

INTERVIEW WITH JOSLIN EATTS
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I This is DAT Tape 3 and camera tape 9 and both camera and DAT are starting out new and we're with Joslin Eatts.

R Now just end her off now with what do you want to know? Native Title?

I Yeah.

R Okay.

I So just to finish off with the Alice Duncan Kemp stuff, you think that Alice has pieced together lots of different people's stories.

R Yeah, she did write about other groups but she put them all in one place. It was probably a lot easier for her.

I One way of viewing her books, it seems to me, is that just as in the way of instead of describing one particular trip, she put together all the trips she'd ever done, so you could say that instead of describing just her experience of Aboriginal people, she was putting together all the ...

R **Alice Duncan-Kemp**

00:02:12:00 What she was putting together, she was putting together other Aboriginal people's stories. Like a lot of those trips, she wouldn't have been allowed on. There's no way in the world she'd have been allowed on any of those secret journeys that she tells you she went to, unless they were forced with a gun, and I don't think Alice would have done that. I don't think she was that sort of person but maybe at that time, it was the early 1900s, it was a very bad time, a lot of the old people were dying, starving, and they were chased off their land, they weren't allowed in certain areas any more, so maybe they utilised Alice and used her too, and said 'Okay, sister, you are one of us. You come with us' because they knew they wouldn't shoot her. So they probably used her so they had access to their sacred places. That's my guess. And they would have told her what ... the things that she wrote would have come from someone else, Mary Ann probably. And she

was an educated girl, too. She was a half-caste because, as I said, William Watson was her father and he was the first manager on Currawilla Station that Costello bought, oh didn't buy, he took it off, just took the land and built a shack up there and he was the manager. He was the first manager on that place. Well, that's where they were born and actually their mother is still buried there. Which I found her grave too. And Moses Coen is called after Moses in the Diamantina area. Mary Ann is called after his sister. And they're on the map today. Palparara, my great-great-grandfather, my Dad's grandfather, Palparara down there, Waterhole. There's Palparara Station. Our names are spread right throughout that land and they'll never go away. 00:04:14:15

I What Pam's thesis that she puts forward, essentially, in her book is that because Alice ... you know the story of the tree falling on her head as a child ...

R Yeah, yeah.

I ... that she was seen by Aboriginal people as being somehow different from other kids.

R 00:04:31:20 She probably was. She may have been a quiet girl and maybe black people at that time had brains and they used the whites too, and they would have picked that up straight away. A way of getting access. They all did it. Probably my people did too. Because if you didn't, what would happen to you, you'd be sent to a mission. So they did have brains and they used them too. They let the whites think that they were in control but they weren't. So that's how they would have done it. Just through using their brains.

I I mean, it's interesting to me from Alice's work that I've read, one doesn't get the idea that whites were strictly in control actually. I mean, stuff like the Aboriginal people telling the Duncan Kemps where to plant and where to put their house and which parts of the place you couldn't go to. I mean, I get a strong sense of Aboriginal power, actually, from Alice's books.

R 00:05:38:20 That's right. Oh, yeah. There's a lot of that in there, too, and some of it would have come from McKenzie, the second husband, because I think he's got a little question mark up there too that I haven't fully researched him yet, but I'll let you know when I do. So he's the other link.

R 00:06:28:10 Just that one bit. But that's only my private view. I don't know. Alice herself, as I said, whatever her life was, however she lived it, was something that helped

her through her life and no doubt because she was a quiet, isolated girl out there, and friendly with the black people, and that was a no-no in them days, you weren't supposed to be on equal basis with them, you had to keep them down on the ground all the time. And maybe Alice, and maybe even her mother, were different. They treated them equal. And, of course, they probably would have been rejected by the rest of the whites. I mean, they're all people like Milsons, the Shaws, they're all come from big places, or made out they did. They were just ordinary people, really, just with a bit of money backing, like McIlwraith. He owned the bank, the National Bank, he owned just about, he had interests in everything. Also an Aboriginal daughter, too.

I And what were you telling me about Debney?

R **Race Relations – Intersex**

00:07:40:00 Debney was the same. He had an Aboriginal son and that was hid. Alice brings it up but she puts it in a different perspective, but that was his son, but I think he was killed. They all did. But I mean, if you went down, see one of them is still down there now, managing it, one of the ancestors. Oh, God, he'd probably have you arrested. But they don't want to know their history. They don't want to think that they've got Aboriginal connections and I don't know why. Why? Just because they've got different colour skins, or ... they should be proud.

I I guess it's that history of rape and, you know, that's what I would say ...

R 00:08:29:20 That's right. That's what I reckon. And most of it was rape too. When you read authors, even Reynolds too, there's quite a few of them actually. I'm just reading that Hothouse's books, Hector Hothouse. My God, that's a lot of crap. But what he does, he does write the stories, see. But they dramatise it and make everything look good for them, like they blame the black trackers for the Hornet Bank massacre. They blame the Cullen la Ringo massacre, they blame the blacks for that. It wasn't their fault. They only reacted. The same as anybody would. If a bloke come up to you and pointed a gun at you, what would you do? You'd react, wouldn't you? You wouldn't just stand there and say 'Okay, shoot me'. It's a natural human procedure. You just react to it and you try and survive and that's what most of them did. And they survived in all sorts of ways and, as I said, they befriended Alice the best way they could do it, probably the only way they could do it, where they knew the whites weren't interested and the whites had no understanding, so

they used her for their own protection and their own way of getting across the country free, without being shot.

I

R 00:09:50:10 Yeah, well that was their way of survival, I guess, and able to look after their places. And most of her work is all about mustering camps and their travels to different areas and checking pegs and naturally the blackfellas want to go along. They want to go see their country too. So, as I said, they just used their brains. But there could have been a genuine friendship. [knock at the door] Go away! Oh, I've got visitors love. A little mate of my grandson's.

But whatever the real reason we probably will never know. As I said, Alice did a wonderful job putting it all together. She's kept it, because if she hadn't the Native Affairs would have got it and destroyed it. But she didn't write it. She wrote it, actually, typing it out and that sort of thing. She could have changed some of the verses, but not very much.

I So you're suggesting that Moses or Mary Ann ...

R Yeah, both ...

I ... wrote stuff and sent it to Alice.

R Both. Give it to her, yeah.

I Do you have any direct evidence for that?

R 00:11:08:20 No. Just the words. The way they're written. And common sense. You've only got to read her books, they're so different than anything else anybody else has ever written.

I But you've seen handwritten notes that are part of her private papers?

R Yeah.

I With different handwriting?

R Yeah. And Yvonne picked that up too. She'll tell you.

I So who's Yvonne?

R Yvonne. Not Yvonne, Yvette.

I Yvette.

R Mmmm. She picked it up.

I Whose handwriting do you think it is?

R 00:11:37:10 Moses. Have to be. Yvette picked it up and she's an educated person, so she's probably the only one but that's because of the interest that she has, see? Anybody else just reading it wouldn't. They wouldn't want to go any further than just to read the book and say 'Oh, yeah, that was a good book. Different, but good' and just put it back on the shelf. But because Yvette is interested in the history and she wants to write her own style and she's looking for that special thing that Laura put there.

I What special thing?

R Not Laura, Alice. The spiritual. The spiritual thing that gets inside a woman's, or a man, or anybody. The special thing. The spirit that is in that country.

I And you're now drawing on Alice's work ...

R Not all of it.

I ... in your Native Title claims?

R **Native Title**

00:12:37:00 Only the names because we have to show proof of things written about our ancestors, so I had to use ... it actually mentions a lot of my ancestors. And Native Affair records. So that's it. No one else has ever written about our family. No one. And we were probably ... there's only just a few of the older people that were sent to missions but there's no background history on them. Not a thing. All it's got on poor old great-grandmother's grave is the year she died. Buried in Taroom. And that's it. Taken away from her country and she'd never had no one with her probably. A few other old Aboriginal people from other areas. So she would have died very lonely. And my grandfather's other sister's buried over in a police paddock in Hughenden. Her husband was with the black police. When they died of the flu epidemic, too, and they're both buried there. That's another one that I have to look into. So I've got evidence of where they're

all buried and they're all from records. We have to show proof so the Native Affairs records is the closest. 00:13:54:10

I So what's the process? From your end, what's the process of going through a Native Title claim?

R 00:14:01:16 Well, it's the connection to your land as well as your genealogies. Our connection to the land. Well there again, it could be a little hard for us because with us it's spiritual. I could tell you things about that country you'd never believe, so I don't tell nobody because they don't believe them. No one believes in the spiritual things any more. But they're there and they're still alive. Everything you read in Alice's books is still there.

I Yammacona and all of that?

R 00:14:33:20 Yeah. She's there more than ever and only lately it's getting stronger. So there's lots of strange things happening out there. And it's ... I used to worry about it but I don't any more now. Maybe it's bigger than all of us. Just like going to church, see, finding God. Same thing.

I Now at the moment, as I understand it Joslin, and I've got what I would call the foggiest notions of this, but there's tricky politics opening up ...

R Oh, yes, definitely.

I ... for Aboriginal people between people with, let's say, descended relationship from the land and then people who lived in land but for whom it may not be there traditional country. How do you understand that? Do you think that the Native Title system, that's been set up by Mabo and Wik and the Native Title Tribunals, what do you think of that system?

R 00:15:42:10 That system was good from the WIK and the Mabo and the WIK, and when it first came out it was good until Howard's 10-Point Plan moved in and created so much problem. So he is the blame, just one man, with a stroke of a pen in the Senate.

I So do you want to explain that, give specific examples?

R 00:16:03:10 Well if you know anything about Howard, I mean look at all, if you've seen his 10-Point Plan, they're absolutely ridiculous. They're just plain ridiculous. I'm sure in

any other country they'd have shot him by now because it's just way out of proportion, you see. He's still English. He's still living in the English atmosphere of their rules, regulations, their customs, their all of that hierarchy stuff from England, and you've only got to look at the man, listen to him. He's not even an Australian. He's pure English. It's simple. And not early English, I mean, late English. It's early stuff. All that royalty stuff.

I Can you explain specifically Joslin? Like, in what way has the 10-Point Plan complicated your Native Title claim?

R **Native Title**

Well, for one thing, he stopped us from using traditional boundary lines. We have to go, lodge land claims now on station boundary lines, which is way out of Aboriginal perspective altogether.

I So you can't ...

R That's just one of them.

I You can't draw the line down the middle of a station and say 'That was my traditional lands, that isn't'. You have to use the station boundary lines?

R 00:17:34:18 That's right, yes. So that's one of the most idiotic things. I mean, that's right against Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal history, Aboriginal anything. That, for a start, should tell you the rest of it's just crap too. But we have to go along with the guidelines and most of us are just getting through there the best way we can. I don't know the results of all my hard work in there but I'm hoping that it'll ... they tell us it's okay but he's likely to go in there and add another amendment and we're gone. They'll never take the land off us and I don't really care what he says, and I don't know about other Aboriginal groups but I'm pretty sure it's right across. It doesn't matter who is there. It's always be our country. And I think you would have heard that right throughout. It doesn't matter if they say 'Okay, that's my land. That's ...' you know, it's not. It'll never be theirs because they don't have the feeling that we have for our lands. And that's the way it'll be forever. Nobody will ever own it and plus the fact, you've only got one life so you never really own it anyway, do you?

I So when you're seeking Native Title ...

R Mmmm.

I ... what is it that you actually want?

R The land. That's what we go for. The rights to it.

I And what rights, specifically ...

R Everything. We can go there when we want to. We can do what we want to and we need to protect everything that's there.

I Is it ownership in the way that whites understand it, that you're seeking? Like the right to ...

R 00:19:22:08 No, no. Whites' ownership, standard of ownership, is nothing compared to Aboriginal ownership. Never will be either, because Aboriginal people don't need Deeds. They don't need documents. They don't need nothing written either. It's all up here and in there, and that's the difference. As I said, it doesn't matter who says they own it, they'll never own it. It's not their land anyway. Never will be.

I I know, for instance, that when Moraberry got sold three years ago, I think it was Sylvie, Alice's daughter, and one of them got the right for them to be able to go and visit the graves and look after them, and visit Moraberry when they want. Does that describe the kind of thing that you're seeking in Native Title?

R 00:20:14:00 No, we go deeper than that. We go deeper than that. But we won't tell them. We keep a lot of things secret and it'll never come out because you can't push one another's culture onto another. It can't be done. Even though we live in standard things like this is modern culture here now. We mightn't have posh homes but they're still homes. We live in modern society, we drive cars, TV, mobile phones, phones, and we eat from the grocery shops, we don't have to kill any more, and all that sort of stuff. But we're just here. The rest of us are all out there in our lands and they'll always be there. And the only thing that I can do is to protect what's there now and that's what I do, and document them, because down the track somebody'll read about it later.

I As I understand it, there's quite a lot of conflict between Aboriginal people who have the capacity to put in a Native Title claim ...

R Oh, yeah.

I ... because they have descended from people who had traditional connection ...

R Yeah.

I ... and Aboriginal people that might live in that same area but not have that traditional connection.

R 00:21:31:14 Yeah. Oh, yeah, well there is, and that's because they don't have a culture, or they have a culture but they're not aware of their cultures. It's like some of the people in Boulia, there are very few really traditional Pitta Pitta people down there. Most of them live here. Mum lives in Brisbane. I live anywhere and the rest of my family live anywhere. Oh, no, they've got homes. They're not like me. But most of the people are the same. They don't go far away from ... I'm never far away from my country.

I I guess what I'm interested in is whether you think this system that both ... I mean, both the Labor and the Liberal government have set up in a certain way the system that gives potentially Native Title rights to Aboriginal people with traditional connections and doesn't give Native Title rights to Aboriginal people who, for a whole complex of reasons, lost that traditional connection to land somewhere along the way.

R **Women/Land**

00:22:33:00 Yeah, well I think they're problems that's going to be faced for a while, simply because a lot of people don't know their culture. They were taken away from their lands. They grew up in a different area, had no idea of where they came from, and later in life when you do get older, you start looking for your roots because your whole body and your soul craves for it. You crave to want to know where you come from. And I don't know about European people but I think deep down everyone's the same. They crave for that feeling of belonging somewhere, their ancestors. Must be. And we're all human, we must all have that same thing there, that's inside, and we're the same. We know where our lands are. It's just that we can't get on a bus or get on a plane and go out to our land when we want to. But other people can. So I guess that's probably it but in all of our minds, Aboriginal people, it's up here and we're always there. I'm always there. My Dad was the same. He was always there. And he used to tell us, you know, my brother used to get Stanley and Grandfather to 'Oh, come on, I want to go and see this place', but it wasn't that, it was going back. And in his mind he would have seen his the whole area

in just one brief trip. But I was unaware of these things that went through my Dad's head and Stanley would have been the same. Because we didn't know the deepness that they felt because they were there. We're only the kids. We didn't go through what they went through and we didn't live on the land as long as they lived there, so we have to try and reach into their minds and hearts, and that's why they tell you stories. That's why oral history is so important in Aboriginal structure. 00:24:36:20

I And that's why digging out the history ...

R Yes.

I ... for you, presumably, is important.

R 00:22:42:09 That's right. Yeah. It's so I can latch onto it and I can spread it out in a different way to my kids, by writing, and computer use or typewriter, or whatever. And probably later down the track, they'll have videos to watch, or something. Who knows? But it's an advancement, has been right from the very beginning. We just had to grow with the country, it's as simple as that. If we didn't grow, we were just left like the river bed mob down here. They're lost. And some of the smaller groups in different areas, they're lost. But people like us, I guess, we're just always one step ahead to survive. My Dad did it, my grandfather did it and I'm doing it and probably my kids will too. It's something just a little bit better but never forget where you come from. So that's basically it.

I I've got no more questions. Do you?

R How's that?

END OF TAPE