



**Dr Janet Baker**

### **1. For how long have you been a speech pathologist?**

I have been a Speech Pathologist for 30 years having qualified with a Licentiate of the Australian College of Speech Therapists (LACST) through the School of Communication Disorders in Melbourne, Victoria. In 1972-73 I undertook my M.Sc in Human Communication through the University of London, Guy's Hospital Medical School and Kingdon Ward School of Communication, and in 2007 I was awarded my doctorate after 6 years of research through the Departments of Psychiatry and Speech Pathology and Audiology at Flinders University. My thesis was entitled: *'An investigation into life events and difficulties, coping styles and patterns of emotional expression in women with functional voice disorders'*.

In reflecting upon my career, it is interesting to realize that I have worked with adults and children across nearly all communication disorders. This occurred when establishing services for SA within the acute hospital and rehabilitation settings, mental health, and community health, and then during my 23 years in private practice where I started out with a general caseload of patients with fluency and articulation disorders, acquired speech and language disorders following head injury, cerebrovascular accident and progressive neurological conditions. Throughout this time I also worked with patients with voice disorders which have become my area of specialization. This breadth of experience has given me a strong sense of what it is to be a speech pathologist over time and I consider how remarkable it is, that our speech pathology education and training gave us such a strong foundation that has enabled us to contribute to the community in such diverse ways.

Whilst I have maintained a focus and dedication to speech pathology, I have always found my work to be greatly strengthened by moving out and beyond the traditional boundaries of the profession. My extensive post-graduate training in counselling and psychotherapy and many years of study and performance in classical singing have added significantly to the speech pathologist that I have become. I have found my work as a clinician and teacher so much more exciting as I have attempted to integrate and inject new ways of thinking and expertise from other professional domains. A further benefit of this has been that other professions and members of the community have come to know much more about the depth and scope of speech pathology. I consider the public perception of our professional identity is still an issue and one we constantly need to address.

### **2. What is your area of specialty and expertise in the field of speech pathology?**

In my private practice as a speech pathologist and family therapist I have specialized in voice, working with children, adolescents and adults with the full range of voice disorders. These have included organic and neurological, functional and psychogenic voice disorders, communication problems related to gender dysphoria, and voice problems particular to professional voice users, teachers, opera and contemporary singers, actors etc. I have enjoyed the challenge of consultancy with medico-legal, work-cover and damages claims and continue to be a mentor and consultant to speech pathologists throughout Australia.

In the area of psychogenic voice disorders - which I have been thinking about one way or another for the last 30 years - it is now so gratifying to be consulted by and in regular communication with local and international colleagues who are also passionate about coming to understand the nature of functional voice disorders and in particular, the psychogenic voice disorder group. In one sense this has developed out of the sharing knowledge and understandings at international conferences, post-graduate seminars and in peer-reviewed publications throughout my career, however, it has become much more focused since commencing and completing my doctorate in this area over the last 6 years. I have no doubt at all that the way in which Speech Pathology Australia has encouraged us all to embrace the principles of evidence based practice and life-long learning, either through our day to day practice, clinical research or the pursuit of higher degrees has influenced my decision to undertake this most recent and demanding challenge at this relatively late stage in my career!

### **3. Describe one major contribution you have made to the profession of speech pathology.**

Not long after returning from completing my Masters in the UK (1972-1973), I was very happily ensconced in setting up new services in the multidisciplinary Child Guidance Clinic. Then, quite out of the blue, along with several other colleagues in Adelaide, I was invited to join the planning committee for the development of a new course in Speech Pathology to be mounted at Sturt College of Advanced Education. This was a very exciting new venture, however quite an undertaking for those of us with no more than 5-6 years experience as clinicians and certainly no experience at all in curriculum design or teaching at tertiary levels. Our first major task was to argue vehemently to convince the School of Education to rethink their proposal of a three year diploma and to agree to the development of a four year B.App.Sci in Speech Pathology which was established shortly after.

At that same time I was invited to apply for the Inaugural Lectureship in Speech Pathology where I later worked with our Head of Department, Ms Kate Stratford and other staff to develop the curriculum and then to teach courses in Articulation Disorders, Cleft Lip and Palate, Voice Disorders, Clinical Theory and Methodology, and Counselling for Speech Pathology. Needless to say – I was literally one lecture ahead of the students! During this time it was essential to establish strong working relationships with clinicians in the field who then offered ongoing clinical placements for our students, some of whom all these years later are still supporting the profession with their generous contribution to clinical education. It was a most satisfying experience to have contributed to the process of bringing this course to successful accreditation, and throughout my years in private practice, I have maintained my close support for the program as an external examiner for the Honors Program and through teaching on different occasions in the area of voice disorders.

In February 2007, I was awarded my PhD, and immediately offered the opportunity to take up my current position as Associate Professor in Speech Pathology and Audiology at Flinders University. In this position it is somewhat ironic, that my primary role and key responsibilities have been to provide leadership as the Coordinator of the new graduate entry Master of Speech Pathology program – to be completed in neither three years, nor four years, but two years! While I consider this a great privilege, at the same time, I am aware of the profound challenges we are all facing, both in academic institutions and in the field, as we respond to the pressures and demands for new models of education and training for our speech pathology profession.

### **4. What special tasks or activities have you been involved in for the Association or supported by the Association?**

I have been involved in a wide range of activities for our professional association which have included Branch President, Chair of the Industrial Committee in the Health Commission to establish the career structure for speech pathologists in SA, Liaison Representative to the Health Funds and Representative to Work-Cover on behalf of the private practitioners, Chair of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee for SA, and Member of Re-Accreditation Committee for the B. App. Sci. Speech Pathology at Sturt CAE.

In 1991 I joined with three other committed members of Speech Pathology Australia, Alison Russell, Cecilia Pemberton and Alison Bagnall, and together we established the Australian Voice Association (AVA) and then mounted the inaugural *Voice Symposium of Australia*. The AVA is a multidisciplinary group comprising otolaryngologists, voice scientists, speech pathologists, voice teachers of singing and theatre voice, counsellors, psychotherapists and academics devoted to excellence in clinical practice and research in the area of Voice. Our symposia have attracted international voice specialists and ENT surgeons both as guests and delegates during the last 15 years, and the AVA has successfully promoted strong multidisciplinary research amongst its members. The AVA has raised the profile of many of our members and their research to international status and many speech pathologists and voice teachers are now undertaking their PhDs. I have been one of the leaders of this association as a member of the board over the years, and have had the honor to serve this group as Chairman of the Board for four years.

I am particularly proud of our concerted efforts in fostering multidisciplinary education and research through the Australian Voice Association (AVA) and consider this to have been a major contribution not only to the wider field of knowledge and professionals involved around the world, but also with both direct and indirect benefits to our speech pathology profession and Speech Pathology Australia.

### **5. Sum up what you have learned or gained from being an active member of Speech Pathology Australia.**

In some ways the experience of clinicians in SA has been a little different from those in the Eastern states where the profession had been established for a longer period of time and with substantially higher numbers. In this sense, we have needed to be pioneers and leaders on behalf of our profession even though we were very young and inexperienced when we set out. There were approximately 5 senior speech pathologists in the state when we started the course and so we began with very few senior personnel to guide us. Through my activities as a member of SPA, and through the constant support of the association, I have therefore enjoyed sharing my knowledge and experience with others. I have always seen it as a most important obligation for us all to support the developing careers of other clinicians and academics, and to inspire speech pathologists, both locally and nationally, to standards of excellence in all areas of clinical and academic practice.

### **6. What does it mean to you personally and in terms of your career to be a Fellow Member of Speech Pathology Australia?**

This has been an interesting question to consider. I fully remember the first time one of my colleagues suggested I should do whatever was required to become nominated and after looking at the form and the criteria that would make one eligible for consideration – I shook my head at the prospect at having to account for all the activities in my career and promptly put the form to one side. It all seemed far too difficult and certainly much too embarrassing to start writing down everything one had done or achieved. The form sat at the bottom of the pile

for at least 6 years until my colleague had approached me enough times for me to think – ‘Oh alright - I will do it’.

From a personal point of view I was not sure what it would mean to me to become a Fellow of Speech Pathology Australia. That was until the day it was announced at the national conference in Melbourne in 2001. The most poignant and lingering memory is that of the spontaneous warmth of the applause and joy on the faces of so many of my friends and colleagues who have been a part of and supported my career so generously over the years. It was also most heartening to receive messages of congratulations afterwards from many other speech pathologists not so well known to me, who expressed their appreciation for what I have contributed one way or another – either through inspiring or extending their vision along their clinical paths.

In terms of my career, I have felt strangely delighted to be able to include Fellow of Speech Pathology Australia on my CV, and possibly, with my recent appointment to my current position at Flinders University it may have made a difference. I think the essence is that we are all naturally very modest about what we achieve, and rightly so, however, to be recognized by our peers and colleagues – perhaps there is no greater honor.

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