

In her 80s, she published *PEDRO OF TONALA*, a detailed study of the home, school, work and play life of a Mexican boy. Based on research Howard began in 1962, it represents a rare example of a folklorist cum educator putting into practice her conviction that children's lives can only be understood when examined holistically.

Howard's laboratory was the playground, her teachers were the children. Throughout her life as a teacher in primary schools and then later as an academic and researcher in children's folklore, she remained

stimulated by and convinced of the learning children had to offer adults. Dorothy Howard was a radical and independent thinker, well ahead of her time. She had an indomitable spirit when it came to this pioneering work of hers. The value she places in the voice of the child and what these voices have to offer in the education of adults, is yet to be recognised by the institutional authorities who govern the world of the child.

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The Game of 'Knucklebones' in Australia

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This Ancient Game played under many names ('Knucklebones', 'Jacks', 'Jackstones', 'Dibs', and others),¹ with various materials (sheeps' knucklebones, stones, marbles, bits of iron, sea shells, double-metal-tripods and any handy, adaptable material);² accompanied by colorful terminology ('tally', 'buck', 'cradle', 'jumping the ditch', 'horses in the stable', and similar indigenous or inherited metaphors and actions)³ has circumnavigated the globe.⁴ The how and when and whence of these global peregrinations are matters of delight to scholars.

But Australian children of 1955, undisturbed by the learned activities of their elders, continue to play the old game with some semblance of its pristine purity.⁵ 'Knucklebones' is the name used the length and breadth of Australia; 'Jacks' was the only other name heard, and that only occasionally and rightly so, for real sheeps' knucklebones are the preferred playing implements of all Australian children with whom I talked.

Alas for the game's pristine purity, however, real sheeps' knucklebones are harder and harder to come by these days; and manufactured imitation plastic bones are offered for sale in little shops that sell marbles, tops, kites and comic books. That real bones are still as prevalent as they are is evidence of the tenacity with which Australian children hold on to cherished old ways; for the peculiar geography, economy and population distribution of the country make it more and more difficult for Aussie lads and lassies to buy or beg real sheeps' knucklebones.

The population of nine million people in a country approximately the size of the United States is largely urban; it is centred in five capital cities (the sixth state, Tasmania, is an island, more rural in culture pattern than the five mainland states). Though the Australians 'live off the sheeps' back' as they say, and sheep have been the basis of their economy for almost all of the country's history, the sheep live in the great Australian 'Outback', the children live in the cities; and the city butcher who, twenty-five years ago, sold sheeps' knucklebones in sets of five, no longer caters to juvenile trade. He finds it time-saving to whack the knucklebones in two, the children say.

In the old days a child bought his bones for 'tuppenny,' took them home to mother who boiled them clean, then dyed with ink or with the juice of berries. A child today needs great patience and ingenuity to collect a set of real bones— he needs an amiable

neighbourhood butcher or a cooperative uncle who owns sheep; and one by one he hoards the bones until he has a set of five. Meanwhile, or if no friendly butcher or helpful uncle is available, he must go to the neighbourhood shop and buy for two shillings nine pence a set of plastic bones colored pink, white, green, red and yellow. Children say the plastic bones 'don't feel right'; 'they don't stay on your hand — they are too slick'; and 'they are not heavy enough'. Consequently, the child who owns genuine bones takes good care of them.

The children who have no two shillings nine pence (and no real bones) revert to stones — stones carefully chosen for size, shape, size and weight. This takes time and patience, as well as careful judgement. Therefore, when a child has collected a good set of stones, he looks after them with care.

Most Tasmanian children, according to reports, are still able to collect real knucklebones, for Tasmanians, because of their island position and their small rural population, have held fast to traditional ways more than have their fellow Australians on the mainland.

The game of 'Jacks' as American children know it, played with a set of metal double-tripods of different colors (sometimes seven and sometimes ten in number) and a rubber ball, is apparently unknown among Australian children. Of all the children and adults questioned and observed in play, one woman in Brisbane, Queensland, had seen a set of metal jacks about sixty years ago.

Sixty years ago or prior to 1900, the game of knucklebones was a lengthier, more complicated game than it is today and was played by children over a longer span of years. In earlier days children played the game well into their teen years, so many older people told me, and could therefore develop greater finger dexterity to perform the more intricate maneuvers.

In suburban Melbourne, Victoria, lives a woman (anonymous by request) over eighty years old who, in her youth, was the champion 'Knucklebones' player in her community — the same community in which she lives today. The neighbourhood was then open country with 'paddocks' or pastures surrounding the home. As she remembers, she was about fourteen years old — around 1880 — when she became the champion. Still able to play the game through several times without a miss, she demonstrated her undiminished skill by sitting on the floor and going through the game three times while her friend, Mrs. Fairlie

Taylor, wrote down a description of her play. This is Mrs. Taylor's description:

Ones. Place four jacks, one at each corner of a six inch square, in the floor. The fifth jack is the *taw*. Throw up *taw*; pick up one jack, put it in the center of the square, then catch the falling *taw*. Next throw up *taw*; pick up two, put them in the center of the square, then catch falling *taw*. Next throw up *taw*; pick up all four (three in center plus odd one), put all four in center, catch the falling *taw*. Place *taw* in center with the four. That ends *Ones*.

Scatters. Hold all five in hand. Scatter quickly over floor. Don't move any. Pick up one for *taw* (this choice involves judgment; the player will consider the position of each jack with reference to the play to be made in scatters). Repeat the plays of *Ones*.

Juggles. Place jacks in a small four inch square, one at each corner, as in *Ones*. Throw up *taw*; pick up two, put down one, then catch the falling *taw*. Now the player has two jacks in hand. Next throw up two; pick up two, put down one, catch falling two. Now the player has three in hand. Next throw up three; pick up two, put down one, then catch falling three. Now the player has four jacks in hand. Next throw up four; pick up one, then catch the falling jacks. Now the five in hand are placed in a pile on the floor. That ends *Juggles*.

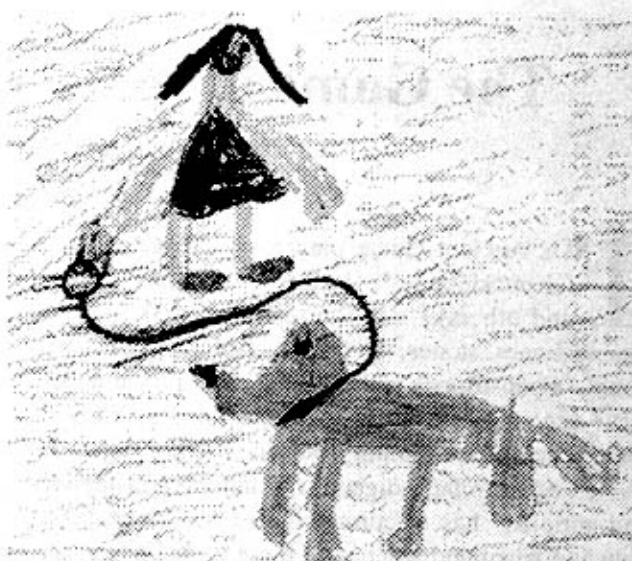
No juggles. Place jacks in a small four-inch square, one at each corner as in *Ones*. Throw up the *taw*; pick up one, catch falling *taw*. Now the player has two in hand. Throw up one of the two (holding one in hand); pick up one, then catch the falling *taw*. Now the player has three in hand. Next throw up one (holding two in hand); pick up one, then catch the falling *taw*. Now the player has four in hand. Next throw up one (holding three in hand); pick up one, then catch the falling *taw*. Now the player has five in hand. The five in hand are placed in a pile on the floor. That ends *No Juggles*.

Horses and stables. The jacks are placed in a bunch on the floor. Pick up a *taw*. Spread fingers of left hand, curve them like a claw. Place claw with finger tips resting on floor about six or eight inches from the four jacks. The claw hand is the *stable*; the opening between fingers are the stalls. Throw up *taw*; push one jack (*horse*) into a stall, then catch the falling *taw*. Next throw up *taw*; push another jack into another stall, then catch the falling *taw*. Continue until four jacks are pushed into the four stalls of the *stable*. That ends *Horse and Stables*.

Mice in Hole. Throw up five jacks; catch as many as possible on back of hand. All that miss are the mice. Then throw up the jacks on back of hand, catch in palm. Choose one mouse for *taw* (this involves careful judgment considering the next play to be made). Next the mouse hole is made by the left hand - thumb and forefinger (with finger tips on floor) make an arch (the other three fingers are clenched so that they will not be an obstruction). Next throw up the *taw*; push all the mice into the hole, then catch the falling *taw*. That ends *Mice in Hole*.

Skim the milk. Scatter jacks gently. Choose a *taw*. Throw up *taw*; catch on back of hand, then moving hand and *taw* back and forth above the other jacks say:

Skim the milk, skim the milk



Turn the dishes over.

Next throw up the *taw* from the back of the hand, pick up one jack ('dish'), then catch the falling *taw*. Next throw up the two in hand; catch on back of hand, and moving hand with two jacks above the other jacks on floor, say:

Skim the milk, skim the milk
Turn the dishes over.

Next throw up the *taw* from the back of hand, pick up one jack ('dish') then the player has three in hand. Next throw up three; catch three on back of hand; move hand over jacks on floor, saying 'Skim the milk', etc, then throw up three from back of hand, pick up one, then catch the falling three in palm. Now the player has four in hand. Next throw up four; catch four on back of hand, repeat 'skim milk', etc, throw up four from back of hand, pick up one, catch the falling four in palm of hand. Next throw up all five, catch on back of hand, throw up from back of hand, catch in palm. That ends *Skim the milk*.

Clicks. Scatter jacks gently. Choose a *taw*. Throw up *taw*; pick up one jack, click it against another, then catch the falling *taw*. Next throw up the two (in hand); pick up one, click it against another, then catch the falling two. Now the player has three in hand. Next throw up the three; pick up one, click it against another, then catch the falling three. Now the player has four in hand. Next throw up four; pick up one, then catch the falling four. Now the player has five in hand. That ends *Clicks*.

No Clicks. Scatter jacks gently. Choose a *taw*. Throw up *taw*; pick up one, catch *taw* (the two jacks must not click). Repeat the plays of *Clicks* but this time without any clicking. Any click heard means the player has missed and must wait for her turn again. When *No Clicks* has been successfully completed, the jacks are placed in a bunch on the floor. The game is over.

The longest, most complicated 'Knucklebones' game current today in Australia is played by children in Western Australia, according to all information collected to date. In April, 1955, Miss Milligen, a schoolmistress in the Mt Lawley Government Primary