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Abstract
I wrote the play Windy Gully in 1987 for Theatre South but the song Windy Gully was written some fifteen years earlier. Our family came to Kembla in 1968. We bought as a job lot a large dilapidated two and a half storey weather board general store, com dance hall/meeting place, domestic dwelling (circa 1895), a huge corrugated iron shed and an imported Hudson ready-cut Californian bungalow (built 1932). In the house was an old desk and in a drawer was a copy of the Royal Commission into the Mount Kembla Mine Disaster of 1902.

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Songs from Windy Gully

Wendy Richardson

I wrote the play *Windy Gully* in 1987 for Theatre South but the song *Windy Gully* was written some fifteen years earlier. Our family came to Kembla in 1968. We bought as a job lot a large dilapidated two and a half storey weather board general store, com dance hall/meeting place, domestic dwelling (circa 1895), a huge corrugated iron shed and an imported Hudson ready-cut Californian bungalow (built 1932).

In the house was an old desk and in a drawer was a copy of the *Royal Commission into the Mount Kembla Mine Disaster of 1902*.

I taught in the school that was rocked by the explosion. The cracks in the school building had been boarded over but the stories were still being told by old miners who had somehow survived.

We had miners living all around us. The Kembla Pit was still operating and the pit whistle was part of the wonderful soundscape of this mountain village.

As I read and talked and walked and listened I began to realise what a privilege it was to live in a close-knit mining community. I went to Windy Gully to search for the mound that some thought was the mass grave. I wrote the song as a tribute to those who died and those who mourned. I was increasingly conscious of the gulf between men who risk their money and men who risk their lives. I talked to many older women whose mother's marched to the pit top to plead with scabs. They described how their mothers made a fire at the end of a scab train and tarred and feathered a scab, who sneaked out from the guarded hut to get a drink at the pub. I tried to imagine what it would have been like to carry every bit of water—for drinking and cooking and a quick scrub in kerosene tins. The only reliable water in '68 in our house was a corrugated iron tank that had been concreted. Water was boiled in the old copper downstairs and carried up in—you guessed it—kerosene tin buckets. I felt a certain kinship with those women of the early 1900s.

I wrote a lullaby, *Don't Dream of the Pit*, that I thought a mother

touched by the tragedy of July 31st 1902 might sing to a baby son. I then wrote *The Price of the Coal* because I was beginning to understand what it cost in terms of human life and I knew that those outside of the mining community needed to be reminded. In this song the dead miner is a son, a husband, and a father.

The children at Mt Kembla School in the late 1960s and early 1970's were full of energy and enthusiastic about their beautiful natural surroundings and the history of the village. They still are. You only had to see them marching en masse in the parade through the village on Saturday 3rd August [2002] carrying aloft the names of disaster victims as part of the disaster commemoration. Their pride in the achievements of those miners of past years was great. They sang the children's chant that I wrote for the play *Windy Gully*. It tells of the inevitability of 'going on the coal' at fourteen, of coal influencing every aspect of life. You were either a miner or married to a miner stoking coal 'in the stove to make the dinner'.

The Miner's Song tells the story of the disaster in a ballad form. I wrote a tune for this also. Wrote is perhaps the wrong word. I made up a tune and sang it to others because I can't write music. The songs and chants were woven through the play *Windy Gully*. The 1987 season was a great success locally. The 1989 season toured the Queensland mining towns and Cessnock and Singleton (my hometown). It had a run at the New Theatre in Newtown. All three productions were made possible by generous support from the Miner Federation.

I still live in Mt Kembla and I have watched pits close and now I watch the new mine opening. Whatever the future holds this is a beautiful place and the loyalty of the few miners left is strong and re-assuring. Everyone pitches in whether in floods or bushfires. The children growing up here have inherited tradition of comradeship. They will keep alive those things we must never forget.

Windy Gully

Wendy Richardson

Lonely the wind sings,
    Lonely a bird wings,
Through fold of hill then all is still,
        In Windy Gully.

Deep in the mountainside,
    Ninety-six miners died,
Loud were the cries,
    Smoke filled the skies,
        In Windy Gully.

Closed now, the old pit;
    sealed up the mouth of it,
Paid for the coal.
    Exacted the toll
        In Windy Gully

Only the rains weep,
    Only the hills keep.
Watch where men died,
    Know where they lie,
        In Windy Gully, In Windy Gully

Lullaby

Wendy Richardson

O listen to me my baby a-sleeping,
O listen to me my baby so dear -

Chorus
Don't dream of the pit,
It's a lifetime of sorrow,
Don't dream of the pit,
It's a lifetime of fear.

They carried your daddy,
All broken and bleeding,
They carried your daddy,
And buried him near.

Chorus
Don't' dream of the pit
It's a lifetime of sorrow,
Don't dream of the pit,
It's a lifetime of fear.

They carried your brother,
All burned and all blackened
They carried your brother
And washed him with tears

Chorus
Don't' dream of the pit
It's a lifetime of sorrow,
Don't dream of the pit,
It's a lifetime of fear.

Price of the Coal

Wendy Richardson

Old woman, old woman,
Can you tell me the cost,
For the coal you are burning,
What have you lost?

I lost me my own son,
Not thirty years old,
They carried him home,
So still and so cold

Young woman, young woman,
Can you tell me the cost,
For the coal you are raking,
What have you lost?

I lost me my husband,
So brave and so bold,
I've a lifetime of wanting,
To have and to hold.

Little baby, little baby,
Can you tell me the cost,
For the coal that is glowing,
What have you lost?

I lost me my daddy,
And as I grow old
I'll always remember,
The price of the coal.

Children's Chant

Wendy Richardson

Tell me, tell me where's your father,
Tell me, tell me where's your brother,
Tell me, tell me where's your sister,
Tell me, tell me where's your mother.

Oh me father's in the coal mine,
    He's a-hacking at the coal-face.
And me brother fills the skips now,
    He's a shovelling the coal fast.
And my sister she is married,
    And her man he is a wheeler.
And my mother stokes the coal up
    In the stove to make the dinner.

Tell me, tell me when you grow up,
Tell me, tell me where we'll find you,
Tell me tell me what you'll do then
Tell me, tell me what will bind you.

I'll be working in the coal mine,
    I'll be hacking at the coal-face.
I'll be filling up the skip then,
    I'll be shovelling the coal fast.
I'll be grown and I'll be married,
    And my man will be a wheeler.
I'll be stoking up the coal then,
    In the stove to make the dinner.

The Miners Song

Wendy Richardson

See him toil up the incline in the wind and the rain,
Hes been home for an evening,
now it's back down again,
To dig coal for the company,
in the darkness to slave,
For a poverty wage and a sure, early, grave.

See him crawl through a tunnel where there's no room
    to stand,
With his coffee pot lamp and his pick in his hand,
And there's death like a shadow follows close by his
    side,
Though there's some who'd deny this
    With their money and their pride.

Then in one fateful moment in the month of July,
The spark was ignited and the mountain replied,
All the death and destruction
    All the burned and the blinds
Were exposed at the pit top and could not be denied

See the wives and the mothers as they stumble and run,
In their fear they are searching for a husband or son,
See them walk through the graveyard to the bell's
    solemn toll,
For they know all too clearly the price of the coal.

See the grass growing greenly now to cover the mounds,
And the healing of time close the mine widows wounds,
See the new generation in the wind and the rain,
As they stride up the incline to go back down again.