

Interview with Edith McFarlane

Topics in Bold

Refers to tapes 81_BC_SX

Some approximate timecode in this transcript

T = Trish E = Edith J – Julie

T OK. So this is Camera Tape No 81, DAT Tape No 81. The camera starts on Time Code 07031214. So a new DAT, new camera. We're interviewing Edith McFarlane at her home in Cleveland, in Queensland. It's the 17th May 2002. And this is the second DAT and BETA SX.

T OK. So Edith, in the photos that Edith knew – oh no, you were going to tell me about the Aboriginal funeral.

E Oh yes. When Emily – when Elsie's mother died, Emily died ah she was to buried the next day and apparently they all gathered for the – for the funeral procession and the husband was led in the front of the procession with a bag over his head and it came right down so he could see nothing at all. Now I don't know what that was for. I couldn't get details from any of the black women. And then she was, the body was taken to one of the stony hills well out of flood water reach and buried there. And a big circle was cleared all round the grave site and I asked them why and they said next morning, somebody would go up and see what animal or bird had first passed over that cleared spot and that is what Emily would become. Emily's spirit would become. Now they, they put no markers round. No grave um fence around it as they had in old days. There were some very, very old grave sites there and the timber was so old that it was beginning to rot, but where they had buried people, they had put a little fence around it. And those were Aboriginal graves. But they did nothing like that for Emily.

T Who was Emily and what had happened to her?

E Ah, Emily helped around the house – not a great deal, but she did do some work round the house. I mean that was the first year I was there so I really hadn't seen very much of her. And she died when the baby was born. The baby lived and was looked after by the other women but that is why she died. She was only very little. A little woman and never appeared to me when I did

see her, as being a very strong one. Most of them were quite – fairly well developed, strong women.

T And did Emily have a second name? Like did you think –

E No. I didn't ever hear any second names for any of them. We had Emily and Ada. Oh, I can't remember. Ada was the wife of the King, Paddy. I can't remember the other names. Some of them were not originally from a tribe there. They had come – one came from Cordillo Downs. Some of them came down from Tanbar when the manager had taken away some of – in about 1925, had taken some of them up to the little township of Windorah promising blankets to them, but when he got there, he put them on the mail truck and sent them down to the Mission and they did not like going to the Mission. Well word got back to them before the manager. They had a remarkable way of communicating and although it was 70 miles from Tanbar to the township, the others knew before the manager came back that the blacks were not coming back with him. So they packed up their few little bits and pieces and they walked down to Durham and that was in the midst of a howling drought. And one of them had a little baby which I think may have died. That was a half caste woman that had that baby. And there was one very old woman who was still at Durham when I went there. There was – this must have happened not all that long before I went there, so the day that Mr McCullagh took me past the camp to show me what their camp was like, this very very old lady came out to talk to us in pidgin English, and I said she must very old. I wonder if she would remember when Burke and Wills went through this country? And he said to her, how long since you've been piccaninny? And she laughed a real cackle of a laugh. And she patted her tummy and she said 'Bell me got in piccaninny'. Bell is 'no' meaning that she wasn't pregnant. It would've been many many years since she'd – since she would have ever have been pregnant. But I would say that she was perhaps 80 or 90 years old. Very old – withered old soul. But she, she had a sense of humour still. Well it seemed to us she did have.

T Now Edith, the next thing I'm going to ask you about isn't pleasant but I'd like to know. I've got – you know who Meston(?) was? He was the protector.

E Who?

T Harold Meston. He was the –

E Oh yes. I've heard the name.

T Anyway, I've got letters written by a Mr Fisher who was a shearer at Durham Downs in the late 1890s and he describes pretty horrific sexual abuse of Aboriginal women. Three classes of prostitute. You know, the stud gins for the managers and then the middle – the middle class of prostitutes and then the prostitutes on the creek. Do you believe that story and –

E I do.

T What do you know about that?

E That's why there are – were so many half-castes. You see there are a lot of half-caste people and there are still a lot of them living. They are half-caste. And um I think it was because of the lack of white women out there. In this book of Flynn's, one of the padres was out in – before, really before Flynn got stuck into this idea of ah of medical help out there. One of them mentions that out on the properties, he'd go on his camels and go round these big distances and he would come to places where there were Aboriginal woman, no white women. But there were children. And as everything is, these men, because they hadn't wives, they hadn't anybody – anybody, white women, they just indulged in sexual behaviour with the black women. And I guess to a certain extent, that still might happen too. I don't know. I've been away from it for so long but we had – at Tanbar we had no – no ah Aboriginal, either black – oh we had a half-caste man at one stage. Um – at Morestone where I was first married, we had three black women and they each had a black husband and as far as I know, there was no intermingling with the white men at all. Um, even if they came into the head station. I think they just went to their own quarters and they never bothered about the black women, as far as I know. I mean it could've happened and I wouldn't have heard.

T So was there a lot of talk about that earlier history of Durham? Would anybody have talked to you about that time?

E No. No. No. I knew very little about early Durham, until we were living at Tanbar and that – the only thing we heard then was from read from an old letter that my husband found in which he refers to the number of sheep and the number of cattle that were carried on Durham when they first went there and the place was a sea of grass and they thought this is wonderful you see. A wonderful place for it. And they put about um 50,000 sheep I think it was and many many thousand head of cattle and horses. A lot of horses of course to do the work. Because a drought came and everything went. Everything went. And they lost practically all the stock because there was no – no feed for them. And that was – that’s the only thing I knew about Durham in the early days.

T You mentioned in your book that there was some mud hut that had been to protect women and children. Do you want to just describe that and the cellar? Was there ever a sense that white people at Durham had once been afraid of Aboriginal people?

E Oh they were! Um, that – that, that was the home that was built about half way between Nockatunga and Durham there was a property that had an old mud house and they had um they had slips like this in the windows for shooting through because there were wild, you know, un – uncivilized people out there in the bush, coming in, and they did have a lot of trouble. At Durham they had an underground – we used it as a cellar, and for a while, for quite a while until Mr McCullagh built a new kitchen, we used to cook down there. Ah and it had a – it was just excavated and it had a – I don’t know what sort of a roof it had on it. A curved roof. And it would hardly have been curved iron in those days. But it would’ve dated back to the early days – of their first days there. And it was a shelter for women if they were attacked by the wild natives. And there were quite a lot of cases, and if you’ve read um books about the country between ah Quilpie and the border – the Queensland border, ah Thylungra um or people –Wellshot Downs, they had a lot of trouble, and John Costello took up Thylungra but he was never satisfied to stay somewhere. He’d get that fixed and then he had to go on and find something else, so when he went away, he would leave his wife with lots of, lots of rifles. And the place was fairly secure, but there were a lot of – quite a lot of wild natives there, and I mean, they said why can’t we come and kill the

sheep or the cattle, whichever? Because the white man is killing our food supplies. They were killing kangaroos and any other wild life to get rid of it so that the feed was left for the sheep or the cattle, whichever they were running. And it's understandable that – I mean if somebody came into your home and started knocking things about, you would feel, except that we are supposed to be civilized anyway, you would feel like retaliating, and that's all it was. They were uneducated. They were really really wild tribes and naturally, when somebody killed off their supplies, they would retaliate by killing out of the white man's supplies. So I – all my sympathy is with the black people I'm afraid. I just don't sympathise with the white man. It was terrible. Terrible to see people being shot and killed with spears but it was understandable.

J Trish, I'm just going to change batteries.

T OK.

E I mean I know particularly Queensland because I spent so much time in western Queensland, but once they crossed the mountains and began to realise all these acres and millions and millions of square miles of country, that had only wild game on it, and they could visualise putting either sheep or cattle and in some cases both on a property, but as a general rule they discovered that it was better for – one might be better for sheep and another one might be better for cattle. And that's what they found at Durham, that sheep were no good in that country. Ah, it was – it was typically cattle country. Ah, Arrabury next door to – next door to Tanbar and I suppose in a way next door to Durham, ran sheep for many many years, but then the dingoes became very numerous and they were losing so much in the way of sheep and Cordillo Downs was the same. They ran sheep for many many years because it was good sheep country. But there are no sheep properties out there as far as I know. Nappamerrie was a sheep – part of it was sheep. Part of it was cattle. But I think none of them run sheep now and that mainly because of the dingo population, and in spite of putting up fences to block the dingoes, they were ways and ways of them getting through and it wasn't a great success really.

T So coming back then to the Aboriginal people you knew at Durham, did you ever know a little girl called Elsie, and if so what can you tell me about Elsie?

E Well there's not a great deal I could tell you about her. She used to come to the – come up to the house. Especially after her mother died, she would come to the house and be bathed and put into a clean frock and she would play around there, but about the only thing that I can remember that was outstanding with her was watching her having a lesson in what is known as a corroboree. And that was - to watch her standing upright and just trembling ah from the shoulder right down to her feet. Not, not trembling in fright but a tremble that she could produce and that was what these black women had been teaching her. But I didn't really see enough of her. Well, I was too busy anyway to see a great deal of her, but I know, later, when she was older, she had lessons with the little white girl when – when Jean started lessons, Elsie went too. She was a pretty little girl. Curly hair. Um, she was – I think she was a full blood black, not a half-caste child, as so many of them – people out there were half-castes.

T Who were Elsie's parents?

E Ah Emily, and as far as I know, Koora Jack was the father. Ah, it may not have been. It may have been another one because they did change partners from time to time. And another thing – it was interesting to watch at Durham, was a fight between two of the women. Ah, one was a woman who had come from Cordillo Downs some time before and the other was Ada, the wife of our King – Paddy. And we heard a terrible commotion up at the camp, went to see what it was all about. They had one waddy, you know, heavy stick between them and the one that didn't have the waddy would bend over, put her head down. The other one would crack her right down the middle of her head. Then she'd pass the waddy back to the other one and she'd bend over, so they went on like this. Well, the bookkeeper was only quite a little fragile man. The manager was away out in the stock camp and so the bookkeeper was the only white man there and he decided he'd have to go and stop the camp – the fight. And he went up there and managed to stop them. I think he was very brave because he could easily have received a blow by accident. But when the girls – these two women came down, they were streaming – streaming with

blood because their head, skull, right through, had been ripped open. Well, Mrs McCullagh blamed one particular. She said she was the one that started it. So she took her away and she bathed her head and she bound it up, but the other one she said was – Ada she said, was the troublemaker and she wouldn't do anything for her. Well some days went past and Ada was one who used to come round and sweep the bedrooms and ah I was in my room one day and she came in and she said, holding her head, she said oh, narcoo(?), that - narcoo was their word for me, meaning 'girl'. Narcoo, my head hurts. And she was nearly crying with the pain, and I said well you just go along and tell Mrs and she'll do something for you. So she did then, cleaned it all up, but how – if that had happened to a strong white man, he would've died. I'm sure no, no white man could have – certainly no white woman could have stood it. But I - and I doubt very much that a white man could have stood such a terrible terrible gash right down the middle of the skull.

T In Edith New's photo album there are all these pictures of that little baby. Why do you think – I want you to – you've only said Elsie's name once. I want you to tell me her name again. Why do you think that little baby was so sort of special in Edith's album? Do you have any sense of that?

E Because she was the only little baby – little baby there I guess at the time. Um, she belonged to ah one of those that had, I think, one of those that had walked down from – oh no, she couldn't have been, because the one – one was pregnant and lost her baby on the way and she was a half-caste. So possibly ah Elsie's mother had come down under great difficulty, got down there. But I don't really know for sure about that and why she was special. But she was the only child there and so she was made quite a fuss of, not only by the black people but by the white people. They just treated her as something very special. And she was a dear little girl too. I didn't have much to do with her of course. I was too busy as I said before but she really was a dear little girl.

T So there was a lot of Aboriginal women at Durham but hardly any babies. Is that correct?

E That's right. Mmm. Most of them I think would have been – it was hard to tell the age, but I think the majority of them would have been beyond the child

bearing stage. Ah, where – why I don't know. The half-caste woman was young enough. She had a – she did have a little baby while I was there. A lovely child, but her husband was ah her husband was black but she was half-caste. Um – and this little baby, ooh he used to – he was subject to fits. Long before his walking stage and when he had a fit, they would rush down to Mrs McCullagh with him. I will say that for her. She was very good if there was anything wrong. Any accidents. She was very capable, and that's, I suppose because having grown up in the bush, she had become accustomed to helping with things. Um – then one day he had one of these fits and ah the idea was cold water and hot water, and Mrs McCullagh ran out of hot water and she said to the bookkeeper, oh get me some more hot water. He went across to the kitchen and came back. It was nearly boiling and they poured it over. He didn't – without feeling it first, she poured it over the child. He was shockingly scalded, but he lived. Well then of course she had a lot more treatment. Not only for fits but for scalding so he was coming every day for dressings.

T Do you think there's a possibility that it was venereal disease stopping Aboriginal women from having babies?

E Well it could have been. It could have been that, because I know that they were absolutely riddled with it. Well the ones that I had at, at um – I didn't know anything about venereal disease when I was at ah Durham. It was extremely ignorant about a lot of things. But when I was at Morestone, we had to rush one woman into the hospital one night in Camooweal and when the doctor came out, he said if you have a baby, don't let them touch anything. She's absolutely riddled with venereal disease. And I don't know really what was wrong with her. As I say, I was pretty ignorant about things and I don't really know just what was wrong with her that night. She came back to the place eventually and ah I heard but they didn't. There were three women there. Two of them would still have been child-bearing age but they didn't. They were never pregnant. As far as I know, they were never pregnant. Because they knew how to dispose of a baby if they didn't want it. So that they could've become pregnant and just got rid of it.

T So who looked after Ada and the – Elsie and the other little baby after Emily died, do you know?

E They all took a turn at looking after her but she spent the day down at the house and went back to the camp with the women at night. And they just cared for her. They were all fond of her and they all looked after her. And they would've looked after the – if, if the baby lived. I think the baby did live. I can't be sure about that one. It was too long ago.

T How did Aboriginal people treat children in your experience?

E They loved children. They really really loved children. Um – when we were coming back from holiday once to go to Tanbar and I had – my three children were – my three children came one on top of the other. I said they might as well have been triplets, and I liked it that way because they were able to play the same sort of games instead of having gaps in between them. But I – we came down through Nockatunga and Ada was then working at Nockatunga and she said oh narcoo, oh narcoo, and she counted in – I've forgotten their, their words for 1, 2, 3. I'll use the English words – 1 – 2 – 3. Oh narcoo. 1 – 2 – 3 using her word for the numbers. And she just thought the children were wonderful. They really really do love children. Little children. And take great care of them too. That - it was only at Durham really that I had anything much to do with, with them and then the ones that I had, I had at Morestone above Camooweal, some rather funny things happened there if I can put the one in that amuses everybody. Um – the previous wife of the manager had never thought to encourage them to be clean, nor the house. The house was a mess. Cobwebs hanging. No ceiling in the top, cobwebs through. Just like festooned for Christmas. And she had never encouraged the women to be clean so the first thing I did, was get some material and make frocks for them. I made them each two frocks. I knew if I made more than that, they would just toss them around. Now I said, you put on a clean frock at night. You take off the other one and you wash it. And then it's ready for you to put on the next night – the next day. And the one that they put on clean at night, they'd work in the next day. So one day the two of the girls came down – the ones that worked about the house, and the third one worked in the kitchen, and Jemima had a dirty dress on and I knew she hadn't had a bath by the smell.

And I said Jemima, you haven't had a bath. Did have a bath. No, you haven't had a bath Jemima and you don't have a clean dress on. Haven't got a clean dress. I said you should have a clean dress. If you had washed it last night, it would be ready for tonight. Now you go back to your camp, you have a bath and you put on a clean dress. As she turned away she said to the other one, Queenie, how bin Mrs know I never bin have a bath? Because the smell was enough without the dirty dress. Well she had curly hair – curly hair to about here, and she came back in a few minutes and she was absolutely dripping from her hair down. Her dress and everything. She put her dress through the water. She got into the bath and she was just, just dripping. Well, I had to laugh. That was the last time that Jemima arrived in a dirty dress and unbathed. And the other funny one about the um I don't know whether I ought to tell you this one. You can cut it out perhaps. The cook – we had a man cook when we first went there, and he had a poisoned hand and he had to leave so I took over the cooking, and I found a slip of paper in the kitchen with little stories of the woman that helped him in the kitchen. And he had told her that she must call him Your Worship and she couldn't say Your Worship, she said Washup. So one day she was in the little dining room off the kitchen doing the ironing and he heard her spitting and he called out Minnie, I told you not to spit longa floor. She said not bin spit longa floor Washup. I bin spit longa wall. If you want that one to stay, otherwise wipe it off.

T Just one – this is the last question I'll ask you about Ada and Elsie because I understand you didn't know them very well.

E No.

T Edith's newsletter said that they followed she and her husband round the west. Do you know anything about what happened to them? After that time you saw Ada, did you ever see either Ada or Elsie again?

E No. No. Elsie stayed – must've stayed at Durham because I heard that when Jean, the little white girl, was having lessons from the governess, ah Ada – Elsie also had lessons and then the McCullaghs were moved up – way up north to Diamantena, on to the Diamantena River, and I remember Jean being with them but I don't remember Elsie coming with them. I don't really know

what happened with her but when I saw Ada at Nockatunga, I didn't see Elsie. So I don't really know. There was no relationship between them. I'm quite sure of that. Ah because I think that ah Ada and Emily were probably different tribes.

T And coming now, and I won't talk so much about Adelaide and Morestone because they're not really in the Channel Country.

E No.

T How did you come to come to Tanbar?

E Because I heard that they were wanting a governess there and a friend, a friend of a relative had been to Nappamerrie Station and they took her on a trip to Durham, which was about a hundred miles or more north of ah of Nappamerrie. And while they were, she discovered they wanted another governess, because Miss New had been there and she had left. And when she got back to Adelaide, she told ah this relative of ours where she'd been and they were wanting a governess and the cousin said – thought of my sister first but my sister was in Sydney with a kindergarten and so they told me about it and I jumped at it. I said right, that's just what I want to do, to get out into that country and have a look at it.

T I actually meant Tanbar. How did you – but although that was very good but how did you come to come to Tanbar?

E Well Tanbar – after we married um my husband had been sent up – I'd been waiting for him to come down to Adelaide so we could be married in Adelaide and he wired to say that the firm that – he was with Vesties at the time, the firm had sent him up to this property north of Camooweal, and I said – I was teaching at the time on the condition that I could leave at a moment's notice, but I got the telegram to say he was being – going straight up there. I thought well they'll never give him time to come down to Adelaide so we could be married. And ah the little girl's mother said well, what are you going to do about it? She said you know, we had an agreement that you could leave at a moment's notice and I said oh, I'll stay 'til the end of the term. She said no, no, no, no. Well, I said, I'll stay 'til the end of the month. So I stayed 'til the end of the month and then I took off by train all the way round the coast up to

Townsville and out to Cloncurry. Met him in Cloncurry and we were married there and then straight out to this property north of Camooweal. Well it wasn't a wonderful position with Vesties. He couldn't really do the things he felt needed to be done. Everything came from the office. And he heard that they were wanting a new manager on Tanbar which adjoins Durham. He'd never been to Tanbar but he knew exactly where it was and he liked that country. He liked the river country. So he applied for the position and he got it, and so we set off – well he put in his resignation and we set off down the back road near the border fence with a three months old baby to Tanbar.

T What year?

E That was in 1932 and Helen was three months old, and we left there in November 1956 and we had over 20 years there. Just over 24 years we were there. And that's how we came to – back into that country again. That south-west country again.

T Can you tell me a little bit about that south-west country?

E The which?

T The, the south-west country. Tanbar. Durham. Why does water move so slowly there?

E Well it comes from the two rivers. The water in the Cooper comes from the Barcoo which comes down through Isisford and the Thompson which comes through Longreach, and they meet just above Windorah. Only a comparatively few miles from Windorah. The two rivers meet and they form the Cooper. Cooper's Creek. That's the old joke about the two rivers making a creek. Well as far as I know, the Thompson and the Barcoo don't flood out very far, but from Windorah downwards, the Cooper floods out in a – in a good flood it overflows the banks and it'll – the most we saw was hundred – one hundred miles of water from east to west. And because it's a very slow – low gradient, down to Lake Eyre, the water moves very slowly and instead of just rushing down the river as it does from the mountains, it moved slowly and it spread out across what we always call flooded ground. And that flooded ground in dry seasons cracks and the longer it is dry, the wider the cracks and they are quite deep. Well when the water begins to flood out, it sinks down

under and it comes up from the cracks which means it's slowing up the growth – the speed of the water all the time, and then as it comes up and it comes up all these cracks, massive cracks in a long dry period, a horse could stumble into a crack like that and break its leg. They're so wide. And then the water spreads out over all the flooded ground and there might be – after Windorah, it breaks into different channels, and we had um we had one channel on the north side of the house and three channels on the western – on the southern side of the house. From one channel – way out there, the channel out this side was somewhere in the vicinity of 50 or 60 miles – no 30 miles, 30 miles of water. Thirty miles of water across there, and when that outside channel flooded, and went further than usual and the northern channel went further than usual, we had 60 miles of water from east to west – from north to south. Yes, north to south.

T So how was the – how is the flood regarded? You know, what would people think about weather like that?

E How do they manage?

T No. What did people think about flood? Like was flood a natural disaster?

E Well it, it's in a way it might be a disaster, especially if you get drowning stock and that sort of thing. In – in some of the country there, the sheep were not fenced off from the river and once they got in, of course they were washed out. The sheep were hopeless there. And by the way, I said north to south. East to west. It was the east to west was 60 miles. Not north to south. It came from the north. Um – but the thing is, that after that water goes, the feed is magnificent. Magnificent for fattening country, fattening stock, fattening sheep or cattle. And it will last for some months but it isn't a permanent feed. The permanent feed you got would be out on sandhills. Well at Tanbar in particular, was sandhill country. Away from the river. And when we had heavy rain, it brought on this wonderful feed which would last – dry, it would become dry, but it was still nutritious.

T How did you come to feel about that land Edith? Honestly.

E 07:45:26:02(?) Ah – I've got a very soft spot in my heart for it really. Um, I know there is terrible disasters. Its terrible droughts. Terrible dust storms. In

a dry season the dust was heartbreaking but I still have no regrets about having lived there. I wouldn't want to go back to it. Sometimes I think I would like to go back just to see Tanbar and then I think no, because I had a very beautiful garden there. Lovely flower garden. And I put in trees and shrubs and things. And I heard that – I did hear at one stage that it hadn't been looked after but I believe they are trying to restore it. But I just don't know. I think just a part of me has been left out there. I was there from 1925 'til 1956 - 31 years, living in that – most of the time in that country. I think it's got to take a part of you and I think you would find that with anybody that lives in that country for a long time. There is something there that will always appeal. You could live on the coast and you could see the changes on the coast and you could go away and live somewhere else, but you would never have just the same feeling. And then again, having grown up in that lovely garden that my father had, not only the masses of fruit trees and grapevines but he had a very beautiful flower garden. A big part of me is down there too. I think it's between those two places, that's where my heart is.

T And is the fact that you were – you and your husband were managers rather than leasees or owners, did that – in any – did you ever feel oh I can't put too much of myself in here?

E Never. No. Never felt that at all. Even with Vesties. When I went to that awful house. I mean the house itself, the building itself was not too bad. It certainly was just great big bush timber for posts this high – thick, you know? Massive posts. And the top part was built on that with sawn timber. Yes, sawn timber for the top part of the house. I don't know when it was built but um then the lower part underneath had been closed in to make a dining room and a sitting room area and office. Ah – but the place itself, I'll never forget, the disgusting state it was in, and it took me weeks with the help of these three women to get it anything like a home. No garden. Oh, a little bit of a vegetable garden down on the flat near the water hole but no flower garden and I must always have a flower garden. And the house was built on a limestone hill. I think it was limestone anyway it was pretty hard stone. And every time my husband was out of sight, I used to get to and dig out the, the stone. Once I got the house cleaned up and painted um I painted the whole

thing inside and out until I ran out of um paint when I was halfway through the last window frame to be done. And I was sitting up on the window sill and I ran out of paint and I asked Vesties for some more paint and they said you've had enough paint. You can't have any more. Well I said, well it's your house, I said to myself. If you have visitors coming up and seeing half of the window is painted. The other half if not. They might think it's a bit funny but it's not my house. We'll leave it. Well then I made the garden and I had round – little round beds, and I grew flowers there and I improved the vegetable garden with the help of the black boy that lived there and um I grew Iceland poppies and we – I put some Iceland poppies on the breakfast and it happened some people arrived there. Why they came there I don't know because the road didn't take you anywhere else. It was just a dead end there. And so we invited them in to come and have some breakfast with us. She walked in – oh, she said, you've got artificial flowers –

End of Side A Tape 2

Side B Tape 2

E On the table. I said they're not artificial. I grew those.

T What else were you going to tell me about gardens?

E About the big ceremonial ground where they had the rainmaking ceremonies, corroborees. Ah, I mentioned that in my book and there were photos of this ground in that book. But it had not been used for a long time but you could still see how they had laid it out in sections and at every corner of this – we'll call them rooms for the want of another word, the stone would be say this high and pointed and it would've been pointed by the men themselves rubbing it down with stones. They would've worked on it with stones. And in a cave nearby, and some of the men found the cave but there was nothing in it of importance, but in that cave the Rain God lived and when a drought came and this would have happened way way back, long before white men ever lived there, ah when a drought came, they would go out to this place and have a corroboree and the Rain God would come apparently to the corroboree and they would call for rain. And ah – I'm getting very hoarse. I've talked too

much. While I was there, there were no ceremonies taking place there but it was so sacred to the men folk that the women must not go. They must never see it. They must never speak of it. They must never see it a photo of it. And not knowing this, I had taken photos and I had the prints and I said to Ada, oh I took some photos at – I can't remember the name of the place, and I held it out. Oh, she said, no – no narcoo. No. No. No. I mustn't look. Mustn't look. Shut her eyes. Turned away. She said don't you tell Paddy I talk about it. I said Ada, why can't you look at it? Oh no, she said. No gin go out there. No gin look at anything. Mustn't talk about it. It was very sacred to the men.

T That's a story about kind of a cultural clash if you like. About one culture – did you often have that feeling that you were –

E That was the only time. That was the only time that anything like that happened. Um – they were prepared to talk about other things and we could go out gathering yams with them and do all sorts of things like that. We could watch – certain corroborees we could watch, but as I was saying, there was one corroboree I couldn't watch until after the sun came up. Ah, they had a lot of – a lot of secrets, which were never divulged and probably never have been.

T Did you ever read Alice Duncan-Kemp's books? And what did you make of them?

E No. No. I didn't know about her having written a book. Um – Alice Kemp, she was the mother, wasn't she?

T Laura Duncan was the mother. Alice Duncan –

E Laura was the daughter.

T There was a mother – Laura Duncan. One daughter – Laura Duncan. And then another daughter Alice Duncan, who then married a Kemp and became Duncan-Kemp.

E Oh no, no. That – no I don't think that's right. I don't want to argue about it but when I was out in that country, I heard that the mother was – she had married a Duncan and he died and she married a Kemp. But she had – and after she married Kemp, she had – I thought she had the two daughters and one was Laura because Laura, the Laura Duncan that I knew and met I think

once at Hammond Downs – not at Hammond Downs, at Mayfield, was a woman of um oh probably middle-aged when I knew her, and her mother was a much older woman and after Doug left Durham – you know, my husband, not then my husband but he was Doug McFarlane – he went – was sent out to a Kidman property to take charge as he thought but in typical Kidman fashion, he was – it was a ring-in. He was to wait there ‘til the new manager came. So when the new manager came, he left. And he had to have work somewhere and he went to work at Mooraberrie with Mrs Duncan-Kemp and Laura who was the young one – the younger one. Well I knew she had a sister but I cannot recall the sister’s name, and I think the sister wrote a book and what she called it – it might have been ‘Our Sand Hill Country’. That’s just come to me. I think that was the name of her book. And that was Laura’s sister that wrote that. And I had never heard that Laura married, but if she married, it would probably have been the man who went there after – I think after Doug there or he may have been there part of the time. His name was Arthur Church.

T They never married but they shared the house for a long time.

E They shared the house. And, and the mother I think would have died um I think she was still there when we left. When we left Tanbar I think she might still have been around but um –

T Did you ever hear the story of Laura Duncan, the mother, going – taking a court case to the Privy Council?

E No. I didn’t ever hear about that. Until it was – I think it’s mentioned on that typewritten sheet you sent me. That was the first I ever knew about that.

T And Edith, this is a – a different tack. But tell me about giving birth to your second – your second and third children.

E Well the second one was born in Adelaide. I went down about three months before he was born and took him home when he was um a month or six weeks old. And when number three was coming, number one was only 2 years and 3 months when he was born and number two was only just over 12 months. There’s only 12 months between one and two. And I said now I can’t – I’m not going to go away and leave you again like I had to before because if I

leave you alone here for 3 or 4 months, I'm not going to do that again. And anyway, I couldn't start off on a train journey from Quilpie to Brisbane and all the way down the coast to Adelaide and there was nowhere in Brisbane I wanted to go because I didn't know anybody, so um I said I'm going to stop here and I'll have a double-certificated sister to come out so that was all arranged and I kept very well. I kept very well with all of them, except with number two and I had a shocking back ache. I couldn't – I could hardly move. And he was an 11 lb baby so probably that's why. Anyway I kept very fit and well and I went on working doing all the usual things and out in the garden and everything else while I was waiting for number three to come, and when the Sister arrived – by the time the Sister arrived I'd got a friend to come and stay with me so that she could look after the children while I was in bed. She was a friend I had made when I was at Durham. They lived – they lived next door. Next door to Durham, and she was about my age. And I asked her if she would come up and stay there until you know, look after the kids. So the Sister arrived and she said which of you is pregnant? I said it's very obvious I think which is pregnant. Well, she said, you're certainly not as far advanced as you think. I said don't you think so? I said this baby will be born in mid September, in about two weeks time. Oh, she said, no. Colin arrived in two weeks time. And things didn't go very well really. He popped along fairly quickly but I haemorrhaged very badly that time and um I think I could've easily slipped away but I made up my mind I wasn't going to. I said I'm not leaving my babies. Three babies and a husband I worshipped and I said I am NOT going to die, and kept thinking of my sister-in-law who had died when her second baby was born. And ah this girl that had come to stay - would look after the children, was sitting beside the bed and if I wanted a drink of water I'd just go – and that's the only movement I ever made. I was determined I was going to come out of it. And the Sister was scared. I knew she thought I wasn't hearing anything but I know she was scared. She was a very devout Catholic and she was praying madly that I would come out of it and afterwards she –

T did you ever –

E Mmm.

T Oh, go on. Sorry.

E Afterwards, she said, you were scared. I said, yes I was, but so were you. Oh no, she said, I knew you were alright. Years later I heard from one of the Charleville Sisters that they – these two had worked together in the Repat and she said, she used to tell me the most hair-raising tale about delivering a baby out in the far west and she said, it never dawned on me before that it was YOU!

T What year was that?

E That was in 1934. '34. And no Flying Doctor at that time. Not down in Charleville. We had no Flying Doctor there then.

T So was there a doctor at all that you saw?

E No, I didn't see a doctor all through. The only doctor – the nearest doctor was up at Jundah which was um about 130 miles away, and the doctors that go out there – and I read the same thing in this book about Flynn, they were no-hoppers. They were drug addicts or addicted to alcohol, and I did have to go up to Jundah once. I'd got a huge splinter in my hand. We had a new house and the floorboards, hardwood floors, and some of them were splintering, and to take up the splinters we used to oil the floors with linseed oil. I get down on my knees and so this and I did this one and I just caught it on a splinter that I hadn't noticed and it drove from here right down to my wrist and I knew it was a big one. That part of it was thin and part of it was thick, and I thought I'm not going to get anybody to, to take that out. And Doug was out on the run. When he came home I said I think I'll have to go up to Jundah to the doctor, and he said why and I showed him. Oh I'd put an antflagistine(?) poultice on it to sort of draw anything out. So the next day up we went. I took Helen but I left the two boys with my home help and away we went up to Jundah. A Sunday. I went to the hospital and the Matron said oh, the doctor's up at his house. Where have you come from? And I said 70 miles the other side of Windorah. She sort of looked at me in a very peculiar fashion and she said, what did you want? I said oh I have a splinter in my hand, I – and it was bandaged and she couldn't see it. She didn't say anything then and she said

oh, the doctor's up at his house. Well I went up to the doctor's house and he took my hand and he's like this – and oh, what have I struck?

T Drunk?

E No, drugs. Drugs. And um oh, he said, oh he said I'll be able to fix that. We'll go down to the hospital. So when we got to the hospital he said do you want an anaesthetic and I said no. And the Sister, the Matron said would you like a local? No. No. Oh, she said, I'll hold your arm steady and stand between you and the doctor so you can't see what he's doing. And I was wondering what's it going to be like? How is he going to manage this with his hands were like this all the time? Well he made a little nick down here and drew this splinter out and as Matron looked at it she said I thought you said it was a splinter, and I wondered why you'd come so far to have that out, she said. That's huge. And it was. At the bottom end would've been um a quarter of an inch across it. Well do you know, in spite of his shaking, that little split he'd cut healed beautifully and wouldn't think there's a – there never was a scar left I'm sure. I wouldn't see it if it was now but I don't think there was ever a mark left.

T Tell me about the Film Australia – (break in recording)