INTERVIEW WITH NARELLE & BRONWEN MORRISH

19 June 2000

TF = Trish NM = Narelle BM = Bronwen JH = Julie Hornsey & BOB

SIDE A

TF So I'm yelling here because I'm using this microphone. **This is Tape 41. Is that correct?**

JH **This is Tape 42.**

TF This is um camera tape 42.

JH Hold on a second.

TF Oh, you're not rolling, sorry.

JH Hang on a sec. OK. Rolling.

TF **This camera tape 42, DAT tape No. 16. We're with Narelle Morrish and her daughter Bronwen Morrish. Is that correct? And we're at their property at Flooden Hills. It's the 19th June 2000. Trish FitzSimons recording. Julie Hornsey on camera for the Channels of History project. OK.**

JH Now Trish, can you just move your esky a little tighter to the camera.

TF Closer?

JH No, tighter.

TF No. Yep. OK.

NM You work well as a team.

TF We've um we'd never met before three weeks ago, although we know a lot of people in common. But we've been working very closely.

JH Test.

TF Bronwen, tell me what you had for breakfast today. I'm just test – and if you need to stop either of you at any stage, just let me know.

I have no idea of your childhood but just sketch for me a little bit – I, were you born in this country?

NM No. I was born in Lismore and um spent all my youth there until I decided to go nursing and did one year in Brisbane and then returned to Lismore. After I completed my nursing, I um was fascinated by the Psych Ward – Richmond Clinic that had just opened. And fortunately I was put, I was in that ward for a year or two when a psychologist just came along. And we moved –

TF And that psychologist was Bob?

NM That's right. We moved to Melbourne and worked there for a while. And then slowly he crept back to the bush.

TF And when you say 'slowly' he crept back to the bush, was Bob from this country?

NM No. He's from around Inglewood.

TF I don't know where that is.

JH Trish, can I just stop there for one sec.

TF Yep.

JH I need to just get –

TF - and I'm rolling too. So when you say Bob slowly crept back to the bush, how was it that you and he ended up in the Channel Country?

NM Well, he was born um in Inglewood and raised on a property and I guess that had a fairly strong hold. Even though after that his schooling then went to uni, um I guess the bush part never left. So um we moved up to Winton and bought a place near Kynuna. We were there for 4½ years and then moved into the Channel Country in '79.

TF And so – I'll come to you in a moment Bronwen – but for you um Narelle, was bush something that you were into as well.

NM Um my grandparents were on a dairy farm so I guess that yeah, there's – I'd seen a touch of bush before.

TF This is really different then, I know that to come from Lismore um you know, little green valleys with little nooks and crags. This is pretty different. How did this, how did this landscape strike your eyes and your heart when you came here?

NM Well unfortunately there were lots of drought seasons but the good ones in between, the good seasons, I guess that it's so beautiful – the landscape. And the waters. The birds.

TF So you were saying like at the moment it's incredibly beautiful? Is this unusual for this land to look like this? Is this unusual?

NM It is really. Yeah, because often it's – with droughts, it's often very soul destroying.

BM About one in ten year.

TF One in ten years is good like this?

BM Yep. The rest is pretty bad.

TF So how about you Bronwen? How did you come to the Channel Country?

BM Um, through my parents. I've grown up here.

TF So what would you say was your earliest memory?

BM My earliest memory probably would have been um of the 1989 flood. I can remember standing on the um verandah of the Springfield homestead and just looking out at this great expanse of water. It was really beautiful. I can remember that. I must've been about three.

TF And what else can you remember from very early?

BM I can remember riding my pony Roaney. My strawberry roan horse and yeah. And just growing up on the station and –

TF So what year were you born in?

BM 1985.

TF And so for you Narelle, where does 1985 come in the kind of the cycle of seasons you've known?

NM Ahhh, '89 I guess was the first good season we saw at Springfield. Um that was a wonderful season. Um about 10 years we manage to get a reasonable season and in between, they're very marginal.

TF And so what is it like? I can't quite imagine what it's like to live through a terrible drought where your family's income is kind of piddling down the, down the plug hole so to speak. I mean what, what's that like?

NM I guess often you have to re-assess your values. Do a lot of soul searching. Um as well and try and feed cattle, keep them alive. Um –

BM Go out with hay and molasses and try and keep them alive or send to agistment.

TF So are you saying that the seasons here almost have like a metaphoric influence on what it's like to live in the land? You know like, that when it's drought, you feel droughty and –

BM Yep.

NM But the glare is really bad.

TF Is it? Oh. In saying, like from what you're saying to me, it almost sounds like you're saying that when the land is lush and beautiful it feels fantastic to live here and when it's droughty, it doesn't. But is that, is that in any way describe how you feel about things?

NM Oh, not really. When it's a drought, you just feel very sorry for the cattle. And thankful that the Banks will be kind enough to keep – help you keep them alive. I guess. With through agistment or feeding them.

BM Letting us battle on and –

TF How would you describe that Bronwen? Like does it make much impact? Had it made much impact on your young brain and soul –

BM Mmm.

TF That cycle of seasons?

BM Yeah, because you sort of – you get tired of the drought and just everything being bare but you know that some time there'll, there'll be rain and it'll be really lush again. You look forward to that.

TF Narelle, I can't remember whether, probably I'm pursuing this line of questioning because I can't remember whether it was you said to me or you said to Johnny and so there could be the capacity for kind of third handum that you were not sure that, that non-Aboriginal people should live in this landscape. Is that something you would relate to at all?

NM Ohh I don't really recall saying that but, yeah, that's – could cause a big debate. Um, Bob probably said that Trish. No I shouldn't – um, yeah, they're fairly amazing how that they obviously lived here before white people settled. Um I admire them because since white people have been here, there – a lot more water's been put in. Um, their coping capacity.

BM I think the white people did do a lot of terrible things to them. There were some massacres on the place next door to ours a long time ago.

TF What do you know about that Bronwen?

BM Not very much. Just that um I think some of the white settlers might have poisoned the waterholes or some of them, and just shot them, shot the black, shot the Aborigines.

TF And is that, like where would you have heard those stories?

BM Oh from my, from Bob or from the ringers that come through.

TF Oh that's interesting. So what ringers that would have worked around this land for a while?

BM Yeah. Yeah.

TF Could you recall any instance of being told stories? See I'm really interested in kind of how historical stories live and get re-told and what impact they have on the way people live their lives.

BM Well um just like after a day's mustering, just round a, round the table.

NM Or campfire.

BM Or yeah. Round the campfire, there'd get told a lot of stories.

TF So can you give me any detail of the stories you might have heard?

BM Yeah. That's stretching my memory. Um, I'm just trying to think of one. Um –

TF How about you Narelle? Does anything –

NM Um just times when – when we first arrived at Springfield, there was still drovers going through.

BM You'd get stories of the drovers.

NM Yeah.

TF What, tell me about that? What do you remember about the drovers coming through?

NM Um they, I think they brought cattle from in the Territory right through and that would be about the last droving trip that, that I'm aware of. Um I remember the night they came – stayed with us. They were lucky enough to put them in some yards and that was, I think, was the first time they'd had a break and not had to watch the cattle during the night. But that was very - very good that that

happened because the next night, as they went through Raymore, the cattle rushed and I think they rushed every night for many many nights. I don't really know what spooked them but, but um yeah, that's ah unfortunate. It must be one thing that drovers really dread.

TF Sure.

NM I mean one of many. Actually full-time. It just stretched it. Oh they've since divided it in two, that job.

JH ….. an ID.

TF Um yes. **This is Tape No. 42. It's still DAT Tape 16, the DAT's on 1210 and um we're with Narelle and Bronwen Morrish out on their property at Flooden Hills, 19th June 2000. And this is the second video tape.**

JH OK.

TF OK. So let's talk about education then. What um what – first tell me what your philosophy of education – what's your philosophy of education was for your daughter Narelle, and then let's talk about how you kind of put that into practice.

NM Well I, I guess for Bob and I with our backgrounds, we really wanted the best for her. That, that we could offer. And um so early on, she seemed a fairly bright eyed bushy-tailed kid. Um and she was exposed to books. Um we decided that because of her remote location, obviously distance education was the essential ingredient there to have her educated. And um was just merely a matter of contacting the school, the Distance Ed school in Longreach, to enrol her in pre-school and now she's doing Year 10 with them. And she's enjoyed it.

TF So tell me your memories Bronwen. From what are your earliest memories around education?

BM One of the earliest was with um the first school radio and I can remember trying to rig it up um my parents trying to get it sorted on the, I think it was on the – Mum's work car. Just putting it up and seeing if we could hear through all the static. And then another one was later when we used the school caravan um just a small caravan, just put the radio in there. And I can remember um there was a steer or a bull it might have been, shoving the caravan about so it was rocking all about during an air lesson. So I called into the teacher and I said um – I've

forgotten her name but it could've been – yeah, but Miss Lilly, there's a bull rocking the caravan and she said that's very nice.

NM That's nice dear.

BM Obviously couldn't hear so –

NM But that was extra curricular so –

BM Yeah.

NM That wasn't the actual school lesson.

BM No. But, yeah – I quite enjoyed it.

TF How did you combine working – like we were just watching the Groves **?** today and we were kind of thinking, God, how does Julie keep her daughter going with schooling whilst also doing all the political work and so on? So how did you balance that?

NM Well especially – um, it be – it becomes stressful at times, trying to juggle it. Because I guess I really want the best for Bronwen. She's um would like to go to uni and, and um complete her education and um so I try not to rip her off whilst try – whilst trying to juggle everything else. But somehow, we've, we appear to have got away with it OK. It's a lot of effort but I think most parents manage to.

TF Do you feel Bronwen that your education has been as much about the conversations you've overheard from your parents and the meetings you've observed and that sort of informal education, as, as formal, or, or – you know, I guess what I'm asking is, you've probably been incorporated into adult lives - ?

BM Definitely.

TF Much more than much kids. I want to know how that feels, positively and negatively.

BM Well, it's good because you can just sit there and listen and just um sometimes take part and just listen to say scientists and find out that way.

TF When you say listen –

NM and …..

TF To scientists, explain that.

BM Um there's been some scientists coming out and researching the wet lands in um Coopers Creek and so sometimes on Springfield so, a few times I've got ahead with the school work and joined them and had quite a bit of fun with that.

TF So how would you define kind of speaking of wet lands, how would you two define – what is the Channel Country? Where does it begin and end? Yeah, I'd like to start with you Bronwen. Where does the Channel Country begin and end –

BM Mmm.

TF And, and what does it mean to you as a, as a land system?

BM Yeah.

NM She can speak much better on this than I can. Thanks Bron.

BM I'm not quite sure about the boundaries of the Channel Country but I think just as far as the Cooper Channels go and like out around Kyabra Creek and along the main Cooper Channels it goes um through Queensland and South Australia. But um yeah, just where the Channel is and the surrounding land.

TF And what does it –

BM And where it ….. out.

TF What does it mean as an eco system? Like what does, what does the Channel Country mean for the humans that live in and around it?

BM It's – the word is basically what you're living on um without the water, without the rain um in the Cooper Channels. And when it floods, that's what you base the sheep and cattle on. And that's how they live.

TF Narelle, what would you add to that?

NM Oh and the wildlife – the birds. Without the water there's none of that ….. In fact, it's very arid out here and um people really rely on that water so – otherwise there certainly wouldn't be settlements. If it, if for some reason it was irrigated and, and the creeks – the Cooper dried up –

BM Suddenly a lot of people would lose their way of life and -

NM And at the moment there – wonderful bird life um – at, on Kyabra Creek where we are at Springfield, there are about 200 pelicans at the moment and cormorants and just wonderful – brolgas. It's just a picture to watch.

BM And during the, during the wet season – oh, during the rain near Christmas up here, we had um I'd say about 500 ibis. Straw necked ibis. That was really interesting to see them. They were coming for the grasshoppers.

TF So what happens in the nine years when they're not here? Like does that really change your farming practices? I guess Narelle this is one for you.

NM Well it does. Um with, with the stock because – I guess that's why we, with the help of the Bank, bought here. Um, because we had agisted for a number of years and often that wasn't even in Queensland and that's a lot of yeah, a lot of effort and um and I guess we thought by getting the other property, because Springfield is barely a living block, um that having this then we wouldn't have to agist, but last year um by um August, September, Springfield was totally de-stocked.

BM Mmm.

NM And we also had to send cattle from here on agistment so – but hopefully that won't repeat itself too often.

TF So is what you're saying that land here has got like a long cycle to it and that if you, and that they're a different kind of land, like the sand hill country or the actual Channel Country? So you thought you'd buy two different kinds of land to balance things out?

NM No, just, just the fact that it was more, more land.

BM Mmm.

NM To, to have the stock on.

BM Sort of spread the risk. If one place was totally dry, then the other might, somewhere on the other place might have rain and good feed.

TF So Bronwen, it's my perception that in one child families, often that child gets – regardless of whether they're doing School of the Air - gets caught into kind of adult discussions and you know, is almost like a mini-adult. I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean in a positive way –

BM Mmm.

TF Do you feel that you've been, like for how long do you think you've been aware of discussions around land and the way it's used in your family?

BM I think just about from when I was born. Like my –

TF Give me examples.

BM Well, like during the drought, I wouldn't be sent off to another room just because like, say my parents were discussing how the stock were dying and that they were either going to have to agist or sell them and, and during the good times who to, like when we're mustering. Discussions about that. I'm not sort of sent away. It's quite good.

TF So have you grown up doing a lot of stock work?

BM Um actually with the, with the school work, I guess my parents have - sort of school work comes first and then like say if I finish my school for the day, then I can go out. Or if I get ahead, then I can do mustering or stockwork or drafting or – yeah.

TF So how might a typical week go for you? Paint, paint a picture now you're in secondary school.

NM Chaos.

BM Mmm. Complete chaos. Like I guess we can be at – I can be at either place but during, during the day, school days, I mostly just complete the papers. Perhaps one hour to an hour and a half with on air ah with my teachers, and just um perhaps some days I might be checking bores with my parents or going out mustering in the car and on the weekends I basically relax and read.

NM And catch up on school work.

BM I don't catch up on school work at all. Um ring friends.

TF So where do friends come from? I guess for most kids, you know like if I think of where my kids have come, friends have come from, it's fundamentally it's like it's child care, schools, soccer.

NM Mmm.

TF Where, where, what, in what contexts are you with other kids Bronwen?

BM Ah about twice a year now in secondary there's um a mini school for the secondary students and I, we all meet up and have a week together, and so you make friends there definitely. And on camp as well. It's a week long camp and sometimes just through um just through penpals. I've got a few pen pals overseas so it's quite interesting to find out what their life is like.

TF By email, those penpals?

BM No. Just by snail mail. Yeah.

TF So you're 15 now?

BM 14. I'll be turning 15 this September.

TF I guess you know, I mean your Dad would probably give you sort of classic psychological moderns of development or whatever. Most 14 year olds are reaching a stage when they're less interested in their parents and more interested in their peers, later to then rediscover their parents. How do you, well does that cycle relate to you or is your life experience so different from most kids that, that those kind of patterns are different as well? Do you know what I'm asking?

BM Sort of. I think that I um sure, most of my life I've regarded my parents as really close friends and that, like my real friends, like they're really good as well but they can – like my parents are really important like so are my friends but my parents will always sort of be there, well not always but – but I don't think I really went through that cycle. Or I could go through that cycle of wanting to become really independent but mmm.

TF Narelle, do you want to talk to me –

JH Trish, can we just quickly – I just need to change filters.

TF Yes. I know the light is going. Narelle, I'd love you to talk, tell me about the decision to keep um Bronwen with you during Distance Ed for secondary school.

NM Well it wasn't really my decision.

TF Just hang on a mo. Sorry.

JH I'm just sort of trying to get the most out of what we've got left of the light here. Oh it looks so –

TF OK. You want me to –

BM Football **?**

JH Oh, it's doing nothing now. Oh hold on.

BM That is - I've got it.

JH Trish, is that – can you see that on Narelle's face there?

TF Yes. Yep. I'll do my best.

NM Does it make the hair change colour too?

TF OK. You rolling?

JH I'm rolling.

TF OK. Narelle, tell me about the, the decision to keep Bronwen at home um for secondary school.

NM Well um it wasn't really our decision. Um Bronwen seemed to thrive on Distance Education. It suits her. She really enjoyed it. And so she asked if we would let her trial Year 8 um to see how High School went and she, she's loved it and she's now Year 10 asking if we'll let her trial Year 11 and 12 through Brisbane Distance Ed which is a little scary but if she can handle it, I'm sure that um the curriculum they offer, it's wonderful. The set up. They do, do a tremendous but the child has to be very motivated and fortunately she hasn't um burnt out yet or – and still very eager so that's, while she keeps enjoying it, I guess we'll keep supporting it.

TF What's the pull to learn for you Bronwen? Like what keeps you doing it? If you have to do it independently? Because mostly it'd be teachers saying your homework's due tomorrow.

BM Well there is some of that. Like the teachers do say you've got get um assignments due by a certain date, but um sometimes there's just the will to learn. Just finding the, finding the material interesting enough um sure there's some papers that I'm not really interested in but just get that done and move on to something – and I sort of, all the subjects are favourites.

TF Twenty years from now? Where do you reckon Bronwen Morrish is going to be age 34?

BM Mmm. That's a good question. I know I want to go to uni but I'm not definite about what I want to do there. Perhaps research scientist.

TF What are, what are some options?

BM Research scientist maybe. Um, some days an artist, musician, um just a wide range. Or perhaps a pastoralist but yeah. I'm not sure.

TF And Narelle? Twenty years from now for you.

NM Oh, I hope I'm still well enough to be able to enjoy life. Yeah. But getting back to um distance education, I feel that they are wonderful. The wide range of extra curricular activities um that they have available for the students, plus they also

include them in the uni exams for the year levels under State, well worldwide exams. Um, and the children see how they go in certain subjects um within their year level and um they come up very favourably. Plus they also um make available Tournament of Minds if the children are interested and Bronwen's competed a couple of times in that and actually won, come second with her team twice.

BM In the States.

NM In the States so yeah, they're not too deprived.

BM It's interesting**?** to see actually because um we, when we were doing Tournament of Minds, the students – we didn't get together until about the week before the actual competition so, we did pretty well to just practice a couple of times with the – practice the play. Working together. But most of the time it was just on the radio.

TF And Narelle, do you want to talk about your illness or do you want to pass on that one?

NM I 'll pass.

TF So – so if I was to understand, what – what strikes you, like women of the Channel Country you've known and yourself, what's, what's at the heart of being female in this environment? Maybe Narelle. You first.

NM Um I guess your vibrance, personality um that's not really answering it.

TF Well what strikes you as diff – like when you've been away to Brisbane or whatever and you come back here, what strikes you about the women here?

NM Um – oh, they're all approachable and fairly friendly. Sometimes I feel that I don't have a lot in common with some. Um whereas in Brisbane, you can seek out people that you have a lot in common with. Um, that's a bit of a downside sometimes.

TF 'cause am I right that you and Bob would have a more intellectual approach to life than would be common out here?

NM Oh I guess so. For some people, they um there's still a lot of people that can't read and write around which is rather sad that they've slipped through now. And um for – a lot of people don't put much value on education.

BM Mmm.

NM Not perhaps like we do. But who's right?

TF How about you Bronwen?

BM Mmm. Well, being female out here, I suppose um you work alongside the males and just – you're not always very feminine – just try and be yourself and um like make friends – you can make friends with the males just as easily.

TF In collecting stories around here with women, alcohol culture – is it –

NM I've heard that.

TF How um, how do you find that? I mean – and it rears its head and would – you know, I've heard stories of the pubs with the kind of the skid row for the men out the back and so on. Is alcohol – have a big impact on your life out here?

NM Yeah it does unfortunately. Um that seems to be the main entertainment and I notice now that violence seems to, to occur more than say twenty years ago. A lot more domestic violence. Maybe it's more public now but um yeah, sure.

TF And is alcohol often – I mean I guess –

NM Often the trigger. Mmm.

TF So without naming any names, give me a kind of a – an example in which, in which you think domestic violence is occurring out here.

NM Oh, I – in a lot of the bush places um drinking is a very common weekly, common weekly occurrence. At most activities. Um – I mean people either choose to drink or not drink. But um because it's so readily available and, and um accepted, I think that often it um yeah, it's caused a fair few fights. Um – look, one other thing too, a downside, for a lot of people in the bush or I mean it's just an issue, um, that especially women have young children. No family support. I guess that's – if you're lucky enough to have relatives around, that's great. But otherwise it's – yeah, you're really rear the child yourself.

TF And is that often isolating?

NM Ahh, no, I guess because there's always young Mums around with bubs and that so there's always people that they can talk to.

TF 'cause I was asking a young woman who's managing a property further west, who's got a two year old and is pregnant –

NM Yeah.

TF And I said did she often see other families, and she said they were around but no, it was sort of too far. And I thought wow! It's, you know, this would be, this would be tough.

NM Yeah. Yeah, that's Nicky.

TF Oh you smartie pants! What's the toughest side of life for you out here Bronwen?

BM Um perhaps like I don't get to see friends unless I'm in Longreach for a mini school but I do talk to them on the phone and write a lot.

NM Definitely.

BM The phone bill's quite a lot. But um that's a downside. Um I don't mind so much the isolation as in missing shops but I do mind like missing out on movies or plays. Um, but um perhaps also snakes. That's a bit of a downside but yeah.

TF Droughts? Would droughts –

BM Droughts.

TF Would droughts enter that list?

BM Mmm. Yep. But apart from that it's pretty good.

TF How about you Narelle? How would you – what's, what's the toughest call? We won't end the interview here. We'll have to –

NM Oh we could. Um, oh being Mr Fix-it for everything. When it breaks down, that's – yeah, that um really tests people. But ah in, in a town you just call someone to fix things but no matter what breaks down, mostly the men attempt to fix it or you do if you're the only one there at the time. Ah that's a bit of a downside. Sometimes it's great because you actually do fix the item. Um a positive is the um technology that's come along and ah I can't imagine living without a computer now, or a fax.

BM But the downside with that is sometimes with email or internet, ah we don't get the same internet access right now. It's a lot slower so –

NM And the telephone um not so long ago, but we've quickly forgotten, we were on the party line and that meant that when the phone line went out, those on the party line went out and fixed it. If it was your turn, you fixed it, come hail or high

water. So I just hope that with Telstra doing such a good job servicing, that it's not totally sold out. Because we really enjoy having a telephone.

TF And just tell us about – in , I gather your family is involved in what, would one call it an environmental battle between cotton farming –

BM Yeah.

TF And organic beef?

NM Yeah.

BM Irrigation.

TF Do you want to just talk about a bit.

BM Yeah.

NM I'll leave that to you Bron.

BM Me? OK. Well with irrigation um what was the year? Um some cotton farmers – they were planning on planting cotton so they bought a place called Kurrareeva **?** and they were planning on irrigating cotton. And they also bought another place called Hammond Downs and um planning to irrigate – um, take that licence and put it on Kurrareeva. Um and we're opposed to that ah with taking the water out um to protect the natural eco system and the river and I suppose our livelihoods depend on that river and if someone takes it out this end, then also the people as it goes down, there wouldn't be so many floods.

TF So how did you go about battling that and, and what have been the results to date?

NM The community um were quite shocked when the idea, when they were approached with the idea. So they formed a group, the Cooper Creek protection group and I guess we've had a fair involvement with it because Bob's been spokesperson for that group. Chairperson. And ah at the moment um they haven't gone ahead and irrigated.

BM And they're not allowed to transfer the licence from Hammond Downs to Kurrareeva so – but yeah.

NM But it's still fairly political at the moment.

BM The battle's not won yet but –

NM Yeah.

TF I don't understand this licence system. Do you know a licence in order to take water?

NM Extract water.

BM Yep.

NM Mmm.

TF And historically, have there been no licences? Like has there not been –

NM They have –

BM Little licences.

NM Yeah. But they've never really been used.

BM But they're still um some of them are still there and could be used in the future.

TF And why are you so opposed? I'd like to hear from Narelle at this point, why you are so opposed to cotton and, and how what you're doing – like there might be a perception that pastoralism ah that's raped the land for 200 years. What more can cotton do?

NM I guess um the water is the issue and if someone takes what goes past, it, it doesn't go further even though they think it's only a tiny amount. But the other thing are the pesticides involved and out here, it is naturally organic beef and um even though they reassure us that none of the endosulphens will, or any of the chemicals will destroy um will have an effect on the beef industry, that's not, not really correct. Plus the fish tend to die when that's introduced and um also, the town of Windorah is so close. Um, they rely on that water. It's their recreation. Swimming in Coopers Creek.

TF It's what they drink too, isn't it?

NM Yeah, that's right. And their life depends on it so ah – while it's sad for people um that had these big plans, in an arid country like this, it's really asking a lot.

TF When you say that beef is naturally organic, I want you to explain – I want you to explain stuff like how you don't cultivate here. That's sort of thing. Because I don't think that's widely understood.

NM Yeah. Do you want to do it?

BM Pardon? Oh well we don't spray, I mean we don't spray pesticides around and neither do we um dip the cattle or – like they're just – there's no chemi, well yeah no chemicals involved with the cattle production.

NM There's no need for the chemicals.

BM No need for it.

TF And why is there no need? Like why are you not planting grasses and that sort of thing that then need fertilisers and chemicals? Do you want to explain that Narelle?

NM Well, water! Um, because it is – when it receives rain, it is so lush, the varieties of grasses. It's already there. It just needs the rain. Um, I, I think one or two people over the years have planted um and hoped to irrigate but obviously it, it hasn't been a success or else we've all missed it. Um ….. just hang in and hope for the next good season. And ah –

TF And is farming –

JH Trish, I'm, I'm out.

TF Of tape?

NM Yeah.

TF OK, we'll just keep going.

NM Because -

JH Of light.

TF You're out of light? We'll just keep going audio only for a little.

JH OK.

NM Because like Dr Suzuki says, um – we, we really – it isn't ours to hand on to the, the next generation.

BM Yeah, that quote was – from Dr Suzuki was that um we don't inherit the – the earth from our parents. We borrow it from our children. So I think that really applies.

TF So are you angry about plans to, to farm cotton here?

BM Angry with – like any form – oh well with the idea of irrigation, not only for our own livelihoods but for the land and um problems of salinity and just the

degradation of the land and the – like all the natural inhabitants, like the, the plants and animals.

NM Fish.

BM Yeah.

TF What would you say Narelle?

NM I, I feel that already it's been shown that irrigation really destroys rivers. Why do we have to do it again to prove that we're any different?

TF Would, if one was to put up this kind of romantic notion at one level that says the Murray Darling is the major kind of water system of Australia. It's fucked to use that –

NM Exactly.

TF A colloquialism. That the Channel Country will be the next great kind of battle ground for Australia or – or a source of potentially kind of resisting that battle ground and, and providing a kind of a good example. Is that a view of what's going on, on out here that makes any sense or is that a romantic city?

NM Well.

BM Not it's com – that's true.

NM Yeah, that's true. And there are a lot of areas um that are all battling and environmentalists –

BM The Paroo River. That's one.

NM Um, attempting to keep irrigation off. Not because we dislike the people or anything like that. Just because we can see that the rivers one by one are being wrecked.

BM Mmm and –

NM And just for that, that quick buck.

BM Not the long term consequences. Yeah. So we want to keep the, keep the river healthy.

TF When one looks at the kind of the earlier history of this area, which I have a bit. I don't know if you've read a hoary tome like *The Life of John Costello* written –

NM No, I haven't actually.

TF By his son in, you know, 1930. It's clear that, that white settlement in this area was entrepreneurial, quickly grabbing –

NM ….. …… Irish.

TF You know, coming saying this is my land. The land –

NM Yeah. And *Kings in Grass Castles* too.

TF Yeah.

NM Mary Durack.

TF Yep. Um I gather the land was more valuable if there were fewer blacks on it because there was less problem.

NM Oh there was a lot of hostility um towards the blacks. In fact a lot of people would prefer to think they didn't exist. We discovered whatever. Like they'd been living there for years. Hundreds of years. But um –

TF I've had the view put to me by many people out here I think it would have to be said, that race relations here have historically been fantastic and have been stuffed up by political – I mean this is not the words they used –

NM Mmm.

TF But I could say a politically, a politically correct ideology coming out of the city um that's about reconciliation that focuses on Aboriginal, Aboriginality as a separate culture. Is that a view that you would agree with?

NM I think a lot of people are terribly concerned um –

BM That their land will be taken over, so –

NM Yeah, that's –

BM And I, I don't think early on there was a terrific relationship between – like, on the whole, Aborigines and the whites, I think there was a tremendous amount of hostility. There were massacres. I don't think the relations were that good.

TF In the race relations you were born into Bronwen, like you've lived in and around –

NM Mmm.

BM Mmm.

TF And there's been – how would you describe, like pretend you're 35 and you're describing to your best friend the, the race relations of your childhood. How would you do that?

BM Well my childhood was, it was good. I mean I, I wasn't really – I don't believe I was racist and like just because someone has a different coloured face and body doesn't mean that they're um superior or inferior and like –

TF Did you grow up up with –

BM Played with Aboriginal children.

TF Did you grow up with a strong sense of, of Aboriginal culture or was it almost like you just didn't even notice that there were Aboriginal kids there as well?

BM I noticed that there were Aboriginal kids but um I guess I wasn't um much part of their actual culture but um like I sort of, I think I did know that existed.

NM A lot of people, especially graziers, are mortified at the possibility of Aboriginals getting possession of their land and they're – it's almost like the Gudigee **?** man feeling and um I think it's been fairly hyped up but a lot feel that they worked so hard. Why should these take it. Um –

TF How do you feel?

BM And now Aboriginal people – some with a mercenary eye have - now feel they've taking a slight interest now that, that perhaps they weren't before. But –

TF Because that's been said to me a lot, that, that the Aboriginal people around here that we've grown up with are, are good people and we respect them but they don't want our land but it's these city types with hardly any Aboriginal blood –

NM Yeah. And no contact with the groups of people that were out here.

BM Or the land.

NM Yeah, or the land.

TF So you're a land owner Narelle? You've worked hard. Bloody hard it sounds like. Yeah. How, tell me your fee – tell me your blunt feelings about Native Title. Positively and negatively.

NM Um I don't think I'm as spooked as a lot of graziers are about it. Um, but at the same time um um it seems a three-way battle at times between the grazier, the mining companies and the Aboriginal groups. Um –

TF Now I don't understand the –

NM Where they, they have to be consulted. I feel sometimes now that the grazier who may not have as much say um if people are mining on, on the land, on their properties and that's, there's a lot of that, even in this area. Um I just don't – a three-way struggle makes it harder when they have to consult um yeah. I guess that's a bit selfish but I would – yeah. If it did come to an issue, um because a lot of the people, a lot of the Aboriginals that have become fairly vocal um aren't from the tribes that were around anyway um –

TF So, I don't understand exactly how Mining Title works, but do you, do you have freehold or leasehold title to your land?

NM Thanks Trish.

BM Leasehold.

NM Is it?

BM Yeah.

NM Thanks Bron.

BM Of course it's leasehold.

NM Of course. Um yeah so really, um people feel – a, lot have this attitude, we own it all. When in fact –

BM We …..

NM We don't. We just lease it and um and we really don't have a say what's underneath.

TF So now it's my turn to be completely ignorant as I swat a mozzie, um if, if, if minerals are on your land, do you not have the right to stop somebody coming on to your land?

NM No.

BM We don't have the right.

NM We don't have the right.

TF And does that happen?

NM Yeah. Yeah.

BM There is –

NM Twice –

BM They look for gas.

NM Gas and oil. And so we have seismic lines dotted over huge amount of Springfield.

BM And that really – a lot of erosion.

NM Yeah causes a lot of yeah, a lot of degradation from it.

BM Mmm.

NM And if they'd found oil or gas, it's not like America. You don't own any of it.

TF That's interesting.

NM Mmm.

TF And as I understand it, I've – as I understand it, part of what I think the Wik Legislation –

NM Mmm.

TF Gave to Aboriginal people was the right to negotiate where there's – ohhh! As I, as it got explained to me, between Marbo and Wik there was – it went something like that the Federal Government was afraid that they could be taken to the International Race Discrimination Court.

NM Yeah. Yeah.

TF For the way in which Australian legislation contravened International Human Rights legislation.

NM Yeah.

TF So they built into the Wik legislation the right to negotiate for Aboriginal people.

NM Ah hah.

TF Is that –

NM Yeah. I, I think that's, yeah. That's right. Hey Trish, we had better go –

TF Go.

NM Because –

(End of interview. Tape continues. **AUDIO ONLY. NO VIDEO TAPE.**)

TF Bob, tell me what you know about, about Maude Schaffer, and particularly Maude Schaffer and the JC Hotel.

BOB Well Trish, um yeah, I first heard of Maude when we first came down to this country which was in 1979 and unfortunately I never had the chance to meet her.

She had retired from Waverney which was her property. They'd sold – Gordon, her husband, I believe when they retired, sold Waverney to the Australian Agricultural Company, so it's now incorporated as part of South Galway. In fact um yeah, if you were to contact the people at South Galway, you may find a little bit more about that. You know, about the actual details of, of Waverney. But Maude, the – all the people I met round Windorah spoke of Waverney as if Maude Schaffer really was the person who ran it you know. There was very little talk of her husband, and by all the accounts I've heard, she was a great horsewoman. Very tough. She used to work with the ringers all the time, with males and so on. And – but the males all had a kind of a almost a respect then awe in relation to her. Um but she – the story about the JC Hotel was that the – when, when she and her husband owned Waverney, the JC Hotel was probably only five miles away from, from Waverney Station and um it was still operating and trading and the ringers would sort of knock off after work if, if they – yeah, if it was convenient for them and go down and drink at the JC Hotel and they were turning up you know at irregular times and to the – without being in full possession of their working abilities so many times that Maude ah bought the licence for the JC Hotel and promptly closed it down and, and then ah took, tore the roof of it so that it crumbled away in the weather and being a pise pub, it just crumbled away to nothing. But Maude is attrib – certainly Maude is given the credit for closing down the JC in that way. And there are all sorts of stories about Maude. I mean she was, she's a fairly, very good horsewoman apparently and very tough, a very tough lady in the – run a mustering camp. She used to run the mustering camp, camp sort of. She didn't have head stockmen or anything like that. She used to run the camp. And ah there's, there's certainly a grudging admiration for her. And I don't know whether that, if, if you are familiar with the details of the landscape of that country. There, there are –

TF Oh well, we went through the JC yesterday – I mean through that – yeah. It's like the Morning Plain really isn't it?

BOB Did you – did you hear of, or did you see – yeah, the Morning Plain. Did you notice two very prominent hills on the edge of the Morning Plains?

TF Is this the hole through the middle of the hill?

BOB No, no, no. Two very prominent hills with conical shaped hills with, with sort of um almost with things that look like nipples on the top of them.

TF I didn't notice them.

BOB No, you didn't notice those? They're on the right as you're heading westwards. Or on the left as you're heading back east towards Windorah. Well, locally they're known as Maude's tits. Um, they are. They're very, very very conical looking – conical shaped looking hills with, with protuberant, very protuberant sort of nipple shaped sort of things –

TF So was there a way that Maude was resented for her power?

BOB Um yeah possibly in a you know in a society where males sort of felt that a women was – had power. That's, that's very possibly but most the stories I hear, she was respected rather than resented. And that, the notion of calling a couple of hills after her breasts, seems to suggest that she was probably some object of sexual desire as well but ah the actual – on the map you'll find those hills are called the Three Sisters. There are actually three of them but the third one is removed a bit from the others and the, the aspect that presents itself to the traveller heading west at least or east, are just the two. And they are very conical and very symmetrical looking and yeah, they – you can identify them as, as you know, as, as looking a bit like breasts. (interruption to taping) ….. figure I heard of was, was Laura Duncan herself um Miss Duncan who unfortunately I also didn't meet. Um but ah yeah, she was quite a legend.

TF What did you hear about her?

BOB Oh just that she, basically that she ran Mooraberrie um ran it very well. Was intolerant of fools and particularly intolerant of DPI bureaucracy. I heard a little bit about it from the DPI. They were attempting to um ah institute their, you know the tubercolosis and brucelosis **?** irradication programme, and Miss Duncan you know had, couldn't really see much sense in that and I, I, I actually felt a great sympathy for her at the time about that. Yeah I heard a number of different stories about Miss Duncan. I mean she was a, she was a little bit like Maude Schaffer apparently, you know? Um, a lady of great competence and ability

running a cattle station. And a lady you know who, whose views were not only to be respected as, as, whose rule was basically you know iron clad. Um it would, would appear to be. I'm not, not suggesting that the stories suggest she was authoritarian but just one of the great stories I heard about Miss Duncan was that ah she wrote a letter to Barcoo Shire Council asking them to – or it might have been Diamontina Shire – yeah, Diamantina Shire because I think they're in Diamontina Shire, asking them to send her a picture of a grader so that if one should ever venture upon her country, that she wouldn't be too frightened. She'd know at least what one looked like and suggesting that they didn't really grade the roads as much as they should.

TF I know. I've heard that story before, so it's a legend.

BOB Yeah, that's a legend. Yeah.

TF Now did you – a legend that I have heard twice about two different women run the pubs and I heard the legend each in exactly the same way which is interesting. It's like a rural myth.

BOB Mmm.

TF It's one about Geraghty McCool **?** running the Western Star Club –

BOB Mmm.

TF And one about Mrs Craigey running the Bedouri **?** pub –

BOB Mmm. Mmm.

TF And the legend was that they printed their own money for the men – when the men came in from droving, and that they would print this money – these things were called shin plasters –

BOB Shin plasters. That's it. Yeah.

TF And that they'd print them on to – they'd somehow bake them and they'd bake them so that they would crumble in the men's pockets.

BOB Aaah yes. Yeah, that's, that – I think that is a, a rur – that's kind of a rural myth. But you know the – the owner, the actual person who was owned the Windorah pub until just very, very recently, actually had one of those. This lady McPhelome's **?** shin plaster. An original shin plaster from the Windorah –

TF And what's that woman's name?

BOB It was McPhelome. I'm not – I never really – never learned what her first name was, yeah.

TF Is this the woman – there's some woman whose name I've been ….. that lives in Brisbane that ran it during the '50s when it got burnt down.

BOB Very probably I suspect. Yeah – yeah. I didn't hear as much about her but I did see ah in a frame, Joe, Joe Geiger who owned the Windorah pub, had a frame of an original Windorah shin plaster.

TF Well I – we filmed the um newspaper article that's in the Windorah pub but it's not – it's like a –

BOB Oh yeah.

TF A simile of a shin plaster, but you think there was an actual shin plaster?

BOB I think there was in, in a frame that Joe Geiger had. Yeah, yeah.

TF Right.

BOB But I didn't really get to know much of the story about that lady.

TF And who are the men that you heard about when you came here? Like who were the male legends?

BOB That's most interesting in that I didn't really hear of any much you know, apart from the – those that are all written down in terms of um Mary Durack's book and, and you know, Costello's book and so on. But the legends – the, the most vibrant legends I heard were about Miss Duncan and, and Maude Schaffer. That, that's interesting in itself.

TF Mmm.

BOB You know, there, there the things that seem to have sunk into people's consciousness, perhaps because in the, the eras that those two people lived that, that it was – would have been regarded as highly unusual for a woman to, to show some sort of dominance and, and ability to control men in stock camps. But ah um yeah, that was the things I heard. The other, the only other thing about Miss Duncan that I heard was her, her ah very formal sort of approach apparently and she had a manager there for many many years. A lovely old bloke. I met him.

TF Arthur Church.

BOB Called Arthur Church. And a wonderful old bloke, Arthur. But apparently in front, certainly in front of the men, like Arthur had been Miss Duncan's manager for probably 30 or 40 years and they lived at Mooraberrie in the same general vicinity and – but they always referred to each other by the very formal sort of mode of address, and Mr Churches and Miss Duncan. And of course there were all sorts of – as you could imagine, the wild speculations in the local population you know, about what there, you know, what degree of intimacy existed in their relationship.

TF As I hear it, he was an inside man eventually but –

BOB Well, yeah, well it's interesting, isn't it? I mean that ah um yeah, really who, who cares but of course it, it fascinated everybody um and it is fascinating to think that people would show that much loyalty to each other. But um and I certainly met Arthur and Arthur was a great old bloke.

TF And she left Mooraberrie to Arthur on the, on the understanding that he then left the property to young married women of her family.

BOB Mmm.

TF And which he did. He left it in quarter shares to three young married women of the Duncan family and his nephew, Tom.

BOB Tom. Ohhh, is that – yeah. I, I knew that, knew that Tom had some share. Yeah. And I didn't know exactly what the, what the precise sort of deal was there but yeah. Yeah. Most fascinating. But I, you know I could tell you some stories about Arthur too. Wonderful old horseman too. But um and you know, some interesting things. And I, I did meet Arthur and sort of could relate to Arthur as a, an interesting bloke.

(End of Side A and end of interview)