

**INTERVIEW WITH ISABEL TARRAGO & SHIRLEY FINN**

**3 September 2000**

**Timecode refers to tape 69\_BC\_SP**

**Topics in Bold**

TF = Trish

IT = Isabel

SF = Shirley

**TF This is Betacam tape 29, we're still in DAT tape 25, the second DAT tape of the interview with Isabel and Shirley and the DAT is on 2028 right now. 69\_BC\_SP**

*About You Can't Make it Rain.*

**SF History**

21:01:13:16 Yeah, what I was saying is, like the author of that, I get ummm really annoyed when you see these books that come out and they don't bother asking ummm the Aboriginal side of things. It's only the managers and the managers then are only people that are made look good because of the workers, of the Aboriginal workers. They should be asking the Aboriginals ummm for their input, not just take managers' side.

**TF** So you think as the history gets written, the Aboriginal side of the pastoral industry doesn't always get written in?

**SF** 21:01:59:10 That's right. Maybe it's too late now because the old ummm the Aboriginal stockmen and that have gone, passed on, but I'm sure they've got relatives that ummm on near stations that know the history just as good.

**TF** I've come to know a bit about the Debneys and, in fact, Mal's family came from Arrabury Station and it was his great-grandfather, I think, that did this thing called Debney's Peace which was when, from what I can understand, this is going back to about the 1880s, was when white and black having been basically at war on the frontier, Debney was apparently much respected by Aboriginal people and there was a kind of a peace that brought Aboriginal people into working in the pastoral industry. So you would expect somehow that he would know some of the background.

**IT** 21:03:05:15 Yeah. He wasn't there. I don't think I actually saw him. I saw Liz, who came out, so I think she might have been a bit, I don't know, I mean what can you say? But one would think, if there was slight ummm partnership somewhere down the track, that there may have been a courtesy call there but it was definitely no go zone and ... which really, because many times we sat around the table and enjoyed the company of others coming in and we grew up on that. So it really stunned me ummm to go back and see that the doors are closed forever, basically.

TF Have you put in a Land Claim for Glen Ormiston?

IT No, we haven't. We've talked about it. Ummm some of our neighbouring ummm traditional groups ummm have asked us to think about it very seriously and Shirley and I have ummm I guess have the respect of ummm the Frasers, you know, just that respect of thinking about what had happened, and there's no one ... there's only us two basically ...

SF Yeah.

IT 21:04:33:18 ... that's around. So it's in our minds at the moment ummm of what we should be doing but we're sort of not pushing towards that way because I believe that we could always have access to go through those places. And that's one of the things that Mrs Fraser had said, that she would always want access to that because there's been a lot of good partnerships. So I don't know what, you know ...

SF What will happen now.

IT **Owners/Managers**

... what will happen. But I'm hoping that ... these managers need to really understand, and I'm quite frank on that, they need to understand that they are only managers. They are only managers of a station that is caring for a station that has been built upon our family and I think we'll go down fighting to reinstate ummm the position of our parents because they really made that station. And we need to have that acknowledgement, not for us but for what our parents did.

SF 21:05:44:08 And what other Aboriginals ummm have done on the station. The hard work that they've put in, and the toil and ummm thing. I think that's the whole thing. They need to be acknowledged, not just ask, you know, past station managers and present one. It's the young ones that have come out here and think they know it, you know. They've got to really sit down. I'm sure there's a list of names and that that have worked on the station. It'd be nice for them to acknowledge the work that the Aboriginal people have done on many a station.

TF When you say, well I want to tease this out, you said you had respect for the Frasers. Is there almost a sense that to put in a Native Title claim would show some disrespect for the Frasers?

IT **Race Relations**

21:06:44:02 No, it's not only that. It's what's happened ummm you know, in the times when the crunch was really, really a crunch time for pastoralists. I mean, what I say, I have a lot of respect for Mrs Fraser. She could have gone in there and had a gun and shot the lot of us. I mean, that's what I'm saying about respect. We could have been decimated like any other station. I mean, that's the disaster of it. But she didn't do that. She had a vision ummm dealing with the Aboriginal traditional group camps that were there and she embraced that. So that's what I talk about. I mean, it could have been a slaughter room and neither of us would be here today to tell the story. But that just didn't happen and that's the respect that I have for the Granny Browns and, you know, the earlier, the earlier pastoralists. We've got some really good ones, not to say we haven't got any ...

SF Pat and Mark Fennell? 21:07:48:14

IT **History**

... good pastoralists now. I've been around the state, you know, and we've got some really fantastic ... but we've got a big gap because we've got people who don't understand the history of this country. They're the ones that really have to get their knowledge of the history of this country right. And understand it. And from there on, I mean, we can move on. But, yeah, I think Shirley and I, I mean, I'm not quite sure if I want to live back on Glen Ormiston.

SF No, certainly not.

IT **Native Title**

21:08:20:08 You know, I've done that life. We've done it. Ummm we've got a wonderful history there, you know. We can talk about it, our kids know about it, but it's nice to drive through and say, 'Oh, well, let's go and camp,' you know, 'we'll go and camp at Meetukka' or something. If we're allowed to do that, well then we don't have to do the other thing by putting legislation to it and claiming Native Title. I mean, we're pretty well clear. We know who we are. We don't have to have Native Title to tell us who we are.

TF Tell me, how would you summarise your life now, Isabel? Life and work.

IT Oh. My life and work, I believe that I've had a very privileged life. Ummm our family, you know, we are traditional people, we haven't lost that. We can work within a white structure, a white system. Sometimes I don't like it ummm but it's the life we have to lead.

TF So what's your working role now, for instance?

IT **Women/Land**

21:09:28:16 I work with Premier and Cabinet. I'm doing the ummm on a task force, indigenous task force for cultural heritage review. I work with Main Roads but I've been seconded over to do the legislation. Ummm I've found it really interesting. Ummm I've worked in, you know, most of the areas. I've been able to go back to some of the areas that we're talking about now and ... I haven't been back to Glen Ormiston but I've been down to Birdsville and there, and the Channel Country down that end, and it's wonderful just to smell the earth and touch the soil. It does do things for you. Ummm but I can do it. So really, we're carrying on the two cultures that our parents established and enhanced and, you know. It ended a sad moment but I don't think so. I think they gave us a lot of forward thinking and you can't go forever but you can get it right.

TF And you, Shirley, how would you kind of thumbnail sketch your life and work now?

SF 21:10:38:14 Oh, I've had a great interesting life. Ummm worked in the public service also, have worked in the community. Now I'm employed by the Queensland Police Service as a Police Liaison Officer to try and bridge that gap between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the wider community and the Queensland Police Service, and I've been doing that for six years.

TF How long since you've been back to the Channel Country? What does the Channel Country mean to you now, living and working here in Brisbane?

SF 21:11:17:16 I'd like to ummm to go back there. I haven't been back to Glen Ormiston for probably ten, fifteen years. I've been back to Boulia and it's great to go back there and see old faces and talk to the people, different things, to meet old people, mmmm.

TF Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think is important to understanding women in the Channel Country generally, and your family in particular?

IT **Race Relations/Women/Work**

21:11:57:06 Trish, I think there is a myth out there that Aboriginal people, you know, really have not rewarded the country. I think one of the biggest rewards that Aboriginal women have played in the pastoral industry, and it's not talked about, is with the children. I mean, as you see, you can ask many of the pastoralists, older pastoralists, I mean their

kids were either taught by an Aboriginal woman or, you know, cared for. They fed them, they washed them, they bathed them. They did everything and there was this bonding and I think this is something that women have really played a major role, and still playing a major role. Women, Aboriginal women today have really bonded with non-indigenous women at many walks of life but I think the pastoral industry has been really neglected and this is what, I think, in our area, you know the women who have been on their own, talk about a ... inspired. I mean, you've got to be a self-generated operator to really survive and you know this is what the women have never been given. Because we've worked in the industry, cattle industry, for so long and yet people say, you know, we seem to be down the lowest of the echelon and I think that has to come up and we've got to start embracing that because the stations wouldn't have been, and the people and the women have really gained so much together.

TF I've just remembered one more question I want to ask you and then I'd like to ... how did you meet Pam Watson?

SF 21:13:55:20 Well, when I was doing my university degree at University of Queensland and Pam was actually sitting in one of the tutes and she was very interested in Aboriginal issues and that and we became talking and she sort of came up to me and said, 'Can I interview your mother because I am a bio-chemist and I really want to know more about pituri and there's a chemist place that really wanted to investigate more' and I took Mum up to meet her. So we started getting together then and talking about the issues and she did tell me that she was going to do a book, you know, some time with all her ... she did a PhD, and consequently she had time to go out and see places where the pituri was growing and all that. So we just became acquaintances then. 21:15:06:20

TF I think Pam said that the very first time she met you was she'd written her Honours thesis about pituri and had said that there were no traditional owners left and that you had pointed out to her that she was wrong in that.

SF Oh, I probably did too, Trish. I probably did too. You know, and I think that's that educational process too, you know. Ummm it's probably just a passing thing and I haven't even thought about it but yeah, I probably would be, I probably would have done that ummm and being that of a significant ... 21:16:18:15

END OF INTERVIEW