INTERVIEW WITH EDNA JESSOP/ZIGENBINE
Updated 15 December 2009. Timecode matches tapes 01_BC_DV and 02_BC_DV.
Topics are in Bold

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

TAPE 1 - SIDE A
TC from 01_BC_DV

So this is Tape 1 of the Film of the Research Shoot for Channels of History. Its 2nd June 2000, Trish FitzSimons recording, camera Erica Addis on camera. This is DAT Tape 1 and it's Camera Tape 1. DAT Tape 1 will cover Camera Tapes 1 and 2. And it's going to be an interview with Edna Jessop/Zigenbine.

I Tell me what your name was when you were born and where you were born and when. Just so we get the facts straight.

R Well, I was born in Thargomindah in the bottom end of Queensland and my name was Edna Zigenbine then. My Mum and Dad were Zigenbines. Harry and Ruby Zigenbine their name was. Now I'm Edna Jessop. I don't know what …

I So Zigenbine, is that a Polish name? What's its history?

R Oh, I think it's got a bit of Polish and German. German, I think, mainly. German, I think Dad was German.

I Do you think your Dad had been born in Germany?

R No, my Dad was born in Charters Towers and Mum was born in Sydney but Mum's got a bit of Polish in her, I think. [Hammistead??] is Polish, I think.

I So how had your parents landed up in Thargomindah?

R Well they met in Hughenden. Dad was working in Hughenden and Mum was working at the hospital in Cloncurry. She was wardsmaid there. And they met there and they got married and then they went droving, and they were droving for Sidney Kidman, and that's how they ended up down south. Dad was droving for Sidney Kidman and some of us were born down there. Me and Cathy, both sisters, we were both born in Thargomindah and Eileen was born in Marree but the other boys, I think they started to come back … one was born in Towers, I think. Oh, they were born everywhere. Andy was born in the bush. One brother. And my sister, last sister, she was born in the bush.

I So when you say you were born at Thargomindah, do you know any details of that? Like, in a hospital or with a midwife at home, or ...?

R No, in hospital, I think. I don't know. I never, ever found out off my Mum. But no, in hopsital, I think.

I And what year was that?

R It must have been 1926. That's my birthdate, 1926.

I And so what do you reckon is your earliest memory, Edna?

R Oh, I don't know. We remembered a bit about Dajarra when I went to school there. I started to go to school there but I never got out of A-B-C. And then Dad shifted us down to a place down near, down the out in . He left us there for a while.

I What's that place? I can't catch that name.

R [Butry??] Siding it was. The common, between Dajarra and Duchess. He left us there for a long time and he was still droving. And we used to just spell our horses there at a common there. Spell our plant there. And then in 1942 we went to Wave Hill. Started droving for Lord Vestey droving out that way.

I So that was, you were in your mid-twenties then?

R Oh, no, when we first went out I was only … I wasn't 16 the first trip we come in with. I turned 16 at Moorestone the first load of cattle we brought in. We … then he kept droving for old Vestey then for a good long time, anyway, a few years. But me and Dad, we drove, we drove for Banka Banka, we drove for Western Australia, we took one mob from Western Australia in, brought them in to Dajarra. That was the second last mob Dad done, he was sick, poor old fella.

I And so while you were a child, Edna, you Mum was having kids along the way. Would she stay in town while your Dad droved, or would your Mum travel with your Dad?

R Mum went with Dad all the time, travelling with Dad. I suppose she stayed in hospital long enough, for a couple of days, I suppose, but she reared all us kids on the road, in the bush. We were all reared in the bush.

I So what do you think, like if you were to just bring up in your mind, a day in your mother's life. Say, when you were five or six, what do you think that day would have

looked like? Because it's got a whole rhythm to it, droving, that I think those of us who haven't done it don't really understand and I'd love you to tell me about what the rhythm of life on the road would have been when you were a kid.

R Well, I don't remember that much about the rhythm. I was a little toddler but Mum used to have to do the cooking and on the road, you're out in the bush, eh? And you've got a tent, that's all. You've got to rig a tent up to sleep in. Mum used to. But we were always, you know, out in the bush, well I suppose we'd done our … Mum done our washing and everything. You had to do it all in the bush and just from day to day, you're just travelling all the time, with cattle. Or if you wasn't travelling with cattle, you were travelling with a plant, going back to get cattle, but you're on the move all the time.

I When you talk about 'plant', what do you mean? I don't understand what droving plant is, actually.

R Well, it's a mob of horses. Well, I'll say. We had 60 head of horses, we had, my Dad had a wagonette, Cobb & Co. That was when we were little fellas. And that was when we were down south, down the bottom end of Queensland, he had this Cobb & Co. coach and then when we left to go to the Territory we had a rubber-tyred cart and we had about 60 head of horses, but if you've got a cart you don't need so many packs but if you haven't got a cart you need a lot of packs.

I By 'packs', you mean pack horses?

R Packs. Yes, pack horses. Well, when we had a cart, we had about 12 packs, I suppose, and we still had the packs because there were so many of us, we had to carry the gear. But we always had round about the 12 or 14 packs and when we didn't have the cart well it was still the same, you know, we always had the packs to carry our gear in. The swags and tucker and stuff.

I So was your Mum looking after you kids and cooking for everybody else on the road? Like, the other drovers?

R For the men, yes, what Dad had working for him, yes. There was, Mum used to do the cooking.

I So what sort of time do you reckon your Mum would have got up in the morning when you were on the road?

R Well, the cook had to get up at 4 o'clock. The cook and horse tailer got up at 4 o'clock. The cook had to cook the breakfast and about 5 o'clock you'd call the rest of the men and they had their breakfast and took the cattle off camp.

I And what would breakfast consist of?

R Oh, I suppose a stew or steak and eggs. I don't know, we never had any eggs. We just had steak and gravy. Mum used to cook steak and gravy or make a stew or curry or something like that. That's all.

I Would you have milk when you were on the road?

R Oh, we had only powdered milk. Powdered milk in tins. Oh, we always had plenty of tucker. Plenty of meat. We used to kill our own bullocks. But we always had plenty of tucker but we never had any … we very seldom had butter. We had butter sometimes. You'd come to a store and we'd get butter but you'd run out through the bloody, along the road you'd run out and go without.

I Do you ever remember being hungry?

R Oh, I don't think so. Not really hungry. Never were, we were always … we seemed to have always have plenty of tucker and stuff. Mum and Dad were pretty good.

I So your parents, your father would have owned all these horses and this plant?

R Yeah, Dad owned them all.

I He would have borrowed money from a bank or …?

R Oh, no, no. I don't think so. No. He gets it from when he was droving. He got money from droving cattle. When we … for a few years we used to kangaroo shoot when there was no cattle, when Dad finished droving. Him and my brothers, the eldest brothers, used to go kangaroo shooting till the next year when the droving started again, we'd go droving again.

I So what time of the year would the droving happen in?

R Oh, this time now. Winter time. Cold. In the cold weather, because it's better for the cattle. In the cold weather.

I So then your Dad would spend the summertime shooting ‘roos.

R Yeah.

I And did you ever take part in that at all, Edna?

R Kangaroo shooting? Oh, we used to do a little bit. We used to have to … they made us do all the hard work. We used to have to clean all the hides and peg them out and everything like that, mainly. That’s what we used to have to do. The brother, Jack, he was a good shot. Dad was a good shot and they used to do most of the shooting. They used to do it all, I suppose, but oh we used to do a little bit but we didn’t do much. We had to clean the hides and peg them out.

I Was it like you were expected to start working at a very young age, Edna, or did you spend a lot of your childhood playing?

R Oh, we had a lot of play. We would spend a lot of time playing because we didn’t have any bloody schooling. We didn’t have school to go to. We had a fair bit of play. But, I don’t know, we used to … it was pretty hard when you had cattle on the road, but it was a pretty easy life otherwise. Not much to do but when I grew up, when I got going I learnt to do leather work and I used to, me and Dad used to do all our own saddles and packs up, counter line them, make all our gear up until next year, ready for the road again.

I So what sort of things would you and your Dad make up?

R Oh, well, you’d counter line the saddles and packs and any broken bridles, and make hobbles, and get everything ready, and make our own hobbles. Neck straps and stuff for the horses.

I So that would be leather work and metal work together?

R Oh, no, it would be all leather work. Mainly leather work. Fixing hobbles and fixing packs up, or broken chains. You might have had to fix a broken hobble chain up with a link or something, but that’s all.

I And the leather work, would it be leather that came from the cattle you were droving or did you, you’d buy the leather? Like, where did the leather come from?

R Oh, we used to have to buy it. Buy the leather. Buy the sides of leather. Dad used to get it in sides, sides of harness leather from the shops. I don't know where he got it from but he got it, I suppose all the shops used to carry it them days because there were so many drovers, and had to keep leather on all the time. Have plenty of leather in their shops.

I And, Edna, it sounds like you and your Dad, because you were one of eight kids, weren't you?

R Mmmm.

I Were you and your Dad especially close?

R Oh, we were, I suppose, in the finish of our life we were because Cathy went away and married and Eileen was married and we were pretty close at the finish, in the last few years, me and Dad was.

I Your Dad was sick from when you were quite young, was he?

R Oh, no, he only started getting sick in … he had a bad fall coming down with a mob of [Elroy??] cows and fell over with him on watch one night, galloping. And he started to get sick, oh, oh I just forget when he started to get sick. I know he was pretty crook in 1950. He was very, very crook then. It must have been in the forties he started getting crook. The old injury just starts coming back to him. In 1950 was when he was very bad and in 1952 he done one more mob and then that was it, no more, he couldn't do any more. He had, I don't know what was wrong with him. He had a busted kidney and had a kidney taken out and he was in a pretty bad way. He used to suffer bad.

I So did you start to take over your Dad's responsibilities as he started to get sick?

R Yeah. I knew what to do. I always learnt what to do but … knew I had to do it, it was just the worry of doing things but I knew how to do things, but I just had to … oh, you'd just take over, I suppose, it's just a thing that comes to you and you've got to do it, and you've got to do it. And you go.

I And was it you, Edna, because you were the eldest, or because you were very close to your father?

R No, I wasn't the eldest. There was six older than me but they'd left Dad. Jack had left, Jack my second eldest brother, he had his own plant, and the oldest brother, he just went away, he didn't have any plant but he just went away. And Eileen, the eldest girl, she got married and then Cathy got married. And then there was only me and Dad and Andy, the brother younger than me, and Mum give it up in, I don't know what year Mum give it up, but in 1950 they were … oh, I don't know, I was working in Tennant Creek. Me and my brother Joe, he wanted to get away from Dad and he worked with a carpenter, and I went down to Tennant Creek, and I got a job at the hospital there. And in 1950 Dad rang me up and asked me would I come back. So I went back to him and then I stayed with him and then in 1952, and then I got married then and poor old Dad was in hospital all the time. I got married and then me and my husband took the plant over.

I So you would have been, what, 24, 25?

R Mmmm, I suppose about that. About that.

I So where did you meet your husband, Edna?

R In Winton. In Winton. We were doing a mob of Banker Bankers in there, me and Dad, in 1952.

I I don't understand what 'banker bankers' are. What's that?

R That was the name of the station. That was the name of the station. Banker Banker.

I And where abouts is Banker Banker?

R Out in the Territory, up from Tennant Creek. Between Tennant Creek and Newcastle Waters, on the side there. Oh, a bit off the bitumen there, it is. But Bedford, it's away out in Western Australia, Bedford. The 1950 mob we took from out there.

I So all this droving from Western Australia and Northern Territory to Queensland, what was that about? Like, why did you have to bring the stock to Queensland from Western Australia?

R Well, them days they didn't have road trains much, eh? They didn't have many road trains them days and it's just sort of come in in the late … oh I don't know when the road trains started to come in, in the sixties I think, they were coming in and then the droving sort of

went away. Took over the droving. There was no road trains in them days. There might have been a few, but not many.

I And so you were bringing the cows from Western Australia. Would they get … where would the cows actually …?

R Bullocks, they weren't cows. They were bullocks. They were bullocks, they weren't cows.

I Right. And where would the bullocks get slaughtered?

R Well, I don't know, in the meatworks, I suppose. They went down, we trucked them in Dajarra and that was the Bedford mob, and we trucked them in Dajarra. A hell of a lot of cattle got trucked in Dajarra, all of Vestey, I think they just went down to the meatworks. I don't know where they went, what meatworks they were killed in, but they went down to the meatworks and got killed. I don't know which one, though, mate I don't know.

I So it was usually Dajarra would be the end of your droving trips?

R Yeah, we trucked a lot of cattle in Dajarra and when we started droving for Lord Vestey, we used to bring a mob in from Wave Hill, take them into Moorestone, up near Camooweal, and then get a mob of fats from there into Dajarra and truck them.

I And what's a 'fat', Edna?

R Bullocks are fat bullocks. When they're fat. When they spell them, you know, and get fat.

I So before you start droving them?

R Mmmm. Yeah, when they're the best … well, when they're on the station they pick out the best cattle that they can, you know, the fattest bullocks, and they make a mob up. And, say, if I brought a mob in, I might bring a mob in this year and they'd let them go, spell them, and next year they'd be fresh and fat and they'd send them on the road again for fats. To the meatworks for fats. Called them 'fats'.

I Was the droving always about bringing the cows from the station to the railhead so they could be slaughtered, or were you sometimes, like for Vesteys or Kidman, moving the bullocks from one property to another?

R No, no. That was done a bit on the station. Yeah, that was done a bit. You might bring a mob in. I don't know, we never done it but … we used to do it from Wave Hill. We'd bring a mob from Wave Hill and we'd put them on Moorestone. Moorestone's another station that belonged to Vesteys. And they'd leave them there, let them go there and spell them and then probably next year or the year after, when them bullocks got fat, they'd send them to Dajarra and truck them and they'd go on to the meatworks then. Truck them and they'd go down to the meatworks. Where, I don't know where they went, but we used to just put them on the train and … By the time they walked from Wave Hill, the poor old buggers were always poor and tired. So they'd leave them spell for a while.

I How about you? How long a spell would you get between droving trips? Because you must have been pretty tired at the end of those trips, too.

R Oh, yeah. You get used to it. Get used to it. The old horses get a bit tired but … oh, well, we'd have, say we delivered before Christmas, we'd have till next year before we'd start again. Oh, we'd have a few months, I suppose.

I So over the hottest time of the year, you'd rest.

R Yeah.

I And that's when … how old do you think you would have been when your Mum stopped going on the track?

R Oh, I was already in my twenties when Mum stopped droving. It must have been in … I just don't know because I wasn't interested in times and dates them years. I just … times and dates. I know, it must have been in … I've got my other date up there, I should have got it out, I suppose, but I think it was 1946 or something, and Mum and I went down to Tennant Creek for a while but she gave it away, oh I don't know love, I just can't remember what year what she give it away.

I Don't worry about that. That doesn't matter at all. While we're just talking sort of about dates, did the depression, I mean you would have been a child all during the depression, and there was a bad drought, too, wasn't there, in the late twenties?

R Yeah. There was. We were down at [Butry??] then, when the depression was on, because we used to see lots of old, lots of people, lots of bagmen we used to call them, poor

buggers, then. Bagmen. And we used to have to dig for water and everything. We had no water, local water, we used to have to dig for it. Dig soaks in the river.

I Because there was a drought on at the same time as the depression?

R Mmmm. Yeah. Well, I suppose it would have been, might have been too. Yeah. But it was a drought anyway. And when the drought come, we used to always have to dig for water. Dig soaks for water, water the horses.

I So how would you know where to dig, Edna?

R Oh, I don't know, you'd just sort of work it out when you get into a river. Work it out where you think water's pretty close. You seemed to work it out. You seemed to know. I don't know. You'd pick a place where there's not much sand, or something, I don't know how we used to do it.

I Can you get good water out of a soak like that or is it always pretty dusty?

R Oh, yeah. No, beautiful water. Beautiful clear water, out of a sandy creek you can. Out of a sandy creek it's beautiful water. Beautiful and clear. But we never had much. When we lived … Dad always stayed at [Butry??] and we never had any bloody luxuries. We never had a house to live in, we only had tents and …

I How many tents would your family of 10 have lived in in [Butry??]?

R Oh (laughs). I don't know, only a couple, I suppose. A couple or three. We had one big tarpaulin. We used to get under that. We had beds and things.

I What were your beds made from?

R Oh, I don't know. I think Dad … I think we did have a couple of beds there. Dad must have got them from somewhere, I don't know where, but we had a couple. Some of us had beds. Some of us had swags. Just lay on the ground. Didn't have any mattress, you don't need them when you're a kid anyway, really.

I And, Edna, I think I said in my letter that I talked to Isabel Tarrago. Do you remember Topsy Hansen?

R Oh, actually, I don't know. A lot of women come and talk to me. I can't remember names.

I Topsy Hansen's an Aboriginal woman that was the station cook at Glen Ormiston for a long time.

R Yeah, well I don't remember that at all. We drove for Glen Ormiston, me and my husband drove for Glen Ormiston, not my father. My father never, not in my day, he never took Glen Ormiston cattle. But me and my husband drove for Glen Ormiston cattle and we took fats. But I don't understand that letter because I can't … I can understand the letter but I can't understand where she reckoned we wanted tucker because we always had our own tucker. Unless we wanted a bag of … we might have wanted a bag of sugar or something like that, but I can't see .. because when you go, when we went for a mob of cattle we always had plenty of tucker because you fill your packs up before you went to get a mob of cattle and cattle. The only thing you want off the station might be, you might want a bag of flour or bloody a bit of meat or something. It might have been meat I wanted. I might have asked a bloke for meat.

I See, it was Isabel who told me this story, Edna, is about … oh, she's 48, so she herself doesn't remember this but it was her mother, Topsy Hansen, who was the Aboriginal woman that was the station cook at Glen Ormiston.

R Yeah, it might have been meat. It might have been meat. I might have wanted meat off them because sometimes you go to a station and when we used to go to a station, we'd want meat. Because if you didn't get meat off them, you'd have to kill a bullock and then you'd have to kill one of theirs and then you'd get in trouble by killing it, until you got delivery of your own mob. Once you got your own mob you were right, you had them to kill when you wanted meat. But that's the only thing I can see I wanted off them was meat. I might have wanted meat off them and they wouldn't give them to you. It's something they wouldn't do, either. Station people wouldn't give it to you.

I What would they say?

R Oh, you're bloody lousy, I suppose. Reckon they never had it, or something. But you only wanted meat if you were going for a mob of cattle. You wouldn't want meat once you got on the road with a mob of cattle because you had your own meat.

I So it would be when you were waiting to collect your mob?

R Yeah. It must have been when we were waiting to collect the mob that I asked them. It must have been meat. It wouldn't have been anything else, I don't think. But we would have had plenty of tucker.

I Did you work a lot with Aboriginal people, Edna?

R We always had Aboriginal people with us, on the road and droving, out in the Territory. Old blackfellas, poor old fellas. But I liked them. We used to like them. We used to call them lubras, the old gins, but I never found anything wrong with them in them days. It's only today they've got too much bloody white blood in them today, that's why they think they're good. But the old blackfellas, they're good old fellas. We always had them on the road with us.

I So would you have Aboriginal women on the road with you as well?

R No, not Aboriginal women. We only had boys. Black boys, we used to call them. We always had them on the road, with the Territory mob anyway.

I Did you ever run across Ruby De Satge on the road?

R Yeah, I knew Ruby.

I Because she was an Aboriginal woman that droved, wasn't she?

R Yeah. She was a good woman. She was a good woman, a good hard worker. She's dead now, poor old thing.

I Yeah, she died just very recently, didn't she?

R Mmmm.

I So when you had Aboriginal boys on your droving team, were they paid wages the same as the other drovers, or how did that work?

R They weren't paid as much money, poor buggers. We fed them. We always fed them, give them clothes, and looked after them there, but the law them days was that when you finished with the boys you wrote a cheque out for them and you give it to the policeman, or whoever, policeman at wherever we were, at the town, and they'd take their share out of it. I don't know what they used to do, but they'd take money out of it and then give the poor

old blackfella just a couple of dollars. I don't know how much they got but they didn't get much but … I don't know how it worked them days, really. It shouldn't have been done like that but that's the way they used to do it. We always looked after our old boys.

I And were they separated out in the droving group at all or were you all together?

R No, they were separated because they were dirty. They never used to wash and they had their own camp. They had their little camp over from us a little bit and used to make their own fire. Had their own swags. We used to feed them and cut their tucker off, always cut their tucker off for them.

SIDE 2

R But they were fed well, our boys were, anyway. Some of them might have had it hard but our old fellas never. What we ate, they ate. Everything we ate, they ate. Sweets, if we had sweets, they'd have it.

I What sort of sweets would you have on the road?

R Oh, I don't know. We used to make roly-poly, jam roly-polies, plum puddings and dough boys and oh, lots of things. Good tucker, always had good tucker. Make steamed puddings and stuff like that.

I Did you ever run across Bill Gorringe on the road? He was droving for Kidman down the southern part of the Channel Country.

R No, I wouldn't have. No, I would have been too young to remember that. I would have been too young to remember that. I don't remember much when we were down that country. I remember only when we come back up.

I So, Edna, you were often the only woman or almost the only woman on the road?

R Oh, no, there were a lot of women on the road. A lot of women worked with their husbands and a lot of women in them days, I think, worked with their husbands. Cooked and everything like that. But how I come to get, is when I took the plant over. I seemed to be the only boss woman in charge of a mob of cattle. That's how they started with me. Because I don't think there was any boss or drover women as they call them. But I was in charge, more or less in charge of a mob, you know. If you had a droving plant and you'd

put me in charge of it, well that's what Dad done, he put me in charge of his plant and I had to take over the plant till he come back. And that's how they started all these stories about me.

I What were those stories?

R Oh, all them write-ups they put in about me, because … there was a fellow at Newcastle Waters, the postman at Newcastle Waters started it all.

I Tell me about some of those write-ups.

R Oh, my dear, they started in 1950 when I brought the cattle in, when Dad got sick in the middle of the there. There was a hawker bloke come to us one night, Mr ah, oh what is it, I can't remember his name, Top Springers, he had a store out in Top Spring and he was coming in and I asked him would he take Dad to hospital. Dad was bleeding – he used to bleed from his penis and he used to have to block himself up with cotton wool to stop himself from bleeding – and I asked him to take Dad away for me, bring him into Newcastle. Well, that just left us in the middle of the and I just took over the plant. It just come naturally. I had my own brother cooking and I had three blackfellas, another bloke, then when we got there you had one blackfella pissed off and left me, so we were just a bit short-handed then but we got along and Dad come back to us then a few weeks later.

I And did you ever get much comment, you said there was a number of articles, but on the road, on the job, how was being a woman as a boss drover different than being a man and what kind of reaction to it did you get? You were a young woman, too, weren't you?

R I don't think there was any reaction. There was just … I don't think there was any different reaction. The men just kept on working as the way they go, they know what to do, you don't have to tell them. You don't have to tell a man once he gets on the road to go and catch his horse or go out to the cattle. If he's laying down sleeping, you kick him and get him out but there's just natural, you just go along and … I just had broken in, everything was … everybody knew what to do. I had two old blackfellas and they were two bloody old fellas. They stayed with me. I don't know, I don't think there was much difference really, but I suppose if … I didn't find anything different anyway, I just went on. I knew where to get the cattle through so we just, it's just a thing you've got to do.

I Did you feel like you had to, in some way, act like a man or dress like a man to do a man's job? Was there any of that sort of feeling?

R No. We always dressed like a man anyway but it didn't make any difference to the way I felt. Only you get worried about things, I suppose. That's all, I only got a bit worried but I never, nothing …

I What do you remember worrying about in the early days when you were boss droving?

R Oh, well, you worry about bloody men walking, leaving you, and you've got 1550 bullocks on the bloody road and walking, and you've got a plant of horses and you've got no men, it's a bit hard but I don't think I thought of that thing. I don't think I thought of these sort of things. I think I just went on, doing my work from day to day. I never, I don't think I thought of anything really. I just can't remember that much. One blackfella, I was a bit wild about him walking away but apart from … the others, I used to have a few fights with my brother Andy but we were always fighting, me and him.

I Was he your younger brother or your older brother?

R No, he was a couple of years younger than me but, oh he was alright, poor bugger, but he used to just do things that used to make me wild sometimes.

I Like what? What would you and Andy fight about?

R Well, we might fight about, we had a couple of fights over not camping where I told him to camp and, you know, things like that. If I told him to camp over there, he'd camp over there, just do things that I didn't …

I So was that about you establishing your authority as 'I'm the boss'?

R Yeah, I think that probably might have been what the problem was.

REMAINDER OF INTERVIEW TRANSFERRED FROM VIDEO (NOT DAT)

VHS1 01.45.46.14 to 02.12.48.20 **TC from 02_BC_DV**

I - sometimes resenting you being the boss drover or whatever, let's talk about now with your husband. You said you met your husband in Winton.

R Mmm.

I How did you meet him and, and how did you and he end up then running a droving plant?

R Oh, it's a bit of a sad story in a way because ah when I was – Dad left me. This is my side of it. My father left me see and I had nobody to help me really. And um anyway I met Johnny, me husband and ah I thought oh well, everything'd be good and ah he was, done a lot of droving himself. He knew what to do. So I reckoned it'd be alright and so um I ended up marrying him and Dad, Dad did the wrong thing by me. He left his – he left the droving plant to me in his Will. That's all he had anyway in the world. But that was – he did the wrong thing by me then, my father did. He did a terrible thing to me I think. Because he left me with the droving plant and um – I, I had to pay people money. I had to pay people money that he promised in the family, I said if I promised you some money, and when I died I had to give it to you, you know, like out of your Will and um I had to give my brother money. I had to give my sister money. And I had to look after him until he died. Ah which was a lot of money all the time, giving him money, money, money, money.

So I reckon when he left the plant to me, I reckon - Johnny was my husband now, was my husband, would've been a good mate but anyway we got on well – along. But he was a bugger for drinking and we just used to fight a lot but only over grog. But he was a good man and ah – how the – eh?

I So what was your life with your husband? What was your life with Johnny?

R Oh it was alright. It wasn't too bad but – only for his grog. Only for drinking it was alright. Then we had a baby and things didn't alter. Didn't change much. And ah I dunno what was wrong with me. I was a, sort of a stubborn bugger. I'd pushed away me own when I was sort of – I had a mind of me own always I guess but – so I came here. I got me kid. I wanted to give me kid education that I didn't have and I did the wrong thing by myself there. I did the right thing by him but – by Jacky – me son. I came and bought this place and give him education and – but in the meantime, my husband took me plant down at

Winton and sold it on me. Sold me horses and me truck. I didn't get nothing out of it. I ended up with nothing. So Dad done the wrong thing by me there. Poor old fella. He left the Will to me but – but that's my side of it anyway. That's the way I feel about it but – then I came here and bought the house and I've been here ever since. I've just got a – I was lucky I got that job in the Council and it was great.

I What was your job?

R Pound keeping horses – pound keeping. Just – mustering stray getting in ….. stray on the street, like horses or cattle or goats or anything like that, I'd pick up and pound them. Put 'em in the yard. Leave 'em there 'til someone come and claimed them.

I So what was it – what were the kind of animals you were mostly impounding?

R Horses mainly. Horses mainly. They were the mainly thing that, that's roaming the streets but I had goats and I had bloody cattle, a few cattle while I was on the job. But um it was great. Only that they ah the Council done the wrong thing by me. They retired me when I didn't want to retire. It just ended my life more than anything. I had to give me horses – get rid of me horses because I couldn't afford to feed 'em and I just sort of ended me – I don't know what I could call it. Buggered me life anyway.

I So Edna, going back to that decision, to give up droving, to move to Mt Isa – and that, that was when you and your husband separated as well?

R Yeah.

I You said –

R We more or less separated then and we were almost, already separated then and he went into Winton, he delivered the cattle we had on the road and he sold, delivered the cattle and then he sold all the plant and then drunk all the money. Drunk the money that he got for the plant and come back here and that was it.

I So you'd had to pay out your brother and sisters their bit of the inheritance –

R Yeah.

I And then your husband –

R Yeah.

I Sold the plant and drank away the money?

R Yeah. That's the way it went. But he ah -

I So you said that it was the right decision for your son but the wrong decision for you, coming back to Mt Isa?

R Well it was right for him I suppose because he got education out of it. But I lost out of it because I got nothing out of it but I still, you know I did things out of it. I got a job and I was alright. I never looked back really. I always had work and I've always been pretty steady with money and I got along alright but I just lost all me horses and me truck and everything. It just went. Don't even, don't know even who bought it. He just sold the lot.

I And how was it for you moving to, to live in one spot after always travelling?

R Oh, it wasn't too bad. I had Mum here with me for a while. She was with me. It wasn't too bad. I didn't think it was anyway. I got a bit of work and doing a few saddles up for people and a bit of leather gear. I got, I counterlined a few saddles for the stations and – and I used to take in washing and ironing for the truckies and get a bit of money that way 'til I got the job pound keeping. And when I got the job pound keeping I was right. I had the horses. I still had a few horses on Enleigh **?** Station out here. A couple of – a few young horses. Unbroken stuff. They're lucky they weren't in the plant. Oh, they were just unbroken stuff and when I got the job pound keeping, I went out and got them and broken 'em in. Broke the horses in that I – the young horses I had out there and broke 'em in and had them then for working horses for meself here. Sold what I didn't want and kept a couple of good horses for myself.

I So Edna ….. life droving, would you describe yourself as loving the land? Or is that a ridiculous concept? Like how would you describe yourself as, as feeling about this land of Western Queensland and the Northern Territory?

R Ooh as far as I could, with me and my son, it was great! It was great! It was a great life. I, I used, we used to like it, you know. We enjoyed being in the bush. It was a great life. But he, we always – I don't know what I could say there because it was just a good life and we all – nearly always together and always had something to do. But um –

I You referred to your sister getting pregnant when she was young. I mean, there were many many more white men than white women. Did you feel yourself kind of under pressure sexually a lot?

R No. Never worried me. Cause Dad always kept an eye on us and um – no, it didn't seemed, I don't know, it just didn't seem to worry us. We just went along with the flow, you know? Just – probably chase good sorts but – we could find. We've got to get away from the old fella, old Dad, but if Dad wasn't around but we had our sling I suppose but –

I Your sling? Like your sling shot?

R Yeah. We had our boyfriends but not known to Dad but Dad kept an eye on us.

I What were some of your father's sayings Edna? What were the things that he'd kind of say to you about life?

R Oh I don't think can remember them the buggers. I don't know.

I Or your Mum.

R Oh poor old Mum. I don't know whether she had any sayings either. I don't think – I don't – you know when you're young, you don't seem to worry about things like that, that goes through the old people's lives you know? You just – you don't seem to have time to worry about the poor old things. You just - I don't know. Dad used to – he always called me 'girl' and I had a nickname 'Muggins'. I had that, that was a name of mine. Muggins. I had that for years. And he used to call me 'girl'. For Christ sake girl, do that right or do something right, you know, but you know? But ah – we'd have, we'd, me and Dad'd have a row and Dad, Dad would say to me you, you're too much like me girl, he'd say. You've got too bad of a temper like me. We could, he could never win an argument with me, Dad couldn't. ….. …..

I You were tough?

R Oh yeah. I had to be I suppose but I always used to beat him arguments. Yeah. You're too much like me he'd say. But oh I don't think we had any slangs. Oh we probably had 'em but I can't remember them.

I Did you have friends on the track?

R Oh yeah, we had our friends I suppose. We had, we had ah – no, we never had money. We had friends when we come to town and I suppose we had friends but I dunno. We, we were always mates on the road. We had to be mates. We worked with one another. We always had to be pretty good – you know, get along easy. Get along together good. Me and me sister Cathy were very close, 'til she got married. We were always close. Right up – way back and I could just remember me and her. We were very close together, one another. But ah –

I So when she married and you were boss drover, did you miss having other women around or the men around were your mates?

R No I don't think so. I had – I don't know how I went then the ….. I often think it myself how I felt but I um I had a lot of worry I suppose but I just sort of went along as you go from day to day. You just had to do it. It was just had – the jobs had to be done. You just had to do it right and you had to get the cattle there. You couldn't just walk away and leave 'em. The cattle had to be fed and watered and watched and you had to get 'em there. And that was your job. You didn't have time to ah worry about anything else or friends or mates or anything like that. As long as you got on with your people, that you were working with you. As long as you got on with your men, they were working for you. You didn't fight with them. It was only me own brother I fought with but he, we used to always fight. Me and him. Since we were little fellas.

I And financially, you'd get paid according to how many, how many bullocks you could get to Dajarra would you?

R Yeah, we got paid ah so much per mile per head. We used to get paid by oh per – you know, so many mile, a mile a head – something per head a mile or something. I just forget how to put it now. But we got paid so much a mile, it was, you were paid, a head for bullocks. Or whatever you were droving. What beast you were droving.

I And would they count them literally every one and work out how many you'd used as killers or it – or it –

R Oh they always put killers in for you. They always give you ah, always give you 7 or 8 killers. When you took delivery. But half the time you wouldn't kill 'em anyway 'cause you had to keep trying to keep as many as you could. You'd kill somebody else's wild

bullock if you could find a good fat one. On a station you never killed your own anyway unless you really had to.

I Because you were going to get paid for how many you could get to the rail head.

R Yeah, how many – how many that you delivered. Yeah. How, how much a head you see, you had to get your number there.

I And would they give you some of the money before they started?

R I don't know how, how that went. I think that er see you only wasn't, wasn't the boss when we took delivery. You only took over me after but I think you um you knew what you were going to get I suppose. I suppose and you used – you had to, you had to eat. You had always had to have tucker. You always – you'd get a load of tucker to, to take you from there to there – where you were going, you know?

I I guess what I was thinking is, you had to pay wages along the way and –

R Oh yeah. Road wages. Yeah. You had to pay wages. Well there was always money. I think that um er the fellow from the station did put money in your bank, so much in your bank. So if a man pulled out on you, you had enough money in there to pay him wages, you know? But by the time you got to the end of the road, well – the end of the trip, well you had plenty of money in there then because – when you finished up your trip, you'd, you used to have to pay all your men off. Like other - any other job.

I And Edna, did you have to deal when you were droving, with floods in the Channel Country here? Like the Georgina flooding or anything like that?

R Oh we had it going out with – before cattle but we never had any trouble coming in with cattle. With – well we had rain. We had a lot of – a few times rain but terrible nights, it storms at night time. While we were on the road, going along in the day time but oh, we used to have a few rainy nights but no big floods you know? But we had a few rainy nights. Bloody rainy nights.

I And then you'd just batten down in your tent and just ride it out?

R Oh you had a tarpaulin. You always had a big – we had a big tarpaulin. We'd put it over – well, when we had pack, when you had packs. Well you'd just cover them up as most, best

you could. And got under your bloody swag cover but if we had a truck, well you had your tarpaulin over your truck and got underneath the truck when it rained but you had to be out there with cattle. You had to stay out there with the cattle to keep 'em on camp. No matter what kind of weather, your lightning, hail or bloody shine, you had to stay out there with the cattle to keep them on camp. So they wouldn't get away on you.

I And so what would be involved at night? What was the work at the night, in the night, in a droving camp? Wet or dry?

R Well you had to do a watch. You had a, if you had 5 men, you had – or 4 men – you had 2½ hours to watch. If you were shorthanded, you might have to go to 3½ hours. But you watch. Everyone had a turn at watching. Everyone did their turn of watching. You used to have to go – you had a night horse. All of you had night horses. We used to call 'em night horses. Tie 'em up, poor old things. And everyone done their round. They used to have to ride around and round the cattle to keep 'em on camp. They always laid down for you. It was just like putting them in a yard. They got used to it, you know, at the finish. They used to come on a camp in the afternoon and all lay down and then you'd just have to take your turn and watch 'em. You just rode around and round 'em and keep 'em on camp. Anything poked away.

I And did you ever have cows that stampeded?

R Yeah. Oh yeah. We had a few stampedes. Bullocks. Had a couple of rushes of them.

I So you call them rushes. Tell me the worst one. What was your worst moment droving with a, with a rush?

R Oh well, the worse night we ever had was ah was ah other side of Newcastle Waters with rain. It was raining there – bad rain. We had a terrible night. And -you couldn't see. Couldn't see nuthin. Only time you'd see the bullocks was when the lightning flashed and they rushed in toward the bull ….. scrub. Me and me sister was on watch. We stopped 'em before they got to the scrub but oh you just got to yell and scream and scream and yell and – the best you can and – just hope for the best to block 'em. But we lost a few that night. We lost 70 I think off the lead but Dad – me father and me sister went oh next day and tracked 'em down and brought 'em back. Brought 'em back. That was on the black soil at Newcastle Waters. It was a terrible night, that was.

I So do you remember at moments like that, terror? Is that the right –

R Oh yeah it would be I s'pose. If 1500 bullocks are rushing. Heading for a bloody bull….. scrub. It's a bit terrorising. You don't know if you're gonna stop 'em or not. And you can't see. You can't see a foot in front of you. All you can – all you go by is sound. Sound of the cattle.

I You can't see because of the dust?

R You can't see because of the dark. The dark and the rain. It was raining, pelting down rain and thunder and lightning. And the only time you seen the cattle was when the lighting struck and you used to have to go by sound. And the poor horse had to too. They, they could see I suppose. They're born to see in the dark but them poor buggers, they had to, they, they knew what to do. You used to have to sit down and yell and scream to try and make the bullocks turn. Turn 'em off the scrub or wherever they was – turn 'em back on to the camp.

I And in that kind of crisis, was being female any different than being male? Either in how you saw it yourself or in what other people would say to you? You know, like –

R Oh, I don't know. Don't think so. I don't think so there because you, you don't know one another's feelings really. It was, I, I suppose when you're born to do it, it just comes natural. You just – you don't think these things when you're out there. You don't think of – when you're young, you don't think of these sort of things. You just go along with the flow. Day after day, and it's only when you get old you start thinking. What happened and what didn't happen and what you should've done and –

I So you never expected to spend your older age having people tracking a path to your door to find out about when you were young and if it was unusual?

R No. Well see when you're young, you don't worry about these things. You just go, go, going all the time and – if you kept a diary of yourself it'd be alright I suppose, but you don't. You don't think of, thinking things. You remember a lot of things but you don't think what you'd like to be or – I don't know just why.

I So as a young girl, you don't remember having kind of particular dreams about the future? It was just going along day to day?

R Yeah. We always wanted a station. Me and my eld, my el, not me eldest sister, but Kathy. The one – the second – oh um older than me. We always wanted a station but Dad wouldn't buy one. Get on to a land for us. But ah we just had to go with him.

I Why did you want a station?

R Because we loved it. Loved the cattle. And loved horses. We just wanted to do that instead of droving all the time. Droving, you drove, you drove. It's a good life. It's a good clean life I suppose but every year's the same old story. Like everything else I suppose in life.

I How about your Mum? Was she happy to be on the track or did she also dream of, of stopping?

R Ohhh, I think she dreamed of stoppin'. I don't think – she, she got sick of it, poor old thing. And when she was young, she was alright I suppose but when she had too many kids she was a bit sick of it I think. Poor old bugger. I think she would've liked to live in a town. Rear the kids in a town.

I So Edna, I know you don't want to talk for too long. Is there anything I haven't asked you about, that you think is very important to understand, I guess particularly about droving here in western Queensland?

R About droving in – well, it's all, I think it's all wherever you, wherever you drove, I think it'd be the same situation. It just – it's the same pattern. A droving's the same pattern. Don't matter where you are. I don't know everyone does it the same. I don't know. Some people might do it different, but there's no way of doing it different because you just – you get up in the mornin'. You, you've got your cook and you've got your horse tailer. They're out first. The boss does the last watch. The boss always does the last watch and he calls the cook and the horse tailer, then when the cook's got the breakfast cooked, the horse tailer calls – ah the boss calls the men and you get up and get your horses saddled up and have your breakfast, cut your ….. and you go. It's just the same old pattern day after day. It's just no different. Some days are dry. We used to call 'em dry days for cattle and next day they'd be watered. You know, water one day and you'd – and next day'd be a dry day for cattle but you always had water for your horses and the plant and ….. and yourself.

I I was reading a story about somebody who took cattle down from South Australia and there just was no water and the cows got madder and madder and then died. Did you ever experience anything like that?

R No. Well if that was the case, that might be all bullshit. Bull dirt too, because if a man, if it, if it was that bad, might have been in the old days. I know cattle did have to go. Some of the old drovers had to go but a bullock won't last any more than three or four days without water. But we had a lot a – we had dry day. We used to call 'em dry days. We'd come to a bore. We'd water. We'd come to a bore today. The bore'd be up there. It might be up there about three or four mile. You'd take your horse on and water 'em. You'd fill up at water and you'd come back to the camp. And the cattle'd have a dry day. We used to call 'em dry days. They'd have no water. Next morning you'd feed 'em off camp, you'd feed 'em to about 10 o'clock I suppose. Half past 9, 10 o'clock. Then you'd cut 'em into water and give 'em a drink and you'd have 'em on the bore for dinner. We'd have 'em on the bore for dinner and they'd all have a good drink and then after, at 1 o'clock you'd take a walk and you'd go on about four or five mile again, and next day'd be a dry day again. It was just the same old pattern all the time, you know? And if it rained and there was plenty of water around – but all the bores were about – some of them were 14 miles – 15 – all apart, you know? And you couldn't do – couldn't do any more than about 9 or 10 mile a day for, with 'em, with the cattle. That was your plan – that was your stages. You, you just had to keep your pattern.

I So Edna, you ended up moving into town to educate your son, and in fact as you were saying, droving stopped pretty soon after then.

R Yeah.

I Anyway, didn't it. So it's a life's that's really gone, isn't it?

R Tis. Gone. Yeah. It's gone. They …… the only way it'll come back, I don't know but the drovers today, they just do – they're just, they're just not the same as the old ones used to be. They'll have a couple of men and two or three dogs and a couple of motor bikes and I mean, I just don't know how they do it today but that's – it seems so silly today, the way they do it.

I Do you know any women doing it today?

R Oh there might be girls working. I don't know. I don't think so though.

I Mmm.

R I don't think there's any boss women, boss drovers. Because there's not enough to be doing it. It might be inside. There might be a few short mobs in patches or something but I don't think so.

I What do you mean by inside? That's –

R Down inside.

I …..

R Yeah. Down inside there. Around Longreach and them places. But I don't think there's any much on at all now. There was a mob come in the other day, or a few months ago, but he had ah only had about two or three men and ooh I don't know how he went. He had a couple a men and a few horses. I don't know how they do it today. It's just a bit stupid. Stupid – a boss wouldn't give you a station. Wouldn't give a man – wouldn't give a drover a mob of cattle in the old days if he, unless he had five or six men and a full ….. of horses, say 50 – 55 or 60 head of horses and a full …… of packs and 10 or 12 packs, you wouldn't, you wouldn't get a job. But today, they give 'em some today with, with a motorbike. There's changed a lot.

I It has changed.

R Mmm.

I Well that's fantastic Edna with the interview. Could we do a little bit of filming with your hands?

(End of interview)

Edna's Hands at end of tape