A Day in My Shoes
Amanda Hiscoe’s Life Story

Amanda Hiscoe and David Henderson

ENQUIRIES
Professor Christine Bigby
Leader Living with Disability Research Group
La Trobe University
Victoria 3086

T 03 9479 1016
E c.bigby@latrobe.edu.au
Foreword

This book is one in a series of five life stories of members of Reinforce, the oldest self advocacy group in Victoria. It represents one of the outcomes of a collaborative research project between the Living with Disability Research Centre (Latrobe University) and the Reinforce History Group, which was a collaborative group formed to work on the ARC Linkage project ‘Self Advocacy and Inclusion: What can be learned from speaking up over the years’. The group consisted of Amanda Hiscoe, Janice Slattery, Norrie Blythman, Jane Rosengrave (Hauser) and the late David Banfield from Reinforce and Professor Christine Bigby, Dr Patsie Frawley (La Trobe University) and Dr Paul Ramcharan (RMIT). These life stories were produced over two years of collaboration with members of the history group and the historian Dr David Henderson (La Trobe University).
Amanda’s Story: A Day in My Shoes
Foreword

1. This book is written by a married woman, now in her second marriage.
2. Who is legally blind since 19 April 1984 and has other disabilities.
3. The following drawings have been done by hand in numerous steps.
4. Green leaves on a brown tree.
5. She reads her information on a white background.
6. With black writing in big print.
7. I can only give you a few drops of water from a glass about my life.
8. Amanda is a good self advocate
1. Yellow is life in my opinion.
2. Green leaves is life in my opinion.
3. Brown trees is life in my opinion.
4. Experience is life in my opinion.
5. Knowledge and skills is life in my opinion.
6. This book is all of my opinions and my views about my life.
7. Looking through the eyes has a power of knowledge and skill and experience.
8. See the person first, the ability second, the disability third.
9. Look at what we can do, not what we can’t do.
10. Give us a go at the things we want to do.
11. Amanda has lived experiences and knowledge and skills.
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Work

It took me a long time to get around to sitting down with Amanda Hiscoe to talk about her life. We had previously made one or two dates to meet up but for one reason or another they had all fallen through and when we did finally meet for the first time, it was in a café in Degreaves Street. It was not all that busy but it was too loud to record our conversation. As it turned out, this did not really matter as it was a preliminary meeting in which we discussed the project and the way that we would go about putting a story of Amanda’s life together.

Amanda was quite clear how things were going to go and as soon as we had ordered our coffees she said, ‘I am going to make your life easy for you pal. I’ve done half your job already’. Then she pulled out a folder (one of many I later discovered) in which she had collected many documents related to her life. She had given the whole project a lot of thought and she had already come up with a name for her story: *Amanda’s Story: A Day in My Shoes*. She had also given some thought as to what she would like to say in a foreword. She explained how she pictured her life as a tree and that each leaf on that tree represented a certain aspect of her life. There were, she informed me, seven leaves in all and each interview would involve us working together to put those leaves on the tree. It was a
striking metaphor and from that point on we talked about our project in those terms: as putting leaves on her tree.

We sat down a few days later for the first interview in the offices of Reinforce. David and Norrie were both at their computers and Amanda seemed comfortable talking in their presence. From time to time they interjected, usually to make light of something Amanda had said. She seemed to find these interruptions funny and exasperating in equal measure. More exasperating for both of us were the works that were being carried out further down the hallway and our conversation was interrupted numerous times by a deafening saw that brought all conversation to a standstill and, in the end, cut the interview short. We talked about work, the first leaf on Amanda’s tree. Amanda took the lead in our conversations. Usually, she had already thought about what aspect of her life she wished to talk about and what she would like to say. Sometimes I interrupted Amanda to ask questions but soon realized that with Amanda at least, this approach could be counterproductive for it stopped the flow of her story. On one occasion I can remember asking her a follow up question, hoping that she would elaborate on what she had been talking about. ‘Oh mate, I can’t go that way. My mind is set a certain way’, she explained. So I learned to let her talk. I learned to let her tell her own story at her own pace.

When you get her talking, you realize that Amanda is a woman who has a lot to say. Sometimes it seems as if she is in a rush to get the words out and this desire makes her stutter, or falter over certain words. Amanda is also, as she puts it, legally blind
though this has not hampered her desire to learn. Once, Amanda showed me her CV and informed me that it needed updating. Nevertheless it was seven pages long and listed her work experience, the educational courses she had taken and the skills she could offer an employer. She has worked voluntarily for many organizations but her first paid job was with STAR.

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1 Amanda Hiscoe, Curriculum Vitae, 14 February 2002.
‘Oh, I’ve just got to think back to the first time’, Amanda said shortly after we began our first interview. ‘I had applied for STAR’s job. It was in 1992. I was a co-worker on the Women’s Health Project. That was for about twelve or six months’. She pulled a booklet from out of her folder. ‘We might have to put a picture of this in’, she said. ‘I was one of the interviewed. They interviewed a number of people in this book, but I’ve only pulled out my chapter to do with me’, she explained.

When I asked what sort of work she had done in this book, she replied: ‘I did videoing, I interviewed people for this book’. The book, *By Me, For Me – Shared Experiences*, tells the stories of five women who have an intellectual disability. During the project Amanda had ‘interviewed women with an intellectual disability about what they remembered about their first menstrual period, what they knew about contraception and their thoughts and feelings about women with an intellectual disability being parents’. Also, as an interviewee herself, Amanda had spoken openly about her own experiences, such as contraception and sterilization and having children. It had taken her two years she said to decide against having children. ‘I thought about the responsibility; providing clothing, food, the money aspect. It’s a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week job, it’s a big commitment, and at the time my mum and dad were not around to give me any support. It was a really big decision

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but taking everything into consideration plus my various disabilities we made a decision together not to have children’.\(^3\)

Next, Amanda told me about a more recent job she had taken ‘back in 2002. I had applied for a job with Community Living Partners, as Assistant Co-Researcher’. She explained that she read the job description and thought that it seemed an interesting job. It also seemed like a job that she would be able to do. She applied for the job. ‘I went prepared on the day, I had my briefcase’, she said smiling. “Oh, this’ll end up clinching the job!” she said, referring to her dapper briefcase. She paused for a moment and then laughed out loud. ‘The idea was to work alongside a person who didn’t have a disability, that was Judy. I’ll just mention her first name, until I get permission to use her photo or her second name. Anyway, I was the first person to work with a non-disabled person. And boy oh boy, well we learned a lot, and guess what, I’m in her thesis. It is a great, big, thick book’, said Amanda. ‘I have got a photo of it, and it was taken in the pub. There’s a chapter on me in it. It says: *Travelling with Amanda*. Judy was the only employee at that stage, and I got the job, and I’ve still had to sit on the reference group as a paid person. The job lasted for about, oh, well you. Well let’s say it was twelve months to make it easy for people who are reading this book to jot the stuff down. I used to keep a work diary, or both of us used to have our work listed and she mentions it in the story, of me. It is quite fascinating’.

‘That was a really eye-opener’ Amanda explained, ‘because I’ve never been a co-researcher, and that’s maybe why I’m able to do a lot of, oh let’s say forward thinking in what we’ve embarked on’. She stopped talking for a moment, and I wondered why. She was fixated on the word embarked, though she had used the word herself not I. For a moment I thought she was going to apologize for using ‘a jargon word’ as she often put it, but I told her that it was fine and that it was not jargon but rather just another word for begin or start. ‘And this person’, said Amanda, referring to Judy Buckingham, ‘is now a doctor. A doctor and yes, you could say I had an arm and a leg of getting her thesis done and passed and corrected. And the feedback that I got from the people who looked over it, they loved my story’. She stretched out the word story, emphasizing both syllables. Amanda told me that she had her own copy of the thesis which was at ‘home under lock and key. It’s this thick’, she said, holding her fingers about three centimeters apart. ‘Wow! Yes and they don’t use simple words either. No way’. She laughed. ‘No way’, she exclaimed again, ‘yes, and see I used to work on my own. I used to work with Judy too. It was good fun mate! We did talk about a lot of general stuff, a lot of ladies’-talk, like a lot of personal, dar, dar-dar, well’. She slapped the table. Then she said one word. ‘Yes’.
I told Amanda that day that it sounded like a good relationship. I remember thinking to myself how this collaboration between Amanda and myself would compare. ‘We went off with a bang’, said Amanda, and she clapped her hands to emphasize the point. ‘Like that’, she said. ‘In other words, we were meant to be together!’ Of this research relationship, Judy Buckingham has written much the same thing. ‘By the end of the year’, she writes of her time working with Amanda on their project, we were very much more relaxed towards each other. She felt at ease teasing me on how chaotic my office was (and offering to tidy it for me) and on telling me when she thought I had not made myself clear’. Meanwhile, Judy Buckingham was able to tease Amanda too for her ‘ability to home into food at anytime or place’.4 They were friends, as Judy Buckingham has put it, and though the work was often difficult each looked forward to working with the other.

School and Friends

The next time we met, a week or so later, we spoke about Amanda’s childhood. ‘Well I was born on the 5th of February 1956’, said Amanda, ‘in a town called Deniliquin which is in New South Wales. Yes, and I was born some time, I don’t know if it was day or night or whatever. Anyway, it would be written on my birth certificate. And apparently I was a twin’. I was quite surprised by this revelation but Amanda barely stopped to take a breath. She told me about the first few months of her life during which her parents and a handful of doctors had battled to keep her alive. ‘The oldest twin died’, Amanda explained, ‘she was still born, I was the youngest of the two twins, and guess how many weeks I was born?’. I was confused and asked if she meant how many weeks premature. ‘Yes’, she said, ‘12 to 13 weeks premature’. Next Amanda wanted me guess how much she had weighed at the time of her birth and again I had no idea but I made a tentative guess of two pounds. ‘One and a half pounds’, Amanda exclaimed. ‘I lived in a humidity crib, and I was fighting in between death and life for three months. They thought that I wasn’t going to survive. So they christened me as Amanda Ann. My mum’s middle name is Ann, so I was called Amanda Ann Millear.’
Amanda was born with a number of disabilities but while her parents and the doctors were simply trying to keep her alive it seems that some of these went unrecognized, and as Amanda tells it, it took her parents a while to realize that her eyes had been seriously damaged from birth. As Amanda explained: ‘it wasn’t ‘til I started to crawl around the place, on the farm. It was a sheep breeding stud and Mum and Dad were wondering why I literally had my head in the carpet’. She laughed, as if it were a joke. Indeed, Amanda often laughed as we explored her memories of those early years at home on the farm and it was not hard to see how fond she was of her family. Amanda tried to tell me about those early years, about the trips from one doctor to another and the constant driving across the state. She was hazy on some of the details but as she spoke a story nevertheless emerged, which revolved around her parent’s struggle to work out what was best for their daughter. ‘I must have got glasses and all that’, Amanda said. ‘Anyway I managed. I was growing up and the doctors and the nurses and all that had told my parents to put me in an institution. They go, no,
no, no, there’s got to be something better for our daughter. Mum and Dad must have stood up for me’, said Amanda and she said it proudly. This, it seems, is an important, formative story for Amanda and she has told this story before. ‘I’m glad they didn’t put me an institution because I’ve heard lots of bad stories. I’ve learned about being independent since I was little. Most people are not as fortunate as me. Not many people had their parent’s support.’

When she was four or five years old, Amanda was sent to the local school in town. ‘I started going to school in Deniliquin, a normal state school. And me sit still? Get real! I can see myself on the floor, still playing this ding, ding, ding, ding, triangle. I used to go in and out of the classroom. They wondered why I wouldn’t sit still. And lar, lar, lar, lar, la!’ Amanda said, waving her hands around like a conductor. When Amanda was six years old her parents decided to send her to Melbourne to attend a special school. ‘So then I’ve been down in Melbourne since six years of age’, Amanda explained. She told me how she had lived in hostels and

5 Amanda Hiscoe, Self Advocates Tell Their Stories, Reinforce, 8.
boarding houses and all kinds of different accommodation. ‘I shared a flat and I also lived in one by myself and all this was done while I was going to school. I went to a special school for slow learners. It was from 1965 or 1966 until the end of 1972 and that was my school life’.\(^6\) The school was an old two-storey brick homestead on Power Street in Hawthorn. When Amanda first went there it had been called Selbourne House. Later it became known as Rossbourne House and, by Amanda’s own account, her first days at school were scary. ‘I still remember even now going into the mistress’s house. I remember sitting at this big table and I was one of the first students. I guess I must have been very alone because I’d never been down to the big smoke before and at six years of age it must have been very scary stuff. Like walking into a big room as if I was a little mouse’.\(^7\) ‘In terms of what it (school) was like, it gave me the skills I need today’, Amanda has said previously.\(^8\) ‘They went at a slower pace. I learned to read and write and also did swimming lessons. We used to have sports days and everything else but there was one teacher I didn’t like and that was Mrs. Lewis. She was strict as old battle boots, but apart from her all the other teachers were good’\(^9\)

When I asked Amanda if she had many friends at school, she said ‘yes, yes, yes. When I was going to my first school in Glen Eira there was me, Trisha, and Mark, and somebody else. We all

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\(^6\) Interview with Amanda Hiscoe, *Self Advocacy Booklet*, Personal Papers, 10.


\(^8\) Interview with Amanda Hiscoe, *Self Advocacy Booklet*, Personal Papers, 10

\(^9\) Interview with Amanda Hiscoe, *Self Advocacy Booklet*, Personal Papers, 11
pretended we were the group called ‘The Monkees’. Amanda was smiling as she told her story. ‘I got Mike Nesmith and somebody else got Davey Jones. Or did I get Peter Tork’, she said, trying to remember who had taken on which role. ‘Oh, I don’t know’. She broke out in an impromptu rendition of a song I vaguely remember hearing on the radio from time to time. ‘Hey, hey, we’re the Monkees, Monkeying around in town. Oh we thought that was great! Oh gee, we were like the four stooges, give and take. Or the three stooges’. Later, during a different interview, Amanda explained to me her understanding of the concept of friendship; what friendship means to her. ‘Its how you treat people and use your manners’, she said. ‘If you want to give your name and address it is up to you in my own opinion. You can’t force someone to give their name and address, and you can’t be forced to make friends with somebody you don’t want to be friends with. I’ve had many a friends in many a places’, she said. ‘I’ve known Janice since 1985. I’ve known David since 1974. I’ve known Julie Cooper a long time. I seem to make friends wherever I go’, she said easily. It wasn’t a boast. It was just a fact. ‘I try to keep in contact with them. I give my name and address out to them and I wait for them. It’s up to them if they care to keep in contact. I’ve got friends in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Sydney, Queensland. I went to Northern Territory but yeah’ and she trailed off without finishing the sentence. ‘If I had every a dollar for each person I’d made friends with, then wow, I’d be a rich chicken’, Amanda said a while later. She laughed and crowed like a chicken. ‘Rark, rark, rark, rark’.
Amanda went home for the school holidays and she has vivid memories of this precious time she got to spend with her brothers and sisters on the farm. Each year, the family would pile into the car for their annual holiday to Narooma. Amanda’s grandmother owned a house outside the town that looked out over the ocean. ‘We would often go fishing in Dad’s boat and I will always remember this. Dad held up a trumpet fish up to my left ear and I couldn’t hear it, because that was my deaf ear. I was the only one that didn’t have home schooling’, said Amanda, ‘the others did. Ruth, Pete, and my younger sister had home schooling’. When I asked who Pete and Ruth were, Amanda explained that they were her siblings. ‘My youngest sister works in the country area in Victoria with her family. Peter, my brother is in Queensland and he’s got two grown up children who are now are legally adults. Mum’s still living where she’s living and Ruth has got three grown up children as well. And most of them have got cars!’ Amanda laughed. ‘Look out on the road!’ she exclaimed, ‘gee! Oh gee wiz’.
After a while Amanda returned to the story of her childhood and life on the farm. ‘We had that property’, she said, referring to the family farm 56 miles from Deniliquin. ‘And we had a dog called Penny and Dad also had cattle and sheep as well. If the cattle came in the house yard, you know, Penny would bite their heels. Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap. She was a corgi and she would nip the heels of the cattle to get away’. Amanda laughed out loud before continuing with her story. ‘We’ve had fires, floods, a grasshopper plague and a mouse plague and droughts as well! The poor cats’, she cried, before launching into story about a time when the house had been overrun by hundreds of mice. ‘They didn’t know what to do with the mice because they were everywhere. In Mum’s drawers! Yuck! The poor cats’, Amanda said again. ‘They didn’t know what to do. Oh they were in the hay bags and everything. Yuck! Then, outside the kitchen door there was this old Agar stove that sat this way and a hot-water tap was on there’, Amanda said and she was painting me a picture with her hands. ‘Muff and Two Butter cats and a whole lot of other cats used to sit there. As soon as the back door opened: “Meow, meow! Rar, rar, rar, rar!” Now when it come feeding time, watch out, watch out! “Ree-ow!” They would even jump up this high to get the plate’, said Amanda. She held her hand about a meter and a half above the ground to indicate the height of the stove. ‘At one stage, 24 cats at once, whoa! Each of us four kids had our own little pet cat. Mine was Two Butter Cats. And there was this cat named Muff, and she was the mother of all cats. There was
Santa Claus and so on and so on. I think I’ve got thousands of cat photos’, she said, ‘don’t ask me where they are, but they’re somewhere at home’.

Talking about the farm and family had put Amanda in a chirpy mood. She was speaking quickly, which meant that she was also getting stuck on a word every now and then, but it was clear that she was enjoying this opportunity to explore her memories and soon Amanda began talking about the family holidays again. ‘This might make you laugh’ she said, before she told me about stopping off for lunch one day on the way to Narooma. ‘I ordered a meat pie and guess what I got?’ I waited for the punch line while Amanda broke out laughing again. ‘An apple pie’, she cried, ‘and I put sauce on it. This was either going to Narooma or from Narooma, and I thought I was getting a meat pie, and oh, this is an apple pie, I’ve got sauce on it! I’ve got so many stories about child life’, she said, and she sighed. ‘That’s only a few that I can think of off-hand, give or take, but oh I used to suffer with nightmares too. Whoa, gee, nightmares in the middle of the night, yuck. Oh, yuck. Gross. One time we were in a lightning storm and a big lightning sort of touched the top of
our roof. All of us jumped out of bed and gee, I was half dressed and half not undressed so 50-50. Dad went out in the car. The four wheels were of rubber. This is so he would have been safe. Lightning storm, dust storms too, whoa!’ Amanda was skipping quickly from one memory to another and for a while it was difficult for me to keep up. ‘Being a country kid, we used to play cowboys and Indians with my Monopoly money. Some of it got lost on the dirt road near the house. And see, I once had this three-wheeler bike, and I didn’t know it was cutting in the side of my foot and it went straight into the tip and Mum drove me down to the Deniliquin hospital. I was called hoppity-go-kick, I was hopping along. Hoppity-go-kick and that was Christmas time or thereabouts. Hoppity-hop. Yes, me.’
Family

Once, when I expressed surprise at how organized Amanda was she was quick to explain that although she was a low or medium hoarder, she was good a keeping everything in order. Every time we met for an interview she always had a folder of things to show me with the relevant photos or documents from which we were attempting to put together her story. By this time it was clear to me that Amanda had embraced the task of working together on the project. On more than one occasion she told me she was enjoying working together on her life story. ‘I don’t mean to be morbid’, she said on one occasion, ‘but when it’s my time from the person upstairs, at least my family and friends will have something in black and white. It means I’m leaving a kind of legacy. Maybe a future self advocate, or a future self advocacy group is going to pick up my book and they’re going to read: “Ooh! Awh, oh shit, ooh! This person’s got guts!” She was silent for a moment. ‘It’s kind of leaving my testimony out there, to read and that type of stuff. The others are probably not as fussy as I am’, she said, referring to the other people with whom I had been working on life stories. ‘Maybe the others have not thought of everything’ Amanda continued and it was clear that Amanda was sure that she had thought of everything. ‘I’m
kind of writing this book as an individual, as a self advocate. In the meantime, I’m a married person and it is sort of all intertwined.’ She played with the word for a moment. But it was an appropriate word and I knew what she was talking about.

How do you tell the story of your life? There are so many bits and pieces that have to somehow hang together. Amanda had developed her own way to approach this project. By breaking up her life into categories (the leaves), which, one by one we were adding to a tree (the story of her life) we able to make steady progress. She was adamant that the documents she had collected over the years would not only be incorporated into the story but also properly referenced. ‘I want you to put the quotation marks in’, she explained, ‘and I want you to put the books name and page number at the bottom of the page’. Much later, Amanda presented me with a folder of documents that we had been looking at over the course of
our interviews. Looking back on it now, I can see that it was an important moment. We, the history group, were all sitting around the table in the main meeting room when Amanda made her announcement. She told us that she was about to give me a present and then withdrew the folder from her backpack. She stood beside me and we held the folder together while Janice took a photo and I remember thinking at the time that this was a sort of break through. I remember thinking that perhaps she now trusted me to tell her story.

The folder is sitting on my desk now as I write this story. On the front cover she has written ‘A copy of Amanda Hiscoe’s History File. To David, Date 7-3-2011. To please be retuned to her when finished with’. The folder itself is filled with all manner of things: references from employers and other people Amanda knows, excerpts from books in which Amanda has appeared, minutes of meetings, certificates of appreciation and flyers for book launches. One of the first documents in the folder is a family tree, which traces Amanda’s family back nine generations to a certain William Haines who, we can see, was born ‘about 1710 in Somerset,
England, and died on an unknown date.¹⁰  There is not a lot of information in these short excerpts on the lives of Amanda’s ancestors, though we can see for instance that this William Haines, Amanda’s great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, married a certain Mary Rogers on 26 September 1736. The Millear name first appears in 1799 when a Mary Haines married Thomas Millear. This is the seventh generation of Amanda’s family and by the fifth generation we can see that the Millears have arrived in Australia, as another Thomas Millear, Amanda’s great-great grandfather is listed as having died in 1895 in Edgarley, Wilaura, Victoria.¹¹ We can also see that by 1963 the Millears were living in Deniliquin, where Amanda was born.

When Amanda and I met on 2 Feb 2011, Amanda showed me her family tree for the first time. Then, while sifting through her photos, she continued to tell me about her family and her life on the farm. Amanda told me how the farm, which was called Delta, lay about 56 miles outside Deniliquin and 37 miles from Jerilderie,

¹⁰  Ancestors of Amanda Millner, Family Tree, 6.
¹¹  Ancestors of Amanda Millner, Family Tree, 2.
where Ned Kelly once robbed a bank. We went through her photos systematically and she pointed out key features of the property. ‘That is the shearing shed’, she said, stopping to look at one photo. ‘That’s where Dad and the boys used to shear sheep and all the other stuff too. I once fed them, the sheep, in a very, very drought time. We were feeding him molasses and all of this other stuff. That was great, oh! Gee pal, we’ve had some good times and we’ve had some bad times on Delta, ho, ho’. Amanda paused to look at another photo. That’s the garage she said, pointing to a large building beside the main house. Yes, that’s it, and you should see in the garage, Dad had everything but the kitchen sink in the garage! Tractors, he loved fixing tractors, TV’s, even radios, he was a mechanical minded type.

I asked Amanda to tell me about her father. ‘His name was Thomas Miliear’ she said. ‘He actually loved fishing. We used to go down to Narooma every Christmas or just after Christmas and Dad went in for a dip now and again at the beach, and all of us kids had to obey the flags: “Stay in between the flags or you get into trouble”. Both of my parents were strict in those days, but if we done something wrong we either get a tap in the bum, or a finger, or whatever. It’s not like today, uh-ah!’ A little later, Amanda returned to talking about her father. ‘It’s going to be six years, on the 14th of August this year, since Dad’s gone’, she said. ‘Looking back, how Dad went. Dad was in bed, Queensland, and he just suddenly went. One day it was: “Oh Dad” and one day: “Uh-oh!” My sister Ruth tried to bring him back with CPR. But a full heart attack,
it’s a certain way, and certain noises. It was not possible. The coroner said the same thing and that really rocked my world.’ We were silent for a moment. Then, slowly, Amanda continued her story. ‘There’s two things that I will never forget’, she said, still talking about her father. ‘One, I was going mad at home at something and Dad said: “Aye, what’s the racket?” and I told him what was going on. After I’d cooled down, Dad said to me: “Don’t leave anger in you, because you can get sick, sicker, and best you let that anger out, at the time. Don’t keep it in, see, or you will get sick, sick, sick, sick”.

Next, Amanda was telling me the other thing she would never forget about her father. ‘The last time Dad come into the place that we’re living now, in October, in 2004. Mum bought us this Christmas cake. It was in a white bowl. Dad was sitting, either there or there at the table’, she said, pointing to the head of the table at which we were sitting. ‘He saw Mum’s photo hanging on the wall and Dad said: “She looks like a young chicken”. Then I go: “Oh! Yes. She paused and then looked up at me. ‘I’ve got that white bowl, it’s got a sign on it, it says: “Dad’s bowl, October, 2004”, it sits above the TV. I don’t know if you noticed it or not. That bowl, and that day, and that time, and that Christmas pudding, yes! I used to ring them up from Melbourne to Rainbow Beach. It’s just not the same without him. Is this true, or am I imagining it, every time I walk in Mum’s bedroom I can still feel Dad there? Is that abnormal, or normal?’ she enquired. I told Amanda that I didn’t know and that perhaps having known someone for so long it can sometimes feel like they are still
around. Amanda thought for a moment. Then she continued, ‘I’ve noticed, whenever I have problems, that I think he’s right there guiding me, to tell me how to get out of it. It’s just funny. Oh, yes mate. Also, Dad and Mum used to collect things. I don’t know if they were low or medium hoarders or not, but I’ve seen so many different things that my dad had. So I don’t know if it’s in my genes to collect things, I don’t know. Or do I just follow Dad and Mum’s footprints?’ It was phrased as a question though I was not sure it was one she expected me to answer.
Confirmation

We started our interview on 15 March 2011 in much the same way as we had the previous one. Amanda was silent while I set up my recording equipment. She was waiting to make sure that the tape was running. She was always keen to know that nothing of what she said would be missed. As soon as everything was ready to go, Amanda started rustling around in the folder that she had prepared for that day. She took out a photo that had been taken of her in 1977, on the day of her confirmation. In the image she is wearing a long dark skirt and a light blue blouse. She is smiling at the camera and her hands are held stiffly at her side. At Agnas Hostel where Amanda was living at the time.

‘I felt nervous on that particular day in 1977’, Amanda said. ‘I think it was in October. I was taken to a church that I’d never been before. I wasn’t the only one. There were about so many others. I felt nervous. I’d never done this type of thing before. I was stepping on new leaves that I hadn’t been before. So the first time he tapped me on the head and kind of blessed me I think. Take the lords bread and wine. That was done in the Church of England. It just makes me feel more close’, Amanda said. She was quiet for a moment. When she did speak again, she spoke quickly. ‘After my confirmation I decided to ask the priest in charge if I could do something in the
Sunday service. I used to wear a special white gown and wooden cross and I’ve still got those today’, said Amanda. ‘Every time we used to dress up in the back of the church, bow our heads. Then we would march out from there through the main entrance of the church. As soon as the organ started to play, I would walk in with the crucifixion on top of this long pole. Boy I felt very nervous going in and still felt nervous going out’. She paused. ‘I suppose that was because I’m the first you see. And the last. The only thing I didn’t like is when father, I think it was Jim Brady then, used incense. I’ve never liked incense in any form, shape or size.’ She sighed, perhaps remembering the sickly smell of incense in the church. ‘It was too powerful for my sensitive snuff. And it stank’, she barked those last words out as if to emphasize her point. ‘The offering used to be brought up the rail and I used to take it up to the priest. All of us would sit on our knees and put out our hands like this’. She held her two hands together to form a shallow cup. ‘I did that for two and a half years running and I liked that’, she said. ‘For some odd reason I stopped that but I think the most scary thing was walking up and down that isle with the cross’, Amanda said again.

Soon we were talking about other things and it was only towards the end of the interview that we returned briefly Amanda’s confirmation, this leaf on her tree. The interview was over and we were organizing a time for the next interview. I remember asking Amanda if she was happy with the way things were going. She was quick to reply. ‘Oh good mate. I can’t wait to see all the leaves in their place down the page. It is refocusing back on to me being a
paid co-researcher with the community learning partners’, she said, referring to the work she had done previously with Judy Buckingham. I was glad to hear her say this, if only because I knew how much she had enjoyed that work. She was quite for a moment and I waited for her to continue. ‘I think confirmation is going to be the smallest chapter in the book’, she said and as we can see from the above, it was a prescient observation.
Three Groups

When Amanda got around to talking about Reinforce (1980) – as well as AMIDA (1981) and Raising Our Voices (1987), the three groups in this chapter, she adopted an authoritative tone. She placed herself and, less explicably, David Benfield at the centre of her story of Reinforce. Perhaps it was because David was in the room at the time and Amanda wanted to include him in her story. In any event, I listened attentively as Amanda launched into her story. ‘Me (Amanda Tuttleby), John Slattery and David Banfield are a few foundation members of Reinforce getting off the floor’, Amanda said and it sounded like an announcement. ‘You have heard this in many versions. Reinforce started up because there was no group around in the history of self advocacy and Reinforce started to do that. This year on the fourth of April it is going to be 31 years. Wow!’, she exclaimed, as if she could not quite believe it herself. ‘We’ve moved around the corner. Protests, you name it. Reinforce was very busy. We started at St. Marks Church hall. Then we moved to one of the support worker’s house. I’m just remembering off the tip of my memory’, Amanda said. ‘In March 1987 we got incorporated, and I or David was the first public officer in Reinforce’s history. That was the only way we could get funding for Reinforce. We’ve had students, paid workers. A bit of a long fight and all but yeah’. She
trailed off without finishing her sentence. Then following a short interruption we returned to the interview, though for a moment Amanda seemed put out, as if she had lost her place in the story. When she did finally start speaking again she did so in the same authoritative tone: ‘if it wasn’t for me and David as foundation members, Reinforce wouldn’t be here. That’s one of the triumphs and we’re still around even now’.

With this final declaration it was clear to me that Amanda had finished talking about Reinforce. I remember that I wanted to know more but by the time I interrupted her to ask a question, she was already shuffling through her folder and talking about AMIDA. She was irritated with my interruption and I let the matter drop. As Amanda talked about Reinforce and AMIDA it seemed clear to me that what was important for her was her own contribution to the foundation of these groups. And once she had finished talking about Reinforce she waved a large photo under my nose. ‘Dar, dar. Da-da, da-da, da-dum’, she exclaimed, with not a little fanfare. ‘I and John are founding members of AMIDA. That’s me’, she said pointing to herself in the photo. ‘And that thing in his paw and my hand was AMIDA’s first funding check. AMIDA was up on the first floor at Middle Park Centre and that’s how AMIDA got started. There was no place to give people independent training and all that stuff. It was a steering committee for a number of years. We used to meet at South Melbourne and Meg Gordon was the convener of the steering group until we got our first lot of funding’. We both looked at the photo in silence and I remember asking how much money AMIDA
had been given. Amanda could not remember. What she could remember was her and John being ‘proud as kittens. AMIDA got funding to run the houses’, said Amanda, ‘and the People in the houses were allowed to have an input and come onto the AMIDA committee and all that stuff. AMIDA has moved around, not as bad as Reinforce I might add too. Middle Park, Barkly Square in St. Kilda and here. Gee! I’ve actually not been on the AMIDA committee since August 1997, because since then I’ve been an employee of AMIDA. Each challenge AMIDA had. People in the houses were given a chance to go shopping, budgets. It was an eye opener’. She paused and then put the photo away. ‘A lot of people were able to go out there and get independent housing. It was like a springboard. All these people had various choices. They were beginning to find out how to read and write, budget and transport. It was the only group that’ Amanda said, though she didn’t finish her sentence. ‘Me and John are foundation members of it’, Amanda said again. Then she went through the other names of those who had been involved. ‘We had Meg, Viv Topp, David Harbottle and what’s his name, Ian Parsons. There was Doug and Des and a whole lot of other people who had been in AMIDA since year dot. It’s like a swinging door. In and out. In and out type of stuff. And that is a second group that I am a foundation member of’.
Amanda dipped into her folder again but she came up empty handed. I wondered briefly if she might be lost without a prop for they seemed to facilitate the telling of her story. It was as if different memories had coalesced in the various objects that she brought to each interview. Then, after more shuffling Amanda found a single photocopied page of hand written notes and resumed her story ‘One day sitting at home since May or June I thought of a radio program idea’, said Amanda. ‘So we went to 3CR. It took two or three meetings to start with. Then we got accepted to do it’. Amanda was quite for a moment and on the tapes you can hear a phone ringing in another room. ‘I’ve got the early notes and a couple of photos of us in a planning meeting upstairs at 3CR. I’ve actually got the notes from the first radio running sheet and all that stuff. My aim was to have a radio program to give people with disabilities a voice on the airwaves’.
Amanda dipped into the folder again and came up with another page, this time a copy of the first flyer for *Raising Our Voices*. ‘I invented this’, she said. ‘This has definitely got to go in the book this one. I made this. I called it *Raising Our Voices* and we did use this for a number of years’, she said, and she enunciated each word as if it were followed by a full stop. And. We. Did. Use.
This. For a number of years. ‘And I am the foundation member of getting this off the floor and running with it and negotiating with 3CR’. When I asked her what was important about being a foundation member of these groups Amanda paused for a moment to consider the question. ‘It means I’ve thought of the future’, Amanda said, and she seemed happy with her explanation. ‘There was nothing out there. It is like planting three trees. It’s like me putting the seed in AMIDA. Same with Reinforce and same with Raising Our Voices. I’ve not put that seed on’, said Amanda, ‘then we’d maybe not be around today’.

‘We used to do lots of shows’, Amanda explained. ‘About pensions, institutions, CRUs. Whole bag of tricks we used to do. Even about the Met ticket and Myki and a whole host of other things. AMIDA has got all recordings from the beginning to the present. It is going to be twenty-four years in August I think. It is going to be twenty-four years old this year and next year it’s twenty-five years! So there’s a quarter of a century of Raising Our Voices next year, next August, coming up’. I asked Amanda what she thought the programme had achieved and she was quick to reply. ‘It’s a voice to air problems out and lets people know we are here. It is the only show that has disabled people planning it, running it and doing. Doing it’.

Amanda paused and for a moment I thought that we were done. Then she was speaking again, fluently and with feeling. ‘For some reason, I don’t mind straight to air stuff’, she said, ‘but pre-recording. Oh boy, that’s a different kettle of fish. Oh gee’, she said,
and laughed out loud. ‘It is more difficult. We would get on air, same with Norrie, we’d been trained to do the CD player’. Amanda was smiling as she talked. ‘It used to be fun’, she said, ‘our music was rock, country music and all the other stuff. I would make sure that we didn’t play an f or a c word. It had people ringing up for musical requests and there were some people we couldn’t get off the phone with. Oh, gee. All the night owls were listening in. And it started in January 1989 and went to 1996, touch wood, I think that’s when we started’. Amanda only stepped down when she became involved in a legal case in 1996, which quickly began to take up to much of her time. ‘I handed the show over and I never got back to it’, she explained. ‘And that was from two o’clock in the morning to six o’clock in the morning, straight to air. Serious pal. That is another achievement for me and Norrie’, Amanda said, ‘its one that I will never forget’. She broke out into a few renditions of the songs they used to play. ‘Power to the People’, she sang. ‘Thorn in my side. Working Class Man’. They were songs that I recognized and I had to resist the urge to sing along. ‘They were good days’, Amanda said, ‘Oh gee’.
Trip to USA

On 2 May 2011, I visited Amanda at her home in Coburg and as I set up my recording equipment Amanda talked about the Royal Wedding that had taken place a few days earlier. ‘I suppose we can talk about the USA trip’, said Amanda once I was ready, and as was becoming the standard practice she sorted through her massive pile of CDs to find the relevant photos. The story she told me of her trip to America that day was disjointed, partly it seems, because of the fact that she was trying to incorporate what other people such as David Banfield have said about the trip before. ‘When reinforce was up in the fourth floor of the building just around the corner from Ross House’, Amanda explained, ‘I started going back then and they had been invited to be co-sponsors for this first international conference. So we did a lot of fundraising and I gather you have had some of this barked about already. You’ve heard all about America from other people. So the way we did it, we did fundraising and all the rest of it. We got some money through the Myer foundation’, Amanda said, and then she started speaking in short, sharp sentences. ‘We had to vote on who was going to go as a self advocate and who was going to go as a support person. And my name come up. Yippee. Never been out of Australia. Never been over seas. So I rang up mum. We had to go up to the American
consulate, not far from the botanical gardens. Dropped our passports in and all this other stuff and we did that and we managed to get all of our passbooks and all that’.

‘We all arrive at the airport. And people were allowed to only go to a certain point and we had a small get together, a small going away party. What not and all the rest of it. We start going into custom area and I looked around and the doors closed and I said shit. So I went through the customs. They checked everything. I was shaking like a piece of jelly. I was nervous. Anxious. Never left home before. Tib Mahaley was one of our support people going over with us. He had to literally put his arms around me to stop me shaking. That’s how bad I was. I guess it was a realization this is your big step: you’re about to go on a big journey’, Amanda laughed. ‘I’ve never shaken so much. Once we were on the plane, I wouldn’t let go of David’s hand until the plane was level. Then I managed to let go of David’s hand. I’ve never been in a six row plane’, Amanda said, ‘it was humungous’.
Amanda talked for sometime and in great detail about the trip to America. About going through customs and the problems the group encountered with visas, the hotels and the strange money. The whole experience was something completely new and strange and Amanda seemed to have absorbed it all. It was only after some prompting or encouragement from me that Amanda talked about the conference Reinforce had been asked to co-sponsor. ‘I remember the massive hall we sat in’, she said, ‘it was gigantic. It was held at Pudget Sound, at the University. And we stayed in the student’s quarters. The University was very close to that. There were people everywhere. There were speakers and there was little groups. Lots of souvenirs. Boy I bought a lot. I’ve got this T-Shirt, it says ‘Label Jars Not People’. Amanda explained how she thought that the conference had gone for something like a week. ‘I did a talk on AMIDA and what AMIDA stood for’, she said, ‘and if my memory serves me correctly I drew a normal sized house against an institution place’. I asked Amanda how the conference affected her as a self advocate. ‘It made me aware that we were not the only disability group around’, she replied. ‘I felt more good that there were other people in the same rowboats, having the same hassles, same problems, same stereotype names. Yuck. We had parties and we went out and everything else’. Amanda started talking again about the differences between America and Australia. The different words. The different money. ‘All their notes are green back’, she said, ‘all the same, you had to watch out and be careful you were not passing over a hundred bucks you thought was a dollar’.
I asked what the conference had done for Reinforce, and when I listen back to the tapes I can hear that I was asking questions that go against the story that Amanda wanted to tell. She was intent on telling a story about her travels in a strange land, I was trying to find out how the conference might have influenced her and other members of Reinforce in regards to their self advocacy. I was prodding Amanda, asking leading questions which she would answer before returning to her own train of thought. ‘It just kind of gave us more challenge to do stuff’, she said when I asked her about how the conference affected the members of Reinforce. ‘We were not alone in the fight. We did make some international contacts too and vice versa. It was a new learning curve for all of us’. But soon, Amanda was back telling her own story, about the excitement of travelling in a strange land. ‘Just as we were coming from the airport, they drive on the right hand side of the road. They had no motorbike helmets on. We were gob smacked. This is a different country. This is overseas. Three of us kept singing this song, it was me Judith, and that guy she was married to at the time. We sang
island in the sun. Over and over again. Over and over and over again’.

We went through some more photos and after a while Amanda summed up the trip. ‘It kind of made us feel proud and honoured to at least be in a country that we did not know nothing about. But with all its ups and downs, problems you name it, hotels not being booked. It was an awing experience. It was once in a lifetime for me. I had to grapple with going through customs, flying up and down, oh gee. I managed to send postcards off. I sent one to my then husband. Mum and dad and the kids, and what not and all the rest of it. I sent them while I was there and it took about a week to get back home. Talk about a slow horse mail run’. She laughed and was quiet for a moment. ‘Talking about on the way back’, she said, ‘this is going to make very interesting reading. Our plane was five hours late coming in. We eventually got boarded. We were up in the air and the pilot says ‘sorry for the delay but this is a brand new plane we are just ironing out all the bugs’. And I go what! I’ve not got a parachute. Shit! Talk about a panic’.
Amanda kept on talking, as if she didn’t want to finish her story. She told me about going through customs again and about being pulled up and questioned about some pills that she was bringing back into the country. I asked her again about how the trip had shaped her as a person and a self-advocate. It was a leading question and Amanda paused before answering. ‘I think it made me a stronger person’, she said, ‘I’ve now had the experience and skill and knowledge to at least go out of the country. I’ve got the photos, I’ve got the book and everything else to prove it, including the two weeks visa thing that was plastered on my passport. I haven’t been out of the country since’, Amanda said with an air of finality. ‘It is now part of Reinforce’s history, its now part of my history and I am a member of Reinforce anyway’. She laughed out loud. ‘From a person with a disability’s perspective it was a new learning curve, it was new way of life. It was just different. Like you can only see what’s on top of the table but you can’t see what’s going to happen underneath the table. Its one of those things. Shit. Shit, shit. Oh yeah. It just flies up at you in your face and you just have to deal with it. And that may mean the money, the different food or the wrong side of the road’.
Two Marriages

‘My first marriage took place on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of July 1980’, said Amanda, one morning when I visited her at her home in Coburg. ‘The priest who married us, I think it was Reverend Horton, I think’. The man Amanda married was Peter Tuttleby and her relationship had ‘its ups and down, its good and bad times and everything else’ as Amanda put it that day. ‘We’d spoken about kids and all that stuff’, she said, ‘and my family and his family were going to be with us. If we wanted kids, that was fine. If we didn’t that was all right with them. Yes, and so two and a half years went by, we went for tests and things, and the doctors laid out all the bad things on me, on the table. At that time I didn’t have no support people around me, it was 24 hours looking on the muddy side of it, and the disability could have been 50-50, and I go: “Uh-uh, no, no”. I was confused, and I asked Amanda what she meant by the doctor laying all the bad things on the table. ‘He said that if I’d stayed on the contraceptive pill for a bit longer that it would interfere with my blood-pressure in later life’, Amada replied. ‘And there would have been a 50-50 chance of disability’. She paused. And when she did speak again she did so hesitantly, starting another sentence before finishing the last. ‘And be passing on a, it was a job, and money, 24-hour care’ she said.
‘Oh, well it just made it more clearer, because the way that I had come in early. The way that my life’, Amanda said, but she didn’t finish the sentence. She was breathing deeply and I had the impression that it was difficult for her to talk about these things. ‘I didn’t want them to go through the same problems. And I’ve heard of this, I don’t know if this is correct or not, but if the Department of Human Services know there would have been a person with an intellectual disability having a child they could have taken that away from me. So that wasn’t discovered until, oh a while ago. I’ve heard stories of them happening. Oh, I’m glad I made that decision, because that could have been me in that boat, type of stuff.

When Amanda started talking about the break down of her marriage with Peter Tuttleby on 24 June 1998, I could not easily follow the story. Nevertheless, as she spoke, it emerged that part of the reason for the break up had something to do with money. Shortly after they were married, Peter Tuttleby, who had been working fulltime, was made redundant and offered a redundancy package. ‘He couldn’t get on the dole for 12 months because he had far too much money in his superannuation’, Amanda explained. ‘We both went in there, and I got treated by Centrelink. I tried to tell them my story but they were only interested in him, and eventually he got on the dole. And guess what’, she said. ‘Social Security, as it was known then, sent me a bill for me to pay them back $800 bucks. I said: “Excuse me, I’m going to a lawyer about this”, and I knew a lawyer, in Blind Citizens in Kensington, and that’s where they were at the time. I explained the situation to the lawyer and
she said: “Could you send me the letter?’. I sent her the letter, and she said to them: “They’ve made a mistake, it’s not you”. So therefore I’m going: “Phew-oh!’ Amanda paused for a moment. ‘And they treated me like shit. Oh no, that’s not my problem, that’s their problem”. So Social Security, or Centrelink know: do make dogs’ ears’. And by that she meant that Centerlink had learned that it was not worth trying to mess with Amanda Tuttleby. She barked like a dog to emphasise her point. ‘Ruff. Ruff.’. Then she returned to her story. ‘So in the last 12 months of the marriage, it started to fall down, it wasn’t what it was. And with him not being in fulltime employment, he did sort of pay his way until he started getting in trouble with the Tax Office, and Social Security. He was ripping off both sections, and I said: “I don’t like this idea”. And then he started not paying his way every fortnight, and I said: “Oh no, I don’t like all this”. It was me that gave him the idea or the ultimatum on 24 June 1998 at our house.
As she recalled these events, Amanda was reciting the lines she had spoken to her husband at the time. “I give you two weeks to decide if we’re going to stay together, or we’re going to break up”, she said, by way of explaining her ultimatum. ‘So two weeks after me saying that, I saw two or three different priests and they said to me: “You’re not happy in the marriage, and God would not want you to be in that marriage”. So after consulting with the priest, in the Church of England in the church that made me more clearer, on the religious side I wasn’t doing any sin or anything like that. But at least I had the strength to go and see a priest, just to make sure that I wasn’t sinning or doing something. And the Church of England allowed me to do that’, Amanda explained. ‘So this happened, it happened on the 24th of June, at half past six, 1998, and that was fine and I rang up Dad on his birthday and I told Mum what had happened and all this other stuff, and they advised me to get a lawyer and all the other stuff, so I did. And 12 months for a divorce and separation’, said Amanda, ‘if you’ve got a disability it’s compounded 10 times bad because you’re stressed-out and your health does get mucked around, and everything else. I never want to go through that shit again’, she exclaimed, ‘but well, hopefully not, touch-wood, and there is wood around’. She slapped the table and on the tape you can hear a loud clack.

Amanda told me how she had learned quite a lot about the Marriage Act and Family Law Act as she waited for her divorce to be finalised. Then, one day it came through. ‘After that, they stacked the papers and my divorce lawyer said: “Congratulations you’ve got
one month to go and then you’re legally divorced” and I got the papers and everything else. I’m: “Yay!”, Amanda said, ‘and I started going down to visit Colin. I stepped back from that, from I think it was from June 24 1998 up until the 5 October 1999. I was on the single pension, I soon did give my married name the boot and I went under my maiden name for about, oh it was about one and a half years. Pretty close to that. And they do ask pretty personal questions once you’re divorced, Centrelink! ‘Colin was married at the time. Us two met each other at Reinforce, in 1984’.

Suddenly, Amanda had launched into the back-story of her second marriage to Colin Hiscoe. ‘Yes’, she said, ‘he moved to South Australia, and he lived there for about 10 years. He was married there with a job for a number of years and I knew Colin had been through separation and all this. So he invited me and I went to South Australia, just to lessen the burden and the stress here and everything else. That went on for some months and Colin’s divorce come through from his first wife, I think it was in 1999. So we were out for tea with some friends, and that bloody Colin gets down on his knees and he said: “Will you marry me?”’. ‘Aye?’ Amanda exclaimed, remembering her surprise. ‘Aye? Aye? Yes, I’ll marry you. He puts the engagement ring up: “Oh, shit. Oh, no way!”’, talk about spring. Boing. It was: “Oh? Oh? Surprise!” Amanda laughed out loud. She was animated and it was clear that she was happy exploring these memories. ‘It was in a hotel or a pub or something, we were having tea, with friends, and whoa! “Oh shit, oh!”’
‘This was after he come back to Melbourne, in oh what was it?’ Amanda was struggling with the dates, trying to remember exactly when it was she had commenced her second marriage. ‘Colin came back to live in Melbourne in October, in 1999. We were married on 5 February 2000. We were buzzing’, Amanda said, ‘but this time taking the vows, it was done by a marriage celebrant in training. She could marry us, but she wasn’t qualified to sign the papers and that’s fair enough. Another marriage celebrant got us to sign the papers and all that was fair enough’, she said again. ‘It was in the park, just right next to the Pentridge Prison. And there were three things that went wrong on that day. Oh! You wouldn’t read about it would you? The CD player wouldn’t work’. I laughed and waited for Amanda to continue her story and Amanda told me how it was the guests who had to provide the music at the start. ‘So I was walking down the aisle, as you normally do, but this aisle was a park, and it was not a short aisle, I might add. So we walked down and the way that they were singing “Da, da, der-dum, ah, ah, ah-hum”, you could swear they’d all been at the pub, but they weren’t, oh, gee! And number two’, Amanda said continuing with the things that had gone wrong at the wedding, ‘was the flies kept annoying me. It was about 28 degrees and while I was saying the vows: “Get rid of these bloody flies!” Oh God, gee! I was flipping and flapping and arh, arh-ah!

We never did get to the third thing that had gone wrong at the wedding. Instead, we somehow got into a long conversation about the lingering resentments and problems from Amanda’s divorce and
the protracted battles she had been forced to engage in with her ex-husband so that she and Colin would be able to live in their house in Coburg. ‘Gee divorce is no good’, Amanda said, not for the first time. ‘Separation is no good, and it’s even compounded if you’ve got a disability. It’s going to act up on your health’. To turn her away from these difficult memories I asked how long Amanda had been married to Colin. ‘It’s over 11 years now, she replied. ‘On the 5 of February 2011, so it’s 11 years, and March, April, and May, it’s going to be 11 years. At least we knew what we were both stepping into’, Amanda said. ‘We had the interests, and the same ideas. Each marriage has their own riff-raff, fights, arguments, this, that, that and all the rest of it. And the way that Colin treats me, mate, is ten times better than my ex did. Sometimes we shout each other lunch. If we’ve got the money, go out for tea. See it’s a lot more sharing, now, give and take. The only time that we’ll really have a fight is over the pension rise, but well I’m good at money, one way yes. And Colin’s got his money in his own way, but still. Well just a few minor fits and fads’, explained Amanda, ‘but Colin and I don’t like fighting’.

‘It’s a lot more flexible and we’ve got our own interests’, Amanda said of her relationship with Colin. ‘I’ve got my Scouting since 1989 and Colin’s got his lodge and his stepdaughters, from the previous marriage. Yes, it’s a lot better than the first one, and a lot more friendly. If you’ve got to discuss important things then we will talk about things’. I said that it sounded like a functional marriage and Amanda agreed. ‘Yes, both of us have had very negative
marriages, at the end of the time-span, but I knew this time, I knew what I was stepping into. I was aware of it, and so was Colin, oh, jeez! And it’s got so in common, it’s not just oh, I mean the difference is that Colin and I share our money, where previously he was the first one to have to be money-hungry and all that. A different kettle of fish’, said Amanda and she meowed like a cat. ‘Raow!

**Conclusion**

Recently, I caught up with Amanda to go over the corrections she wished to make to her story. By this time she and Colin had separated and I was reminded that while we have to finish a life story somewhere, the lived story is never really finished. I met Amada at her home, where she gave me tea and biscuits and then she pulled out a copy of the story I had given her more than a year earlier. After a few sips of tea and some general conversation she got down to work, taking me through the story page by page. I had only put aside about half an hour for our meeting but on seeing the manuscript I realised that I should have know better. Amanda had been nothing if not thorough. She had marked the relevant pages with sticky notes and scribbled over some of my writing. Some of the errors she wished to fix were simply matters of fact and I was happy to oblige. Amanda made it clear she wanted the record straight. She also wanted to change the names of some people mentioned in the story, which seemed fair enough too. I was, at first, more circumspect when she wished to change some of the
things she had said during the course of our many interviews, but I consoled myself with knowledge that the changes were minor and that this was her story (to do with whatever she liked) after all.