

# Compelling Interviews

*ELIZABETH KIRKBY-McLEOD outlines the background of the NZSA Oral History Podcast Series that launched on 27 September.*

“**B**y the way, this is not going to be accessible to anyone...” I gulped. Eighteen years ago Michael King had just told Gordon McLauchlan to speak as freely as he wants; their interview was going to sit, ignored but there for the record, in the vaults of the Alexander Turnbull Library. He was right of course – at the time.

The idea of recording an oral history of NZSA and its evolution in New Zealand dates back to the 1990s. Oral historians conducted interviews with prominent and influential authors who were involved with our organisation, for example past presidents. These audio files were then stored in the Turnbull. As the decades went by new rounds of interviews were recorded and lodged in the Turnbull and as long as the NZSA exists I hope this cycle will continue, growing the history and extending the story.

That pure historic record is important.

Yet a couple of years ago – and after the death of several of the participants including Michael King, Christine Cole Catley and Lauris Edmond – it was realised that we had something special squirrelled away in these recordings; we had the authors’ voices.



Gordon McLauchlan

As Jenny Nagle, NZSA CEO, says, “The social history and intimacy of the interviews is compelling.” Creative New Zealand agreed and provided some funding to give these interviews new life. In 2018 that means digital and online as the NZSA Oral History Podcast Series, accessible to the world (or at least anyone with an internet connection). Which brings me to this moment – hearing Michael King encourage Gordon McLauchlan to speak freely because no

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one was going to be listening. What would Michael have thought if he had known what I was up to?

The 1980s and 90s were a challenging time of change in New Zealand for all, authors included. Michael was encouraging Gordon to speak freely about those times and the battles NZSA fought with government and other institutions to retain the freedom and means to write.

In other interviews authors talk about different battles, including sometimes with each other. Time takes the sting out of some of this – like secret spy files finally released long after the war is over, these podcasts initiate younger authors into the history of their brethren and free older writers from carrying their memories alone.

It's not just about the 20th century of course. NZSA has interviews with authors from as recently as a couple of years ago. Things change; some authors get more involved than others. But one theme remains, and it's the reason that I think Michael King might have been okay with these podcasts. Each one speaks about the need and power of NZSA as a collective voice.

Once upon a time it was writers like Lauris Edmond and Gordon McLauchlan who made sure we had a say in our future as writers, and we can't afford to lose that.

Over the next year you are invited to hear their part of our shared history and

to reflect on your role in our future. So listen while you drive in the car or do the ironing; let us know what you think and take time to imagine our history as an organisation, and your part in it, over the next 30 years. ■

### PODCAST BASICS

Google Dictionary defines a podcast as “a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically.” The NZSA Oral History Podcast is just that! You can listen through the NZSA website, Soundcloud, Stitcher, tunein, iTunes, or wherever you get your podcasts. If you have a podcast player app on your phone you can take the podcast with you anywhere.

Once you find the NZSA Oral History Podcast SAeries, subscribe to it. This means that you will automatically be made aware when a new episode comes out (usually once a fortnight). The more people who like and subscribe the easier it becomes for others to find it.

The podcast series is hosted by writer and broadcaster, Karyn Hay. You'll hear her introduce the interview and give a little context. The author of this article, Elizabeth Kirkby-McLeod, produces the series.

Episodes 1–7 will include Lauris Edmond, Gordon McLauchlan, Fiona Kidman, Kevin Ireland, Bernard Brown, Christine Cole Catley and CK Stead. ■