

INTERVIEW WITH JOSLIN EATTS

3 June 2000

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Timecode refers to tape 08_BC_DV

Topics in Bold

TC from tape 08_BC_DV

R 00:01:04:20 Alright. It was bad when I was going to school because we were living in Hughenden at this time and because I'm left-handed and at that time they still had the British belief that if you were left-handed it was wrong, you were evil, or dominated by Satan and the devil, and that came back through their old Celtic myths from way back in the early century of their history. But they did carry it, not in all schools, but Hughenden, it must have been through that teacher, probably through his family, lifestyles, and that sort of stuff. So, because I was left-handed, he broke these four fingers on my hand because I wouldn't ... I was a left-handed writer. So, needless to say, my Dad came down, bashed him up and they arrested Dad and put him in the lockup for a couple of days, but he went to court and I don't know what the outcome of that, I never really asked Dad, but he was out anyway. He didn't stay in there very long. Probably got fined, I'd say. But after that, that teacher left and we never seen him again and, of course, my finger, well it had given me four months of leisure. No school. (laughs) So I loved it. But that was the worst part of my schooling days other than fighting my way through. Needless to say, I didn't get much education. We were only briefly in towns because Mum and Dad always worked out ... contract work always entailed bush work.

I And what was it that kept your parents moving? Like, they weren't afraid to be taken under the Act, it seems. What was the engine to move?

R **Race Relations-Sex**

00:02:57:10 Well, I think it was freedom. Freedom to do what they wanted to do. And freedom to be in the bush, because that's the life they chose. I mean, they grew up through that way. My Mum was the same and my Dad, too. And even today, I mean, you see evidence, even today,

Aboriginal people, where they live is always close to their lands. That's why I still live in Winton. And when I bought that house in the seventies, I never knew that we had the Irish link there. Never knew until I started doing some history research of old Winton and I discovered that he had that piece of land. He had the whole block, actually, for his bullock wagons, and I thought 'Well, wow, if that isn't something deep. Of all houses, I had to go and buy that place'. I could have bought any house. I could have bought any house at all and, of course, after my life in the west as a young girl and a teenager, I was sort of just working in hospitals and ... mostly hospitals I worked in. I didn't like station work and so I stayed mostly there till I got married and then my life changed.

I So, I want to talk about marriage but why didn't you like station work?

R 00:04:24:22 I don't know. I mainly liked the hospital work. I suppose it was cleaner and there wasn't any chance of any bloke raping me or anything like that. I couldn't be locked up like my old people were. And I think that's basically the reason why.

I So did you directly observe girls being raped?

R 00:04:47:02 Oh, yeah. Yeah. And, of course, alcohol. Well, we never drank, see, my Mum or Dad or any of us. A couple of the kids do now, like my brother there and one sister. They like a pot or two but I don't, never did. My Mum and Dad never either.

I So in what kind of circumstances did you see Aboriginal women being raped?

R **Race Relations-Sex**

00:05:11:00 Well, I didn't actually see them being raped but Dad told me what they used to do out on the stations. They all had an Aboriginal house, a specific house, only young girls in there, all for the white men. Every station had them. They were called stud places. Springvale had them, Diamantina

Gates had them. Every station imaginable. Durack had one. Costello had one. All the big heroes had that.

I And they were jails, essentially, weren't they?

R Yeah.

I

R **Race Relations-Sex**

00:05:46:00 Yes, they were locked up and they were only used for sexual purposes and, as I said, their kids were probably killed. I don't know. Maybe they got a few out. It's hard to say. I never really did much research in that because to talk, when you're doing research in Aboriginal history, you have to talk to people and there's not much documented, I can tell you that, because the whites hid it. Mum's aunty is one of them, although he looked after her and his white wife accepted it because she had no choice anyway. So Mum was the same. Her people were all station people but Mum will tell you that side of that.

I So your Dad, you grew up with your Dad telling you these stories?

R 00:06:38:13 Mostly, yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. And I believed him. Everything my father has told me, maybe not everything. He didn't tell me some ... some things he'd tell me, little fibbers that I found out were not true. Other things he never told me nothing that I found out. But the things that he did tell me were honest things. They were cultural things. They were to do with the family, the history, and the way they were treated on the stations and them old people, the last poor old fellas still buried out there, and that was a really sad thing. There was eight old people left in 1924 and they were all in their seventies and their eighties, all waiting to be transported to the mission.

I On, this is Springvale?

R 00:07:27:05 Diamantina. They moved them from surrounding stations, see. After Meston's report they started rounding and sorting them up then,

see. And the few ... they had a lot of the old people herded in special areas. They always had special areas set up for them. Whitula was one of them. Meston got that one fixed up with Costello because that was part of his land, so that was a way of shoving everyone in there and all, oh yeah, you know ...

I So _____ was a station but all the old people got rounded up and put on one station?

R 00:08:04:10 Yeah. Eventually, yeah, they must have made a deal with Costello so it was proclaimed an Aboriginal Reserve and there was well over two or three hundred Aboriginal people there by the 1900s. And 1904, I think, it closed down by then. They'd herded them all into Diamantina Station because that was another big reserve there. They had relay camps, what they call relay stations. We call them holding yards because that's where they used to hold them and there were usually sections, kids in one section, women in the other section, and the men were always out on the stations anyway, working, and the old people were always in a section so they could dispose of them very smartly.

I And Palm, if anybody bucked the system ...

R 00:08:53:20 Oh, yeah, straight to Palm, yes. One of Mum's ancestors murdered one of the blokes that he worked with. Oh, boy, that was good. Everyone cheered. They thought it was great because he was a very cruel man and that's wonderful. I think one of the last ancestors died here a few years ago and we all laughed and we all had a merry old time. I rang Mum and she said 'Oh, God. Good'. But he was one of those cruel people. There were a lot of them but there were also good ones too.

I So Joslin, there is here, in just researching this film so far, there's an ugliness in that history ...

R Oh, yes.

I ... deeper than I even realised.

R Yes. Oh, there's a lot of ugly things.

I I want to come now to your life and I understand you saying you didn't want to work on stations.

R No.

I What were the race relations and the sexual relations and the gender relations that you observed as a young person on stations?

R **Race Relations-Sex /Work**

00:09:49:20 Well, I knew if you went onto the station you'd have to end up in the bed with the bloody station owner, or the manager. That's where you'd have to, or you'd end up on Palm Island or Cherbourg. And they'd just work the guts out of you anyway. Get you pregnant and shove you on a mission. So I avoided those places. I wouldn't work on them. I always made certain I had a job in town somewhere, at the hospitals, or the pubs. I didn't like the pubs very much but I did work in a few of them, but mostly the hospitals is where I worked mostly, throughout my working life. Even after I got married I was still working in hospitals.

I So, from what years, from what ages would you have been on Springvale with the Milsons?

R 00:10:36:12 Oh, I was only a little kid. After that, as I said, my Mum and Dad were free and they just did contract work and I just went with them till we ended up in Hughenden and I think it was the first year that I got my fingers here broken. So I could write right-handed, and I still can't write right-hand either. But from there, then, we just moved around until Mum and Dad busted up and I just worked where I could get work, and one thing, we could get work. You just had to watch where you were working, that's all, and who you were working for. But there was quite a few of them. One bloke tried to, I remember, he was a wardsman, tried to be smart and I remember kicking him in the fork and I think I must have busted one of them. But he copped it. He was going to get me charged and I said 'What for?' because I was very cheeky when I was young. I used to stand up to them all, coppers and all, because we knew the secrets and Dad was good at

relating a lot of that stuff. And I was good, too. I used to observe a lot of things, like if there was whitefellas mucking round with black women, you know. I used to go out of my way to let them know that I knew too.

00:11:48:18 So it happened in a lot of the towns. I avoided it mostly and most of my jobs, even from there, like when I got married, I was still sort of working on and off when I could to help with the money – it was pretty tough – and he worked in the Railway. Then we busted up and I ended up moving down to Brisbane then, where I could get the kids education, better education. There was hardly anything out here then. And a bit of a tough battle for a while. I used to work, because you couldn't get the dole in them days, you couldn't get pensions or anything, so I used to work in a cannery down there then. And I think most of my life I was backwards and forwards. I'd go down to Brisbane and work for a while and I'd go back to Winton because Dad was still out there working around there, and till about the seventies when things changed. There wasn't that much racism around, I noticed, because I've had fights with teachers, throwing teachers out the window too and been charged with assaults and all them things, or bashing them up, because they were cruel to my kids. I copped it when I was young and I wasn't going to let it happen to them. So there were quite a few of those conflicts during the time when my kids were going to school but boy, oh boy, it's a wonder they didn't lock me up for life. I was really, really a nasty person. But I think it was, just going back over the years, you've just got to stand up stronger and you had to learn to fight. 00:13:24:10

I I'd like to understand a little bit more about ...

Now I'm rolling, so it's 1708 here and it's 1345 on the camera, thereabouts.

Joslin, you wanted to tell me one more thing about life with your husband and how you brought up your children.

R 00:13:59:20 Yeah, it was really hard, difficult, and he was working in the Railway and Mum was living here in Mt Isa then, and she went down to Brisbane so we sort of followed her down there, and then things went wrong

from there. Just one of those things, I guess. He ended up picking up with someone else. So it left me with all these children.

I How many children?

R 00:14:25:15 I had six kids then, and I was pregnant with my seventh. So I had no money, no way of getting anything at that time. So I got a job in the cannery. I worked then till I started having pains. I booked straight into the private hospital, down The Valley there, had the baby and went straight back to work. They give me two hours, so it took me two hours. I went straight back to work. And then I was there, just kept working for a while and got sick, and I ended up picking up with a bloke. I lived with him for a while and had some more children and that was a battle too. I was still doing the same thing, working and that, but I had a partner too. That didn't last long either. He sort of turned into an alcoholic and so we just split and went our separate ways and then I moved into ... and I become a cab driver. I drove a cab for seven years in Brisbane to support my kids. That was a good way of looking after them and making money at the same time. I was lucky enough to win a licence through the government auctions. So I bought into the cab. I owned it, paid it off, and I leased it out in 1975, went back to Winton, leased it back to the company for 12 months and then till I got a buyer, and sold out my interests in Brisbane and bought the house in Winton that my ancestor owned, which I didn't know at that time.

History/Education

00:16:04:08 From there, then, I tried to get a job in Winton but that attitude was still there, you know, and I didn't have the skills. I had no skills, not much schooling either to go with it, so I ... and at the time a couple of the kids wanted to do Year 11 and 12 and they didn't have that facility in Winton so we packed up and went back to Brisbane. The girls finished their 11 and 12 and I went to TAFE College and did a two-year course on Aboriginal and Islander History and it got me a Diploma. It wasn't much but it was something, so from there, then, I got a job as a Liaison Officer at Cherbourg Community, Aboriginal Community, and I spent two years there, and that was, my interest was aroused then with history, so I started doing family

trees of the Aboriginal people at Cherbourg. And a friend of mine, a little white girl, she was the secretary for the Community Services, we combined our skills together and we created the Cherbourg Historical Society. Between the two of us, we did all the histories of all the people and some of their stories and we had a newsletter that we used to put out little bits and pieces of interest on history.

00:17:32:00 And then I got homesick, packed up and come back to Winton, and I couldn't get a job. By then, you know, without a job I was had it and I thought 'Here I am'. I didn't want to go back to working in hospitals and pubs. I had a degree in something better, so I ended up getting a job over here in Mt Isa and from here, I stayed there for a little while and then I become involved with government contract work then, because 1986 was the first year that the Census involved Aboriginal people. So I become involved in doing all the government work and the Electoral Commission opened up the way then for ATSIC so since then that's the only work I've ever done is government contract work for the Bureau of Statistics, and I did housing surveys with a couple of private firms that do surveys and ...

I You did the Pipeline Project?

R **History/Channels**

00:18:35:16 And that came up. The Pipeline Project came up and that gave me an opportunity, then, to move back into the country and follow up on the interest that I had in history, and I've always been interested in history from my Dad, way back, and I just developed my own style and I'm a private researcher now. I don't say, I'm not skilled, I don't have any degrees or anything but a lot of people come to me for assistance, so that'll tell you something. And even the John Oxley Library send people out to me, and that's black and white.

I And you are now doing a degree, a higher degree, aren't you, with Deakin?

R **Native Title**

00:19:14:14 Yeah, with Deakin University now. And it's been wonderful. It was cultural interpretation. Because of my land claim, in 1992 the land became available and, of course, the Mabo Decision had just come down then and awaiting the Wik Decision, so I started moving things into place to lodge a land claim. So in 1992 I lodged my very first one under the Lands Act but I was knocked back because the parks were not gazetted at that time, so I kept pushing and pushing until, finally, I just got there. And my land claims, so far, are going ahead steadily, following the guidelines, and I do a lot of undercover stuff, too, like land protection and cultural management and history.

I Where do you reckon is the source of your passion for history? You mentioned your father.

R Yes.

I What did your Dad tell you about history?

R 00:20:24:04 Well, he said it was very important to preserve it as much as we can. We have one advantage now. We have computers that we can document things and they're preserved forever. The oral history that Aboriginal people had died out, sort of thing, during his growing up time, so just using the modern techniques, I mean we're just as active as what they were. I still don't have any computer skills, only the basics, but some of the kids chip in occasionally and type things up for me that I want done, but I still do all basic writing and I'll keep all my history in books and I'll have a couple of little small pamphlets of different sections of my work that I do and surveys and the history of the Channel Country, I know everything.

I So Joslin, when you were saying that you think that computers have given Aboriginal people a way of transmitting their culture, similar to the old oral system, do you want to explain that?

R 00:21:47:10 Yes. Well, it's not similar but it's a way. It's not similar. You can't do anything with a computer that comes straight from your heart, because when you're writing English, which is what we have to use, you can

portray some of your feelings in the work that you do by words that you use, but it's not the same because you can't combine the oral history with your land. I tried to do it with pictures, like the book that I did, with the pipeline. I tried to portray what things I've felt, how I felt about that, by using those pictures. It didn't quite make it but it's there, you know. But it's not the same. It's just a different method, a different way of preserving history, because a lot of the people, say, during Dad's time, they held back a lot of stuff from him too, probably, because you had to follow the law and Dad was initiated but he may not have been fully initiated. You see, we come from a very high degree race of people. They were all kings, even on my mother's side, which means they were very special people. So they had very strict guidelines to follow and Dad knew that but I didn't know that at the time until I got into deeper research. And, of course, with Native Title we have to go right back now and there's been a whole lot of stuff. Alice Duncan Kemp's work, I've always been an avid writer and reader. I love books, I have a lot of first editions. I just love them. So I've had all her books. I bought them every time they came out, the first one even I bought as soon as I was able to read and, you know, be really interested in it. And it wasn't for a few years that I begin to understand the meaning of her books. The things that she put in there all were my family. 00:24:08:16

I So Alice's first book came out, I think, in 1932.

R Yes.

I So that would have been before you were born.

R That's right, yeah.

I So when do you remember first being aware of Alice's books?

R 00:24:21:00 Oh, I'd say about, probably about 10 years ago, that I ... because I look for everything to do with history. So I combine the stuff that I've got and build it ... you build history by what other people write. One good thing that English language and books have given people like me is their history and that gives me an opportunity to dissect them, because they

only tell you the good things but they do tell you locations. They tell you where they were, what years they were there and on the other side of the Aboriginal histories, you get all the other stuff, and you can put them together very simply. If he was the father of that child, there he was, the year that that child was born. It's a bit difficult doing Aboriginal history but I've developed a very good style that works very well and probably because the interest has always been there anyway, and I like the truth. If nothing else, I go for truths and facts and always have on the sideline something to back it up, so you have their books that they write about their histories.

I So you're saying that for you to read the history written by white people gives you a way to understand their perspectives?

R 00:25:49:20 Oh, yeah, definitely. And how I found my family in Alice's books was one name. It was Poperara, King of the Diamantina River, and Moses. Well Moses was my grandfather's cousin. They were first cousins, by blood, too. So I just tracked them all back and there they were. They were all in her books. Even my grandfather's name is there. My Dad's name wasn't. It could have been one of the young boys that she mentions in there, young boys, but I don't know for sure. But Mick, you can't mistake that. There was only ever one Mick in that area and that was Michael McCabe. There's never, ever, been another one.

I And Michael McCabe was your grandfather?

R Grandfather, yeah. And plus he was tall. He was handsome. Very handsome.

I So you probably told me and I've missed the connection somewhere but Mooraberie is a long way from Springvale.

R That's right.

I It's probably what, three or four hundred kilometres?

R Yeah, probably round about that.

I So how had your ... you said your Dad was Kurrawalli and your Mum was ...

R No, my Dad's Murrawalli, my grandfather is Kurrawalli on his Mum's side. Because she is Kurrawalli.

I Right. So your Dad was from the lower Channel Country.

R 00:27:14:00 His mother, no my Dad is from the top. The Murrawalli. His mother was Murrawalli person. That was their clan group. And my grandfather's mother was Kurrawalli and they linked up and Palparara, King of the Diamantina, that's in and throughout her books, he was born at Palparara which is in the middle, and he has both connections. Now, that was the name that tore me back to her books and I thought 'My God. How would she ever know that?' and I researched and found all Native Affairs records and my Dad's and grandfather's certificates, everything I could find on them, and they were there.

I Now it's interesting, I've interviewed a number of people, well a couple I suppose, so far, and talked to some others on the phone. White people from around Windorah, Jundah, don't necessarily give great credence to Alice Duncan Kemp's books ...

R Of course they don't.

I ... partly because they say that Alice left Moraberry when she was 20 and she was writing the books ...

R 00:28:22:04 You see Alice didn't ... Alice wrote the books but it wasn't her words. They were written by an Aboriginal person. That is why her books are different.

I Do you want to explain that?

R **Women/Land – Alice Duncan-Kemp**

00:28:34:15 Yeah, Moses wrote them. And Mary Ann helped. They were both educated. Alice only just wrote them. And if you've seen any copies,

and Pam will tell you the same thing, so will Yvette, there's no way in the world that that white woman could write the way she did. And that would only come from a blackfella's heart, not from hers. And she tried so hard, she's like Yvette, she tried so hard to get that feeling of belonging but she never, ever reached it. Right throughout her life, Alice never reached it. But she tried so hard. It would be like Yvette, it'd be the same thing. And she'll never get there because they're not Aboriginal. Simple. But they can get close. I mean, it's not what they want but it's close and maybe they're going to have to be ... and I'm sure Alice was the same, although they reckon even before Alice died she was moody, she was quiet, she was very secretive, and she used to lock herself up in her rooms and she was weird. So she searched probably most of her life and still never got what they had. The feeling of freedom and love for the land, the culture, the true spirit of everything. The honesty, the truthfulness and the deep religious feelings of everything that grew, the land, the trees, the water, the birds, everything.

I So Alice left Mooraberrie, I think in 1923, something like that. When she wrote the first of the books, she would have been I think married, travelling round with her husband ...

R Yeah.

I ... and as I understand it, because there was bad blood between, I'm not sure whether between Alice and Laura or which of the Lauras, you know, Alice and her Mum or Alice and her sister.

R Probably the sisters, I think, because Alice remarried, see, and none of them knew.

I You mean Laura remarried.

R Laura remarried, yeah, and none of them knew. She kept it a secret. And then when he died, well she had an affair with the other bloke. And they never knew that either.

I Are you talking about Arthur Churches?

R 00:30:57:17 Yeah. Yeah. He was her boyfriend, he was the last one. And he only came there as a, he was just a rabbit shooter. He was a nobody, a nothing, and she, well there was limited men out there in them times and the whitefellas would have had their own wives, you know, and there were plenty of black women so why would they want another white one? They usually only had one white one and a lot of other Aboriginal women. So Laura was fair. I still think there's, I haven't found it yet but I will.

I You haven't found what?

R Laura's identity.

I You're talking about Laura the daughter?

R No, Laura the mother.

I Laura the mother?

R 00:31:44:20 Laura the mother, yeah, when old William Duncan died, she remarried and then when he died, she lived with the other bloke, so as I said, that's all been, even the family never knew a lot of that. So it was probably kept secret because you're not supposed to do them things, see.

I I know Robyn said that her Mum, yeah, didn't tell her a lot about the first Laura, Laura the mother.

R No, no, that's right. Very rarely is anything spoken of her and if you go through all her books, she only mentions one or two sisters' names, so they couldn't have been close at all. And none of them were involved with Alice's thing.

I So what I want to understand, Joslin, is exactly what you believe, because Alice left Moraberry in the, say, early twenties ...

R About the twenties, I think, yeah.

I ... and I think only came back about three times so would barely have seen Moses and ...

R **Alice Duncan-Kemp**

00:32:51:02 Well Moses didn't go very far. He only went as far as Windorah and that was only briefly. He stayed around Morney for most of his life. He was on Mt Leonard as a black tracker for a while and then he retired then, and died in 1952. And that's where he's buried, on Morney station. And Mary Ann's buried a bit further down at Betoota. That was his sister. So they never left the place, and plus the fact he could write, you know. And have you seen that handwriting? Oh, you wouldn't have seen any of the notes, eh? That's been left. Yeah. Some is very good writing and the rest is real illiterate looking. Alice, from what I can gather, some of the stuff, I can't even find her listed in any of those private schools that she was supposed to have gone to. So maybe she didn't have any education. I shouldn't be talking about her like this. As I said, she left me something that nobody could ever leave. She left our people, and she was probably just a pawn, a person, or someone to relay something on for someone else. I think a lot of us, maybe not a lot of us but some of us, are probably meant to do those things anyway. There's always something in someone's life that you benefit someone else. I don't know, it's just things that I can see sometimes, and I think she left that for us. Because what she did, she put all the tribes on Moraberry Station. She put every tribe on Mooraberrie Station. Now common sense is going to tell you that that could never have happened. Never. Never, ever, could happen. All those people in one station? No.

I Because traditionally they would have had ...

R 00:35:49:06 Rights. Even if they were hunted off their lands from Kurrawalli or Diamantina Gates or any of the stations round there, Monkira, there's no way in the world, even Debney, he's had Aboriginal descendants, too.

I Debney?

R 00:35:05:16 Yeah. He was on Kyra. So, no, but she put everybody on Moraberry Station. Everybody. And they did not all come from Moraberry. Even Clara, there's a lady she mentions, Clara, in her books. Clara comes

from Springvale Station. She was there during my Dad's time and I have a picture of her and how she says she, what's the word she used? 'With her heart, she gave me her son'. Now that's a lot of crap. He was sent there by the Native Affairs and I found the reference to it, too, through Native Affairs records. So a lot of it's lies. I've dissected her books. I've dissected them that much, there's not much left of them. There's not much left of Alice Duncan Kemp, and her dream. What she did leave, as I said, she left what she wrote, yeah of course, but the rest I've dissected it.

I So is what you're saying that Alice didn't actually write the books?

R 00:36:12:16 No. She wrote the books alright, because she had the typewriter to do it. I couldn't imagine a blackfella having a typewriter. But she wrote them, but it weren't her words, they were all Aboriginal words. And what she did, she just put them all in, on one station. She's got history there of Wonkamara people. She's got history of Durrie people. She's got history of Pitta Pitta people. She's got history of Murrawalli Kurrawalli people. She's got history of that many people. Wonkamata people. She's even got history of the Kullalli and Boothamara people from over the Cooper's Creek. Now that's not hers, that's come from McKenzie. Because McKenzie ...

I Who's McKenzie?

R That's the second husband. Husband No.2.

I Laura's second husband.

R 00:37:02:20 Second husband, yeah. Yeah, well he did a bit of exploring and a lot of that stuff that she writes in there about Aboriginal people coming over here on a land bridge, that's all a lot of crap too. That's all his stuff and plus his father was a scientist. His father was a very educated man from England and he was over in the New Hebrides and India and all them places doing all that indigenous research there. That's all his stuff that she used. She must have had access to it, probably the son kept a lot of his father's things, and you know there's a lot of stuff in there but, as I said, I don't want

to tear Alice down because she left a lot for me. Stuff she'll never dream of, even in death. So no, I always give a reference to her when I'm writing any material on the history of our country down there and legends and stuff like that. I always put a little reference to Laura, not Laura, to Alice, because she kept it together. It could have been lost. See? Native Affairs could have got it and dissected that too. It would have been burnt.00:38:21:16

TAPE 2 – SIDE A