INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA HODGKINSON
11 January 2001

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

TAPE 1 – SIDE A

I **I'm going to interview Patricia Hodgkinson today which is 11 January 2001 at her Greenwich Road house, and this is for the Channels of History project. This is an audio only interview.**

Okay, shall we start with you or with your Mum?

R Oh, I suppose it would be better to start with me, wouldn't it?

I Yes. Okay, so I'd like you, just at the very beginning, to tell me your name when you were born and where and when you were born.

R Yes, I've got that detail anyway. Okay, my name is Patricia Hodgkinson. I was born Patricia Joan Richards. I was born in Wilcannia, New South Wales, when my father was manager of Mount Murchison Station on the Darling. It was a crack Kidman station at the time.

I And how had your father come to work for Kidman?

R My father came to work for Kidman because, before World War I, he had been manager for a millionaire cattleman called Bluey Buchanan and that in itself, his appointment there was because my grandfather, my father's father, he had four sons and two daughters and he was a pioneer of Queensland in that he and Landsborough were the people who discovered Central Queensland – Ivanhoe and all the townships there – and he built a log cabin at Nebo which was 90 miles from Mackay, over the Eungella Ranges. As his sons grew to manhood, as each one grew close to 17 or 18 and my grandfather felt that they were inclined to tell him how to run stations, he presented them with a horse and two blankets each, smacked the horse on the rump and said to the sons, 'See you in two years son', and away they went.

Well my father was the second son and when his time came and he was presented with the two blankets and the horse got smacked on the rump, he set out for Northern Territory and he started at … was working on the Elsie Station just after the [Miluka?] had died. From the Elsie Station he went to Victoria River Downs which was the largest station, largest

territory in the world at the time. It was owned by Vesteys. While he was working on Vesteys' property there, there was a great mob of cattle to go to Sydney – 1450 head of cattle had to go down to Burke in New South Wales – for this millionaire owner, Bluey Buchanan, but because at the time malaria was so rife in Darwin, there was no one to take the cattle down because they all fell ill with malaria. There was just, the drover was sick, and everybody in the camp was sick. Nobody to take this great mob of cattle down to Burke, except my 17-year-old father-to-be and a black boy aged 14.

So they set forth with 1450 head of cattle. They weren't seen or heard of for seven months and fourteen days until they came to [a food?] stop in Burke. No roads, no set cattle paths at all, and when they got there my father telegraphed this millionaire owner, Bluey Buchanan, in Sydney – 'Arrived in Burke, what to do with the cattle' – and he telegraphed back 'Get the first train to Sydney, hand the cattle over to the agent in Burke', which he did. When he got down there, Bluey Buchanan couldn't believe that this young stripling had made the journey and only lost 14 head of cattle. So he said to my father, 'You're good enough for me, son. When you're 21 come back and I'll give you a station. Give, as in give you the management of'. So my father-to-be turned up when he was 21 in Mr Buchanan's office and he was given the managership of Clooney Station, out in south-west Queensland, where he was the manager for a couple of years. The nearest township to that was Bedourie which is where my great-aunt, Mrs Creggie, ran the pub, and she had her nieces up from Melbourne from time to time, one of whom was my mother-to-be. So that's how he got his first managership.

Then along came … they were married in 1912 and two years' later, first World War came and my father's two brothers, who were both single, were not married, father was married by this time and had one or two children. So the brothers figured it out that my father should go up to Mackay, Nebo, and take on both their stations because the one thing that was important during World War I was sending beef to the troops overseas. And so my father did that during World War I. When they came back again and he handed over their properties to them, he needed a job, and so he applied to Sid Kidman who knew all about his record as a manager and it was then that he was offered the managership of Mount Murchison Station where I was born.

I Terrific.

R Made that link?

I Yes, terrific. That was a wonderful answer. So at what point did he and your mother marry?

R 1912 my father and mother were married in Adelaide.

I So she had been with him then … he met her when he was working at Clooneys. Were they married when they were at Clooneys?

R No, no, no, no, no. It took a lot of persuasion on my father's part to induce my mother to go back to the bush.

I So tell me a little bit about your mother, then. Where had she come from and how had she finished up in Bedourie? Because I can picture that pub now.

R My mother was born Margeurite de Courcy Talbot in Kyneton, I think it was, Kyneton in Victoria, but I can't remember the year. They moved and my father, Henry … my grandfather Henry de Courcy Talbot he from family history seems to have been nothing more than a professional aristocrat. Not known as far as anybody knows, to soil his aristocratic hands with toil. He was a Mason in Melbourne, in quite a high position with the Masons in Melbourne, and my mother … there were four girls and my mother and her three sisters were privately educated and they had a French artist come to the house to teach them drawing and they had a French teacher come to the house to teach them French, and lived a very elegant life as was part of the scene at the time. But my grandmother developed, when my mother was 16 I think, coming up 16, my grandmother had developed cancer and when she was dying of cancer, my grandfather took off – nobody knew where but it was suspected that he'd gone to America because he was actually born in New York. But nothing was ever seen or heard of him. So he leaves four destitute young women.

I With a lady's education.

R Superbly educated and not a single useful trade amongst them. And out in the bush, in Bedourie, was this aunt of my mother's, who wasn't spoken about because she was bog-Irish, very common. 'Common' meant a lot in those days. They couldn't understand these days what being common meant. Common she might have been, but she had a very big and generous heart and she said 'Somebody's got to do something about these girls'. So she had them up two by two, because from the only photographs I've ever seen of the four of them together, they were certainly very beautiful young ladies, and she had them up two

by two where, to my mother's horror, they were required to serve behind the bar. When she went back to … as I say, met my father there, but was so horrified by the whole scene at Bedourie – her aunt's pub – that she fled back to Melbourne. And that's where my father had to go to try and persuade her to marry him.

I When you say she was horrified by the scene at Bedourie, did she tell you stories of that? What do you imagine 'horrified' her?

R I can only draw this picture for myself of this well-born, well-educated young lady who'd never heard a swear word in her whole life being behind the bar. And if you can think of stockmen and all sorts of drovers and stock people who'd been out on the road or punishing cattle under a hot Queensland sky or twelve months, and they come in and they put their cheques across the counter because all they want to do is to get so drunk they block out the memories of the preceding twelve months. That is what apparently this young girl, not surprisingly, found very difficult to take.

I So do you know anything of the negotiations between your parents about marriage?

R No, no I don't know anything about that. I just know that when my father was absolutely determined to marry my mother and he had to go down to Melbourne and proceed with his courtship there. Well, obviously he was successful and why they were married in Adelaide I don't know, but they were.

I So then they'd come to Mount Murchison near Wilcannia and that's where you were born. What do you think was your earliest memory?

R Earliest memory of the station homestead at Mount Murchison was that it was a very beautiful property right on the banks of the Darling and it was the crack Kidman station at the time. But therein, I can remember the dining room table that … my mother had housemaids and people who looked after all the domestic essentials, but I can see her … we had a lovely garden there and we even grew violets, and I can remember the snowy white tablecloth and my mother strewing violets along the centrepiece. And I was just so struck with the beauty of these violets on the centrepiece of the table.

The next thing is not a memory but it is told by my mother herself, and that was she had never met Sidney Kidman, the owner of the station, but one evening she was looking out the front door when she saw a man wandering around the iron heap. Now every station's

got an iron heap where old disused iron pieces are thrown because the way every man's always told himself, one day he's going to fix that and do something about it. Anyhow, this gentleman picked up a piece of iron and he came wandering right up to the front door and my mother was horrified, and she said, 'Round the back, my man. Round the back'. This gentleman took no notice of her and he proceeded through the front door. Then my mother realised with horror that this was Sidney Kidman who owned the station. That, as you might say, terminated my father's employment with Sidney Kidman because my mother made it clear that she did not wish him to take up employment with such a crude man. This is true.

And so that is when, before then, at Mount Murchison, a terrible, terrible tragedy took place. The Darling was in flood and my father, this was just after dinner, and of course everybody dressed for dinner at Mount Murchison, and he had his high celluloid collar with the stud in the throat of it, and there was a tin rowboat and he took my mother and my sister Helen and sister Lucille, who was 18 months, and myself the baby. I was six months. He took us out in this rowboat to see the extent of the flood. Nobody heard a thing, not even a ripple, but when they looked back from the flood, Lucille my 18-month-old sister, was missing. My father went straight over the side of the boat, dived straight away, boots and all, collar stud and all, and almost lost his life at that point. When he came up and got rid of his boots and his collar stud, my brother came down from the station – he was older, I think he was seven – but he could row the boat back to the station landing with my mother and the other children, whereupon my father and the stockmen on the station dived for three days before they found Lucille's little body pinned under a tree. And that, as later on we knew, was the beginning of the end for my mother because she never, ever got over it. So what she wanted to do was to get as far away from Mount Murchison and the Darling as she could, which is how my father came to take up an appointment as manager of Mount Leonard Station, south-western Queensland.

I And how old were you when you moved from Mount Murchison to the Channel Country, to Mount Leonard?

R I know how old I was when we moved from Mount Murchison, which was 40 miles outside Broken Hill, because my father and my eldest brother Laurie, who was then 10, they had been up to Mount Leonard before on a, well you might say a reconnaissance he was asked to make to go to, before he was actually appointed to Mount Leonard. So he and my brother Laurie had gone up six months before. My mother had to wait in Broken

Hill because my brother Peter was born there in December the year before we moved, the rest of the family moved up to Mount Leonard. And I do know that I was very excited when people told me that we were going to cross the border from South Australia, from New South Wales into Queensland, and I thought it would be a great big gate that you walked through – and of course there was nothing there at all – but I had to get through that gate so I could go and see a person they spoke a lot about, who turned out to be Miss Dorothy Gafney, and the Gafneys owned the pub at Birdsville. And I was told that when we got to Birdsville we'd have lovely cold drinks, which after a week of travelling in a tin lizzie over the formidable sand hills on the Birdsville Track, so I just thought all you did was, there was a big gate and you walked through it and then you met up with Dorothy Queensland, as I called her in my little and I was also told that I was going to be four in 'vember. I was going to be four in November. So this must have been about six months before. And that, as far as … I was four in November, so that would have been 1924.

I Can you tell me … you probably have just very partial memories, but of arriving at Mount Leonard?

R I certainly can remember very clearly our arrival at Mount Leonard. My father caught up with us in – with my mother and my sister and I – because he met up with us in Birdsville, because he had purchased a tin lizzie, a brand new Henry Ford tin lizzie, and we drove from, set out from Birdsville up to Mount Leonard, which was 110 miles. Birdsville being just on the border of South Australia, Mount Leonard just being on the edge of Queensland. And my brother, who was born in Broken Hill, Peter, he was only months old, and there had been flood rains and my father battled his way, battled his way, through all the floods, but they beat him after [Durie?] Station which was about half way between. And in the great lignum swamps there, the tin lizzie refused to go any further. So my father had to set out and, just walking, he had to walk 60 miles to get to the hotel at Betoota which was across the creek from Mount Leonard. So he was gone a fair long time.

I can remember an horrendous night because my poor mother is trying to light a thermos surrounded by flood waters and the lignum growing right up to the car, she's trying with damp matches to light a primus stove to heat the milk or Glaxo or whatever the mixture was to quieten my baby brother who yelled very loudly all night. The mosquitoes were the size of dinner plates and so it was no wonder that I remembered that night. But anyhow, after dawn, we heard the wondrous sound of a buggy coming towards us – a buggy, two

horses – with Mr Garrett, who was the publican at Betoota Pub, Mr Garrett, my father and we had to leave the tin lizzie where it was and he picked up the family and the next thing was we arrive at Betoota Pub where we were given …

I In a truck?

R In a buggy. No, we were in a buggy – two horses and a buggy. And we arrived and Mrs Garrett, Mr Garrett's wife at the pub there, she had a wonderful breakfast ready for us, and I can see my brother Jack who was two years younger than I, so he was two and a bit, my brother Jack solemnly sitting up and eating his way through, I think, a bowl of eggs. He just had one egg after another like he's never going to see eggs again. When we're all fed and watered and in a much better frame of mind, Mr Garrett, in the buggy again, took us across to the station, Mount Leonard Station. You had to go round by the creek, Mount Leonard Creek, and come up the other side, and there was Mount Leonard Station. It just looked like bliss and heaven, something that was out of the water and you didn't have to climb through the wet lignum to get to. Anyhow, when we arrived at the station our luggage turned up eventually. They got the lizzie unstuck and our luggage came.

I had a big doll, a celluloid doll Jean, and it was naked because all Jean's clothes were packed away somewhere or other, and in exhaustion my mother had one of the gins just put all the suitcases in a storeroom – it was full of sacks of flour, but just put the luggage in there until she stopped being exhausted and was going to do something about it. But on top of the sacks of flour was my big celluloid doll, naked doll, Jean. The next day my mother decides we're going to get the stuff out and unpack it and she sent in Judy, an old black gin, 60 years plus, smoking a pipe, eternally with the pipe in the mouth. She was introduced to a broom which she hadn't seen in her life before, and didn't think much of, but she was introduced to a straw broom and told to go and clean up the storeroom. Next thing, there was bloodcurdling yells from this old gin. If you've ever seen an old gin turn white, well Judy did, because what she saw was the pink celluloid doll on top of the flour sacks and she knew straight away that my mother had killed my brother Peter, months old, and flung him up there. And she kept screaming and screaming 'Dead [purdi pulia?], dead [purdi pulia?]' (dead baby, dead baby). So mother had to deal with this distraught old black gin and she had to wake up my peacefully sleeping baby brother, got him out of his cot, and he dutifully yelled blue murder, and that convinced Judy that my mother hadn't murdered the baby. '[purdi pulia?], okay'. After that, she grabbed hold of my pink celluloid doll Jean and I never saw it again.

I That's a great story. So that story, juts tell me what you had for breakfast. I'll just make sure the light's working properly.

R Cereal. Paw-paw.

I That story tells one something of the relationship between white women and black women in the Channel Country, doesn't it?

R Mmmm.

I When you think of that, when you think of the relationship between your mother and the Aboriginal women, how would you depict it? Are there other stories that seem to you to speak of that relationship?

R Yes, indeed. I'll go on with Judy because the black women, the gins, down on the camp … and the camp was, oh about a quarter of a mile down from the station on the banks of the creek. My father made it very clear to we children that if we went within cooee of that black camp our little pink bottoms would change colour very rapidly. He said 'They don't' come up and sit in our sitting room, you don't go down there. That's their place'. And that's how the thing worked so very well. But it became known, my mother who's got this very large home, was Mount Leonard at the time. It was half [sounds like 'pee-zay'], that is mud brick thing that had been built, and that was the cool half of the house. There was a long hall, 54 feet long, and the other was in timber, because it had been built at two separate stages. So it was a large house and my mother wanted domestic help to help in the house.

The black women had got word of this missus coming, this white missus coming, and they had determined that they weren't going to be in it – no way. They'd never done domestic work and they didn't fancy it one little bit. Anyhow, my father got in touch with whoever the senior black man was at the time and he just told them that, yes, one of them had to come up and that, yes, they would be paid wages. It wouldn't be much but they would be paid for working in the house. Well that altered the picture. But the only one, the first footer, was, as I say, old Judy who came up and took away my pink doll. The first thing was, of course, the washing. The wash house was a day's march from the house and it was just a straw building right out in the open on its own and what had to be washed were my father's and my brothers' riding trousers. They were moleskins – thick, thick material – and they took a lot of cleaning, washing. After the men sit in saddles for days on end, they

took a lot of washing. But Judy was shown how to fill the tub with water and bar soap, which was made on the station, presented with a piece of bar soap and told to clean my father's moleskins. Well somehow she managed that one pair of moleskins to last all day because she had no intention, really, of altering her ways. Still the old pipe going. Anyhow, my mother got conversational with her, although Judy had very, very little spoken English, but she asked Judy, who she knew to be well over 60, if Judy had had any piccaninnies and old Judy – and I was there at the time and I can see her just shifting one quid of tobacco from one side of her mouth to the other and saying, 'Not yet, missus', which killed my mother. Apparently she still had hopes.

Eventually one or two of the other bit younger gins were persuaded, yes, they could take up employment in the house without loss of face and we went from there. There were no piccaninnies because this tribe was dying out. They had moved and moved and it was just the remnants of the tribe at that time.

I So where were the younger people, do you know from this Aboriginal group?

R Well, we have to get to an historical piece now which I have seen verified, and that was an early manager of Mount Leonard Station, before it came under the management of my father's employers, Sinclair, Scott & Co., in 1903 I think it was, there was a great massacre on Mount Leonard itself, and Old Joe the black, of whom I have many photographs, and he lived to 105. He outlived my father by about 10 years, 15 years. Old Joe and my father just became blood buddies for life and my father had such tremendous respect for this really great old nobleman, he really was, of black species. And Old Joe told my father when he first went to Mount Leonard that the policeman who was across the creek lived in a stone building there because there had to be a policeman because there was taxes between states. Mount Leonard being two-thirds in Queensland and one-third in South Australia, tax had to be paid for cattle crossing the borders, so the policeman and this hut. The policeman at the time, whose name I've long since forgotten, was absolutely petrified of the blacks rising against him and so Old Joe explained to my father that come sunset every Saturday night he lined up all the blacks in front of Mount Leonard Station on Garu Plain. That was a plain that extended for 60 miles outside the station. He lined up all the blacks and he shot every tenth one. When Old Joe said, in his talk he said, 'It come my time and,' he said 'I fall down dead. I gammon dead'. When he was a little boy of 10, he gammoned dead, fell down. He waited until big star come up, you know, boss, big star?

When the evening star came up, Old Joe ran away to the scrub and that's how he survived the massacre of the blacks on Mount Leonard Station.

I So it was just those few individuals that had been lucky enough to escape?

R Yes. But as a result of that massacre, well most of the blacks fled into South Australia, down towards Broken Hill way, but it was only the remnants of that tribe that was left when we arrived there.

I And can you think, as a child, your first awareness of … well I guess I want you to tell me the story of hearing their dances at night. I haven't framed the question properly but can you tell me about how you became aware of Aboriginal culture?

R Aboriginal culture. I can clearly remember a very hot summer night and there was no way you could sleep in the bedrooms, we all used to sleep out on the verandahs in the faint hope of catching a breeze before dawn, and in the middle of that night I heard weird sounds, really weird sounds. They weren't frightening, I wasn't frightened by them, but I'd certainly never heard anything so strange in all my life. And anyway, I woke mother, or she was aware that I was wakened by it, and she told me that the blacks, our blacks, were having a corroboree in their camp because one of their number had died. They never referred to anybody on the station, it was a matter between themselves, and they were singing all these funeral chants, we would say, and it was the stillness of the night and the strangeness of the Aboriginal chanting that first drew me to the realisation that those black people down there had a very different culture from we people who, if we wanted to make music we'd put a record on the HMV gramophone.

I So did it ever, as a child, it's an interesting world you're portraying of your father ensuring as absolute separation as possible between Aboriginal life and his family's life and, at the same time, great respect. Did that ever strike you as contradictory as a young person?

R No, it didn't because remember, my father was the fourth generation of pastoralists who had gone … my dear little grandmother used to say that when grandfather found her the station and it was just getting half way comfortable, grandfather would say, 'Right, into the drays,' and into the drays would go the piano, the bible, the family silver, and the ball gowns. It took me a long time to get out of Grandma why the ball gowns but I now understand that they were the last relic of the life she used to lead in Port Macquarie, before she was married I guess. But anyway, my father, having been born on Nebo Station

there, he had just grown up with blacks all his life, which is why he had such an inborn respect for them, and devoted really. The most important work he ever did was when he was forced to go to Adelaide for a court case about the station, something to do with taxation between states or something, and he nearly died of boredom in Adelaide because he, as the manager, had to give vital statistics. And when he was there he had been rankling about the fact that he couldn't pay the black stockmen. They had to be paid, all their pay had to be paid to this drunken policeman across the way, a fellow called Reilly, whom the blacks loathed and were frightened of, but under the Protection of Aborigines, my father had to pay their wages to this drunken policeman who drank it all and when the blacks turned up to ask for new boots or a blanket to go under the saddle, he just said to them, 'No money. You've got no money'. So when my father had this enforced stay in Adelaide, he went all out and, with the help of his employer S.B. Sinclair, who was a figure of note in Adelaide, and with the help of the Commissioner of Police and he just went to every … the Governor. He didn't stop. He went to every avenue he could and he won the point. As a result of my father's, what he did in Adelaide, when he came back there he could pay our stockmen by cheque himself. When they wanted to go walkabout, they had money to do it, and I can remember being called, I was five years of age, being called into my father's office and one of the blacks is going walkabout and he wants that pink piece of paper, money, to go walkabout with, and so the cheque had to be witnessed. And it was witnessed by Patricia Hodgkinson, sorry Patricia Richards, and the blackfellow put his thumb mark on it, and I – my father signed for me, of course, but I was terribly impressed with the fact that that blackfellow owed it to me to get his pay when he went walkabout.

I So it wouldn't have been equal wages to white stockmen but the point your father won was the ability to pay the money directly, rather than via the Protector?

R Yes. They weren't given the full wage for a stockman, as I was told, because my eldest brother was a stockman all of his days out there, was a pound a week and that was all, nothing else. They had to provide their own saddles and they had to provide their own horses. They had to provide everything. A pound a week was the stockman's wage and the blacks got ten shillings, which was they thought a fortune, considering they had it for the first time anyway.

I And they would then … you provided some food for them?

R Oh, goodness yes. Every Monday I used to ride out with my father to get the killer, and that was, he would bring in about ten or a dozen cattle, the nearest at hand, and the great competition with my father and we children was who was going to spot, get into Father's mind and spot the one that he had selected to be the killer, our food for the next week. And so, the beast was shot and very quickly strung up on a high gallows, and these men who'd never been trained in butchery or anything like it, they were just lightning fast at the way they cut up the beast sufficiently to hang it overnight. But before the beast got strung up, the blacks were there, Old Joe, Hughey, whoever was good and strong, and they had great big black, we called them Japan tin trays, and on the top of those tin trays the blacks, with great delight, they couldn't take any steak away because that wasn't cut the first night, it had to bleed and things, but they took away all the innards and all the stuff that we call sweetbreads. I never touched sweetbreads in my whole life. I never have. But all what they said was the good stuff, the innards of the beast, that got piled high on these great big tin trays which they put on their heads. And you could hear, when they arrived back at the camp at the gunyahs, you could hear the cries of delight of the women at all these goodies. And my father treated all the blacks in the camp as fellows who'd done a good job of work and therefore needed good treatment. He never ever stinted them on not having the best bits.

So next morning, before the crows could get at it and pick it to bits, this carcass, meat carcass, was cut up into joints and corned beef, beef to be corned, because there was no way you could have fresh meat. It would have gone off by evening time. And all of that was carted in a dray down to the butcher's house which was just an open – as you'd see in Africa – with the cane grass roof on it, and just open sides, and quick as quick as quick, my father and the fellows had to cut up every piece of joint and piece of beef and put it into salt wine. It was the only way. You couldn't have … in winter time you could, but in summer time there was no way that you could keep meat fresh for more than 12 hours. So it was corned beef for breakfast, corned beef for dinner and corned beef for tea.

I And Gladys Cross who now owns Carranya Station described kind of having, when you eat it, it sounded like you'd have to scrape the bad bit off often before you got to actually edible meat in the middle? No?

R No.

I Maybe your lots were better at …

R Curing.

I Curing it, yes. She described that there would be putrid flies on the outside that you'd have to get rid of.

R That was bad management, was that. My father wouldn't have tolerated that. But so you'd wonder why my favourite meal today is what it was for many years when I was growing up on Mount Leonard station, which is corned beef and carrots. I still adore it.

I So your early childhood was on Mount Leonard. Can you paint a picture of your days?

R Well, I can't really because I was … my eldest brother by this time he's 10, 11, 12 or so, and my mother put her foot down very firmly and said that brother Laurie had to go off to boarding school, which my father protested like nothing on earth, because his son, trained by him, was one of the best men he had in the camp anyway. But no, no, no, my mother insisted he had to go to boarding school and he went to Emerald as far as I remember. Emerald comes into it somewhere or other. And then my sister who was four years older than I, she was sent off to boarding school. So that left me with the three younger brothers and I was allowed … there was no such division as boys and girls sort of thing. I was the instigator of most of the naughty pranks and stuff but my father insisted that I had to be, if I was going to be brought up with the boys, I had to do their things.

And of course the first thing was how to learn to ride and look after your own pony and, above all, how to treat your animals. And my father was absolutely rigid about that. You saddled your own pony. You looked after your own pony's feet and the boys had to do exactly the same. And the great joy is that we had … we were on … Mount Leonard was well on the Artesian Basin and we had windmills and the nearest one was eight miles down, the eight mile, where there was a windmill which pumped endless supplies of boiling hot water out of the ground, which cooled in long black troughs, which the cattle drank. Pity about those artesian bores was that after a certain depth, the water went salt and the cattle wouldn't touch it, so that made it necessary on this good bore, eight miles from the station, it had to be checked regularly all through the summer, that it hadn't dried up or gone salt.

TAPE 1 – SIDE B

R So that was what our Sunday outing was, whereas city children would be put in the back of the car and go to the beach for the day, we took our corned beef sandwiches and off we went for our Sunday outing, which was to check the bore out at the eight mile. And it was a sight to be seen. All this water gushing up to the height of the windmill and higher, and then coming down. It used to be, I thought, a terrible wicked waste of water because we were brought up to know, and we had evidence all around us, of how precious every drop of water was. So that was what you'd say our Sunday outing.

Then, we had, with my father, as I said, when we went out looking for the killer well we could ride out with him, but he was quite certain that our riding out had to have a purpose and that is he would tell us that we had to go … there were sand hills in front of Mount Leonard which were the last bit of where the Simpson Desert peters out. There is low sand hills and he would send us forth over these sand hills to check on the grasses. Any grasses we saw there we had to come home and describe to him because there were, now Mitchell grass was one which is a great source of water in drought years. All those sand hill grasses were marvellous because they had [minimum?] water in them, so we'd have to come back when … we might have been 40 miles away but we would ride back and tell Poppa what the state of the grasses were on the sand hills. So that we were kept busy little people and I suppose my mother might have approved thoroughly of that because it kept us out from under her feet anyway.

I So let's talk about your mother a bit, then. When you were describing your mother, the woman used to strewing violets down the damask tablecloth, then being on the side of the road with a six-month-old baby, alone by a flooded river, you get a sense of the difficulties of the position she found herself in. As I just asked you about your life, there's a sense of kind of joy, I guess, in this land. How did your mother respond to the land of Mount Leonard and how did that lead into her daily routine?

R My mother never ever took part in the male side of the workings of Mount Leonard. Lots of the women, famously Miss Laura Duncan, who actually ran the stations and were marvellous at managing cattle and stock, my mother never ever took place in the physical side of Mount Leonard at all. But she was a reader and she had a very extensive library of books that she brought up with her. She was, amongst other things, she was a Napoleonic freak, you might say, in that she had every book ever published on Napoleon and she read

and read and read, and that started me on good reading because in the long, hot afternoons when my mother and father and the rest of the station disappeared for a camp, as they called it, that is they had a rest and read, I was bored out of my little brain but I found that if I got the kitchen steps out and put it against the big bookcase in the sitting room, I knew she had some books up on top. And so I climbed up.

At aged eight I know I read Nathaniel Hawthorne *The Letter A*. Now, I was taken with the cadence. I didn't understand them but it was the cadence of the words as I said them to myself that really got to me in that book. I had no idea that the letter A stood for adultery and that this poor lady had been caught in the act of adultery and it was a book that made Nathaniel Hawthorne very famous. But also, of all things, she had Omar Khayyám, the poems of Omar Khayyám edited by FitzGerald. Now, to this day, I have my mother's copy and two others of that and, to this day, I can say all the stanzas of Omar Khayyám edited by FitzGerald. Again, it was the cadence and the love of the sound of words. So while I'm doing that and being very careful always to put the kitchen steps back again, that's how I filled in the long, long hot afternoons.

But as for my mother, she was also a writer and she wrote many articles for the *Bulletin*, and the *Bulletin* was the bushman's bible, and the *Bulletin* was famous then for its [read/red?] page. The back page of the *Bulletin* was a literary haven for so many Australian writers who were first published in the red page of the *Bulletin*. So she also started and she started a novel. It was not set in Mount Leonard. She wanted to get as far away from that as she could and it was set in the time, in France, in the time of Charles IV. Now you'd wonder why on earth I'd remember that, except that I can remember her distinctive writing. She sent it off to, I don't know how many publishers, and it never got published but at least it occupied her mentally.

I And what were her writings for the *Bulletin*? That's fascinating. What would she be writing about for the red page?

R Oh, just about famous characters who came to the station. Terry Madigan, he was a professor of geology, Professor Terence Madigan, professor of geology at Adelaide University. That's just one. And he crossed the Simpson Desert by camel. Mmmm, I can't remember the date but you could certainly find it. I think it was somewhere in the late twenties. People who came, like the Flying Doctor John, John …

I John Flynn.

R John Flynn. Now it was these birds of wild plumage that really kept Mother's interest alive out there and I can always remember John Flynn's arrival at the station, and the year – it was 1927 – I would have been seven years old because my father and the men were out on a muster, about 40 miles from the station. And this man clip-clopped up on a camel and when he got down from the camel, he introduced himself as John Flynn and he came inside and Mother gave him tea, and then he propounded the scheme that he had in mind for putting a mantle of safety over the bush. And that was that he wanted to get pedal radios set up from Cloncurry, which would be the base, and Mount Leonard certainly would be one, and the stations. He wanted to get … he'd thought this scheme out of having a base, a wireless base in Cloncurry where women as isolated as my mother could get on the pedal radio and could tell the doctor at Cloncurry what had befallen whoever was sick, ill, or had fallen off a horse, at Mount Leonard, and that he had found this wonderful radio man in Adelaide called Alfred (Alf) Tregeer who was way before his time with radio reception. Well, my mother was – naturally any woman in those isolated circumstances would have been – but she had had an experience only 12 months before when my youngest brother Terry was born in Longreach Hospital, and he was brought home to the station fat, chubby, lovely little baby, whereupon he immediately started to die. He had something called thrush or some baby disease and he just started melting away in front of my mother's distraught eyes. I can remember we all had to take turns that this little baby was in a hammock on the verandah and we had to swing this hammock all day to try and alleviate his distress.

Anyhow, my father and the men were away but our bookkeeper, Mr John Gray Park, he was, had known Father in another station and he was a highly respected fellow, and he could drive, because there was a Chevrolet car at the station. So Mr Park got a piece of paper from Mother which the only drug that Mother knew about that could do anything for this baby's condition, she wrote that down on a piece of paper and Mr Park drove 456 miles into Longreach where the only doctor was. The doctor was out on a drug binge and was of no use to anybody but Mr Park, being a well-educated fellow, he recognised the drug Mother was after and he smashed open the doctor's drug cabinet, got the bottle of whatever, drove 456 miles back again to the station and, by God's mercy, brother Terry improved, he recovered, and I don't think that brother's ever had a cold from that day to this. But that's how close my mother was to losing her youngest baby when John Flynn

popped up subsequently. So she said to him, 'Please, John, you must wait till my husband comes back – it's only a couple of days – because I know perfectly well what his feelings about this matter will be. So he did.

I Your mother would write to the *Bulletin* about the people that came to the station?

R Yes, like John Flynn.

I So what would be her name? Somebody Richards?

R Oh, yes. Mrs …

I What was her name?

R Well, in those days you took your husband's name. Mrs Harold Richards. As far as I know, because that's what the address was to ladies who were married then. Can I finish about John Flynn?

I Yes.

R And so, when my father came back and he certainly was very taken with John Flynn's idea and he said, 'John, I am your man,' and he said, 'I can speak for the rest of the Channel Country out here. From this day forward' – we had a race meeting every year – 'the Betoota Race Meeting, and from this day forward every Betoota, every race meeting, the whole proceeds will go to the Flying Doctor thing'. And so John was delighted and got on his camel to go away when my father said to him … oh, my mother had said to him, 'Now listen, John, when my husband comes back, I won't go on about this Reverend Flynn because,' she said, 'they're not very strong on religion in the bush and it's better if I just say Mr Flynn, John Flynn'. That was okay. But as he's getting on his camel to depart, my father said to John Flynn, 'You know, John old man, you nearly had me fooled. I thought you were that bloody parson the whole district's talking about'. Now that's John Flynn, you know.

The other people who came, apart from Terry Madigan, and these writers came. Ernestine Hill, except she was later and became a great friend of my father's, but that was after Mother had left the station, and Ion Idriess, and also our neighbour Miss Duncan, her sister had written, by this time she'd written *Our Channel Country* …

I Oh, what's the first one? *Our Channel Country …Our Home amongst the Sand.*

R Ahhh, *No Roads Go By?*

I *No Roads Go By where Strange Gods Call …* What's the first one? I think it's just *Our Channel Country*.

R You can check that out. And so writers came, innumerable. And also, and they were a pest because they arrived at the station, fresh out of petrol, and demanded petrol from the station owner and rations to get down to Birdsville or somewhere, which hugely embarrassed the stations, of course, because they had barely enough to run the station on, let alone be with largesse give visiting writers. Professor Elkin. There were innumerable professors who came up to try and glean information about the culture of our blacks. And, of course, our blacks were too cluey for that. They never divulged any of it. Wonderful instance, my father … we are talking now about somewhere in the thirties, probably about '37, and it's a winter day and our two old blacks, getting very old by this time, they're sunning themselves in the winter sun outside the men's kitchen, on a bench outside the men's kitchen, and Professor Elkin was staying in the house and he came over. My father was shoeing a horse just where these old blacks were, and chatting away to them, and Professor Elkin actually asked my father's permission to interview these two old black gentlemen sunning themselves, and my father said, 'Oh, right, go ahead'. So the professor snapped open his notebook and he asked questions of the blacks and he solemnly wrote down the answers that they gave. Then he snapped his notebook shut and off he went. And my father, who had a mouthful of horseshoe nails in his mouth, nearly choked on them because he said in the lingua franca of the country at the time, 'You old black bastards. What did you want to tell the professor all that load of codswallop for?' And the old black chuckles. Poppa said he'll never forget how they killed themselves laughing and they said, 'Oh, boss, him silly bugger anyway'. That's off a reel is that one. So that killed Poppa, it really did.

But we go now, years go on. I have a daughter who is first-year anthropology at Sydney University and she comes home to me and tells me all the wonders of black culture as propounded by Professor Elkin. And she got furious and livid with me when I told her this story of where Professor Elkin got his lore from. To this day she refuses to believe me.

I Let's just go back. That's a great story and it really relates to the whole Channel Country …

R And so many people out there will – not now – but there will be descendants of, who remember what an unpopular person Professor Elkin was.

I Let's go back and talk about your Mum a bit more. That's fascinating, all this stuff, about her being a writer and I get a picture of her, almost like she would have stayed inside ignoring what was outside.

R A recluse. Inside was her world. Outside didn't exist. I suppose it was the only way you could have dealt with it, wouldn't it, eh? If you can think of the blinding glare of the sun on the sand hills, and the blinding glare – it's all rocks, like the planet of the moon, you know – blinding glare, all summer long, and that brassy sky, and Poppa saying, 'Oh, for Christ sake, Hughey, send her down'. Rain, seven years' drought, you know. Poppa looking at that brazen sky, day after day, and his favourite horses dying and all that. So Mother shut all that out.

I It's clear that your father was a major force in your childhood. How would you describe the role of your Mum in your childhood?

R This is the difficult, difficult bit. I don't know how to say it and I don't know really … you see, what her, you'd say ill-treatment wouldn't you, of me and my brothers, all stemmed from the shocking aftermath of Lucille's death. That she'd turned off her maternity, like that. And she had four kids, didn't she, after that? Guess why she had four kids? 'Cause there was no damn pill, was there, you see? All of those pregnancies, she must have hated, mustn't she? She didn't want any more kids but she had to have kids 'cause that's how society was at the time. But that I don't want to go into – if you could find some way of skating over that.

I Having children got her away from the Channel Country, didn't it? Well, wasn't it the case that when she would have the children she'd go away for a while?

R Oh, yes, but that was the custom of the time. For my brother Laurie, Laurence Talbot Scott Richards, imagine that plaster she gave the poor little bastard. He was born in Melbourne because she was a [Smellbourne, Smellbourne?] on Yarra, girl, and her friends, her lifelong friends – and I don't think she bothered with her relatives – but she had

lifelong friends so she'd, for three months she was down in Melbourne before and after the birth. And Helen was also born in Melbourne, my next sister, she was born, so that was another three-month sort of thing. Lucille, I can't tell you, can't remember, but most likely Melbourne. But by the time they got up to Patricia Joan, Poppa was manager of Mount Murchison, well it's only 40 miles to …

I Broken Hill?

R No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

I Wilcannia?

R Wilcannia, where there was a cottage hospital. Are you recording this?

I Yes.

R Yes. There was a cottage hospital at Wilcannia where I was born because probably, by this time, my poor father had had enough of digging out funds to support this retreat to Melbourne for the birth of every child. And the wonderful thing about that was my father, who dealt with animals all his life, had never seen a human baby born, and so – it would have to be me, wouldn't it – anyway, Poppa was going up, coming down the steps of the cottage hospital, having visited my mother with me, when two English ladies who'd been staying at Mount Murchison were going up the steps to see my mother. And the English lady said to my father, 'Oh, Mr Scott Richards, you're going to see your lovely little baby daughter, are you?' Poppa held his hand to his head and he said, 'My Gawd, I've never seen anything uglier in my whole Goddamn life'. He'd seen a human baby. 'Oh my Gawd,' he'd never ever, and he was shaken, and he went tottering down the steps.

Time goes on and my aunts in Sydney, the Misses Scott Richards – one of them's a great traveller, goes to a meeting of the Royal Geographic Society in London and they introduce this lady from Australia, Miss Judith Scott Richards who's a visitor from Australia, and at the end of the meeting two very old English ladies come up to my aunt and said to her, 'Oh, Miss Scott Richards, did you ever have a brother who was out on the banks of the Darling?' 'Oh, yes,' says Aunt, 'Certainly, that was my brother, yes'. 'Oh, do tell us, please, did he ever accept that little baby girl?' They'd worried all those years.

I And so your Mum, after she came to the Channel Country, she had the child in Longreach, Peter in Longreach.

R She had that, and she brought Peter up, she brought Jack up, who was born in Broken Hill – that I remember – and she brought Peter up. He was born in Broken Hill, and then two years later there's this youngest one who was born in Longreach.

I Right. So after she came to the Channel Country …

R There was no retreating to Melbourne. There was no more retreating to the comforts of Melbourne, that is for sure. But, as I say, we must have all been … now don't record this.

I Should I pause?

R Just pause, yes.

I Okay, I'm recording now.

R Mmmm. But as a result of the drowning of my sister Lucille on the Darling, my mother never ever recovered from it. Although she had four children after Lucille, no, no, you can't count me because I was all right, wasn't I? She had three more sons after me. None of those children would she have had if she had been able to do anything about it. That's about as neat as I can make it.

I No, that's terrific. And could we then, just tell me in the way you want to, about your Mum coming to leave the station, because she never really reconciled to life at Mount Leonard, did she?

R No. She just never did. She had a great correspondence with her friends in Melbourne and they sent her up through the, I think it was the Victorian Literary Society, they kept her alive with books and magazines from Melbourne. So she always had an interest in what was going on in theatre in Melbourne, what was going on in the art world in Melbourne, what was going there. And so, it wasn't terribly often, but when she could take the bush no longer, she would retreat to Melbourne and I don't suppose my father could maintain her in Melbourne all the time so she had to come back to the bush.

I How would she get on with the other women of the Channel Country because she would have been very different from ,say, the Miss Duncan Kemps or the Laura Duncan Kemp the elder, for instance.

R Yes. My mother did not get on with the women of the other stations round about and one can see why, in that the woman on the next station up on the Queensland side, she had been a Lancashire Mill girl and she married her husband when he was fighting in – see, I mustn't say names here – she was, her husband Mick was over in World War I and Mrs, and this lady was his trophy from World War I, straight from a Lancashire Mill. The lady down on the Birdsville side of it, she too had been born in England and she had come out from work in a factory also, because the women in England just had no futures at all. There was nothing they could do except be servants and slaves in English homes. So they were brought out by an employment agency which looked after migrant women from England, and I wouldn't know what their first impressions of the Channel Country were when they arrived there. I only know that they put their backs into it and that they went through so many horrific trials and that they stuck it out and were justly rewarded for doing so. But they couldn't speak my mother's language and she couldn't, or wouldn't, speak theirs. So there was just civilities and that's about all you can say.

I It's class difference and there's a different relationship to the land. She must have felt like a bump on a log.

R Because you can't really appreciate, unless you were born into those times, of how much class meant. People go on about the class system in England through the years. They have no idea what the class system was out in the Channel Country and how isolated my mother felt because she couldn't have any converse with these other women, because she took no part in the life of the station whatsoever and she was a recluse.

I Geoffrey Dutton says that there was, and describing his book called *The Squatters*, and he says his own grandmother became an invalid and that actually there was a whole sort of category of upper class Australian women that never reconciled to the land.

R Well, I can't remember any invalids amongst these women but I do know that in the early years of the twentieth century, that being an invalid was a wonderful way out for a lot of women, not only in the bush, but in the cities too. That it was one way of getting your own back and people, they couldn't do a thing about you. It was a trade and it was a very, very convenient one.

I And would you describe your mother as running that trade? Not running that trade, but participating in it.

R She participated in that trade in that she was the world's greatest hypochondriac. If she said she was having goitre problems, she would persuade my father to let her go down to Brisbane where they probably said, 'No, there's nothing with your goitre, Mrs Scott Richards'. Well then she would proceed on to Sydney and she would proceed on until finally she convinced somebody that she had goitre so that would be six months in wherever, having the operation and recovering from it, but she read medical books from cover to cover out there and whatever it was, Mother had it.

One awful memory of Mother and her hypochondria is that she went to, we'll say Brisbane, and she had a gall stone operation. When she came back to the station she had her gall stones in a blue velvet bag, and when there was a visitor Mother used to say to my sister Helen or to me, 'Patricia, Helen, bring the blue velvet bag with the gall stones'. I can see my sister now, she answered the call once, coming back and she's got the blue velvet bag of gall stones at arm's length, and she says, 'My sister, if I ever have anything removed from me in any hospital in this land, you have to promise me you will drop it down the toilet'. That is why Helen and I both grew up not admitting to a single headache all our lives in case we turned out like Mother.

I So you grew up with a very different relationship to the land to your mother. If your mother hid inside, hiding from the glare, how would you describe the connection? I've just been reading Peter Reid's book about different relationships to the landscape. How would you describe the way you started out feeling about the Channel Country and how you came to feel about it?

R It was, the Channel Country, it was so different in my little imagination to what we had lived on in New South Wales, on the Darling, that that was what you might call 'civilised' territory. You had gardens and at Mount Murchison I have one clear memory, and I was very young, I've worked it out that I was only three when a wonderful thing happened at Mount Murchison. The man came, and the man put a telephone on the wall and, although I don't think there were any photographs, I have the clearest picture of my sister Helen with the mouthpiece and I'm holding a little black thing that I put to my ear, an extension, and just feeling as if the most wonderful miracle, because somebody in Broken Hill 40 miles away was talking to us.

I And by contrast? Paint a picture, then, of the Channel Country. What you're saying is there was none of that.

R No. Because when you are young and you're taken to a place, you just accept all the conditions and everything that happened every day was normal. One thing I do remember is that my mother was concerned that I and my three younger brothers hadn't been taught to swim and there wasn't any reason why we should have been, but right outside the back door of the station was a 12,000 gallon tank of water which was pumped up from the creek, which was for station use and stock and everything. It was a mighty big tank. 12,000 gallons. So she spoke to my father who said, 'Oh, that's right. Hughey's the man for that'. Hughey was a fairly youngish stockrider, stockman, at the time. And he said, 'There's only one person to teach kids to swim and that's blacks'. And so, my mother standing watching, and what Hughey did was, he picked up the three boys – Jack, Peter and Terry – and flung them in, just picked them up bodily, flung them into the middle of this 12,000 gallon tank. The black fellow and Pop knew exactly what would happen. They paddled dog paddle for dear life, didn't they, till they hit the side of the tank. My mother screamed blue murder and said, 'No, they were not going to throw her daughter into that', which is how I grew up to this day, I couldn't swim five yards, because my father said, 'Oh, well, it's your affair, if you want the girl to drown, that's your affair'.

But a little bit later on, my brother was detailed off to teach me how to swim. Now by this time I suppose Laurie's about 15, 16 or so, and I am very much younger, so Laurie picks up his dog and his gun – he was a great bird fellow with bird nesting and shooting anything that stopped still for two minutes at a time – and a rubber inner tube, and he marched me down to the end of the creek, the bend of the creek where he couldn't be seen from the station. He plonked me inside, it was the very end of the creek and the water was about two inches deep. He flung the inner tube in, shoved me in it and went off with his dog and the gun and said, 'And don't you dare move, and don't you open your mouth. Got that?' So I didn't. I just paddled happily for God knows how long while he went off shooting eagles and God knows what. He came back, he picked up me and the inner tube and marched me home. I was too scared to tell anybody about this so I'm 17 years of age before I get into a rip situation in a beach in Melbourne and I damn near drown because I can't swim.

I So you've never … because water is central to the Channel Country.

R Yes. If I'd been dropped in the middle of a creek, I'd have drowned because I was too scared of my brother who actually, I mean he was a really wonderful person later on in life,

but he was a very, very commanding figure as one's elder brother and one did not tell on him, that he'd dumped me at the end of a creek in an inner tube.

I That story is interesting, too, because it's about your mother standing up to your father in a way, isn't it, and about her saying …

R 'Oh, not my daughter, not my daughter.'

I … my daughter is to have a world similar to mine. Was there a way in which you were in any way torn between your mother's world of inside and your father's of outside, or could you between them?

R No. Not the least bit of it. I never attempted to enter my mother's world because I never understood her and I was convinced she didn't understand me. An instance … mail day at Mount Leonard Station and every other station on the route, and because the mailman, he stayed overnight at the pub, he wants to get away early next morning because there's talk of the Cooper coming down in flood and he wants to beat it into Windorah where he had to deliver the mail to. So my father's furiously writing out cheques, paying bills, and at the other end of the table my mother is furiously finishing off her correspondence in order to catch this mailman.

I'm bored out of me little old brain, nobody wants to talk to me. I go out into the kitchen and there's the station cook, not the men's cook but the station cook, and she is making a plum pudding. Now this is June, but I have a clear memory of the Christmas pudding where it had a whole lot of sparkly things in it. There were bells and there were bachelors' buttons and all the sparkly things in it and I get an idea. So I rush into the sitting room where my mother's furiously writing and say, 'Mummy, can I put your rings in the pudding?' and she just said, and I remember it, 'Yes, yes, yes, go away. Don't bother me'. She did say, 'Yes, yes, yes'. I went into her bedroom and, in an eggcup on her dressing table there was some gin and her five beautiful rings were inside, in the gin, in the eggcup. Now the five beautiful rings were all trophies that my father had won at race meetings over a long period. He was a gentleman rider until he was over 40 when he started to put on weight but nobody could touch him for riding in these race meetings, and the prizes were, when you're looking back, astonishing. Ropes of real pearls. One of these rings was a beautiful ruby, one was a diamond and one was a sapphire, the most beautiful rings you ever saw, plus other things that he'd won in years gone by. So the rings that I put in … I

managed to get them into the kitchen and the cook is, by this time, stoking the fire, has her back to me, so I just popped the rings into the pudding. Cook comes back and just gives it a stir, puts it in the cloth, puts it in the pot and the pudding is cooked.

When we get to the table that evening, my father served the beef and the veg, whatever veg, down one end, and my mother always looked after the desserts, puddings, at the other end. My mother took the knife and put a slice in the pudding and there her rings winked up at her. She never paused in her track, she just said, 'Patricia, get to your bedroom. You will be dealt with later'. Poor little old me, I was howling, howling, howling, 'But Mother you said I could. You said I could'. That's when I knew at age five you could never trust a grown-up. You just can't. And now when I think of what she must have felt like when her gorgeous rings wink at her from the pudding.

I Would your mother have spent a lot of time, your mother and you and your other children, in the house alone while your father would be away at camp?

R Oh, yes.

I Could you explain how that goes, because I think that often is not understood, the way that the women sort of held the fort.

R Yes. Well, in the beginning, I'll tell you how they coped with that situation. From earliest times when we moved to Mount Leonard, and on other stations – the owners of our station at the time were Sinclair, Scott & Company – and they were pretty canny men of money in Adelaide, Scotsmen at that, but what they had to do was they employed ladies' companions for the likes of my mother and other women round about who had to be left on their own for weeks at a time. We never had trouble about hostile blacks. We had a lot of trouble with drunken men who would come over from the pub with evil intent in their hearts but it was a dangerous, terribly dangerous, situation. And so, I can't speak of other stations but I do know that we drew on a family in Birdsville called the Hagans, a very famous family, 13 children - the six boys and seven girls, I think – and the six boys all turned out into excellent stockmen and drovers. My father and the other managers, they just thought they were dead lucky if they could get a Hagan boy to come and work for them because they knew their trade backwards and they were wonderful riders and that was fine. Mrs Hagan who, it was said, had jumped the convent wall to marry Joe Hagan when he was young Joe, and for what reason Gawd only knows, but she jumped the convent wall and married Joe,

had the 13 children, but the seven girls were all sent to convents in Adelaide, beautifully educated. Now, they could only stay at the convent long enough for the bills to get too pressing and then they were moved and sent to another one. But Mrs Hagan, having been well-educated herself, was determined that her girls were going to be.

So when Mother got her first ladies' companion, who was Edie Hagan, Edie's duties were only really to be, she'd have to do housework, she had to be company for my mother, and she had to dress for dinner at night, no matter who was there, that was how things were. And I thought I never saw anything so beautiful in my life as the sight of Edie Hagan, Miss Hagan of course, as we would have called her, in her beautiful lace pointed evening gowns. And the irony of that is that at the time that we had, paid for by the station management, Edie Hagan to be ladies' companion to my mother, up over in the stockmen's headquarters, and they had a tin shed as their headquarters but, of course, they never slept in it, the heat was too terrible – they slept outside on the gibbers outside – we had Jimmy Hagan, the eldest Hagan boy, working on the station, and Jimmy had a bad fall. They weren't too sure whether his back was broken or whether it wasn't, but all I know was this was before Flying Doctor that Jimmy had to be put in the back of a buggy and had to go over 400 miles, over the Birdsville Track, to get to hospital in Cloncurry. And so Edie Hagan, this beautifully refined young lady, is up at the men's huts and she is packing what they called in Queensland and still do, a port, packing Jimmy's port to go off to Cloncurry and she says, 'But James, James, I can't seem to find your pyjamas' and Jimmy says, 'What's them?' And young and all as I was, I was tickled to bits to find the difference between an educated sister and a Channel Country stockman.

I But it's also about women keeping up standards or something, isn't it?

R Yes. And the ladies' companion thing carried on for a little while, but then along came the Depression and there were no more luxuries like ladies' companions, no way. And we were on our own, Helen of course was away. I was there and my three younger brothers were there and it was brilliant moonlight, the men were 40, 60 miles out at a camp somewhere or other, and my mother had acute hearing and I had to sleep with her, and she woke me up and she said, 'There's someone coming up the track'. Now how she could have heard something coming up the track way down there, I don't know, but in this brilliant moonlight we could see a man's figure waving from side to side, and so Mother had a shotgun, a .44 shotgun, which she didn't know how to shoot anyway. And so as this waving figure comes towards me, she hands me the gun. Gawd, I don't know whether I'm

10, 11, 12 or something or other, and I don't know what to do. She said, 'Pull the trigger'. And so I pulled the trigger and last seen of, the wandering figure did about turn and, as far as I know, he's still going.

I I'm going to stop and change tapes.

TAPE 2 – SIDE A

I Okay, this is the second DAT recording with Patricia Hodgkinson, nee Richards, at her home in Greenwich, and Trish FitzSimons recording for the Channels of History project – and I think the first tape says 10 January, but I'm told that I've lost two days of my holiday.

R It definitely is. I have you written down there as the 12th.

I Right. So we just stopped the tape before with the swaying figure of the man …

R Retreating.

I … coming up the road. I've come to have this image of alcohol being an important part of Channel Country life almost, with the, well, partly the publicans, the abstemious women presiding over, whatever the opposite of 'abstemious men' is.

R Plain old drunken men. Not so with Mount Leonard. About the drink, the demon drink, at Mount Leonard, it was made perfectly plain and clear to the stockmen, the blacks and anybody who wanted to work on Mount Leonard that drink would not be allowed on the station at all. My father had had experiences and he, himself, was certainly not a drinker. He went down to Birdsville and he went into the bar and he had a drink, said hello to everybody, shouted for the bar, walked out. He did that all of his life because of, not only was his mother one of the original 'death is a demon' type mothers, but he just had no liking for it. Winter time, oh he loved a good whisky going to bed but he knew that station life, riding dangerous horses, unbroken horses, and drunken riders, led to only one end, and he said the only way to deal with that at all was to ban liquor from the station.

I So the stations tended to be dry, then, and the towns and the pubs would be the place of alcohol.

R I cannot say the other stations. I can only speak for Mount Leonard because I do know that the station up the road, every now and again the manager there, who was a highly thought of Kidman manager, he and his Lancashire wife would get a case of rum out and they would be blind for the next two months. And it depended on whoever, what their taste for drink was like. But as far as my father was concerned, there was only one terribly sad incident where, as I've said, our Sunday outings were going from Mount Leonard to the eight mile to check on the windmill at eight mile at the bore drain there and then we came home again. But on this occasion, Moses, who was a very elderly black and a big white beard and this very, black, black face, he was detailed to put in that Sunday afternoon scrubbing the kitchen floor of the homestead kitchen. That was his chore for the afternoon. What my mother had completely forgotten about was, it was getting near Christmas and she had a bottle of rum on top of the kitchen dresser ready to anoint the Christmas pudding, and never given it a thought, but old Moses, in his curiosity, must have stood on a chair to see what was up there and boy, oh boy, what's there but a bottle of rum. Whereupon, we came home from the outing and Moses is spreadeagled on the kitchen floor and he is gloriously and totally drunk. He's a lovely drunk. He wants to kiss my mother. He wants to kiss the kids. He wanted to kiss everybody because he was so blind drunk. And my mother was livid. Not about what happened to Moses, because of the difficulty she'd gone to to get that bottle of rum for the Christmas pudding.

I So you couldn't just go to the pub and buy a bottle of rum?

R No, no, no. It was beer only so you couldn't be bothered with it. It was not much more, this pub that I speak about, not much more than a shanty really. The homestead was quite nice, Mr and Mrs Garrett lived in, but as far as the pub goes, and I tell you this, it's no better today.

I It's shut down now, Betoota Pub.

R Yes, because of the mad man. He's a Polish fellow, Simon, and he, when he gets … he drank himself out of that pub for sure, but when he gets mad he just loads his rifle and shoots anybody in sight. It was no surprise.

I I stopped to take a photo and Julie said she could see somebody kind of looking at. I didn't see him. Tell me a little bit about your education, then. How did your education proceed?

R Well, when I was five, coming up to six I think, my mother had to go into Longreach to await the birth of my youngest brother Terry, and I couldn't be left on the station, as I say, my sister and my other brothers, they were away at school in Brisbane, Adelaide, somewhere, and so I had to go into Longreach. Terry was born in August 1926 so this was perhaps a couple of months before then that we had to go into things and I suppose to keep me occupied, because I was … I wasn't a naughty child or I can't ever remember deliberately setting out to be naughty, but there was a saying that my father had quoted to me many times that our bookkeeper Mr Park used to say – 'See what Patricia's doing and stop her doing it' – which was grossly unfair, but it was just that I couldn't bear to be bored and I had to be finding out about things.

Anyhow, I must have driven my mother and the place where we were staying at in Longreach absolutely bonkers because the next thing I know, they put me into a convent which was close handy thereby. Well, they don't bother to stop and tell me who the inhabitants of a convent are. They just bung me in there and I saw these black-robed creatures all bearing down on me and I yelled blue murder, and just absolutely ran for the gate and bolted. I bolted and that was it. And they had to catch me and bring me back and said, 'No, no, no'. I had it in mind that they were black eagles. Black eagles were common in my experience. Nuns were not. Anyhow, they got me back and they tried to tell me, you know, what really loving, caring people these were, but I still started yelling again and so the nun people just said, 'Well, Mrs Scott Richards, go away and leave her, she'll settle down'. That's where they were dead wrong, weren't they? I was terrified. Never been frightened of a snake or a goanna or anything but I was petrified of these black nuns. Anyway, they won, so I just had to stay. Attempt at pre-school education failed dismally and that was it.

When I came back to the station, at that early age, I think I must have started about a year or so of correspondence school, which was only just starting up then, but it was obvious that wasn't going to work because you had to wait a fortnight to get the mail, get your little bit of lessons, and then another fortnight for it to get back to Brisbane to be corrected. So there was a time thing there which wasn't very good and also you couldn't catch my brothers who were also invested in this scheme. You couldn't catch them for dust. They only had to hear Mother demanding that we all sit around the table and do our lessons for my father, who was well in on it, to take the three little boys and they were on horses and 50 miles away before Mother could do anything about it. And I used to complain, 'Why

am I the only one? Why am I the only one?' So that was a failure. That education was a failure too. So thereupon I was sent to boarding school and my sister, as I say was four years older, the deal was she was supposed to look after her little sister, and that deal didn't work out either because my sister had another frame of mind. That was I would look after her. I think it was Clayfield College was the first one in Brisbane, if I'm not wrong, and we had to wear our pinnies to meals, our little black pinnies with pockets in them, and my sister who was very tall, very remote and very lofty, would just command me to open my pinnie pockets and her sausages and frogs-eye pudding would go into my little pinnie pockets and I'd have to waddle away from the table and bury them somewhere. I never had one happy moment at that blooming place, although I made some lifelong friends there, really, as it turned out. And so that's how it was that we were sent, my sister and I, and we didn't last terribly long at these boarding schools – the first one anyway – because my mother came down in the meantime and she was appalled at the way we were being taught French. It was not the way that she had been privately tutored in French. So, of course, we had to swap boarding schools, didn't we, eh?

I How old were you when you'd gone to boarding school?

R Oh, 7, 6, 7, 6, 7, something like that. And then we went to the next one which was, oh, New England. On New England. NEGS, NEGS, NEGS. We were a bit older, we were at NEGS. And we were . You can imagine from Mount Leonard, 118 in old money, degrees, every summer to New England in the winter, where our toes and our fingers fell off with frost and what not, but apart from that it was a fairly all right sort of a place. Except that we were one year there and at the end of the year I was picked for the concert. I was going to be the sugar plum fairy. I was a little fat dumpling and I was just right for the sugar plum fairy, apparently. My heavens had opened. There I was, a star of stage and screen. What happens? My mother comes down and decides that they're still not teaching us properly so she waltzes us out of that and we had to come down to, I think Brisbane was after that. My heart was totally broken. My career finished before it even started. Shocking. And then it was, I think it was back to Brisbane. You see this is the bit where it's so hard to put which year was what.

I So you got moved around to multiple schools, your mother trying to find somewhere that was good enough?

R Yes. But there was one glorious year in that, it was the heart of the Depression, 1933. Helen had to be maintained because she was just coming up to, what did they call it in those days?

I Debut?

R No, no. Was it called Leaving then? There was Junior and whatever – in Queensland. She was going to Teacher's College.

I I could say Senior but I'd be making it up.

R No, that's right. She was in Senior year and then, with a lot of wangling, she'd managed to get a scholarship the following year to Teacher's College, and so she was okay about that. And I just had to … in '33, so she was down in Brisbane proceeding with her education. When '33 came, that was the worst year of the Depression, and my younger brothers who were at boarding school in Brisbane, they've got to be brought home. I've got to be brought home because my father's salary is slashed in half as was every other family's, couldn't afford boarding schools any longer, so we had to have one year with correspondence lessons at home. Eventually that fell, so when we were struggling with correspondence lessons out there my aunts, my father's two sisters, and his mother, who were living in Linfield, Sydney, they must have been in consultation, they said, 'Send Patricia down and she can go to Linfield Primary School'. God knows, Mother must have gagged on that because she only believed in genteel schools for the daughters of gentlemen, you know, and all that. She must have actually gagged, and she hadn't spoken to her in-laws in umpteen years as far as I know, but the day was won and my sister and I came down in 1933, whenever it was, and we had one year when I …

I In '33 you would have been …

R No, 1930 was the year I came down to Linfield, and I had one year at Linfield Primary School and I just thought I was in utter heaven. Going home each day to the aunts who were immensely kind, and Granny. They were terribly, terribly kind, and all they wanted to do was fatten us up because I was a poor little waif after all this drought stuff there. And I can remember that the aunts, Aunt Judith and Aunt Daisy, the first thing was they took us to Bondi. Oh, the sea at first terrified me and then I saw how wonderful it was and Aunt Daisy even persuaded me to take a dip in the briny. And I came out absolutely puzzled. I couldn't figure out this bit. And I said, 'But Aunt Daisy, who pays for all the salt?' Out in

the bush, Poppa's moan, moan, moan was about having to pay a pound a ton for salt up from Adelaide, you know, for stock purposes and this, that and the other. He went on and on and on about the price of salt. I go into Bondi Beach and there's nothing else but salt. Who pays for it?

I Except the bores would have been salty. The bores were salty.

R They didn't go salty in my time there. They did subsequently. But then came Santos and people drilling for oil and the deal was no Santos, no nothing, until they put down fresh bores. So we escaped the worst of it there. But I'll never forget that first dip in the briny at Bondi Beach there. But after one glorious year of that, my mother said, 'That's quite enough of that' and it was back to boarding school in [Smellbourne?] on Yarra. That was the name of the Goddamn place. It's still there. I would have thought somebody would have bombed it years ago. But, no, it's still there.

I So that was your secondary school?

R Yes. And by this time I I'm coming up to 15, 16, and there wasn't any nonsense about going on to further education, you know, you had to think about getting a job or something. But I was saved from that because I was thought to be quite clever – and I wasn't, I was only naughty but I got a scholarship to a place in Prahran in Melbourne, but it was a further education place, anyway, and I did very well there and I was just finishing there when, guess what, the war came along. I had a scholarship to uni, I could have gone to uni, but by '39 the war started, didn't it, and by early '39 - '40 my eldest brother, he's already, he had been CMF but he's already in the Army and the next fellow's joined up and there they go, and I thought things out and I thought, 'I can't actually justify, and I wouldn't want to be very happy, just trotting off to university when I've got brothers who are prepared to do a bit more than that' and so, I don't know whether I would have made it through or whether I wouldn't, but anyway I had the opportunity, but I joined the Air Force in the end of '41, end of '41 – '42 I think, the Air Force, the WAAF. And so I had a very active war, you might say. I was here, there and everywhere, but it was a wonderful experience. So I did very well with all the patchiness and the spottiness, you know, and I suppose it was because I have, still have to this day, a natural love of learning, a yearn to learn you might say.

I So from the age of six, then, you were back in the Channel Country for holidays?

R Coming and going, yes. And certainly I can remember at 17, the last year I was out there for a Christmas holiday.

I So how would you feel going back to the Channel Country?

R When?

I As a child. I'm interested to get an honest sense from you of … feeling positive and negative for that land.

R Well, as I say, when the last of my educational spurt was in Melbourne, oh I was having a gay time in Melbourne. Oh, I had friends all over and the Oriental Hotel, I know that saw a lot of under-age me at the cocktail hour. There it was, but my father who, poor darling, he was dotty about me. That helped a lot, you know. When I was at boarding school he would write and he would put a ten pound note in the letter and he would say, 'There's no need to mention it to your mother. I'll be telling her when I write,' knowing full well he wasn't going to do anything of the sort. So I never knew, never thought about money, money was what Poppa gave me, you know. There was no other source, as far as I knew. I learned a different story later on in life, didn't I? But there was Poppa and he was … I loved him so and I loved the life out there so much, but I was perfectly safe in Melbourne at my very young age and I never got into moral turpitude or danger or what not because the whole time Poppa was my guiding light, even so far away, and if I couldn't write Poppa a letter and be funny about it or something, okay it wasn't on. Temptation was there in abundance but I thought, 'How am I going to tell Poppa what I've been up to?' and that was my …

I So he was your rock.

R He was my guiding light through all that time apart. And, as I say, the last thing on this earth that I ever thought I would do … I wanted when the war broke out, I wanted to come home to see him because, of course, my brothers had all joined up. There was no transport and the only car we had was up on blocks. There was only buggy transport and what not but I loved it so much I wanted to come home. I said, 'Poppa you'll need me. There's no Laurie and there's no young men and that, then, you'll need me. I know more about this station than they do, anyway' and Poppa said 'Oh, oh, it is not on.' He said, 'And there is no way that you can get anywhere'. He said, 'It's not the right thing to do'. He said, 'There are only old men and old people here,' and he said, 'I can manage' with the couple

of blacks that he had and the . He said, 'I can manage,' and he said, 'I'm very, very proud of my sons that they have all answered the call,' and he said, 'You will too'. Which I did.

I So in that sense of wanting to go back to the Channel Country, was it the land itself or was it really the connection to your father?

R Connection to Poppa.

I Yes.

R Yes. The land was just the land and it was always there and when it wasn't seven years' drought well you had a wonderful season or you didn't, or something, but the land was eternal. That was part of me, anyway, nothing spectacular about it. I didn't know any other kind of land. I was too young to remember Mount Murchison and what not like that. But, oh no, it was Poppa.

I When you described your father sending you money in the letter and you said he said 'I'll write to your mother about it' and you knew he wouldn't, that presumably your mother had already left the Channel Country, how did your mother come to leave the Channel Country?

R Oh, well she came and went, dear. You know, like any excuse, like an operation on goitre or something, and it took her away for months and she sort of came and went. But then the final thing was, and this has got to be covered over, but this was that she went mental. It destroyed her. It killed her. Now that's the bit that I will not have anybody

I Can you find a way to say it that you could live with?

R The stress and the … the stress of living in alien country overcame her. That's as much as I'll allow. And you can understand why because, apart from that, it was a shocking disgrace amongst the other fellows. These fellows who brought out there mill girls from Lancashire and, you know, uneducated women for whatever, they buckled in, they learned to be significant in the district and this, that and the other, and my poor mother just died of the death she lived there. And, as I say, I never saw that because, as I say, I was so damn scared of her all my life and I never understood her for one minute. My sister could. She never, she was such an aloof person, and she could get away with blue bloody murder with Mama. I couldn't because I was too scared of her always.

A wonderful instance of Helen going to her graduation ball at Teacher's College, somewhere about '35, '36, somewhere or other. My mother had been away from the station for some time but she was going back because in September was the race meeting, our race meeting, Betoota. And so she, Mother swans off to the only French dressmaker there is in Brisbane. I can see it now, this glorious outfit she had made, of pink gorgeous material, and it's a dress with a jacket, but the jacket has – Birdsville – it's got fox fur around the elbows. What the other women must have thought Gawd only knows.

I What month would the races be held?

R September.

I Getting hot.

R Getting hot. Boiling. So you had this French dressmaker and dear God knows what it must have cost then. I don't know but it would have been guineas, you know. Anyhow, she apparently swanned around with her beautiful real pearls won by Papa and all that. But Helen writes to Mother on the station and says the graduation ball was coming up, please may she borrow the French outfit. Mother must have been out of her mind or something or other because she sent it down to Helen, and Helen duly takes to it, cuts off the fox fur, shortens it and then Mother keeps pleading for the return of her beautiful dress. Helen ignores the letters. By this time my mother wants Helen impounded by the police and jailed until such time as she gets her dress back again, so Helen had no choice in the matter. She had to mail it, the ruins of it, back again. I was there when Mother opened the box. Oh, my God. But you see, that's Mother living out her dream of how things used to be and the wonderful balls and the things, you know, where she appeared as a shimmering, shall we say memento of a life that actually never was.

I Because her father had gone, her mother had died when she was 14?

R Yes.

I Betoota Races. I've got, is it you that gave me? Who was it that gave me the photo … I think it was you. They're all men and there's one woman along the rail in the mid-forties. The race meetings were basically for men until …

R Yes, yes, except I think that was a Birdsville one, at which my father was asked to judge, of course, because he was the greatest judge. But they all were such wicked, wicked … there's the whole of Australia and they're racing around it, and what happens about the cut-ins and the digging into the horse next to you and what not, the mayhem that went on. But Poppa, known from far and wide as being a man of his word and totally incorruptible, didn't care what happened. He just disqualified the entire meeting if he wanted to, sort of thing there. Oh, they were absolute rorts and I was It was the only time the district came together. There was Mount Leonard and Betoota in September and Birdsville followed next.

I was in America, it must have been '88, our centennial, I was in America and I ended up hearing this about Malcolm Fraser going out to Birdsville and there were 450 private planes. You've got that lonely photo of the whole of Australia, the centre of Australia there, and Birdsville, this is where 450, and Malcolm Fraser the Prime Minister went out. I don't know what Poppa would think about that if he were alive today.

I So back when you knew the Betoota Races, what part did women have in that activity?

R Oh, a very big part indeed. First of all, with the black gins, my mother always ordered cretonne material from Brisbane with the biggest dahlias and the biggest roses and the most purple and red colours, because that's what the gins considered to be race wear, and she made them up what we later knew to be Mother Hubbards, you know. She ran them up a Mother Hubbard and they got new white sandshoes to top it off because they never had anything on their feet in them days anyway, but a race meeting was a race meeting and so she provided them with white sandshoes and these huge Mother Hubbard things with the violent patterns. They thought they were in heaven, total heaven. And the women had ordered their frocks from Brisbane before then, nothing elaborate but beautiful tasteful frocks. Well Mount Leonard Station, we used to have 17-20, that is, verandah, beds, beds, beds everywhere and the stockmen and the men used to have to get off to the stockmen's quarters and do the best they could, that sort of thing. But that went on in Birdsville, everywhere, and they'd stay for the meeting. Yes, they'd get there before the meeting. They'd stay for the meeting and the day after the last day they would start going away and that took the best part of a week, because they'd all be around their cars and what not and it'd be 'Goodbye old chap,' you know, 'See you next time,' 'Well, look, it's so close to lunch you might as well stay, eh?' And there'd be great pots of beer at lunch and what not,

and oh, I don't know what. 'I think you'd better have a bit of a camp before you go' and this went on for three days with just anybody. It was the most wonderful getting together.

I I've heard people tell me stories about, say, Laura Duncan being the first woman that kind of dared to, or did, go to the, was it the race track that was the male preserve, because there were parts of it, weren't there, that women didn't go to? Or is that not as you recall?

R There were parts of it that blacks didn't go to.

I So describe the race meeting. Where would the men go, where would the women go? Where would the blacks go?

R You're out in the middle of nothing, just desert. You're on a clay pan. A clay pan's a flat bit of earth that's perfect for racing around. There is no building, there's no rails, there's no nothing, except this shaky little bit of judge's box, on which my father sat, or whoever was the judge , this shaky little bit of thing that he had to climb up and judge the race from. And there was no such thing as lining the rails or anything like that. The heat was quite enough, thank you very much, that they were inside open sheds and open things and what not but the women weren't too fussy about who won which race. They weren't terribly because they were interested in the great picnics that they brought out, you know, and what not, and there wasn't a sober member at any part of any pub in the whole of south-west Queensland, you know. Oh, and the ladies naturally drank champagne and what not, you know. They were as blind as anybody else. But still, there it was. But a race meeting was really, really a getting together, where women could finally exchange news of their kids and how well their sons and daughters were doing down in college. From Mount Leonard and all the other stations they mostly sent their kids to Adelaide, to St Peter's and to because we were only 900 miles from Adelaide and 1,100 miles from Brisbane.

I And so which bits of the race meeting were Aboriginal people not welcome at?

R They were not welcome anywhere near the judge's box. They accepted that and that was it.

I And would there be class distinctions at the race meeting? I remember going to a race meeting at Merriwa in about 1985 and there, there would be like all the squatters, the

graziers would be up on the hill, and then there would be like the working class section down near where people were laying bets. Is that …?

R No, because there were only graziers. Well, let's not be too prissy about that. There were only station managers, mostly Kidman station managers, their wives and their kids.

I And the men that worked for them, like the stockmen.

R Oh, yes, yes. But most of those were so busy getting blithered in the pub, one fellow was famous for, he was out to it before the first race. He was blissfully out to it, lying on the pub floor, but for 12 months afterwards he could tell you what won the third and what was backed in the fourth and what not. He'd never seen a damn race. He'd been on the floor for five days or something or other. But I can remember one or two race meetings where you met these station owners, station managers' wives and people, and they brought their kids. Well, it was kind of supposed that because this kid came from the next station to you, you were going to be best buddies and things. Oh, it would be wonderful for the children. We hated each other on sight and we could remember it was all about skitey tales about who could ride the best or who could skin a kangaroo, you know. It was all, like they have today, you know, with who's got the best skateboard or who's got this, that and the other. But I can't remember making any great friendships amongst any of those kids.

I Was there a class distinction between people like the Duncan Kemps that owned their own property and properties like Mount Leonard where it was managers' families living there?

R Not really because the Duncan Kemps, for such a long time, were living on the smell of an oil rag. They couldn't afford to be prissy. The sad thing was that I have no idea what over, but my father fell foul of Miss Laura Duncan early on. She was called Spitfire Duncan because she was a , red hair, always wore a silk handkerchief, you know, because of her freckles and this, that and the other, and whatever Poppa did to upset her, she maintained that for a long time and she . She couldn't understand how Mrs Scott Richards could put up with that awful little as he'd done her over a race meeting, a muster or something or other. But in the fullness of time, they became – loneliness, I suppose – became the greatest of mates and, not too long before he died, I can remember Poppa writing to me in Castle Hill there, skiting. You know when he was getting old, oh he hated the thought of getting old, but he always 'It's amazing what a fellow of my age can do, Trish'. For instance, he got

up at piccaninny daylight, that's when the stars are still in the sky, saddled a horse and he rode up to see Miss Duncan, up at [Mooraberry?], and he got there in time for smoko. Smoko's 10.30 or something or other like that. He'd ridden a horse 60 miles, 40 miles or something up there, had smoko with Miss Duncan, had a good chat, had lunch with her, had a camp (a rest) in the afternoon, had a camp, got one of her horses, swapped horses, and arrived home when the stars were just fading in the sky. Now he wrote that proudly to me. I wrote him back a scorcher and said, 'Wonderful. Great. When you have your heart attack on the way back, do you think I'm going to your funeral, 'cause I'm not', you see. I felt, you know, he will do one of those silly damn things and his bleached bones will be found years later or something or other. And I thought that's a bit of male show-off.

I So they became mates.

R They became great mates . She was very lonely for, shall we say, one of her own? She was born a snob and she remained one till the day she died. But she had Arthur Church working for her. He was her manager for years. And it was commonly known that, yes, he was her lover but kept in his quarters and she remained in hers. Class? Anyhow, he remained faithful and she left the property to Arthur Church in his lifetime. Then it has to revert.

I Yes, then it reverts to the unmarried female relative, I think was how it went. When you read Alice Duncan Kemp's books, one gets a sense of Aboriginal people being absolutely kind of in the rhythm of daily life on the Duncan's property. I shouldn't say Duncan Kemp, the Duncans, you know …

R Alice Duncan …

I … the Aboriginal people saying, 'This is where you go through a gate' or 'This is where you put your house' or 'You can't cross this land'. Does that accord with your understanding of relationships between Aboriginal people and whites?

R Dear heart. That is Alice Duncan Kemp's greatest load of codswallop and fantasy that you ever read about. I've told you how our blacks kept their law to themselves and I'm here to tell you that the [Mooraberry?] blacks never in a wild fit would have told Alice Duncan Kemp anything like that at all. Okay, she's made the … she won her point as an authoress with *No Roads Go By* and all this sort of stuff, and then she has to think, 'Oh, there's a good market' and she gets stuck into it. Honest to God, my father, I don't know, no he

didn't read that one. He certainly read *No Roads Go By* and what not, but she rarely visited [Mooraberry?], very rarely. She and Laura did not get on from the time they fell out of their cradles.

I But what she's writing about is her childhood, is actually the period, like you, it seems, Alice had a childhood at [Mooraberry?] and then an adult life away and she writes over and over about that childhood.

R Yes, but they never ever, she never ever came … I think I only remember once or twice in my whole time did she ever visit the station. Laura, there was no way she could get on with Mr Duncan Kemp, no way. So lively and they didn't call her 'Spitfire' for nothing, you know. And 'Men, the men'. I can remember this as clearly – 'Men, the mentality of men' – the way she used to speak. And, as I say, she could have been attractive if she didn't have such a bitter, twisted aspect on men and the mentality of men and all that, and she firmly detested her sister Alice.

I In reading Alice Duncan Kemp's books, if one takes them as a rendition of truth, one is seeing Aboriginal and white Australians living and working with a degree of closeness and interrelation that is rare.

R No way. You know why the system, as propounded by my father, they were there, that was their culture, and we don't interfere. That made the whole thing work. Otherwise, he would never have been able to call on old blacks and Old Joe, my grandfather … I have shown you the picture of my grandfather's, haven't I? That's the most treasured picture I've got because they were just there and silent in our background, but they were there to look after the boss's kids and that was it. But it would no more, we would no more have pressed them for any information about their marriage customs or their anything at all. Pop knew a whole lot but he wouldn't talk about it at all. That was sacred blacks' business.

I Now, in Alice's books, she talks about her father, is it this white pioneer, black saviour, but there's also a part where her father is saying 'The land is theirs essentially and we are the tenants'. Did you have a sense, growing up, that your father was a pastoralist on Aboriginal land or was that a knowledge that …?

R No, we were white and we were superior because we were white and that was it. You know, only twice in my life, you know of recent times, when I went up to Arnhem Land and the Bungle Bungles, when I went up there I got the eeriest, spookiest feeling I've ever

had about blacks in my whole life - that I definitely was an intruder up there. That belonged to another culture, a long time ago but it had nothing to do with me and, strangely, my soldier son Andrew, he was doing jungle training up there at the time, and I said 'Andy have you ever been up to the Bungle Bungles?' 'Yes, I have, Mum, why do you ask?' I said, 'Because I got this awfully weird feeling of my being the intruder and the blacks, still the spirit of them, all round'. He said, 'Funny thing, Mum, I had exactly the same feeling'. Last November I took myself toddling around South Australia and the Coolong. Ever been to the Coolong?

I Yes, round Robe, yes. I didn't spend a lot of time there but I remember it.

R Well, I remember years ago who married into Mount Gambier. Pete took me there and he drove in a bit, stopped the car, and then we went through the bushes, and I got that same eerie feeling. Now I never ever had it because the blacks were our grandfathers, they looked after us and we had a warm friendly feeling for them. But I understand, it took me all these years to understand the feelings that black people have for this land.

I So you didn't get that understanding from Joe and Moses and, I've forgotten the name of the woman.

R Judy.

I Judy. You didn't …?

R Oh, Judy never spoke. She just shifted the pipe from one end of her mouth to the other, and that, and my father having made it terribly clear, that was their culture and we'd better get our little pink noses out of it.

I But the land was yours?

R Oh, yes, of course it was ours. Of course it was ours. Goodness me. Hadn't they had all this trouble with the blacks and having to shoot them off, you know, decimate them, as we would say today? Oh, we were, had, as a right. That culture borne about from, okay the first pioneers there, they had to fight for it, didn't they? They had to fight hostile blacks, but I can quite imagine what hostile blacks must have felt. All those centuries, you know, they had it all their own way, and then they've got to kowtow to this fellow with the white

face and what not. I'm no great … I'm not a bleedin' heart for Abo culture and these people going around Sydney, and we must say sorry and forgive me. Forgive me.

I So as you grew up, the land had been won, if you like, by your side in hostile engagement …

R In a massacre.

I … and you were dealing with the defeated?

R Yes. And, you know, I never heard a word about that massacre, apart from Joe's telling my father how, as a ten-year-old, he gammoned dead and he ran away to the bush. Never heard another word about that having emanated on Mount Leonard until a very recent date. Since getting involved with you, and I came upon a reference in the book you encouraged me to read, which I did, you know, about this massacre on Mount Leonard . God Almighty, that was what Old Joe Black was talking about. But it never impinged on us. That was all history.

I So you arrived twenty years later but nobody …

R No mention no mention. And then, you see, there's still this business of there were so many men out there, single all their lives. If they wanted sex, there was only one way to get it, wasn't it, raid the blacks' camp. That was never spoken about but it was there.

I And you knew it was there?

R We knew when the coffee-coloured little people … when the coffee-coloured little people. Even from a young age, I knew I was terribly sorry for them. They were neither fish nor flesh nor fowl. With one or two startling exceptions, cream always rises to the top wherever it is, and Billy Gorringe had a black mother and a white station owner father. He and his brothers. But his father never denied it and sent them to have a bit of an education at the Christian Brothers or whatever it was. Billy Gorringe became known as the greatest cattleman that ever was and if my father was ever lucky to have a drover, our cattle in charge of Billy Gorringe, he thought he was home and hosed.

I Because I've talked to Alice Gorringe who's Billy's stepdaughter, and Peggy's still alive and Bob's in Quilpie, and Johnny was also Bill's stepson, he lives in Windorah now with his wife Dot.

TAPE 2 – SIDE B

R … Gorringe with Bill Gorringe with this great reputation as being, you know, a wonderful cattleman and drover, and he put himself through correspondence school or something like that. But, as I say, his white father never denied him, never denied his paternity or anything like that and so he, somebody promoted him and he became a manager of a station.

I Which station?

R I don't know, have to …

I Now what's it called? Araberry?

R Araberry? Oh yes. No, I can't remember …

I Because they lived on Araberry for a while.

R They lived on it but it wasn't Araberry

I So you left the Channel Country. I say I left home over about twenty years but you kind of, step by step, moved further away …

R Totally truncated when the war came and I joined up the Air Force. I did have one trip. '44. Yes. I got some leave and, oh, there was one really interesting one before then. '44, I had had one drop of leave where, because I was in the Air Force and you only had to blink your eyelids at pilots and you got a lift to here, and I got a lift most of the way home. But then, 1944, October, I was at Maryborough, Bundaberg, one of my stations, got a telegram from my father's bookkeeper Ron Michel who was very well known out there. Ron Michel's cousin is Keith Michel, you know the actor, brought up in Adelaide both of them and he became the publican at Betoota. Anyway, Ron did the books for the station for Poppa during the war, and the telegram said 'Your father injured. Broken pelvis. Not to worry. He's okay. Love Ron'. Not to worry, my father, broken pelvis, what the hell's he talking about? And so I got on to, straight away, the Wing Commander Charlton, Boy

Charlton, at our place. Well, that was lucky because he and I were a bit of an item, and so he had me in Brisbane the same afternoon, and the same afternoon or next morning, I got a plane straight through to Cloncurry, whereupon I was going to hire the Flying Doctor to get home to see my injured father. There I struck a rock with my big toe, didn't I? The Flying Doctor refused to take me down to Mount Leonard because there was nothing wrong with me, not even a sore thumb.

Two or three days in Cloncurry and I got on to the Minister for Civil Aviation, I got my father's partner in Melbourne, and it never occurred to me who was going to pay for this little old drop, but as I'd had this eternal belief that money came from Poppa, anyway, it didn't bother me. And anyway, I had to move mountains but finally, and very reluctantly because they knew him, they allowed the Flying Doctor pilot to take me down to Mount Leonard, and he had to pick up straight away and come right back to Cloncurry. How I got back was another matter.

Anyway, the pilot and I didn't get along well. We didn't get along at all because the only plane I'd been in before was a little Fox Moth, the things in World War I, sort of thing. By this time he's got a Dragon Moth or something, which has got a longer wingspan, so we're over Mount Leonard and the pilot says, 'And where do I land?' and because we'd had words already, I said, 'I presumed that as the pilot of this craft you'd know where to land, wouldn't you?' He said, 'What I mean is, I can't land there where you said because my wingspan won't let me'. So up there, we're above Mount Leonard, having this great argument, and then we see down below an old black person with a kitchen chair – he's my grandfather, Old Joe – and he's waving the kitchen chair up at the plane and pointing across the creek. So the pilot picks it up, we go across the creek where there was a bigger, no airstrip, you know, it was flat land and what not. We land there, the rotten pilot threw my bag down on the ground and he took off straight away, you know, with no love lost betwixt us.

So I'm there and I say, 'Good God, Old Joe's twigged to what it is', so all I had to do was just wait a while and then out comes the buggy from, two horses, Old Joe who's never seen a plane in his life before, but he's there, and he kept on saying when Poppa had this accident forty miles out and he'd broken his pelvis straight away, he was getting a Mickey who was too big and they flung him up in the air, down on to the corner post there. Poppa spends agony that day because there's no transport except horse, and they pull Pop under a gum tree where he's eaten by flies and Gawd knows what, while one of the young blacks

gets a horse, laps into Mount Leonard, gets the buggy and comes out to pick Poppa up, which is hours and hours and hours later. And they bring Poppa in and just put him on the lounge in the sitting room, whereupon somebody wanted to ring the Flying Doctor or get on the air and get in touch with the Flying Doctor. Poppa refused point blank to have the Flying Doctor. He said, 'I know what's wrong with me,' and he said, 'That doctor's got to deal with soldiers and sailors who are going off to their death and I'm not going to worry him, so there'. Refused point blank. There he was lying on the couch. Old Joe, who had never been in the sitting room in his whole life, comes up from his camp, took up his position on the stone outside the sitting room, and all through the night he made cups of tea, mugs of tea, for Poppa, and turned him over. And Poppa says it was just like, when Old Joe's turning him over, just like he had a bad headache one minute, the next minute it had gone away. Old Joe had inadvertently put the bones together but when Poppa was at his worst, you know with pain and there's no pain killers, no nothin', Old Joe used to comfort him, 'Never mind boss, never mind boss. Little one come soon'. Me. And Poppa would say, 'You old black bastard, what would you know, she's busy winning the war'. You know, if he were alive today, Poppa would still say I won World War II. That's what he believed. And Old Joe just chuckled and that. 'Little one come, little one come.' So it was no great surprise to him when a plane appears and he gets the buggy over there and Poppa's face, and Old Joe's face, when I walk in the door. Poppa's language was, 'Jesus Bloody Christ, you old black bastard. What do you know'. He was so thrilled but there it was. But Old Joe still, this is the boss, so he doesn't come into the sitting room and what not there, but he just turned him over and that was sheer devotion.

I So Aboriginal women came into the houses regularly because they were working as domestics but Aboriginal men, their world ended at the door?

R The Aboriginal women did not come into the house because they were inclined to have scant disregard for my mother's beautiful pearls and all this sort of business there. They'd just, I can see one of them picking up a hand mirror – 'Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee, hee' – and they'd spend the whole time looking in a hand mirror and not doing a bloody thing else. They looked after the kitchen and carried meals and what not but we always had, up till the end of, nearly the end of World War II, always had housemaids.

I And the housemaids were white?

R Mostly half-caste. See, it was so difficult for half-caste girls.

I So the traditional Aboriginal women would live down on the …

R In the camp.

I … on the river bank, and what, work in the kitchen that was separate from the rest of the house?

R Yes, or the men's kitchen. The men's kitchen …

I But the part Aboriginal women would work in the house proper?

R Oh, yes. And the half-castes, they were just called half-castes, they worked in pubs in Windorah, somewhere round there, and they were damn glad to get a job anyway. But we had innumerable half-caste housemaids.

I Did you ever meet Nellie Parker who was known as Tim? She was the laundress in the Windorah pub but that was probably later.

R Oh, no. And we wouldn't have had anything to do with the laundress in the Windorah pub, my dear. No. But, as I say, you were never short of staff because there was always somebody wanting a job, desperately, absolutely desperately.

I So you would make a strong distinction between traditional Aboriginal people and part Aboriginal people? They were considered chalk and cheese?

R Ohhhh. Oh, they were unfortunates. Dead unfortunates were those children. See, it depended how their white fathers, whether they acknowledged them or whether they didn't. Some of them were really excellent. My mother told me about, at Mount Murchison I think it was, on the Darling there, where she saw a young, very nicely dressed young Abo boy about 14, 15 or so, smartly pull up his horse outside and she said to him, 'Hello, little piccaninny. Which way you bin jump up?' That's the lingo. He said, 'Mrs Scott Richards, I am Mr De Berg's man and Mr De Berg has asked me whether you and your husband could join us for dinner on Saturday night'. Mother nearly fell down damn dead because the De Bergs – and that's a very famous name out in pastoral circles and is to this day – the De Berg and whatever there were, were accepted, educated, St Peters, Adelaide. Depend. Depend.

But, as I say, I don't subscribe to all this sobbing into our soup about blacks and what not. If I have to spend the rest of my life, and I shall, in presenting a case that I'm going to get people to believe in, that people like my father only did the very best for the Aboriginals, which is why my father was so revered by his blacks. He and Old Joe wouldn't have been dead friends if Joe had been white, pink or purple, it wouldn't have made any difference. They were just soul mates and, you know, when I saw that first, the evidence of that? Poppa died in '63 and we get up to – I'm here so it must have been '74, '75 – but I'm thinking about things and I think, 'Oh, I must be getting old because I'd like to go out to Birdsville and I'd like to see Poppa's grave'. He's buried at the end of the sand hill there and they don't spend much on graves 'cause they're covered over by sand and it doesn't matter. I'd like to go and see Poppa's grave. At that very same time my brother up in Yarra, Yarramundi, Yarra-something, Yarraman, he rang and he had his lovely wife Bernice at the time, and I said, 'You know what, brother, I've just had a real crazy idea. I'd like to go out to Birdsville and see Poppa's grave again', and he said, 'This is so funny'. He said, 'Why do you think I've picked up the phone to you?' Had the same idea.

So we did and had a lovely trip through Queensland. We went out and the cemetery is eight miles from the pub in Birdsville. So we went out there and the whites are buried on this sloping side of the sand hill, the blacks are opposite, they're up there, but we have a look around and we find there's a black, an old black, at the foot of Poppa's grave. It's Old Joe. As I say, he died at 105, about fifteen years before Poppa had died, but when they came to bury Poppa, we all flew out, hired a plane in Brisbane. By eleven o'clock we were there. They had just rolled Poppa in his blankets and the AIM sisters said The Lord's Prayer or something …

I What year is this?

R '63 Poppa died. And with the greatest simplicity, Poppa was put in his grave there, but when Old Joe's time came the Billie Bookie, the man who is Birdsville and what not, and they just said about Old Joe. Uh, uh, we can't put him up there with that black mob, he belongs at Pop's feet. So there's my old black grandfather buried at Poppa's feet. Well, Terry and I fell over each other and we howled. We said, 'Look, can't you just hear them. In the middle of the night, Poppa saying, "You remember old man, that mob we sent down in '34?" And Old Joe, "No, boss. No, boss. You no bin right there. That not '34, that be '32, 'cos you remember Gorringe took 'em?"' To this day, they'd be arguing about whatever it was. But the most wonderful fusion of black and white is my father with Old

Joe at his feet. Well, they can talk all the rubbish they like here but that's what it means to me. We didn't worry about reconciliations or bloody nonsense like that. We lived it.

I And your Mum? Where did your Mum … where is her grave?

R In Brisbane. But I didn't know about it because I was away. I was overseas. My sister had looked after her and done all that she could, but by that time it was a huge problem. My sister had young children at the time and Mother was definitely unsafe with them.

I As an adult, or as a much older adult, recently you've been writing about your childhood in the Channel Country. What do you see as the motivation, the kind of … what animates a desire to write about your past?

R Now, dear, dear Trish. That's one of the dumbest questions you could ever ask. Of course when you get to my vast age, you go back to your past. It's simple. But not only that, the thing that really got me going was that I now have grandchildren and they're not particularly interested because if I try to get them interested in something that happened at Mount Leonard in 19 da da, 'Yes, Gran, very interesting, but I've got to go', you know. So I'm living in hopes, I'm going to have my first great-grandchild in June or something or other. I won't be here but it'll be here and I just know that as the current grandchildren, as they get older, they'll start asking questions, and it was my daughter Christine who said, 'Mum, do you realise that when you slip off the twig, you are our last point of reference to anything in the Scott Richards family' because my father's was … the first Scott Richards, he wasn't Scott then, the first Richards brought a load of convicts out in 1790, the Second Fleet. Left the sea because he already had a grant in his pocket from the government there and he took up land at what is now Campbelltown, and from Campbelltown it was uppity, uppity, uppity, but always pastoral pursuits. And that was it.

Now that's going back a long time to 1790 and as I thought, 'Oh, God' … I'm one of the greatest proponents of multiculturalism that you could ever get. When the war finished and were a country of six million, how we ever escaped occupation by the Japanese, Gawd only knows. It was only because he was smiling on us, that's all. And I thought, 'We've got to build up a population'. But as the population builds up, our beautiful pure British blood is being diverted, isn't it, you know. And I've got to stick up for my lot of British blood. It's so important for, as yet, unborn kids, that we …

I So you'd say it's something to do with posterity. Like, your descendants knowing where they've come from?

R Yes. See, people have to spend all this money going to hunt up convict ancestors and what not, well I'm lucky in that I know from whom, and I have a very interesting, very wonderful niece who's got going on this thing. She was so interested in my bits of writings that I pay Maureen, when she needs it, whenever she needs some money, and because it's now such a business and so a romp, it's fifteen pounds an hour in what used to be Somerset House, you know, but when Maureen's got enough detail things, but she needs something from there well I pay whatever so that Maureen can go and get the real things. So she's doing the chart bit.

I So you're really delving back into your long family history …

R Yes. In Australia.

I … and your memories of the Channel Country is just a small part of that?

R Well, it started in Australia and it sort of went up. And, as I say, little Granny used to say any time Grandfather found a station that's getting half way comfortable, into the drays, the bible, the piano, up, up, up, you know, till finally Poppa gets out to south-western Queensland. But we have been important in building up this country since 1790.

I So am I right then, it's really the history of your family that is important to you, not the history of the land?

R No, no, no. You're wrong. You haven't got it right. The importance to me is that what my family has been and means to Australia, right up to where I am now, because when I go there is no way anybody could document any of this at all. I can because of family records and hearsay and all that sort of thing but when I go, we just might as well forget that there were ever people who started this country, like Great Grandpa who was with Landsborough and pioneered all that Central Queensland lot. It wouldn't be there if Grandpa hadn't … can you switch this thing off just a moment?

I Yes, but I don't know why Finch Hatton is called Finch Hatton but …

R One would think, out of Africa, he went out there and he had a wonderful time exploiting his bit of Africa, didn't he? But he was a son of a noble house in England.

I I mean it's all English colonialism, really, isn't it?

R It's English colonialism but I think that he hadn't blotted his copy book with his, the homes in England … that like many another he was a remittance man when he got out here. We had them by the scad in Birdsville. Wonderful people who very rarely gave a hint of their beginnings. One was a famous writer in Birdsville, but he was a dipso and in between rum bouts he wrote … he was a journalist and he wrote for the *Bulletin*.

I It's interesting what you say, when you say you know, are reconciliation we lived it, I mean I've had an Aboriginal woman Isabel Tarrago say essentially the same words to me. Her family, her parents, their traditional country were Glen Ormiston out from Boulia, and then she grew up there. Of course, most Australians don't have that direct experience …

R No.

I … and have to find a way to acknowledge kind of two different cultures having been connected to the same bits of land. What's so terrible about reconciliation?

R Reconciliation comes from the heart. It's not something that can be legislated for, my darling. It just can't be.

I I feel …

R I don't feel, okay, when that thing is full of history about and all the Governor Phillip and the beginnings of Sydney, which was so tragic. It was terrible. How did those … I've had this in my mind so many times that old Phillip rows ashore and he's got everybody with their blunderbusses all at the ready and all that. Those Aboriginals have never seen a white man in their life before, because of their amazing intelligence, and because they would have had the word passed through from Botany Bay, over their overnight telegraph station, you know, would have told them what was heading their way and all that, and I can imagine every black that ever was feeling that, of course they were intruders. They just walked straight into this land and told the blacks, 'You can get lost, we're here now'.

I

R ‘We’re here. We’re the British and that is that.’ That is absolutely terrible and we don’t want to go on about what Patrick … Keneally, you know …

I I know.

R Never mind his name, Keneally.

I Thomas Keneally.

R *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* and all that. It’s just gut-wrenching, isn’t it? Totally gut-wrenching. And, okay, all of that’s been dealt with by the time my father comes on the scene in Mount Leonard and all he’s filled with is compassion.

I But it’s also true, I mean, I don’t … what am I trying to say here? Your father’s compassion was possible at one level, wasn’t it, because a previous generation had suppressed the opposition?

R Yes, and also because it was a time when the white’s had won anyway. It wasn’t as if he was the former generation that had to go out with his shotgun and blast them all to hell. But he was making up for that in the way he went down to Adelaide and he fought City Hall to a standstill but he still got permission to pay his blacks and see that they got a decent life.

I I might turn off the tape here. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about?

R I wouldn’t think so, dear. One would hardly think so.

I Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you think is really important to understand?

R No, I’ve gone down remembering, dear.

I Okay.

R This were a mistake, what I want you to understand. A traveller, somewhere in the early thirties, got as far as Windorah, south-west Queensland, and he wanted to go to Birdsville but he took the wrong road. Instead of going through the Jaycee and Mount Leonard, he took the left-hand fork which got him on this lunar rocky landscape …

I I can picture it.

R … to an outstation called The Planet. The Planet was an outstation of Arrawee Downs. In those days you had to have boundary riders to ride around because there were no fences and to protect your stock you had to have boundary riders. Anyway, this poor lost traveller pulls up at the only galvanised shed for a million miles around and to the door comes Moses, of whom I've already spoken, you know with the and the traveller says, 'Who are you?' and old Moses, 'I'm Moses'. 'And where am I? Where is this?' He says, 'You're at The Planet, mate' and the traveller says, 'That figures'. That is true. That is exactly what The Planet outstation of this station looked like. Just moonscape, nothing else. Not even a tree. And to the door comes Moses.

I So do you find that land beautiful?

R Oh. Let me tell you how the desert can bloom. 1927, I'm seven years of age, and there were rains, wonderful rains, after a seven-year drought or something. There's marvellous rains and the sand hills all come into bloom. This Plain, right in front of Mount Leonard, it goes for sixty miles up past [Mooraberry?] and what not,
after it had been flooded, and the wild flowers bloomed. Mr Park, our bookkeeper, in the open Chevrolet drove us through these wild flowers, up over the car, and the scent nearly sent me out of my little child mind. I'd never smelt a flower in my life. I had never seen a flower in my life. And here was this wonderful desert blooming and it lasted that season and that was the end of it. That was 1927. Nothing was seen or heard of those flowers again until 1948. I'm back from England and I've just had, she's a week old, I've had my daughter Christine, and I get to hear over the radio or something that the Shell Company has just been out there and they filmed the wild flowers in south, in the Channel Country. They filmed these wild flowers and they're showing at the Shell Theatre in town and what not. Oh, I've just come out of hospital with Christine, so I ring them up and say, 'Look, when I was seven years of age I saw that as we drove through it', and they said, 'Would you like to believe they are the same seeds that have waited 27 years to germinate?'

I So there's a 1948 Shell film about wild flowers in the Channel Country?

R There sure is.

I Mmmm. So that's six years before *Back of Beyond*.

R Yep. Anyway, I'm talking to the Shell man and he said, 'Oh,' and I told him who I was the daughter of and what not. 'Oh, Mrs Hodgkinson, you must come in and see our film.' I

said, ‘I’ve just, I’m sorry but I have a week-old daughter’. They said, ‘No problem at all, we’ll send a car for you’. They sent a car out to me. Hugh was in the Navy down in Victoria. They sent a car out to Linfield and I sat in their Shell Theatrette and I tried to see the film. I couldn’t, there was just tears running down. I could smell, and they were the same seeds. Now that went on for many years and long after *Back of Beyond* when they … I don’t know probably about ten years ago, he turned it on again. It’s cyclical.

I So are you saying, you told me that story in response to me saying ‘Is the land beautiful?’ Is the land only beautiful when its …?

R It’s only beautiful … it is not beautiful during the day, in the blazing heat of this brazen sun, the reflection on the awful boulders and it’s absolutely forbidding territory, you know, you just wish you’d never have anything to do with it. Come sunset, when the sun sets blood red over the sand hills, and I’d only just begun reading about Egypt and what not, but when we got all our loading up from Marree every six months by camel loading. [Rodah Singh?] was the camel leader, and I can remember as clearly as anything a blood red sun going down behind the sand hills and on the horizon, we were expecting, you know, rations, comes [Rodah Singh?] and his string of about thirty camels coming – we were the last station on the line – and he’s coming over the sand hills in this sunset there. And I said to my little self, ‘It’s got to look like Egypt, hasn’t it?’ So [Rodah Singh?] comes to the station and the camel, the lead camel, settles himself down gratefully after … he’s walked from Marree, 380 miles away there. The lead camel settles himself down and then the others settle themselves down. [Rodah Singh?], a great friend of my father’s, goes into the office to do the cheque and paperwork and that stuff there, and the lead camel looks as if he never wants to move again. And then the next brother to me, Jack – Jack and I have absolutely loathed each other from the minute we set sight on each other – and Jack says to me, ‘Get on. Go on, get on’. I said, ‘No, no, no’. He says, ‘You’re scared. You’re scared, aren’t you?’ ‘No, I’m not getting on.’ ‘All right, you’re scared.’ All right, I’m stupid as well, so I get on. That camel rizz up exactly like that and 80 miles an hour it went over all those great boulders and stones and things, and it is going. A short distance from the homestead I see ahead of me the only little patch of sand there is, so I roll myself into a little ball and flop over and by God’s grace, I hit the bit of sand. The camel [Rodah Sing?]’s lead camel, is still going as far as anybody knows, you know. But the only thing was I picked myself up and my poor little sore bottie and I limped to the

station. But the only good thing is when I get there I see my mother with Jack over her knee and she's laying it on good and proper.

I This is fascinating. Can I ask you one last question? I tended to think in my mind that there are some women that come to the Channel Country, find it tough but kind of love it, and there are other women that come to that Channel Country – and I suppose I put you in that first category – and there are other women who find that Channel Country, find it tough, and can't cope with it, and your mother would be amongst them.

R It was forbidding.

I But also, Laura Duncan's niece tells me that as an old woman, Laura Duncan would sometimes say white people shouldn't live there, you know. What am I trying to say?

R I don't think so. I disagree with Laura there because white men, they went up to bleeding Darwin when there was malaria rife and they battled the odds up there, didn't they? They battled the odds in the Pilbara. White man will take on any challenge in the world.

I And white woman?

R They've got to go where their men go, don't they dear? Except these days. But they're lucky, they get trips out, you know, by You'll always follow your man, I don't give a damn where it is – the Amazon or wherever it is. If the stupid bastard wants to go there, you'll follow him.

I So you followed your bloke to Sydney in a sense. Your husband …

R No, no, no, no, no. That was a total revolution. He was British Fleet . He was a fly boy. Oh, God, how those flies could fly! I'd been in the Air Force four years and I thought I'd seen They were out here to … the final strike on Japan, and their carriers were all lined up in Sydney Harbour and they were getting their planes all tizzied up, you know, so we met at Maryborough Station one night. I was Welfare Officer there. And, strangely, in the mess when you've got your … at lunch time, hung your cap on the hook, there used to be a pile of beautiful violet-scented letters to somewhere, and they were all to Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten. How about that for a eh? Dear old Phil was there in that state. Anyway, the boys knew why they were at Maryborough for a final top-off before they made this final on Japan. Hugh and I met one night in the mess, at a dance, and you won't believe this but we decided then

and there, mmm, mmm. I was engaged to five other fellows at the time but that didn't … they're going off next day to New Guinea and when they say 'Will you wait for me?' what are you going to say? 'No I won't?' So that was another problem. Anyway, that was Hubert, that was me, and then we had to fight City Hall. His CO Pat was 23, head of the squadron. His duty is to prevent us getting married at all costs and he said, 'Okay, you can do sums, can't you, because we've worked out the odds. Two in ten will come back from this mission. Are you still going to get married?' and we said, 'Yes'. So we damn well did. The atom bomb fell on 6 August 1945, the day we were married here in Sydney. That's when we had our first row. Hubert – we didn't get the news for two days, the 8th – and Hubert said, 'Oh, I won't be able to go to Japan'. I had a brother I hadn't heard of for three years. I had another one Oh, I let him have it, through the jugular. 'I don't give a damn about you and your fly by stuff. I've got brothers …' and he understood because they'd been trained and over-trained and over-trained, and all of a sudden there's this big let-down and we were already married, and so all they can do … they don't know what to do with these fly boys. Within a month we were on a ship to England. He had to be [demobbed?] in England and what not and, as I say, I just fell hook, line and sinker for this handsome devil and remained in love with him for the next 26 years and there wasn't any argument. But, oh my agony, Trish, my agony, when after three-and-a-half years in England we come back – Poppa paid our fares back, he couldn't stand this Pom business. He wanted his daughter back and that was it. He paid our fares. We came back and I've got seven-months-old Peter here in my arms and Poppa couldn't leave the station then. Subsequently he did to come down and meet his Pommie son-in-law. That was a bad enough strike in the bush anyway, having a Pommie son-in-law. Anyway, I'm sick with anxiety. I adored my father, and my husband, but they were men of different worlds, weren't they? And I was in agitation. God knows what I worried about. They were two men who understood each other and that was it. Hugh thought that Poppa was the greatest fellow, Australian, he'd ever met and there we were.

I So there wasn't any sense in which marriage took you away from the Channel Country? You'd never wanted to marry … you didn't want to be the Lancashire – I can't remember what you called her – but her son's wife or whatever, you never had any desire to go back there? Is that right?

R No, Hubert was a … God, he joined the Navy in '43 at seventeen-and-a-half. He was trained on Nelson's Victory and all that stuff. English to his bootstraps. Beautiful voice

and what not. A deeply English fellow. But he said he and all the dozen pilots that were still here in Australia, you know, when they took one look at Australia – Sydney, Australia – they said, 'Huh, this is for us!' Hugh was going to be a trainee engineer and he said there's engineers on every street corner in England. And they said Australia is the place. That was a huge relief to me. I didn't have to force him to come back. No way. I had to keep pulling him back. He just fell in love with Australia before he met me, so that was great. But, as I say, my father and my beloved husband were of two entirely different worlds but they had total respect for each other. Oh, Pop just thought that … oh, God Almighty, Trish, he said, 'I never thought I'd have the luck to see you married to a decent fellow'. His choice had been British, Dutch or you name it, American, Gawd knows what. 'I never thought you'd have the luck to crack a good one like this.'

I So in the end, is connection to family more important than connection to land to you?

R Oh, indeed. Indeed. Yes, because wherever Pop was, you know, in his youth and what not, they were part of the land and Poppa could have made land on Planet Earth or something upstairs, you know, he would have done that there. But because I admired all my marvellous … my lot were all pioneers. Poppa was one of the greatest pioneers of them all because of his total belief in the land. No way could my father have been pensioned off as manager of Mount Leonard. He thought about it before he left and, down in Birdsville, there are the old-timers' cottages. When that scheme was promoted, my sister and I, she was at Kingaroy, and we both started to worry about … Poppa had never been sick in his life but, you know, one of these days, what's going to happen? Who's going to have Pop? Where are we going to make him happy? We agonised over it. She had, her husband had two peanut farms in Kingaroy. And she said, 'Well, I think we're the logical ones because on the second farm there's an old dilapidated cottage with no problem at all we could have done up, and Pop could come here'. So she him down at Christmas to inspect where he might come to live when he was really old and what not. And he said, 'God Almighty, kid, I could stand on a kerosene drum and I can see everything I can survey in five minutes'. Thank you very much, he hoofed it back to Birdsville, didn't he? But that put something in his head because when the AIM (Australian Inland Mission) decided to put up these old-timers' cottages, Poppa paid for the first one – and it's still the cottage there. On the day he died, he went there and he was putting in a step for the *old* fellow that lived there who was only about 69 or something. Oh, the old fellow broke his

bloody neck, you know, so Poppa put in a stone the morning he died for the old fellow there. When Pop was good and ready, he was going to retire to Birdsville and that was it. But he went to the pub to say goodbye to everybody. He was out at Sandringham Station at the time. He was a locum and was he valuable. When the station, the manager, wanted to go down to Adelaide, take the car and take the kids and the wife down there, who do you get in? You get Pop. He knew how to run stations.

I So Mount Leonard had a different manager by then and your father was

R Yes it did. Jim Lindsay. Yes. And, oh, were they grateful to have the locum they got. He knew what you did about creeks drying up and cattle moving and had to be on the wireless three times a day, you know, that was he knew all that bit. So he was a happy locum. Refused a trip pay for it, no way.

I Was your father connected to a specific bit of land or was your father connected to the notion of being a pastoralist wherever that was?

R No, he became a partner in Mount Leonard during the war. When my …

I But I mean spiritually connected, I guess, you know, linked.

R I think perhaps he was more connected to Nebo where his father was, where his brother pioneered all that there, but when during the war, and he became great friends with the owner of the station, S.B. Sinclair and his great big brother who died. His grave's on Mount Leonard. When S.B. Sinclair realised that my mother was non compos mentis and Poppa was a partner in the station by then, that he had to do something to ensure that my mother was out of the business there, that he made me a – I've forgotten what you call it, but the party that doesn't have any voting rights or what not.

I The proxy.

R Proxy or something or other there. That's what Sinclair did anyway, so that I was part of the ownership of it without any voting rights or anything at all, which worked out very well indeed. But Poppa had, when he finally retired from Mount Leonard and went on this locum business, which suited him to a tee. He could fit in anywhere, go off, went to the Commonwealth Games to see his beloved Golden Girl Betty Cuthbert win, and he had a lovely, lovely life. On the way back he stopped in to see me and me kids, you know. 'Oh, I wish you'd had those bloody kids somewhere else except Sydney.' There it was. But he

just had a wonderful retirement and the day that he was in Birdsville, he'd been down to see me, '63, been to see me and my bleedin' kids. Oh, and that's when he started me off on this family history kick, because we were laughing about my aunts, the Scott Richards, who were Linfield and never let anyone forget it. We were so British we had it written on our singlets and all that stuff, eh. And I was laughing, and Helen was there I think, and we were laughing with Poppa and saying, 'Wouldn't it be ghastly if somebody found out that we were descended from a convict, you know, how would the aunts ever survive?' and Poppa laughed and he said, 'Oh, no, kid, no, no, no'. He said, 'We weren't convicts,' he said, 'we brung 'em'. This is the sea captain who brought out the load in 1920, left the sea, became the pioneer, you know, from then on.

I You said 1920, did you mean 1820?

R No, I mean 1790, that fellow came out and left the sea and started the pioneering bit. And I said, 'Well in one way, Poppa, I'm glad about that bit of news but on the other way, it makes me dead unfashionable 'cause unless you've got a convict ancestor, you're nothing in this place', you know sort of thing. But giggle about it. But that sowed the seed in the little old receptacle up here and I thought I've got to find out about all these fellows, and there it was. But, no, the land is in me for five generations. The exploring, wondering what's over the next hill. What's over there? But I am dead proud, dead chuffed, about all my forebears that, no matter what the cost to them was, no matter the difficulties or the hardships, they believed in this land. Now, could you imagine, and don't get me started, you'll be here till Monday month. But when we get started on the illegal immigrants complaining about the bath water not being hot enough in … I get unsafe.

I Let's call it, we'll draw a line … thank you very much.

R Yes. We'll draw a line. I just can't grab that one at all.

END OF INTERVIEW