

**INTERVIEW WITH JOSLIN EATTS**

**3 June 2000**

**Transcript updated 16 December 2009.**

**Timecode refers to tape 06\_BC\_DV**

**Topics in Bold**

I = Interviewer      R = Respondent

**TAPE 1 – SIDE A**

**06\_BC\_DV**

**Erica Addis on camera. This is DAT Tape No.3 for the Channels of History project. Interviewing Joslin Eatts in her home in Leo Street in Mt Isa and the current time code on the camera is 28.07. It is half-way through Camera Tape 6.**

I      So Joslin, I'd like to just get a sense of your life because I actually don't know that at all. So I'd like you to tell me where and when you were born and what your name was and what your parents' names were.

R      00:28:19:19      Okay, well I'm a McCabe, that's our family name. My father was Harry McCabe and my mother's Alice Wilson. And we come from the Boulia area, which on my mother's side is the Pitta Pitta Groups and my Dad comes from the Murrawalli Kurrawalli Group which is the Channel Country. And my Dad was born in his country and my mother was born in hers and I was born in Winton, just on the edge. My life out there, mostly in the Channel Country was probably after Mum and Dad got married and I was on the way and the first thing I remember – I think I must have been about four years old – and I remember my Dad had two camels. My Mum and Dad had two camels and I used to ride on them. Oh, boy oh boy, what a time. And I had pets. I had bilbies and I had a pet snake and my Mum killed the snake and I remember I cried for weeks. After that, it was just roving the country.

**Childhood**

00:29:39:19      That's most of my young life was in the bush, with them, and then we finally sort of, Mum and Dad left there. Maybe the work had slowed down by then, so they went to Winton and Boulia and they did different contract jobs. My Dad has always worked out in the open and always on his own. Mum mostly too, with him, other than when she was having another

baby – my brothers and sisters which were born in the four towns of the West, that's Hughenden, Boulija, Winton and Mt Isa. And other than that, we just mostly stayed in the bush most of our life until my Mum and Dad split up and the family split up. So my Mum took my two brothers and sister and I stayed with my father. And I never saw them for a long time after that, and all I can remember was bush. Fences. Poles and posts and all that stuff that Dad worked with. I mostly stayed with him until I got married and then I sort of went away and come back. Always come back to Dad and always went back to Winton. He was still cutting posts and even when he, before he died, he was doing, what do you call? Fowl houses, still building fowl houses and garden sheds for people. So he died when he was 87 and my Mum's still alive. And that's it.

I That that you've just told me I'm really interested in and would love to unpick and get in more detail.

R Okay.

I So your father was Murrawalli Kurrawalli, your mother was Pitta Pitta, you were born on the outskirts of Winton. Do you know the circumstances of your birth?

R **Childbirth/Race Relations – equal pay**

00:31:38:06 Yep. Well, I don't remember it, of course, but my Mum and Dad told me that when she was ready to have me, we were working somewhere down near Currawilla or somewhere down the back blocks of the Channel Country anyway, and they were fencing and yard building and so they packed this couple of horses up and apparently Dad got Mum to Winton just in time for me, and she had me and then they just packed me in the saddle bag and we went back to the Channel Country again. I said to Mum and Dad 'Thanks for that'. But anyway, I guess, I think for at least four to five, maybe I was probably about maybe four, five, round about five years old and I sort of, we moved around a lot. We never had any permanent place because, by then, in 1934 my Mum and Dad got married and then they just worked around there, up until about the 1942s or '45 when the one of the

Acts come in that Aboriginal people had to get paid equal wage. Well most of our people moved. They left Springvale and Diamantina Lakes Station and, of course, my grandfather was the same. He was born out there in that country, spent most of his life there until he died, and he's buried in Winton. He never left either and, actually, hardly any of our family ever left.

I It was a long, slow process. It's a confusing history, that one about wages, isn't it?

R Yes.

I Because, as I understand it, that first Act, back in about 1898, wages were supposed to be paid but it got ignored.

R 00:33:39:03 Yes, that's right. Yeah. Well, when the Welfare Act came in, which was the most worst, degrading Act that this government had ever, ever put together, and the reason they did it was because there was too many Aboriginal half-caste kids around and too many old people and, as I said, they probably foresaw what would possibly happen. They wanted the Aboriginals out because by then they were quite settled in their little places and there was too many of the older people. Their culture has gone completely. So, what they did, they just herded them in and mostly kept them and put them on reserves, which there's still evidence of the reserves down there now, which I've done a lot of research.

I Cherbourg and

R 00:34:34:10 Oh, no. This is out here in this country. A few of them did go. The Native Affairs, of course, had control of everybody at that time and, of course, we had Dr Roth in Boulia. Oh very famous surgeon, he was. He was also not a very nice man. He'd dissect a lot of Aboriginal people in the hospital there and 'I suppose you're going to cut that out but I don't care'. He used to dissect them for Darwin, on his ...

I

R He used to cut them up, cut Aboriginal people up in little pieces, their hearts and their brains, and stuff like that, so they could experiment, and their blood was tested to see what species they came from because he was very strongly engaged with Darwin. When Darwin came out here to Australia, Darwin also paid a visit to Roth in Boullia, but a very brief one because he took a wagon full of heads back with him and body parts.

I Oh, this is all the ... when you were saying 'Darwin' I was thinking of Darwin the place but you're talking about Darwin's Theories of Evolution.

R No, Darwin the man. The Theory of Evolution. That's right. And Roth somehow became embroiled in it, too, because he had the opportunity. He was the first Protector for Aboriginal people in Boullia, so it was a great opportunity for him to do that part and they both failed anyway, so they murdered for nothing, which is a pity I suppose. But at least those people just died for science.

I You're alleging that Ross actually killed people for dissection?

R 00:36:21:03 Yeah, of course he did. Everybody knows it. They all knew it. I didn't know it because I was only, oh I wasn't even born then. But my Mum and Dad, my Dad particularly, my Dad was a very smart man and, of course, we have Irish blood in us which means we're not full-bloods, and they spent all their life in the Channel Country. The whole lot of it. Dad never left the place. In 1942 my Uncle Reg left, and around about 1943 when he got married, my Uncle Bill left it about 1945 when he got married. And my grandfather left it round about the same, oh no, after the Kidman birthday party. My grandfather went down for that. He worked for Kidman at the time and he had a fall off a horse down there in Adelaide and he was very sick after that, so when he came back he retired from stock work and ended up in the 'Curry Hospital for about four months after that. And he never went back. None of them ever went back because they would have had to pay them wages then. People like Milson and Shaws and all the others down there, they probably went downhill after that because they had no free labour any more. And they overstocked the properties, and even you

can go down there at any time now and see the remnants of what they didn't do. So I guess, I'm not blaming anybody, I guess it's just the way the system was at that time, overtaking of all the lands, but they did destroy our people. The older ones, by 1924 the last old Aboriginal person was buried there. There were a few just after that and what didn't go to the Missions, because my great-great-grandmother, that's my Irish great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, she was taken ...

I What was her name?

R 00:38:29:20 Her name was Dangri but he called her Jenny Lyn because he was Irish and he went to the Shearers' Strike in Winton, got involved with that, shooting people, and he was on the Irish side. He was one of the rebels, of course, and they called a mountain just outside of Cannington, actually, which is below west of here anyway, after him. It's called McCabe Mountain, because Dagworth Station wasn't far from there, so he was involved with all that shearing business and fighting and shooting and burning and all that and he was one that was sent to prison. So they sent him to St Helena Island in Brisbane and he stayed there until the First World War, so they give him an option to rot in jail or go to the front line, so he went to the front line and he survived all that. In the meantime, his wife was left at Diamantina Gate. She was a housemaid there.

I Diamantina Lake?

R 00:39:33:02 Yeah. So she was left there and there was quite a few Aboriginal people there at the time. Would have been about 100. A lot of older people too. There weren't many kids because the half-caste kids were sort of taken away and a lot died out there too from disease and stuff.

I Can I just interrupt?