

INTERVIEW WITH JULIE GROVES

19 June 2000

Updated 15/01/10. Timecode from tapes 39_BC_SP

Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

I So this is camera tape 39. It's still DAT tape 14 and the DAT is currently on 40 minutes and this is the second camera tape interviewing Julie Groves in her house at Horton Vale, 19 June 2000. Trish FitzSimons on sound, Julie Hornsby on camera. Channels of History project.

So Julie, I'll come and talk about School of the Air again in a minute but when you said when you were first married you were cooking for you and Ian and you said there were five of you, were his unmarried brothers living in the house with you? What was the structure, if you like, that you married into?

R Gender Relations/Physical Hardships

15:01:26:02 Yeah, there was ... oh, well there was sort of two brothers finished school. There was one still at school but sort of during the holidays they would come ummm but, yeah, like we'd sort of work between the places but because so much needed to be done on these two places – Horton Vale itself, there was nobody living here, we worked it from Coniston – ummm they were sort of with us all the time and I found that really hard ummm because when we were first married, things had been really busy, hectic. It was sort of through the middle of the year and the cattle sales and that, to try and work through those steps that you obviously have to when you first start a relationship with somebody and then all of a sudden I was sort of plonked in this new world ummm with a new experience and I still didn't really, to me, ummm know my husband, like as in spending the time and everything with him, because in town there were that many outside commitments I seemed to have as well. Ummm and having somebody live with you all the time, I really found that hard in a relationship, like we couldn't get away like just to sort of talk over the day and because I was stuck in the house all the time by myself, which I'd never been in that

situation before, there was always something to do, ummm that, yeah, it was just hard to come to terms with. Ummm but that was the way it had to be. There was nothing else that could be done but then ummm Ian's parents obviously realised that and the homestead we were in was really old and the kerosene fridge eventually died after lots of tears. It's a wonder my tears didn't put it out. Luckily it didn't set fire, although there was a fair few near misses with me. But when it died, there was a transportable home that come up in two halves and that was his family had sold a block off ummm off their original home place, and the money was put into putting a home, so we sort of shopped around and found one of those homes that come up in two halves. And we were doing that and we had a verandah along the front so I think I was cooking for about 12 men. I was pregnant with my first child and my kerosene fridge died, so I was using the kerosene deep freeze which was a lot more reliable ummm and the fridge, before it died, it was getting full of these tiny little red ants that get in and they used to pull all the lining out of the refrigerator and it never worked very well. When it was 120 degrees, I wanted a thermometer that went higher and I couldn't find one because it had hit 120 on the side, the cool side of the verandah, every day for weeks while these people were there working. But the ants would be in the jelly and in anything that you sort of ... you couldn't really prepare that much ahead. I was terrified of poisoning someone. But then this fridge died so I was trying to use the kerosene deep freeze as a refrigerator and cooking for all these men and that went on for weeks. There was a portable lighting plant. The 32 plant had gone kafoop and you just couldn't get parts for it any more. So we were using candles. It's not romantic to have candle-lit dinners – I can assure you – for two months stretch, especially when you're cooking for that many people. Ummm and they sort of did get some party lights and there was an old, sort of a portable generator which, because, well I couldn't start when I wasn't pregnant but it just was too heavy, you're just not allowed to touch it when you're pregnant. And the refrigerator part, that really got to me ummm and I'll always treasure a man that was next door, he come up one day and found out what was going on and there was, I had had a gas one too, a fridge rather they'd resurrected from somewhere, and it worked, and then it failed on me. But he brought up just an old yellow Electrolux, I think it was,

but it just looked like a normal fridge that my grandmother used to have, and it was a gas fridge, and just treasure that day that that man, oh well my husband went down and picked it up, but he come up and, yeah, it sort of just to value something like that seems ridiculous in these days but I can still remember the, yeah, just the feeling I had. 15:06:03:02

I So Julie there was a way in which you'd married not just the man but the family and the physical difficulties. Did you ever regret it?

R **Childbirth/Physical Hardships**

15:06:12:12 No. Ummm sort of sometimes you'd wonder why you were there. Then the kids. I suppose it was when ... I got a telephone when the first baby was born. It took two months ... the house ... oh, well I was sort of in the old homestead and we were to move into the new house with the new baby ummm because the old house wasn't wired for 240 and the new home was. We waited two months for an electrician to come out from Quilpie to actually hook it up. We had the 240-volt generator was there all ready and the house was wired. We just needed him to run the wires across to the homestead. Ummm but, yes, so I had to wait in Longreach. I refused to come home without a telephone ummm it was my first baby. We didn't have a Flying Doctor radio which, I suppose, we could have got. We had a Flying Doctor medical chest but no ummm contact with the Flying Doctor. Ummm the phone line they did run sort of virtually, oh post, but tree-to-tree through the river because it was hard through the flooded country, but I did have a phone to come to, but it was just ... I had to wait six weeks after my baby was born. I think we were in Longreach ... oh she come two weeks early so I was in Longreach for two months. Ummm yeah, and all it was was waiting for somebody to come to actually hook my 240 up. And I thought I was made with that 240. I had four hours of power in the morning and four hours of power in the afternoon. I had a telephone. Ummm it sort of worked, I think, between eight o'clock or nine o'clock in the morning and through till ten o'clock at night but if there was an emergency, it was always plugged through to somebody that you could get hold of. Ummm but yeah, I don't know how the women did it, like rearing children out here without that

medical assistance because I used to ring my mother and 'Help', because you don't want to ring the doctor or somebody that you don't know very well and it might be just a simple thing. Because it's a new baby ummm the clinic sister, you had access to them once a week, once a month rather, when they come round for Flying Doctor in Windorah. But, yeah, just those little questions that, funny little questions you're not sure of. 15:08:31:02

I So this was about 1980 when your first baby was born?

R Yes.

I And just one question I want to pick up that goes back a bit, you said you never actually set fire to the kerosene fridge, you went close. Did you hear of fires starting through kerosene appliances?

R **Accidents/Jeannie Reynolds**

15:08:48:20 Yeah, my best friend down there, her ummm she'd lost her mother and her two sisters and her grandfather in a fire that was started by kerosene fridges. Ummm I suppose, yeah, through my grandmother and people talking, there were a lot of tragedies where people have been burnt in house fires or, even today, there's women that go to town, and I know what they mean, you come home and hold your breath to have a look to see if your house is still there when you get home, because even when you're there you've sort of got an open flame just over a fuel tank ummm under the fridge and you just have to keep watching to make sure that the flame was still alive and then the thing would smoke and you'd sort of have to try and ... you'd have this special utensil you'd clean the chimney with, and you'd sort of just be black, when this ... different days Ian'd come home and there'd just be this black smoke billowing out of the house and they didn't know if I'd set fire to it or not. Ummm but it was the fridge, and I know one day they come home and I was sitting there in tears with the fuel tank of the fridge was actually on fire. Well apparently it could have exploded and gone all over me but I'd never ... I don't ... never had anything to do with a kerosene fridge before and that, and I suppose Ian had grown up with them ummm and you know, sort of to them it was old hat, but any woman that comes into this

situation and you have to deal with, they just seemed like monsters. Ummm and I'll admit, I was terrified of it and there's no way in the world I would have been able to ... I would have felt comfortable living in it with a new baby, but then there's women that had to do it and they're still doing it, so ...

15:10:34:22

I So there are still women using kerosene fridges now?

R There's one just on the property next door. I think they might have, they sort of might have set up trying to run a refrigerator off sort of just the solar panels, but they've still got to run it off a diesel generator for so long. But they've still got their kerosene deep freeze. But, yeah, there are still women that I know that are actually using kerosene refrigeration.

I And they're doing that because they can't afford the electricity generation for the whole day?

R **Physical Hardships/ Owners of Companies**

15:11:06:24 No, well there'd be very few family people that would run a generator 24 hours a day. Most of us sort of seem to run it ... some run it sort of a morning and turn it off through the middle of the day and then run it for lighting. Ummm and those Mums of us that are teaching, we usually have to line up at night when the generator's running and that's when our housework ummm, things like washing and ironing, they never seem to go away, ummm and stuff like that, that's when it's actually completed. Ummm some sort of run it during daylight, you know, and you sort of go to bed early at night. But no, it's just beyond us to be able to afford it because we get no, you get no subsidy or anything from the government. There's no assistance whatsoever. If you want to run your power 24 hours, then you have to actually pay for it.

I So running your power at the moment, running your generator, eight hours a day or something, how much would your family spend on power each year?

R 15:11:06:24 Well just to average out here, just for the fuel ummm part of it, it's up sort of around \$10,000 a year up front. That's what we have to pay and then, like to buy a generator, the generator over there sort of it needs a major overhaul and we need to purchase another one, they're \$12,000 and then, in the meantime, you've sort of got all your sort of filters and servicing. All the servicing's done here, like Ian sort of does it, and he, or the men have to try and fix it themselves because otherwise the nearest place is, if you get to a diesel mechanic in Longreach. Ummm that means that you've got to pack your generator up and take it up to Longreach and sort of have them look at it because it's just that expensive to get somebody to actually travel down. By the time you pay their travelling costs to come, or find somebody that will come, ummm so it's all a very expensive business just to flick a switch and get a light.

I Going back then, to 1980, first baby, electric light, telephone. How was that? How was that time of your life?

TAPE 1 – SIDE B

R 15:13:31:20 Ummm well I thought I was made. Ummm I'd sort of caught up with the twentieth century. It wasn't, I suppose it wasn't easy as in being from an extended family where, you know, sort of I suppose when you look at it these days in town, my sisters you know, they'd sort of have a, over a cuppa you could talk to other people. Ours come about, I suppose you go into the Flying Doctor with your baby to have a check up and it was just a social interaction because there was a baby boom. The year my first was born there was sort of, there must have been about 19 children just in Windorah born within about 12 months. And that was just about unheard of to have that many babies and we all had to go away to have our babies but ummm yeah, to have that many there, and I suppose there were sort of mums of varying ages. Some it was our first, others it was sort of their last child and just to hear different people talk ummm I suppose we picked up things and asked questions and you'd sort of go to the shop and have a cuppa and yeah, like, because it was the first baby I suppose the people, the women in the community, the questions they'd ask was more or less to, looking back,

it'd be to draw that new mum out and talk about things, so yeah, you didn't think about it like that at the time but to look back on it, to me that's what they were doing, just helping us out.

I The older women were checking up on you a bit, looking after you a bit, helping you become a mum?

R **Braided Channels /Anne Kidd**

15:15:17:04 Yeah, oh looking back, that's the impression I get but I don't think it was ever consciously done. It was just that ummm extended family part. Like, everybody knew, in a small community everybody knows each other's business and some people find that intrusive ummm and, to me, because I'd grown up, to me, in a country town, and you knew it happened anyway, and it sort of as a teenager growing up I think it kept you in line. Ummm there didn't seem to be the amount of problems that there are in the world today. I don't know whether that's why or not but, yeah, and it just sort of overflowed into that, for me, into that small community, and people cared. And I think that's sort of what ummm I suppose, well it helped me a lot. Ummm and that these virtual sort of strangers that weren't part of my family but, yeah, you could sit there and have a cuppa and you'd go to town and it was an occasion you'd look forward to. And then as my oldest went to pre-school, we had a small playgroup and that was, you know, sort of the mums with children were actually doing, you had to teach them pre-school by correspondence and we'd only have it sort of, can't remember now, I think it was once a fortnight or once a fortnight. But that was something we all looked forward to and, you know, even the pregnant mums would come along, all different, varying age groups, and we'd just work with each other's children and that was just another area. I think, I just treasure the memories of that because the interaction with the other mums, it was more than just a playgroup ummm it was sort of, yeah, where we kept each other sane and talked about our problems. Oh, yeah, I suppose, without actually saying you had a problem, you could just talk about something in general terms and if nobody picked up the vibes, nobody knew that it was a great problem and you could just have it solved or suggestions would come out of that without

sort of saying, 'I have got a problem. This is what it is. What can I do?' sort of thing and, yeah, I think that gave, to me, that gave me a lot of support and I would think other mums.

I And how about the galah session? At what point did you get a radio and how did the radio intersect with your life?

R 15:17:46:18 I never had a radio. Ummm we first went onto new technology with the telephone ummm but, yeah, I sort of, I suppose to me I never really, well never had, have only sort of rung the sort of for the Flying Doctor, had contact sort of a couple of times, but yeah, like I had more or less a family doctor. I had my children in Longreach. I went to stay with my parents ummm and that, and there was sort of the family doctor from the time I was young, and then sort of there was another doctor sort of through Ian's family. There was always a doctor in Quilpie and I suppose I would contact either one of those ummm because I didn't want to put the doctor out to me, the Flying Doctor, I suppose it come through my husband, was there ah for emergencies as well ummm and that, and, yeah, like you could still ring them up. There was no hassle and if I went to the Flying Doctor in Windorah and you needed to follow something up or let them know how you got on or whatever, well you'd get back to the doctor, whereas in Jundah with the health clinic ummm, you know, if you take one of the children in to be stitched up or whatever, well then, or a cold or something, well then that sister will usually ring you back, you know, that evening or the next morning just as a follow up to see how the child got on, whereas in Windorah ummm there was a woman there, Anne Kidd. Ummm she was our saviour. She sort of never got a cent in payment from the government or that but she'd sort of stitch people up and if you had a hassle with the temperature of your child or, you know, sort of if you needed something checked, well you'd sort of ring and see if Ann was there. She was always available. She's just a marvellous woman. I've just got that much respect for what she did for the community. Ummm, yeah, and I suppose you always felt safe sort of with her there.

I So going back, you said you wanted to have the telephone partly because of the possibility of medical emergency, what's the worst medical emergency

you've had to deal with with your husband and kids out here and how did that play out? I suppose I'm maybe thinking of the mincing story but you tell me.

R **Accidents**

15:20:16:10 Ummm I suppose something that continued on, I had a child who had croup very bad. Ummm the family doctor in Longreach had told me never to put him in a car to take him to town, he'd be dead before I got him there, but didn't sort of make me feel very good but I suppose it made me stop panicking and to stay at home with him. Ummm we didn't, we never ran our power for 24 hours so you'd sort of have to weigh up how sick your child was as to whether you ran the generator or not and I had a sister whose son had croup, lived in town, had 240-volt power, got the vaporiser sort of and in those days it was steam. I had a kerosene heater that I left running in my children's, that child's room. The two boys were in the room, sort of in the wooden house. I had a tin that used to sit on top with Vicks in it, trying to run that. I don't know what the kerosene fumes ever done to that child. Ummm then Ian's aunt gave me a little spirit lamp and a little, I remember them in the chemist shops in the little triangular boxes, but you couldn't buy the medication or whatever it was that you put into the top of that lamp, so I suppose, as far as ongoing, that did really worry me ummm with that child because the hot water system with three kids, if they'd sort of use the hot water I didn't have steam to put him straight into. To this day, the electric frypan sits in a cupboard where I can just grab it. I never ever, I always have water in a kettle so everything's just ready to set it all up and Ian would start the generator. But as far as the worst one, was the same child ummm he put his fingers in a mincer. Ummm he would have been seven year old on Christmas Eve. Ummm it was about sort of seven o'clock or so and I can still remember, I was standing at the clothes line folding nappies. I had a six-month old baby and my husband come out and said, 'Oh, we've got to go to town. Craig's put his fingers in the mincer' and I just thought, 'Oh, yeah, he's sort of just cut them across the top or something' and I sort of just stood there and kept folding nappies. Ummm I suppose, looking back, I

must have been in shock. And he said, 'We're going to have to go. Get your nappy bag' and I realised then that it wasn't just to Jundah, it was further on, so I sort of grabbed the nappies and threw them in the nappy bag and went to town. I hadn't seen the fingers at this stage and it wasn't till they sort of put him in the ... there was an outpatients centre at our little hospital and there was sort of a narrow table like you get in theatre with the big lights over the top of it and they sort of unwrapped the fingers and I was confronted with a mangled mess. His ring finger of the hand he wrote with, the first thing you thought of was the mum teaching, he'd taken the top joint off. And the middle finger come back to the knuckle. And, yeah, it wasn't bleeding but it was just a horrible mess. It was beyond, you knew it was beyond the sister. We rang for the Flying Doctor but, because they had to find the pilot and the doctor and the plane, etc. it was going to be about four hours. It'd be midnight, eleven or twelve o'clock before they could get there, so my husband said, you know, because it wasn't bleeding they gave him a pain killer, he came back here and got the kids' clothes. I wasn't sure where I was going, to Longreach or Brisbane. I don't think I'd even thought past any, thought through any of that, picked up what he could find of Santa and we headed out to Longreach and he was in hospital and on drips, etc. before the Flying Doctor could have got to Jundah to collect him. And then it was the decision of what they were going to do, whether they patched him up in Longreach or flew him through to Brisbane, but they sort of did do it in Longreach so ... but that'd be the worst. 15:24:39:22

I think for me, coming down here I had no medical training whatever. I was terrified at the sight of blood. Ummm yeah and a couple of times, yeah, one brother-in-law, he come in one day in a ... oh, we were out mustering and I was on a horse and the horse had rolled down an embankment ummm and when he was getting up he kicked him and sort of hit him behind the ear and he had all this blood dripping out and he sort of, just sort of had a cut there and I sort of doctored that up, or had a look at it and said, 'We'll have to go back to the house and clean it up'. I had no idea what concussion was. My husband sent me home and my brother-in-law Robert, he went in to have a shower and he turned the water on and there was a snake dropped out into

the shower and both of us are terrified of snakes. So he sort of pulled a pair of jeans on and come screaming out of the shower and that and Ian come home about ten minutes later and we were both trying to find something that we were going to kill this snake with and Ian went in to check this snake out and it was only a python and neither of us had even looked at it. I wouldn't have known what a python was anyway. It was a snake. So we sorted that out but after I'd sort of cleaned up this ear and that, ummm I knew their mother was a matron. We didn't have a telephone. I suppose that's what really brought it home to me. And we were sort of sitting there and then he kept sort of more or less repeating things and I couldn't quite work out what was wrong and I went down to Ian and said about it and he said, 'Oh he's got concussion'. But ummm they still didn't think of ringing the Flying Doctor. It was no big deal. So we drove him next door and called the ... his mother would come out here as a trained nurse. She was at the Quilpie Hospital, that's where she met his father. So we went next door and rung her up and told her that he was coming and he hopped in the car and they waited for him to turn up and, yeah, Mum checked out the ear to see if it needed stitches and kept an eye on him, he had concussion, but yea, in those days ... whereas today you'd probably ring the doctor or get them to bring an ambulance, but in those days people ... I suppose they ... they weren't negligent but unless you ... they were aware of how much it cost to keep the Flying Doctor flying and that, and if somebody had a broken arm or a leg, if it was in this area, they seemed to take them straight through to a doctor in town as opposed to ringing the Flying Doctor.

15:7:13:08

I In that story of your son's minced fingers, it was very much you and your husband here together and I take it, because you own this place there's not things like your husband going off on stock camps for a long time. Is there a real difference in women's lives between the family-owned properties or the family-leased properties and the company properties? And how might that affect husbands and wives?

R **Owners of Company Properties**

15:37:39:10 Ummm yeah, I suppose on the company properties the men go out and camp. Ummm before they used to employ cowboy-gardeners, so there was always a man around the place. These days there doesn't seem to be too many of them about. Ummm the women are left by themselves and, just with the amount of tourists, like you never know who's getting around. To me, yeah that would be very worrying because I know I worry here. Ummm a couple of times people have turned up and I haven't heard them and they've been talking to my kids outside. It's not something that you're sort of consciously ... if you thought about it all the time, you wouldn't live here but, yeah, it's just something every so often it just brings awareness home. But as far as the husband and wife, I think it's not an easy lifestyle but we're best mates. Ummm I don't doubt that that happens on the ... well, it does happen on the larger places because I think a lot of women out here talk about their husband as being their best friend and you're there, they sort of go out but they come in for morning tea and lunch and afternoon tea. That's it. They're sort of working close by. But, yeah, and to talk things through, what happens, and then you work alongside your husband as well so that's sort of ...yeah, that's just constant but I think a lot of the worry, too, like if you're on a large property ummm you do your budgets and that but somebody else in the long run owns it, whereas on a small family property you're responsible, you know if something goes wrong well you sort of have the worry about where the money's going to come from to pay for it, and to pay for it you sort of go without something else to do that repair and I suppose it comes back to your generator. You know, if you're cleaning children up and they've just sort of had the vomiting and they've been sick all over themselves and their beds and the floor, well you know, sort of you can clean that up with a candle so there's not really any need to start a generator, whereas ummm there's a woman whose son, she's got a family of bad asthmatics and she has to keep oxygen on hand with her children, so you know sort of to run a motor for a machine, but no I think I'd rather be, with all the stress and worries and everything, yeah I know my husband's going to come home most nights, unless he's sort of away at a meeting or something. And I don't think the women on places ... there are some whose husbands do work away but there's sort of not that many of them, whereas most of us,

yeah, sort of the husbands are there and if something goes wrong, it's not your fault and there's somebody there that'll ... I suppose you presume that they're going to fix it. 15:30:52:00

I When you describe the very early days of your marriage you said you would have liked to have been outside, you'd grown up with horses and so on but it was the woman's job to be cooking and cleaning for your husband and his brothers. Would that describe your role throughout your marriage or have there been shifts according to your family situation and economics and so on?

R **Women/Work/Correspondence/Gender Relations**

15:21:15:18 No, once we come up here ummm we sort of come in, we went into partnership by ourselves. Ummm the place was very run down, nobody had lived in the house for about twelve years and that, and we didn't even have water sort of to the house. Like, there was sort of a pipeline that used to be there but I think it told a history of poly-piping connections. So the first thing was sort of to get ummm water and power. Ummm we moved here on a Friday and I started to teach for the first time on the Monday and the carpenters left on the Wednesday and my sister arrived to paint my house on the Friday. Otherwise I think it'd be still waiting to get painted. Ummm the sheep yards were full of holes. Ummm they were sort of virtually non-existent and it was Ian and I and the kids. I think the oldest was six and the youngest was 16 months so, yeah, sort of didn't even have, or there was two trees in the yard. Didn't even have a house yard to keep my 16-month-old son in ummm and that, so I suppose my role changed then. I was sort of a teacher as well as being a mother and that was awfully hard. Ummm I've had to lock myself in a room so I could try and get something to do with my oldest child. What I didn't know was she immediately went outside and told the next fellow that her mother loved her more than I loved him and that's why we sort of sat in the room together, so for about three weeks he sat outside the door and howled. Ummm the 16-month-old, well my sister was here for a while painting for two months, which I just treasure, and she used to sort of keep half an eye on him. But, yeah, it just meant that my four-year-

old then had responsibility of looking after that 16-month-old, like his baby brother, ummm and he was just my eyes and ears. But I did have to come out of that locked room ummm because it was just too much stress on my children. But I enjoyed the life. It wasn't easy but sort of like long-term, if we worked together, we were going to have something that we could be proud of and something that would provide a livelihood and we were together ummm sort of 24 hours a day, so I suppose that was important. But it was a big strain on my husband who was doing a lot of heavy work. Looking back, you know, at the time I didn't realise, but the things he'd have to do by himself, and it's only brought home to us as the kids have got old enough to help with that part of it, it just sort of makes you aware of what those men must go through today. It's not just my husband. It's other family places where, you know, Mum, Dad and the kids and that's it.

15:34:20:14

I Why wouldn't you employ ... like on the big properties there are jackaroos and ringers and stockmen and so on. Why wouldn't you employ people to help your husband?

R 15:34:31:16 We just couldn't, we still can't afford it ummm today. Like, there was staff around on, even when we come up here ummm sort of 14 years ago, there were different places around that employed staff and they don't. Two older people in their seventies next door, they're running it sort of by themselves. Ummm I think a lot of it is too, like the staff, the worry about litigation ummm and that, you know, sort of you hear some horror stories over that and, you know, we just presume that sort of everybody uses their common sense but it just seems to be these days that workplace health and safety, everything has to be laid down and, to me, workers are ... you think a worker's an idiot ummm until they've sort of been through all these regulations and just the time it'd take to sort of ummm keep up with all the changes. Like the big companies, they've got special offices that keep sort of people aware and they have workshops and everything and it's sort of the workshops are all well and good but they take you away from the property and there's just that many of them these days that they expect people to

attend. And the property, that's your livelihood and if you're not here to run it, everything just keeps going backwards but, yeah, and I suppose the other thing is the workers don't want to come out here and live without power. Like, if it sort of gets down to cool 30 degrees at night, they're not going to ... they'd think that was a hot day in, some of them, in the town or city that they come from. And you can't get a decent night's sleep till usually just on daylight sometimes. It sort of cools down then. Then it's time to get up and you sort of face another day with 120 degrees, oh well, what is it, 48-50 degree temperatures.