

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID DUNCAN-KEMP

30 August 2000

Timecode refers to tape 63_BC_SP

TF = Trish DD = David JH = Julie Hornsey DDK = Dawn

JH

TF Right. OK.

JH I'm thinking we should also probably get a cut-away for Dawn.

TF Yeah.

JH Is that alright?

DDK I suppose so. But I don't have to say anything do I?

JH No. No. I, we'll get it at the end.

TF Yeah. Was that difficult for you as a child? That, your mother cutting off.

DD 15:19:40:14 I don't think we noticed it. Um we were sent to boarding school when we were fairly young and I think that this is something we never noticed. And um once we went to boarding school, when we come on home on holidays as a lot of Christmases, we went straight out to Mooraberrie. And I think that it sort of didn't – we never noticed it.

TF So you'd be visiting Mooraberrie much more often than your mother?

DD 15:20:07:12 Oh yes. Oh yes, definitely. Yes. Ah, we were out there in '39, 1940, '41, '42. Sometimes in the middle of winter we used to go out. Um sometimes they'd meet us in Quilpie. Sometimes they'd meet us in Charleville. Ah – no, we went out there quite a bit when we were young.

TF Sylvie too?

DD No. No. It was only the boys. Ah Sylvie only went out if Mum went out. But um no, we went out quite a bit.

TF I – somebody told me you kept the places – machines humming.

DD 15:20:48:14 Oh later years I did. Yeah, later years I did, yes. I used to go out and do work for them and I even bought some of them down here and, and repaired them and took them back but ah – no, I was – I, I did a little bit there. I purchased quite a few vehicles for them over the years and built bodies and crates and things like that. A lot of my life's tied up in that country.

TF And your Mum, as your Mum – I have, I haven't read your Mother's obituary. I'm hoping that's something we might get to today, but, but as your Mother died, what would you sum up as her kind of key passions, achievements?

DD 15:21:31:20 Ooh, I don't know whether I can – what I can say there. I, I think that in her later life, she was a very lonely woman to a certain extent, even though we were here, because um I think she had the um idea of a lot of old people in the west that, that um we couldn't communicate with her ah I just don't know how you'd describe it. Um it's a bit like um my grandmother's second husband's brother, Donald McKenzie, who in his last few years, he was like, lived in Adelaide. And he was like an old bullock. He walked up and down the fence. And they tell me he had a pout about a foot deep you know, trying to get someone to talk to him because no-one in Adelaide could talk to him in the language that he was used to. And I think this is what my mother felt, that ah in respects that um we couldn't understand what her life had meant to her. I don't know. I think this is ah – that's why I say that I thought, you know, towards the latter end of her life, she was very lonely.

TF In some ways that's, I suspect, a common – I mean it reminds me of what Patricia Hodgkinson says of her life now.

DD Mmm.

TF And in the Channel Country, it seemed like often the girls of the Channel Country married out – like your mother did.

DD Yes. Yes.

TF And then there'd be new women coming in –

DD Mmm. Mmm.

TF So there's prob – you know, although your mother may have felt lonely, she probably wasn't alone in that life

DD 15:23:22:00 No, I don't – no, I don't think so. I think this is just something that a lot of people who came from that country, felt. Because it's – they grew up in a totally different environment and, and, and ah conditions, if you like, to the average person in, in, in um in closer settled areas.

TF So in, in later life, in old age, did your Mother talk of the Channel Country a lot then?

DD **Channel Country Definition**

15:23:47:16 No, not a great amount. Not a real great amount. Um she was always going crook about what people called the, the Channel Country. Ah her idea of the Channel Country, it didn't start 'til it got below Windorah and it didn't start until it below um Monkira where it, where it did, you know, ah go out into channels. But see today um if you live anywhere near, near the Thompson or the Cooper or any of those, it's all Channel Country today. That it's er it, it sort of lost it's identity if you like.

TF Boulia, I think, has got a sign 'Heart of the Channel Country'.

DD Yes. Well see, it never was regarded as that.

TF Your Mother would have taken a dim view.

DD 15:24:33:18 Oh yes. Oh yes. Very much so. Very much so, because ah see the, the, the um the Georgina doesn't start to flood 'til it gets down towards Bedourie and um, you know flood out. The channels are there but it's, it's not what they call a Channel Country and I – this is what's, I think something that she would totally disagree with. And I think a lot of the old, older hands in that country would definitely agree with too.

TF One thing. Somebody told me, an Aboriginal woman told me, that, that your mother didn't – that in a sense, it was almost like your mother, your mother wasn't necessarily writing the books. She was writing up Moses's – that Moses would write to her and that she was putting forward really Moses' view um and that he was a highly educated man and that, but as an Aboriginal person couldn't easily have published. What do you – what do you think about that?

DD 15:25:35:10 I think there might be some truth in it. I think this, ah, ah, that's possibly could be quite feasible because um ah he taught her so much. And I think in, in, and in his teachings this is, this is what's happened. Um some of those, some of those old blokes, some of those old black boys and even some of the old white men, they were very very um intelligent men. Very intelligent men.

TF Did you ever meet Moses?

DD No. No. No. He was long before my time.

TF When had he died?

DD Ooh, I think about 19 –

DDK I think just before or after ah she got married.

DD No. I think it was before that. I think he –

DDK No. He was there when the cattle case was on. I think it was 1920.

DD Yeah. Yeah. I've got an idea it was early '20s.

DDK Yes. The early '20s.

DD Yeah I think somewhere about then.

TF But so he wasn't alive in the forty years when she was writing her books?

DD No. No. No. No. He'd long gone. He'd long gone.

TF Did she talk of Moses?

DD 15:26:54:02 Not very often. Occasionally. Ah sometimes she'd speak of different things that happened out there and of other – there were some very very highly educated black men out there that had been sent away and educated. There was um Morney Donald I think they called him, was one, and um he was very well educated too. He's, he was at ah Mt Leonard at one stage I understand. Ah when Sinclair was there.

TF So was there anything that I haven't asked you about David, that – that you think's important for me to understand the kind of – the female line of Duncans out in the Channel Country or out at Mooraberrie and I guess how that then has impacted on your life.

DD 15:27:50:00 No, I don't think so. I think that only thing else that I could say regarding this, that I think there was a lot of other women in that area ah who had the same hardships and survived it. I think Mrs Rabic er at Cuddapan would have been one. Um old Mrs Jimmie Kidd at Mayfield was another. She lost her husband when their, those children were small. Ahh and there's so many of them I think that, that ah deserve just as much recognition. I think that ah all of them that went out into that country – because I think you've got to remember that when they went out there that, that communications and, and everything were very, very poor and ah I think they, you've got to take their hat off to them, to the fact that they survived it and, and made such a wonderful job of it. That's how I feel about them. Um I don't think personally that you could single anyone out in particular. Um because if they hadn't have gone out there, that country would never have gone ahead. That's the only thing that I –

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DD 15:29:11:04 They're killing that country. In, in, in the respect that the big companies are now coming back and getting such a big conglomerate that they're operating because of aeroplanes and helicopters and fast motor cars where before there was so many people employed in that country, now there's that. And I think it's, it'll kill that country eventually.

TF So it's emptying out?

DD 15:29:54:18 Yes. The big companies will own it and, and all they're there for is greed. Perhaps I shouldn't say that but that's just how I feel about it ah they have no um, their heart is not in the, in it. Kidman, I think that er I've got to say this for him, that he would probably be the better of the big companies. But all the rest, all they're interested in is profits.

TF Kidman's employees struck me as happier than the employees of the other –

DD 15:30:07:06 I would think that could be quite correct. I think that er Kidman at least looks after his men. But a lot of the other companies don't – couldn't care a damn. They're there. They're paid, and that's it. And the only, as I say, the only thing I, I feel that it's a great pity that we're going back to the old feudal systems I call it where the um the big, the big companies or the big owners, own everything. And the little man doesn't get a chance. And it's been proven in that country that the small person can survive. But I say that in, in all due respects because the Rabic family lived there for years. Mooraberrie survived for 90 odd years. Um quite of other properties around there survived. It's only in the last 20 years that the big companies have got in and gradually choked everybody out, which I, I honestly feel it's a great mistake. 15:31:05:16

DD OK David. Terrific. Thank you very much.

JH We might just um –

TF What –

DDK Who do I look at?

TF Let me –

JH Oh we're just looking at David really.

TF Yeah. 'cause the reason we're doing this is you know how sometimes you would look to the –

DD Yeah. Yeah.

TF Well we might –

DD Yeah. Yeah, I can understand that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

TF Cut in. They call that a cut away.

DD **Race Relations**

15:31:24:14 Regarding this um stolen generation. Um I just feel in my own opinion, going on what I've seen in the west, that a lot of people have got to realise that if those people, or children in those days, had not been taken and put into um missions and similar places, that they wouldn't be alive today.

13:31:52:12 **END OF TAPE (63_BC_SP)**