While the material details of life in those years are evoked richly, I particularly enjoyed Stone's awareness of popular culture. He offers vivid descriptions of his own boyhood interests: in marbles and comics, American cowboy movies and two night-time spectator sports – wrestling and dirt trackers or motor bike racers. There is also his reading, from American comics to Boy's Own Annuals. There is excellent analysis of schools, both primary and then, as one of the lucky few, at Mount Albert Grammar School where, in Form 4A during 1937, he met a young Keith Sinclair.

Stone has a great ear; and you will find many, long-forgotten, examples of the popular language of the era – 'I mind', meaning 'I remember'; the 'yard', as the unbuilt part of the 'section'; and 'youse', as the plural of 'you'. Sometimes the words followed from the material situation – so the absence of refrigeration meant that 'stale', 'sour', 'rancid' and 'curdled' were common expressions – and sometimes they followed the impact of popular culture – so American movies gave us 'super-dooper', 'whoopee', 'scram' and 'vamoose'.

As a historian, Stone is aware of the dangers of soft nostalgia, which is why he always supplements his memory with the historiography. But he does claim the old bromide that 'life was simpler then' (p.7), which in my view seems absolutely contradicted by the incredible feats of organization, in dealing with travelling salespeople, or trips to many specialized small shops, which his mother especially was forced to carry out if the family was to flourish. I cannot believe she thought her life was 'simple'.

Another minor criticism is the lack of an index. *As It Was* is such a valuable account of the social experience of the interwar years that it should function not only as an engrossing read, but as a reliable source of reference for social historians. An index would have paid due justice to a fascinating and informative book.

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The Unconventional Career of Dr Muriel Bell. By Diana Brown. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2018. 196pp. NZ price: $35. ISBN: 9781988531304.

ONE OF THE PLEASURES of this book is the way in which it takes common features of New Zealand dining tables and kitchen benches and makes them unfamiliar. In so doing, Diana Brown underlines Muriel Bell's 'revolutionary' work getting iodine in salt, fluoride in water, and milk in schools in order to improve the health of New Zealanders.

Brown uses Bell's career as New Zealand's first state nutritionist to examine how medical research and nutritional science were shaped by gender across the twentieth century. Bell's early years in medicine illustrate how the field of nutrition opened new opportunities for women during the first half of the twentieth century. Her professional and intellectual achievements in the face of sexism in universities, hospitals and research laboratories make for a jaw-dropping read. Brown's point about sexism is underlined by the 1963 closure of the Nutrition Research Unit that Bell led.

Brown argues that the feminization of nutrition made it intellectually and politically vulnerable compared to fields like biochemistry that were dominated by men. The litany of contemporary health crises that require exactly the interdisciplinary and applied research that Bell championed emphasizes the point that her personal loss was also a tragedy for public health worldwide.

This book makes a strong case for the imaginative and analytical possibilities of professional biographies of New Zealand women. It is less convincing when it presents Bell's personal life within this framework. Bell left rich sources on her intellectual life and career, but few records that tell the inner stories of her marriages, ageing, retirement, or death. Ultimately, there are a set of mysteries at the heart of her life. The book's chronological chapters develop a compelling narrative about Bell's professional journey and her cumulative contributions to the health of the nation. Yet the short sections that comment on personal topics – such as Bell's appearance and style, her feelings about married life, and her experiences of depression in later life – interrupt the arc of that tale. These parts of the book are based on sparser sources – they often repeat observations made by others – and are frequently speculative. Taken together, they fit awkwardly with Brown's determined efforts to expand the evidence base for her field. The unknowable parts of Bell's life raise interesting questions about the possibilities and limitations of biographies. I would have liked to read a separate, substantive, section that connected unanswered questions about Bell's personal life to Brown's experiences researching and writing the book.

Brown tells a powerful story about Bell's determination, intelligence, generosity and smarts, using a set of technical documents and public service achievements that could sound dry in the words of a less perceptive author. Along the way, Brown explains crucial scientific developments, delivers rich depictions of her subject's social and intellectual worlds, and masterfully demonstrates the national and international significance of Bell's research. *The Unconventional Career of Dr Muriel Bell* is a compelling account of nutritional science, governmenta and the achievements of women during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

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