**INTERVIEW WITH DAVID DUNCAN-KEMP**
**30 August 2000**

TF = Trish DD = David JH = Julie Hornsey DDK = Dawn

**SIDE A**

**TF** **So this is DAT Tape 22 and Betacam Tape No. 62. It's the 30 August, 2000, and we're with Dawn and David Duncan-Kemp in their home in Oakey. Trish FitzSimons recording sound for the Channels of History project and Julie Hornsey on camera.**

JH OK. I'm rolling.

TF David, what can you tell me, just excuse me. Julie, can – you're not seeing my face at all in that mirror are you? You're not getting that camera ….. at all?

JH Oh no. No, no. I'm not seeing the mirror at all.

TF Fine. Terrific. Just checking. What can you tell me David about your grandmother Laura? Do you know anything about her life before she came to the Channel Country?

DD Very, very little really. Um she was a daughter of a prominent Sydney um Solicitor and they lived at Parramatta. Um and unfortunately he ah lost a um oh I suppose you'd call it a, a case in, in Court which ah very really nearly bankrupt him and they had to sell out. Her parents came to live in Brisbane and she went out to live with her sister whose manager, whose husband was um managing Daroo **?** at the time. Um a chap by the name of, they were – people by the name of Alexanders. Ah it was there that she met my grandfather who was at the time, I understand, a pastoral inspector for one of the big companies. Um this was before the turn of the century. They were married at Daroo um I understand then in um the turn of the century they um bought Mooraberrie. But on, on, on taking over Mooraberrie they found out that the lease had expired and it took them approximately 3 or 4 years to sort it all out with the Government before they actually became owners of Mooraberrie.

TF So through your grandmother's life, and we'll talk about the case later, but – but law and law cases gone wrong and, and the government were kind of themes that recurred in a certain way, weren't they?

DD Yes. I think um the way I always thought of my grandmother was that um if things didn't go her way, shall I say, um she had no hesitation in, in taking Court action or you know, threatening Court action because I understand that, at one stage there, she threatened to take um Kidman Estate to Court which is rather ironical now that they own Mooraberrie but um ah you know? These were things that she had no hesitation and I think this is why she had no hesitation in taking the Queensland Government to Court.

TF We'll come to that in a bit but is your image then, would she have had like a Victorian childhood? I mean, what – what you know, what sort of –

DD No, I don't think so. I think she had a very, very hard um life really ah once they left Parramatta. Up 'til then I would say yes, she probably would've had a, a reasonably good life. I think that she was – to my knowledge I don't know where she was educated but I do think she was very very well educated. She had a beautiful handwriting. Um and I think she was very very intelligent. I take my hat off to her because she was left with three young children when her husband died and um there was, she would've been I think quite entitled to have sold the property in those days but she never. She battled on and tried to keep the bat – er tried to keep the, the property going for her descendants.

TF And how, how well did she manage that? I mean what was your grandmother's life as you knew it?

DD Well she was a very totalitarian sort of a person in, in, in lots of ways. Um I've spoken to some of the older men in the country out there years ago that knew her and had stayed at Mooraberrie and I'll just quote you one instance that the head stockman of Monchiro **?** was a chap by the name of Dick Hennis and he stayed at Mooraberrie one time and he got up early in the morning to offer to go up and milk the cows for her, and my grandmother wouldn't let him near the place. She said the cows knew her and that she was, she would only allow herself to milk

them. Um but this is the sort of person I think she was. Everyone I've known that knew her, all said that she was a remarkable woman.

TF Do you think that the physical work of the place was something she, you know, beyond the kind of the cows I guess, would have been close to the house but the, the physical work of pastoralism, do you have any knowledge of –

DD Ooh yes. Ooh yes, my word. She, she always – she rode sidesaddle. Ah she went in to the mustering camps and she had no hesitation whatsoever in running the, the camps on Mooraberrie and getting the cattle away. She was a great believer in ah I understand in ah baby beef and to my knowledge, that, that she was one of the first that started this idea of turning bullocks off at no more than three year old. The idea being that they'd be young and, and very good to eat.

TF Can you relate that story of baby beef to the Channel Country? Like is there anything about the Channel Country that made it suitable for baby beef?

DD Ooh, no, not really I suppose but the only thing I can say that it was very very good fattening country. Very good fattening country. And I think this is why a lot of the big pastoral companies ah purchased um properties on the, in the Channel Country for that purpose. See the North Australia Pastoral Company. They purchased properties there wholly and solely as bullock depots where they'd send their bullocks down from the Territory wholly and solely just to fatten them so I think that, that alone speaks that the idea of, of what the type of country was.

TF I thought maybe that the reason she started baby beef was because you have this cycle of flood and drought that the baby beef meant you could you know, get them going in a good season, that – you don't think –

DD Well – possibly, it possibly could've been so but ah, ah that – the season out there were very very unpredictable. You could have a um a reasonable year this year. Next year would be a drought so therefore all the younger cattle this year wouldn't be fat next year. You see? And, and this is just how it went I think. Um I went to work out there in 1946 and it was a very bad drought. Um it's something that I will never forget for the rest of my life, to see the cattle. How poor they can get and the fact that you had to shoot them because they couldn't get up. Um but yet, in '47, August '47 it rained and it's remarkable the, the way

the cattle responded. They were up – you know? Putting on weight straight away. It is fantastic country.

TF You say your grandmother um you know, was, was quick to go to kind of legal action. Could you tell me the story of, of – she had a battle, didn't she? With the Queensland Government. Could you tell me that whole story –

DD Well –

TF As if I knew none of it.

DD I don't know a great amount about it. All I know is that under the Sugar Acquisition Act that T.J. Ryan, who was Premier of Queensland at the time passed as a, as a war measure, that under which they could acquire stock. My grandmother was – used to send all her cattle to Adelaide and she intended to do so and she took them across the border at Birdsville and they were ah, um arrested I understand. I think that's how they, they – I was told. And the cattle were all bought back and she fought that right through to the Privy Council. I've heard that many different stories as to who won and who lost um I honestly don't know. But all I understand is that, that she was told or we were told that um technical – technically she won the case because she was using Section 92 which was free trade between the States. But as it was a war time measure, the Queensland Government had every right to pass such legislation so I leave it to everybody else to decide who was the winners and who were the losers.

TF And you say it was a Sugar Act that, that gave them the, the right to actually acquire her stock –

DD That's right.

TF Was it – it was about where she marketed the stock, wasn't it? Whether she sent them to Brisbane or Adelaide?

DD Well, possibly. Um the Adelaide market at the time I understand, was far better than Queensland markets and ah that was why the cattle out in that country all went to, to um Adelaide. They all sent them to Adelaide. Down through Maree. Um well actually it wasn't Maree in those – yes it was. It was Maree. That's when they changed the name. It was Herbert Springs before that.

TF So if this was an issue that was not just for your grandmother but for other graziers around, were they involved as well do you know? Or was it an individual battle that she was –

DD Well, that's something I, I'm not too sure of, but I understand it was an individual battle ah other pastoral companies and pastoralists all offered to help her but whether she accepted the help, I do not know.

TF I think it was your cousin Robyn, it would be, wouldn't it? Robyn said I think that – is it right Your grandmother was Protestant but it was mostly Catholics around and that the farmers organisation – I might be getting this wrong, so if I'm getting wrong don't blame Robyn. But, but – but the um that, that the Graziers Association was Catholic and helped your grandmother but that there was kind of sectarian feeling as well?

DD Well that's something I don't know Trish. I honestly do – I haven't heard that before.

TF Mmm.

DD But it's, it's ah I would be a little bit surprised but it, it could have. It could have happened.

TF Do you remember – I mean certainly that area seems to have been predominantly Catholic families. In Australia at that time there was great division between Catholic and Protestant.

DD That's right. Yes. Not so much in that area. Further east yes. Ah around Quilpie, I'd say yes. But to my knowledge, I don't think that was um happened in that area. I know that the Bergans' who were on ah Currawilla I understand were Catholics, but I understand they got on very very well with them. Um but I think there was quite a lot of others around the area. I, I, I honestly don't know about that.

TF And how about with Aboriginal people? Your Mum's books portray a, a theme of very close interaction and, and the sort of vital importance of Aboriginal people, the pastoralism. What's your knowledge of that in relation to say your grandmother and when she was running the property?

DD They used Aboriginals a lot but I, I honestly believe that if the Aboriginals hadn't been there, they would not have survived. That's how I feel about it. A lot of people disagree with me on, about that. Um but I do think that the Aboriginals knew where everything was. They could um they were very very good stockmen. And when my father, when my grandfather and my grandmother first started Mooraberrie, they had sheep and the Aboriginals were always the shepherds. They used to wash them in the water holes before they shore them to get the dust out of their fleeces and they were very very good um you know, station hands I suppose you'd call it. But I think that honestly feel that if they, they didn't have them out there at the time, they would never have survived.

TF Your Mum's book describes the Aboriginal women helping to build Mooraberrie. To pummel the –

DD Yeah. Yeah, yeah – make the pise walls? Yes. Yes. Ah I think that the poor old Aboriginal woman or the gin as she was known as, I think they were um very very good workers. Ninety percent of them I would say would be spotlessly clean from that I've – even in my young days being out there. But ah they were very very good workers. There's one thing that I can remember grandmother telling me that at one stage there that the house gins were there and she was paying them for something. What it was I don't know, but anyway, she paid – some of them with a shilling each, some of them were sixpences and the others were threepences. Now it all amounted to the same amount of money but the fact was that those that got four threepences instead of a shilling always thought they had more money because they could jiggle it and make a noise. And the ones that got the shilling, more or less cried because they didn't – thought that they never got the same amount of money.

TF Generally I think –

JH …..

TF OK. I'm rolling. Um generally, as I understand it, 'til kind of – almost like up to the '60s, Aboriginal people weren't paid cash wages. I don't know. Maybe your grandmother was – and I understand that was the case on Mooraberrie as well – um, what do you know – like you know, I guess about the kind of – the

transaction? What, what your family gave Aboriginal people and what Aboriginal people gave your family on, on Mooraberrie?

DD Well I don't remember any Aboriginals being on Mooraberrie after about 1940. We were out – there was children in '39. Ah there was a family there. Benny and Dolly Hughes and their son Willy. Now they were paid because the – if they came from South Australia, they were not under – they were not under what they called the Queensland Act. Therefore they were entitled to be paid. But if the Aboriginals came from Queensland, they were under the Act. Now the money had to be paid to the Police Station and I understand that most of them out in that country all claimed to have come from South Australia. So as – beat the Act. I think they were very very well looked after. Um, I won't say housing-wise. Probably by today's standard it would have been very poor, but I think that people have got to realise that the, the um pastoralists – some of the pastoralists, their houses weren't, weren't what you'd call top notch either but ah but ah I think in cases of sickness and things like that, they always looked after them. Or tried as much as they could, you know, to help them.

TF The issue you were talking about, what good workers Aboriginal women were, I'm not saying specif – I don't know what was the case in Mooraberrie – but in general in Queensland, including south-west Queensland, the, the pastoral properties needed fewer women than men and they, so the women were often sent to the towns which I wondered whether maybe, because Moses was on Mooraberrie for a long time, wasn't he? After the women had gone? Was it, is that your impression that it was kind of like men left working on the property?

DD No. No. No. No. I, ah they tried to keep the families together to my knowledge. Um and even some of the big companies, when I went out to work there in 1946, they still had black people. They tried to keep the families together because they, I think the idea was that if they didn't keep them together, the men wouldn't stay. They'd be there for a little while, then they'd go. And the idea was to keep the families there so that the men would always be there.

TF There's – I think it's from one of your mother's books where she describes I think your grandfather. Do you remember the grace that he said?

DD No.

TF I think it was white, white pioneers, black saviours.

DD I think they would have believe in that. Yes. Yes. Um – I'm not a racist by any means but there's a lot of things today I don't believe that's right. Um there's a lot of things I would like to say but I won't. Not on, not while, not on here anyway um because I think it will offend too many people. But I honestly feel that ah the, the, the black people of those days were very very well looked after and ah they had a very good home. They were always clothed. They were always fed and I think the children um were well looked after.

TF Let's talk now about, about your mother. Growing up – like do you remember when you first heard about Mooraberrie, when you went there – um, you know, what was the kind of the culture around the Channel Co – because tell me. Where – where did you? Tell – fill in your mother's life for me if you like, from, from childhood to say around the time when she was giving birth to her children. What was Alice Duncan-Kemp like in, in brief. If you were to give a thumbnail sketch of your mother.

DD Well I don't know much about it. Um, I think she was reasonably well educated. Um but um I know at one stage there she took up um I would presume today you would call it, call it similar to Karitane Nursing. And ah I know that she worked for some people up around Muttaburra and up there, looking after children. But other than that, I, I will be quite honest. I don't know too much about my mother's early life. Um –

TF Would she talk of her early life a lot?

DD No. No. She did not. Um, none of the family did, to be quite honest, to my knowledge. My aunt, well Aunt Trixie I don't know about, but Aunt Laura very very seldom of her early life. Um – Mum got married in Longreach, I think, in 1923 I think it was. Um and then um my father, him being an ex bank manager, they went back to the bank then. And um we, we sort of moved around the countryside from there, from branch to branch, until he retired. 'til they retired in 1947 and then went back to the land.

TF So in that time when they were travelling round and the time you were growing up, what was your mother's life? And I'd love you to use, use Mum or Alice –

DD Yeah. Yeah.

TF Rather than just she.

DD Mmm.

TF Tell me – yeah. What was your mother's life in your childhood?

DD She was a very active woman in lots of ways. She loved horses and ah to my knowledge, from about 1937 onwards, she always had a horse. Um she um – she did a lot of writing, I can remember that, because in every house that we were in, there was one room always put aside that was strictly forbood -forbidden to the children, which was known as the Writing Room. And that's where my mother did all her, her writing. Um she loved to go out to the west whenever possible. Um she – Dad apparently, Dad and Mum had a, must've had holidays because ah in 1933, they drove out with the three of us and ah, three boys, and ah I think they spent over eight weeks, eight or ten weeks at Mooraberrie which I think they very much enjoyed. Um And then every, oh I suppose about every two or three years when we were growing up, we used to go up out there for holidays.

TF Is it true – I think your mother only went there – like you said she was there for eight or ten weeks in 1933 –

DD Mmm.

TF How many times would your mother have been to Mooraberrie between when she left there and when she died?

DD Ooooh!

TF Approximately.

DD We were there in '33. We were there in '39. We were there in '40. Ah we went out again in '42. I think we went out again in '44. I suppose about six or seven times.

TF So she hadn't been there from, when did – there was like, it sounds like quite a long gap when she –

DD Oh yes.

TF Didn't go there.

DD I understand she left there when she was about 17. 17 or 18. And ah she never went back then – oh I suppose it would've been for at least I suppose about 15 years there before she went back again.

TF And why –

DD To my knowledge anyway.

TF And why was that do you think?

DD Oh I think there was a little bit of conflict between the, the, the members of the family because it was a, it was a trustee's er an, an estate, until all the children became 21. And I think there was a little bit of conflict of interest until it was all fixed up. That's what I think.

TF So there was inheritance questions?

DD Yes. Yes. I think that's the best way to put it. Yes. Um – I've, I've, I've never been told the full story ah so I don't know, but I think this is what a lot of the trouble was.

TF So your grandmother would have inherited it from your grandfather or would it ….. ….. ….?

DD No, he did – she did not. I understand that, that ah she was the trustee but the, the, the three girls were to get the ah it was left in trust for the three girls. That is what I under – have always understood. And I think they had to wait 'til the eldest was 21 before anything could be done.

TF So was it trouble then between Laura who was living there and your mum?

DD I think there would've been. I, I, I honestly don't know on that but I think there was um I don't know how you'd call it – um, I suppose a conflict of interest or something like that.

TF And divides families.

DD Yes. Yes.

TF Yes. Yes.

DD Um, so I – no, as I say, I'm not, not dead sure on that.

TF So – it's interesting that your mother didn't talk much about her childhood and yet she was writing about it over and over again in a certain way. How do you, how

do you understand that? Like where do you think the writer in your mother came from?

DD I don't know but I, I think that, that the whole thing was that she had so many pleasant memories and, and ah um of when she was a child or in her young years, and, and just how much the ah the, the blacks meant to her. I, I, I often feel that was because she – there's only one thing that makes me head that way too, is in all the books that she wrote, she very very rarely mentions both of her sisters. Alright, she mentions Aunt Laura as Sandy but she very rarely mentions Aunt Trixie in them so whether Aunt Trixie wasn't that way inclined and wanted to go um walkabout I suppose you'd call it, with the black, black ah people, I don't know.

TF She also doesn't mention her mother, hardly at all. Like she talks a lot about her father –

DD Yeah.

TF Who died what? When she was six?

DD Yes. Yes. Yes.

TF How do you understand that?

DD Oh I think this comes back to the fact that – a lot of it to do with the trust, trustee business and the conflict that, that sort of came out of it I suppose. That's the only reason I, I feel about it.

TF And it's interesting – how did your father feel about your mother's writing do you think? Do you think – well, yes. How did –

DD Oh it never worried him. It never worried him at all. I think he encouraged her because I think that ah he thought it was a, an escape for her and I think this is why, why it never worried him. It never worried any of our, the, the, the – of us children, the fact that she wrote. I think it proves that she had more brains than us.

TF It's interesting. Patricia Hodgkinson, who grew up – who was Pop …..

DD Yes.

TF She says she – she's writing about her childhood in the Channel Country, she says she drives her children crazy talking about the Channel Country which is why

they were glad that she had me to talk about. But it's interesting that your mum was obviously thinking about all this stuff, but not talking about it with you kids. Why do you think that was?

DD I don't know. I think possibly because she thought we weren't interested. Because none of us sort of um I suppose leant that way, would be the best way to put it.

TF It's interesting now, like I look round this room and you've got beautiful paintings of Mooraberrie. Would I be right that Mooraberrie is now important to you?

DD It always has been. I suppose when you're, when you're, when you're 16 years of age, and you're given a ticket to go to Quilpie to, and catch the mail truck out there and ah you know, you go grow up and you – see I was there for a number of years there and I think this, this, it grew on me. The only – I'd love to live out in that country now but I, I know I can't. But ah it's, it's a country all of its own. Except when the sandflies are about. But it is. It's, it is, it's – I can remember when I went out there in '46, days meant nothing to people, whether it be Saturday, Sunday or whatever day. The only day that meant anything was mail day. And that was the only thing people were interested in. They very very rarely left the, the, the premise or the properties, um barring to attend musters next door and about once a year they all went to it all. You know, generally there was race meetings on. Well now this time of the year, there's five on in a row. Well most of them always went to two of them. One, ones in that area always went to Patoota **?** and ah Windorah. Or – and then when Windorah wasn't running, quite a lot went on to Birdsville but the – you know, as I say, that's, that was the only entertainment they had for the year.

TF Somebody told me that your Aunt Laura was the first woman to brave the races. That before that it had been all male.

DD Well that, that could be possible because if you had known her, I can understand that. She was very much a feminist. I think, personally I often think that she was born in the wrong generation. That had she been born um 50, even 50 years earlier, Germaine Greer wouldn't stood a chance. She was a woman that could, could turn her hands to most things. She was an excellent car driver. She was a

reasonable horsewoman. She could drive a horse and cart. And I mean, chop wood, so you know, there's pretty well nothing she couldn't do.

TF When you were talking about your mum, what kind of – and that you said you thought part of why she wrote was because she had such fond memories of relationships with Aboriginal people – what kind of relationships did your mother have with Aboriginal people in, in her adult life?

DD Very little, except through her books, because all the ones that she knew were all dead. And those that weren't dead had been dispersed. They, they, they'd moved out and I would say that 90% of them would have been dead anyway because um they were all – apparently from what I understand ah most of them on, on Mooraberrie anyway, died in the early '20s. I understand it was a disease. Whether it was measles or chickenpox or one of those things went through the, the Aborigines in that area and this is what cleaned most of them up unfortunately.

TF So between the time when your mother left Mooraberrie as a young woman and when she came back fifteen years later, that aspect of the property had, had shifted?

DD Oh yes. Oh yes. Well see there was very, very – Mooraberrie didn't employ many black, black people after that. Why I never knew but ah this, there was the odd ones as I say. That the Bennie and Dolly Hughes were there but they, they were about the only ones they ever, ever employed. Um Mooraberrie always only employed about three people. Three or four people. That was all, you see? There was never big – any big camps.

TF I was going to say, so who did they employ instead or, or was it a shift in the way that, that pastoralim, pastoralism – we'll just wait 'til this clock finishes striking.

DD You'll get another one in five minutes.

TF How many minutes ….. ?

JH I'd say about five.

TF Um was it – if, if Mooraberrie stopped employing Aboriginal people in the '20s, who did they employ instead?

DD Mainly white people after that. Um, Arthur Churches went there in '27. Um there was, there was a few other old, old men round the area that they employed

but mainly they always sort of generally one or two elderly chaps and the rest were, were ah young people. Ah why I don't know. Whether they thought the young ones were better workers or ah I often thought it was the fact that they were cheaper um cheaper labour, that was all, you know? That they could ah the wages would, wouldn't, weren't so great.

TF You're talking here about younger white people?

DD Mmm. Mmm. Yes. Yeah, they always used to get them about 7, 15 to 17 year olds.

TF When had your Aunty Laura taken over running the property from your grandmother?

DD Yeah. About 19 – in the early '40s.

TF Right. So it was a shift then. You were saying earlier, you know, Mooraberrie couldn't have functioned without –

DD Mmm.

TF Aboriginal people. But then by the '20s that ….. …..

DD Oh well see, they were established.

TF ….. ….. shifted.

DD They were reasonably established and they had a good name. Therefore they could get finance. And that's, that's what, what kept them going, was the fact that so long as they could get finance, they could survive. And if it wasn't for the blacks, they would never have managed to, to, to get finance in the early days because the, the, the um you could say that wages were nil and um the, the, the Aboriginals did the work. Whereas in the '20s and onwards, and the whites came in. See they all had to be paid to do the work and I think this is where that, it came in.

TF And with your mum, like in, in travelling as a Bank Manager's wife, travelling around Australia, there would have been Aboriginal people in those towns.

DD Very, very few Trish because see they went to ah Goulburn in New South Wales and then from Goulburn in New South Wales to Richmond in North Queensland. Um which there, there weren't too many Aborigines round Richmond in those days. Then from Richmond ah to Toogoolawah – well there was none there. And

then to Oakey you see, so there, actually there – to my knowledge when we came to Oakey in ’39, there was no black people round here.

TF So was there a –

JH Trish, I’ll change tape.

TF OK. 63?

JH 64.

TF 64.

JH Just before you do any more –

TF So this is 64?

JH 63.

TF 63. **This is Betacam Tape 63. It’s still DAT Tape 22 and the DAT’s on 35 51. Um time code 15 and this is the second um, the second Betacam of an interview with David Duncan-Kemp.**

OK. You’re right?

JH Yeah.

TF Did your, did your mother – so your mother in adult life, there wasn’t Aboriginal people around her. In her books she’s writing about them lots, particularly in the later books. What do you think was fuelling that kind of interest?

DD I don’t know. I think it was just that um I suppose you could put it down that she had a one-track mind and, and, and um and she wanted people to, to find out you know, about the Aboriginal families I think. I think this might be um she was very very involved I know in the Anthropology Society and I think this is why. Um –

TF What did she do with the Anthropology Society? What was her involvement there?

DD Oh I think she supplied them with quite a lot of material. Um – I – in 19 – in the early ‘50s I took quite a bit of material that she had in the way of message sticks and woomeras and spears and things like this, down to give to the Anthropology Society.

TF Was this to Elkin or the Anthropology Society in, in Brisbane?

DD In Brisbane. In Brisbane. Actually I gave them to ah Dr Winterbottom. Took them to his house. He was living at Toowong at the time. At it'd be 19 – there's your clock again. Um but, but I think that, that her idea there with the Anthropology Society was to ah try and pass on what information she had about them and, and, and their life style I think. Ah as she knew it.

TF And was she involved at all, things like – I can't think of the – not fic – it's too early for ficatsee **?**, but kind of Aboriginal political organisations –

DD No. No. No.

TF Were starting up. Did she ever express an opinion on that kind of –

DD No. No. I don't think – not to my knowledge anyway. Not to my knowledge.

TF It's interesting that for a certain kind of, I mean not, not terribly many people have known about your mother's books, although I think you know, they knew and then they'd forgotten and I think they're being rediscovered.

DD Mmm.

TF Out in the Channel Country it's not your mother that's remembered. It's, it's your Aunty Laura, is much more –

DD Yes. Yes. Yes.

TF Yes. That's an interesting – almost like a contradiction, isn't it?

DD Yes. Yes.

TF Between the way different people have known.

DD Yes. Yes. Ah I think the fact – the reason my Aunt Laura is so well known was that she managed the property and um made a success of it, which I think, in those days was something er you know, rather out of the, out of the blue if you like, because women were, were not really tolerated and the fact that ah she did so well out of it. I think this is what upset more people than anything.

TF You'd be aware, your aunt, you know, in, in some term – in some stories, your aunt was running the property on her own. In other, the way other people tell it, it was really your aunt and, and Arthur. Um, how do you view that? And, and you can talk as much or as little about that as you want to.

DD No. I, I, I have this to say about that. They were a very good pair. Ah (phone interruption)

TF We were just talking about your Aunt Laura.

DD And Arthur.

TF And Arthur.

DD They were a very good pair in, in this respect. Um Arthur was an excellent stockman. He um a very, very good cattleman but the way I, I worked there for quite some time and Arthur unfortunately was not a leader. That if um the ah, how would you put it? Aunt Laura sort of ah moulded the bullets and Arthur fired them if you like. But ah no, I think that between the two, it, it was, a a joint effort, that Aunt Laura could tell Arthur what to do and Arthur could carry it out. And I think this is why it was a very, very successful operation. Ah well it must have been because they, they made a wonderful job of it.

TF But so you wouldn't see that your aunt was, was running the property on her own. Really she – it was –

DD No, it was a joint effort. Joint effort. For years she did run it on her own and then she gradually let Arthur take over, because she always went into the mustering camp for years. It was only in the ohhh, I suppose late '40s that she didn't go in to the mustering camp. And it was only when we ever got really short-handed that she came in to the mustering camp from then on. Um, I suppose the main reason I suppose was, age was starting to catch her. She was getting well into the mid-forties and ah I suppose you've got to look at the fact that the horses weren't quite as ah cooperative to her as what they were when she, when she could take them – busters and things like that.

TF People describe your aunt as being elegant. You know, seeing a woman in a silk shirt whizzing past in a Mercedes and thinking 'Who's that?'.

DD Yes, I suppose she was. Um, I know she was a – one thing that I can remember well is, is old Mr ah Pop Richards, Harold Richards from Mt Leonard just said once. He said that when he was cooking, he said he was flour from head to foot. But he said that Miss Duncan, he said, she can go into the kitchen and knock up a feed and cook anything. He said she comes out as clean as when she went in. But ah, ah no, I think that ah she um she seemed to have a knack of, of being like that.

TF And would you have an opinion on why your aunt and Arthur never married for instance?

DD Oh yes, I do. Because my aunt was a great believer in tradition. By that I say that, that ah never when I was out there did you go to, to your meal at night time in your ordinary working clothes. You dressed every night ah and things like this. And she always kept that sort of standard, if you like, and ah I think it's – the old saying is you know, the, the ah ne'er ere the twain shall meet and I think this is something that was ingrained into her and this is what, what happened.

TF So there was a class difference?

DD Oh yes. Oh yes. Definitely. Definitely. Ah I think Aunt Laura towards the finish, accepted Arthur. She always did, but ah there, there would be um there was always that sort of barrier if you like, between them. And it was only in the last I suppose 15 years, or it wouldn't have been that – 10 years – that they, they started to talk on personal names. Before that it was always Miss Duncan you see, and, and things like this. But Arthur never ever called Aunt Laura 'Laura' and it was only until the last – well to my knowledge – in the last five or six years that the barrier was broken there.

TF Your cousin Robyn described your Aunt Laura in late life, later life, you know, when she was getting frail –

DD Yeah.

TF Saying whites shouldn't live in that land. It's too tough. Or, you know, words to that effect, which really interested me because I know that's how Patricia Hodgkinson's mother felt.

DD Mmm.

TF But, but I suppose I had had this image of your aunt kind of you know, um – does that ring true to you –

DD No. No. Well Aunt Laura left um died of, from what I remember of when she was about 84, wasn't she? Somewhere that, anyway – and it was only in the last two or three years that she never lived out there. So I, I disagree with that and ah as she said, it was her home and ah ah what she used to try and do, was to come

down at least once every two years and have a break down on the Coast. Down in Brisbane. But no, I, I, I don't see that at all.

TF I think Robyn was saying that, you know, I guess it was when she'd be staying in Brisbane and – because she would come down to Brisbane not when in the hot but in the winter or something?

DD Oh no. No. No. Quite - most times she went down, used to come down um in December and stay through 'til oh generally about March.

TF So she'd miss the worst of the heat?

DD Oh yes, worst of the heat. Not always. Sometimes she'd stay down longer and not come back 'til say June. Sometimes she'd drive down. Nine times out of ten she used to drive down.

TF And when she came to Brisbane, Arthur would stay?

DD Oh yes. Yes. Yes. There'd always be someone there. Ah if Arthur was away, well, well when I was there, I'd be there you see? And, and there'd be always someone there to ah operate the radio and just keep things under control – under, you know, check on things. That's all. Because there's very very little stockwork done ah from oh end of November through 'til end of February because it was too hot.

TF And how did the inheritance play out in the end? Like you said when your grandfather died, it was in trust for the three girls.

DD Well all I know is, that it finished up at between – it finished up that um my grandmother got half – I think this is what it was – and Aunt Laura finished up with half. But I think that Aunt Laura got her half by buying out the other two – her two sisters. I'm not too sure on that.

TF I guess I'm talking about when Aunt Laura died. Like how – you know, Mooraberrie is no longer in your family's hands –

DD That's right.

TF So there's that story of –

DD Well when Aunt Laura died, she left it to Arthur Churches on a, on a the understanding, or what she told me that upon his death, that it would return to the

Duncan family. Well unfortunately it didn't. Three quarters of it did, but a quarter didn't. And that is what caused the sale of the property.

TF And it was – didn't she leave it to the umarried –

DD Unmarried girls. And which Robyn unfortunately was very, very lucky that she was unmarried when Aunt Laura died. Because I have no doubt whatsoever that Aunt Laura would have cut her out of the will.

TF So it's interesting, because in a straight – I mean part of what started me making this whole film before I was going to the Channel Country, was interested in the way that inheritance works and you'd be aware that mostly it's the sons.

DD Yes.

TF That inherit.

DD Yes. That's true.

TF So how do you understand that kind of clause of your Aunt's will?

DD Well she was a feminist and I think this is – her idea was that anyone who married, had a husband or a wife in which to help them. Whereas the unmarried girls had nothing and this was to give them something to live on. I honestly feel that's what it was. Um and, and, and um, I think that was her attitude all her life, that ah spinsters were sort of um well, not exactly frowned upon but sort of ah never got the same opportunities as a married person.

TF So she would have seen herself –

DD Oh yes.

TF In that light?

DD Mmm. I think so. I do. Whether she ever looked like getting married at any stage, that's something I do not know. But to my knowledge, no.

TF So, just explain then, as if I didn't know it, what happened to Mooraberrie. Like how it, how it came to be owned in its current way.

DD Well when Arthur Churches died, he left his, left the property to four people. To a grand-nephew and to three of the Duncan family, namely ah Judith and Robyn and my sister. Now what happened then, I don't know, but the – Arthur's grand-nephew wanted out and the others were no ways capable of buying him out so the property had to be sold. Which to me was a great, great pity. But um that's how

it goes. And, and, and this is what happened. And ah now of course it's, it's, it's gone. It'll never come back into the family again, because none of us on either sides will ever have the money to be able to buy it.

TF And can you go to Mooraberrie? Like what, what now is your relationship to Mooraberrie actually and, and psychically I guess – psychologically?

DD Well there was a, a, a clause in the sale that gives us access to Mooraberrie, mainly to inspect the grapes, so we can go back there. I would like to go back. I, I, I think it's fantastic country. I do. I think that ah – and anyone who lives out there, I take my hat off to. Because it's a hard country. And if you get droughts er droughts will, will tell people – will sort the, the, the ah people out in that country very very quickly.

TF In later life, how did you mother relate to her sister and, and to her? Um well, I don't know when your grandmother died but –

DD 1955 my grandmother died. Um oh no. She got on reasonably well. She corresponded with, with – well particularly Aunt Laura. She, she, she seemed to ah get on with well and I think ah Aunt Trixie – she, she, she got on reasonably well with too. But um I think Mum would've liked to have gone out to Mooraberrie again but ah um she never did. I think that was our fault. But ah that's –

TF Your fault?

DD Well, the – her children's fault. We should have taken her out. But um, but then again you've got to look at the fact that, that ah age was starting to go against her and ah we were still young and, and where we'd do say a thousand mile in a day, unfortunately she couldn't stand that, you see? And, and these are the things that I think that ah we overlooked.

TF Was there a way that your mother was always living in the past? I mean it's interesting that, that she was writing and writing about a period of her life, rather than you know, writing about her life as it developed. But – is that a, is that a, a true picture of your Mum or not?

DD I suppose it would be. I've never ever thought of it that way, you know? I know ah when my elder brother got killed, it, it, it ah – um, she took it very very badly or very hard.

TF As anyone would.

DD Oh yes. I can – I understand that too, but I, I think that she never ever sort of ah um she sort of went back more into her shell, shall I say, after that than what she was before. And I think that ah um she was a very strange person in that way. She could sort of cut the world off without any effort whatsoever and, and she had a – she was oblivious to what was going on around her. And I think the Aboriginals taught her that.

TF That's interesting um Pam Watson's book talks about how your mother's writing, what she describes as spatial rather than temporal. You know, it's about travelling through a place rather than travelling through time.

DD Yeah. Yeah.

TF And suggests that perhaps that came from kind of the amount of time your mother spent with Aboriginal people.

DD Oh I do. I think, as I say, that I, I do. I think that they, they taught her a lot. A lot. And ah I think this is why that she, as I say, that she could close herself off and this is something I think that Aborigines could do. And, and, and ah they taught her this.

TF Was that difficult for you as a child?

JH ….. …… ……

TF Right. OK.

JH I'm thinking we should also probably get a cut-away for Dawn.

TF Yeah.

JH Is that alright?

DDK I suppose so. But I don't have to say anything do I?

JH No. No. I, we'll get it at the end.

TF Yeah. Was that difficult for you as a child? That, ….. your mother cutting off.

DD I don't think we noticed it. Um we were sent to boarding school when we were fairly young and I think that this is something we never noticed. And um once we

went to boarding school, when we come on home on holidays as a lot of Christmases, we went straight out to Mooraberrie. And I think that it sort of didn't – we never noticed it.

TF So you'd be visiting Mooraberrie much more often than your mother?

DD Oh yes. Oh yes, definitely. Yes. Ah, we were out there in '39, 1940, '41, '42. Sometimes in the middle of winter we used to go out. Um sometimes they'd meet us in Quilpie. Sometimes they'd meet us in Charleville. Ah – no, we went out there quite a bit when we were young.

TF Sylvie too?

DD No. No. It was only the boys. Ah Sylvie only went out if Mum went out. But um no, we went out quite a bit.

TF I – somebody told me you kept the places – machines humming.

DD Oh later years I did. Yeah, later years I did, yes. I used to go out and do work for them and I even bought some of them down here and, and repaired them and took them back but ah – no, I was – I, I did a little bit there. I purchased quite a few vehicles for them over the years and built bodies and crates and things like that. A lot of my life's tied up in that country.

TF And your Mum, as your Mum – I have, I haven't read your Mother's obituary. I'm hoping that's something we might get to today, but, but as your Mother died, what would you sum up as her kind of key passions, achievements?

DD Ooh, I don't know whether I can – what I can say there. I, I think that in her later life, she was a very lonely woman to a certain extent, even though we were here, because um I think she had the um idea of a lot of old people in the west that, that um we couldn't communicate with her ah I just don't know how you'd describe it. Um it's a bit like um my grandmother's second husband's brother, Donald McKenzie, who in his last few years, he was like, lived in Adelaide. And he was like an old bullock. He walked up and down the fence. And they tell me he had a pout about a foot deep you know, trying to get someone to talk to him because no-one in Adelaide could talk to him in the language that he was used to. And I think this is what my mother felt, that ah in respects that um we couldn't understand

what her life had meant to her. I don't know. I think this is ah – that's why I say that I thought, you know, towards the latter end of her life, she was very lonely.

TF In some ways that's, I suspect, a common – I mean it reminds me of what Patricia Hodgkinson says of her life now.

DD Mmm.

TF And in the Channel Country, it seemed like often the girls of the Channel Country married out – like your mother did.

DD Yes. Yes.

TF And then there'd be new women coming in –

DD Mmm. Mmm.

TF So there's prob – you know, although your mother may have felt lonely, she probably wasn't alone in that life …..

DD No, I don't – no, I don't think so. I think this is just something that a lot of people who came from that country, felt. Because it's – they grew up in a totally different environment and, and, and ah conditions, if you like, to the average person in, in, in um in closer settled areas.

TF So in, in later life, in old age, did your Mother talk of the Channel Country a lot then?

DD No, not a great amount. Not a real great amount. Um she was always going crook about what people called the, the Channel Country. Ah her idea of the Channel Country, it didn't start 'til it got below Windorah and it didn't start until it below um Monkia **?** where it, where it did, you know, ah go out into channels. But see today um if you live anywhere near, near the Thompson or the Cooper or any of those, it's all Channel Country today. That it's er it, it sort of lost it's identity if you like.

TF Boulia, I think, has got a sign 'Heart of the Channel Country'.

DD Yes. Well see, it never was regarded as that.

TF Your Mother would have taken a dim view.

DD Oh yes. Oh yes. Very much so. Very much so, because ah see the, the, the um the Georgina doesn't start to flood 'til it gets down towards Bedouri and um, you know flood out. The channels are there but it's, it's not what they call a Channel

Country and I – this is what's, I think something that she would totally disagree with. And I think a lot of the old, older hands in that country would definitely agree with too.

TF One thing. Somebody told me, an Aboriginal woman told me, that, that your mother didn't – that in a sense, it was almost like your mother, your mother wasn't necessarily writing the books. She was writing up Moses's – that Moses would write to her and that she was putting forward really Moses' view um and that he was a highly educated man and that, but as an Aboriginal person couldn't easily have published. What do you – what do you think about that?

DD I think there might be some truth in it. I think this, ah, ah, that's possibly could be quite feasible because um ah he taught her so much. And I think in, in, and in his teachings this is, this is what's happened. Um some of those, some of those old blokes, some of those old black boys and even some of the old white men, they were very very um intelligent men. Very intelligent men.

TF Did you ever meet Moses?

DD No. No. No. He was long before my time.

TF When had he died?

DD Ooh, I think about 19 –

DDK I think just before or after ah she got married.

DD No. I think it was before that. I think he –

DDK No. He was there when the cattle case was on. I think it was 1920.

DD Yeah. Yeah. I've got an idea it was early '20s.

DDK Yes. The early '20s.

DD Yeah I think somewhere about then.

TF But so he wasn't alive in the forty years when she was writing her books?

DD No. No. No. No. He'd long gone. He'd long gone.

TF Did she talk of Moses?

DD Not very often. Occasionally. Ah sometimes she'd speak of different things that happened out there and of other – there were some very very highly educated black men out there that had been sent away and educated. There was um Morney Donald I think they called him, was one, and um he was very well

educated too. He's, he was at ah Mt Leonard at one stage I understand. Ah when Sinclair was there.

TF So was there anything that I haven't asked you about David, that – that you think's important for me to understand the kind of – the female line of Duncans out in the Channel Country or out at Mooraberrie and I guess how that then has impacted on your life.

DD No, I don't think so. I think that only thing else that I could say regarding this, that I think there was a lot of other women in that area ah who had the same hardships and survived it. I think Mrs Rabic er at Cuddapan would have been one. Um old Mrs Jimmie Kidd at Mayfield was another. She lost her husband when their, those children were small. Ahh and there's so many of them I think that, that ah deserve just as much recognition. I think that ah all of them that went out into that country – because I think you've got to remember that when they went out there that, that communications and, and everything were very, very poor and ah I think they, you've got to take their hat off to them, to the fact that they survived it and, and made such a wonderful job of it. That's how I feel about them. Um I don't think personally that you could single anyone out in particular. Um because if they hadn't have gone out there, that country would never have gone ahead. That's the only thing that I –

**SIDE B**

DD They're killing that country. In, in, in the respect that the big companies are now coming back and getting such a big conglomerate that they're operating because of aeroplanes and helicopters and fast motor cars where before there was so many people employed in that country, now there's that. And I think it's, it'll kill that country eventually.

TF So it's emptying out?

DD Yes. The big companies will own it and, and all they're there for is greed. Perhaps I shouldn't say that but that's just how I feel about it ah they have no um, their heart is not in the, in it. Kidman, I think that er I've got to say this for him,

that he would probably be the better of the big companies. But all the rest, all they're interested in is profits.

TF Kidman's employees struck me as happier than the employees of the other –

DD I would think that could be quite correct. I think that er Kidman at least looks after his men. But a lot of the other companies don't – couldn't care a damn. They're there. They're paid, and that's it. And the only, as I say, the only thing I, I feel that it's a great pity that we're going back to the old feudal systems I call it where the um the big, the big companies or the big owners, own everything. And the little man doesn't get a chance. And it's been proven in that country that the small person can survive. But I say that in, in all due respects because the Rabic family lived there for years. Mooraberrie survived for 90 odd years. Um quite of other properties around there survived. It's only in the last 20 years that the big companies have got in and gradually choked everybody out, which I, I honestly feel it's a great mistake.

DD OK David. Terrific. Thank you very much.

JH We might just um –

TF What –

DDK Who do I look at?

TF Let me –

JH Oh we're just looking at David really. ….. …..

TF Yeah. 'cause the reason we're doing this is you know how sometimes you would look to the –

DD Yeah. Yeah.

TF Well we might –

DD Yeah. Yeah, I can understand that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

TF Cut in. They call that a cut away.

DD Regarding this um stolen generation. Um I just feel in my own opinion, going on what I've seen in the west, that a lot of people have got to realise that if those people, or children in those days, had not been taken and put into um missions and similar places, that they wouldn't be alive today.

TF Why is that? When they'd lived in that country traditionally?

DD I think, not so much in, in that country out there but down Birdsville way and up Bedouri way and places like that, things were a lot different and, and I – why I just say that is, see diseases and things like that – and, and, ah a lot of ah um well the nomadic life I suppose you'd say that they lived, was sort of ah that's the only reason why I just say that. That's all. Whether different people have different ideas and opinions on that, but that's just the way I feel it and I've spoken to a few people, different ones that I know, and I know this for a fact that, that um a lot of, a lot of the indigenous people today who are, who in my day were regarded as yellow people um wouldn't be alive today and I, I've got people who'd back me up on this. Up round er Cloncurry and up that way. That the, they belonged to no tribe. No, no, no family if you like, that um ah the full bloods wouldn't accept them and the white people doesn't, wouldn't accept them.

TF I've heard different um different versions of that, yeah. I'm just recording here on audio –

DD Mmm. Mmm.

TF But not on –

DD That's alright.

TF But not on film. Um -

DD No, but I just – I, I just say this in, in all sincerity. And, and ah I, I just feel that I think sometime, somewhere along the line, that people have got to take this into consideration too.

TF One Bid Campbell, who, who was a – now, what's her family's name? ….. ….. Maxland, near Boulia. It'll come to me in a minute. McGlinchey. She was Bid McGlinchey. She said that and then we were talking to Jocelyn Eates **?** and Jocelyn thought that that probably applied in the very early days but that by the time you came to the 20th century –

DD No.

TF ….. Aboriginal people there was – their, their kids were too precious of whatever colour –

DD Yeah. Well –

TF For that to apply. But –

DD Ada Miller -

TF Yes.

DD At, at Mt Isa. Well she comes from Camooweal actually, her family. And I was talking about it, talking to her about it at Winton. And she said to me that she knew this happened quite a lot up there in the Gulf. Because um she did quote – remember that? She quoted some family that – there was two yellow children in it, and they hid them so that the, the elders of the tribe couldn't kill them.

TF There's certainly – I've also certainly heard the stories of mothers blackening their kids' skin so that the Police wouldn't take them. You know?

DD Yeah. Yeah.

TF Yeah.

DD No, no. That could be quite right too. Mmm. Mmm.

TF Obviously there was – yeah. Tricky politics ….. …….

DD Oh yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Ah – all, I, I know is that there was two old black fellas that used to be round at Currawilla there when I was very young. Ah Benny Hughes was one. I spoke about him before. And there's another old black chap there. What his true name was I don't know, but all he was known as was Currawilla Jack. You know, they were both as black as that case, but that's beside the point and I can remember old Benny saying to us once, that it's a poor man that takes a black girl for a wife but he said it's a terrible ah black man that takes a white woman for a wife. And something I didn't understand in those days but I do now.

TF Although it's interesting. I might just stop here.

(End of interview)