

Local News

In search of Einstein's 'silenced' partner

Patrizia Reimer

Albert Einstein was a genius, there is little debate about that but could it be he had some help along the way, some unacknowledged inspiration that only years after his death the world was prepared to reveal? According to local producer Geraldine Hilton he had much more than a little help, he had a 'silenced' partner, a woman, help him form his most lauded scientific discovery, the theory of relativity.

Ms Hilton and her Bangalore production company Melsa Films are creating a stir in the worldwide scientific community with a documentary, *Einstein's Wife*, which explores Mileva Maric's role as both wife and scientist. The film has aired twice on America's respected public broadcasting channel PBS breaking ratings records in its first run in November last year. The network has also nominated the film for the 2004 Emmy Awards. The first documentary for Ms Hilton which took seven years to research will have its Australian premiere this week on the ABC.

She was inspired to look into the mysterious first wife of Einstein after a series of previously hidden love letters were published in newspapers in the early 90s. When she began her research shortly afterwards she found



Anika Koprivec plays Mileva Maric in *Einstein's Wife*.

the lack of available material stifling and was also thwarted by the Einstein apologists as she called them, die-hard supporters who wanted to maintain the man's mystique. Many of these were to be found at the Princeton Centre for Einstein Study which held most of Einstein's archived papers.

'I had to keep working and earning a living and at that stage there was only one book that had been written about Mileva Maric and it was written in Serbia with no translation,' said Ms Hilton. 'I had to wait seven years until people like those at the Princeton Centre for Einstein Study started to publish more of the books relevant to the period I was studying. I needed the distance of a decade for them to come down,' she said.

Mileva and Einstein got married in 1903 and di-

vorced 16 years later. In 1909 Einstein began an affair with his first cousin Elsa and left Mileva in 1913 to be with his lover. Einstein's autobiography makes no mention of his first wife and it seems his love life was full of secrecy and controversy, perhaps just like his scientific achievements.

The letters between Mileva and Einstein, kept secret for many years until 1987 when they were first released, were significant because Mileva refers constantly in them to 'our work'. Shortly after in 1905 the genesis of the theory of relativity took shape. She has since been described as Einstein's scientific collaborator.

In researching the mysterious Mileva Ms Hilton travelled to the United States, Germany, Slovenia, Switzerland and was in Yugoslavia during the Serb-Croat war. Here she and the cameraman

aroused suspicion and were detained for questioning by leather-jacketed men in a smoky jail.

The greatest difficulty in the research however was a fear by Einstein supporters that his name would be tainted but Ms Hilton and her female researcher overcame that by playing on that Aussie laissez-faire attitude that people mistook for harmlessness or ineptitude.

"She's just an Aussie director, what would she know", is what they'd think, we'd act dumb, we're just a couple of Aussie chicks and they'd think, "what would they know", said Ms Hilton.

But it seems one should never underestimate the capabilities of a woman or two.

Einstein's Wife screens on the ABC this Wednesday April 21 at 9.30pm.



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Council hopeful has more success with book

John Bailey, an unsuccessful Greens candidate in the recent Council election, can take some consolation from the news that his book, *The Lost German Slave Girl*, has been shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Prize for Non-Fiction (Douglas Stewart Award). The book describes a slave trial in the mid-19th century in the southern American state of Louisiana.

The judges said of the book: 'This rich material pro-

vides the backdrop for Bailey's masterful and thoroughly researched study into the history of the legal and normative discourses surrounding and "justifying" slavery. Through the use of historical records of the court case that aimed to establish "Sally Miller's" true status, Bailey raises important issues concerning the role of memory, communal ties, law and social norms in the creation and maintenance of identity.

Part detective story, part social history, part legal critique, this book challenges past assumptions about slavery as well as questioning the role of law and community in the establishment of personal identity.'

The Premier will announce the winner at a dinner in Parliament House on the May 17. *The Lost German Slave Girl* is due for release in the United States later this year.

Workshop shows how to attract native critters

A Landcare workshop seeks to shed some light on what can influence which species are present in a forest patch and why some species are abundant and others rare. Local wildlife experts Hank Bower and Mark Fitzgerald will present 'Considering Fauna Habitat in Bush Regeneration Projects' at the Byron Shire Council Conference Room on Wednesday, April 28, 6.30pm- 8.30pm.

This workshop will be especially relevant to land holders who are restoring native vegetation and creek banks. Creating homes for native

critters is frequently overlooked when cleaning up weeds and planting out degraded areas.

Radio-tracking studies in Byron Shire of two tree-dwelling snake species provide details of the role of particular habitat features, such as tree hollows. Occupation of tree hollows is important for more than 300 native vertebrate species in Australia and 100 of these are considered rare or threatened.

Hank and Mark will give advice on how to create quality habitat and maintain biodiversity.

Hank will talk on the role of structures in habitats and landscapes particularly for threatened species such as the bush hen, black bittern, fruit dove, white-eared monarch and owls. Mark will cover the habitat requirements of popular local reptiles.

Funding from Envirofund has enabled the Tweed - Byron Landcare network to run this free workshop which is open to all Landcarers as well as the local community. Places limited so book in early with Ros on 6626 7028 or Judy on 6684 5390.

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