He died at the age of 42, of war-related causes, when I was four years old, so my knowledge of his war – until I found his war diary and began to read books about the Timor campaign – came from my mother. I have tried, in every novel, to refer not only to the excitement of the times, but also to the sacrifices made by those who fought for Australia.

Personal experience

There's a reason I set my novels in Perth and Melbourne. I have a need to walk where my characters walk, to imagine I'm looking at what they see. I felt better when I knew exactly how long it would have taken Meg and Tom in *A Stranger in my Street* and Johnny and Nell in *Taking a Chance* to amble from the Supreme Court Building to Howard Street, where the Colour Patch Cafe was situated in 1943.

I walked up and down Megalong Street, Nedlands, where Meg lives in *A Stranger in my Street*, which incidentally is where my mother lived in 1939 with her mother and sisters. I wandered along Violet Grove in Shenton Park, where Nell lives in *Taking a Chance*. I strode around South Yarra, where my new novel is set, and visited the mansions that housed various branches of the Allied Intelligence Bureau during the War.

The Silver Dollar Cabaret, where some of the action in *A Stranger in my Street* takes place, is long gone. It used to be in an old building on the corner of Milligan Street and Hay Street. But the top floor of Boffins Bookshop in Hay Street was where another infamous Cabaret, the Cocoanut Grove, was situated, and I walked around there, dodging bookcases, and imagined it as a smoky, noisy nightclub filled with American sailors and their girls.

I know exactly what view of the Swan River you get from various points on Stirling Highway and I know the route taken by Meg's trolleybus as it winds along

Mounts Bay Road towards Perth. In the 1970s I ate hamburgers at the now long gone Bernies' Hamburger Bar, so that was a memory I could use when Bud takes Meg there after dancing with her at the Embassy Ballroom in *A Stranger in my Street*.

I've sat in on trials in the Criminal Court – that grand old number 2 Court in the Supreme Court building. I've seen it from the viewpoint of a barrister. I know how it looks, smells and feels. And I used that personal knowledge in the first chapter of *Taking a Chance*.

Another personal experience I used in *Taking a Chance* was my memories of visiting a prisoner in Fremantle Gaol to take a statement from him in 1982, when it was then still a working prison. In *Taking a Chance* I tried to invoke the sense of desperation I felt when the heavy doors were locked behind me, that feeling of mild panic. Believe me – the sun shone less brightly in that ghastly place.

I was at my doctor's surgery last year and as my GP took my blood pressure I asked her about treatments for Asthma in the 1940s because the heroine in my new novel is asthmatic. She laughed and said, "In your first novel the heroine had a migraine. You get migraines. Now you're writing about asthma and you're asthmatic. I suppose it's a good idea to write what you know."

I do know what it's like to gasp for breath during an asthma attack, but I've never watched a judge put on the black cap or heard the death sentence pronounced. I've never danced with an American sailor. I've never been assaulted by or assaulted another person, or been a soldier or a secretary or a journalist. Imagination is crucial in writing a novel, but for the little details that really give a reader the sense of being there, of experiencing with the characters what is happening to them, you need more than imagination. It's the little details that convince. So we authors steal those feelings, those descriptions of experiences we've never had from those who have experienced them. And we do so in many ways.

Speaking to people who know or who were there

Authors are rather vampiric. We call in favours and ask friends, colleagues and professionals for information and we suck in the details they give us. I too often cross-examine friends if they know things that might be of use to me in my writing.

Last Saturday at a friend's birthday afternoon tea, I cornered someone I hadn't seen for a while. "Weren't you a policeman in Sydney before you did law? A detective? In the 1980s?" When he admitted this I spent an hour interrogating him

about his memories of those days, about cases he'd been involved with, the methodologies used in solving crimes, the means used to calm violent situations, to defend himself or to attack when necessary; apparently the large torches the policemen carried were much better in a scrap than the smaller coshes.

I'd always wanted to write a novel that began with a Judge putting on the black cap and pronouncing the sentence of death, and I do so in *Taking a Chance*. I wondered what it was like to hear the words spoken. The death sentence wasn't actually abolished in WA – the last state to do so – until 1984. So I know people who have been in court when the black cap has been put on by the judge and the sentence pronounced. I've asked many people and they all tell me that they felt as Nell does in *Taking a Chance* – even though you know that the sentence will be commuted, just hearing the words is a shocking and sobering experience.

I store up interesting little stories. How in the War a young boy would be taken to Kings Park as a Sunday treat to watch the Catalinas take off and land in the river. From another, his feelings on watching a Catalina nearly crash into a neighbour's house in Claremont when it was flying too low on take-off. How it felt to get chewing gum from the nice Americans when they arrived to take out your sister. A man told me how, at the age of six, he ran into his mother's room and found her in bed with a strange man. She said, "Meet your father, darling." His father hadn't been home for three years and he was a stranger to the child.

A woman who came to one of my talks told me of her older sister, who loved to dance with Americans and who, like Meg in *A Stranger in my Street*, would paint her legs in a time of shortage of nylons. One evening her sister painted her legs beautifully, drew the line up the back of the calf with an eyebrow pencil for the seam, then slipped on her lovely white dancing shoes. Only they lived in Wales. It rains a lot in Wales. By the time she got to the dance she was crying and her white shoes were brown.

On 20 May last year my cousin Bernard, who lives in California and is a retired doctor, wrote me an email in the course of which he said of *A Stranger in my Street*:
"I enjoyed the picture you painted of American servicemen at loose in an Australian city. You do not have personal memories of those years, but I do. I was a teenager in Adelaide when the Yanks were in town. And I remember vividly how defiantly unconventional they were, disdainful of the restraints of us law-abiding Australians. One day I saw with my own eyes a couple of American navy

men riding on a city tram, standing on the back platform with wind in their faces. With the tram moving fast, a gusty wind blew off one of their navy hats. Without a moment's hesitation, his buddy nonchalantly leaned out the back, grabbed the rope and pulled the tram's power supply down off its overhead power line. The tram came to a sudden halt, with its motorman shouting his protests. The navy man trotted back and retrieved the lost hat from the street. In one minute the tram was on its way again."

I used that story practically verbatim in my latest novel, *A Time of Secrets*.

Oral histories

I also find interesting and useful quotes, which give me wonderful insights into the era, in books such as *When the War came to Australia* and *On the Homefront*, or the recollections of individuals in documentaries such as *The World at War*, or *Girls' Own War Stories*. Autobiographies such as *Wild Card* by Dorothy Hewett have also been very useful.

Dorothy Hewitt was rather a gold mine for ideas, in fact. She was later a poet and novelist, but in the War she was a young Perth journalist and she was a lot more free-spirited than my mother!

In *When the War Came to Australia* she is quoted as saying:

*"There was this sense that it was important that you lived for the moment because there mightn't be any other one, mightn't be many more moments or perhaps none, and therefore a tremendous amount of licence and liberation came into people's lives which would never have happened - perhaps at all, particularly in a place like Perth."*¹

More than a little of that "licence and liberation" Hewett describes was because Perth had been "occupied" by American and other troops. Young women were expected as part of their unpaid work and patriotic duty to welcome the troops at dances and to volunteer at clubs and canteens. To quote Dorothy Hewett again:

"All life changed radically in Perth from then on because suddenly you had this influx of American airmen - on Catalina boats mainly - and American army

¹ Dorothy Hewitt, quoted in Joanna Penglase and David Horner, *When the War Came to Australia* (1992), p.205.

*personnel, but particularly American sailors and submarine ratings. And the streets of Perth suddenly became this R and R joint, with all the girls rushing around after the Americans because they'd never been treated like this in their lives, with orchids and lots of money and fur coats and nice speeches. Australians didn't really go in for those things very much."*²

I knew that Aussie girls were bowled over by Americans, but didn't know how the Yanks viewed the traditional Australian male's relationship with women. The following quote gave me some idea. An American Staff Sergeant Bill Bentson, who married an Australian girl, said:

*"The Americans thought that the Australian woman was really downtrodden, and we'd go to functions that were put on by the different organisations and the Australian men would be at this end of the floor and the Australian women would be at the other end of the floor and it seemed like the women were being overlooked and not catered to, and segregated. It seemed like the men didn't want to have too much to do with them - they'd be having a joke and hamming amongst themselves in a sort of man's world and the women were just sort of left."*³

I put the sentiment into a conversation between Meg and Annie in *A Stranger in my Street* as follows:

"Mind you, Australian men think more of their mates than their women. They have no idea how to treat a girl. You know what they say, that on pay day an Aussie man goes to the pub with his mates first, then places his bets on the ponies, and then picks up his girl and takes her to the beach."

I laughed. 'Because he's spent all his money on his mates and the ponies?'

She swept colour onto her top lip. 'Americans always go for the girl first,' she said. She rubbed her lips together and smiled. 'That's why Americans are so great. And they stay with you the whole night.'

I smiled, and she rolled her eyes. 'I didn't mean it that way, silly. I mean that when an American takes you out he really looks after you. If he sees a

² *ibid.*, p.111

³ Bill Bentson, quoted *ibid.*, p.117.

group of his mates he doesn't leave you cooling your heels so he can spend time with them.'

She was right. That was how it usually went if you were out with an Australian, the men all up one end of the room and the women at the other." (p.140)

Mum's comments about polite Americans were verified time and again by women who spoke about this period. Joy Boucher, an aircraft construction worker in Sydney is quoted in *When the War Came to Australia*:

*"The first thing you noticed when you met an American, was their manner. They had very good manners with women. A woman likes to be spoken to properly, and naturally when they were treated so well by the Americans, the reaction was quite profound. Almost everyone went out with some Americans, because they were just everywhere and we had no Australians to dance with."*⁴

It was telling to me that these words so echoed what my mother had said.

And the American uniforms were so nice. This quote summarises a view I've heard and read many times since.

*"There were so many things that are different from now and men had buttoned flies, all army uniforms had buttoned flies, and then along came the Yanks and they had zippers - and you found yourself trying not to look. They really made the front of the trousers very neat, I tell you and they didn't really come into the civilian population in Australia, zippers, until the war had ended - but oh, very neat."*⁵

This was something so many women spoke about that I knew I had to incorporate it in my book. In *A Stranger in my Street* I use it this way:

"The American 'invasion' of Perth was, in Annie's view, the most exciting thing ever to have happened here.

'Well, who wouldn't think so?' she said. 'They are charming, they know how to treat a woman and they look so dashing. I mean, honestly Meg, their uniforms are smooth. The Australian uniform is baggy and scratchy. Their

⁴ Joy Boucher, quoted *ibid.*, p.111.

⁵ Patsy Adam-Smith, quoted *ibid.*, p.107.

uniforms fit. I love that even the enlisted men wear ties, not just the officers.'

She giggled. 'And their flies are zippers. Our boys have buttons, like they've just come off the Ark.'

It was early in our friendship and I was taken aback.

'Annie! Just how closely have you been examining their uniforms?'

'Well, it's pretty obvious. If you look.'"(p.60)

It was reading Dorothy Hewitt's Autobiography, *Wild Card* that set me thinking about the novel that would become *Taking a Chance*. She wrote:

*"Later, when I am assigned to the Children's Court as a part-time reporter for the Daily News, I see the seamier side of the Yank invasion – dozens of teenagers, some as young as twelve, standing in the dock pregnant, charged with being 'uncontrollable children'."*⁶

And she also said:

*"I always remember 'VD and a rabbit-skin coat' – that was what many Americans left these young girls with, and they'd go off to reform school, and God knows what happened to them."*⁷

This got me thinking, and I began to research the newspapers ...

Newspapers and magazines

I needed facts. So I started reading newspaper reports about the WA Children's court in the 1940s. I read the sad stories of girls of fifteen, sixteen, seventeen or so who would stay out all night, drink too much, keep undesirable company and get in too deep. Apparently it was as much a problem in 1943 as it appears to be now. I used some of those stories in *Taking a Chance*.

I was able to read these articles easily because over the past few years the National Library has been quietly arranging for the digitization of Australian newspapers and magazines, from the nineteenth century to the 1980s. They are all

⁶ Dorothy Hewitt, *Wild Card* (1990), p. 121

⁷ Dorothy Hewitt, quoted in Joanna Penglase and David Horner, *When the War Came to Australia* (1992), pp.177-8

there – the *West Australian*, the *Daily News*, the *Argus*, the *Army News*, the *Australian Women's Weekly* and many more. As of 3 April 2014 there were 125,031,208 articles available to search in Trove Digitised newspapers – www.trove.nla.gov.au – a goldmine for an author who wants to get and give a sense of the period in which she is setting her novels.

For instance, on 13 March 1942 the *Daily News* ran the headline MET, WED IN ONE WEEK, about Nedlands woman Roma Coombe. To put such quick romances into novels causes a suspension of belief in today's more jaded world, but it certainly was the case in wartime, and I could prove it.

On 29 August 1942 the Perth newspaper *The Mirror* wrote:

“Since March - 174 Western Australian girls have married American sailors. That works out at a marriage a day. There are several instances of couples having met one day, married the next, then the husband has gone to sea, and the wife hasn't seen him since.”

That such quick liaisons might end in disaster was another theme in *Taking a Chance*, and for disastrous endings to hasty romances I had *The Mirror*, Perth's tacky scandal rag with its seemingly endless supply of salacious stories of the divorce courts, especially ones involving American servicemen. In *Taking a Chance* my heroine Nell Fitzgerald works for a newspaper called *The Marvel*, which is a thinly disguised version of *The Mirror*.

I used the Trove digitised newspapers in so many ways in my writing. From a contemporary newspaper I got the exact form of words of the death sentence at that time. I sometimes wonder about a particular expression, so I search Trove and see if those words were used in in the 1940s. If they were, then I felt confident in using them in the novels.

I read all the Bluey and Curley cartoons printed in the *Argus* from 1939 to 1945 and made careful note of the slang they used. Examples are:

- Poor coot
- You beaut
- Poor cow
- It's apples
- Too right

- He must be bomb happy
- Blimey
- Fair dinkum
- A bonzer little girl
- It's a corker
- Thumping big
- Cripes
- I've got the blooming pip
- The brass-hats (meaning officers)
- Whacko!
- Have a nose around
- Are you shickered? (meaning drunk)
- Deener – shilling – a bob
- He'll be skittled, sure as eggs.
- Yer mug.
- She's a little bundle of dynamite.
- It's on the nose
- Gorblimey

From the newspapers I found out interesting facts, such as that it was almost impossible to buy lipstick in a metal case because the cases were being turned into cartridge holders, so the same lipstick cases had to be used over and over again, and simply refilled. I found this out from advertisements in the newspapers, and I used one of these ads in *A Time of Secrets*: “Don't throw your old case away, keep it on Active Service.”

Newspapers also gave me excellent descriptions of clothes of the time. Nell in *Taking a Chance* writes about fashion and is always fashionably dressed. I was able to ensure that every outfit she wears was taken from descriptions of real outfits in 1943.

Feature articles have given me amazing insights and ideas. On 27 April 1937 was published an article entitled: “WOMEN IN PRISON: Conditions at Fremantle Gaol, Described By 'Ixia'.” I used this article, together with my own experience of visiting

Fremantle Gaol in 1982, to ensure that the descriptions of the women's prison in *Taking a Chance* were accurate.

Photographs

I find photographs invaluable in giving me a real sense of place. Many are digitised on library websites such as Trove or the State Library sites and I look them up constantly. They enable me to describe buildings that have been long demolished, such as the Embassy Ballroom, and they give me a sense of what places such as St Georges Terrace really looked like at that time.

Contemporary Novels

There were very few novels published in the 1930s and 1940s about Perth. I've consulted all those I could find, looking for facts and insights.

- *A World of our Own* is a novel by GM Glaskin published in 1955. It's set in Perth in 1946 and deals with the stories of a group of returned servicemen and women. It gave me some really good details about suburban Perth and the views of Perth people just after the War had ended.
- *Money Street* is a novel published in 1933 by John K Ewers, set (not surprisingly) in Money Street, Northbridge. It reflects the social life of the 1930s in inner city Perth. In *A Stranger in my Street*, Mrs Gangemi lives in Money Street, as homage to this book.
- Dorothy Lucie Sanders (also known as Lucy Walker) wrote a series of novels in the 1950s that were set in a fictional Perth suburb she called Pepper Tree Bay – really Peppermint Grove/Claremont. *Six for Heaven* (1952) was the first of six novels that became known as the *Pepper Tree Bay series*. They have been described as a 'commentary on Western Australian social life in the nineteen twenties and the thirties along the picturesque Swan River'. The books gave me a good idea of the attitudes of people in that part of our city at that time.

Other novels that were published during or soon after the War, that I read and used as historical evidence are:

- *The Fatal Days* by Western Australian author Henrietta Drake-Brockman. It was published in 1947 and traces the arrival of the American GIs to Ballarat, and their interaction with the locals;
- *Come in Spinner* by Dymphna Cusack and Florence James was published in 1951 and is a classic depiction of wartime Sydney.

Medical sources

I obtain my sources for medical matters such as stab wounds, poisons, asphyxiation etc from various sources. I was very proud to find in an article in the British Medical Journal of January 1956 entitled “Prolonged Activity after Heart Wound” which had exactly the information I needed to make the central crime in *A Stranger in my Street*, believable. I also use a British website – forensic medicine for medical students – which has been invaluable. <http://www.forensicmed.co.uk>

Secondary sources

Of course these are used extensively. Books, journal articles, websites, dictionaries, documentaries have all given me information that I could feel confident about using in the novels.

For instance, my latest novel deals with the wartime intelligence service in Melbourne and there was no way I could have found out all I needed to know without access to the work done by others in this field. The CIA has a website, *Studies in Intelligence*, and this had a detailed article about the very mission I was interested in, as did John Laffin's book, *Special and Secret* (1990).

How can I mention all the books I've consulted? I'm so lucky to be married to a librarian at UWA, who could order books as I needed them. A few of the more important to me include:

- Jenny Gregory, *On the Home Front: Western Australia and World War II*
- Joanna Penglas and David Horner, *When the War Came to Australia* (1992)
- Kate Darian-Smith, *On the home front: Melbourne in wartime: 1939-1945* (1990)
- E Daniel and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under* (1985)
- Barry Ralph, *They Passed This Way: The United States of America, the States of Australia and World War II*

- Anthony Barker and Lisa Jackson, *Fleeting Attraction: A social history of American Servicemen in Western Australia during the Second World War* (1996)

I also found to be invaluable the website www.ozatwar.com which is a goldmine of information about Australia during the Second World War.

Other useful secondary sources I own and use extensively are dictionaries and Australian reference books, including the *Australian National Dictionary*, the *Historical Encyclopaedia of Western Australia*, the *World War 2 Almanac* and *Diggerspeak: The Language of Australians at War*.

In conclusion, I have tried in all my novels to recreate what it was like to be a young woman in 1943, living in Australia when the world was at war. And I've tried to do so in a way that is historically accurate but also will be of interest to a reader in 2013. And that is possibly the most difficult part of writing historical fiction – balancing historical plausibility with an engaging story. I hope I've succeeded. Read the books and let me know what you think!!

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