

INTERVIEW WITH MANDY MURRAY

20 June 2000

Timecode refers to tapes 45_BC_SP

Topics in Bold

TF = Trish MM = Mandy JH = Julie

SIDE A 45_BC_SP

TF ... June 2000. Channels of History project. Trish FitzSimons on sound. Julie Hornsey on camera. This is Tape 45 for camera, Tape 17 for DAT and this is the first interview with Mandy Murray on her property called

—

MM Braidwood.

TF **Braidwood**, thank you, just outside Jundah. So Mandy, tell me where and when you were born and what, we're not going to go through your whole life story, but just where and when you were born and what your name was when you were born.

MM 21:01:19:00 Um born in South Afri – South Australia, in Adelaide in, on the 18th September 1961. And Mandy Boyer is my maiden name.

TF And um how in, in brief terms, when did you land up in the Channel Country and what was, you know, I guess I'd like you to tell me the story of meeting -

MM It's been –

TF Meeting Alex. Actually first just tell me a little bit about your childhood. Just so we get the sense of, of where you get your trajectory.

MM **Childhood**

21:01:58:06 Oh OK. Um wonderful childhood. My father's an architect and my mother was a nurse and they came from overseas and moved to Adelaide, had five daughters and we had a fantastic childhood where we travelled every school holidays. My father rigged up an old Combi van into a camping van that accommodated a family of seven, including two dogs, a shower, a toilet, everything, and all my childhood memories are of us travelling. Um all the way up along all parts of Australia that I wouldn't even know what they were called unless I looked back at the slides. Um and while travelling through Queensland one holidays, they decided that my asthma seemed a lot better here and hence went back to Adelaide and moved and we were Queenslanders from then on.

TF And do you think from that travelling, would you – that you got a feeling for the Australian bush?

MM 21:02:56:08 Possibly from that but also when we did move to Queensland, my mother is definitely an animal, bush, land, space all around her person and um we lived near the city of Brisbane because my father's work being an architect, needed to be there but we have five acres which I still remember being a lot of land as a child and we had every baby animal you could think of that my mother would bring home in the back of a Mini Moke. When she picked the five girls up from school, we'd clamber in amongst calves and chickens and whatever she happened to have discovered that were not being treated right by somebody somewhere. Um and we all had horses and we did pony club and I just remember such a fun time with my sisters and I guess as a result of that, we are very very close.

TF So are talking Kenmore or something like that?

MM Um Aspley, was called, I think it's now called um Bridgeman Downs, Castledine, Bridgeman where we were. But it was sort of all Aspley then. Yeah.

TF So are saying you almost grew up like a country kid in the city or did you grow up with a city identity?

MM 21:04:06:04 I would say, at the time I didn't think about it, but now looking back, I was definitely more of a country girl. I know we didn't, def – we definitely didn't have the neat braids and the neat school uniform. I mean um friends that I went to primary school now still laugh at the Mini Moke pulling up and the five girls with hair out to here, half putting on our shoes as we were running up because we had got the calves out of the next door neighbour's market garden that morning or, or um chased the horses out of the other neighbour's beautifully manicured lawns and then run for the bus with the bus driver putting bets on which one of us would make it to the bus first and I guess um feeding calves before school, riding horses after school, bringing up, being woken up in the middle of the night to watch baby pigs being born while we all sat with hot Milo and my father rigging up a light thing so we could all witness the birth of these pigs and I guess I feel a lot more like I was a country girl. But then as we became teenagers, um my friends all tell me I was very

much a city girl. I guess because we moved into the suburbs once my parents were divorced so they all saw the five Boyer girls as being definitely city girls.

TF So, at, so – fill me in then, the trajectory that landed you up here. Like how did you go from that –

MM From that there?

TF Yeah.

MM **Romance**

21:05:25:08 Um did my teacher training in Brisbane and was teaching in Brisbane, very close to where I lived for three years and transfer day arrived and everybody point to me and said it's your day today for sure. Um, three years in the one school in the city was fairly lucky as it was and, yeah sure enough, the mail came in. The Principal came to my door. I ran to the other side of the room saying 'No, no, no. It can't be true', but I must admit, part of me thought the adventure was exciting. Um I was sort of half wishing that OK, my life would take a different change and wherever the department sent me would be an adventure. And I was sent to a town called Aramac, north of Longreach, north east of Longreach, and um within about eight months of lots of different adventures of living away for the first time from home, and oh, just lots of different things that went on that year, at the end of the year ended up at the Muttaborra B&S Ball, affectionately known as the Burrado. I met a tall blonde surfie Sydney boy who told me he was a grazier and I thought yes, 12 o'clock, we all tell stories at that time of night. Um and I had to laugh because my friend that was teaching at the school with me at the time, we'd dressed up in, you know, the beautiful shoe-string strapped dresses. We beared the cold. It was quite a cool night. But you don't worry about that when you've got your shoe-string strapped dress on and by 11 o'clock, we looked at each other and we both said 'It's time. It's time'. And we went to the car and put on the big daggy half-dirty sweatshirts. Within ten minutes a voice behind me said 'Would you like to dance?' and that's where I met Lex and um I'm always laughing at the fact that we went all that time being freezing cold. I should've put that sweatshirt on from the start.

TF The, being a teacher or a nurse or a governess and coming to a country area and then marrying one of the graziers or one of the, the men here, is in some

senses like a well trodden pathway. Do you think at some level you expected something like this to happen or was this a, a surprise in your life?

MM Gender Relations

21:07:36:18 I don't think – I definitely didn't expect it to happen because I left Brisbane with a 'you'll be – you'll meet a' – the Principal said to me, 'Don't worry dear. You'll meet some lovely grazier and you'll never come back to the city'. And I said 'No way. I couldn't live without my shops and the restaurants and the movies and you know, coffee with friends and um I'll be back in my two years when I've done my country service'. So I didn't really expect it and I certainly didn't think I'd stay living out in the west. Um but I know since I've been here that every year the transfers, they come out around, on – sort of very attached to the Longreach area and they have a Meet & Greet at the beginning of the year at the Longreach Gentlemen's Club and um from that intake every year of the new nurses, doctors, teachers, there is always a couple that remain behind and a few friends of mine um and myself are affectionately known by one of the graziers as the '85 Drop'. He says the '85 Drop' wasn't a bad year because that was when a few of us arrived and we, a few of us have married and stayed so it definitely happens. I just didn't think it'd be me.

TF And so how was it that, that Alex was a Sydney surfer?

MM And came here?

TF But a Channel Country grazier, yeah.

MM 21:08:55:18 Um, his family, he's one of five children. One girl and four boys. The family lived North Shore in Sydney at Wahroongah. His father was um born and bred on a banana plantation actually at Byron Bay and had – oh I think he grew up in the Victorian sheep country. His father and um when Lex was born, they were at Byron Bay on a banana plantation but they moved to Sydney for their Dad's work. He ended up owning a trucking business in Sydney and um as the kids got older, his dream was to take them out on to the land. He didn't really like what, what he could see happening um I know Lex's Mum felt that the area lived and the people they mixed with, tended to be fairly pretentious and she really liked the thought of the whole family moving, working together, living together, socialising together and they started looking at a property. And they actually went western New South

Wales never dreaming they'd end up in Queensland. And I think the story goes that they were flown over a few properties and the plane kept flying and they eventually ended up over sort of this area and um later on, the father and I think three of the boys came back in a car and camped all the way along and I think they camped down here at Bellwater Hole and fell in love with the place and, and this is where they came. And within sort of three or, three years I think, they owned three properties in this area so – yes. It was, it's quite amazing because it wasn't something they planned either.

TF So that would have been what? Mid 80s or?

MM 21:16:26:02 Ah yes. Would've been I think because Lex went from Sydney school to the Longreach Pastoral College so – and I think we worked out I was just before I went to Aramac so it must've been sort of, yes, early 80s.

TF So it's –

MM '79 I think they bought the place.

TF It's interesting if Lex had grown up in the city that he was going to agricultural college. I mean father and son very much shared the same dream or powerful father/son doing what his father wanted? Or –

MM Um –

TF You know what I'm saying?

MM Yes.

TF From Mona Vale –

MM Mmm.

TF To Longreach Pastoral College would have been –

MM 21:11:06:08 Yes. I think Lex had, he left ah right at, I think he was still sort of the last bit of school or the beginning of Year 11 or – so he was still very much sort of a school age and in, in the middle of studies, and so to come out here um during a time when he wasn't sort of ready to leave school totally, I think that was the step that they chose – they chose, or he was keen on – I'm not quite sure of whether they expected him to go there or if he sort of thought that would be good. I know they were all really excited to come here so I guess the idea of learning about the land was, he would have been happy about. But um he did find college was difficult in the first year due to the fact most of the students were from the land and he had no idea. And he was, he was fairly well teased apparently for being, asking you know the silliest

questions but that only helped him to learn more and I, you know, from what I gather, he did quite well at college and has definitely had an interest in the land ever since so.

TF So was there a way in which you and he had a somewhat similar background? Like city based but with a kind of a dream of the country?

MM 21:12:17:04 I think so. We talk about things now and we laugh at the fact we're bringing up, the way we bring up our own children is very much taken from the things that happened and what we did as children. And even though he, he was sort of from a wealthy Sydney area and you know fairly wealthy parents, um they certainly weren't spoilt children and they had to work and learn about the value of money and whereas I came from a divorced family where we sort of, I guess we struggled but not that any of us were aware of it. Um we felt we had everything we ever wanted and it's only now that I realise the val – you know what money's all about, that we actually really didn't have that much but um his family did very similar things with their children as to what happened to us so we'd have very similar ideas in a way we're bringing up our own children. So I guess in that way it probably helped for us to feel familiar with everything I guess.

TF So how did you then, how did the Aramac to, to Jundah –

MM To Jundah come about?

TF Yeah.

MM 21:13:13:22 Well funnily enough, at the end of my Aramac year, you have to put in whether you want to transfer out by about October and I had decided that I was off overseas and because I hadn't been teaching five years, in those days you had to have five years before you could apply for travel leave, so I thought OK, I'll resign. So I had actually just resigned and went to the B&S Ball and met him. So I was already off and gone and finished with teaching. I went back to Brisbane and I worked in a restaurant in the city where I had been working part-time through college and I thought if I get lots of experience and I was a hostess at the restaurant and I thought, you know, I learnt a lot about bar and cocktail waitressing as well and picked up a few new skills ready for sort of travelling, and um of course that was all my plans until I met him and I went to Brisbane, worked at the restaurant but of course we were on the phone all the time and missing each other terribly and thought

gosh, I can't believe that I could've been out that far closer to him um so for that year I worked until Easter and realised I really didn't want to go overseas for a few years because I'd met him and I really just wasn't wanting to go now and so I actually, one day walked into the office of ah the North Brisbane Department of Education office, and I walked in and I talked to the Regional Director I think they were called in those days and I said I was just wondering if I could go back full-time teaching out in Longreach. And he said 'We never get those requests'. But he made a phone call to Longreach Regional Director and he said 'Oh I know Mandy Boyer. She was teaching in Aramac last year. Actually she would be quite useful here in Longreach because there's another girl that leaves at Easter to get married. She was the local relieving teacher but we weren't going to replace her. But the fact I do know of Mandy and I can see that she would you know, actually be quite useful here, um ring her and tell her she can be, if she can be out here in a week can she start.' So I got a phone call as soon as I got home to say when can you start and I was absolutely blown away because at that time I had lined up that I was doing a parachute jump with the Queensland Uni Rep ? Club um and a few other things that were coming up in the next two weeks that I just didn't want to miss so I sort of said oh well 21:15:36:22 I've got to rearrange a few things here and um I could be out there in three weeks so sort of they said right and I suddenly ended up in Longreach at the relieving teacher. Um came via sort of Lex's property. His Mum and Dad lived here at the time with him and um we sort of thought great. All set. This is, this is it! He's two hours away from me. This'll be great. But unfortunately within a few weeks, I'd really sort of got into the Longreach scene and was suddenly single, because actually when I was in Aramac I was in the middle of breaking up with a Brisbane person and it was all very confusing and suddenly was on my own and I thought oh I actually really like this so I came down one weekend and told Lex that it was off. So that was a, that's a very long story but anyway, after um I stayed in Longreach for two years and the new school of Distance Ed was opening and I was very excited, oh because then I decided I'd go overseas at the end of that year. And then the new School of the Air was opening and I thought gee, that would be great skills to learn to teach children on the air on properties and you know, that would be really um a challenge in my teaching. I don't think I'll

go overseas next year. I'll do that. So I applied and I got that job. Did that for a year. The following year was the Brisbane's um Centenary in '88 and I thought I'd really love to be in Brisbane for that and so a friend of mine that taught with me Longreach, we went and lived in Brisbane for the year and of course right at the end, we'd already organised the transfer from Longreach to Brisbane. With six weeks to go, we went to the Stonehenge B&S Ball and of course on the way down, my friend Sally said to me 'Do you think Lex Murray might be at the B&S Ball?' and he had long gone back to Sydney. During this breakup he's left and gone back to Sydney and worked and came back out now and then apparently to do work for his Dad out here which I didn't really know about. And she said 21:17:29:14 'Do you think Lex Murray might be at the B&S Ball?' and I said 'Oh I wouldn't think so'. Um so we walked in and within half an hour, Sally turned to me and tapped me on the shoulder and she said 'Guess who's just walked in?' and apparently I turned to her and said 'Is my lipstick still on?' and she said – just looked at me and she just went 'He's for you'. And I was really quite shocked and anyway at our wedding, she stood up and told that story 'cause she was my bridesmaid and told everybody how you know, I had to, I wanted to make sure my lipstick was still on because he was, he was actually there, so obviously deep down there was still something. Something there. And I was hoping to run into him again. And he made it very tough for me from then on you know, to end up back together but I worked on him and it worked. So then I was actually transferred back to Brisbane. Stayed in Brisbane for the year. Went for the promotion to become the Principal of Jundah because we decided if we're going to be together, it's got to be right here. None of this Longreach or whatever, so um I won the promotion to become Principal of Jundah School so out I came. 21:18:30:02

TF So in your life at that stage, what mix of kind of career and assuming career would come from marriage if you know what I mean? Like um how much were you assuming that, that marriage would end your career and how much were you seeing a longer, a longer term pathway for a profession? Can you remember?

MM 21:18:53:20 Um I think my main aim was that he and I would be together and the fact that there was a job going, I don't think I thought I would just

come out and live here and you know, have a relationship with him and live here. That never crossed my mind. It was sort of like well I'd need to find a job. I need to transfer as a teacher out closer to him and the school was coming up for transfer, for a new Principal. Um something I had never dreamed of going – yeah that was something somebody else did, somebody much brighter and much better at teaching could do. Wasn't something I'd ever be given the chance to do. And of course um went for the promotion and won the position because it wasn't really a sought after position and come into this whole new challenging career and I was just so thankful because um you know, it's been the best part of my career. I think it's given me so much more confidence in the fact that anybody can do anything if they want to. It's not certain people that get to do these things. Everybody can if they want to. And it's actually a lot of my friends um it helped them in Brisbane realise that if there was jobs going as Educational Advisors or something not just in the classroom, it made them sort of think well maybe we are the sort of people that can do these things so um I didn't ever stop to think that I wouldn't be continuing my career but – by coming out here. It was sort of like I'd have to find somewhere where I could teach so I could also be close to him.

TF And this was a one teacher school?

MM Mmm. One teacher.

TF So do you want to describe what, how you found work, describing – arriving in Jundah? What year was it? What did you find –

MM **Women/Work:Teaching**

21:20:27:00 Um '89. I was so naïve to think I could even take it on. Um I think because I'd already been – I had taught out west and I had taught in smaller schools, it wasn't quite as scary as I think coming from a big school in Brisbane. I would never have been able to think that I could do that. But I was very naïve in to thinking that I could do it. Um and I think at the end of the first year I found the job even harder than when, in the first week. In the first week you just don't know what's involvement. By the end of the first year I felt it's too hard for one person to do this. There was no admin assistant then and the teacher aide hours were very, very little. I had seven grades. I had um fifteen children in my first year in seven different grades. There were seven subject areas to cater for for every grade level. I was also running the

admin side of a school and paying, and paying bills and running a cash book that I had never ever had to do myself. Ah and never ever learnt to. I didn't do accounting or anything at school. So it was a huge huge learning curve. Um very, very frustrating at times. Um you know, your praise and your pats on the back are very few and far between and of course anything you did wrong was always the focus. Um but I guess that's probably something that makes you tougher and makes you realise that um you know, you're not in it for the, for the pats on the back. But um it was a really, it was a really hard year and I actually ended up with pneumonia and, Ross River Fever and then pneumonia and you know, being quite sick from not taking a break when I really – my body really needed a break when I was sick and I just felt that you couldn't do that. And I remember the Doctor in Brisbane saying to me once, you know, I don't know what it is about you women that feel like you can't stop when your body's telling you your sick, and um you know, you'll end up in hospital and a sickly person for the rest of your life if you don't, you know, listen to your body and stop and I was sort of a bit frightened about that because I was always quite healthy and fit. Um – 21:22:28:24

TF Is that to do with a tough environment?

MM **Women/Work: Teaching/ City Girls Go Bush**

21:22:32:08 More to do with the, the workload and the, the responsibility of running a school and being in charge of those children's education and going to bed at night and waking up in the middle of the night thinking 'I didn't do enough with that one girl in Year 4 today. I just never seem to get to her. Those three little ones in Grade 1. You know, have they spent too much time waiting for me to get back to them'. And I guess I had a lot of sleepless nights and Lex was a very big shoulder to cry on. Um and at the end, sort of getting close to the end of the first year and I battled out here with no electricity and frogs in the toilet and spray bottles all over me to try and sleep at night and wetting the sheets. Under the shower and quickly putting it on your body and trying to fall asleep quickly before it dried and of course waking up half an hour later and you're like a steam bath because it's so hot and we had a donkey for the hot water which would take sort of two to three hours to heat up to have a hot shower and um I'd get home from school at 7 or 8 at night. Lex would come in from the property about the same time. So your shower

was like 10 o'clock you know, before you could get in and I think, it was, it was a very different environment. A different job. A different workload. And it was a tough year um and I know he always laughs and says he waited 'til I'd been here three years before he asked me to marry him because he was never quite sure if I could survive. But um at the end of that year they decided that they needed to employ admin assistance so I think I started to see that there was a bit of a light at the end of the tunnel and I think I started to feel that that challenge wasn't going to kick me out and you know, I could maybe handle the frogs now and um that I'd work that programme so that Year 4 girl wasn't left out as much and yeah. And I felt, felt actually by the end of my six years as Principal, that I had it, not completely right but I felt that I was fairly on track. But it took you know, a lot of, a lot of doing the wrong thing before you find out it's wrong and doing things a different and, yeah, big job.

21:24:27:14

TF So that first year, you and Alex were living together here with his parents or you were living on your own or you, you clearly weren't married at that point?

MM **City Girls Go Bush**

21:24:36:00 No. Weren't married and very aware of small towns so we decided um that the school house that's available for the Principal, that I would rent the school house and um everybody knew that you know Lex Murray's girlfriend was going to be the new Principal of the school so they knew that I was already going out with him and I sort of thought just a little bit down the track that that was probably a nicer way to come in than to have come as the single teacher and then the rumour's gone around that I'd hooked up with Lex. So it was sort of quite nice that it was already established. I stayed at the house but um I'm very nervous alone at night. I don't know what it is about me but um I just don't like being alone at night and I found it quite hard to stay in the school house by myself and his Mum was living with him here at the time and she would go between the two main properties, Braidwood and Moorak, and more and more, if I was sort of staying here, it gave her the chance to maybe be over there and by about Easter time, I remember a couple of the Mums at school staying to me 'You should live at Braidwood. Why don't you live out at Braidwood?' and more and more people started saying things to me about you know I should probably live out

with Lex and you know, why don't you live there and I thought oooh, this sounds OK. So after Easter I think I gave up the rent on the house and they rented it out to somebody else and I moved in here and then within sort of a fairly short time I think, his Mum thought great, then she can look after husband over there so um it's sort of just the way it happened.

21:26:02:00

TF So rural attitudes had shifted along with city ones quite a lot by, that's late 80s, early 90s? I mean ten years before it would've stretched someone like you I would've thought to, to be living together before you were married.

MM 21:26:18:00 Mmm. Well there were some people in town that were living together, not married, but with children. So that, yeah. Surprisingly the attitude was never – although I do feel that it was probably lucky that I didn't just arrive as the single new Principal and meet, meet Lex because I think that might have been more of a gossip angle than – I think that might've been harder. Harder to bear.

TF Were there other attitudes that, that um other attitudes or aspects of life that were a big adjustment for you coming, I mean obviously you'd been via Aramac but thinking this is kind of, this is where I live now. What were the things that you had to really adjust to?

MM **City Girls Go Bush/Women/Land**

21:26:58:08 It's funny when you say 'this is where I live now'. It took a long time before – when I'd say to Lex things like 'well on the next holidays when I go home' and I called home Brisbane for such a long time. And um I was sort of living here but this wasn't – I didn't really feel like this was my home necessarily. I was sort of out here and um well the adjustments, I mean you know I love all of my friends and I'm very close to my Mum and my sisters and um, that was hard. But the beaut thing about being a teacher is every ten or so weeks I could go and you know, I was able to go to Brisbane and spend that time with them. But it was just adjusting to things like not having power. Not having air conditioning. Not being able to sit in bed at night and read a book because the lights are off. You know, the generator's been turned off. Trying to come to terms with having to stay here on my own some times because if Lex was out working at the other end of the property, it was very hard for him to have to come in. Um I remember one night, he rang,

or his Dad rang me to see how I was going. They were shearing and they had to shear right out the back on a property and I was - all the through the day when it was daylight and I said no, I'm fine. I'm fine. As soon as it was dark the panic set in. The anxiety attack. Um and I remember he called me up on the radio to see how I was going and I just burst into tears and he said 'Look, get in the car. Drive out. We'll leave a flashing light on for you out in the middle of the paddock. Find us and bring a sleeping bag.' so I bothered to do even that because I just couldn't bear to be here on my own. Um yes so think the um -21:28:33:12

JH My battery's just died.

TF Are you rolling?