

# National Centre of Biography, ANU

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## Biography Workshop

Sophie Jensen

***Azaria Chamberlain. 68 days. 591 objects.***

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Date: Thursday 25 October 2018  
Venue: Jean Martin Room, Beryl Rawson Building,  
13 Ellery Cres, ANU  
Time: 12 midday until about 1.30 p.m.  
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Lindy Chamberlain holding Azaria Chamberlain, with Aidan & Reagan Chamberlain, 16 August 1980. Photo Michael Chamberlain.

Azaria Chamberlain lived only 68 days. However short her life, it was her death on 17 August 1980 that left an indelible mark on Australian culture and society. This history is represented in collections held by the National Museum of Australia. The Museum holds 369 objects donated by or purchased from the Chamberlain family, as well as more than 200 items acquired from other sources associated with the case.

The management of these collections raises questions regarding material culture, museums and biography. What is their value in terms of biographical study and exploration? What can a collection provide in terms of experience, evidence, inspiration and/or understanding for a researcher? For an audience? What challenges arise when approaching a life primarily through material culture? When an object takes on a life, or at least public identity, of its own, how do we balance its story with that of its owner? Can such a collection ever be 'complete' or 'finished'? A consideration of these questions is necessary to guide the development, interpretation and appreciation of this remarkable group of objects into the future.

Sophie Jensen is a Senior Curator at the National Museum of Australia and currently Head of Collections Development. Sophie has curated a range of permanent, temporary and travelling exhibitions for the NMA including *Play School*, *Rare Trades*, *Miss Australia: A nation's quest* and *Noelle Sandwith: An artist in the outback*.