

Oral History Australia 2021 Book Award

Citation:

The judges this year have awarded a joint prize. The winners are: *Many Maps, Charting Two Cultures, First Nations and Europeans in Western Australia* by Bill and Jenny Bunbury (UWA Publishing, 2020); and *In the Eye of the Storm: Volunteers and Australia's response to the HIV/AIDS crisis* by Robert Reynolds, Shirleene Robinson and Paul Sendziuk (NewSouth Publishing, 2021). Two other books also made the short list: *Out of the Madhouse: from Asylums to Caring Community?* by Sandy Jeffs and Margaret Leggatt; and *Upheaval: Disrupted lives in journalism*, edited by Andrew Dodd and Matthew Ricketson.

Many Maps, Charting Two Cultures draws on over thirty years of oral history interviews conducted by Bill Bunbury for ABC Radio's Social History Unit, augmented by additional interviews. Juxtaposing historical sources and interpretations by historians, a linguist and descendants of settler Australians with the oral traditions and current concerns of First Nations people, this is an ambitious and sensitive exploration of two ways of knowing the same land. It reveals the different perspectives on both historical events and recent issues but avoids a polarised narrative, showing us instead how the entwined experiences of Indigenous and European Australians enlighten, complicate and enrich our understanding of our shared past. This book's great strength, aside from bringing new attention to a valuable archive, is in how it uses oral history to bridge between oral and written traditions, giving each equal weight. It is a fine example of the attempt to reconcile our history.

In the Eye of the Storm is a collection of first-hand accounts from volunteers who filled an array of positions, from personal care to administrative and educational roles, in Australia at the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. Set largely in Sydney with contributions from other states and territories, this is an intimate portrayal of tumultuous times that extended far beyond the gay community. It is a pleasure to read a book that allows oral history narrators the space not only to speak at length about their motivations and actions but also to reflect on the impact on their lives long after infections began to decline in the 1990s. By focussing each chapter on a different individual, the interviewer-authors present a nuanced portrait of these volunteers and show how the oral history process affects narrators' memory and interpretation of their lives. Sensitively edited and beautifully written, it is an important contribution to both Australia's social history and the craft of oral history.