

WITH LIZ DEBNEY
Recorded 4 June 2000
Updated 16/12/09.
TC is from tape 12_BC_DV.
Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

So this is DAT Tape 6, camera tape 12, 4 June 2000. Trish FitzSimons recording, Erica Addis on camera, interviewing Liz Debney out at Glen Ormiston Station. And this is the third camera tape and the second DAT of this series.

TC from Tape 12_BC_DV

I Okay. We were talking a little bit, I want to get on to floods and droughts and flooding plains. But had we finished the Xavier Herbert stuff?

R We were doing that off camera.

I You were saying that the Sally Dingo book you felt had helped you. What's that? Tell me a little bit about that book and then we'll go onto droughts and flooding rains.

R 00:01:16:00 Sally Dingo wrote the story of her husband, Ernie Dingo, and his family's early life in Western Australia and it helped me understand a lot of things about the early, the social stages that the Aboriginal people went through, going from the ... and I've always known about the effect of the removing of the Act. I can remember in 1966 when the Referendum was held and ... 1965 it must have been.

I '67 was the Act.

R 00:01:55:00 '67 was the ... well I can remember when I was in primary school in Grade 7, which is '65, it was being discussed, and being absolutely horrified that there were people that weren't getting equal pay. You know, my little 11-year-old sense of injustice was ... and, you know, I can see morally that all people are equal and that things like the Act were very, very wrong but what you were saying before about it totally changed the way, you know the people were no longer welcome on the stations, and I can see the effect that it had. I don't know what the answer is, which was right and which was wrong. I certainly don't think they should have stayed being paid not equally and all that sort of thing but it made a huge difference, and so I just felt Sally Dingo's book is an excellent way of learning about the early ... what happened to the Aborigines on the stations there and the fact that, for some, a particular group of them who had been used to being kept and

looked after and housed by the properties, but they didn't have the social security to fall back on, it just didn't exist for them, and they had it very tough. And that comes out in that book, yep. 00:03:24:10

I So talking of floods, dust storms and droughts, tell me ... perhaps we'll start with when you arrived here 13 years ago, what were the seasons like, and just tell me how you've experienced that kind of cycle, because the essence of the Channel Country is shifting, isn't it?

R **Women/Land/Droughts/Pastoral Companies**

00:03:49:04 Mmmm. Okay, when we came here it was in September. It was at the tail end of a very dry period but there had been winter rain, so when we came here everything was nice and green. For the first, and yeah we've lived through the cycles that we've just come out of a very dry couple of years where our stock numbers have gone down. The droughts don't affect me in the way that they would somebody who is on a privately-owned place where they're seeing their income disappear. We still get paid, you know Mal still gets paid his salary whether it's floods or droughts or whatever, so we're not affected in that way but it's certainly seeing the country get drier and drier, it's very depressing and you feel for the country itself, because you know how beautiful it can look and it looks so sad when it's all dry and it makes life more difficult because decisions have to be made about shifting cattle and that sort of thing. But as far as floods go, we're on the western side of the Georgina River.

Floods

Until about six years ago, the bridge that you came across when you were driving in didn't exist and that crossing was often uncrossable for up to several months at a time, so we just had no access, and we have a similar crossing to the north of us at Roxborough if you want to go out that way. So back in those days, to not be able to drive to Boulia or Mt Isa for six weeks or a couple of months was quite common and even today, in these days with the bridge, I think we went a couple of weeks, it might have been a month, that we couldn't ... that the water was over the bridge so we could not go anywhere by road. And I'm always amused when you hear on the radio when there's been flooding rains sort of in the more settled areas and all of a sudden there's food drops happening because people haven't been able to go anywhere for a week, but we're used to it and we work around it. It's just ...

and we're very fortunate here because we have an aeroplane so we can get people and things in and out.

Dust/PastoralCompanies

00:06:40:16 Dust storms. Haven't seen a good dust storm for a long time and I hope I never see another one. When we first came here, the second year that we were here was still not a terribly good year and we had some dust storms. In our earlier days, when I first went to Coorabulka, in my housemaiding days, there were some shocking dust storms. I remember one time we had the bosses up from Brisbane and the manager's wife, being a very efficient lady, had made sure that I had the table all set for tea at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and this dust storm came. So we had to, you know, totally clean the lounge room, wash everything, and yeah. So it's just part of the cycle of ... you certainly live with the elements.

I You were saying you didn't get so distressed by drought because at least the income is continuing. Can Mal face it with that equanimity or is the impact on you that you're helping him to deal with his stress?

R 00:07:43:14 Yeah. Yes, he's certainly got a lot more stress from the management point of view. It's definitely very stressful, making the decision. It's, even though we don't own the cattle, the decision to have to actually remove several thousand of the cattle you're responsible for and shift them somewhere else for someone else to look after, is a very difficult decision for a manager to make. 00:08:11:06

I I guess at least in a big company, there can be

R That's right, yep. Within the company, yeah.

I Last question, I think. Tell me who are the historical figures from this area in general and this property in particular? Like, when you came here, who were the people you would hear about? You mentioned Topsy ...

R Mmmm, Topsy and Snapshot. Ummm, the manager who was here before us, ummm, was here for quite a long time, ummm. Oh, isn't that terrible. His name's gone right out of my head.

I Don't worry.

R History-Glen Ormiston

00:08:53:15 Uhhh. I know it as well as I know my own. Ummm, yeah the names of all of the past managers ... people talk about 'Oh that was done in so-and-so's time' – and Jimmy Dwyer was the manager here before us – and particularly the men, you'll hear them say 'Oh, that yard was built in Dwyer's time' or 'That yard was built in Martin Heywood's time' or 'So-and-so put that bore down'. They tend to look over the management history of the place in terms of who the manager was at the time, which is interesting, plus the fact that NAPCO has only owned this property since the late sixties. Before that it was owned by a different company, one that ... the shareholders were very similar but the actual companies were different. 00:09:47:07

I Am I right? I think in the sixties it was owned, I mean I know the Frasers, Malcolm Fraser's family are involved in the NAPCO Collins thing, but was it the Frasers?

R It was owned by ...

I Does Malcolm Fraser enter much into the folk lore?

R 00:10:04:06 Not him, in particular, but the Frasers themselves, the Fraser family. It was owned by Collins White and the Frasers are descendants of the Collins family from round Beaudesert but, yeah, it's all the same family I gather but his connection is fairly tenuous. 00:10:28:21

I And Malcolm Fraser's aunt, as I had heard some of the story of Glen Ormiston from Isabel Tarrago, Malcolm Fraser's aunt had owned this property in the period that her parents worked here.

R Well her family would have owned it. That would have been in the Collins White time, yep. 00:10:51:06

END OF TAPE: LAST FRAGMENT OF DAT TAPE 6 CUT OFF HERE.