

INTERVIEW WITH JULIE GROVES

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Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

Transcript missing until 16:14:00:12

Like all it might be, you just ring ... we've got our own support mechanisms amongst the mums and you just ring up somebody and have a whinge and ummm but then it's all forgotten, like you know, you sort of talk to each other and all you need to do is have somebody to listen to you and I just realise what a great benefit that was to me.

I That role of being both mother and teacher, did you take to that easily or were there difficulties in it?

R **Women/Work/Correspondence: Teaching Kids**

16:14:29:08 Ummm I suppose it was just one more thing and it was accepted. I didn't ... I had absolutely no training ummm and because you're a mother teaching your child, you expect perfection from your child, so it's sort of ... I don't think there's too many mums that aren't in that boat. Ummm but yeah I suppose because I started from Year 1, ummm everything had to mesh around it ummm and you just had, my day is just set up, like for fifteen-and-a-half years now you sort of turn the radio on and you listen to notices and then you sort out your ... you sort of start school at eight o'clock. No matter what happens the child is at that desk and I think that just has to be, no matter what happens later on, but no as a mum it's not easy. There's a hell of a lot of tears go into it. Tears with your child, tears from you. You question yourself, you question your ability. I'm lucky with the husband I've got, he ummm yeah, if I'm sort of screaming too much, he'll come in and let me know ahhh and because he's been through it, he's sort of also seeing it through, I suppose for him, through his mother's eyes, and the frustrations. But he'll also come in and he'll cook a meal, you know, he'll just come in sort of different times and you know sort of cook lunch or say, 'Well I've thought of something to cook for tea tonight' and he'll do it. So I have been really lucky like that. But people would come into my house and this is

probably the tidiest it's ever been because things just get saved up for the holidays ummm and that, and that's when you sort of catch up on you know you sort of throw everything in a box and you sort it out in the holidays sort of thing. If the cobwebs are there, well, if you don't get time to do them, they get there and you've probably got dirty windows and everything else, but just as long as the floor's clean and there's enough clothes and food ummm but, yeah, so it's definitely not easy.

I How about the curriculum? Have you ever had parts of the curriculum that have been sent to you that you haven't been happy with?

R 16:16:49:06 Yes. Ummm we're sort of as parents we're sort of ... I suppose you're that involved with your children's education, we have questioned it. Ummm when they rewrote papers, we sort of had input ummm or not sort of actually the curriculum part, just the time it's taken, because ummm sometimes they just take that long to work that the children just haven't got a hope of coping and, to me, it's sad because our kids are under pressure. We've got them under pressure and nobody's got, because we're not trained teachers, we've got no idea that there's too big a workload on the children and that filters down that gradually, as the mums say we can't cope, well then they come in and our school actually takes ummm part out of it to try and let them, because we work in a two-week cycle. But, yeah, some of the content ummm you know sort of the community that my children have to live in, there's some of the content that ummm no, I don't teach because I don't agree with what they're teaching.

I Could you give me an example of that? I'm interested in the example we discussed last night.

R **Race Relations/History/Education**

16:18:11:13 Ummm yeah, my children grow up, have lived with Aboriginal children. Ummm to me, my upbringing and my husband, it doesn't matter what colour your skin is, everybody comes into this world the same and goes out the same. We all live and breathe. And ummm my second oldest child, they'd rewritten the papers and they had a segment on

Aboriginals and they sort of went into it, and he asked what an Aboriginal was and I had to tell him that his mates were Aboriginal and that really, that upset him because he thought they were the same as what he was. And he didn't even realise that their skin was black ummm so that was how much notice the kids took and after that child, the next two I vowed and declared that I would never name an Aboriginal ummm because there were Aboriginal people come in and out of our family life. Ummm Aboriginal people I think the world of. I really admire them. But to me it's not because they're Aboriginal, they are a person. And then with my last child ummm in Year 5 they studied Aboriginals for over six months and, to me, they were making out that they were a different race of people ummm they were sort of creating segregation and all sort of all the talk of ummm sort of resolving our differences and everything, to me, I could see it splitting our little community and making one race of people seem different to another. So I know I wasn't the only mother that was concerned. Ummm there were mothers from all different areas because there's Aboriginals in all our little towns, like larger country towns as well as our small towns, and stuff was ... mothers were taking stuff out of the paper ummm yeah, and I will admit I cut stuff out and I put a note to my teacher and explained that my child lived in a community with Aboriginal children and she was reared to believe that neither child was any different. She was friends with them and that was the way I wanted it to stay and I refused to teach that they were different to her. 16:20:44:10

I And the stuff that you found problematic, did you feel like it was idealising Aboriginal people or portraying them negatively? What was it in the curriculum that upset you and upset your child?

R 16:20:57:12 It wasn't negative. To be quite honest, the child just got sick of studying the same thing, paper after paper after paper. It just kept coming up. Like there was no variety of it. Ummm I suppose what they were doing, they were ummm portraying Aboriginal people ummm like as in today, but then the child would sit there and watch a video and say, 'Well why are they Aboriginal?' because the person that they knew, they're black, and these people weren't very black at all. Like they obviously had white blood in,

they were not pure-bred, and then they had a video clip of ummm a hunting segment and this eight-year-old child sat there and said well, you know sort of the old Aboriginals they sort of walked everywhere, they used a spear, and these people turned up to go hunting in a four-wheel-drive with a gun, dressed in modern-day clothes and that was to show the child today how they ummm how they lived a long, you know, sort of a long time ago and, to me, that was an insult to the people because like you hear some wonderful tale of some, you know, some of the droving trips and some of the achievements of the Aboriginal people and like their ummm just their stamina and, I suppose, things that aren't recorded and yet the children were taught none of that. It was sort of, yeah, like in our home it just seemed to be teaching them that they were separate people.

I Being divisive rather than inclusive?

R Yeah.

I Was there anything ... I know there's been drama in the curriculum in Brisbane about presenting white occupation of Australia as invasion, let's say, rather than ... was that any part of what was problematic? Whether one presents we white occupants of Australia as having originally been invaders or whether the land was empty. Have those issues arisen for you in curriculum at all?

R 16:23:27:04 I suppose we're lucky ummm talking amongst some other mums ummm we can look at what's being taught. Ummm some of the stuff, I suppose, we were taught differently. I don't think anybody's ever got away from the fact that it wasn't ummm, there wasn't conflict but it's still ongoing.

TAPE 2 – SIDE A

R **History**

16:23:56:14 It's still ongoing in life today ummm in other countries so, yeah, as far as the invasion ummm it depends which side you look at because, let's face it, like sort of the Aboriginal people come through from the north and they come here, then we had sort of Dutch settlements, or the

Dutch sort of come in and like for centuries, just on the fringes, not so much in the interior, there's sort of been people mixing in and my family didn't invade and I can't see why I or my children should be held responsible for something that, in that day and age, that seemed to be, that was the done thing. You know, we can't change history and we have to take what was there ummm work with it, work through it and move forward. But this business of paying ummm you know if it was invasive and sort of paying, who do they pay? I've got a bit off the track here. Ummm yeah, because it's not filtering through, it's not creating jobs for our children. That's not my particular children, but to me our children are the children in our community and that, sort of if it's going to do good for those people and everybody mixes in together well, hey, we're all the same and I suppose that's the way that parents are ... I suppose we interpret that curriculum as to where our children live ummm in society. Whereas out here they have to live with the children so we don't teach any different. 16:25:51:00

I Okay. Let's move on to your political stuff. When did you start to get involved outside your family in political activities, Julie, and I'd love you to tell me the story of that.

R 16:26:05:10 Ummm oh, I suppose it all started ummm I suppose the basis of it was when my daughter come along. We were in Windorah and we ummm the centenary come up and we were sort of catering and that ummm and we had a committee. And the money that we made out of the weekend we wanted to ... we were going to put into a park. Like we had a vision that there wasn't a park and a park was needed and all we needed was some ground so the council sort of got a fence built around the block where the park is today. Ummm and there was a bough shed put there and we wanted, a friend and I, we wanted to sort of go ahead and put the money into putting trees and grass and playground equipment and somewhere for us to go with our children to get them away from the pub, because the only place to go, you had a lawn at the pub and you could go to the pub, I don't know, to have a cup of coffee, and it was sort of like a gathering place, and we'd sit up in the bar and drink tea and coffee. So it wasn't the alcohol part, but then we

didn't want our kids there. Like, they could play out the back but you couldn't really see them, otherwise they'd be out in the street, and we just saw a need for a park and when we wrote to the council we were told that it had to be landscaped and approved and everything else and they pulled the fence down. In the meantime, the friend and I that were behind it, she sort of her husband died and she moved away and I was up here and I suppose things settled down for a while but then, I suppose, in January, I suppose you did a lot of whingeing and things you'd like to see, and in January 1999 ummm we had, there was an announcement on ABC radio that the ummm Mines and Energy Minister of the time – it was a Labor government – had announced that the deal we'd been negotiating through Caplec which was the local electricity authority that covered our area, and they were in Barcaldine, or Rockhampton rather, and the head of it, and the previous ummm Coalition government ummm, that had been knocked on the head, that was to bring power into here, this area. And we were to run with ummm RAP power was the answer for us and ...

I RAP?

R 16:28:35:07 Remote area power supply, as in solar. And anyway, I think when that announcement was made, I'd had an afternoon tea here a couple of weeks before and, of course, everywhere you went power was an issue for us, and becoming more and more so, and I had about four phone calls from different women saying, 'Did you hear what was said? What are we going to do?' And there was a community cabinet meeting to be held in Longreach in two weeks' time and the ministers of the Labor government were coming out and we didn't, none of us had a clue, knew anything about politics, so said, 'Oh, well, we'll all just write a letter and tell of our hardship, how we have to live, and we'll put them together and we'll take them up' and we were going to target ummm Judy Spence, the Minister for Women's Affairs, because we felt that a woman would listen to us more than a man. We didn't know what you did. I did ring up the phone number and found out that we couldn't book a deputation with a minister. We didn't even know what a deputation was.

So we were ummm put our, still collecting letters when we went to Jundah, through Jundah.

Women for Power

16:29:45:10 There was nine of us went up and there was five of us in our car and I said to the women, 'Well, we're going to have to have some sort of a summary of these letters' and gave somebody a pad and a pencil and they were supposed to go through the letters one at a time and summarise them. But people were shocked at some of the things that were in those letters. Like, we used to whinge about it amongst ourselves but everybody was in the same boat so I suppose we just waited for the government to bring power one day. Ummm and the women got that involved, you know, sort of by what come up in somebody's letter and then ... I suppose it was therapy for us in a way, you talk about experiences. So the long and the short of it was by the time we got to Longreach, we didn't have very much written down for the summary. We collected more letters. We met in the park about an hour before this meeting started and we collected more letters and one of the sisters had a computer so she was going to summarise these letters and she sort of had a bit down and she sort of wanted facts like how far we were from Longreach. Well that was okay but then sort of just the information on how many people in our shire and how many places involved and families, and we realised we didn't know very much at all, but she put together a summary and another sister was waiting to photocopy it, and we had to have it professionally bound, so it had holes punched down the side and a binder put in. So we sort of had three copies of this, so this is what we turned up with but ummm two of the women went off to do that. We were in the park and we had name tags. People were going to have to know who they were talking to. And they said a name and we hadn't thought of any of that, we just thought we'd just have a name tag, and I said, oh, you know different ones that ... they said 'What are we?' and I said, 'We're just women here and we want some grid power' and we couldn't put 'Women for Grid Power' on our stickers so we just had 'Women for Power'. And what I was told, people kept saying later on, was that nobody knew who we were. Nobody

knew what we were after. Ummm they just thought we were another power group that was sort of different political arm or something, and anyway the Premier went and asked one of the women you know what we were and what we wanted, so through that, we got twenty minutes with the Premier ummm Minister McGrady the Mines and Energy Minister. I'm not sure who else was there but it was all new, like sort of the bureaucratic officials with them. And we were asked to put our ummm point lightly and not beat about the bush because time was short. But that man did give us twenty minutes and he ummm sent us off with the Mines and Energy Minister who women had been writing to for years ummm you know, sort of with their hardships and that, and they'd get a reply back and that was as far as it went. But I think it was just we had to do something rather than write on an individual basis and our letters, nobody told any lies, they just ... some of them haven't even told how hard it is for them to live and the stories behind it and, yeah, I just ummm was spokesperson on the day and ummm never done any interviews before and really got thrown in at the deep end, didn't know how you addressed ministers or how you went about it. Ummm and we had our time with Minister McGrady but didn't feel that we were sort of getting anywhere with that and we had gone there to meet with Minister Spence and she was excellent, ummm sort of listening to us. Ummm we went to the Health Minister but didn't get a very good hearing there because her mother had lived without power in the hills behind Maleny and said it was the worst thing she ever did was getting power onto that property. But I don't think the minister in this day and age would like to live without power. But that was her opinion. Ummm and yeah, and we just sort of handed out our booklets and we thought we'd leave it at that and then it was sort of just on a roll. It's just continued on, it hasn't gone away, and people from all walks of life have just said, 'Don't give up' and 'Keep going' and it's not me, it's the women's letters that are just speaking for them. And ummm ...

I So going from that day when Women for Power was created, just tell me what's happened since. So that's a year-and-a-half ago, what has Women for Power done since then and have you had any outcomes so far from your struggle?

R **Women for Power**

16:34:45:12 Ummm yeah, we sort of got as far as ... we've been lucky in a way ummm Federal government had a community, or had a cabinet meeting in Longreach and we got to meet John Anderson and had time with his advisers. Ummm we've sort of been lucky that the government has these things like the Coalition – Queensland Coalition – we went to Blackall and met the ministers there. It's all really hard because we're just a group of mums ummm that didn't know what you did or anything and then, through Women for Power, it became not the power, we were picking up other issues in the community and you were sort of picking up ideas from the people you met with. And the long and the short of it was that I was encouraged to stand for ummm local council and was lucky enough to get on there. And, yeah, it was just sort of one step forward to just the things that we were picking up on ummm but you've got to get out of your area down here. The information and things we've found out and discovered, people aren't going to come here to this isolated community really, and you know sort of give you answers you have to actually go out and look for them. The power's ongoing. Ummm we have got, or the minister's answer is remote area power supply solar. It's been here for nine-and-a-half years now, it's worked for six-and-a-half. We've just about worn out a \$12,000 stand-by generator. Ummm it's sitting over there at the moment but just doesn't work. It needs a major upgrade. It'd cost about \$150,000 to replace. 16:36:32:00