

INTERVIEW WITH BEV MAUNSELL

21 June 2000

Timecode refers to tape 49_BC_SP

Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

I This is camera tape 49, DAT tape 18. The DAT's now on 2752. This is the second camera tape of an interview with Bev Maunsell outside her house in Jundah, and it's 21 June 2000. 49_BC_SP

What was your next job after the telephone exchange?

R Women/Work: Ladies Help/Dust Storms/Childbirth

01:01:06:06 I went to a property called South Galway. Once again, that was west of Windorah. Ummm there were a young couple there, Rod and Judy Barnes, and she was to go away and have a baby so I went out to stay there for the six weeks that she had hoped to be away and ummm I was actually there for three months. I learnt a lot. I was very young. Ummm by the time I left there three months later I was driving quite well. I would drive from South Galway to Windorah. Talking about the dust storms before, the road that we would take, and I was quite often on my own, was a little track ummm and it would quite often be so windswept that there were times when you could hardly, you know, pick your way. You'd have to know the direction in which you were heading and once I actually had to climb a windmill and look for the homestead. I knew that I was close to the homestead and ummm I just honestly didn't know which way to go and, as I said, I was young. I should have known but I drove over ... I was in a little jeep and I drove over to the windmill and climbed the windmill to ... oh, please let me be able to see the homestead, and I could, so that was following, you know, a dust storm I presume, and lots of wind and stuff, and sort of all windswept around that area, and I just couldn't see which way to go.

I What was the name of your job?

R Butchering

01:02:52:18 Ummm if it was to have a name, it would probably be

housemaid and yet I probably didn't ummm because Judy's husband Rod, as far as, if I can recollect properly, from what I just heard, once again did pretty much ummm followed my parents' direction, and he had actually asked my father if he knew of anybody that could go out there and sort of be there while Judy was away and, of course, Dad nominated me very quickly. So I was cooking. Ummm I was cleaning the house, manning the wireless, ummm you know driving off to wherever, if anybody needed picked up, or out to the aerodrome with the plant. The mail plane used to land there then, actually, a DC-3, TAA. Ummm just sort of probably doing the jobs that Judy did ummm you know, just seven days a week. But I learnt to kill there. I learnt to kill a beast and ... not actually kill the beast but to cut the meat up and things like that that I was very grateful for later on.

I Did you feel vulnerable, being a 16, 17-year-old girl out on a station, with I guess mostly men?

R 01:04:18:12 No. Actually ummm it was during the quiet time, during the Christmas/New Year period and ummm there was an aged cowboy there, a dear old gentleman. He's since passed away. And I helped him do a lot of things that he wasn't always physically able to do, and that's where I learnt a lot, so I was very appreciative of that. I heard lots of stories too from him.

I Like what? Tell me a story he told you.

R 01:04:52:16 Ummm well, I probably wouldn't recollect a specific one right now but as in mustering camp stories and working with stock and ummm I guess his old ringing days. Yes, Trish, so he was an interesting old fellow and had, was an old bachelor. He'd never married. He just worked with cattle and horses for the duration of his life. Ummm yeah. One wonders, I suppose, whether they were even all true, but yeah he was a very interesting old fellow and he was called the cowboy.

I Would he be the ...?

R 01:05:38:00 Yeah he did the garden. He sort of emptied ummm well he took the scraps away from the kitchen and fed the animals and things like

that, looked after the chooks, collected the eggs ummm looked after the meat once the beast was killed and ummm general rouseabout, I guess. So that was his life. That's what I meant when I said he'd sort of had a lot of interesting stories to tell because that was his life.

I You told me, I think, when we talked on the phone that you were called lady's help and I know ...

R Yes.

I ... that on some of the stations early in the century the managers' wives were allowed to have a lady's help, a woman there so that they wouldn't be the only woman when the men were around.

R **Pastoral Industry**

01:06:20:12 Yes, yes, Trish, that's true too. That was for company more than anything and ummm they'd do light household duties. When I first ... I'd forgotten that because when I first came out here a lot of the properties had ... I worked at for three months and they had a bookkeeper, a housemaid, a cook, a gardener ummm several outstations where there were married couples at each outstation, so the number of people on a property could be ummm twenty, perhaps more on some of these properties, many buildings, and that's gone.

I Why has that gone and what impact do you think that going has had on women's lives?

R **Gender Relations/Leisure:Tennis**

01:07:16:10 I think that it's had an impact on the community more so than just women's lives. It probably may not relate to that. Ummm loss of numbers, of course. There will always, I guess, now be more males and young men in the districts than women because there were jobs there that were created for women and young girls. But loneliness could be an impact that it would have on women because, you know, if you had a housemaid and a cook – not that they mixed a lot, mind you, but at the same time you did

have other women's company on the property and women around the same age, too, you know. If you had young couples on the outstations, and they may have children, small children, so the children had company. You know, they had other little children to play with and they all came into the station, which you could travel to the properties next door. They played a lot of tennis in those days and the properties had tennis courts so there'd be quite a crowd ummm at the tennis afternoons.

I And what caused that to end, do you reckon? Why do the stations employ fewer people now?

R **Pastoral Industry**

01:08:43:10 Ummm I would be guessing. I don't know whether I could answer that correctly. If I said that it would be perhaps finance ummm but companies have bought a lot of the privately owned properties, or some of the privately owned properties. They have moved homes off them. Ummm you probably notice in Windorah there are quite a few homes there that were moved to Windorah from properties. Some of the smaller properties that they bought that were previously privately owned were used for outstations so ummm perhaps it is the bigger companies buying the smaller properties, or buying more properties and working their additional properties from the one station.

I When you started to work round these different properties, were there many Aboriginal people working on properties in the sixties?

R **Race Relations**

01:10:04:06 Yes. There wasn't, to me, there was no awareness of the difference between ummm how many white or how many Aboriginal stockmen may be working on a property. They were stockmen as a whole and if you refer to the fact that there may be eight ringers on a property, or any particular property, you wouldn't think as in how many Aboriginal or how many white and still don't. We weren't ever really aware of any ummm discrimination or racial ... we all played tennis together. We went ...

everybody joined in at functions together. I know that many years ago ummm you know I hear stories of how Aboriginal people had to knock on a kitchen door on a property but I certainly didn't see any evidence of that when I moved into this country in the early sixties. And during my teenage years in Windorah, there were a lot of young Aboriginal men in and around the town and, I mean, everybody played tennis together. They danced together. Everybody did everything together and people were never ... this wasn't brought to our attention and ummm I think that it's probably sad that it has become an issue or that people have allowed it to become an issue.

01:11:58:06

I I think you're describing it very well, Bev. Part of this is to get a sense of how things have shifted and I know it's not always for the better but it's important to get across the sense of how things were then, how things are now. Did you come across Aboriginal women on the stations?

R **Race Relations/Gender Relations**

01:12:10:10 No. I'd never thought about that actually but there weren't on ... I didn't work on a lot of properties either. I mean , South Galway. I went out to for a little while ummm with Gladys Cross's mum. Ummm yes, but no. No, no Aboriginal women on those properties – during my time.

I So there were male stockmen but their families would be in the town or they were mostly single?

R 01:12:48:00 Either that or single. Single, Trish, probably ummm because there wouldn't have been any reason for their wives not to have been on the property if the job ummm or the employment was for a married stockman. It wouldn't matter whether he was Croatian or Aboriginal so, I mean, yeah I'd say single.

I Had you grown up on the Darling Downs? You're describing in Windorah black and white mixing in easily. Had that been your experience on the

Darling Downs or were there not many Aboriginal people at all on the Darling Downs?

R 01:13:22:04 No, no, Trish, there weren't. There weren't any Aboriginal people in the area that we lived in at Meandarra. Ummm no, no. I don't remember ever ummm any families living in the district or children attending the school there either.

I So it was new to you, coming to Windorah?

R **Braided Channels: Gorringe**

01:13:57:12 Yes. The first Aboriginal ... the first people that I ever met were an Aboriginal family ummm a young couple, Dot and Johnny Gorringe, and they are still amongst my closest friends today. I actually fell out of a tree there at a creek at Kyabra ummm whilst we were swimming and he was the only one brave enough to stay in the water and catch me as I fell, and quite a bit of blood and whatever there, and ummm we're very good friends today, as we were from then and, I mean, I was thirteen and he and Dot were just a young couple waiting for their first born. So, yeah. 01:14:44:20

I Tell me about meeting your husband, Bev. How did that happen?

R **Romance**

01:14:49:18 I knew Graham. I didn't know him very well. He was extremely quiet, quite shy actually, and even though we both lived in Windorah which seems quite incredible because it was such a small town, but he was away a lot and ummm I knew him and yet I didn't know him really well. But there was a B&S ball at _____ and my brother invited him to come along and I started to go with him from there, yeah, from that night.

I How old were you?

R Ummm I would have probably been sixteen point something. Sweet sixteen.

I Why was it that he wasn't around a lot? I want you to tell me what his job was and a bit about his life at that time.

R **Racing Industry**

01:15:55:20 He worked for a gentleman called Percy McF who owned race horses and Graham was a jockey, so they spent many months away. They would go down as far as Oakey to races, ummm but they'd stay there for periods of time, I imagine to attend other race meetings – I'm not sure – and they'd sort of come back to Roma and they may be there ... I can remember one year they were three months or something in that area, so ... Charleville ummm Quilpie, so for what he would refer to as a racing circuit or whatever, he, yeah, he would be away and that was what he was doing. He looked after race horses virtually – groomed them, and he rode them, and he fed them, and he dressed them and he undressed them, and whatever else was entailed in that, yeah.

I Would he ride in races in Brisbane?

R 01:16:56:08 No, no, no. We lived in Brisbane for a few years and he was what they refer to as a strapper, and it entails virtually the same type of work ummm riding track work in the morning and ummm outrageous hours. I think the track would open at 3.30 in the morning and ummm but he, yeah, and that was the same thing, just riding track work and ummm and grooming the horses and sort of looking after them in general. He would escort them to the races on the weekend, wherever that may be, in Brisbane, you know, the Coast, wherever.

I So when you met him, I'd like you to explain, was there a whole bush racing circuit? Like, he was a jockey. Could you explain?

R **Racing Industry/Leisure**

01:17:46:20 Yes. Yes. Out here. That was different, Trish. I think it ... and I'm not too sure of how it worked because I was not familiar with the world of racing when we met but my understanding of it was that he rode

amateur and ummm the jockeys in Brisbane were professional and they had – and this is my understanding of it – completed a three-year apprenticeship. So that was the difference if I think that’s what you may be asking. But out here, ummm I would suggest they might have all been amateur but there was a racing circuit and I can remember eight meetings in nine weeks or something, that he was riding in even after we were married and had the three oldest children and we would trek around to all the race meetings. Ummm most of us just had conventional cars and some people would be pulling floats and it would be a great convoy ummm a lot of entertainment. There’d be a great convoy of us, you know, and it’d be ... I can remember we’d be sort of going over a sand hill and you’d look at the next one and there’d be trucks going over there with all the horses on. Much excitement involved in that and yeah, so we’d all pull up for lunch. You know, there could be seven or eight vehicles. We’d all pull up for lunch and sort of have picnics under the trees and that was great for the kids. The kids loved it. They were quite well-trained actually. We got to the stage where we’d stop the vehicles and they’d be out collecting wood for the fires and, you know, climbing up on the truck and getting things down that they knew we needed so ummm, they were wonderful times. There was lots of flat tyres, of course, because the roads weren’t sealed and – or still aren’t, of course, to Birdsville – but ummm lots of flat tyres, lots of lost mufflers along the way and ummm many stories came from that.

I How would you live if he was amateur?

R **Racing Industry**

01:20:07:02 Oh no, this was ... he had a permanent job as well. I mean, this was perhaps ... well I wouldn’t call it a hobby, I mean, but it probably was. He worked for ... he worked on the western roadworks when they were putting the bitumen down at a place called Waverney and he worked for ... the owner of the horses was Ron McCullough. This was later in our life, not when we were single. This was after we returned to Windorah from Brisbane. He worked for a man called Ron McCullough. Mac’s Roadworks put down a section of that road ummm kilometres of that western road and he

worked for the roadwork company for Ron during the week. He had a permanent job and this racing, of course, was just their interest so to speak. So he would get up in the morning and before he went to work he would ride the race horses work and bring them back and ummm feed them and whatever and then he would go and do his day's work, and then again after work in the evening he would tend to the horses, and then on the weekends. But, of course, when the racing circuit started, well the boss went as well. So, yeah, and he continued, of course, with the wages and he worked virtually full-time or travelling or whatever with the horses then, yes, so he was actually riding for his employer as he was before we were married when we worked on the property with Percy McF when they were out here. Percy owned a property west of Windorah called Paraguay and ummm so I mean that entailed both as well – station work and the race horses, yeah. 01:22:02:14

I What did that mean for your life then? What was the

R

I What did that mean for your life? What was your role?

R 01:22:22:20 It meant a lot of changes for me, actually. It really did because I had had nothing to do with the racing world whatsoever. Ummm I had no idea about it, whether it be the horse or what was involved in it. I learnt very quickly in Brisbane. I mean, I got to the stage after five years in Brisbane where I could rattle off the breeds of most of the horses that were racing each weekend or during the week. It did become my life, as well as the children, of course, and him, I mean Graham, but I don't think I ever enjoyed it. I became quite sick of it actually. It probably was never for me and yet I respected Graham's love of that ummm life.

I What did it mean in terms of your schedule? Paint a picture of your day if Graham was race horsing, working, race horsing. What did that mean for your life when your kids were little?

R **Racing Industry/Leisure/Gender Relations**

01:23:35:06 When we lived in Brisbane, I felt that it was difficult because I already had a baby when we moved to Brisbane. Our son was born in Toowoomba and then after three years in Brisbane I had two more children, so I virtually had three babies. I probably had to remind myself quite often that my mother ran a dairy farm, or their little farm, because ummm I did accept Graham's life because that was his life and that was his love but I was not impressed with the world of racing and ummm it wasn't often that anything happened to improve on that. For me, personally, I didn't really have anything to do with the racing side of his life in Brisbane other than ummm launder the clothes and things that, you know, the jockey wore. We had ... there was a jockey living with us, Dougie Messingham, who is also godson of our son. We were with a lovely family, a fellow called Graham Ramsay, so I mean my world was the home and learning to cook. I was a pretty terrible cook and so that's probably where I started to learn to cook. Adjusting to life in Brisbane was probably something that I found really difficult. It wasn't probably, it definitely was a difficult time for me. Ummm so a lot of things changed together, Trish, as in, you know, the racing world being there and we'd not been a part of that Brisbane scene. I was quite excited about the fact that Graham rode in races out here when we were going together and that we got to go around to the races and, you know, watching him ride, and I liked that. But once we got to Brisbane, of course, and he was working at the stables and wasn't a part of the riding, it's not that I wanted him to be but I didn't really have anything to do with the racing side of his life there. He worked there at the stables full-time and, of course, had it been later in our life, or even earlier in our life, I probably would have gone over to the track and watched him work the horses and things like that but I was virtually housebound with small children and the cooking and the housework and stuff like that. 01:26:14:08

I With the races out here, before you went to Brisbane, were women an important part? Just describe what part the bush race meetings might have had in women's lives.

R **Racing Industry/Leisure/Gender Relations**

01:26:24:16 Probably work, as in ummm catering is always an issue here whenever there's any sort of a function, including the races, ummm people, whether it be Windorah, Jundah, Stonehenge, or whatever small town in the west, and a limited number of houses, limited accommodation, of course, so on a personal level there you've got women racing around probably wishing half the time the races weren't on because they're making beds and cleaning house and cooking up a storm for both the function and the visitors that they expect to have at home. During the sixties and seventies women really dressed for the race meetings. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed the opportunity for the women to dress up and to wear hats and some of them still do – Birdsville, Bedourie and Windorah – but a lot don't. The mode of dress, or the expectation of the mode of dress has dropped. There was much excitement. There were many catalogues out on kitchen tables and women would be pouring through and it wasn't uncommon to have two or three outfits exactly the same, and the question was 'Do you get the David Jones catalogue?' sort of thing. But there was a lot of excitement, much more excitement generated around the race weekends in years ago than now. It's more commercial now and ummm there's a two days race meeting here in Jundah. The Friday attracts mostly connections to the horses, as in owners, trainers, jockeys or whatever. The Saturday is the social day. And it is nice to see that some people do still dress nicely, as they would anywhere else for the races, but I guess once nobody would sort of come along in jeans and tops, whereas now that's just accepted mode of dress. 01:28:34:10

I It seems like

R and ummm

I Was this about women not being allowed at the races?

R **Racing Industry/Leisure/Gender Relations**

01:28:36:00 Not accepted, yeah. Their presence wasn't accepted at the races and I saw a photo of Betoota and they were all men and they were all dressed up in their, you know, high collars and everything and there were several women there. I was told it was the first race day. Now whether that,

see I don't have my facts straight and I hate that, because that could have been the Betoota Race Club that didn't allow the women at the races. It may not have been a general ...

I I can check that out. So you think, in what sort of era do you think women were not allowed at the races? Or at Betoota?

R **Laura Duncan**

01:29:13:00 Judging by the photo that I saw when this was said to me, and there were several women, the period of dress would have been, I'm guessing at around 1920, early 1920s, and I was told that that was the first day that it was accepted that these women attended the races and my understanding of that was that it was like an unwritten bush law ummm because Laura Duncan was one of those women and from what I've heard, she would probably attend if she thought that, you know, they ...

I Are you talking about Laura the mother or Laura the daughter now?

R 01:30:02:18 If that photo was an early twenties and she was in her mid-twenties, ummm it would nearly be the daughter. That would be the daughter.

I So by the time you were actually going to races in the sixties and seventies, it was a big deal for women?

R Oh, it was a social event. Probably the social event of the year for women.

I And how about the pub? When you arrived in Windorah, did women go to the pub?

R **Pubs/Alcohol**

01:30:45:20 No. Well, they went to ... they did go to the hotel but never, not in the bar. I wouldn't say 'never', not to the bar, the pool room, although ummm the country hotels, or the bush pubs, are much more casual than hotels anywhere else. I mean, even right up through Kynuna and any of the small hotels, aren't they? And people do wander around ummm but that's

more so today, I suppose, but I think for as long as I remember ummm they probably wandered into the bar of the Windorah Hotel. It wouldn't be frowned upon. I mean, I wouldn't have been allowed. I would have been, you know, I would have been in trouble if Dad or Mum caught me in the bar ummm but that was different people's opinions and expectations, I suppose, of their families more so than ... and then children can sort of wander in looking for Mum or Dad or whatever here, you know, have a barbeque and it's more or less a building more so than, you know, sectioning it off and saying well ummm you don't go into the bar. But there are still women, and that includes myself, I would prefer not to be in the bar of any hotel, and that's no offence to any local hotels, or any hotels in the whole shire, or the Diamantina Shire either. I would prefer to sit in a lounge or a pool room than to be in the bar of a hotel. But, once again, it depends on who's in there and I'm sure, as in condition more so than person, ummm I'm sure that's probably most people's opinion, you know.

I So the public bar was like the male space where you'd find people drinking too much?

R 01:32:44:00 Not always but it was a place where you could find the males had had too much to drink, you know, whereas they probably, you'd have a less chance of them being in the pool room, whereas now they could be in any room and people don't mind so much anyway, you know. I think the hotels in the country are very casual too. You know the families who own them, or who manage them and run them. Ummm they're everybody's friends. You would go to the hotel. You wouldn't go into the bar because you necessarily wanted a drink. You might just go in looking for them or somebody else and I've often sat in this hotel and the Windorah Hotel and had coffee, because they'll go and make you a coffee and have a chat.

I And was the bar in any way the bank when you arrived in Windorah?

R 01:33:38:24 No, not that I remember, Trish. Not that I recall. Ummm because the only bank that I can remember having access to in Windorah was

the Commonwealth Bank at the Post Office. Yeah. But ...

01:33:54:00