

11<sup>th</sup> CODA-International Conference  
Buena Park, California, USA  
July 11-14, 1996

“Everyone is a Star”

Keynote Address  
By  
Peter and Judie Bonser  
Global Pioneers and Founders of CODA-Australia

“Pioneering CODA-Australia”

## **Opening:**

(Ocker accent)

Peter: Gidday, how are ya? This ‘ere is me missus.

Judie: And this ‘ere is me old man! Hey Peter, reckon they’ll understand our Strine?

Peter: Sure is good to be here and see so many of ya blokes and sheilas ‘ere and it’s great to have our Aussie mates ‘ere, too! Strike a light, hope you all can understand our way of talkin’.

Judie: Crikies, it’s nerve rackin’ standin’ up ‘ere.

Peter: Strines aren’t too good at being gawked at givin’ public talks. Coz we weren’t too sure what ya waned to ‘ear, we asked a couple of ya folks. Carrie Moreland and Rochelle Braithwaite when they were visitin’ us downunder. Ya know what they said in their American accents, “Just talk about how you all have sex downunder!” Well, we just said, “Fair dinkum? Are ya troppo?” And they said, “Nope!” Now, after a lot of thinkin’, what we reckon that’s different is that coz of where Strine is, that is in the Southern Hemisphere, and we’re all standin’ upside down, it’s pretty quick to get a rush of blood to the head!

(Normal accent)

Judie: Well, did you understand our “Strine”? Strine is the “dinkum” language used by Ockers from Australia. If you need a dictionary to understand everything we’ve just said, you may bid for one of these books at the Auction. (Shows “The Dinkum Aussie Dictionay”). Once you’re fluent, you are ready to come down and visit us anytime. You will always be welcome.

## **Introduction:**

Peter: It is a real honor for both of us to be here and it took a while for us to really know why were asked. You see, in Australia, American is generally seen as “bigger and better”, more advanced, the “Big Apple” syndrome, etc., etc. So, for two Australians to be standing here where we are now is really something! We have been hailed as “Global Pioneers” extending CODA out of California and the USA where it all started and planting the seed in another country. In essence, that’s all we have done! In our presentation, we will share with you some of the events and work we, as well as others, have done which brings us to be standing here amongst you today. Listen carefully to our story and come with us to begin our journey. Firstly, we will begin by giving you some personal background about us as a couple. Then we will tell you about the Australian story and how we see the term “Pioneers” applying to us and close with a challenge for the future.

## **Keynote Address:**

(OHT-Overhead transparency 1: Judie’s family)

Peter: Once upon a time, in a far, far away land, a beautiful baby girl was born. She was the 6<sup>th</sup> child to Reginald and Laura Treloggen. They named this baby girl, Judith Elizabeth. The Treloggens had seven children in total, five of whom were deaf. Reginald and Laura were also deaf. Only two of the children were hearing, the second child and the sixth child. Laura also had a deaf sister and throughout the family tree there are many Deaf relatives. The interesting thing to note here is that in 1975, it was confirmed that both Laura and Reginald had Waardenberg Syndrome. It is very unique to find both partners with the same syndrome, hence the very large number of deaf family members. The Treloggen family lived in the suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria.

(Explain photo – Being 6<sup>th</sup> child, not many/any baby photos. Indicate Tony, who died when young at 36 years of age from a heart attack. Point out who is who in photo.)

(OHT 2: Peter as a small boy.)

Judie: A while later, in Sydney, which is several hundred miles north of Melbourne, a bonny, bouncing baby boy was born. The child was named Peter Wayne and was the first child born to a deaf couple named Peter and Betty Bonser. They had four sons, all of whom could hear. Betty also has a deaf brother and there are a few deaf relatives scattered around the family tree. Some of you may have met Betty, either at Deaf Way or Maryland CODA held in 1989.

Both of us have led interesting and colourful lives and though we had never met, our paths, at times, took very similar routes. We both grew up being the family “interpreter” and never met until we were in our mid-20’s. The funny thing is that for a few years, a few mutual deaf friends tried to get the two of us to meet but being as independent as we are, each politely told our “match-making” friends where to get off!

Peter: (Want to explain – keep watch USA has influence on our lives a lot – not Elot!) During the mid to late ‘70’s, both of us became professionally involved in the Deaf field. Judie worked with deaf children and I worked with deaf adults. Then on one weekend in June, 1980, Judie came to Sydney to visit her deaf sister. The visit coincided with a workshop and presentation held at the Deaf Society of New South Wales which was being given by Dr. Edward Merrill, then the President of Gallaudet University. My eyes met Judie’s!

Judie: And mine met Peter’s!

Peter: In the corridors of the Deaf Society building, just prior to the workshop, and without knowing whom the other person was both of us were instantly attracted to each other! You can imagine our surprise (orange eyes!) when later we learnt of each other’s identity and realized how much time had been wasted by not listening to our mutual friends!

However, the distance of 600 miles and other life circumstances where to keep us apart except for a few phone calls and chance meetings (at which

Carmel – the wonder bra woman was once – proof!) until we met again at the National Deafness Conference held in Sydney in April, 1983. The attraction was still very strong and three days later, yes, three days later, we became engaged to be married.

(OHT 3: Church) OHT 4: Wedding) (OHT 5: Parents)

Judie: Our wedding took place fourteen months later in July, 1984 and the ceremony was in the Chapel of the Victorian Deaf Society in Melbourne followed by a reception at the Melbourne Zoo. “Must be visual!” The ceremony was officiated by the Rev. Neville Sandon, a Presbyterian Minister and would you believe, a coda! We must add here that the term “coda” was not known to us at that time, however, it was a deliberate decision to choose Neville because his parents were Deaf and therefore could perform the ceremony in the language that we and both our families could understand. We did not use an interpreter as such at our own wedding. Our sign language is now known as “Auslan” but that term also did not exist at that time but we sure knew we came from a different linguistic background and community. After the wedding, we honeymooned in Fiji and then settled in Sydney.

(OHT 6: Honeymoon photos on deserted island)

(OHT 7: Reg and Laura)

Peter: Just prior to our first wedding anniversary in 1985, Judie’s mother, Laura, passed away from a massive stroke. After her death, we decided to make the move from Sydney to Melbourne so as to look after Judie’s father, Reg, who was already frail. Tragically, it was to be only a few weeks later after arriving in Melbourne that Reg, whose condition had continued to deteriorate following Laura’s death, also passed away. It was a very sad and difficult time. We decided that when the right opportunity came (job offer) we would move back to Sydney.

We stayed on in Melbourne for almost three years and I continued working at the Victorian Deaf Society. It was during this time that a deaf woman from the United States was employed there. Her name was Carla Anderson; she had previously worked for an organization in Los Angeles, named GLAD, but alas, fell in love with an “Aussie” and moved to Melbourne. (Mention about seeing Carla and Phil in “Passport Without a Country” video).

Some mother later Carla had received some new and interesting information from the GLAD organization. This information (flier) was an announcement about the Conference for Children of Deaf Adults being held in Fremont, California, the very first conference, in just a few weeks' time. Carla thought that it may be of interest to us both so she left the flier on my desk. I read it with great interest and wrote straight away asking for more information knowing it was not possible to attend.

The introductory CODA Newsletter arrived some time later and as probably happened with many of you, there were many parts of the newsletter which struck a chord, rang bells, pulled at the heart strings or brought memories flooding back. For me, in particular, were some of Millie's memories and one of Hugh Prickett's poems. I took this newsletter home to share it with Judie and the same thing happened with her. We each wanted to know more so sent off the membership form – not knowing what was to come in the years ahead.

Both of us continued our interest both personally and professionally in the Deaf field. By this time, both of us had interpreted and attended numerous National events around the country which led us to be involved with others in the setting up of interpreter associations in Victoria and New South Wales which later spread to other states and in 1993 a National Association was formed. Pioneers!

Judie: Just as an aside, in Australia, sign language interpreters are accredited by a national independent body which also accredits interpreters and translators in many other spoken community languages that are used in Australia. Accreditation in "Deaf Sign" first occurred in 1984 and we, including some of the other Australians who are here with us today. Coincidentally, most interpreters happened to be codas and inevitably, we use to and still do often have little gatherings long after the non-coda interpreters had gone. Interesting!

Peter: GLOBAL PIONEERS – by default! After the event! Often without realizing people become pioneers because life's path takes them along that road. If there is something to be done and you are there – what's the point in turning back! Just keep going!

“Pioneers”? It seemed that even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was room for a few more pioneers and life’s path had led us, and others, to some very new and challenging frontiers. But did we want to be there? This is something that is debatable! Being up front or taking the front line is something we are often faced with. We have been in the front line for our families all our lives. The front line may be a familiar place but often it is not a comfort zone, just as Sheila described last night. From our many work experiences, we could see the great disadvantages deaf people were forced to endure and knew there was much to be done before any equity would be seen. The area of interpreting was one way we knew we could contribute. 1981 was a huge awareness-raising year being the International Year of the Disable. Many front line experiences were had which involved the media, national television, government officials, etc. During this time and subsequent years in Deafness Awareness Week and Deaf Pride Week, many talks were given on our experiences being brought up in a deaf family.

Judie:        During 1986, Raili Ojala from Finland, visited Melbourne and met with us as well shared similar work experiences and what was of paramount interest was that all of us had deaf parents. We had a great time together then as it was meant to be, we all met again later, too!

(OHT 8: Peter, Millie, Betty and Betty)

In 1987, both of us, along with John Hallett from Adelaide had the opportunity of being Australian interpreters at the World Federation of the Deaf Congress in Helsinki, Finland. Boarding a train to travel from Helsinki to Lappennranta (a few miles from the Russian border) to attend a Sign Language Symposium being held prior to the WFD Congress, we just happened to bump into Railia and a few others who were codas. There we all were travelling on this train sitting together and it was on this ride we met Betty Colonemos. You can imagine the riotous time we had on that train trip. We also shared a flat with Betty and if you want to learn about Finnish saunas, just talk to Betty!

(OHT 9: Group, Finland)

During the visit to Finland and the Conferences, we met many other Codas. Walking in the woods one day on a special island that goes back in history to the early days of Finland, we thought we had stumbled upon Goldilocks but

were mistaken, it was Millie the Brother! We could not believe our eyes! (Orange eyes!).

(OHT 10: Millie)

We never expected to ever meet this person whom we had read about with great interest and the organization she had founded but, she was also, ummm, how you say, “young”. Founders and pioneers, to us, were people who are either old, grey, or even perhaps passed on to their next life!

Peter:       Millie spent many hours telling us all about CODA, the organization and about being a Coda. We were enthralled and, like sponges, soaked up all the new information.

Amongst some of the others we met there were Shirley Shultz (now Myers), Eli Savanick, Sherry Hicks, as well as people from the United Kingdom such as Liz Scott-Gibson and others from all over Europe and Scandinavia. A large group of Codas went out to a restaurant one evening and we were the noisiest and nearly trashed the place!

Many of the interpreters present at the international event were, in fact, Codas. However, of great impact to us while thinking about all this new coda information was the fact that there were no coda interpreters from Germany. Millie talked about the shocking practice of sterilization of many Deaf people during the Second World War and how this had virtually wiped out a whole generation of people. Amongst these there would have been codas. What if our parents had been born there – it was unthinkable.

During the World Federation of the Deaf Congress we attended an international meeting held for codas. Of the 56 or so who attended from 17 different countries, three were from Australia. John Hallett and both of us.

The Congress interpreting experience was unbelievable and gave us much insight into the international scene. Not always so easily accessible for those who lie in the great land downunder. Australia is so geographically removed from all the Northern Hemisphere and other great nations...the unexpected CODA/Coda experience however, had an enormous impact on our lives.

So many things were much clearer, pieces of life's puzzles and mysteries fell into place and the whole picture of our lives and relationships with our deaf

and hearing family members, friends, and acquaintances were both clarified and confirmed. We also realized that there was a history to codas and a need to explore the possibility for future services to be developed for the benefit of all Codas and Kodas.

Both of us now knew that we had a very definite identity and that there was an explanation or reason for the things which were so mysterious to us before. We also were given another identity, whilst in Finland from Betty Colonomos. She gave us the label of “Ken and Barbie”! Tonight, you will be meeting Ken and Barbie’s grandparents! Look out for them!

Judie: Armed with all these new experiences we went back to Australia and not only shared the international interpreting experience but the Coda experience as well. We have continued our CODA-USA membership ever since as this was the best way to stay in touch. At the end of 1987, we moved back to Sydney to live and continued to share our experiences with people there. Often it was just one to one or, at times, it was with a small group of mostly coda interpreters. The ones in interpreting were the people most readily at hand.

In 1989, Peter had the opportunity of going to Deaf Way as an interpreter for another group of Australian deaf participants. This was an ideal opportunity to attend the CODA Conference being held in Maryland.

Peter: I met up with many of the faces that I had met in Finland. I went to the CODA Panel session and the following week onto my first Conference held at Westminster, Maryland. My mum and a friend of hers were also traveling with me and they, too, have been supportive of it ever since. They have asked to be remembered to all they met. Another coda friend from Melbourne, Marianne Bridge, was also able to attend Westminster.

As I listened and became a sponge yet again, the experiences of others helped me to clarify my own all the more. It was so amazing to me that I had gone half way round the world only to find home! I think that’s something like a Liza Minnelli song, “You’ve Got to Ring Them Bells”...there were other beings like me! They were from this planet, too! We were all from this planet, we all had our countries of origin, but I then found “Codaland”! I so much wanted Judie to attend one. Her exposure to a CODA Conference was not able to happen until four years later. (1993).

## **Passport Without a Country**

It was in 1990 when Judie and I were introduced to Cameron Davie who was doing a degree in film and video production. He needed to make a film documentary for his major project. We talked about CODA, the organization and about being codas. Later, he met with a number of other Australian codas in various cities. Neither of us could imagine the impact his video project would have. In 1991, “Passport Without a Country” was produced. There was no set script, everyone just spoke from the heart and responded to questions asked during the filming. We had nothing more to do with it until the final product was released. Some of us on the video did not even know of each other so to see the final version was mind blowing. We later found out that the video was somewhat of a first. Life’s path had taken us and others to the frontier yet again. Pioneers by default! Now the video reaches many people in many countries and corners of the globe.

Judie: I became very puzzled by Peter’s enthusiasm for CODA after his return from Maryland, so much so, that I wondered if I was not being a good wife! You know! Good support, understand, etc., but I noticed a change in him. A certain air of peacefulness. I became jealous. What did CODA give him that I couldn’t? I wanted to be the same way! Other people like Della Bampton were also made curious by his comments about CODA and how one really had to experience it to fully appreciate it. Well for Della, that was it. She was off in 1992 to New Orleans. She had never even been outside the country before and now like Peter this is her third visit to a CODA Conference.

I was finally able to attend the Spokane Conference in 1993 and there were a total of six Australians who attended. Apart from myself, Peter, Della Bampton, Della Goswell, Fiona Perry and Marion Burrows all came. Wow, during Spokane, I started to understand what Peter was trying to tell me!

## **KODAs**

Peter: Kotas are always very special to us and we are keen to see programs and services developed to educate them, their parents and others who are significant in their lives so that all can develop a positive appreciation of Deafness.

When the concept of bilingual education came to Australia – we were contacted by a private school called The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children at North Rocks in Sydney. We were asked to be involved in preliminary discussions about the setting up of a preschool for Deaf, Kodas and hearing community children. Other codas involved are amongst the Australians who are here at this conference. Alan Marcus and Millie Brother have both visited this program and my mum is a staunch advocate for the program. It is proving to be a great success and its progress is being watched by other centers around the world.

## **KODA Camp**

(OHT 11: KODA Camp) (OHT 12: Alan & Betty Marcus)  
(OHT 13: Camp Leaders)

Judie: In 1993, the Deaf Society of New South Wales received a grant of money to run a residential Koda Camp for 8-12 year olds. In total there were 25 children. The camp ran for four days. Some of the people here were also involved along with others back home. The camp was a huge success and the star of the camp was none other than Alan (“I’m a shock”) Marcus, or as the kids called him “American Alan”. The Australian Coda Leaders were not psychologists, so it was good having Alan there. All the leaders involved in the camp were Codas, except for four people.

One was a hearing psychologist whom the children could not warm to. One child even wrote a poem about each of the leaders and commented on this particular person as being “Not one of us”! This was so interesting to us because the person who coordinated the camp was another non-Coda, but, who happens to be a fluent signer. She was accepted by the children. We also had an older Deaf couple as camp “grandparents”. This was very successful too as it gave the children someone they could sign to if they wished and deaf voices to listen to. Just like home! Parents have since given extremely positive feedback about the camp and the changes in their children’s’ attitudes and behavior.

Later, we were to find that this residential camp was apparently a world first. Life’s path had again led us, and others involved, to the frontier. Pioneers by default! We are hoping to host another camp later this year.

Peter: To coincide with Alan's visit, the organizing committee from the camp and some Sydney people who were involved with "Passport Without a Country" arranged a launch for the video. Alan was the special guest and launched "Passport Without a Country". We also thought it would be an opportune time to also launch "CODA-Australia". The then State Minister for Health, the Honorable Ron Phillips is a coda and thanks to childhood contacts, he agreed to launch the organization. So a big event was arranged in Sydney. The venue was the majestic State Library rich in history. Very fitting for the occasion, we felt!

CODA-Australia now has a membership of eighty-six.

Australian Deaf Community reaction to CODA-Australia has been interesting with all doubts, questions and fears I believe you have experienced here!

Later that year, six Aussies registered for Spokane – our memories are greatly treasured. Now there are more codas who are able to understand what I had been talking about for four years.

(OHT 14: Millie cutting cake/Odette's birthday)

(OHT 15: Yulefest, Sydney)

The following year in 1994, the CODA-Australia Interim Committee got together and arranged our first Retreat. Concerns of cultural differences were discussed. (Comments: Aussies reserved, etc., not show emotions, weak, wimp, be tough, etc.) Nevertheless it was agreed we go ahead and give it a go. The Retreat was held in a small country style resort at Windsor on the outskirts of Sydney. We were very fortunate that Millie Brother was going to be nearby in Fiji (doing her usual "wild thing" – diving) so we managed to lasso her to our great land. 24 Codas attended. Not bad, considering Australia's overall population is only around 17 million. What's more important is that the retreat and the format used, worked! Millie proved to be a great Ambassador and was a hit with the Australians.

(OHT 16: Melbourne group)

Judie: Last year, in 1995, Melbourne Codas arranged Australia's second Retreat with 32 participants attending. Some newcomer comments included – "I came cuz I wanted to see what all this charismatic stuff was

about!” and “I thought I had dealt with everything in my life, but I’m just realizing things still affect me!” One of the many memorable stories shared by the participants included a trip to Egypt, when the Australian coda stayed with an Egyptian family whom she met whilst there. The parents were deaf and took her home to meet their hearing daughters; the rest of the story needs no further explanation. The coda bond was there.

## **Other Activities – That Are Happening or We’ve Done**

- November, 1995 – Odette Shaw’s place for a Sleepover. Great fun!
- Carmel Batson in Melbourne working with Bernadette Wallace on Koda Kids stuff.
- Since Millie’s visit, efforts were put into encouraging as many Aussies as possible to come to Los Angeles (Buena Park) and with the wonderful promotional visit from one of your conference planning committee members, Rochelle Braithwaite and another support person, Carrie Moreland, there are more of us here this time. Six went to Spokane, twelve are here in Buena Park, how many next time?

(OHT 17: Rochelle and Carrie)

It is now proposed that our next Australian Retreat will be hosted in Adelaide, South Australia, next year in 1997. The motivation is continually increasing especially after the visits made by Alan, Millie, Rochelle, and Carrie.

## **Closing**

Peter:        Looking back, perhaps we have been global pioneers but we followed our experiences and told others of what had meant so much to us and how it affected and enriched our lives. So whilst we may have been at the front line at various moments, the growth has not happened without the support and efforts of others who have come along side and who also shared the same vision. Some of them are here with us. They, too, are global pioneers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Our story is shaping up to have a happy ending, as one would expect in a fairytale, but let us assure you that this is no tale.

Just like us, everyone here is at the frontier and this makes you all pioneers. We would like to invite you all to join us in searching for new CODA frontiers that will take us into the next century.

So, to the not too distant future, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) will be hosted in Brisbane, Queensland in Australia in 1999. In fact, the WFD will come to the Southern Hemisphere for the very first time! Australian Codas are keen to see as many of you there in 1999 as possible! We are hoping to be successful in a bid to host a Conference one week after the WFD. So start saving your pennies now! We would love to have you come downunder!

Let's pioneer together so that we may find all corners of our global community and every branch of the Coda Family Tree.

The hard thing about coming to CODA is leaving it!

Thank you for having us!