Channels of History Project

Interview with Edith McFarlane

T = Trish E = Edith J – Julie

Side A Tape 1

T **OK. This is Trish Fitzsimons on sound. Julie Hornsey on camera. We're with Edith McFarlane in her house in Cleveland. This is Tape No 80 on camera and we'll call it 80 for DAT, in the Channels of History project. Checked for Spelling, otherwise not edited.**

J OK. I'm actually rolling. And I'm rolling –

T Edith, I'd love you to tell me where and when you were born and what your name was when you were born.

E I was born in Adelaide in 1903 and my name was Edith Weidenhöfer. My grandparents had come from Germany in the 1800s. My father was born in Adelaide.

T And what was the land – like in what context did you grow up? What was the land like around you in your childhood?

E Well, we – we had a property in the Torrens Valley ah about 11 acres and most properties there were 11 acres and they were given over to fruit farming, fruit growing ah peaches – all the stone fruit, grapevines, and my father looked after that in his one and a half day's away from the office in the city. Um so my childhood really was spent in a very open area and then I later learned something of the outback of Australia through Mrs Gunn's book and felt that's – I would like to go out there some day.

T From a young age?

E I was quite – only in my teens I think when I first began to think about wanting to go into the – into the outback.

T And what do you think it was that fired your imagination?

E Well, maybe it's because it's because it was something within me. You see my – my forebears, coming from England and from Germany, then when my parents were very newly married, they and my grandparents, went off to Paraguay for this wildcat scheme that was going to convert the world to you know – you must've heard about it. The Paraguayan Scheme. When everybody was going to put in and everybody would share the profits, but it didn't work. It just didn't work. Right from the beginning. But I think the fact that they had – there'd been so much travel to Australia and then from Australia, I probably got back with that feeling of wanting to travel, and I wanted to travel overseas too. But first of all I did want to see more of Australia and –

T Were your parents idealists politically?

E Very - very much so. And so were my mother's parents. Very, very much of the idealistic ah feeling of sharing and sharing alike, and they did pull their weight in that community but it just was no – to no avail really, and my grandfather died there and my parents and my grandmother, and some of her other children too, came back to Australia very disillusioned. Very disillusioned. Because that was long before my time. That was in the early 1890s that they did that. So I had heard so much about it, that I think I was probably inspired to also do something a little different.

T Would you have described yourself as an adventurous child?

E No. No. No, not as a child. I was a bit on the timid side. Very shy. Always retiring if there were visitors about that I didn't know very well. I just didn't want to be in the limelight, and I think even by the

time I had finished at school, I had – I tended very much to sit back and take things as they came.

T How much education did you get Edith?

E I went through four years at High School. Well, the fourth year was a repeat of the Third Year. In those days the Senior was a very hard exam to pass. That was the Third Year of High School. I don't know what it's called now, but it's Third Year of High School, but ah it was almost an understood thing that you didn't pass your exams at the end of that year, and so I repeated it. I had passed one – one exam which I hadn't expected. Nor did the Headmaster expect me to pass it and was going to say don't – don't put yourself down for that one, and I forgot to go and see him and next day he said you didn't come to see me and you filled in your paper and I said oh, I'm sorry about that. He said I was going to tell you not to take Latin. Latin was the only thing I passed. Um and then the following year I did get my Senior Certificate and I had 12 months at home to settle myself down for doing a kindergarten training course and I had no music lessons, and I had to be able to play for the children and I got an old tutor book and taught myself to play. By the end of the 12 months I could play everything required for kindergarten and a few of the easier classical things, and so off I went and did my two year kindergarten training course. Started my own kindergarten and gave that up to help Mother and in that final year was when I heard about the position out in the south-west corner and decided to apply for that.

T What was the position and how did you hear about it?

E It came through a friend who had been staying at Nappamerrie Station and she had heard that they were wanting a governess on Durham Downs. I said to Mother, what do you think about my going? Oh, she said, I don't know. See what Father says. So when Dad and I were coming home from a concert, I said what do you feel about it? My

going away like that. It's a long way, for those days it was a very long way. Oh, he said I don't know dear. See what Mother says. So neither of them could decide. I had to decide for myself that I would go. And I promptly packed up my things and went off on a train to Birdsville – to Broken Hill, and from there up to the north-west corner of Tibooburra – of New South Wales to Tibooburra on the mail coach which was not a coach but a big lorry. Very, very hot weather. Terribly hot weather. Drought stricken. The worst drought that had been in that country for quite a long time and I was met at Tibooburra by the head stockman whose name happened to be McFarlane. So you know what happened? I just fell in love with him when I first saw him. You needn't – you needn't tell the general public that if you don't want to. And he took me on the - the rest of the way which was um maybe 400 miles I suppose into Queensland on to the Cooper.

T What year was this in?

E That was in 1925 and I was 22, and so I settled down to, to try to teach the boys and draw a curtain over quite a lot of – a lot of the ensuing two years that I had there which were not all that happy. Ah, I got back into Adelaide quite a wreck and I had um, I had about the best part of nine months at home when I was asked to do some relieving at one of the schools and from then on, I was doing jobs filling in for people and then governessing again in South Australia until I went up – came up to Queensland to be married.

T Can we just go back a little bit –

E On to Durham.

T As you were um on the journey to Durham, did you meet any other women?

E Ah, we stopped at er one of the Kidman Stations and had morning tea with a woman who had either 8 or 10 children and how she managed, I

don't really know. And then we went ah further to another small property, what they call selections, and there was a woman there who was pregnant and I later heard that she went to Tibooburra to have her baby. There was a little hospital there. And she died. And the baby lived and was looked after by the sister – the older sister, who was about 12 or 13, and the father. And I think it was that kind of thing which inspired John Flynn and the other people who pushed so hard for doctors and nurses in the inland. There was so much in that – in that time, and before the time that I went out there where people had no medical help at all, and it meant that if they wanted to go to a doctor, they might have three or four or more hundred miles to go to get help. And if they didn't have adequate transport, well there was nothing else. They would just die. So that – that illustrated to me in the very early days what could happen with that outback country.

T And when you say you – you fell in love with your husband when you first saw him, do you think in some way you went to Durham looking for love? Like there are lots of governesses that marry out there.

E Yes, well no. I had no thought of that when I went away. I had never been particularly interested in the opposite sex and I didn't dance very much, but if I went to a dance it was a matter of having a male partner. But I had really gone to see the country and to see the native people. Something of the native people. But there was no thought then that I would eventually live there for all my married life. Um – but he was – he was a very – a man that was very much admired by everybody and I have recently heard from the man who's managing the property that we stayed on finally. He is a legend in that country for what he did, and I think it was something in him and just looking at him – I could see something that appealed to me whereas it never happened before. So I won't go in to any more of my private life.

T So I'd love you to tell me a little bit more of – of examples of the dry that you saw approaching Durham Downs – the country. What it – what it – what that drought of 1925 was like.

E The country was completely bare. Not a blade of grass to be seen, and we passed sheep, coming into the watering places, a windmill with troughs, and they staggered in. That was in New South Wales. Then it came over the border. It went into Queensland, and the waterholes were so low that they were only really bog. Mud and a little bit of water, and cattle would – in very weakened condition, would go down to get a drink from these meagre little pool of water and of course they had to plough through the mud and that was it. They couldn't come out again. They just couldn't pull themselves out. And many of them were shot there. Others just died there. It was a most tragic thing, and perhaps a very bad beginning for a new chum from the city to be witnessing something like that. But it still didn't deter me. Well then from there until I reached Durham, I didn't see any more – I saw the dry country, but I don't remember seeing any more stock and we travelled on to Nockatunga Station which is on the Wilson, and left there quite late in the evening. Um, the manager wanted us to stay but I had understood that the car was travelling better in the cool weather so I said well I was prepared to go on, not realising just how much further it was going to be and we didn't arrive at Durham until 3 o'clock in the morning. I was exhausted. Absolutely. I had never had a long trip like that. Nor been into any country that was so depressing. However, I was prepared to stay on and to go back for a second year of teaching there.

T Beth Staer is a woman that you may or may not remember, who was the governess at Clifton Hills Station in the – later in the '30s. She describes expecting to find a glorious station and finding like a shed amidst a sandhill and she wanted to run away. What was you first impressions of Durham Downs?

E Well, Durham Downs was a house built of pisé which is mud and clay tamped together in frames like you would – as you would put cement in frames when you're building up. And it's tamped down. And that lasts for many years but it does fret away and becomes very untidy and dismal looking, but still, it was a house with bedrooms and a main room so that my impression of the homestead was it was really not depressing ah as some of the things had been. I think that Clifton Hills was much further west in country that had fewer transport vehicles. It was much more difficult to get um supplies there and it was probably an old – may have been an old pisé house. On the other hand, it may only have been a – a place built with bush timber and imported iron, as um the house we finished up in at Tanbar, the old pisé there was taken to pieces eventually when we built the new place, and when the ceiling came out, I discovered that the rafters, instead of being timber, timber cut – timber. You know, all processed and sawn properly. It was boughs cut in the bush and wired together. There were no nails or screws. It was just all these long bush – pieces of bush timber with a wire around to hold them together. And that house stood from 1865 until 19 – the late 1940s.

T Going back to Durham, who do you think had made that pisé?

E Well I – the, the original – the original settlers. And I really don't know for sure who the original settlers were. It was a Kidman property finally, but he was not the first owner. I don't who they were. And it would've been white men who built it with the aid of Aboriginal men folk I expect, and they would've taught them what to do. They themselves of course were still living in gunyahs and living – and even when I went there, they were still living in their natural way. But they would have been brought in to help with any work to be done in the way of building.

T And what was the floor of Durham Downs made from?

E Um – I think it was a dirt floor. It was a long way. I can't really remember.

T I think in your book you said something like wax and dirt or – there's a – I wish I could remember the precise detail but yeah, I think it was some kind of like rammed packed earth.

E Well it would – it would be just dirt rammed down and watered. Um, I know the verandah was done like that. Every now and again the verandah was wet down and then tapped down and boards may have been put on in the inside of the house later. Ah, but I just can't really remember exactly now what the floor was like. I remember the verandahs quite well.

T And how was – was the house close to water? Like just describe the environs of Durham.

E Well the house stood about – on a rise – about oh four or five hundred yards from one of the big water holes in the Cooper. There are five waterholes along the Cooper who are – which are permanent water holes. In between it dries up completely in a long drought, between the big floods it dries completely. And these water holes then are used for pumping water to the garden, vegetable garden or whatever, or home use, pumped in – usually pumped into a big tank – holding tank. Um, and it was a stony – very stony, very very stony country all round there, right from where the house stood back – many miles back into the bush was stone. Ah, one of the roads we used to go over had to be cleared every little while but the stones would all work up again. Great big stones would all work up again so it was very rough. Rough travelling out along that way.

T So could you describe the garden of Durham to me and who worked in it?

E We had a – in those days there were quite a number of Chinamen still out in the country, either as cooks or gardeners, and when I went to Durham, there was a Chinese gardener and he had a wonderful display of vegetables in the cool weather. Nothing in the summer. That's what I found at Tanbar too. You just can't grow things. They wilt. The green vegetables wilt. The root vegetables rot in the ground because it's so hot and as soon as you water them, they become steamed. But this um Chinaman had little square wells in various places in the garden and he would pump the water into those wells. They had a donkey whip. A whip being – the donkey was attached to a long shaft and he walked round and round and round in circles, and as he walked, the water was pumped up from the river. And then he wanted to water the garden, he took his two big – great big buckets with him and he dipped them into the well and carried the water to all the plants. There was no piping laid on there. It was all done by hand. Everything was done carrying the water.

T So when you first arrived, was the garden there or did the drought mean that there was –

E No. They still had the garden. Well, there was very little left in the garden by that time because of the heat but the following winter, we had a beautiful garden there and fruit – some fruit trees. I took cuttings of a fig tree from home and that fig tree probably is still there. I know long, long afterwards somebody told me that the fig tree was growing and bearing very well. But on the whole, soft fruits – stone fruits, don't do well there. It's too hot for them. They – they'll grow but the fruit is very small. But the vegetables are always very lovely. And oranges do well out in that country too. Apples no. It's too hot for apples and pears but oranges do very well indeed.

T And what was the working life of a governess? I know there's things you don't want to tell me Edith. I'm certainly – I read the little – the

little thing about mental cruel – cruelty mentally applied, and you must pick your way through that. But I'd love to know as – because I'm interested in women's work. As much as I can, about um what your – the daily life was like. Are you right Julie?

J Um. Yep.

E Well I don't really know what would happen on other properties. I can only say what it was like for me. When I got there, I was told – apart from teaching the children, I would dust the dining room which was more of a sitting room than a dining room. They had built a cane grass dining room separate from the house. And if there were any flowers in the garden, I was to put the flowers in. Otherwise there was nothing else to do but teach the children. Now that was alright. I did my best, and it wasn't with correspondence. I think correspondence schools had begun then but they were not very widespread, and so it was a matter of just working a little bit from works and from memory. But unfortunately it wasn't very long be –

T Edith?

E Yes.

T If you wouldn't mind, we might start that, just that last question again just very briefly the beginning, but what was the working life of a governess on Durham Downs?

E It was teach the children and to do this slight amount of dusting in one room and put in flowers if there were flowers available. Otherwise, no other duties. But it was not very long before I found that I was expected to do something else. One of the things – take the family darning socks round to the school table and darn the socks while I tried to teach the children. And then in the winter time, ah we had a few cows there and milk and get some cream and one day I heard the children's mother say in a loud enough voice for me to hear, oh, I

didn't realise how much Miss New did to help me. Oh, I felt so bad about this, so I talked to the bookkeeper who was a nice old gentleman who eventually married the previous governess. And I said, am I supposed to be doing anything else? Um, I'm doing all that Mrs. McCullagh asked me to do. Well, he said, um – ah, well um ah – Miss New used to get up and make the butter. So I got up very early on these cold mornings to make the butter. And then the children's mother decided to take over cleaning the bookkeeper's room until she was too tired to do any more. Who did the bookkeeper's room? The governess. Then it was the head stockman's room. When he was out in the camp ah somebody would go up and tidy his room where the children's mother started. Soon she was too tired so the governess took it on. The governess had very little time to teach the children. The little girl – the mother fussed over the little girl's food, didn't want the old bush cook cooking them, so she did them and she became too tired. So the governess made the sweets, then she made the sweets for the family and she made the cakes for the family. And in between all this, there were periods of long, long silence, when I was ignored.

T Who – who was Miss New? I want you to tell me –

E Miss New, oh Miss New was the previous governess. And I don't know how long she was there, nor why she left, but I have great suspicions that the reason she left was the same reason that I had to give up in the end. I was a nervous wreck. After I married and we moved back to that south-west corner to the property adjoining Durham Downs, and the bookkeeper came up to see my husband on something to do with the property, and he said to me oh the governess is having a bad time down there. And he mentioned her name and she was one of my co-graduates. Then I was almost convinced that the reason why governesses left there was because they were over-burdened with – with jobs that you know, really didn't – weren't a governesses job.

T I've heard that it was – I've come across other cases in this research of women that never could really handle the Channel Country and became kind of invalids. Is that what you're saying about Mrs McCullagh?

E No. No. She grew up in Birdsville so she – that was the life she had –

End of Side A Tape 1

Side B Tape 1

E Grew up in Birdsville so she – that was the life she had known. See it was a mental – mental attitude of hers. She had a wonderful husband who just thought the world of her, but I learned a lot of things later which I will not discuss on this film that I realised that there was just something that – something was wrong. But she grew up – her people were in the hotel in Birdsville, and she grew up there. So she knew that outback life and Durham was certainly a better spot than Birdsville, because Birdsville – I've only just seen Birdsville very briefly flying from Tanbar down to Leigh Creek. But my impression of Birdsville was that there is nothing, absolutely nothing but sand and stone. No – there seemed to be no timber about. It was – but Durham was quite a – not an unpleasant place for living for as far as surroundings were concerned and being quite close to the water where there were lots and lots and lots of lovely trees all along the channels. It was really quite pleasant there, and to go out in a boat – we quite often, if there were a few people about, we'd get the boat and we'd go out in the evening down along the river and it was very, very pleasant. But I think she did not know how to handle people and she was unsatisfied in many ways and it was taken out on the governess who was the only other white person on the place.

T Can you tell me about um jokes played on the new chum? On you as a new chum?

E Yes. I had only been there for a few days and some of the men were in. They weren't doing stockwork at the moment, and I heard a rooster crowing, not very far from my – where I was sLeighping on the verandah. When - on the very hot weather we slept out on the verandah, so I thought I wonder what that rooster's here – near here for? He ought to be down with the – in the fowl yard. So something came up about it at breakfast time and I said oh, this rooster woke me up this morning. I don't know why. And the boys got a bit interested about this, the two boys that I was to teach, and they went round investigating and they came back and they said, no wonder you were wakened by the rooster. It's tied under your bed. And some of these young fellows out for a practical joke to tease this new chum from the city, had decided to feed the rooster on corn to make him crow lustily and then they took him up one evening, about when he would've been asLeighp you see, and they tied him to the leg of the bed or under the bed somehow or other and left him there. Of course he slept peacefully all night but at daylight, he started to crow. That was the – that was the only practical joke they ever played on me. I think they found that I took it quite well so it wasn't – it was all – all fell very flat because I didn't annoyed with them over it.

T There wouldn't have been many young non-Aboriginal women there. Were you the object of a lot of attention?

E Ah, I guess, had I been the right sort, I could've been. But I wasn't the right sort. Um, no they were always very, very polite to me. Ah, the old bookkeeper was something of a flirt but a very harmless flirt and sometimes we'd go out in the car in the evening in the cool just for a run in the car, and Mrs McCullagh'd sit in the front with the children and I'd sit in the back with the bookkeeper and the bookkeeper would

be trying to hold my hand and I objected to things like that. But he, he was just harmless really.

T Was this Norman McLean?

E That was Norman McLean, yes. He was a nice fellow. And in the end, when I was so completely run down and exhausted from the treatment that I had had, he said to me – he always called me 'girl' - most of them called Miss Weidenhöfer but he always called me 'girl', he said when things get too bad, he said, if you want to talk, come up here to the store and have a chat. I wouldn't – I wouldn't say what was worrying me, but he could see, and I feel sure that that's what had happened perhaps to Miss New. But um at the end, Mother wrote to me. I had written to my sister and expressed very volubly what was the position there and she was in Sydney. She was running a kindergarten in Sydney. And I didn't expect her to say anything to Mother but she wrote to Mother and she said I think Edith's having a very bad time. So Mother wrote to me, said she wanted me to come home. Ah my husband, husband-to-be, had come back to the property. He'd been away from there for several years. Well, he left about four months after I got there and then he came back um late in '27 – he came back – so he was away for about 18 months. And he just came back to see everybody, but during that time I discovered that he was as much in love with me as I was with him, but nothing had ever been said before. And I had – I had mentioned him in letters. They said I mentioned him more than I mentioned anybody else. So Mother wrote a letter to him asking him to support me if necessary and in the case of his being absent, would the bookkeeper open the letter. But as it happened, he had left and gone to help at Nockatunga because the bookkeeper there had had an accident and was going to be away for a long time, so he went over to look after the store for him and the mailman – the postal people in Thargomindah knew that he had moved to Nockatunga so they redirected his mail. It didn't come to Durham.

Of course he was worried then about what was happening to me, and eventually he – Mr Hughes, the manager, said to him, there might be somebody at Durham that would like to go Adelaide. You're to go over and see, and I said no. I wouldn't give her the chance to say I had let her down, although it was school holidays – I wasn't bound to be teaching, but I stayed 'til the bitter end.

T So Edith, when things were difficult with Mrs McCullagh, how did you handle that?

E Well I just became depressed. I struggled to do all the things that she wanted me to do. I struggled to try and get teaching done. Ah but in the end, when Mother's letter came and she also wrote to Mrs McCullagh and said – and I know, my Mother was a very, very lovely person. Everybody said that about her. She must have written a very lovely letter, but she said she wanted me to come home. Well Mrs McCullagh's sister was there at the time so she sent her around to get me and I was abused ah verbally. Ah my Mother was accused of writing a terrible letter. She didn't think my Mother would – because she had met Mother, I didn't think she could write such a terrible letter. Well that – because that upset me and I dissolved in tears. I was absolutely brokenhearted to think of anybody talking about my Mother like that. But I went round and I did the evening duties of getting things ready for tea and for supper and ah the bookkeeper came round and said you're upset. I said very upset. Very upset. And he – and I said, did Mrs McCullagh show you the letter that Mother wrote and he said yes, and it couldn't have been a nicer letter. Which, you know, I was glad that somebody else had seen it because I knew Mother couldn't write a nasty letter.

T Who owned Durham Downs in these years?

E That was a Kidman – a Kidman property, and they had had it for quite a long time at that stage. I don't know when they acquired it, but they

acquired so many properties out there as you probably know. But they would have nothing to do with the running of the place. They would only have the financial side of it to think about and ah telling when they wanted stock sent away. If it was a good season and they could send stock, they would say what they wanted. But otherwise, they had nothing to do with the running of the home.

T Did the bosses from Kidman come to visit?

E Mmm? Pardon?

T Did Kidman or his managers come to visit?

E He had a general manager in that corner. Mr Watts. And he came over several times, but Kidman himself did not come there. I believe his son, in later years, may have gone to Durham. I know he was at Nockatunga when Doug was helping there in the store and the bookkeeping, but I don't know whether he ever went across to Durham. It's a long and dreary trip through river country. Ah about 90 miles and most of that is a very poor road so he may not have wanted to take it on. But the general manager, for all the properties down in that corner, used to come occasionally. Otherwise it was left entirely to Mr McCullagh to – to run things and he was a very good manager too. An excellent manager, and a very nice man.

T Now you've described that um you – part of why you'd gone to Durham was because you were interested in Aboriginal people.

E Mmm.

T How would you describe what you found – describe the Aboriginal people around Durham and the way they lived and worked with the white people.

E Well, they – they worked – we had two that worked around the house, and one that helped the cook in the kitchen, and one very old one, sometimes two very old women would come to rake around in the

garden and keep tidy and things in the garden, and a very, very old man who was the King of the tribe, looked after the cows and took them out to feed and brought them home again and I think did the milking. They did all those sort of jobs. Ah then when they had finished for the day, they would go back to the – on to the top of the hill to their camp which was just as they had always lived. In humpies that they'd made themselves. There was a big building put up in which they were supposed to live because the Government had said they must be properly housed, but they didn't want to be housed like that. So they never did use it. Um, the reason being that if somebody dies in the humpy, they won't – no – no – the rest of the family won't live in there. They knock that humpy down and build another one. In the case of Emily dying, they knocked that humpy down and her husband, when he was in at the station, lived in another one. It's a superstition which has been ingrained into them I suppose for centuries that they will not live where somebody else has lived and died. Perhaps if the person died somewhere else, it might be a different matter, but if they actually die in the humpy, that's what I understood, they would not use it again.

T When you say they were living naturally or just as they always had, what do you mean by that? Could you give me some examples?

E Well, they took off all their clothes. They went up and when we drove past one day, there was a big scatter. They were all quite naked. Men and women. Nothing on at all. Ah, the ah they did get supplies from the station but at the same time, they did some hunting and fishing for themselves and they would cook over their little fires in their humpies, just as they'd always done. They, they were not dependent on the white man's food as later the ones that I had when I was first married, always had food supplied to them, and they would take it up to their own little humpies. But at Durham, they did quite a lot of hunting for themselves. There would be birds to kill and a certain number of

rabbits about there, and dingoes. I don't know that they did kill dingoes but there were dingoes about.

T How about Aboriginal women? I'd like you to tell me about the nardoo for instance.

E Ah, they – in, after floods, there's a nardoo that grows, a plant that grows there that's called a nardoo, and as it dries, the seeds mature. They're very small seeds. Very small seeds. But they would go out into this country and it's a flooded country, where the – you know, where the flood had been, and they would gather the seed and take it back and they had grinding stones. Um, the one that they used for nardoo I think was the - a round one with a hollow in the centre that would be a stone about this wide, and a hollow in the centre, and then they had a round one – a rounded stone which they ground round and round and round and round, like this, until they had a flour. Like a flour – what we would call flour, and they would make – what did they call it? I forget what they called it. But it'd be like making bread. Making biscuits. Something like that. And it would be pounded down and then mixed up with water and cooked in their ashes or in their fires. Ah, then they had another long one. I used to have them – specimens of these that had been found you know, laying around in the bush. But I left them at Mayfield with the – you saw Francis Hammond where she lived with her grandmother and her aunts or was it cousins? And they have - had that stone there. About this long and it was a red stone – a reddish colour, and on one side there was a deep, a very deep groove about this deep and then they had a round long round stone which they rubbed up and down and up and down there and the seed that they ground in that, one of the women told me was called pepper – pepper seed she called it. Well there is a grass that's called pepper grass and I imagine that that's where they collected the seed and that again would be used for making up into something for some of their food.

T How about string making?

E Yes. String making was quite interesting. Um, there's a – it's like a marshmallow, a very plant would grow up oh maybe five or six feet, and when that was mature, they would cut that and strip – strip it in long like threads then to make string, of course they had bare legs, they would put the string here and they would rub like this until the various strings were bound into a – into one cord, whatever size they wanted. And as they, as they did this, it was cutting the string and the leg would bLeighd and the blood helped to bind all these threads together and that would go until they had the length they required. And then that string was used to make into dilly bags they always called them, to carry their few possessions if they were walking about anywhere. Ah, and they would be - I don't, I didn't ever see the making of those but I just know that they had these dilly bags to put their odds and ends in. Ah the other thing that they made was coolamons(?) to carry their babies in and a coolamon was cut from a tree, the bark of a tree, and then shaped to be – to various sizes. If it was one for carrying things that they'd collected if they went out digging up yams, they would carry them in their coolamons. If they had a baby to carry, they'd carry the baby in it. They'd be about this long, and hollowed. Ah, it must've been a certain amount of timber, not only bark, unless there was a specific kind of bark which was very solid.

T And was there evidence of traditional forms of trade?

E Ah, the only thing I knew of that came into that country from the Birdsville area was pituri and pituri was what today people would call tobacco, and they chewed it. I think it may have had a certain amount of drug propensity in it and they would chew it and chew it and chew it and like kids with chewing gum, they'd go and stick it behind their ears you know, for the next chew. Um, but that didn't grow there. That came from a plant that only grows further west. How far – how

much further west I don't know but I know it was in the Birdsville area, and so some of them must have walked right away across that way, which is a pretty terrible – terrible area to walk in. Stony most of the way. Ah, might be some flat areas, but there's no water holes. Unless it might happen to be just after rain, a shallow spot might hold water, but there are no water holes such as there are in rivers. So they must have walked across there to exchange goods at some time or other.

T And was there ever gatherings of more than just the Durham Downs people at Durham?

E We had one very, very big gathering. When they came from Nockatunga, Nappamerrie, Innamincka, Arrabury, Cordillo, oh it must've been hundreds of them there, and each night they had a big corroboree, and I did go down one evening to watch them and I knew that they were going to corroboree well on into the night and the early morning, and I said could I come down to watch in the morning and they said yes, but not until after the sun has risen because they were sacred rites then. It was quite fascinating to watch them and the head gear that the men used in their dancing, was made of sticks, a frame made of sticks covered with feathers. Oh they were very intricate. I think in the, in the book there should be some photos of those um head – head gear, head dresses. Anyway, I did go down in the morning. After sunrise I went down to watch them again but it was only the men that danced. The women sat all round the outside and they, they changed their songs. Oooo – ooooo – ooooo!. You know, it was, it was very monotonous. There's no tune as we know a tune. It was just a continual humming sound, buzzing sound, and their clapping. Or if they had sticks with them, they would be hitting their sticks on the ground. But the dances were quite intricate really and all had a specific meaning.

T And was this kind of traditional ceremony accepted by the managers? Like how did the Aboriginal workers mix their traditional and pastoral?

E Well they would, they would choose a time when there was not a great deal of stock work to be done and I suppose all the managers were the same, that they – some of them they had objected. But ah evidently the one, at that time, all the station managers and station owners were quite prepared to let their, their workmen go to attend these big ceremonies because it – I don't think it would happen more than once every two or three years. It was only once in the two years that I was there that a big ceremony was held, and they came from everywhere. So it was not frequent and they would choose a time when it would suit the stock work that had to be done.

T So how would you characterise relationships between black and white on Durham in terms of conflict or – or cooperation? You know, how would –

E Well I think on the whole, I think they did work very well with the – with the white man. Ah the only instance I knew of when there was any trouble was with a man who had been down – he was a half-caste. He had been down at one of the Missions and then he'd gone back to that country, and I think it was when Mr McCullagh was out riding one day, just got on to the horse and this particular black man picked up a great waddy and he was going to hit him on the head with it. Fortunately somebody saw what was going to happen and managed to stop him but otherwise there was never any trouble that I could see and none that I ever heard of.

T Now going back in the time before you were there, there had been trouble between black and white. What evidence of that did you see?

E Oh well that was shocking. In those very early days. Nappamerrie was operating. Ah and they saw some of it there. The convicts I think

had seen something of it. The troopers who were sent out to get rid of the blacks really, which was a terrible thing really, um they would get a black man or black men from other tribes that they knew were not friendly tribes and take them with them. Well there was this very big roundup on Nappamerrie and they were herded up and shot. But one little black boy managed to hide and when it was all over, he went back to Mr Conrick and Mr Conrick looked after him and he grew up – he was an old man. When I saw him, he was an old man and very faithful old man. Very faithful to Mr Conrick. There was a place on Durham, right beside one of – the river, that Mr McCullagh found one day and he came in and he said I just found a place ah in a sand hill that I'll take you to have a look at. So we went up with him and these skeletons had been unearthed with a storm. A wind had come and blown the sand away from them and as far as I know, that was the first time it had been found and the skeletons were laying at all angles. Obviously they'd been shot. Legs this way. Arms that way. Bodies every way – which way. If it, if it had been a natural cemetery which they don't as a rule have, they would've all been laid out in straight, you know, reasonably straight lines. But these had obviously been shot and it, it's a terrible reflection on our early pioneers. I still don't believe that our Prime Minister should say 'I'm sorry". It was nothing to do with him, and a lot of compensation has been carried out in the way of trying to help people so I think this idea of you must say 'I'm sorry' is ridiculous, and the Stolen Generation business is also a farce. A lot of those children, the parents asked to have the children taken away where they could be given a chance. I don't know whether you heard, when oh, who was the half-caste man? It was very much –

T Charlie Perkins.

E Charlie Perkins. When Charlie Perkins died, his mother I heard on say on the television news, he was not stolen. I begged them to take him away and give him a chance. So there you are! And that's from the

Aboriginal woman and I think that it's these um trouble-makers amongst them who are just trying to get something more and they are not looking after what they are given. They have been – have had houses built for them. They've torn those houses down to make fires outside to cook their food. Well you can't really say that it's the white man to blame for everything that's going on now but I do think that originally it was terrible terrible cruelty that they should have sent troopers out and particularly getting black men from other tribes to help them to come and kill their kin – they're more or less their kinsmen but they did belong to another tribe. I've got very mixed feelings about all of the things that are going on today with the Aboriginal folk up in the north. They've been helped.

T We'll just pause a moment because we're just about –

End of Side B Tape 1

Side A Tape 2

T OK. So this is Camera Tape No 81, DAT Tape No 81. The camera starts on Time Code 07031214. So a new DAT, new camera. We're interviewing Edith McFarlane at her home in Cleveland, in Queensland. It's the 17th May 2002. And this is the second DAT and BETA SX.

T OK. So Edith, in the photos that Edith knew – oh no, you were going to tell me about the Aboriginal funeral.

E Oh yes. When Emily – when Elsie's mother died, Emily died ah she was to buried the next day and apparently they all gathered for the – for the funeral procession and the husband was led in the front of the procession with a bag over his head and it came right down so he could see nothing at all. Now I don't know what that was for. I couldn't get details from any of the black women. And then she was, the body was

taken to one of the stony hills well out of flood water reach and buried there. And a big circle was cleared all round the grave site and I asked them why and they said next morning, somebody would go up and see what animal or bird had first passed over that cleared spot and that is what Emily would become. Emily's spirit would become. Now they, they put no markers round. No grave um fence around it as they had in old days. There were some very, very old grave sites there and the timber was so old that it was beginning to rot, but where they had buried people, they had put a little fence around it. And those were Aboriginal graves. But they did nothing like that for Emily.

T Who was Emily and what had happened to her?

E Ah, Emily helped around the house – not a great deal, but she did do some work round the house. I mean that was the first year I was there so I really hadn't seen very much of her. And she died when the baby was born. The baby lived and was looked after by the other women but that is why she died. She was only very little. A little woman and never appeared to me when I did see her, as being a very strong one. Most of them were quite – fairly well developed, strong women.

T And did Emily have a second name? Like did you think –

E No. I didn't ever hear any second names for any of them. We had Emily and Ada. Oh, I can't remember. Ada was the wife of the King, Paddy. I can't remember the other names. Some of them were not originally from a tribe there. They had come – one came from Cordillo Downs. Some of them came down from Tanbar when the manager had taken away some of – in about 1925, had taken some of them up to the little township of Windorah promising blankets to them, but when he got there, he put them on the mail truck and sent them down to the Mission and they did not like going to the Mission. Well word got back to them before the manager. They had a remarkable way of communicating and although it was 70 miles from Tanbar to the

township, the others knew before the manager came back that the blacks were not coming back with him. So they packed up their few little bits and pieces and they walked down to Durham and that was in the midst of a howling drought. And one of them had a little baby which I think may have died. That was a half caste woman that had that baby. And there was one very old woman who was still at Durham when I went there. There was – this must have happened not all that long before I went there, so the day that Mr McCullagh took me past the camp to show me what their camp was like, this very very old lady came out to talk to us in pidgin English, and I said she must very old. I wonder if she would remember when Burke and Wills went through this country? And he said to her, how long since you've been piccaninny? And she laughed a real cackle of a laugh. And she patted her tummy and she said 'Bell me got in piccaninny'. Bell is 'no' meaning that she wasn't pregnant. It would've been many many years since she'd – since she would have ever have been pregnant. But I would say that she was perhaps 80 or 90 years old. Very old – withered old soul. But she, she had a sense of humour still. Well it seemed to us she did have.

T Now Edith, the next thing I'm going to ask you about isn't pleasant but I'd like to know. I've got – you know who Meston(?) was? He was the protector.

E Who?

T Harold Meston. He was the –

E Oh yes. I've heard the name.

T Anyway, I've got letters written by a Mr Fisher who was a shearer at Durham Downs in the late 1890s and he describes pretty horrific sexual abuse of Aboriginal women. Three classes of prostitute. You know, the stud gins for the managers and then the middle – the middle

class of prostitutes and then the prostitutes on the creek. Do you believe that story and –

E I do.

T What do you know about that?

E That's why there are – were so many half-castes. You see there are a lot of half-caste people and there are still a lot of them living. They are half-caste. And um I think it was because of the lack of white women out there. In this book of Flynn's, one of the padres was out in – before, really before Flynn got stuck into this idea of ah of medical help out there. One of them mentions that out on the properties, he'd go on his camels and go round these big distances and he would come to places where there were Aboriginal woman, no white women. But there were children. And as everything is, these men, because they hadn't wives, they hadn't anybody – anybody, white women, they just indulged in sexual behaviour with the black women. And I guess to a certain extent,that still might happen too. I don't know. I've been away from it for so long but we had – at Tanbar we had no – no ah Aboriginal, either black – oh we had a half-caste man at one stage. Um – at Morestone where I was first married, we had three black women and they each had a black husband and as far as I know, there was no intermingling with the white men at all. Um, even if they came into the head station. I think they just went to their own quarters and they never bothered about the black women, as far as I know. I mean it could've happened and I wouldn't have heard.

T So was there a lot of talk about that earlier history of Durham? Would anybody have talked to you about that time?

E No. No. No. I knew very little about early Durham, until we were living at Tanbar and that – the only thing we heard then was from read from an old letter that my husband found in which he refers to the number of sheep and the number of cattle that were carried on Durham

when they first went there and the place was a sea of grass and they thought this is wonderful you see. A wonderful place for it. And they put about um 50,000 sheep I think it was and many many thousand head of cattle and horses. A lot of horses of course to do the work. Because a drought came and everything went. Everything went. And they lost practically all the stock because there was no – no feed for them. And that was – that's the only thing I knew about Durham in the early days.

T You mentioned in your book that there was some mud hut that had been to protect women and children. Do you want to just describe that and the cellar? Was there ever a sense that white people at Durham had once been afraid of Aboriginal people?

E Oh they were! Um, that – that, that was the home that was built about half way between Nockatunga and Durham there was a property that had an old mud house and they had um they had slips like this in the windows for shooting through because there were wild, you know, un – uncivilized people out there in the bush, coming in, and they did have a lot of trouble. At Durham they had an underground – we used it as a cellar, and for a while, for quite a while until Mr McCullagh built a new kitchen, we used to cook down there. Ah and it had a – it was just excavated and it had a – I don't know what sort of a roof it had on it. A curved roof. And it would hardly have been curved iron in those days. But it would've dated back to the early days – of their first days there. And it was a shelter for women if they were attacked by the wild natives. And there were quite a lot of cases, and if you've read um books about the country between ah Quilpie and the border – the Queensland border, ah Thylungra um or people –Wellshot Downs, they had a lot of trouble, and John Costello took up Thylungra but he was never satisfied to stay somewhere. He'd get that fixed and then he had to go on and find something else, so when he went away, he would leave his wife with lots of, lots of rifles. And the place was fairly

secure, but there were a lot of – quite a lot of wild natives there, and I mean, they said why can't we come and kill the sheep or the cattle, whichever? Because the white man is killing our food supplies. They were killing kangaroos and any other wild life to get rid of it so that the feed was left for the sheep or the cattle, whichever they were running. And it's understandable that – I mean if somebody came into your home and started knocking things about, you would feel, except that we are supposed to be civilized anyway, you would feel like retaliating, and that's all it was. They were uneducated. They were really really wild tribes and naturally, when somebody killed off their supplies, they would retaliate by killing out of the white man's supplies. So I – all my sympathy is with the black people I'm afraid. I just don't sympathise with the white man. It was terrible. Terrible to see people being shot and killed with spears but it was understandable.

J Trish, I'm just going to change batteries.

T OK.

E I mean I know particularly Queensland because I spent so much time in western Queensland, but once they crossed the mountains and began to realise all these acres and millions and millions of square miles of country, that had only wild game on it, and they could visualise putting either sheep or cattle and in some cases both on a property, but as a general rule they discovered that it was better for – one might be better for sheep and another one might be better for cattle. And that's what they found at Durham, that sheep were no good in that country. Ah, it was – it was typically cattle country. Ah, Arrabury next door to – next door to Tanbar and I suppose in a way next door to Durham, ran sheep for many many years, but then the dingoes became very numerous and they were losing so much in the way of sheep and Cordillo Downs was the same. They ran sheep for many many years because it was good sheep country. But there are no sheep properties out there as far as I

know. Nappamerrie was a sheep – part of it was sheep. Part of it was cattle. But I think none of them run sheep now and that mainly because of the dingo population, and in spite of putting up fences to block the dingoes, they were ways and ways of them getting through and it wasn't a great success really.

T So coming back then to the Aboriginal people you knew at Durham, did you ever know a little girl called Elsie, and if so what can you tell me about Elsie?

E Well there's not a great deal I could tell you about her. She used to come to the – come up to the house. Especially after her mother died, she would come to the house and be bathed and put into a clean frock and she would play around there, but about the only thing that I can remember that was outstanding with her was watching her having a lesson in what is known as a corroboree. And that was - to watch her standing upright and just trembling ah from the shoulder right down to her feet. Not, not trembling in fright but a tremble that she could produce and that was what these black women had been teaching her. But I didn't really see enough of her. Well, I was too busy anyway to see a great deal of her, but I know, later, when she was older, she had lessons with the little white girl when – when Jean started lessons, Elsie went too. She was a pretty little girl. Curly hair. Um, she was – I think she was a full blood black, not a half-caste child, as so many of them – people out there were half-castes.

T Who were Elsie's parents?

E Ah Emily, and as far as I know, Koora Jack was the father. Ah, it may not have been. It may have been another one because they did change partners from time to time. And another thing – it was interesting to watch at Durham, was a fight between two of the women. Ah, one was a woman who had come from Cordillo Downs some time before and the other was Ada, the wife of our King – Paddy. And we heard a

terrible commotion up at the camp, went to see what it was all about. They had one waddy, you know, heavy stick between them and the one that didn't have the waddy would bend over, put her head down. The other one would crack her right down the middle of her head. Then she'd pass the waddy back to the other one and she'd bend over, so they went on like this. Well, the bookkeeper was only quite a little fragile man. The manager was away out in the stock camp and so the bookkeeper was the only white man there and he decided he'd have to go and stop the camp – the fight. And he went up there and managed to stop them. I think he was very brave because he could easily have received a blow by accident. But when the girls – these two women came down, they were streaming – streaming with blood because their head, skull, right through, had been ripped open. Well, Mrs McCullagh blamed one particular. She said she was the one that started it. So she took her away and she bathed her head and she bound it up, but the other one she said was – Ada she said, was the troublemaker and she wouldn't do anything for her. Well some days went past and Ada was one who used to come round and sweep the bedrooms and ah I was in my room one day and she came in and she said, holding her head, she said oh, narcoo(?), that - narcoo was their word for me, meaning 'girl'. Narcoo, my head hurts. And she was nearly crying with the pain, and I said well you just go along and tell Mrs and she'll do something for you. So she did then, cleaned it all up, but how – if that had happened to a strong white man, he would've died. I'm sure no, no white man could have – certainly no white woman could have stood it. But I - and I doubt very much that a white man could have stood such a terrible terrible gash right down the middle of the skull.

T In Edith New's photo album there are all these pictures of that little baby. Why do you think – I want you to – you've only said Elsie's name once. I want you to tell me her name again. Why do you think

that little baby was so sort of special in Edith's album? Do you have any sense of that?

E Because she was the only little baby – little baby there I guess at the time. Um, she belonged to ah one of those that had, I think, one of those that had walked down from – oh no, she couldn't have been, because the one – one was pregnant and lost her baby on the way and she was a half-caste. So possibly ah Elsie's mother had come down under great difficulty, got down there. But I don't really know for sure about that and why she was special. But she was the only child there and so she was made quite a fuss of, not only by the black people but by the white people. They just treated her as something very special. And she was a dear little girl too. I didn't have much to do with her of course. I was too busy as I said before but she really was a dear little girl.

T So there was a lot of Aboriginal women at Durham but hardly any babies. Is that correct?

E That's right. Mmm. Most of them I think would have been – it was hard to tell the age, but I think the majority of them would have been beyond the child bearing stage. Ah, where – why I don't know. The half-caste woman was young enough. She had a – she did have a little baby while I was there. A lovely child, but her husband was ah her husband was black but she was half-caste. Um – and this little baby, ooh he used to – he was subject to fits. Long before his walking stage and when he had a fit, they would rush down to Mrs McCullagh with him. I will say that for her. She was very good if there was anything wrong. Any accidents. She was very capable, and that's, I suppose because having grown up in the bush, she had become accustomed to helping with things. Um – then one day he had one of these fits and ah the idea was cold water and hot water, and Mrs McCullagh ran out of hot water and she said to the bookkeeper, oh get me some more hot

water. He went across to the kitchen and came back. It was nearly boiling and they poured it over. He didn't – without feeling it first, she poured it over the child. He was shockingly scalded, but he lived. Well then of course she had a lot more treatment. Not only for fits but for scalding so he was coming every day for dressings.

T Do you think there's a possibility that it was venereal disease stopping Aboriginal women from having babies?

E Well it could have been. It could have been that, because I know that they were absolutely riddled with it. Well the ones that I had at, at um – I didn't know anything about venereal disease when I was at ah Durham. It was extremely ignorant about a lot of things. But when I was at Morestone, we had to rush one woman into the hospital one night in Camooweal and when the doctor came out, he said if you have a baby, don't let them touch anything. She's absolutely riddled with venereal disease. And I don't know really what was wrong with her. As I say, I was pretty ignorant about things and I don't really know just what was wrong with her that night. She came back to the place eventually and ah I heard but they didn't. There were three women there. Two of them would still have been child-bearing age but they didn't. They were never pregnant. As far as I know, they were never pregnant. Because they knew how to dispose of a baby if they didn't want it. So that they could've become pregnant and just got rid of it.

T So who looked after Ada and the – Elsie and the other little baby after Emily died, do you know?

E They all took a turn at looking after her but she spent the day down at the house and went back to the camp with the women at night. And they just cared for her. They were all fond of her and they all looked after her. And they would've looked after the – if, if the baby lived. I think the baby did live. I can't be sure about that one. It was too long ago.

T How did Aboriginal people treat children in your experience?

E They loved children. They really really loved children. Um – when we were coming back from holiday once to go to Tanbar and I had – my three children were – my three children came one on top of the other. I said they might as well have been triplets, and I liked it that way because they were able to play the same sort of games instead of having gaps in between them. But I – we came down through Nockatunga and Ada was then working at Nockatunga and she said oh narcoo, oh narcoo, and she counted in – I've forgotten their, their words for 1, 2, 3. I'll use the English words – 1 – 2 – 3. Oh narcoo. 1 – 2 – 3 using her word for the numbers. And she just thought the children were wonderful. They really really do love children. Little children. And take great care of them too. That - it was only at Durham really that I had anything much to do with, with them and then the ones that I had, I had at Morestone above Camooweal, some rather funny things happened there if I can put the one in that amuses everybody. Um – the previous wife of the manager had never thought to encourage them to be clean, nor the house. The house was a mess. Cobwebs hanging. No ceiling in the top, cobwebs through. Just like festooned for Christmas. And she had never encouraged the women to be clean so the first thing I did, was get some material and make frocks for them. I made them each two frocks. I knew if I made more than that, they would just toss them around. Now I said, you put on a clean frock at night. You take off the other one and you wash it. And then it's ready for you to put on the next night – the next day. And the one that they put on clean at night, they'd work in the next day. So one day the two of the girls came down – the ones that worked about the house, and the third one worked in the kitchen, and Jemima had a dirty dress on and I knew she hadn't had a bath by the smell. And I said Jemima, you haven't had a bath. Did have a bath. No, you haven't had a bath Jemima and you don't have a clean dress on. Haven't got a clean

dress. I said you should have a clean dress. If you had washed it last night, it would be ready for tonight. Now you go back to your camp, you have a bath and you put on a clean dress. As she turned away she said to the other one, Queenie, how bin Mrs know I never bin have a bath? Because the smell was enough without the dirty dress. Well she had curly hair – curly hair to about here, and she came back in a few minutes and she was absolutely dripping from her hair down. Her dress and everything. She put her dress through the water. She got into the bath and she was just, just dripping. Well, I had to laugh. That was the last time that Jemima arrived in a dirty dress and unbathed. And the other funny one about the um I don't know whether I ought to tell you this one. You can cut it out perhaps. The cook – we had a man cook when we first went there, and he had a poisoned hand and he had to leave so I took over the cooking, and I found a slip of paper in the kitchen with little stories of the woman that helped him in the kitchen. And he had told her that she must call him Your Worship and she couldn't say Your Worship, she said Washup. So one day she was in the little dining room off the kitchen doing the ironing and he heard her spitting and he called out Minnie, I told you not to spit longa floor. She said not bin spit longa floor Washup. I bin spit longa wall. If you want that one to stay, otherwise wipe it off.

T Just one – this is the last question I'll ask you about Ada and Elsie because I understand you didn't know them very well.

E No.

T Edith's newsletter said that they followed she and her husband round the west. Do you know anything about what happened to them? After that time you saw Ada, did you ever see either Ada or Elsie again?

E No. No. Elsie stayed – must've stayed at Durham because I heard that when Jean, the little white girl, was having lessons from the governess, ah Ada – Elsie also had lessons and then the McCullaghs were moved

up – way up north to Diamantena, on to the Diamantena River, and I remember Jean being with them but I don't remember Elsie coming with them. I don't really know what happened with her but when I saw Ada at Nockatunga, I didn't see Elsie. So I don't really know. There was no relationship between them. I'm quite sure of that. Ah because I think that ah Ada and Emily were probably different tribes.

T And coming now, and I won't talk so much about Adelaide and Morestone because they're not really in the Channel Country.

E No.

T How did you come to come to Tanbar?

E Because I heard that they were wanting a governess there and a friend, a friend of a relative had been to Nappamerrie Station and they took her on a trip to Durham, which was about a hundred miles or more north of ah of Nappamerrie. And while they were, she discovered they wanted another governess, because Miss New had been there and she had left. And when she got back to Adelaide, she told ah this relative of ours where she'd been and they were wanting a governess and the cousin said – thought of my sister first but my sister was in Sydney with a kindergarten and so they told me about it and I jumped at it. I said right, that's just what I want to do, to get out into that country and have a look at it.

T I actually meant Tanbar. How did you – but although that was very good but how did you come to come to Tanbar?

E Well Tanbar – after we married um my husband had been sent up – I'd been waiting for him to come down to Adelaide so we could be married in Adelaide and he wired to say that the firm that – he was with Vesties at the time, the firm had sent him up to this property north of Camooweal, and I said – I was teaching at the time on the condition that I could leave at a moment's notice, but I got the telegram to say he

was being – going straight up there. I thought well they'll never give him time to come down to Adelaide so we could be married. And ah the little girl's mother said well, what are you going to do about it? She said you know, we had an agreement that you could leave at a moment's notice and I said oh, I'll stay 'til the end of the term. She said no, no, no, no. Well, I said, I'll stay 'til the end of the month. So I stayed 'til the end of the month and then I took off by train all the way round the coast up to Townsville and out to Cloncurry. Met him in Cloncurry and we were married there and then straight out to this property north of Camooweal. Well it wasn't a wonderful position with Vesties. He couldn't really do the things he felt needed to be done. Everything came from the office. And he heard that they were wanting a new manager on Tanbar which adjoins Durham. He'd never been to Tanbar but he knew exactly where it was and he liked that country. He liked the river country. So he applied for the position and he got it, and so we set off – well he put in his resignation and we set off down the back road near the border fence with a three months old baby to Tanbar.

T What year?

E That was in 1932 and Helen was three months old, and we left there in November 1956 and we had over 20 years there. Just over 24 years we were there. And that's how we came to – back into that country again. That south-west country again.

T Can you tell me a little bit about that south-west country?

E The which?

T The, the south-west country. Tanbar. Durham. Why does water move so slowly there?

E Well it comes from the two rivers. The water in the Cooper comes from the Barcoo which comes down through Isisford and the

Thompson which comes through Longreach, and they meet just above Windorah. Only a comparatively few miles from Windorah. The two rivers meet and they form the Cooper. Cooper's Creek. That's the old joke about the two rivers making a creek. Well as far as I know, the Thompson and the Barcoo don't flood out very far, but from Windorah downwards, the Cooper floods out in a – in a good flood it overflows the banks and it'll – the most we saw was hundred – one hundred miles of water from east to west. And because it's a very slow – low gradient, down to Lake Eyre, the water moves very slowly and instead of just rushing down the river as it does from the mountains, it moved slowly and it spread out across what we always call flooded ground. And that flooded ground in dry seasons cracks and the longer it is dry, the wider the cracks and they are quite deep. Well when the water begins to flood out, it sinks down under and it comes up from the cracks which means it's slowing up the growth – the speed of the water all the time, and then as it comes up and it comes up all these cracks, massive cracks in a long dry period, a horse could stumble into a crack like that and break its leg. They're so wide. And then the water spreads out over all the flooded ground and there might be – after Windorah, it breaks into different channels, and we had um we had one channel on the north side of the house and three channels on the western – on the southern side of the house. From one channel – way out there, the channel out this side was somewhere in the vicinity of 50 or 60 miles – no 30 miles, 30 miles of water. Thirty miles of water across there, and when that outside channel flooded, and went further than usual and the northern channel went further than usual, we had 60 miles of water from east to west – from north to south. Yes, north to south.

T So how was the – how is the flood regarded? You know, what would people think about weather like that?

E How do they manage?

T No. What did people think about flood? Like was flood a natural disaster?

E Well it, it's in a way it might be a disaster, especially if you get drowning stock and that sort of thing. In – in some of the country there, the sheep were not fenced off from the river and once they got in, of course they were washed out. The sheep were hopeless there. And by the way, I said north to south. East to west. It was the east to west was 60 miles. Not north to south. It came from the north. Um – but the thing is, that after that water goes, the feed is magnificent. Magnificent for fattening country, fattening stock, fattening sheep or cattle. And it will last for some months but it isn't a permanent feed. The permanent feed you got would be out on sandhills. Well at Tanbar in particular, was sandhill country. Away from the river. And when we had heavy rain, it brought on this wonderful feed which would last – dry, it would become dry, but it was still nutritious.

T How did you come to feel about that land Edith? Honestly.

E Ah – I've got a very soft spot in my heart for it really. Um, I know there is terrible disasters. Its terrible droughts. Terrible dust storms. In a dry season the dust was heartbreaking but I still have no regrets about having lived there. I wouldn't want to go back to it. Sometimes I think I would like to go back just to see Tanbar and then I think no, because I had a very beautiful garden there. Lovely flower garden. And I put in trees and shrubs and things. And I heard that – I did hear at one stage that it hadn't been looked after but I believe they are trying to restore it. But I just don't know. I think just a part of me has been left out there. I was there from 1925 'til 1956 - 31 years, living in that – most of the time in that country. I think it's got to take a part of you and I think you would find that with anybody that lives in that country for a long time. There is something there that will always appeal. You could live on the coast and you could see the changes on the coast and

you could go away and live somewhere else, but you would never have just the same feeling. And then again, having grown up in that lovely garden that my father had, not only the masses of fruit trees and grapevines but he had a very beautiful flower garden. A big part of me is down there too. I think it's between those two places, that's where my heart is.

T And is the fact that you were – you and your husband were managers rather than leasees or owners, did that – in any – did you ever feel oh I can't put too much of myself in here?

E Never. No. Never felt that at all. Even with Vesties. When I went to that awful house. I mean the house itself, the building itself was not too bad. It certainly was just great big bush timber for posts this high – thick, you know? Massive posts. And the top part was built on that with sawn timber. Yes, sawn timber for the top part of the house. I don't know when it was built but um then the lower part underneath had been closed in to make a dining room and a sitting room area and office. Ah – but the place itself, I'll never forget, the disgusting state it was in, and it took me weeks with the help of these three women to get it anything like a home. No garden. Oh, a little bit of a vegetable garden down on the flat near the water hole but no flower garden and I must always have a flower garden. And the house was built on a limestone hill. I think it was limestone anyway it was pretty hard stone. And every time my husband was out of sight, I used to get to and dig out the, the stone. Once I got the house cleaned up and painted um I painted the whole thing inside and out until I ran out of um paint when I was halfway through the last window frame to be done. And I was sitting up on the window sill and I ran out of paint and I asked Vesties for some more paint and they said you've had enough paint. You can't have any more. Well I said, well it's your house, I said to myself. If you have visitors coming up and seeing half of the window is painted. The other half if not. They might think it's a bit funny but

it's not my house. We'll leave it. Well then I made the garden and I had round – little round beds, and I grew flowers there and I improved the vegetable garden with the help of the black boy that lived there and um I grew Iceland poppies and we – I put some Iceland poppies on the breakfast and it happened some people arrived there. Why they came there I don't know because the road didn't take you anywhere else. It was just a dead end there. And so we invited them in to come and have some breakfast with us. She walked in – oh, she said, you've got artificial flowers –

End of Side A Tape 2

Side B Tape 2

E On the table. I said they're not artificial. I grew those.

T What else were you going to tell me about gardens?

E About the big ceremonial ground where they had the rainmaking ceremonies, corroborees. Ah, I mentioned that in my book and there were photos of this ground in that book. But it had not been used for a long time but you could still see how they had laid it out in sections and at every corner of this – we'll call them rooms for the want of another word, the stone would be say this high and pointed and it would've been pointed by the men themselve rubbing it down with stones. They would've worked on it with stones. And in a cave nearby, and some of the men found the cave but there was nothing in it of importance, but in that cave the Rain God lived and when a drought came and this would have happened way way back, long before white men ever lived there, ah when a drought came, they would go out to this place and have a corroboree and the Rain God would come apparently to the corroboree and they would call for rain. And ah – I'm getting very hoarse. I've talked too much. While I was there,

there were no ceremonies taking place there but it was so sacred to the men folk that the women must not go. They must never see it. They must never speak of it. They must never see it a photo of it. And not knowing this, I had taken photos and I had the prints and I said to Ada, oh I took some photos at – I can't remember the name of the place, and I held it out. Oh, she said, no – no narcoo. No. No. No. I mustn't look. Mustn't look. Shut her eyes. Turned away. She said don't you tell Paddy I talk about it. I said Ada, why can't you look at it? Oh no, she said. No gin go out there. No gin look at anything. Mustn't talk about it. It was very sacred to the men.

T That's a story about kind of a cultural clash if you like. About one culture – did you often have that feeling that you were –

E That was the only time. That was the only time that anything like that happened. Um – they were prepared to talk about other things and we could go out gathering yams with them and do all sorts of things like that. We could watch – certain corroborees we could watch, but as I was saying, there was one corroboree I couldn't watch until after the sun came up. Ah, they had a lot of – a lot of secrets, which were never divulged and probably never have been.

T Did you ever read Alice Duncan-Kemp's books? And what did you make of them?

E No. No. I didn't know about her having written a book. Um – Alice Kemp, she was the mother, wasn't she?

T Laura Duncan was the mother. Alice Duncan –

E Laura was the daughter.

T There was a mother – Laura Duncan. One daughter – Laura Duncan. And then another daughter Alice Duncan, who then married a Kemp and became Duncan-Kemp.

E Oh no, no. That – no I don't think that's right. I don't want to argue about it but when I was out in that country, I heard that the mother was – she had married a Duncan and he died and she married a Kemp. But she had – and after she married Kemp, she had – I thought she had the two daughters and one was Laura because Laura, the Laura Duncan that I knew and met I think once at Hammond Downs – not at Hammond Downs, at Mayfield, was a woman of um oh probably middle-aged when I knew her, and her mother was a much older woman and after Doug left Durham – you know, my husband, not then my husband but he was Doug McFarlane – he went – was sent out to a Kidman property to take charge as he thought but in typical Kidman fashion, he was – it was a ring-in. He was to wait there 'til the new manager came. So when the new manager came, he left. And he had to have work somewhere and he went to work at Mooraberrie with Mrs Duncan-Kemp and Laura who was the young one – the younger one. Well I knew she had a sister but I cannot recall the sister's name, and I think the sister wrote a book and what she called it – it might have been 'Our Sand Hill Country'. That's just come to me. I think that was the name of her book. And that was Laura's sister that wrote that. And I had never heard that Laura married, but if she married, it would probably have been the man who went there after – I think after Doug there or he may have been there part of the time. His name was Arthur Church.

T They never married but they shared the house for a long time.

E They shared the house. And, and the mother I think would have died um I think she was still there when we left. When we left Tanbar I think she might still have been around but um –

T Did you ever hear the story of Laura Duncan, the mother, going – taking a court case to the Privy Council?

E No. I didn't ever hear about that. Until it was – I think it's mentioned on that typewritten sheet you sent me. That was the first I ever knew about that.

T And Edith, this is a – a different tack. But tell me about giving birth to your second – your second and third children.

E Well the second one was born in Adelaide. I went down about three months before he was born and took him home when he was um a month or six weeks old. And when number three was coming, number one was only 2 years and 3 months when he was born and number two was only just over 12 months. There's only 12 months between one and two. And I said now I can't – I'm not going to go away and leave you again like I had to before because if I leave you alone here for 3 or 4 months, I'm not going to do that again. And anyway, I couldn't start off on a train journey from Quilpie to Brisbane and all the way down the coast to Adelaide and there was nowhere in Brisbane I wanted to go because I didn't know anybody, so um I said I'm going to stop here and I'll have a double-certificated sister to come out so that was all arranged and I kept very well. I kept very well with all of them, except with number two and I had a shocking back ache. I couldn't – I could hardly move. And he was an 11 lb baby so probably that's why. Anyway I kept very fit and well and I went on working doing all the usual things and out in the garden and everything else while I was waiting for number three to come, and when the Sister arrived – by the time the Sister arrived I'd got a friend to come and stay with me so that she could look after the children while I was in bed. She was a friend I had made when I was at Durham. They lived – they lived next door. Next door to Durham, and she was about my age. And I asked her if she would come up and stay there until you know, look after the kids. So the Sister arrived and she said which of you is pregnant? I said it's very obvious I think which is pregnant. Well, she said, you're certainly not as far advanced as you think. I said don't you think so? I

said this baby will be born in mid September, in about two weeks time. Oh, she said, no. Colin arrived in two weeks time. And things didn't go very well really. He popped along fairly quickly but I haemorrhaged very badly that time and um I think I could've easily slipped away but I made up my mind I wasn't going to. I said I'm not leaving my babies. Three babies and a husband I worshipped and I said I am NOT going to die, and kept thinking of my sister-in-law who had died when her second baby was born. And ah this girl that had come to stay - would look after the children, was sitting beside the bed and if I wanted a drink of water I'd just go – and that's the only movement I ever made. I was determined I was going to come out of it. And the Sister was scared. I knew she thought I wasn't hearing anything but I know she was scared. She was a very devout Catholic and she was praying madly that I would come out of it and afterwards she –

T did you ever –

E Mmm.

T Oh, go on. Sorry.

E Afterwards, she said, you were scared. I said, yes I was, but so were you. Oh no, she said, I knew you were alright. Years later I heard from one of the Charleville Sisters that they – these two had worked together in the Repat and she said, she used to tell me the most hair-raising tale about delivering a baby out in the far west and she said, it never dawned on me before that it was YOU!

T What year was that?

E That was in 1934. '34. And no Flying Doctor at that time. Not down in Charleville. We had no Flying Doctor there then.

T So was there a doctor at all that you saw?

E No, I didn't see a doctor all through. The only doctor – the nearest doctor was up at Jundah which was um about 130 miles away, and the doctors that go out there – and I read the same thing in this book about Flynn, they were no-hopers. They were drug addicts or addicted to alcohol, and I did have to go up to Jundah once. I'd got a huge splinter in my hand. We had a new house and the floorboards, hardwood floors, and some of them were splintering, and to take up the splinters we used to oil the floors with linseed oil. I get down on my knees and so this and I did this one and I just caught it on a splinter that I hadn't noticed and it drove from here right down to my wrist and I knew it was a big one. That part of it was thin and part of it was thick, and I thought I'm not going to get anybody to, to take that out. And Doug was out on the run. When he came home I said I think I'll have to go up to Jundah to the doctor, and he said why and I showed him. Oh I'd put an antiflagistine**(?)** poultice on it to sort of draw anything out. So the next day up we went. I took Helen but I left the two boys with my home help and away we went up to Jundah. A Sunday. I went to the hospital and the Matron said oh, the doctor's up at his house. Where have you come from? And I said 70 miles the other side of Windorah. She sort of looked at me in a very peculiar fashion and she said, what did you want? I said oh I have a splinter in my hand, I – and it was bandaged and she couldn't see it. She didn't say anything then and she said oh, the doctor's up at his house. Well I went up to the doctor's house and he took my hand and he's like this – and oh, what have I struck?

T Drunk?

E No, drugs. Drugs. And um oh, he said, oh he said I'll be able to fix that. We'll go down to the hospital. So when we got to the hospital he said do you want an anaesthetic and I said no. And the Sister, the Matron said would you like a local? No. No. Oh, she said, I'll hold your arm steady and stand between you and the doctor so you can't see

what he's doing. And I was wondering what's it going to be like? How is he going to manage this with his hands were like this all the time? Well he made a little nick down here and drew this splinter out and as Matron looked at it she said I thought you said it was a splinter, and I wondered why you'd come so far to have that out, she said. That's huge. And it was. At the bottom end would've been um a quarter of an inch across it. Well do you know, in spite of his shaking, that little split he'd cut healed beautifully and wouldn't think there's a – there never was a scar left I'm sure. I wouldn't see it if it was now but I don't think there was ever a mark left.

T Tell me about the Film Australia – (break in recording)

T OK. So it's Camera Tape No 82. It's still DAT Tape No 81. This is the third camera tape, still second DAT tape. The time code on the camera is 080651 and it's the 17th May 2002. We're interviewing Edith McFarlane at her home for the Channels of History project.

T Tell me Edith about when the Film Australia documentary happened – your – what you remember of that.

E I can't remember how we first heard about it but the camera crew arrived with the um the director of the film and they filmed round – finally at the end they filmed round the house, the garden round about the house for publicity, overseas publicity purposes. But um the only thing that they did close to the house which came into the Channel Country film was the arrival of the mailman who was my son Donald and the mail was mailbags stuffed up with newspaper, roughly crunched up newspaper, because the mailman wasn't due about that time so we just had a pretend session. And then he filmed – he also filmed Donald sitting on the bank of the creek waiting for somebody to come across in the boat to take the mail from him, which happened when the creek was in flood. And I think he also took him – a photo of

him down on the crossing. Well of course the river at the time wasn't in flood but I seem to remember Donald said that he did take a photo there but I don't remember seeing it in the original ah film which I saw, the complete film. What I have seen recently was only the little bit about the mail being delivered at Tanbar and you have seen the film. But what did you see in the film? Did you see any stock movements or arrival of aeroplanes or anything like it?

T Oh yes. All of that. It's about 10 minutes long. So the scene arriving at Tanbar is just one tiny bit.

E Oh well I see, they, they do have it. Well my daughter-in-law, Donald's wife, have got – or his daughter rather, had seen this but they brought it up to show us um at Christmas time and I was so disappointed because that was all I saw. Was just that part of the mail arriving at the homestead. Anyway I'm glad that they do have the complete film.

T And Edith, tell me about what I've called here 'pestilences'. You know, what do you remember of plagues?

E Of what?

T Plagues.

E Plague? Oh, grasshoppers which stripped the garden and they come in clouds. Just great clouds of grasshoppers, and if you're driving along the road on a sunny day and a cloud of grasshoppers came, it was just like a rain cloud coming in front of the sun. It would go quite dark. They were – millions, millions of them. The other plague was rats and we had three rat plagues. Um, they also come in thousands. Ah, the vegetable garden was just at the stage of being ready to harvest things and the man who was doing the garden was elderly and not a very strong man but he'd worked hard on it. And he went down to the garden. The carrots just about ready for picking. There's a little

furrow where the carrots had been and all the tops laid neatly along the top – beside it. Beside the furrow. Peas ready to be picked. The shells were all in a heap at the end of the row empty. Um, our root – all root vegetables had gone. This, this would be a period of over a couple of weeks I suppose that we lost the lot. And we had grown broccoli and they run up the stems and ate all the broccoli until they just left stems standing up this high. And when there was nothing else, absolutely nothing else left, they went up and they ate the piths out of the – out of these broccoli stalks. They ate lemons. We had two huge lemon trees. I think they may have been Lisborne lemons and we'd get lemons – well, the juice from them would fill a half pint glass. Beautiful lemons. And they used to fall on the ground a lot of them. They were far more than we could ever use. And they would clean up what was on the ground – what hadn't been raked up um, then when there's nothing left on the ground, one would run up the tree, nip off the lemon and they'd drop on the ground and then three or four of them would sit around the lemon like this – like miniature kangaroos sitting there. The rats, if I remember rightly, were about this long. I don't know what that is in centimetres. And ugly, horrible looking things. Not like the port rats round a harbour that have ugly teeth. These were better looking but they still were ugly and humped back. And they would sit round there and their paws on the lemon, like a kangaroo sits up with his paws there, and they would clean up the lemon and get another one.

T Apparently Laura Duncan told her niece when, as an old woman, that that Channel Country was too tough for white people to live in. Do you have any sympathy with that as a notion?

E No. You can, you can – well of course, where they lived was a different type of country too. They, I think – I didn't ever go to Mooraberrie but I have an idea it was in sand hill country. Well, we had sand hill country and river country because it's such a big place,

you see, three thousand square miles which is several million acres. Ah, but Mooraberrie was a much smaller place and I think they may have had a creek running through it. Or a couple of creeks really. But they didn't have flooded country. And I can well imagine that they would consider it very tough country to live in. There was a – the smaller places are called selections. Well there was one place about 40 or 50 miles to the west of us and a family of – I think she had 8, 8 children I think, and they had no relief country at all, so they really had a hard time. And that is the sort of country I think white women should not live in, but where I lived in both cases, we had the relief country so that ordinarily if it was a drought, the back country still would carry stock. The river country would be dry. But in a flood you - and after the flood had gone and all this beautiful feed, you'd put your stock out there and you'd benefit by it too. I mean I couldn't – I never felt that it was country that I shouldn't be living in. I never did have a feeling like that. Not as far as the country was concerned. Durham was a different matter because it was the personal business there that made me so unhappy. But I never had any regrets at all about living at Tanbar. I was perfectly happy there, all the time. Even in a drought. And we seemed to be able to cope, partly – partly the fact that I had a husband that was very understanding and very good and a good manager for as far as the work was concerned. We – he had the greatest respect from the – from the Board, and ah they did everything they could for us. The Managing Director said ah the first thing he said when he got there was, you've got to make this house fit for Mrs McFarlane and the baby to live in. You've got to do everything you can for them and for the 20 odd years we were (dialogue fades)

T So what made you want to start to write Edith?

E Well I wrote very very long letters home right from the time I first went away to the bush. Sixteen pages of, you know, writing paper.

And they kept all my letters for me and when I was being married, they gave them all back to me and away I went up to the north with them. And one day I read a book written by a woman who had gone out to a place – I think it was west of Townsville or west of Rockhampton and she had stayed a couple of days there and then she went back and she wrote a book about it. And her book sold. And I thought, well with the experience that I'd had in the south-west and this of course was shortly after I married and I was only up in the north-west then, I thought I think I could write better than that and put in more information. So I got all these letters out and I started to write and I wrote a number of pages and I read it through and I thought, nobody would want to be bothered with this, and I threw it away, and I am ashamed to say, I burned all the letters, which was a terrible thing to do. So that, that was in 1930. And after I came to live here in Cleveland, something suddenly made me think, I really should jot some things down for the family. So I started to write and I scribbled away, scribbled away, and I'd go to bed and I'd think oh I should've put something in about this and I'd go and I'd probably .... and they see such and such and I'd write at the bottom and ah then I rewrote all that. And I still thought of more things. Until finally I decided I'd done enough, and that was the little book that's in the Library. You found those two books that I put in there to show you. You see, the first – the first one is only a little one. And I had 1500 copies done and they sold fairly quickly. And I began then to write about the things I had not written about before. Things I'd remembered. And I had that for quite a while before I decided that I would put the two of them together, and I – I went ahead then and did that. Sorted out a few different photos for the second lot. Some of the first book photos are in the second one, but some of the – those in the second one are not in the first one. So I put it altogether and I took it up to the printers and said what about it? The same printers that did

the first one. Considerably more expensive, and um – I think it's the first one, the 1500 copies cost me $1800. The second one cost me um $6,000. Bit of a difference.

T And why – what was it – what was the writing about? Was it to understand what you'd been through or for the kids or?

E No. Well, partly I think, for the family. Partly for other people to get some idea of what living out in that country meant. Um, so much of what is written about that country puts the bad side on it and not the good side. I know in my book I did put the disadvantages but I also put the advantages. Ah, the contrast. That's why I called it *Land of Contrast* because you do have these terrible contrasts of heat, cold, dry, wet, dust, everything that's not nasty. I mean all these sorts of things – it is, it is in fact a land of contrasts. And that's why I called it that, but I think um behind it all was the feeling that I wanted people to have some idea of how you lived in that country. How you made the best of everything if you wanted to. If you didn't want to – I know – I know – I've heard of women who have gone out there and they've moaned all the time. Well if you decide to marry a man and go and live his life, well I think you must accept the good with the bad. Not find all the bad sides and moan all the time about it. The majority of bush women are not like that. The majority of them do make the most of what they have and try to get through. And if they have children, try to do the best for their children.

T Did you know Mrs Richards? From –

E Richards?

T She was from Mt Leonard Station. She was just one who found that country very difficult to live in.

E No. The Lindsays. I knew the Lindsays who were at um ah Mt Leonard, but I didn't know the people who were there before that. The

Lindsays – ah Bill Lindsay's father had property outside Winton and he also had an interest in Arrabury. A financial interest in Arrabury Station, and then when Mt Leonard was looking for a manager – I presume it was Mr Lindsay Senior, who got the job for his son. But those properties now are combined. A lot of those countries. I mean where Tanbar was one time was – when we were there, 3,000 square miles, it now is a matter of millions more. They've taken in Mt Howard which is on the other side of the river. Ah, they've taken in some of those – I think, even Mt Leonard I think might've gone in with it. A lot of properties that the company now, which is Stanbroke, Stanbroke now owns Tanbar, and they had properties up round Boulia and then they bought Tanbar and Rocklands which was the breeding station for Tanbar and that was at Camooweal, um so they've got enormous areas and enough wealth probably to make comfortable homes for the women. Where the people who lived on the small properties, it was a struggle all the time to make ends meet. And I think that you have to admire those women for having stuck to it.

T The properties now have many fewer people on them, don't they?

D I think so. Yes. I think they, they're working with far smaller teams of men than – even when we let – when we were at Tanbar, I think there were fewer men in the stock camp than they had on Durham and I think it's gradually come down, partly because men don't want to go out there. It's too far away from the coast and all the coastal advantages, or so-called advantages. I imagine that's, that's why it is, and ah the people out there are having smaller families because of the difficulties of education. I mean they can have correspondence lessons but there comes a time when children need to go away to a boarding school to learn to live with other children and to be able to compete with other children. I would like to have kept my children at home all the time but I knew they must go away to boarding school eventually, and it's hard. That comes very very hard. It's very very lonely once

your children have gone away. And because mine were all so close in age, I sent all three of them at the same time, and I found it was very hard to adjust. If I hadn't had my garden, um and sometimes – well I had no help in the house too after we came back from Adelaide. Um, the children went to school in Adelaide and I stayed down there. My husband said you'll have to stay with them. You can't lose all the three children like that at once. So they had 12 months in Adelaide, and then realised that if we had a flood, I wouldn't get them back to Adelaide in time for school. So he was talking to one of the padres, Fred McKay's brother, and he said ah I'll see if there's any possibility of getting them into the schools in Warwick. Presbyterian schools in Warwick. And that's what they made room for them there. Well, we could fly them over the river. The Flying Doctor would help us out there, which did happen. For their first trip away to school, was a big flood, and Helen had Whooping Cough and we got the Flying Doctor out to see her. I didn't know what it was but I knew there was something radically wrong, and at the same time we needed to go away so he said well I'll take you in. And ah he took us into Charleville, and with all their luggage, it was a bit of a crowd in the poor little Dragon Rapide but we got there safely. It was hard to lift the plane off the ground to begin with but once we got off, we were fine.

T And Edith, in your book you talk about all the big meet – gatherings of Aborigines but then there's some sentence like now there's hardly any left.

E Mmm.

T What happened? Why was it that when you were first there, there was lots of Aborigines and by the time you left, there was very few?

E Well, because – there were none on Tanbar because the – I think I was mentioning it before. The manager sent them away to the Mission. And then those that had stayed on the station, heard this, and they –

before the manager got back, and had a chance to take them away, they left and they walked down to Durham. So that's why there were none there. And there were I think one or two at Waverney where Mrs Schaffer ran the camp. Um, as far as I know, there were no others, in that particular corner. Arrabury. Cordillo I don't think had them. Arrabury had none.

T The Gorringes I think were at Arrabury but maybe earlier – in the '30s.

E In the '30s. Yes, well the Debneys were there for a long long time before we went to Tanbar, but – and ah then Mr Debney, the father, retired and his son took over. Well now, I don't know who's there now but maybe the Gorringes took over from – from the Scott – or, not Scott.

T No. The Gorringes were an Aboriginal family –

E Oh, they were – they –

T That were there with the Debneys.

E Oh I see. They were there in the '30s? Yes. Well they would've been just workers there, wouldn't they?

T Yes.

E Yes. But as far – I don't – I only went through Arrabury once, coming back from Adelaide and we, we came round via Arrabury for some reason or other. Instead of coming straight up from Nappamerrie we went to Arrabury, and we were only there for 1 night and I don't remember if there were any – any natives there then or not. But know there were not very many out in that country then. And I think the thing is, they were not having children, and if they did have children, they were half-castes. Mostly. And then the half-caste population would scatter elsewhere and they would, they would get some education and be sent to the Mission. Get some education there. I think that all – that's the bottom of the whole thing is that they – they

weren't populating the country as they did in the old days, before white men came.

T Because geographers say that there would have been more Aboriginal people traditionally than there are white people now. Do you believe that?

E Well it's hard to say. I wouldn't have thought so. I wouldn't have thought that there would have been. Certain areas, yes. Um – up in the north for instance, where living would be better because they were near the coast and they could – and anywhere down – anywhere near coast where they could fish. Ah, but when you got out into that back country, they would have a lot of hard times because there's always been droughts out there. Ah ever since it stopped being an inland sea, they would've had droughts in that country because of the general conditions of the way the weather works. And they had to move from, from one place to another because their water hole was dry or some other reason. That they couldn't get any game. The birds had all flown off somewhere where they could get water. They would have to move too. Well, if they had to move like that, they were not going to let their – their numbers increase. And it is well known that Aboriginal babies were quite often killed because they couldn't afford to keep them, and they couldn't afford it if they were getting too many girls and they wanted boy babies. Well, girls would be disposed of as soon as they were born. And even one of those women that was at Morestone told me that they didn't keep babies if they couldn't afford to keep them. If they couldn't feed them properly. They didn't keep the babies. So I don't really and truly think that the inland population would have increased very greatly, but coastal population may have.

T Anything I haven't asked you about that you think's important to me understanding the life of women in the Channel Country and your life in particular?

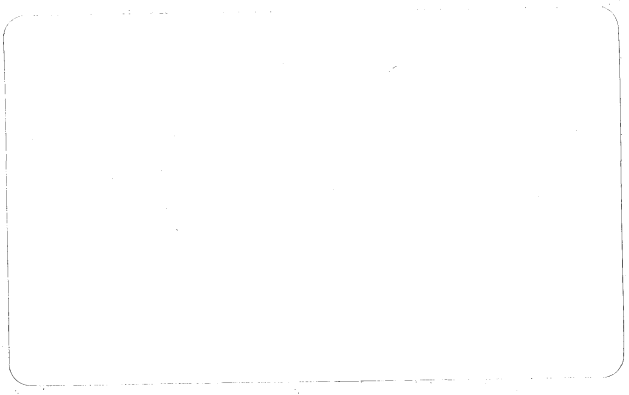
E Well I think you've got to have a feeling of um of something very close relationship with your husband to begin with. Um – and then with the children. You've got your children growing up. Maybe – I mean I was in a different position that I'd worked with children at a Catholic kindergarten. I was not a qualified primary school teacher or anything but um, I'd had sufficient education and with the aid of correspondence lessons, I was able to get them through and they've all done very well within their various lives. They, they have done well. But where a woman perhaps didn't have the advantage that I had had, and couldn't pass the things on to her children, and perhaps didn't have the same close ties with her husband that I had, it might be very difficult for them. And they, as Laura Duncan said, you say, it's not – it's not a fit place for women to be living. Well I can't see that at all. That provided you've got a reasonable amount of commonsense and you can make do with the hard times and look forward to the good times, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be able to cope with that life.

T You – obviously it didn't um it didn't take years off your life.

E Oh no. No. I don't think it did. I mean the people who asked how old do you think she is? They would put me in my 70s. Quite often. Or maybe my early 80s and ah I think it's partly the fact that I didn't give way to the hardships over there and a lot to do with the fact that I grew up in a very healthy climate and a very healthy surroundings, not in a city where you know, where close settlement. I had 11 acres to roam round in when I was a child and I was happy with that. Um, I've just recently written at my daughter-in-law's request, about my early life, and she and Colin had talked about it and she said Colin wants you to write about your life. You've done a lot of interesting things. And if you talk to him, and I'll type it down. And I thought, oooh, like talking to you, I keep remembering something that's out of plumb and I just couldn't go on from way back up to now in a proper sequence so I

decided to write it instead while I was waiting for them to come down anyway. They don't come as often as I'd like them to. Um – and so she has typed it all. She has put it through the computer and she gave it to me to check. I found a few mistakes I'd made. Because of my sight I'd made a few stupid spelling mistakes but um – and then I remembered other things that I should've put in. And she has added that, and when that was done, she said Colin said to me, well now you've done that, you can write all about Dad's life too. Well, Dad's had an interesting life too.

End of Side B Tape 2



Braided Channels Vol 2 Item 5 INTERVIEW WITH ALICE GORRINGE
7 June 2000

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

SIDE A

I **This is Tape 10 on DAT, we're 18 minutes 27 seconds into Tape 20 on camera. It's 7 June 2000, Trish FitzSimons recording, Erica Addis on camera, for the Channels of History project, and we're interviewing Alice Gorringe.**

So Alice, tell me where and when you were born and what your name was when you were born.

R My name is, or was, until I got married, Alice Murray Bates. you know, how Mum took after Grandma's name in those days, and I came to Queensland. I think I went to school in every state in New South Wales, every town more or less, seven schools in all, so we didn't get very far in schooling because we were moved so much. My Mum's uncle was a fencer so he moved from property to property, from town to town, and you just went to those schools. But I don't remember going from Tibooburra, I was born in New South Wales in a place called Tibooburra, is the proper name, but we call it Tibooburra, and I don't know, what was it, on the 7th of the 25th, '35. So during the war they moved us over to what they call [Wunaring?] but uncle wasn't satisfied there so they saved their food for months and months, because you wasn't getting very much rations, you wasn't allowed to go out and hunt or anything like that, other than on the river where you were in view. So one month they packed up their camel wagon and cleared out. So they used to travel at night. They were good bushmen, they used to travel at night. We ended up at Underfoot, through the border up there, is the Queensland-New South Wales border. So we lived in Queensland then and I think we had two, one more child in Queensland.

Camels – I don't like camels from that day to this because they were camel wagons and they seem to complain continuously, camels do. So Cunnamulla was the first school I went to, so I went to school there for, I don't know, probably a couple of weeks, then you move on. We ended up down at what they call Wilcannia and there we had another baby by this time. We moved from there to White Cliffs, that's back north again. We used to have a whale of a time at White Cliffs because we had goats there. Oh, we lived with cousins, like family lived with families during the Depression. Poor old Dad was an alcoholic but that's how you lived them, in them days.

So my Grandma got it in her head that we had to go home so they had a horse and buggy, so they came across and picked us up. We all went back to Tibooburra again then. Dad worked on the sheep stations around, pulled himself together for a little while and ... so I used to spend most of my time with Grandma and Grandad. He wasn't my real Grandad but I used to spend time with them, out on the border fence. We were allowed to have pet kangaroos, you could have anything you wanted because there was only one child in the family by this time. And the other kids stayed with Mum in town. But Gran got sick so I had to come back to town and we ended up in Broken Hill, another school. I think I must have been Grade 3 or 4. You leave school at that age and you go to work. We ended up going to Arrabury then. Mum's met up with this other guy, she's left Dad in the meantime, so we've got to get up there. We had an even bigger backyard to play in, with horses as well as cattle then. So we had a whale of a time there.

I So, am I right that at one stage, the stage when you went off with the camel wagons, you were actually, your parents were escaping a reserve?

R Yes, they didn't like the reserve life. And the old uncles had the wagon so they left. And no one ever caught up to them because they'd only travel at night.

I So Aboriginal people in New South Wales at that time could be put on a reserve and not allowed to leave? Could you tell me how that system worked because I don't think it's widely understood.

R Well, you was put on these reserves and given rations every fortnight or every month, I think. I was too young to understand but there was hundreds of us there and I don't know about meetin' boys today and girls today that was there when I was there but I didn't know 'em. I didn't know 'em at the time. Because you stayed in your little family groups and, not only that, you were a different tribe of people from different places and you were inclined to stick with your own tribe mob. Not that we had very much tribal thing in our days, you know, as children. Oh, we learned to talk the language and the swear words when we got up to Arrabury because there was a lot of full-bloods there. Chew their tobacco, you know, you just burn the ashes of the leaves, shake it out and put a bit of tobacco with it, and you'd be able to spit out of the corner of your mouth and that sort of stuff. But then again, there, we mixed with the both sides there but, bein' half-castes, if the blacks didn't like us, they was tellin' us, 'You're only a half-breed'. You know, you used to go back, if we did something wrong, but we learnt quickly.

I So your family in New South Wales, do you know where your traditional lands would have been or has the family moved round so much …?

R Yeah, around [Tinnanburra?], what they called [Tinnanburra?]. It's down below ummm Cunnamulla, down in through that area there somewhere. That's where Grandma really come from in the beginning, in through … I think it's [Tinnanburra?] they call it. Never went home to have a look when I was down there. and Dad's family's all around Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Cobar, in through there. So I was only readin' the *Reader's Digest* the other day and there's a Dutton in there. We were related to the Duttons as well. What welfare's done to this Dutton boy. So welfare's definitely no good for you. You know, you could get out and work.

I Your family, then, was, even though your father was alcoholic, your Mum and your Dad were determined to get out of the reserve and find work?

R Yes, mmmm. Yeah. Yes, he did and he was away from his family, I think that was his problem. You know, he had no family other than Mum's family and, believe it or not, in Mum's family there was two girls and between 'em had about 15 children, eh? Or more. 'Cause Aunt had five or six and with Mum's 11, there would have been 12 or 13 there. Most of us did live. That's a great big family.

I So tell me how you came to be Alice Gorringe, how that came to be your name.

R Well, that was my stepfather and when we came to Arrabury we all went under the name Gorringe. You know, well I think I was nine when I came up there and it's just as easy to be a Gorringe as a Bates then, so it just went on.

I And Bill Gorringe had a good reputation, didn't he? Tell me a little bit about him. Tell me your stepfather's name and tell me a little bit about him.

R His name was William, William, I don't know what, Henry I think, and Gorringe, of course, and he was one of the top ringers around the place. He could do almost anything but read or write properly, you know, then, it wasn't schooled. And ride, he taught us to ride like he did, break our own horses in and try and ride bulls and all this sort of stuff but it didn't work out very well. Roping and everything else you had to do. We could kill a beast ourselves. It took three of us to kill a goat, at nine year old, but we finally did it.

I So tell me about killing a goat, Alice. What …?

R Very terrible, it was. They're not like sheep. They're not very quiet. You can cut a sheep's throat and it'll just grunt, but a goat, he screams all the way through. And Mum was saying, 'Hold it, hold it. Can three children hold a goat down and cut its throat?' We'd have been better off shootin' it in the head and then making it unconscious and cuttin' its throat. Oh, if Mum was near I think I'd have strangled her but Mum kept out of my way. I must have had that killer look in me eye. So, we had no meat, we had to do it.

I But your parents, your mother and your stepfather wanted you to acquire skills as a kid, like you had an education in bushcraft, is that right?

R Oh, yeah. We could live off the land, just go out and eat whatever. We ate, more or less, whatever cattle ate, and horses. We never had very much veg in our younger days but we grew up okay. We had all our teeth and everything else. No sweets, no soft drinks, nothing like that. We'd never seen a take-away until I was in my twenties. I think I was 22 when I saw the first take-away and said, 'Oh, yummie, this is good'.

I So are you talking about, you were living on bush tucker or you were living ...?

R No, we were living on the stations. We had ... we'd go to get groceries every six months, go into Arrabury and get a load of groceries and if anyone came out and you wanted something, they'd fetch it out. Mum could make bread with potato peelings, make a yeast out of potato peelings. We'd have bread. We learned to cook very early in life, used to make chips and that sort of stuff, cook your own while Mum's away.

I So there was plenty of potatoes?

R Plenty of the basics like cabbage, potatoes, pumpkins. Very seldom that you got carrots but you could grow your own during this time of the year and the soil was reasonable.

I And tell me about the story of actually ... do you remember coming to Arrabury Station for the first time?

R Yes, we came up on a mail truck. You sat up the back, Mum with five children sat up the back, and they made a bit of a hollow in the loading, the groceries, so you sat back in there. And it rained. That was funny. It rained so all I had to cook a big feed in for all of us, was the two truck drivers, there's about eight of us I think. So they emptied the gallon tins, you know the ordinary four-gallon tins. No one ate anything till you get a rabbit so he threw this rock at one and killed it, so we had veges on and we stuck it in with ... oh, if you've

seen a kerosene tin, it's that big, isn't it? I put the rabbit in there after we cleaned it, potatoes, pumpkin, everything we had. That was a stew for two or three days till the ground dried out so we could move. That's the biggest stew pot ever I'd seen, I reckon.

I So this mail truck. Where was it coming from and where was it going?

R It was coming from Broken Hill to Arrabury and all the stations in between. You'd have Naryilco, Oriantis (?), ummm, Nappamerrie, Innamincka, and then you came on up to Arrabury and it's done all those round, over to Cordillo just through the border. So it was a long run and one of those old cratey things that travelled what, 20 mile an hour or something like that. It was monstrous, or we thought it was, you'd have to go to the toilet, you'd have to climb right down again and I think Mum ended up making a potty of some sort so she wouldn't have to stop every five minutes with five children. So we get up there and we'd never seen many really full-bloods before until we got to Innamincka and there was a lot of them there, lived on the river. So Mum had some of her babies at Innamincka so we used to go down there, there's this nice so we used to mix with them. They used to sit in this little dish and row across like little ducks, eh. It was really neat. I still can't swim. I was reared on the Cooper and I still can't swim.

I Why is that, do you reckon?

R I don't know. Because girls wasn't allowed to swim sort of thing. It was sort of understood that you didn't swim. Mum didn't swim. We bathed, you know, you got down and had a wash and from that day to this I don't have a cold shower, even summertime, I have a warm shower. That water is so cold and you've got goose pimples on your goose pimples when you're trying to soap yourself.

I Do you think that was a traditional Aboriginal thing?

R I don't know. Because a lot of the other girls can swim. But we wasn't allowed to. And you weren't allowed to swim in mixed company or anything. Even with shorts or trousers on, you still wasn't allowed.

I So your mother brought you up to be very modest?

R Yeah. When we wasn't workin', we went to church. Needless to say, we used to like to go to work a lot instead of goin' to the church. Well, Mum was probably modest too, eh? All those old ladies were. Even the men of my generation. They were, too. They

wouldn't ... if they walked inside they'd take their hat off, always. They never walked inside with a hat on.

I Alice, I read somewhere, you would know probably much better than I do, that there's a pretty ugly history of Aboriginal women being subjected to sexual attention that they didn't always want.

R Yeah, mmmm, yeah.

I I read somewhere that Aboriginal people responded to that sometimes by becoming extremely modest as a way to try and protect themselves. Do you think that was going on in your family at all?

R Oh, I know we always wore trousers. Always wore trousers. Regardless of what was going on, you wore a pair of trousers. So we wouldn't, I don't know what it was. You wasn't allowed to sit a certain way or anything else. You always had to sit like so, you know.

I Not with your legs open.

R No, no, no. That was too vulgar to sit like that. And, I don't know, it was just the dress. 'Cause you bent over a lot around the camp fire, you know, you did a lot of bending over, so a pair of pants and a long shirt was even better. As for the other episode, it still goes on, let's put it that way. When I was in The 'Curry, I often tell one of my friends, if ever they, the police pick me up for something – not that I'm a police hater, I've got granddaughter that's a policeman – even if they lock me up I'll scream out to you 'cause you stay in the shop across the road and if you don't get me out, when I get out I'm going to beat you up. I used to threaten her because it still goes on in these small places. If anyone wants sex, they just go to the jailhouse and that's it. Like I said, it still goes on today.

I So you're saying that you had to learn young to protect yourself and part of that was to be aggressive when you needed to be?

R Yeah, that's right. Oh, I don't know how to put it. Like I said, the boys did know us from the ... any stranger come along, they didn't know we were girls 'cause could you imagine riding along behind cattle and cattle dust your hair, it'd be just the same colour as the boys' and we've always had sort of long hair, but plaited, and it's just all matted with dust anyhow. It took 'em a while to find out what we were, which was good for us, we didn't

mind. They could swear and carry on behind us, we didn't care, as long as they didn't come near us. And if they turned out ... most of them turned out okay, you know, you could stand and talk to them. Even tried drinking with them once but Dad caught us. It wasn't very good. He boxed our ears and kicked our backsides. That was the way it was.

I And your Mum? Tell me about your Mum making undergarments for you. What would your mother do?

R Yeah, well she must have ... I've been thinking of that. I might try and make them when I go home. They were really good. They tied in the front. You could pull them as tight as you like and I think they were tied on, the brassieres were tied on top as well, so you'd just pull yourself right up, you know, a bit like a pair of stays I suppose. Because riding a horse all day long is a bit rough on your breast part, anyhow. So I find now the elastic doesn't last long enough so I'm thinking of making me own once more.

I So your Mum would make your brassieres?

R Yeah, mmmm. I had a pair that fit me and ... you had about three pairs, I suppose. Because you didn't get to change that often out there because you'd have to do it in a swag or go down behind a bush somewhere to do it, because regardless, there's always men in the camp, always. Same as the bath. You bathed in the moonlight somewhere, you know, and just hope no one was watching you. It was unreal. In the bore drains, we used to love going south. There's hot bore drains. You could jump in there and wash your clothes, then you've had a bath at the same time.

I So what had taken your family to Arrabury Station?

R Oh, Mum met up with Bill then, see, the fellow we came up. Mum used to find it hard to cope with five children and no education and that sort of thing. So Arrabury was good, good for us, she stayed home and looked after the radio, the younger children. We all went to work. They used to send us for killers and we used to chase emus all day. Come home and get another hiding. We used to swim our horses to get the sweat marks off 'em. Didn't make no difference. When they're dry the sweat will come out.

I So from what age do you reckon you were really contributing to the work of Arrabury?

R Oh, I don't know. Ten? Ten onwards, I suppose. We used to go everywhere. We went everywhere with the old guy, that's all we knew was stock work, till I was about 17 and I

got in … I don't know, I [bailed up?] I didn't want to do this any more so I went cooking at the pub in Windorah.

I And how was your family paid? Like, were you paid a wage working for the station?

R You'd be joking. In clothes and food. I done that for 14 years and I got a car that was worth $300. Three hundred pounds in them days, yes $600 for 14 years' work. I don't know, I was quite happy with that. There was also me, I was the oldest, and then there's John and then there's Peggy. So us three used to be together all the time, more or less. Different jobs but we'd see a lot of each other and have lots of fun as well. And fights. We used to fight as well. If you got into a fight, they let you fight until you couldn't stand any more, so … that's the way it was in the camps. Me and John had a fight from five o'clock one afternoon till nine o'clock at night, I think. We couldn't stand up so we had to give up. It made no difference. I can go and see John today and we're still the same as we used to be. We can only see something funny and look at each other and we just start laughing again. Poor Dot, John's wife, if we want to go to the pub and there's anything on, we just look at each other and just go like that. And all of a sudden we'll disappear and we're down the pub having a beer then.

I **Okay, so this is camera Tape 21. We're still in DAT Tape 10. The DAT is on 2407 and this is the second tape that has part of Alice Fortune, previously Gorringe nee Bates's interview on it, and we're in her son's home in Mt Isa.**

So tell me, your stepfather and mother would have been paid by the station, were they Alice?

R No. Only Dad. Mum wasn't, although Mum manned the radios and cooked for them when they came through. Oh, if you attend a muster … in once place, say they attend a muster at Arrabury, so they'll come into The Planet, a group of men, most of them will eat down at the camps but a lot of them would come, like the head stockman and that sort of thing. Mum would cook for them. Some time you'd have about 20-25 men there at the station.

I So what was the exact job that your stepfather was doing for Arrabury and do you know how much he was paid and how he …?

R No. I never knew how much he was paid. It was a question you didn't sort of ask, you know. Well, he was the manager of an outstation. Arrabury was an outstation. Nulla was an outstation but Nulla wasn't manned when we were there, but that's what they were. You took care of the stock in that area around there. So that's what he was. He could sign his name but he couldn't read well or write well.

I Do you think he was getting cash wages or was he getting wages in food and clothes?

R He was getting money somehow, yeah, but probably into his bank account or something. He had a cheque book so I could say it went into that. He could sign his cheque book but he couldn't write out the amount so we used to have to do that, or Mum only she wasn't always home. Not that we had that much education ourselves, you know. I went as good as Grade 3, Form 3, or whatever it was in those days. But it's okay, you do learn to read and write. We had jam tins, syrup tins, and what have you.

I And did you learn ... you obviously learned how to do stuff with animals. What's involved in breaking a horse? Tell me about the first time you broke in a horse, Alice.

R Oh, first you've got to get it into the yard. We broke in brumbies mainly, that's what we practised on. You'd run them down and rope them and sneak 'em into a yard and well, you'd have to get from the rope round his neck to a halter on, or a bridle on, if you were game enough to get that close. From there you'd sort of, what they call bag him down to make him a bit quiet, and eventually get a saddle on him. And eventually you'd get on him and hope for the best. And we used to have to do that if we wanted horses. The best ones we ever found was the brumbies on the Cooper. They were really passive horses, never even bucked with you or anything. You could pull 'em in today, rope 'em, do something to their mouth so you can turn 'em when you want to go, jump on 'em and ride 'em away. They were quite good. Some of the brumbies are really rough. They used to wait till you got outside and throw you off, but you didn't dare get thrown off because you'd lose your saddle. So you just hung on to whatever you could and it's no fun riding bareback with your tail bone on a horse. You soon get a sore backside from that.

I Now you were saying that girls didn't swim and yet breaking horses is something that in lots of families they would have said that wasn't for girls. Other than not swimming, was there anything on the work of the property that was sort of not for girls?

R Not for girls? No. We weren't allowed to salt meats at a certain time of the month, that's about all. If you had your periods, you wasn't allowed to corn meat, wasn't allowed to touch the meat. But no doubt cooks in the kitchen handled meat all the time. Well that's just different there. You could cut your own beef [strap?] and that sort of stuff but on certain days of the month you just didn't do it. Send the meat bad, so they reckon, so that was their little thing.

I How about vehicles? Did you learn mechanical skills?

R Don't talk about that. We broke an axle when I was about twelve, I suppose, in the old Ford thing they used to have. So we had to change it. Needless to say, touch wood, we haven't broke one since.

I So, Alice, I don't know that I've ever broken an axle but I've been driving for 20 years and if I did, I wouldn't have a clue how to change it. How did you work out what to do?

R Oh well, Dad supervised. He lay down and had a smoke and a cup of tea and so we pulled it all off one day, one afternoon, and went back the next morning. He just sat there and supervised again. There's all these cogs you put in together to change it, yeah. And they're a separate axle, you know, they're an axle about that long, you put 'em in with all … so you can put all the cogs in, change a tyre. We changed a tyre the other day. My grandson thinks I'm marvellous. 'The wheel, the wheel, Nanny,' he tells me. And you had to do it, though if I'm doing it again. But mind you, we couldn't see over the top so one'd do the clutch and the brakes and the other one'd do the steering, that was taller. And of course the gears were here, well you didn't do that. If he sung out 'the gears' while he's down there pushing the clutch and the brake in or whatever, ' the brakes in'. Change the gear and

I So whose vehicles would these have been that you were driving?

R The station's. The station's vehicle. Did you ever see those old 1920 Fords where you could put the top down? One of those.

I Like a Model T?

R Yeah, yeah. Those. I often tell the kids that's what I used to learn to drive. I learnt to drive in one of those. And they had 'em in a ute version as well, you know.

I And so, were you sneaking away to drive this vehicle, or you were encouraged to drive it?

R We were encouraged to drive 'cause Mum didn't drive. It was a case of have to. If anything happened to Mum, we had to get on the radio and meet someone at a certain place, so you had to drive. All my kids, I taught all my kids to drive at ten, eleven too, for the same reason. We'd go camping and if something happens to me or Dad or whatever, you've got a driver. If you can't drive one on the highway, you can drive to the highway, that sort of thing.

I So it was a survival thing?

R Yeah, more or less, yeah. Same as Mum ... we used to travel around mainly in a four in hand buggy with rubber tyres – a bun cart they used to call them. They've got ... they're just a trailer car with wheels on that just rolled freely. The horse drug them. So Mum used to drive a four in hand. Quite neat, she used to be. If they bolted, she'd stand up and pull it in. You'd have reins through here and there, see, both sides.

I And how would you, like in that country you would quite often have had different channels, wouldn't you? How would you cope with the channels?

R Oh when we got into the channels, see out on Arrabury there wasn't any channel country there, other than down on, I don't know what they call that creek now, near Betoota, but in the Channel Country Mum used to drive a four in hand. She'd go down and back here, drop all the children off at the top, usually about four or five of those, drop them off at the top, go along till she could find a place to get up, might have to turn around and come back and go up the high, up the creeks, up the lower part of the rivers. You've been down to the Cooper country?

I I'm going down there soon.

R Well take note of the banks, how steep the banks are. The banks are like that and Mother used to get across those okay.

I So that would have been, the Model T wouldn't have coped with that but your mother could do it with horse and cart?

R No. Yeah. Horse and bun cart. But we didn't have the Model ... we wasn't on the then, we was out on Arrabury. And the same thing with the creeks, you used to

get out with a shovel and a crow bar, that's all they carried, so you'd cut the bank down and get across. Ant beds are marvellous things for that, to make a bridge. They last for ages, too.

I So what, you'd … tell me about how would you use the ant beds? You'd take the ants nests?

R Yeah, you know those big ones you can see? They're not as big as the Territory but just throw them in there and break 'em up with an axe and drive across 'em. We used to do that out here … Bill was working in the Railway, my husband, out at . We went out one night and we had one of those old T Model Fords – we couldn't afford anything else with a couple of children on fettler's wages – so we went out and, not checking the lights before we left, we get out there and coming home just on dark, no lights. I think we had two blankets, one pillow and five kids. And that's how we used to get across the creeks anyhow, just pull up an ant bed as well. The things you learn, it's unreal.

I And tell me about what relationships you had with white kids on Arrabury, because you were on Planet Downs, weren't you?

R Yeah, we were at the outstation there. It was always okay with us. If they had any problems, we never heard of them. We used to play with them. Very seldom we seen children so, if we did, you played with them. There was another family over on Tambo, which we didn't get to see anyhow, only … I think we went to the race meeting in Windorah once. Suddenly there's kids galore to play with. When we were at that age of 14 and 15 well you wasn't allowed to run around with the kids any more then anyhow. That was the thing. When you got to the teens you were supposed to be like a lady then – other than riding horses and fallin' off and everything else.

I So what did being a lady involve? What parts of your behaviour or dress had to shift when you were 14 or 15?

R The shift was more or less your behaviour, that's all it was. You didn't go shouting or running around with the children. You more or less helped Mum in the kitchen in your spare time. I remember the first time I There was this mare called Daisy and I had to ride her, she was a chestnut. This was usually in the bush races. I knew she was fast but that's what I wanted and we had an old Aboriginal Long Ted, he used to look

after us kids more or less, you know, he was an old full-blood. Ted said to me, 'You can't ride it, it's just too strong and it'll take off'. 'But I must ride it.' Okay, he let me go and we were up at the creek, changed horses, I rode Daisy back from up there. Horses on stations are playing and race into the trough, buck around, and Daisy took off because she thought it was a race meeting. I ended up over the trough. [Tracey? Daisy?] come and I'm trying to pull her but she won't let me, she's just shakin' her head and yelling, so she propped and I went straight over the top. And Mum came running. She could hear the commotion and poor old Ted, he can't get up. He's laying on the ground holding his stomach.

I I'd love you to describe a race meeting at Windorah, Alice. Picture it in your brain and tell us all about it.

R They're very good. Ummm, I only went to one there. Can I tell you about the one at Betoota?

I Sure.

R By this time my brother George has got this horse, I don't know what's the name of it. Anyhow we lived at the Planet and never went to Betoota Races in my entire life so we're there and everything. You're bettin' on anything and everything that moves. So me cousin's got to training this horse for me brother and she just threw herself down, she's a real hyped up thing, so here's Spinny trying to get her up – that's Spinny my cousin – and I'm lookin' for a piece of wire. I'll get her off the ground, I'll just it under her tummy, just flog her, and just as we got the wire all sorted out, George come around – that's me brother – 'Come on darling, get up,' and he pulls it up. We could have killed him with the piece of wire as well. That was it. And race meetings are good. We didn't dance, it was antisocial more than anything. But Windorah Races are good. You can go to dances and dance with Tom, Dick and Harry there if you wish to and we all had those big flared skirts in them days, remember? So many metres in a skirt. My aunty made me one of those and I thought I was just it. A pink polka dot, it was.

I And would Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people all mix together at those dances or would there be kind of the Aboriginal bit and the non-Aboriginal bit?

R No. What I can remember, everyone came in, but the boys mainly went to the pub and Mum and the kids came to the dance, you know. Until the pub closed and then everyone

else came up. What I used to like about those days, if they had a difference they'd tell it by fist. They'd have a fight and get it over with. And that's when you see 'em all walkin' round arm in arm, mate this and mate that. You know, there was no grudges whatsoever. No, the Aboriginal kids used to come as well to the dances, although there wasn't that many there. There was only us and aunt's family, I suppose. And me other aunty and uncle had one or two. So there wasn't that many kids but we all played together. They all went to school together, all fought together and, well the boy next door to me now in Windorah, he was about when I left home, going to school. Even now I give him a lip bashing over the fence, you know. He comes in for a cuppa tea and it's that way in Windorah, you know, you just walk in to anyone's place and if you want something you go in and take it, leave a note to tell or say who it was, and that's it. You drive into their properties and do the same. You just leave a note – 'Just come to look. I come to borrow this' you know, whatever it is, and you're gone. I find them there really good but I got the shock of my life when I went to Bourke when I was younger and you had to go in through a side door to go to the movies. You wasn't allowed to … you can buy your ticket at the front door but you couldn't go in there. But that was only once or twice you went down. You was too tired to go to the movies anyhow.

I So you're saying that growing up in Windorah it wasn't a big deal?

R No, I didn't find it a big deal. Arrabury either, for that matter. But just when you went to town, oh there were small towns like Charleville, Bourke – we used to go to Bourke with cattle – and even the properties we didn't find anything. I remember they never used to like us puttin' our horses on their sheep feed in the next paddock and we feed them up with a bit of beef or anything else, you know, if they went home to bed, we'd let our horses into their yard. Just cut the fence, undid the wire and put 'em in. They didn't like it, but if they wanted beef they'd have to let us do it. Yeah. That's all there was to it. They were our stock, they were our living, so we had to feed them.

I So was there a way in which you felt yourself to be kind of living on land that was yours when you were at Arrabury?

R Mmmm. Yeah, I suppose so. We used to do a lot of things on the land there and it made no difference to us. Like now, we've got a land claim in at Glengyle, not me really, but you know, it's for the other kids, like my younger sister, see, 'cause her father comes from there. He was born there. But it's a free land. If you get a land claim, let 'em use it.

They've been using it for hundreds of years now, why not let 'em use it? You've not going to go out and camp on it, you're not going to live on it. That's what it is, it's just open range still.

I So what area is that where you've got a land claim?

R In through Glengyle and Birdsville, in through that country, because ... but he's still using it for the same reason they've always been using it. I don't believe you should put a land claim and bar anyone from it. If you're not going to live on it, work it, let it go. Let 'em use it like it's been used all the time. That's what I reckon.

I So let's just say your land claim was successful. What would that mean? Like what, in your understanding, does a successful Native Title claim involve?

R Well, it'd make you feel free to go and live there if you wanted to. But still, I don't think I'd bar the stock that people have got it now. I still wouldn't bar 'em. I'd like to have a little corner to grow some veges, fruit trees, probably put up a little house. That's what it'd mean to me. And that'd be home.

I So could you imagine, if your land claim was successful, would you imagine that you and the white people currently living there would continue to both live ...?

R Oh, I'd hope so, yeah. Like now this land claim's in, there's a few of them in it, and I think I'd like that. 'Cause like I said, white people really haven't done me any harm. There might have been a few things way back in your childhood but what's the use of living in the past really? It's now, the present, more than anything. Our other two sons married white girls. One's a German girl even. And I get along quite okay with their mother. She talks a little bit of English, I talk a little bit of German, and we can talk, us grandmothers, mainly sign language, but we can talk.

I So am I hearing are you slightly perplexed by all this politics?

R Yeah, I think it's silly. They'd even go back to the hard and fast ways they had before but, you know, like they was using people, but why can't we all get along? We all live on this planet and fighting's not going to improve anything, is it? Look at Fiji. Look at New Guinea. It's doin' no good.

I I know talking, for some white people who have owned or leased land, Native Title feels like a real threat. You know, it seems like this land that they've considered theirs could potentially be taken away from them.

R Yeah, I realise that too. And they paid a lot of money for their land so I say why can't they use it, you know, for what they're using it for? Well, Aboriginals are not going to use it. They've not used it, have they, for years and years. This is the way I look at it. Like the Diamantina, the Georgina, whatever it is now, there's cattle on there. You're not going to go down and put two cows on it or something, or three cows or half-a-dozen, whatever I can afford, and run them there. That's crazy. 'Cause you'd need a little paddock to hold 'em in anyhow.

I So I'm getting a bit confused here, Alice. Are you saying land claims should only go on to land that white people aren't currently using?

R No, no. I think if they want land, why can't they pay for it like everyone else, you know, or live on it and work it? Down home there we had a loan in an Aboriginal, a loan for a house. Everyone sort of built their home. It's a self-help, you know, you help your ... we put up one of these and you had what you liked inside, and then you're supposed to grow plants to make it look respectable, eh? Like, you're living in a house, why not do it? But a lot of people didn't do that. They didn't want to do that. They didn't grow one tree. And they was whingeing for someone to come and do their gardens. They're able-bodied, why can't they do it? You know, the house is a reasonable price. This is stupid. If you want a garden, get in and put a garden in. No one's going to come along and do it for you. No one's got that sort of time either. You grow what you want. Like you wasn't allowed to paint it until you got permission and all this sort of rubbish, too, but I went ahead and done it. I said I'm buying, I'll do what I like and that's it.

I So independence is important to you? Doing things for yourself.

R Yes, yeah. I think self-help offers the best thing out. Look, we can go on the dole. Go on the river bank. You got to have a bit of pride in what you do, I reckon, in yourself as well, in your family. Sure, my kids all went to high school, boarding school, on a grant. That's all I wanted, just to put 'em, education for 'em, something I never had. They came out reasonable people.

I So we actually, I need to get that bit filled in. How did you meet your husband?

SIDE B

R Droving, where else would I? He was around, you know.

I Could you just tell me that again? Tell me how you met your husband.

R Well, when you're the only girl, or two girls, in the entire countryside, you get plenty of proposals, naturally, but you don't want to take 'em all. I wanted to give us a home so I took this one. That's the only reason I can give.

I And so where did you meet your husband?

R Windorah. That's him up there when he was in the Army. Not that we get along very well. In the meantime, a lot of things happened, so we don't get along very well.

I How old were you when you married?

R Well, I was 22 but the mind was about 15, I suppose, yeah. 14 or 15. Very sheltered family life sort of thing, you know. Within the family, you didn't work outside. I think I worked outside the family for about two years, that's about all.

I So was your husband from around Windorah?

R Cloncurry. Julia Creek area.

I So what had brought him to Windorah?

R Stock. He used to come down with stock from up here. and another place up in the Gulf.

I So he was a drover?

R Yes, he was one of the guys on the ... he didn't own a plant but he was one of the guys, you know, working with the drover. You always had about four or five men with you. So ... when you're fetching a couple of thousand head of cattle you've got to have five or six men.

I So, 22. That's 35, so 1957 when you met your husband?

R Yeah. So we ended up coming up here in that car, that 300 pounds car that we had. I took it when I left. My wages for the 14 years.

I So who gave you that car?

R Ah, I threw a bit of a tantrum because I wanted a car of me own down in Tibooburra so I drove it back from there, in this souped up model of a sedan. Needless to say, we had a car at home that, if you went courting you took all your sisters and brothers with you to push the car when you stopped it. And you parked on a ridge like this so you could, so they'd have easy pushing. You could start it going down.

I Because they didn't have a starter motor?

R It had a starter motor on but goodness knows what was the matter. I think we put it together ourselves.

I So when you say you had a tantrum, who did you have a tantrum with and …?

R Me stepfather, 'cause I really wanted wheels and I really liked this thing. It was a Super Snipe, eh, one of those … the policeman had one. had one in what's-a-name so we knew they were fast, they used to race the buggies and the rest of the cars down home. So once we got that, we used to all go to the river for tea. Black and white and everyone. And from there, the seven miles home we'd race. Even the policeman, sorry. He did too. So horse and buggy or whatever you had, you'd be racing. It was a wide road, good wide road, so we was going to battle along with this car. We ended up doing it too.

I So who came up with the 300 bucks?

R Dad did. Me stepfather did, yeah.

I So when you say it was wages for 14 years of working on Planet Downs …

R No, no, no, not Planet Downs. As drovers. We left there … when we left Planet and I was about 16, 15-16, we went droving straight away. Dad had a lot of horses so we used to have, we had 30 horses on plant, or 25-30, and we had a spare at home, and when we came back we picked that one up and leave the other one. By the time we come back, they'd be rested and we'd use them. It was a continuous thing. You just went round and round.

I So where were you droving?

R From morning, we'd go to the next one at Glengyle, Mount Leonard, in through that country. Waverley, it all depends what was available and you took.

I And where would you be droving them to?

R Bourke. Bourke, Quilpie, . You'd take a load of cattle up to and you'd fetch a load of bulls back or something. The bulls, they travelled in about three or four hundred, they'd do that once in a while, you had to take a load of bulls back. So it was continuous work up and back as well.

I So that would be you and your sister and your brother helping your father?

R Mmmm, stepfather, yeah. It'd be nothing for the boys to get on the grog at Windorah or something and you'd lose them. They'd all get huffy and pull out and so you'd do half a night watch for the next fortnight or three weeks. Two on, two off, you know. All because there was only four of us besides cooking, and no one liked cooking. Not over an open fire anyhow.

I And going on those droving trips, when you'd get to Quilpie or Bourke or whatever, are you saying that you would encounter racism then?

R Yes, mmmm. Especially Bourke, yeah. Well, Quilpie you used to phone the taxi driver. He used to take the poddies, like the calves just born close to town. He used to take those and rear them, but he'd give us bread in exchange and take care of us girls when we hit the town. We'd go to the movies but Mr Greenie would be waiting there. As soon as we walked up, they rang a taxi and you're home. So to amuse ourselves, Quilpie's got very hot bore water, so you'd fill the tub up and we'd soak ourselves and get all the dirt that's on us for the 12 months or ... we wasn't allowed to go anywhere from the movies. Greenie would be waiting for us.

I Was Greenie Aboriginal?

R No, he was a white guy. We used to stay with them.

I So he would be keeping you safe from men?

R Yeah, mmmm. He'd pick us up and take us home. It didn't matter how much water we used as long as we ... it wasn't outdoors, you know. The boys, very seldom we camped down the stockyards where the men were. If we did, Mum was with us, sittin' on it. So it was, you know, reasonable. You didn't have to worry too much.

I And was there a sense that being a Gorringe was something special?

R Yeah, to everyone it was. Even, like, in later life the proper Gorringe family, you know the younger children, used to say, 'Well, you weren't Gorringes anyhow' and the young sister-in-law. They said, 'Oh, but he chose us and we turned out better men than your husband did,' you know. Even the men part of it. My sister would always throw that in their face now, 'But he chose us. He didn't have no choice in you guys'. You know, that sort of thing. Yeah, I suppose it was, eh? Because he was known all in that country for his horsemanship and what he could do with a horse and he brought us up the same way. A bit like Bulloo Downs mob, you know, you was brought up the same way. You knew how to change a tyre. Even at home, and the boys are home with me, I've got four boys, had four boys, we've got to pull the engine out of our cars and everything. Even I can get down and undo the nuts and pull my engine out and have a look at it. And put another one in, or whatever. That's what you was brought up like. And I found in later life my husband didn't like that at all but I felt he married me for those things I had. To put up a fence, a chook run, or anything else. And then at the end of it, he didn't sort of like it.

I What didn't your husband like about that?

R My independence and what I could do. That's what I felt anyhow. He said I was only puttin' him to shame. I said, 'Look, I've been doin' this fencing and cuttin' posts and everything all my life. This is about all I know'. I can put up a chook run, you know, it's no problem. I might inside behind my netting, but I can do it. He used to get very annoyed with it. Like movin' me gas bottles and things. That's the sort of life we lived. You're independent and you do it. It's got to be done, you do it.

I Now your stepfather Bill, when he went droving, he had his own plant?

R Yeah.

I And so you and your sisters helped him. When you were married, what happened then?

R But I didn't. I married in Cloncurry and I didn't go home. I didn't go home for 30 ... I've been home ... for 15 years before I went home, and just to let the family see the children. My eldest boy was about 14, 15 then, and ... I never went home for 31 years or something

like that, to live or anything. See, my children were at school, I couldn't afford it. Our kids in boarding school. And you had your husband at home then to after and everything.

I So did your husband keep droving after you were married?

R No, no. He went into the Railway. Came up and got a job in the Railway. We lived at Duchess, we lived at [Koonjabbie?]. Seven years at [Koonjabbie?]. I don't know, four or five years out here at Duchess.

I Because if your husband had kept droving, he wouldn't have been able to take you with him, would he, because the …?

R Not with the children in school. But my sister could tell you a story about her and her husband droving. Peg, just ask her about the droving trip. She went on doing it with her husband. Her husband was a fencer drover too so she done a lot of it.

I So what was your life then, after you got married, Alice? Give me a glimpse of your life in Cloncurry.

R Ah, we moved to Duchess. When I got married we moved out to Duchess just up the creek here. It was okay. I had my goats, you know, animals still. Had a little garden. I already had a child by that time. I had Patsy, she was about six. Sent her to school, walked to school with them. You had the school house on the rise over at Duchess, eh. The kids lived over here and the school house was over there, over on the hill on the other side. So if the creek was running, it'd be running a bank so you'd have to piggy-back the kids across the water up to here. It was strong so you had to.

I So you're saying it was your first child that had a different father?

R Yeah, mmmm. So, and after that, we had more children and used to walk round the hills with the kids all the time. Even my teenage boys, we climbed every hill between here and The 'Curry. It'd take us a full day to come up here from The 'Curry 'cause you'd take lunch. You'd have a barbecue lunch and climb all the hills, all the way.

I So you were about … how old were you when you had your first child? Can you tell me a tiny bit about that, how that happened.

R I was, uhhh, about 16. You just met someone, like the boys were out all the time, you're inquisitive, and that's what happens. But after that, I had ... I missed by kids, family, so much. I think I had six, five more, just to make up for the family. I had my own kids to walk around the hills with and Christmas time and Easter, make bunny tracks everywhere and all that. So I thoroughly enjoyed 'em all. This is two of them up here now, you can see. That's George in blue there, and this is David down here with the baby.

I You've got family all round you on the walls.

R Mmmm. And he's a friend, that little guy up there. Very good friend, Dean. And there's another group around the corner. That's my family. You know, you put away the big frames and one family's in there and another family's in another.

I So what brought you back to Windorah, then, Alice?

R Well, I always told my kids, when they grew up and finished school, I'm going home. If not home, I'm going to Western Australia. I couldn't afford Western Australia so I went home.

I Where was the West Australia dream? Why West Australia?

R I don't know. But my nephew won a, you know how you win a holiday for two. He won a holiday for two for the America's Cup when the America's Cup was over, so I've been over to the West then. We went over there for a fortnight, my sister and I. The plane leaves over there at six o'clock in the morning or some ungodly hour, so we go out to the casino, pack our bags and leave 'em at the door in the motel, and go to the casino, ordered this great big flash meal, didn't know if we were going to be able to pay for it, and we thought we'd be washing up when the plane left anyhow. But it worked out okay. Yes, okay. I'll give you a bit of water. No, you don't want water. Do you want apple juice? Here, have this.

I If you need to stop, we can.

R I'll have to, yeah, and give him a drink.

I So this is camera tape 22, it's still DAT tape 10, and it's now 1 hour 2 minutes and 18 seconds. We're interviewing Alice Fortune, previously Gorringe, nee Bates. It's 7 June 2000 and this is the third camera tape to have part of Alice's interview on it.

So tell me about coming back to Windorah then, Alice.

R Yeah, well, we were always glad to go past then my home. We call it home. It's still home to me. And the closer you get the faster you get, that seems to be the way. You look down at your speedo and you're doing 120, 130 or something. Something you shouldn't be doin' at all. I can't wait to get home again now. You just sit on the river bank and fish. One of my friends said, 'Yeah, murdering little fish all the time'. I said, 'But I don't kill 'em for nothing, I eat the darn things,' you know.

I What is it that you love about Windorah?

R Mainly it's the freedom, getting' into the country once more. I've been away for 32 years, you know, so I've got to get around and have a look again. We ran out to the Jaycee and I took one of my friends out there and me, in the meantime, bought all those big stations down there, and to clear a homestead site, they just dig a big pit and throw everything in it and cover it over. They had some camp ovens that are good for chook water, or dog water dishes. I went there looking but couldn't find them so this friend of mine, she's a very little la-di-da lady and I said, 'Come up, we'll have another look at the dump, I'm lookin' for ovens and things'. We get up there and see a big old collar, you know, to put on a horse if you want that horse for draggin' a cart. They're good if you're do 'em up and put a mirror in 'em. They look really effective on the wall. I could see them under there but they were under a sheet of tin so I've got Maureen leverin' the tin and I'm trying to pull this collar out. She said, 'If my sons could see me now, they'd kill me, scraping around in the rubbish dump'. I said, 'But it's a good cause. I want to put a mirror in it'. We had some fun there then. She likes a little beer. She loved to take a six-pack or a dozen with her, so she sits along and drinks and tellin' me yarns and I sit along and drive, and laugh like hell at nothing.

I So is Maureen, is she a relative?

R No, she's just a friend, yeah. But she lives in that ... she came out from Brissie somewhere as a girl of 18 or 19, into that bush life, eh, cooking on an open fire, poor thing, and Eric, she lost her husband there, so ... I overnight with her some nights, we get on the beer, overnight, camp over at her place. She camps at my place. So we don't want to drive through town, the policeman's half way through. Catch us for DD, us two old people in town.

I So is she a Murri?

R No, she's a white lady. She's cooked, and she's done everything. She's taught her kids school right up until they went to, you know, high school and all that sort of stuff. Like I said, I can get along with anyone. She's got a chihuahua now. I don't like sleeping with this chihuahua, so I don't like sleeping up there. She either comes to my place and leaves the chihuahua at home. The chihuahua will jump all over you all night long. It'll lick all your face.

I So had you and your husband … did you come back to Windorah with your husband?

R No, no. We separated earlier, yeah. And I worked around here for a while, worked in for a while. Didn't like the counter life so I went out cooking on the station. I started cooking when I was about 18 out on the stations, so it was a good thing to fall back on to every now and again.

I You were saying when you went droving that nobody wanted to cook.

R No, but who wants to cook over an open fire? You've stood near one of those on a summer's day? Unreal. Cook your face. We had the most wonderful cook. His name was Archie. Archie , you know, that's his son in the book. Oh, he was marvellous. We used to have wild duck stuffed, fritters for lunch, and all sorts of things. You could only carry 'em in a little bag about this big, eh, that's your lunch.

I So he was a Chinese cook?

R Mmmm. No, he was part-Chinese, I think, come to think of it. And made beautiful bread in a camp oven. Oh, lovely.

I Where was this, and when?

R He came cooking for us, Archie , that's Jack in the book, remember, his father. He done most of his time with us. Us girls wouldn't cook. He used to cook. That's what he was. He was the cook.

I This was when you went droving with your father?

R Droving, yeah. He always told me I was the hardest woman he'd ever known how to please. And he must have liked me in a way because it used to be cold like this weather,

he used to let me sleep in the campfire, cook break, you know where the break is. That's something. You've got to be very privileged to sleep in that. I used to come off watch about nine or ten o'clock, see I'd have to do the first watch because I'm getting' the horses at four o'clock in the morning, and he said, 'Girl, you're cold'. He'd chuck my swag in behind there. I said, 'Yeah, I know'. And you'd sleep with your boots on because you don't want to take 'em off, you know, your feet just get cold. So he'd chuck my ... 'There, go to sleep there. Don't put your back towards the fire, it'll cook your kidneys' he reckoned. 'So what, you're goin' to cook my face? It's ugly enough as it is.' He said, 'Oh, do what you like then'.

I Where would your Mum have been during these droving trips?

R Home. Home with the children at school. Windorah, in Windorah.

I So your Mum had a second family with Bill and she'd stay home with them?

R Yeah. Yes. There was another six or seven needed school, see. Odd time she'd come, must have been school holidays. From one year to the next, it wouldn't make any difference to us. But she used to come once ... and if we were short-handed, she'd come and cook and leave the children with me aunt. She could come back half way down or something, when we got another cook. But once we got Archie, it was pretty safe for her, she didn't have to cook. We ran across the river once at Tanbar, and Tanbar's got that big waterhole . It's spooky as hell, eh? It's real spooky and ...

I Why is it spooky? Why is the waterhole at Tanbar spooky?

R I don't know why. It is very spooky. Nicholas, I'll smack you in a moment. And Mum's standing there, she's growling away. She'd probably been sick for years and years, this poor old lady, eh, and she's down there growling. We've got a light, you know those lights you put up, up on the top, we used to drop the sideboard of the bun cart and she's there and we're saying, 'Don't move, Mum, don't move', and she's saying, 'Well don't tell me what to do and what not to do' and she went to step like that and there's this big brown snake coming through. The cattle just got on camp and it's all private country and it's and snake, and she's going ... and she chucked the light. We had no light for weeks. And screamed at us and said, 'Why didn't you tell me it was there?' We couldn't get a word in edgeways, and we didn't want to laugh either because it looks like Jolliffe'scomic books, eh, things that'll happen. So we

all decided we had to go and watch these cattle. and we were killin' ourselves laughing . But poor old dear must have been sick and she was rousing on the younger ones besides us, and the biggest snake ever I'd seen went between her legs, eh. So when she stepped back, she could just see it going. But even to this day, we don't go fishin' at by ourselves.

I You don't go fishing?

R No, not by ourselves. No.

I Did you ever get to know much about Yamacoona and the traditional Aboriginal stories from that country?

R No, no. Just talk, more or less, you know.

I Do you think there are Aboriginal women that do understand that stuff a lot?

R I don't know. Probably old Fanny and Dolly and them, but they're all gone now, see, all those old ladies. I know down in the sand hills down around, bordering on Mount Leonard, at The Planet, you'd see skeletons down there, skulls and everything layin' around. And they reckon in the Channel Country, again, there's still skulls in there. Didn't realise Aboriginal skulls would be that thick, eh. Unreal. They'd have to be if you're going to hit each other on the stick in a fight, eh. And some of them are coiled up. They must have been burial grounds, you know. On the burial grounds they use mica. They stick it in the fire, cook it up and it goes powdery. They powder it up in their coolamon and make balls. They had all these balls. If you see a heap of balls round like that, you know that's a grave. Just don't go onto it or anything.

I You were saying, I think, when you arrived at Arrabury, that sometimes as a part Aboriginal woman, full-bloods would be thinking less of you.

R Yeah. Mmmm.

I Was there a lot of traditional Aboriginal people round the Channel Country?

R Round then, yes. Round Innamincka there. Like I said, there was about 100, 150, if not 200, down there. That's the Harris boys now. That's some of them and I never knew what happened to 'em. Arrabury had their own little mobs, you know, the goat ladies, the

cleaners that done the laundry. But Maggie, Maggie – that's who you ought to talk to, is Aboriginal. Maggie, she lives in an old people's home in Cunnamulla. She's from up here at Tea Tree near Alice Springs. When I was talkin' to her, she's an old medicine lady of some sort, she got me a song, a power song for women. I think I might have the tape in the car. I never thought of that. And it's about me. She was sittin' at home at one day and I drove in – long grass – and I just drove in, parked, and hooked under my caravan, and I stopped and I opened the door and I looked out and there's Maggie sittin' there. 'Maggie, why didn't you move? Why didn't you let me know?' I could have ran over her. She said, 'No, girl, you was right. You drove past me'. And, oh, now she tells me.

I So Maggie, where had Maggie lived her life?

R Maggie's come from Tea Tree, outside of Camooweal ... ummm, Alice Springs.

I And where has she worked for her life?

R She worked on the opal fields down there and before that, I don't know. Maggie was an older lady when I got to know her, and yeah, she'd be the one. She told me what happened at ... I asked everyone I knew that I ran across, 'What happened to all those people?' They said, 'Well, missions'. Aren't you goin' to send 'em to a mission in New South Wales? So one night they got it in their head, they just packed up and left. Some went to ummm up that way, some went to Alice Springs, and some went in between. Up in Western Australia. They just walked away overnight.

I So if people thought they were going to get gathered up and put to a mission, like your family they'd clear out?

R Yeah. Clear out overnight, yeah. So that's what happened to 'em. Whether they all got through or not, I don't know. Maggie said a few turned up at old Tea Tree. They wouldn't go into the town like Alice Springs or nothing. They'd just go round those. So some turned up at ... Tea Tree is just a shop, a little outpost there. So some turned up there and she was talkin' to us and she said others went up to Western Australia and back over to Port Hedland, that way, Port Augusta rather.

I So, Alice, there's a kind of, how would I describe it? Your traditional country is down near Tibooburra, Alice Springs, but it's not ...

R No, not Alice Springs.

I Not Alice Springs. What did I say? Broken Hill.

R Tibooburra, yeah.

I But it's around Windorah that is home because that's where you spent your life.

R Yeah, yeah.

I What do you think of the Native Title system that's been set up?

R Well, really, I don't think it's right. I think you should be able to settle, like we'd love to settle in Windorah. We'd like that as our tribal land. 'Cause my brother John, he's left there for about two years. He's been there since he was ten, if that, and he knows that country like the back of his hand and, at the moment, he's caretaker of all those Aboriginal sites and everything there. No one's come to see 'em. He knows where they all are. He lives off the land there. He's worked there all this time. I think we should be able to own that, you know. I don't want half of Windorah or anything else, just the block I'm living on, most likely, and the rights to go fishing. Cotton was coming in then and trying to keep us off the rivers. But the rivers is all, what do they call it when they put cattle down? It's like a common, you know, where … a stock route. The rivers are all stock route and they can't keep us off the rivers. Up at Currareva, they bought Currareva, it's up the river, not far, and it's all ploughed ready for cotton, to put cotton in, and we're still fighting that 'cause it won't give us green beef any more, you know. Our market's good for green beef at the moment, not that we're makin' millions out of it or anything else, but our fishing is good, that's all that interests me. And we'd like to keep it like it is. All that land there. And we run into an inland lake, we don't run into the sea or anywhere else. There's no with our … it's just going to all build up in our system there, in our river system. They reckon they're going to build a wall. The Cooper rises 25-30 feet, 40 feet, sometimes. How are they goin' to build a wall that high to keep, you know, the cotton fertiliser in?

I So you feel passionate about the environment of Windorah?

R Oh, very, yeah. Yes, I do. They're still fighting it. They'll probably beat us in the end but we're going to give them a good run.

I So there are Aboriginal people who do have Native Title claims around Windorah?

R Windorah, yeah. That's me sister-in-law, yeah. Me sister-in-law's got that. And Angela's aunt. Believe it or not, Angela and them came from around there too. Off, you know where Glen, where Linwood is? There's a place there called, what's that? We was lookin' at it the other day. That's where Angela's grandparents come from – great-grandparents. Her Mum's mother and father come from there. Ray, Ray, that's where they was reared, so …

I And how about, I think, has Jocelyn got claims down …?

R Jocelyn's got claims from McKinlay down to Mirra Lake, Yamma Lake. She couldn't walk that in ten years, let alone live on it. It's just too, the area's just too big, and there's two or three tribes between.

I But I guess the Native Title system is based on traditional connection to the land, isn't it, not actually where you've lived?

R Yeah. No, no. It's got to be way back and Dot can do that 'cause she's, not Gorringe, 'cause her family's lived all around there all the time, and Dad's still alive. Although Dad is white, more or less, he's got a mother is Aboriginal.

I So Dot's got a land claim round the Windorah area?

R Yeah. She's supposed to be getting a big grant for that too. So Shirl was sayin' this morning. Shirley Davidson can tell you more about that.

I So what do you see in the future for yourself, Alice?

R For me? If I wasn't so lazy, I'd get up and do something with me life but … they wanted to re-educate me but I don't like cities, I like a bit of freedom. I've worked all my life. I reared six children and put them through school. I'd like to do what I want to do now, and that's just sort of laze around. I do a lot of patchwork when I'm home, you know, for my grandkids and stuff like that.

I And what are you doing here in Mt Isa?

R At the moment I'm baby-sittin' till these kids … they've got a court case pending over George's ankle. His ankle is had it and he's tryin' to get somethin' out of the mines which is very hard. So that court case is still goin', I'm just tryin' to help 'em out so they can

work to get enough money to go to Brisbane for a court case. Why can't they have it here? They know the people have got no money. You know, like travelling expenses, like that. So he went to Townsville and they put it off again, so they'll have it in Brisbane this time. So that comes up next month.

I And do you do this kind of thing a lot? Like you've been here for several months.

R No, no, I don't. I've been up to Darwin and stayed with me daughter up there, stayed with me granddaughter in Townsville. I've been tripping around. I've got a daughter in town here, stay with her. I just divide my time, if I'm not doin' baby-sittin' like this. I had a week over at David's, a week up at Patsy's, and ... call me marmalade, I just spread myself around. Yeah.

I And how do you travel around these days?

R With me car.

I You've got a four-wheel-drive?

R Yeah. It's very clapped out but it still gets me from A to B. Just ... the boys said, 'Turn your cassette off, Mum, and listen to the motor sometimes'. 'Yes, dear.' Turn the cassette up and away you go.

I And do you still work on the mechanics of your car?

R Yeah. I do a fair bit of it, yeah. I can change a tyre, me oil, change me water, and that sort of stuff.

I You wouldn't change an axle these days?

R No, not on these modern things, I don't think. Just wait for help. I've got the what-a-name on the RACQ so they can come and do it for me.

I So, Alice, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think it's important that I understand to understand your life and, through that, women in the Channel Country?

R I reckon my lifestyle is very rough, very hard. You worked hard and it's just, I reckon it just proves that hard work don't kill anyone. And I still do it. I dig up my yard. I around home, into a smaller area. I still dig up half the yard at home.

I Now, I've forgotten exactly where we were up to. You were just saying hard work didn't hurt anyone.

R No, I don't think so. And all of the kids, children today, you know the teenagers, they get on my goat but I reckon fair is fair, eh? You've got to try and understand their point of view on things as well. They've got it rough compared to us, I reckon.

I Why is that?

R Because everything's just handed to them. They haven't got to work for a thing, you know, although Mum and Dad is working. Well, we always had Mum home, regardless, one way or the other, and we was always with Dad, I suppose. We worked hard but we had, you know, you sort of felt secure all the time. Now these children these days haven't got that, eh? My sons ... I've always been home for my children too. I babysat a lot as for extra money but I never left home.

I So when you say they get everything on a plate, what are you talking about?

R They get monetary things, like, but not much affection, I reckon, the children, and I don't think that's fair to them. That's my way of looking at it. They need Mum and Dad home to give 'em that little whack now and again and I'll give 'em that cuddle when they want it, and ... and that cuddle is important. We fight like cats and dogs, me and him, most of the time, but I think he loves me. His Mum says, 'They're goin' to hate you Nana'. I said, 'Yeah, well this is me. If they can't accept me like I am,' you know. It worked for me. I wasn't as rough on my children as they were rough on me. Now we've got a stock whip down the back or if you're in hand's reach, you just got that and, you know, just back-hand 'em. You didn't stand there and all the time. You didn't dare. You was told once and if you didn't take any notice, you'd get the whip. Often get the whip across the backside, and it hurts, through clothes and all.

I So who would whip you?

R Dad. If you didn't listen, that's what he ... he said, 'I'll tell you once, twice, you've got to live or die by these rules and that's it'. Which is what it's like in the country.

I Were you ever whipped by white people?

R No. They wouldn't dare whip us because they'd have to fight the whole family then. Mum as well as Dad.

I And tell me about your relationship with the Debney boys and Irene Debney.

R Irene Debney, yeah. Okay, yeah. Irene is nice but she was overworked and underpaid too, I think, like we were. The Debney boys. We used to outdo each other on horses, try to be the best camp drafter, or the best pacer, the best galloper. And me and Scott used to ... Ross used to argue the point over a horse here named Hook. Hook was a very fast trotter, you know, like trotting, like harness horses. I wanted Hook right or wrong but he'd never give me Hook, till the very last year when he got married, he felt sorry for me so he give me Hook. You could trot for miles on him, you know, and he wouldn't puff out, because he was just a pacer.

I So how did you know the Debney boys?

R How well?

I No, where did you get to know them?

R Well, Planet was an outstation of Arrabury, and we used to attend the musters together. They used to come out and muster there, we used to go in and muster there. We seen a lot of them, you know, a fair bit of them. Nulla was another base. You mustered all round Nulla from there, like Mount Leonard, Mooraberrie, and you'd sort of base there and everyone would take their own cattle home to their own property.

I So the Debneys lived at Arrabury?

R Arrabury, yeah, mmmm. So when you went in for groceries, you'd see 'em. They came out on messages and in car, mainly pack horse and things like that.

I And so Irene Debney, would she be racing you on horses as well?

R No. Irene didn't come to the camp very much. There you are again, see, that's the girlish thing. The girls stayed in the house. See, that was their home so she had to clean it, wash, organise home. But if we came up there, we was allowed to have lunch with them or tea with them. But you set the table, we had to set the table. 'Cause no doubt Irene would be

run off her feet and Irene had someone to do the laundry, I think that's all, for her. You was allowed to have a bed there if you wanted a bed in the house. Like I said, that was the attitude. Even in Windorah now, Crosses. You walk in the side and she's 'If you want a cup of tea, get it yourself on your way through. You know where the cakes are' and that sort of thing. But the other generation, they're very light-fingered. I don't know, why is this so. You couldn't, even my house, they'd come in the front door, I'd make sure they'd go out the front door. You can't let 'em walk through the house or they'll lift something on you. That's your own nephews, nieces and things.

I So you feel like you grew up in a society where there was a lot of trust, including between black and white?

R Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's true. I've had me nieces walk through the house there, and I won't tell you that on the tape, the other one, no. But ... and they lift things. Like, I can walk through Gladys's place. I walk through Marilyn's house, that's up the pub, in behind the bar and walk out the other side. They know you're not goin' to touch anything. And that trust, I reckon, is hard, you know, it'd be hard to win back if you lost it. I wouldn't dare take anything. You can get in the bar sometimes and chuck a beer over to whoever wants one out the back. It's no problem.

I Now, going back into the nineteenth century, there were things like there were massacres of Aboriginal people, and probably of whites too, round the and Windorah area, there's, I want to say black hole, but anyway, does that history ever weigh on your heart, that kind of ...?

R I think it was quite horrible out ... they were grown men, and men alone, that used to round 'em up like cattle and shoot them. I reckon that's disgusting. You know, they could separate the men from the women and shoot the men, maybe, if that's, they were frightened of. But then the women might have been as vicious, I wouldn't know. But the young children and everything else, well they couldn't be bothered with them, I suppose, you know.

I Did that history ever weigh on your heart?

R That's all, I think it's very terrible that that happened, like that, when they came in and just ... why couldn't they organise things to cope, you know, together, work together on it?

Language was a barrier, I suppose, but then most likely they was in too big of a hurry to grab a lot of land quickly. But still, it's the mighty dollar, isn't it?

I So the word 'reconciliation', does that mean anything to you?

R It means a lot to me for the Stolen Generation. I'd like to see something done for them because a lot of those children suffered a lot, I think. But then you've got the European you know, the what's-a-name, what did they call 'em when they sent 'em out by the thousands?

I Oh, the English.

R Yeah, yeah. They've got those as well. Isn't it sad to see how they got on, poor things? I know my aunt, that's Dad sister, isn't it. I call him Dad because he practically reared us. His sister was taken from Glengyle to Windorah because Windorah was a way station where they could put them on a cart. She rode from there, a nine-year-old, with pack horses, and a policeman, of course, at Windorah. Oh, it takes me a good six hours in the car, or more, so you can say that's two or three days for her to ride across there so they can put her on a [stage coach?] to send her to a mission, Woorabinda or somewhere, when Father died. See, that was cruel too. Well, why couldn't ... they must have had cars in them days, and why couldn't a lady go with her, eh? There's this little girl with all these men again.

I And did that aunt ever come back to Windorah?

R She came back to Arrabury, yes. She died. She's buried over in Longreach now, that old lady, and she was only a little tiny thing, eh. Little tiny pigeon-toed woman. She used to tell us girls, 'You'll suffer when you get old. You'll suffer, all this horseback riding and falling off'. 'We know, aunt', we know now. My back aches. The bottom is your biggest part on girls and so you'll hit the ground on your bottom.

I Last question. Tell me what are some of your mother's sayings, or your father's sayings. Like, what were the kind of things they'd say to you over and over?

R Ummm. They used to tell us to be honest, mainly. You be honest and fair about everything. And Dad's favourite saying was that no one was any good. He wouldn't be any good as long as his bottom pointed towards the ground. That was ... I even say that to

the stepbrothers now, 'You'll be no good as long as your bum points towards the ground', you know. That means he's got to be dead before he'll be any good.

I How about your Mum? What would she say?

R Mum used to say the less we knew the better off we'd be, about everything, because she was one of those generation where they was taken as children. But she never told us they used to hide her, but one of my friends told me they used to roll her in a swag and sit on her, and if she sneezed or something, it was all up and gone, you know. They'd unroll the swag and take her. 'Cause she was lighter than I am. And I think that was Mum's problem, see.

I So your Mum wanted to hide you from that ugly ...?

R Yeah, mmmm. She never told us much about it. The less we knew the better off we were. That was her favourite saying on that issue. Peg might be able to tell you more 'cause Peg looked after Mum in later life. Like I said, m and Mum were like cats and dogs. We used to fight all the time. We never got along very well, but God I can understand a lot of the things now.

I And what are the sayings that you've said to your kids over and again?

R Oh, a bit of hard work never killed you. I'm still going. And another thing, be careful with your money. Spend it wisely is the main thing. We had a few bankers in the family through boarding school. Joey was a banker

I I'm about to run out of tape.

R Mmmm. Hard work never killed anyone. That's the best one.

END OF INTERVIEW