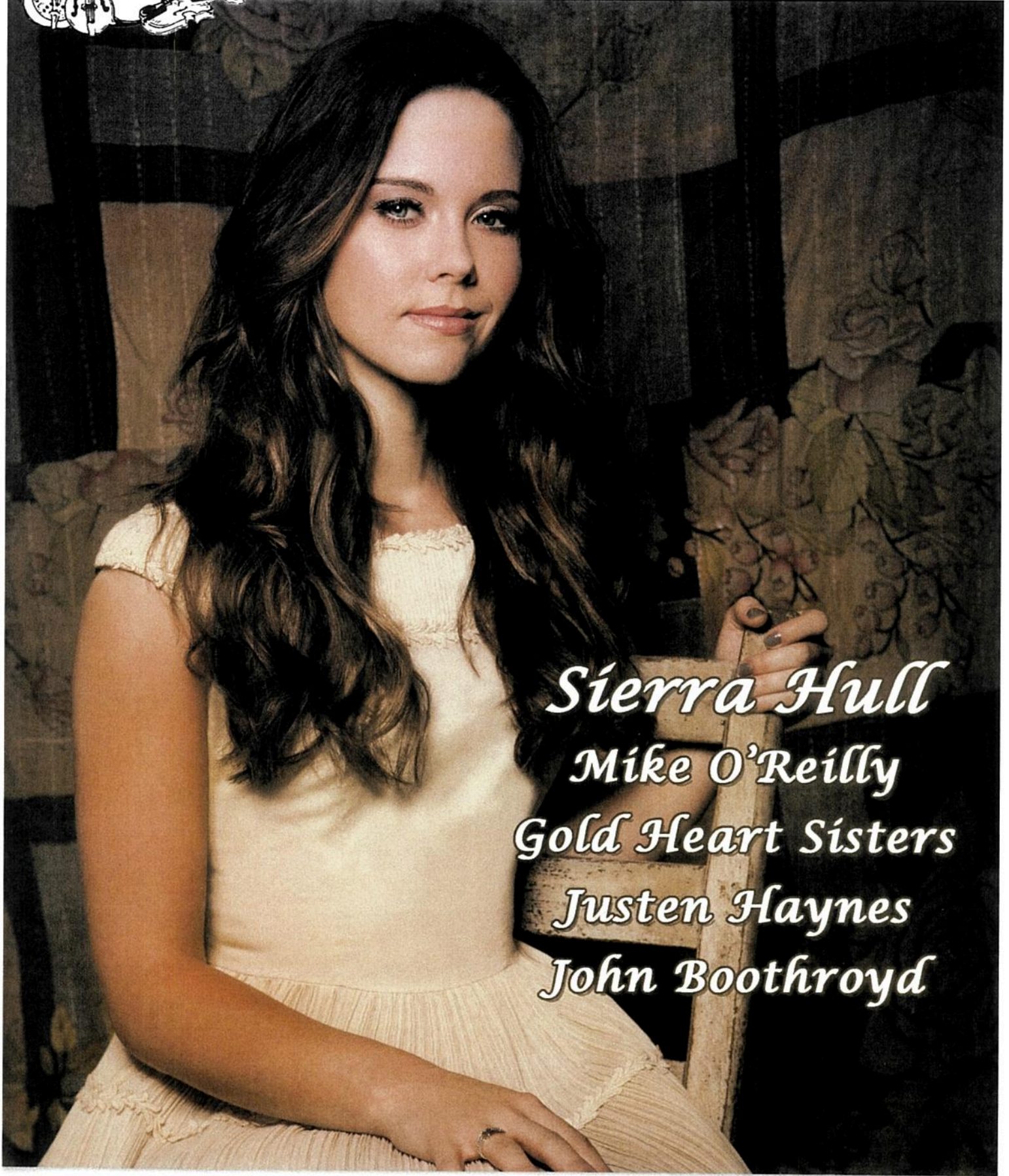


# BLUEGRASS

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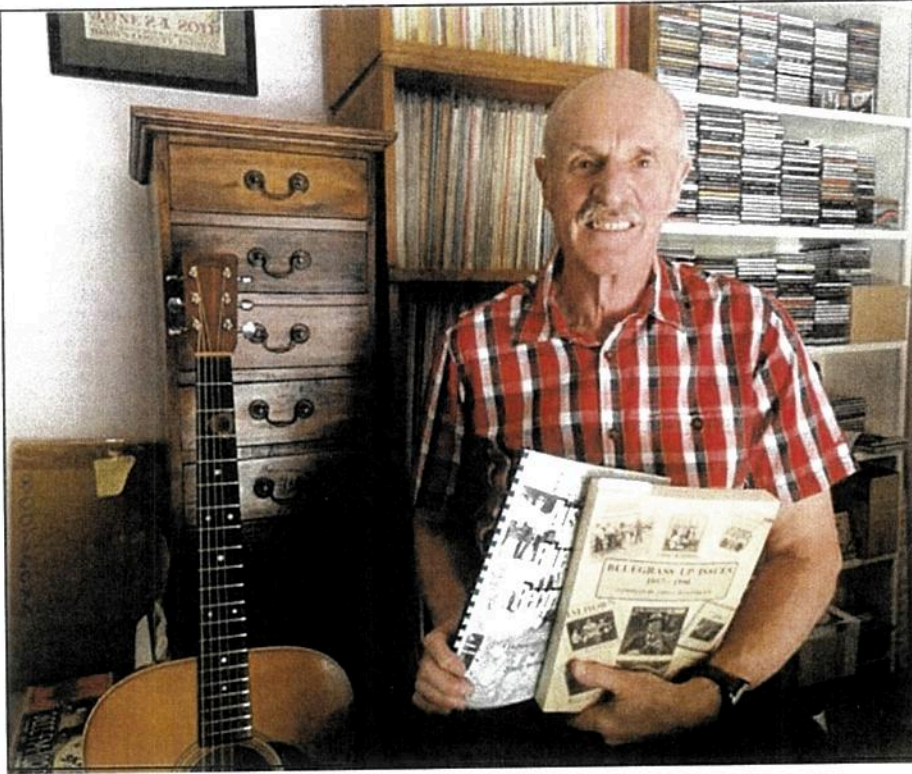
2016



*Sierra Hull*  
*Mike O'Reilly*  
*Gold Heart Sisters*  
*Justen Haynes*  
*John Boothroyd*



# JOHN BOOTHROYD



## BLUEGRASS DISCOGRAPHER

In 1990, Australian John Boothroyd compiled and published the comprehensive discography *Bluegrass LP Issues 1957-1990*. Its 393 pages covered 5,938 LPs from the U.S. and 19 other countries and included 100 reissues. This was no mean feat, especially for somebody living in Australia, and at a time when the Internet wasn't developed and many of us weren't particularly familiar with using computers. It took him six years to compile.

Boothroyd's involvement with old-time, country, and bluegrass music began in Melbourne in the late 1960s during the folk music revival. He formed a duo with his late wife Juanita Hillman performing songs from artists such as the Carter Family, New Lost City Ramblers, Doc Watson, the Delmore Brothers, and the Country Gentlemen. They also lived in England for a year and performed at folk club venues in and around London. He was playing clawhammer banjo, and both played guitar. Juanita passed in 2001 and John continued to perform, mainly as a soloist. (His solo album *Still Rollin' On: Old Time Style Songs & Tunes* was released in 2013.)

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By Jan Dale

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The first time John heard bluegrass music was when he bought an LP in Melbourne in 1963. It was the Blue Ridge Mountain Boys *Hootenanny 'N Bluegrass* issued in Australia on the Time/WG label, featuring Charles Trent and Rual Yarbrough on banjos, Herschel Sizemore on mandolin, and Tommy Jackson playing fiddle. He recalls, "I just liked it straight away without realizing it was going to lead to a lifetime of interest in the music."

He became a serious collector of bluegrass records and for about six years presented a monthly radio program in Melbourne. When first interested in the possibility of a discography, it was primarily for his own purposes. "I'd hear about a band and would be keen to know if this was their only recording and to learn a bit about them. So I'd make a note and talk to other collectors, some of whom were very encouraging of my idea to put together a discography."

Two Swedish collectors, Urban Haglund and Lillies Ohlsson, had compiled *A Listing Of Bluegrass LPs* which was published by Kountry Korral in 1971. This was a great inspiration to Boothroyd who says, "It was obviously never really meant to be complete, but was a great basis for me to pick up on and expand." This discography was an alphabetical listing of artists with numerous photos and basic information such as the name of group, title of the LP, country of origin,



John Boothroyd and Charlie Pennell



record label, and issue number. It also had an asterisk against the title if it contained non-bluegrass material.

Boothroyd carried this format through into his own listing, with some additions. He set out the criteria which he used to justify entry into the book: It had to have at least one track of bluegrass music in the traditional sense and to feature a five-string banjo played bluegrass-style. A few exceptions were the inclusion of musicians "essentially associated with bluegrass, but not including banjo," for example, duet issues by artists such as Jim & Jesse and the Stanley Brothers. There is also a separate section featuring the fiddle as the lead instrument, with the banjo playing either a minor backup role or not present at all. He notes, "I have included these fiddle LPs because they form an integral part in the recorded history of bluegrass music." Likewise, there is a section on guitar, featuring artists such as Doc Watson and Norman Blake and few of these included banjo or fiddle backing. He chose not to include 45s largely because it would have been a much more difficult task to try to identify the majority of them.

When asked how he managed to find all this information, Boothroyd explains that *Bluegrass Unlimited* was a great resource because it had reviews of many recordings. "When I was really getting into doing the book, I contacted Pete Kuykendall and asked if he was able to copy the reviews in the very early issues which I didn't have. He sent photo copies and, as I had subscribed to the magazine in the early '70s, I now had every issue. That was a great starting point. I included the *Bluegrass Unlimited* month and year against all LPs that were reviewed in that publication. I read through every review to make sure it fit the category—very time consuming." (There were other magazines referred to such as *Pickin'*, *Frets*, and *Muleskinner News*.)

Auction lists were also a good resource—from Bill Vernon, Chet Rhodes, Bob Fuller, Strictly Country Records (Rienk Janssen), and County Sales. "Also, there were several collectors here in Australia. One was David Crisp from New South Wales who has a wonderful collection and was a great supporter of the project. I would travel the 450 miles to Crisp's home and search through his collection." Boothroyd also knew many bluegrass musicians in

Australia (he was playing in a band at the time called Devil's Dream), so he looked through their record collections as well. It was always worthwhile checking out local record fairs and junk shops, too. Surprisingly, some quite obscure LPs were discovered at such venues.

There were also some local publications, such as *Country & Western Spotlight*, which had reviews of recordings, both Australian and imported. He remembers, "Sometimes you couldn't just tell by the name of the band. It would sound like a bluegrass band, but I'd have to be confident that it was before I put it into the listing. Also, included in the A-Z section is "V" for "Various," so you can imagine the fun I had with all the Starday records, for example, that were churned out in the '70s, in particular, and which might have 18 tracks, but only one bluegrass, which I did include." He also had contacts in Europe, such as Pieter Groenveld, and contacts in Japan who helped with releases in those countries.

Boothroyd's discography doesn't include track titles or musicians' names because he didn't have access to that information in all cases. Regarding the actual compilation work, Boothroyd was fortunate in that his late wife Juanita was a librarian and was a great help because she was familiar with a cataloging program called "In Magic" which is what he used. That did all the sorting and he could format it into whatever he wanted. However, from time to time, the computer would crash, and he would lose data which was not always retrievable—frustrating, but not unusual for those times.

Out of interest, Boothroyd compiled a graph of all the LPs he listed. The very first time bluegrass banjo was featured on an LP was in 1957 on *American Banjo: Tunes & Songs In Scruggs Style* featuring different musicians. Then the releases steadily increased with the largest number (316) being released in 1976. After that, it declined to about 90 in 1989 and, of course, disappeared with the demise of vinyl.

Three hundred copies of Boothroyd's discography were published (at his own expense), most of which were sold through County Sales, but there are also copies housed at The Library of Congress, The National Library of Australia, and the Victorian and New South Wales State Libraries. It was

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reviewed by Murphy Henry in the January 1992 edition of *Bluegrass Unlimited* and in the *County Sales Newsletter*.

Since *Bluegrass LP Issues 1957-1990* was published, he has been making notes of any issues which should have been in the book or errors of which he says there are plenty! He doesn't usually see the LPs, but there are sometimes references to them in *Bluegrass Unlimited's* "Notes & Queries" column. I asked him if he ever considered a revised version. It has been suggested by a number of people and does go through his mind,

but it would be quite difficult to use the data he currently has. For technical reasons, it would not be a simple matter of scanning in the pages and adding to them. Also, there are now online discographies.

### Australian Bluegrass History & Discography

After publishing *Bluegrass LP Issues 1957-1990*, Boothroyd turned his attention to purely Australian releases and began work on *Australian Bluegrass*

*Recordings: A History And Discography* which he published in 1999. As its name suggests, this discography gives a summary of the history of bluegrass music in Australia, how it was first heard, and includes profiles of some of the early most influential Australian musicians.

Of course, he already had all the information relating to the LPs, so now it was a matter of looking at other formats as well because he had decided to include 45s, cassettes, and CDs. He noted that *A Listing Of Bluegrass LPs* compiled by Swedish collectors Haglund and Ohlsson did include a brief history of bluegrass in Australia written by Tasmanian historian Hedley Charles.

However, he felt it was time to enlarge on this and include all the releases issued since that time. There is a total of 763 different tracks performed by 64 separate groups or soloists listed under their own name. The inclusion criteria were much the same as in his worldwide discography. As with the LP discography, the Australian discography is out of print, but copies are housed at the Library of Congress and in Australia at the State Libraries of New South Wales and Victoria.

The very first bluegrass recording released in Australia was in the 1950s—"The Weary Heart You Stole Away" and "I'm Lonesome Without You" by the Stanley Brothers & the Clinch Mountain Boys, recorded in 1953 and issued on Mercury (A-1085). Soon after that were 78s by Flatt & Scruggs, Carl Story, and Mac Wiseman. Boothroyd says, "These were encouraged by an organization called The Country & Western Collectors Record Club based in Melbourne in 1959. They had arrangements with the American Starday label and also issued regular newsletters which advised members of recent American releases.

"Very little was played on the radio so it was from listening to these recordings that local artists began to try to play the music and they made a fantastic effort at copying the American bluegrass sound. In every case, it was the impact of the five-string bluegrass banjo which aroused their interest. Musicians in Australia, as in America, would hear this incredible playing by Earl Scruggs and wonder how on earth he did it!" Eventually these American recordings were picked up by local radio stations so people were able

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Lonesome River

### Fri., Oct. 28th Schedule:

Commonwealth Bluegrass

12:00-12:45 & 6:00-6:45

Code Blue - 1:00-1:45 & 7:00-7:45

Mill Run - 2:00-2:45 & 8:00-8:45

Larry Stephenson - 3:00-3:45

& 9:00-9:45

Lonesome River - 4:00-4:45

& 10:00-10:45

Commonwealth  
Bluegrass



The Boxcars



Deer Creek Boys



Mill Run



Code Blue



Flatland



Jr. Sisk  
and Rambler's Choice

### Sat., Oct. 29th Schedule:

Flatland - 12:00-12:45 & 6:00-6:45

Deer Creek Boys - 1:00-1:45 & 7:00-7:45

Mill Run - 2:00-2:45 & 8:00-8:45

Jr. Sisk & Rambler's Choice - 3:00-3:45 & 9:00-9:45

The Boxcars - 4:00-4:45 & 10:00-10:45



to hear bluegrass on the radio for the first time.

In addition to detailed profiles of some of the most influential Australian bluegrass musicians, in its A-Z listing of recordings, *Australian Bluegrass Recordings: A History & Discography* includes a brief history of each band, list of musicians, track listing, and often a photograph of the record cover.

The first Australian bluegrass recording was a four-track EP in 1965 by Melbourne band the Hawking Brothers & the Green Willow Boys. It was called *Blue Grass Down Under* and featured Alan Hawking on banjo, Russ Hawking on resonator guitar, mandolinist George Mack, guitarist George Harris, and Alan Pope on bass. That was followed in 1968 with another EP also by a Melbourne band, the Hayes Brothers and the Bluegrass Ramblers. This group then released two LPs in 1968 and 1969. In his publication, Boothroyd says, "From what I thought to be a small number of commercially released bluegrass records from 1965, I soon discovered that bluegrass was not confined to capital cities, but groups from Fremantle (Western Australia), Mossvale (New South Wales), Devonport (Tasmania), and Rockhampton (Queensland) were also playing and recording bluegrass." By then, as well as on radio, bluegrass was being featured on national TV.

Generational heritage in old-time and bluegrass music does not exist in Australia as it does in the U.S. The Irish/Scottish musical heritage took a different track here in the form of traditional Australian folk music which was played by musicians for dances, and the singing of ballads about Australia and its way of life. Boothroyd mentions that when he and his late wife started playing, there were very few local fiddle players and those who did exist really didn't know how to play old-time or bluegrass fiddle.

When asked about the bluegrass scene in Australia today, he says "Well, for a start, most people who have an interest in bluegrass and also old-time music spend time in America. That wasn't possible in those early days when you had to go by ship and take months off work. Most people couldn't afford that. Also, most annual leave here was at Christmas time which wasn't peak festival time in the U.S." He continues, "Things have changed a lot. There are top bluegrass

artists coming out every year touring Australia and giving workshops."

When Boothroyd first started playing in the late 1960s, the opportunities to learn were very limited. There was the Pete Seeger banjo book *How To Play The 5-String Banjo* and the *New Lost! City Ramblers Song Book* and a few others. He says it wasn't easy to get the feel. He would have to slow the vinyls down, and it was difficult to even find the right tunings.

Just a few of the American musicians who have since toured Australia are Lynn Morris & Marshall Wilborn (1994), Frank Wakefield (1996), Roland White & Diane Bouska and Tony & Bill Ellis (1997), James King Band (2004). Last year, it was Laurie Lewis & the Right Hands, Chris Henry & the Hardcore Grass and old-time band Orpheus Supertones. Australian bands such as the Davidson Brothers, Mustered Courage, and Bluegrass Parkway now perform at major festivals in America, and some Australian musicians are now members of American bands.

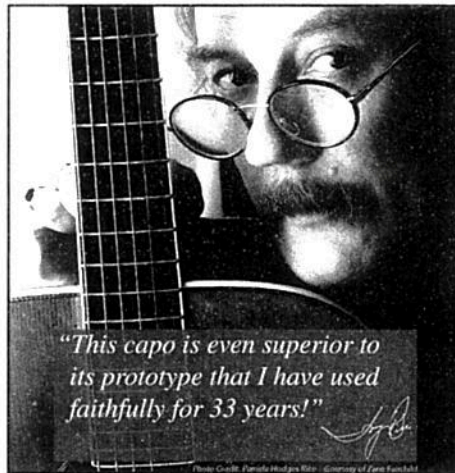
John Boothroyd's pioneering work in compiling *Bluegrass LP Issued 1957-*

1990, the first comprehensive discography of bluegrass recordings released worldwide, and *Australian Bluegrass Recordings: A History & Discography* have been the foundation for today's online listings and will continue to be built upon. It's an interesting fact that the first two attempts at worldwide bluegrass discographies were made by two Swedish gentlemen and an Australian. Further proof that bluegrass music is truly international!



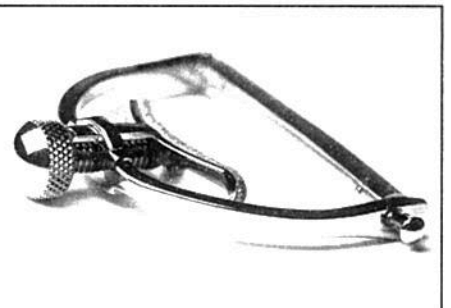
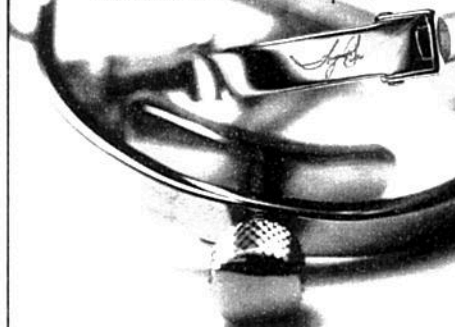
Jan Dale is a freelance journalist and hosts a weekly bluegrass radio show in Melbourne.

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