

INTERVIEW WITH ISABEL TARRAGO & SHIRLEY FINN

3 September 2000

Timecode refers to tape 68_BC_SP

Topics in Bold

TF = Trish

IT = Isabel

SF = Shirley

TF So this is **DAT tape number 25**, we're still in **Betacam number 68**. This is the **second DAT, third Betacam, interviewing Isabel Tarrago and Shirley Finn**.

IT I'm amazed I've done pretty well without coughing.

TF So Isabel, from your end, you weren't at home, were you, when your family left? What's your memory of ...?

IT Oh, yeah. I had just come home from school, didn't I?

SF No, I don't think you were.

IT Yeah, I remember packing that red Ford.

SF Oh, okay.

IT The old truck.

SF Yeah, the red truck. Yes.

IT **Race Relations/Aboriginal Labour**

20:19:15:14 The red truck. And I remember the ... I've got a photograph, we've got a photograph of that. And Mum ... we didn't have very much and I remember I was all excited because I didn't know all this other stuff was going on. I was too young, basically, and I just thought we were going for a holiday, and I thought Jimborella, wow!

SF Big swimming hole.

IT Big swimming hole. We had big fun because that's where all the corroborees, ceremonies, were and I had a ball because see all the women used to look after me and I could just have ... it was just paradise for me.

And I thought, 'Oh, we're going up' and all I was worried about was my old dog. The old black dog.

SF Yes.

IT I can't even remember her name now.

SF Poosum.

IT Possum.

SF Poosum.

IT 20:20:07:20 Poosum. That's all I wanted, to make sure she could travel on the truck, and she was a lovely old dog, and we got up there and old Granddad Barrum, he was ... because he had a lot of goats and I used to love to go down and milk the goats with him and I thought, 'Oh, this is going to be fun'. So I had this as a holiday but ummm yeah, I didn't even look for, but I realised then it was no holiday because we ...

SF It was for real.

IT It was for real and by the time we got into Boulia ... we left Jimborella after Christmas and we went into Boulia and they moved us into this old house. It was an old shop front, wasn't it, where you and Mum ...

SF Yeah, it was an old shop front.

IT 20:21:00:20 Old shop front, and there was no houses so Mum actually got ... Dad and Shirley and Mum and Dad, they set it up and ummm I had to go back to school and I think Mum got a job at the ...

SF Australian Hotel.

IT ... hotel.

SF Cooking there for a while. She cooked there and then from there she ahhh we moved to Mt Isa and stayed there and Dad went back to the station ahhh ...

IT We lived in Dorothy Street then.

SF 20:21:29:06 Yeah, and ummm worked there for a few months but I think nothing was the same. Everything sort of changed. Ummm he wasn't doing much, he wasn't going out, sort of just doing things around the station, and that wasn't him. After being a head stockman with horses, you know, and cattle for thirty-odd years, you don't ask a person to do the yardman or, you know, or round the station. So he left ummm came back to Mt Isa and then got a job at ummm Marquar Station and ummm we had gone to, we had moved to ummm to Townsville then.

IT Well you got married in Mt Isa.

SF Yeah, got married in Mt Isa.

IT She got married in Mt Isa and her and her husband went to Winton, didn't you?

SF Went to Winton to live.

TF And did you go back to school and complete your education?

SF Yes.

IT 20:22:34:16 No, I left. Ummm I started working in Mt Isa Mines then, Batoni's, because I knew I couldn't leave Mum on her own. Shirley and Teddy, her husband, went and I was with Mum. Mum was working and I stayed with her as long as I could ummm and we were in Mt Isa when we found out that her father had died at ... oh, I was back at school, wasn't I?

SF 20:23:03:20 No, you were in ... you were in Sydney at the ... we'd left. We had all ummm all left. Mum had gone to ummm Townsville to live, Isabel had gone back to ummm Sydney but it was ummm really very funny because ummm Mary Robbins, who was the partner of Martin, his daughter came up, Heather Mills. Heather and John. And ummm they were university students, or teachers, at the time and ummm I still don't know how it ever happened because Isabel was only 16 at the time when she left with

Heather and John to Sydney and ummm she ended up working down there ahhh became very good friends with ummm Yvonne Cawley, Goolagong Cawley, ummm and I went and lived at Winton. And I had got a phone call, then, to say a Mr Hanson had passed away. Then I thought, 'Oh, it must have been a brother' but when I had rung Mum, she had said it was Dad who ummm he always ummm said that if he ever passed away, he wanted to do it riding horses and mustering cattle and we had sent a telegram to Isabel. Isabel flew up to Townsville. We drove from Winton across to Townsville and ummm he had passed away mustering horses and ummm he must have got a pain in the chest and got off his horse and lied down under a tree with his hat and boots on, and the horse was tied up under a tree. They didn't find him, I think, for three days. 20:25:21:10

- TF So your Dad did not last long after leaving Glen Ormiston.
- SF No.
- TF And how about your Mum? Can you just sketch briefly your mother's life from then till she died.
- IT Oh well, she ended up with ... she was with Shirley and the kids because that basically kept her going.
- SF Kept her going with the three children.
- IT Yeah, so ummm ...
- SF And then we moved. Isabel was still in Sydney at the time and I moved down here and virtually Mother was between Brisbane, Mt Isa and Sydney, and she was just probably a Madame Butterfly, fluttering here, there and everywhere.
- IT And enjoying it.
- TF She continued to cook in Mt Isa?
- IT Yeah, and in Sydney, and here. I mean, she worked for the ...

SF 20:26:23:00 She worked for the Bethany Home at Morningside and she worked for Opal. She'd done cooking here for hostels and everything but for a lady who couldn't read or write, she could catch a bus from South Brisbane all the way to Morningside.

TF So your Mum, it sounds like she could adapt in a way that your father couldn't. Is that ...?

IT **Topsy Hansen**

20:26:47:16 Yes and I think that's one of the things ... I guess that's a strength that ummm that she had. You know, the character that she had, because she was the driving force. Ummm she was the outgoing, you know, she got in there and did things, and made things work, and I guess that's where ... and yet our Dad, you know, he was very strong as well but the life, you know, from the bush to come into even Mt Isa, to Townsville was really ... he hated it. He really did hate it. It is a different lifestyle and you've got to cater to different things and ummm it's just one of those things. So I guess overall Mum, you know, she died at 85 here and she was strong as an ox but I think she had done everything she possibly could have and left a legacy of ummm you never give up, you know, and I guess that's the thing, too, because you've got to keep challenging whatever. And I believe she challenged the system of living in two cultures and she was a winner every time because she could adapt to the white philosophy as well as living a traditional lifestyle, and she didn't sacrifice that. 20:28:10:02

TF Tell me the story of what you did with your mother's ashes because you said before that she'd always said to Bill Fraser, 'Take my ashes back to Glen Ormiston'.

IT **Topsy Hansen: Ashes / History**

20:28:26:18 Yes, she sort of said to Bill that she wanted to go back home. She said, 'Don't ever bury her in someone else's country because she'll come back and haunt us' and she died, it'd be twelve years last Thursday, 31 August. In '88 she died and ummm ummm Shirley's eldest girl Avalina,

Ray my husband and myself took her ashes back to Glen Ormiston and ummm along the way, you know, we stopped and told everyone and they were pleased that, you know, she had her wish to go back there. It wasn't a very ... going back to Glen Ormiston, we hadn't gone back there for so long and I thought, 'Oh, well, this is not ... we can come back and speak to the manager' and that, and Bill Fraser, Mrs Fraser's son, organised everything so we didn't have to do a thing and I didn't even know ... I knew the managers were there but he organised everything and said, 'That's fine'. And the board of directors, obviously, I don't know, the word didn't get through or something, so we arrived at the station, the homestead, and we wanted to get some water and they just didn't want to know us, really, and we said, 'Well, we're taking Topsy's ashes back to Lake ...

SF Wanditta. 20:30:07:08

IT ... Wanditta, and Ray had to ask several times, 'Well, you know, we've camped and we've used the water, can we just top up the water' and so, because Avalina was only five, so we were just mindful ... we knew water was on the way but ummm all the creeks and that, but we needed water just to have. And they were very reluctant to even engage in a conversation and my husband got very angry and ummm he actually got a little bit cranky because he reminded them who, you know, that this woman was one of the women who really made an impact on this station. So it's really sad to see that ... and I think, analysing it, if you don't have the right history or information there, ummm and you hear about all this Aboriginal process going on, if people don't know and they don't want to find out, it makes it very difficult. But the same thing that, as Shirley said, acknowledges ...

SF Acknowledge. 20:31:20:12

IT ... acknowledgement has to happen.

SF Yes, they have to acknowledge all the ummm the Aboriginal people that made all these stations to what they are today. You know, it's a sad ...

TF Did you know the managers that were there?

IT No. I never heard of them.

SF I did ummm yes. Jim Dwyer, when he was there ummm ...

IT The ones now?

TF No, the ones when you took your mother's ashes back.

IT Yes, the new ones.

SF Oh, no. No, I didn't know them.

IT 20:31:55:02 None of us knew them. And we just thought, because Bill, you know Bill said to us, 'Go ahead, you take your mother's ashes back home' and I suppose maybe he didn't explain to them either, you know, so I don't know what the breakdown was but we had to be fairly blunt and ummm Ray just said, 'Well, we'll just get the water and move on. Thank you.' Didn't even ask ... they didn't even ask us in for a cup of tea or, you know, and that was against Mum's ...

SF

IT ... anyone that came to the station ...

SF Was welcome.

IT ... the policy was for my mother, you come in, you have a feed, we'll give you some things to take with you. It just turned upside down and, you know, that's the way it was.

TF What were the names of the people that were there?

IT Oh, I can't even remember. Liz and ...

TF Was it Liz Debney and Mal?

IT **History**
20:32:59:04 Yeah, Liz and Mal Debney. And, I mean, they were just so young and so, you know, I thought, wouldn't have known much of our

history anyway. But, you know, not even to be offered a cuppa tea, which is a ... it's a recipe of entry. It's a bush entry and no matter who you are, and I just thought, 'Oh, well, I got a message'. A very distant thing. And I thought, 'Well ...'. I just said to Ray, 'Get the water, let's go. We'll have a cuppa tea down the road'. So it was very sad but I had a feeling.

TF Going back in time, your Mum had offered a cup of tea to Edna Jessop's family. Do you want to tell me that story?

IT **Race Relations/Women/Topsy Hansen/Edna Jessop**

20:33:46:22 Yes. Well, when Edna and her father came across droving ummm and Martin Hayward was the manager then, said, 'Oh, well, don't worry too much about the Jessops' and my mother said, 'Martin, I'm the cook. They are welcome to come and have a feed and have something to eat and, moreso, I'll cook some food for them to take on the road,' so my mother was a very, very ummm humanitarian person and it doesn't matter who you are, the policy for her, any visitors that came to Glen Ormiston you were given ...

SF You were made welcome.

IT Made welcome to sit down and have a cuppa tea, have a break. If you wanted a shower and freshen up, you could do it. And Mark and Pat Fennell actually commented on my mother for doing that when they brought their first baby back. So, you know, the rules and that have really changed on management.

TF Did you try to explain to Mal and Liz the kind of history your family had there?

IT 20:34:53:18 I don't know whether ... I think I just said to them, you know, that my mother and father made this station and left it at that and I didn't really feel like engaging because I thought if you can't do it from the bottom of your heart, in respect ummm, well there's nothing I can do. And I really didn't feel like engaging with them after that so it left a pretty well ummm

sour feeling in my mouth because that's not how you treat people in the bush. It doesn't matter that I happen to be Aboriginal. You just don't treat people like that in the bush. That whole ummm management of the old style has gone forever and I said to Bill when I came back, and he said, 'Well, there's nothing ... what can I do?' He was sorry but he did his job. Bill actually did his job to get my mother's ashes back, and that was it.

20:35:57:20

TF And where did you leave your mother's ashes?

IT At Wanditta.

SF At Lake Wanditta. Yeah. See, once again, like the ummm title of this book. Is it *No More Rain*?

TF *You Can't Make it Rain*.

SF **History**

You Can't Make it Rain. Like the process of that, what they should have done, like the author of that, they should have come and asked people, you know. What did they do? They only asked the managers that's there now, the past managers. They didn't ask the people that made that station.

20:36:30:18

END TAPE

TF They didn't talk to Aboriginal people?

IT Aboriginal people.

SF No.

TF This is good stuff to be talking about. I want to go on to talk about Land Rights. Often it seems to me when those things go wrong between people, often there's not intention so much as ignorance.

IT See, I don't know their background. I don't know where they come from.

SF See, like for instance, when I went and done that workshop at Bedourie, down there, the policeman come back and said the ...

