

# SINGABOUT

## JUNE 2019

### DON'T BE TOO POLITE GIRLS

Is it a parody or a song using a traditional tune?

Many readers will know the shearer's song Flash Jack from Gundagai, in a small book of Songs of the Shearer which I put together from BMC Singabout songsters, to be sold at the Royal Easter Show when the Concert Party sang at a shearing demonstration using a steam driven machine. The introduction sounds jingoistic, but was directed against too much influence from USA in our culture, in that period of late 1960-70s.

Originally published in Singabout Vol 5, No 4, p10 it was noted that although we were uncertain who was 'Flash Jack' the identity of hungry Patterson or 'Old Tom Patterson' as Banjo Paterson knew him was T.F.Patterson who took up 'Ulonga Station' in 1871. He eventually owned 300,000 acres with a long frontage to the Lachlan River near Booligal. To the south, covering the One Tree Plain, it stretched half way to the Murrumbidgee River. The reference to the Wolseley shearing machine, first introduced in 1888 and 1893, when the Bank of Australasia became the owners of Ulonga, places the song around this time.

The well known chorus goes: All among the wool, boys, keep your blades full boys, I can do a respectable tally myself whenever I like to try, But they know me round the backblocks as Flash Jack from Gundagai. The verses are written in the first person and

tell of all the places where the shearer has shorn. It is a work song describing the experiences of a shearer.

Glen Tomasetti used the traditional tune of 'Flash Jack', when she wrote the song to commemorate the High Court decision to hand down equal pay in 1969. I think it is a clever parody using a tune identified with men's work and paralleling women's work experiences. Glen was a fine singer songwriter, an assured and authoritative performer with considerable understanding of the cultural and historical aspects of Folk Music. She always spoke her mind. She held the opinion that, as Australians we had a responsibility to sound like Australians and would take people to task on this point. She wrote the words *Don't Be Too Polite, Girls* as a song about women's pay and work conditions. It became the equal pay anthem many women sang with the conviction that comes from the shared experience.

She was also a writer with passion and a strong understanding of women's struggles throughout Australian history. During the 1960s-70s Glen sang in various folk music venues in Melbourne and taught guitar accompaniment classes in a room above Traynors coffee lounge. Glen was a rebel against her background and the times. At this time Glen organised recording sessions, radio programs & theme concerts. She made the front page of a daily paper for withholding 6% of her tax as equivalent to the amount being spent on the war by Harold Holt's government.

With the American war in Vietnam came the organisation SAVE OUR SONS in which Glen played a major role. She helped organise the biggest folk concert of all at that time, a Peace Concert at the Myer Music Bowl. Singers came from Sydney and eventually the idea for festivals and touring groups began.

Glen was in the forefront of the Folk revival in Australia. She was a great humanist and a great encourager. Apart from her abilities as a singer, collector and historian she was a strong anti-war activist and a life long supporter of the women's movement.

*Don't be Too Polite, Girls* it is still sung with gusto when women gather to sing protest songs as the message is still relevant.

I organised a themed concert at the National Folk Festival, Easter 2019 to commemorate fifty years since the song was written and the first concerts in Port Phillip, Melbourne which became the National Folk Festival.

***R. Dale Dengate***

# Don't be too Polite Girls...

Trocadero, 1 PM. Friday 19-4-19.

## National Folk Festival



Share  
Songs & experiences with

Merith Power Kate Burke Jess Lloyd  
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2019 National Folk Festival < 19.4.19

## Flash Jack From Gundagai

I've shore at Burrabogie, and I've shore at Toganmain,  
I've shore at big Willandra, and upon the old Coleraine,  
But before the shearin' was over I wished myself back again  
Shearin' for old Tom Patterson, on the One Tree Plain.

Chorus:

All among the wool, boys, all among the wool,  
Keep your wide blades full, boys, keep your wide blades full,  
I can do a respectable tally myself whenever I like to try,  
But they know me round the back blocks as Flash Jack from Gundagai.

I've shore at big Willandra and I've shore at Tilberoo,  
And once I drew my blades, my boys, upon the famed Barcoo,  
At Cowan Downs and Trida, as far as Moulamein,  
But I always was glad to get back again to the One Tree Plain.

I've pinked 'em with the Wolseleys, and I've rushed with B-bows too,  
And shaved 'em in the grease, my boys, with the grass seed showin' through.  
But I never slummed my pen, my lads, whatever it might contain,  
While shearin' for old Tom Patterson on the One Tree Plain.

I've been whalin' up the Lachlan, and I've dossed on Cooper's Creek,  
And once I rung Cudjingie shed, and blued it in a week,  
But when Gabriel blows his trumpet, lads, I'll catch the morning train,  
And I'll push for old Tom Patterson's on the One Tree Plain.

This song was printed in Paterson's *Old Bush Songs*, and also published (without attribution) in *The Land*, 4 July 1930.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/103051007>

There are several minor variants to the above, including one in which the repeat of big Willandra in the second verse is changed to Gooriananwa.

According to one source, Flash Jack was a bushranger by the name of Jack Molloy who was nicknamed "Jack in the Boots". There was certainly such a person, captured in 1861 in the Gundagai police district, but no indication of his ever being a shearer.