INTERVIEW WITH FRANCIE HAMMOND
3 September 2000

TF = Trish FH = Francie

SIDE A

TF - No. 70. This is DAT Tape No. 26. It's the 3rd September 2000. Trish FitzSimons recording. Julie Hornsey on camera. And we're interviewing Francie Hammond at her house in Cleveland for the Channels of History Project.

TF OK. Now that I've got over all that fallava –

FH Yes.

TF Francie, can you tell me where and when you were born –

FH Yes.

TF And what your name was when you were born?

FH Yes. Well I was born in Brisbane and ah on the 5th April 1926, my mother died when I was born. She was Mary Francis and they reversed the name for me. I'm Francis Mary Hammond. My father was George Hammond and – you know, one of the Hammond family ….. …..

TF So your mother came to Brisbane to give birth.

FH Yes.

TF But your parents – how, well how long, how long had your parents been in the Channel Country or how, how did you family come to be connected to the Channel Country?

FH Well my great grandparents and grandparents came up from New South Wales. They, sort of, there was – different ones came. There were the Tullys, the

Duracks, the Hammonds, and the Hammonds I think were one of the, about the second family to came up. And that was my great grandparents and then my grandparents came too, about the same time I think, or a bit after, and my grandparents – oh great grandparents, took up a place called Tennim **?** – it's owned by the Tullys now. They've been sort of, ah relations, and - or distant relations, close fam – friends I always say. And they own it now and then, my grandparents had Hammond Downs which was across further along, you know, the Channel Country. And then my moth – my aunt and father were born there. Well I think my grandmother was down in New South Wales when my father was born, but one of the things that I've always remember – my aunt saying – that when the women came up, the families, pioneering families came up, they'd all come to one particular place along the way. I'm not sure, and they'd have their baby and they'd go on then. Baby and all.

TF So the, she was suggesting that there was a particular place –

FH Yes.

TH That they had their babies.

FH Yes. One, one of their friends, you know, one of, one of the clan or friends would, had this place there, sort of probably about half way along. I'm not sure now where it was because as I say, I didn't listen properly but um that was, that, that, that was sort of a you know, they'd have their baby there with this particular friend and they'd come on. And my aunt was one of the – I think she was the first girl born out there but I'm not sure. But then – and my father was born down in New South Wales. My grandmother must've gone down there to have him. He was the third of the family I think, or the fourth. Another one died. And um then there were, there were four aunts and my father and they were all, you know, brought up out there. And then my mother came up, my aunt married ah James Kidd, you know, that you've heard of and they had the five children and then my mother came up as a governess to these children and met my father who was at Hammond Downs, the next property, and married him. And they were married

happily for eight years and then I was born and she went down to, to Brisbane and um she died having me. So that's how we came to be. ….. …..

TF So your father's family then had been in the Channel Country for many generations –

FH Well two –

TF But your mother -

FH I was the third – I think we were the third generation. My, me – I and the kids, were about the third generation but there are other generations born since. And I think it adds up to about seven generations if you count the little ones.

TF And, and your mum had come from Brisbane?

FH Yes.

TF So what were the kind of – you obviously never knew your mother –

FH No.

TF But, but from the older women that you did know, what was the picture of, of life for pioneering women – like the women of –

FH Mmmmm.

TF Going back to your father's family –

FH Yeah, pretty harsh. Well my father and aunt talked of their childhoods you know, and ah what – as I – um like the foods had to be brought up, supplies had to be brought up from New South Wales and it took weeks to get there and the flour would be all weevils when they got there and I remember saying it was – excuse me –

TF I'm just going to start that again and then we'll get it –

FH Oh. Um, where was I? Ah –

TF Where I said how were things – you started to talk about the weevilly flour.

FH Yes.

TF You can just start it again.

FH Yes, well as I say, it was very harsh and there were – the supplies had to come up from Wilcannia in New South Wales and it took weeks, or probably months to get there and the flour would be full of weevils and the – at one stage they had some candles brought up and they'd all melted together and things like that and I remember my aunt saying it was ooh, a big deal when I opened up a tin of treacle. And – but she said there was a Chinese gardener near, or on the place. I think probably all the places had Chinese gardeners and they generally had good vegetables. Probably only in the winter because vegetables didn't grow well in the summer. But you know, and – and ooh, they'd be short of meat at times and, and the cattle – sometimes when they sent them to be sold, the prices'd be so low they'd have to send money after them to cover the cost. So that was another thing at times. Money was awfully short and food was short and you know, they had – I think they had a pretty harsh childhood but they all grew up into lovely people. Yes.

TF So what happened to you then with your mother not alive? Who, who provided that kind of mothering role for you?

FH My aunt that I was talking about. Well I was with my grandmother in the city for a time and um I came up when I was about two. I came up with my cousin. One of the ah daughters and my aunt's husband, Uncle Jim I always called him, and I came up to Quilpie and went out west and I stayed there ever after.

TF So, it's a complicated family structure yours.

FH Yes.

TF How – what was the relation of the, the person that brought you up? So your father stayed in the city then, did he?

FH No, no, no. He's, he had the property out west where he ….. and ran it and you know, that was the family living. But he married again and unfortunately his second wife kind of you know, didn't take to me and she didn't take to the bush. She stayed on in the city and brought up my half brothers and um then um later on, after the boys had grown up, she went out west for a while but my father was ailing by that time and he came down to the city and my brothers took over the place, Hammond Downs, but it has been since sold and they're living – well, one is down here and another one is out at Quilpie. And ah, oh dear! No, and but my mum – most you know, sort of the ones I was really connected with, was my – well my cousins and aunts at Mayfield, that …..Meg and Bub, the ones I was talking about before.

TF So it was your father's sister?

FH Yes.

TF That brought you up?

FH Yes. My father's sister. Yes.

TF Right.

FH And her daughters. And they used to say poor little Francie. She hasn't got a mother. But what I had amounted to four mothers.

TF So how much older than you were these cousins?

FH Aah well the eldest was 23 when I was born and the youngest was, was ah a boy and he was 14 so sort of I was quite a bit younger than them but they said said they always looked on me as a little sister and I didn't know the difference between a sister and a cousin. All those cousins anyway.

TF And so, do you remember, do you think, arriving at, at Mayfield?

FH I do. Well I remember arriving in Quilpie. It was quite funny. Um I don't remember being on the train but I remember we went to the hotel to spend the night and it was a hot night evidently and my cousin Meg ah put a mattress out on the verandah of the hotel to sleep on and I was sort of dancing around all excited. The novelty of sleeping on the floor on the verandah. Getting in everyone's way. And then the next thing I know, I must've gone to sleep and I heard it raining and I hadn't heard rain on a galvanised iron roof before and I didn't know what it was. I had a mental picture of little black apple seeds falling all over the roof. I was what's that? And she said it's rain. Go to sleep. And I went back to sleep and then the next thing I remember was in a car driving on out, out west you know, and I said when will we be out west? And Meg said oh, we're out west now. We're going to Mayfield to Aunty Fanny's place. And Uncle Jim, who was a Scotsman, said Aunty Fanny'll be pleased to see a little family won't she, you know? So I know that is an authentic memory because he's the only person I ever heard one little girl referred to as a family. But it most probably is a Scots expression.

TF And can you describe with child's eyes what Mayfield was like?

FH As a child, yes. Well it sort of, it became home to me. Well it was – it was – there was lovely spreading verandahs and, and white roofs that you could see from a distance and ah, all the garden was – what I thought was the lawn, you know, there was a lawn – at the edge of the lawn was the, a um wooden log and I thought that was the lawn. I was so small. And I remember sitting there with my Aunt saying when will I be three? And she said well, what she was trying to explain I think was it was three more months to my birthday. And she said there'll be three new moons 'til your birthday. And I had the mental picture of three lovely new moons shining over the roof for my birthday. I really thought - I must've thought I was a VIP.

TF And so how did education go for you out there Francie?

FH Well I was sort of one of the earlier ones for the Correspondence School. They had Correspondence School and I did Correspondence School until I was about 14 and then went to boarding school. That was the norm, you know? You'd do Correspondence School until you were considered old enough to go to boarding school, and I, I was 14, which was a bit too old actually, but ah as I – you know, I was a cosseted little girl. They didn't want to part with me.

TF So who oversaw your education, at Correspondence School?

FH Well first it was a, a dear old great aunt who was staying with us. Aunt Anthea. She was, she was – had what they called a good method. It must've been a very good method because in those days, they had these awful little primers they were called. Little blue books, you know? That was the, what they called First Prep, Second Prep and um, oh they were the dreariest little books. I don't know how they kept them on for so long because they were, they were very old fashioned in my day and um but she could somehow make all these dull little stories interesting. And ah but one thing I do remember, and I don't know if you'll care to be bothered with this, but she was teaching me to make T's And I was doing T's and they looked like long lanky men in big hats. And I said they look like men don't they, in hats? And she said yeah, yes, and mine were falling all over the place so I said they look drunk and she said oh no Francie, you mustn't say 'drunk'. It isn't ladylike. You should say 'intoxicated'. There I was at five or six telling everybody – like going around telling everybody they shouldn't say 'drunk'. They should say 'intoxicated'.

TF So where do you reckon you'd seen drunk men?

FH Oh I don't know. I think I probably imagined it or had it described or something because I don't think I ever did. And then – oh! What was I going to say? Then sort of my aunt, well she went back to her place – she was just staying us, with us for a couple of months I think, and my cousins took over and taught me, you know? But I got way behind my class for a variety of reasons and when I went to

boarding school, I was way behind my class, and I was a naturally gawky girl and, and sort of it was a, it was quite an endurance test.

TF Did you run across – were there other small children that you would see regularly?

FH Ah well not – oh, now and then, you know? The – visiting children. And then other children – yes – now and then, you know? Made the most of it but I was, I was awkward with other children for that reason I think, you know? I'd sort of – I'd play with dolls and then it, didn't occur to me when I was playing with other children that they wouldn't have minds and ideas of their own like dolls.

TF So you were mostly with older –

FH Yes. With grown-ups.

TF People.

FH Yes. Yes.

TF And would you describe it as an isolated life? The world of your childhood?

FH Not really because there were people coming and going all the time. It was, you know, a very lively place. But ah probably rather isolated from other children, you know? But not from grown-ups.

TF So what would have – what would've comprised the whole kind of, all the people on Mayfield Station, and I'm talking here about workers, family?

FH Yes. Well there was my aunt and my Uncle Jim but he died when I was about five I think, and then there were my three cousins, my girl cousins. Kit, Meg and Bub. And two boy cousins, Jim and Tom. And then a man that worked on the place called Snowy. And he was, oh he was a very – a lovely bloke you know? He was always teasing me and that, you know. Um, oh that sounds silly, ah but he, he really was, you know? He was great fun. And then my father. He was about – I

think about 27 miles across the river and he used to come every now and then, you know? At least once a week, to come and see me. And I'd talk to him every day on the phone, and so um well there were lots of grown-ups and they were all loving and cosseting and all that and –

TF So you'd, so you'd talk to your father on the phone?

FH Yes.

TF What sort of telephone was it?

FH Ah well party line. What they called a party line. You'd brrrrr – wind the handle, and so many rings for the different places, and it was pretty old fashioned but it worked, you know? Perfectly well. You'd could hold a good conversation. One of the things I remember when I was a bit bigger, I said to Meg, wouldn't it be nice if you could see the people you were talking to on the phone? I was then about ooh ten or eleven I think. And she said yes well they're going to have that one of these days. It's called television. But they say it won't be in in Australia for another ten years. Well somewhere in between the war came because it was more than ten years but it did come but we still don't talk to people on the phone with television.

TF So was there a sense – did the outside world impinge much on Mayfield? Like did your um aunt and cousins keep in touch with kind of um State and National and –

FH Oh yes. Well we had the wireless. Yes. Everyone – you know, we're never isolated or kind of way back people and you know, when they got the chance they'd go for a holiday and come back and, and ah but my aunts, or my cousins rather, ah they did a lot of work on the place, you know? The riding and all that. And at one stage, when I was about seven or eight, the two, the two younger of the girls, they were at – camped out for about three weeks. Pulling out bogged sheep with their brothers and they'd, they'd um you know, it was really hard work for them and I can hear my aunt say they can't get any men to stay there. It's too

constant. And we used to drive out, my aunt and other cousins. We used to drive out there. There was a little hut there where they were camped you see. The girls' camped in the hut and the men outside. But um every night, every evening we'd drive out and take out supper for them, or dinner, you know. And I can remember sitting up in the back of the car surrounded by saucepans and lovely smells and ah we'd get out then and I, I used to think it was lovely, sitting up in this little hut having our tea with them all. An um but it, it must've been pretty hard on them, you know, because it was hard work.

TF Was there any work on Mayfield that, that would get defined as kind of men's work that women shouldn't do or, or were these ….. doing –

FH Mmm, I don't know whether – well they were working as hard as the men. One thing they were never allowed to was that the um marking, you know, which amounts to the castrating of the sheep or the cattle or anything like that. It was just – girls weren't allowed to that. And um I suppose they'd be – well it would be taken for granted now but in those days it just wasn't nice, you know.

TF But other than that, they would be –

FH Oh yes.

TF ….. ……

FH Yes.

TF Was that unusual? Was that considered, were they considered unusual –

FH No, not out there. There were other places too, you know. Friends, oh quite often they did. Yes. Ah know, but a friend of ours, Laura Duncan, she used to go out into the cattle camp and, at night, and Bub went out to keep her company one time and, and she and Bub used to like, every night, you know, if they were holding cattle, mustering them or anything like that, someone would have to ride around the cattle, and she and Laura, they'd take this turn. They'd go around together you know, and they'd have to – one of the things you have to do when you're

riding around cattle at night, is to sing or whistle or make a noise as you go so as not to frighten them. I mean if you hear the noise – ah hear a sudden noise, they'd take fright and stampede. But um this keep it going. That was one of the things they had to do. But they had, they would have the first watch like, and the men would take the later ones.

TF We've heard …… with Laura Duncan's niece and nephew on Wednesday.

FH Oh well.

TF Alice's children.

FH Oh yes. Yes.

TF So we've, we've heard quite a lot about Laura.

FH Oh well, yes. Oh well you know about Laura. And she, well she and Bub were great friends. Oh well she was a great friend of all the family but she and Bub were particular friends you know?

TF And like Laura, um none of your cousins ever married did they?

FH No. I think they were too busy.

TF Somebody said to us – I forget who – of the kind of, of the Mayfield ladies, something like they would no man, no man would be good enough for them or, or –

FH No. No.

TF Words something to that effect.

FH It wasn't that. No, I don't know. No. They just sort of – you know, I've said, they were too busy and, and out there, practically all the men were either your relations or you know, too old or too young or too something.

TF Because there would only have been a few families, most of whom were related –

FH Yes.

TF Is that –

FH Yes, sort of. Yes. Um at that time, yes, it would have been.

TF And were there Aboriginal people living on um Mayfield?

FH There were when, before I came, or when the, when the girls and those were, were small. Ah you know, they were, there was a couple there. And they sort of used to look after them. They'd go out with them and, and um you know, wander around the bush and, and catch fish and all that and they, they'd say, oh they were lovely.

TF So just one couple?

FH Yes, that were there then. Yes. And I think, well I think they both died. Ah that's right. I remember them saying when the, when the ah when the woman died, the wife died, the old man – he came up to the house and he was sort of howling all the way. Crying all the way.

TF And other than this man Snowy, were there other workers, non-Aboriginal workers?

FH Yeah, well from time to time, yes. There were other intermittent ones. He was the permanent one. He, he came there oh before I was born and he was a lad and um he stayed on until he died. It, it was sort of just part of the place, you know.

TF And so he was a single man?

FH Mmm. Mmm. He was a nice old chap. He had a heart attack and um oh, when was that? Somewhere in the 1950s and he would've come there as I say, before I was there. Before I was born. And um that was one of the things he – you know, it must've been two years before I came there or two years before I was born,

because he always insisted that he was just two years younger, older than I was. Which I didn't believe.

TF And how about – I think it's true that in the '30s there were some terrible dust storms out there. Do you remember?

FH Oh well there've always been dust storms. Um, ooh, ah right, right up until recent years – about – because there was one particular one, I'll show you a photo of it later – it came through Windorah and then it came on to Mayfield and this – I think it was the worst one I remember. We looked out and there was great copper coloured cloud. The sun was shining on the, on the dust as it was coming up in a great copper coloured cloud and it went over the sun and the world went black. It, well we went into the rooms and shut them. It was dark in the rooms and um when it was over the sand was on the floor in waves. It was just like beach sand. That, that was the worst one as I say I remember but there have been other ones similar to that, but not quite as bad.

TF What year would that have been?

FH I'm not sure of the year. It would've been somewhere in the – in the '50s I think. 50s or 60s? 50s I think. Yes.

TF Ann Kidd I think was saying that um she thought that since you'd, you stopped having sheep at Mayfield –

FH Yeah. Yeah.

TF That the um vegetation grew on to the sandhills and that that might have been part of why there were fewer dust storms.

FH Oh well there've been quite good seasons out there in recent years but see there would be further – that dust would be coming from further west again too. She could be right though because she's been there since I left.

TF How about floods? How did flood –

FH Oh well –

TF From part of the –

FH Yes, well floods. Um that was a good flood. There've been bigger ones than that. I think I described it when only the tops of the trees and the, and the sandhills were out. And I remember we were up in Sandy's Plain looking down on this spreading water and ah oh floods, floods are really exciting, when there was a really big one you know. The house at Mayfield was sort of oh, on the ridge as I say, above the flat – the spread of the flood water and every morning you'd wake up and see the flood coming a bit higher and shining in the sun. And at one stage it came into the corner of the yard. We were beginning to think it might come right to the house, but it didn't. And um there were um one time, there ooh, this was when I was going back to boarding school. It was in 19, 1941 I think it was, and we had to row across the Cooper 17 miles because you sort of rowed in and out of the channels as the water was spread right out. But you had to row in and out of the channels to get across and um it was, ooh, it took us sort of, I think, most of the day. We, there were several of us you know, kids going back to boarding school and other people going and we, we – there two boats. A big one and another one and it took two or three men to row them, you know. And it had to be just right – the time for – if it was too low, you couldn't have gone all the way, because the, there'd be land up in between, and if it was too high or if there was a wind blowing, it would blow up waves that could've swamped the boat if the boat – see the boat was well-loaded. And ah so ah we all went in that – and oh, it was great fun. One of the things I remember, we rowed over ah it was early morning and then when we got to the Cooper itself, we were rowing between the lines of the trees like little mountain ranges, and we rowed over this, this part of the Cooper that – well this sort of a ….. part ah under the trees where we'd camp. We'd have a, we'd had a sort of a little holiday camp there. Whole - all the kids of the district under a camp and a tarpaulin and we'd, you camped under the trees. We rowed over this part where it was and you know, the water was well, way above. And another time later, again this would've been in the '60s, late '60s I

think it was, there was, was this really big flood and there were people being rescued in helicopters and brought and some came and stayed with us and there was a man who got appendicitis and um the Flying Doctor plane couldn't land there. The airstrip was too small so Sandy went out in his plane and brought him in to, to the Flying Doctor's plane was in Windorah and we were all waiting there on the airstrip and getting anxious, you know. It was getting dark and the plane hadn't come and Ann, Ann and Sandy were engaged at that time and she was there waiting too and then being a nurse of course, she got on the plane and helped the man. But the poor man, when he got off the plane, he looked so sick. We didn't know him for a start, you know. He was, was really sick and he had to row to this strip, airstrip, and his, he was too sick to row and his 13 year old son had to row him to the airstrip so, for where Sandy could pick him up. So it was, you know, quite an adventure.

TF So there was nothing – floods were no disaster. They were –

FH No. No. They came –

TF Welcomed?

FH They came slowly and they spread out and everybody pretty well had their houses built up you know, out of flood waters reach. Some were flooded. There were some places and – at that time. Others, you know, they moved their houses. But it was, as I say, it was really exciting. I used to love a flood.

TF How about the drought? What was –

FH Um –

TF The worst drought you experienced?

FH Well, they – I doubt know that there was a worst one. The first one that I remember as a bad one was when I was 13 and it went on for three years and, and you know everyone felt it badly but ah then there was another one – oooh, when was the last one? It must've been in the '60s and it seemed to go on and on and

on. You know, and you felt – there's an awful sort of a feeling about drought. You kind of feel all dried up inside and I remember while it was still on, I was down in the city and I went to see The Sound of Music so that's about the era that it was. When The Sound of Music was popular. When it was first in.

TF ’65. … Yeah.

FH Yeah. Was it? Yes. And I remember seeing, you remember that scene in The Sound of Music when she was dancing in the summer house and the rain's pouring down? Well it brought the tears to my eyes. The sight of all this glorious rain.

TF So how, how would life change during the drought? You were saying you felt all dried up inside.

FH Yes. Well everyone was worried and the, the stock were dying and the place was dreary and ah you know, sort of it was just a chronic state of worry and ah yes, I don't know –

TF How about the, the drought of the early ‘80s? How did it compare?

FH Yes, it was a – yeah, they were all pretty bad. And ah early ‘80s – no, we came down here in the early ‘80s. Mmm.

TF I'm thinking –

FH I don't remember it.

TF Of during that, that big country –

FH Mmm. Oh yes. That's right. Yes. Well that was fairly bad but not all that bad. Not as bad as the one I was talking about, I don't think. No. It was a –

TF So tell me, tell me then about going to boarding school Francie. Where did you go to boarding school?

FH Down here in Brisbane. To Lourd Hill and um as I said, I didn't, I hadn't been to school at all until I was nearly 14 and I was behind the class for an assortment of reasons that, that oh it's too complicated to explain now, and um there I was, nearly 14, among the 10 and 11 year olds. And I didn't board for a start. I, I went as a day scholar for a few months and then went back out west, and then went boarding the next year. But ah I felt so, so disgraced among these kids and I was naturally awkward and ohhh, it was pretty horrible.

TF And how did you respond to the city? Was that –

FH Yeah. Well the city didn't worry me because you know, we used to come down here fairly often and stay with our relations and you know, have holidays and that. That didn't bother me. But at that stage, I think with the, with the business of, of boarding – oh not boarding. I wasn't boarding then. But sort of the business of trying to sort of fit in at school and all that, I really began to get a sort of claustrophobia from the city. But that was um you know – then, then the next year I went boarding and that was sort of bad again in a different form. And as I say, I felt as though I was behind my class. I was naturally awkward, an awful gawk, and um it made me terribly shy and awkward in every way, you know? I took a long time to sort of be able to mix with people my own age. Even young adults. And I've sort of always had the feeling that when I was with other adults that I was – sometimes I felt like a nuisance child or – and I didn't know what to say and that was you know – I've only begun – I'm beginning to sound like it now, trying to explain things, but I've only begun to become less awkward in recent years. I've, I've, I've said one time, I'm probably the only person alive that went from gawky adolescence to staid middle age without an intervening period of joyous youth.

TF So how long did you spend at school? At Lourdes Hill?

FH Mmm. A couple of years actually – all told I, I got down and, and see I'd been behind my class. I was 17 when I left and I thought well I couldn't face coming back to school at 18 and so I, I left then.

TF And what did you have in mind? What, what view of your future did you have when you were leaving school and how did it then unfold?

FH Well it didn't. I had a view. Well I wanted to be a writer, but ah I got nothing but rejection slips and then I got a ah sort of a – not mental block – what do they call it? Writers block. And then oh well, you know, I just settled down out west and I did, I tried to write for a time and then I ah, oh that was right. I was asked to take over the, the ah religious instruction class for the children and I sort of was always making stuff for them in the class and that, stories and pictures and that, and I think that somehow absorbed my creative abilities. And then when I came down here, I decided to take a course in Children's Writing and ah I did fairly well at that and I'm trying to write a kids book now.

TF Good on you! Where had that dream or being a writer come from?

FH Well I don't know. I always seemed to have a sort of instinct to write stories. When I was, when I was a little kid, the first thing I did – when I was starting to write, I thought yes, I'll write a story. I sat down and I put Tom is a good dog. Then I didn't - ….. …… there's no other words I know to spell. So I gave it up for a while.

TF I've got a daughter who's nearly 6 who's just at that stage now.

FH Yeah. And then, and then I've had – there's an old exercise book floating around here somewhere. I think we brought it down. But ah I don't know where it is. And it's got all sorts of little drawings and stories in it. I used to draw things, you know, like the Children's Comics. Well you probably don't know the sort of Children's Comics that they had in my day with little dressed up dogs and that, and I had all those and then I had stories that I tried to write in it. And, and in my terrible handwriting. And I don't know where it is now but I'd be ashamed to show it to you if I did anyway.

TF Had you known other young women to write? Like did you for instance know Alice Duncan – Duncan?

FH No. Well she was older again that I was, you see, so she was you know writing. No I don't know – though my mother's side of the family were all journalists and writers and that so I think I got the instinct from them.

TF Terry Kavanagh's Dad –

FH Yes. He, he was –

TF He was editor of The Courier Mail.

FH Yeah, and The Sunday Mail and he's retired now and living up north. We were up, up in Isa, went up there and stayed with him. Yes, he, he was and, and my grandfather on my mother's side. He was, he was a um, what they call you? Was one of the bards of Ireland back in his youth, you know, and then he, he came to Australia and he did a lot of writing here, so I think I get it from there. So it was just that – I know, the first thing I'd always wanted to do, when I first came to it, a typewriter I thought ooh gee, this is lovely. I can write a story on it, but I didn't have time. It was somebody else's typewriter.

TF So –

JH ….. change tapes …..

TF OK.

TF OK. So this is um Tape 71, time code 23. This is still DAT 26 and we're up to 33.20 on the DAT and this is the second Betacam interviewing Francie Hammond at her home in Cleveland and it's the 3rd September 2000.

TF Um now, I've just lost the place. Do you know where we're up to?

JH You were talking about her writing.

TF Oh yes.

JH Ohhh.

TF And – oh I think I was going to ask like you just elided about 30 or 40 or 50 years of your life –

FH Yeah, well nothing interesting happened in between really.

TF So paint a picture of your daily life for me. You, you mentioned the religious instruction classes.

FH Mmm.

TF But, paint a picture. Mayfield. It's. it's the 1970s, just for instance. What –

FH Yes.

TF What would your daily routine have been?

FH Oh nothing much really. I, you know I helped in the house and, and that sort of – no. That's quite boring. I, you know, I didn't do anything very interesting.

TF No. I'm interested in it.

FH Yeah.

TF Paint a – what time would you get up? Like paint a picture of a day.

FH Yes.

TF From a picture in your mind.

FH Now I'll be giving pernicious nostalgia. Um, oh well, um I'd get up I suppose and, and um – ooh, well we'd have breakfast and I'd make the beds and, and you know, help around the place. Sometimes I'd water the garden and sometimes I'd do some of the cooking. We'd just talk or visitors would come. People were always coming and going. And um oh then there'd be the Flying Doctor. I haven't gone – would you want to hear about the Flying Doctor?

TF Yes.

FH Because it, it was one of the things that sort of, you're talking about women's lives, it was what, probably one of the things that made the biggest difference in our lives. I remember, it started up when I was still at boarding school, for our district you know. It was in other districts that they came first to Charleville and there was - the first Flying Doctor out there was Dr Vicars who was a wonderful man and they used to come then, every month and for a start they used to land on the plain. There was a big wide plain just away from the homestead you see and they'd land there and come across to the house, then the – Jim or one of the girls would drive him into the town and he'd see the patients there and he'd generally stay the night with us and leave the next day. And then um sometimes there'd be a flood and they'd have to ride, ride across from the plane, the aeroplane on the plain, across the channel to the house and then stay the night so it was decided that we'd build an airstrip and Jim - ah Tom was at the war then. This was while the war was still on. The first – the Second World War rather. And Jim and the girls and all of us went out but Jim did the main work, clearing the, the scrub, the mulga and trees and bushes and that off that airstrip that you see there in the picture. And um it made quite a good airstrip and they used to land there. And then as time went by, they made a proper airstrip in Windorah and he'd land in Windorah and then they still used to stay at our place at Mayfield, the night, and ah it, it was great, you know. It made all the difference. They'd have the clinic, the people would come that needed to see him and a lot of others would come to the house er you know, the – at Mayfield. Our friends – they'd come and see him there, which made a bit of ill-feeling but that's another story you know, but they sort of thought that ah you know, it was exclusively for our friends but it wasn't really. The people would come and well you couldn't say oh don't come and stay which would make them feel unwelcome. So he used to see them there.

TF So he'd have like a, a public clinic in Windorah –

FH Yeah.

TF And then see some people –

FH Yes.

TF At Mayfield.

FH And, and so other people, you know, that didn't understand the situation, felt that it was a, a you know, snobby sort of thing or something – you know, there was a little bit of ill-feeling about it and it was one of those things that you couldn't explain about because you couldn't say to the people, don't come. That'd make them feel unwelcome and it would have been better for the Doctor to have just gone straight back and you know, had a rest and had his tea and all that but –

TF And did you basically keep house whilst your cousins were running the property?

FH Ah –

TF Because there weren't really any men in the picture, were there?

FH Oh, there were actually. See there was, there was Tom, the youngest brother. He was – worked around the place. Then he went to the Second World War and came back quite well but four years later he was killed in a riding accident and then Jim, his brother, he was running the place too but Bub was helping him and then he had a heart attack so that he couldn't do as much and Bub was doing a lot of the work and Meg, well she wasn't as strong then, but she, she and Jim and then when Sandy grew up, he was helping to run the place too.

TF But, but was it that you were basically – were you keeping house for Bub and Kitty?

FH No, no. We all, we all did some, you know. I did some and I didn't do an awful lot because um well we sort of we were all falling over, would have been all falling over each other's feet and I didn't do much when I was young but I'd, I came into you know, and I helped in the house and did some of the cooking. That sort of thing. We all did a bit.

TF And Jeannie Reynolds? Did she – do you want to tell me about Jeannie?

FH Oh yes, well that was very sad. She was a little girl and ah they were – her father was our cousin and he was, he was married and his wife and they had um one, Jeannie ah Lau – ah Jeannie, Lillian – Lillian was the eldest. And ah Jocelyn and Saura **?** and then there were two boys, um Chas and um – ooh, what's the kid's name? Ah George – and, and they were ah ohh, you know they were, they were, they were a nice happy family. And then one night they, they brought the two girls back from boarding school. Lillian the eldest was nursing and Jeannie was a little thing of about four then and they – the girls had come back from boarding school and they'd just arrived about midnight, with their old grandfather too. And um he was - they went to bed and in a night, in the night, a fire broke out. They think it was the fridge. The kerosene fridge blew up. And two of the girls were trapped and their mother tried to go in to rescue them but she was trapped too and they were all burnt to death and so was the old grandfather. And Jeannie started to run away and the mother said go after – to the husband, to George. And he went after her and she went into the house to try and rescue the girls but she never came out. So it was a dreadful thing.

TF And, you – did you help to bring up Jeannie?

FH Well, no. She stayed, she lived with her father but they went, you know, back to the place. They rebuilt and she and her father and the two boys were there, but she often came over to stay with us and then she stayed with other friends that the ah the folk in the Post Office in Windorah – the O'Brien's, they were a lovely family. And she used to stay with them and go to school there. You know, she was – when she was school age. And um then – yeah, she went to school and you know, she grew up. Well, she was. She must've you know, talked a lot about us but yeah, she was. She was a dear little girl and she used to stay with us quite often. Yeah.

TF So you and Jeannie were both effectively motherless.

FH That's right.

TF Did you know many – were there other motherless children that you knew?

FH No, not around the district that I can think of. No. No.

TF And how about – did you know people like Nelly Parker and the Gorringes? Like how would you picture – how would you portray relations between white and black in the Channel Country?

FH Mmm. Well, good in Windorah, but they improved – ooh, well um when I was young, the um – this is going to sound awful but I'll have to tell you the facts. They were sort of, as the saying, lesser beings without the law, you know? And people in those days, made the mistake, I think, of thinking they were dumb – the Aborigines. You know? And they weren't. They were intelligent but – I think now – but in a different way. That's the full-blooded ones and the others, sort of you could see sort of how they improved, you know? I can remember when they were, when I was young, they'd be er that, you know, hang their heads and giggle and, and um then they would be – there'd be a dance, say, and the ones that were there, they'd be sort of just hanging out about on the verandah. And they'd have their supper, you know, when every – after everybody else had had theirs. And in these days that sounds dreadful but that was how it was. And then gradually they, they sort of – I can remember the time going by, they moved in and they, they'd dance and for a start they'd be kind of gawky. You'd see – you know, they'd be in what – in those days er the girls used to have silver evening shoes they were called. And they'd wear, wear there's with bobby socks. But that dropped and then you know, they, they sort of just moved in and became steadily more sophisticated and you know, they were, they were accepted out there, you know? They danced with the people and had supper with them and the kids mixed and all, you know?

TF So that's very interesting Francie. What kind of time travel would you give to that? Like when you're talking about them say, you know, gawky and having –

FH Yes.

TF Then dinner – supper later. What –

FH Yes. That was –

TF Sort of year would be talking?

FH Ahh, let me see. Up until ohhh, probably up until after the First, Second World War and then gradually the, the, they began to pick things, you know? Well it was a surprise. One girl was there. She'd been away or she'd came from somewhere else and she was a smart girl, you know? Good looking, smart, able to dance. And you know, it was a surprise to see her and a part-Aboriginal girl could be smart and um poised as a white one.

TF Do you know who that was?

FH No, I don't remember.

TF Because now there's the Gorringes and –

FH Ah yes. Well they, yes well they came a bit after that and um although the Gorringes – you know, they were a nice family. Everybody liked the Gorringes. And there was Mrs Gorringe. Mrs Ivy Gorringe. She was a – you know, a lovely lady. As a matter of fact she came down here to see us you know and stayed here the night. And she was that sort of person you know? And ah and the, the children – as I say, when I taught the religion class, they were, ah several of the kids were ah part-Aboriginal and – they, they were good kids, you know. I never had a bit of trouble with them. But I often did with the white ones.

TF And what caused those barriers to break down do you think?

FH I don't know. Well I think it was the, the, the – probably the Gorringes and their family. They were, they were good type Aborigines and you know, they were able to mix with us and, and ah you know, probably taught us.

TF Do you know Alice? We interviewed Alice Gorringe in um in Mt Isa. Do you know Alice?

FH No, I don't know Alice. I knew Mrs Ivy Gorringe and her sister, um Mrs Monnigan, and then there were the, the Monnigan and Gorringe children that were in the religion class and they were – as I say, they were all nice children. And um various ones. There was one – Bubby Gorringe, who had a heart of gold, and ah I think you know, the other ones I can't remember.

TF There was John and his wife Dot –

FH Oh yes.

TF Still ….. …..

FH Ooh yes. They're still the …… Well Dot, you know, she, she was ah they used to be out at our dell and, and you know, visit Sandy and those. We saw them there.

TF And what led to you leaving the Channel Country Francie?

FH Oh well, my cousins – um, Meg had a stroke and Kitty – she had had a big operation for cancer about eight years before and she was, she got on well but sort of began to feel that she should be near a doctor and um Meg had – we were down here. We had another house at, at Thornlands, and we were there. And one night, one morning she had a stroke so she went into the hospital and sort of ah realised that we'd have to move down here and we went out west and packed everything up. Ah and ah, while that was going on, our – our um, the cousin – another cousin that was living down here and the Estate Agent were looking about for a house. They found this one. They rang up about it on the phone and described it to the girls and they thought it was just what they wanted and by a great stroke of good luck, a, a new Police family had moved to the town and they – all their stuff had been brought out on one of those great big removal vans, so all our stuff came down on it. Otherwise it would probably have – it'd still be out there.

TF So you would've been about 60 when you came to Brisbane?

FH Probably. Yes. Yes. It was ’84. It would have been. Yes.

TF And how did you find life in Brisbane after all those years?

FH Yeah. Well, OK. Not too bad. See I’d been um used to come down here for holidays so we’d be – you know, used to the city, but not sort of permanently. And well, we expected it – well I expected it to be much worse than it was. It was – seemed like, it seemed like a bad dream to be moving out, you know? But ah –

TF So how often do you get to the Channel Country now?

FH I’ve never been back. It was so awful when we left, you know. We thought oh no. We can never go back. It was just – you know, you’d feel, you’d feel like a ghost if you went back. I’d hate it. Couldn’t do it.

TF Why not?

FH Oh well, you’d either have to be back there permanently with everything just the way it was or not at all. It was – it would be too much. I know when we came away in the car, we all kneeled and we cried for miles.

TF So the four of you all left together?

FH Yes. Yeah.

TF Have you got a photo of you leaving?

FH No. Ah no. And, and we were there and, and Jim’s wife or widow she was then, and one of their kids, Denise, and one of Sandy’s kids – and we were all at the gate – oh and Ann, yes. We all fell on each other’s necks and howled and got into the car and left. Ohhhh.

TF So do you still dream of the Channel Country?

FH Not so much of the Channel Country. But of the house and of all the family, you know. They’ve, see they’ve all died and, and yes, I often dream of them and yet it

doesn't hurt waking up. You know? In the dreams, they're just there as if they'd never been away.

TF And is Mayfield – who lives in Mayfield now?

FH Well it burnt down. It's very sad. It burnt down. Not long after we came down here. And um so there's an old caretaker there now. An old man. And I think he looks after the chooks and sort of scares people away. But the – most of the house burnt down. There's just one part of it is still standing and ah but the um there's Sandy's place, you know? The, the family is there now.

TF And who was left living in Mayfield when you left?

FH There was a couple. A caretaking couple there. And it was one night, well Sandy and another friend –a man , they'd all been there and um well they'd had dinner there and some friends of the caretakers and then this fire broke out in the night. I don't know what caused it but it broke out and, and the man that was doing the caretaking, he chopped down the – it was - the place was built in three sections, like a lot of country houses are, and he chopped down a walkway between the two places and saved the part which was where every – what we used to call the sleeping part – all the bedrooms and that were there – and the main part, the, the sort of the nicest part – the kitchen and the lounge and the dining room – that all went.

TF So is there anything I haven't asked you about Francie, that you think's important for me to understand women's lives …..

FH Oh yes. There was refrigeration. That was, that made a big difference because I can remem – I can remember when I was about 7 or 8 I think, there were – the country refrigerator was unknown. But I think they had them in the city. Well I think the city people had ice chests and um, yeah it was a big deal to get ice cream. They'd sometimes have it at the races and they'd, they'd bring it out in a vat you know, and all the children – they'd be hanging around. Getting as much ice cream as they could. And when you went to the city, as far as I was

concerned, it was a, a you know, the time to have ice cream. But then, as I say, when I was about 7 or 8, or before that, they had what were called bag coolers or Coolgardie Safes and we had a big one. It was – ooh, the size of a standing meat safe. That big. Ah, ooh probably not as big – it probably looked bigger to me, because when you're small, things look bigger. But they had a wide flat metal tray on the top that was kept filled with water. There was a tap built – set up over it to, to drip into it or turn on when it got low. This was filled with water and then that dripped down through little holes around the edge on to hessian bags which were down the side over chicken – ah chicken netting sides, and the air blew through there. It was on the principle of one of those things. Ah – you know, air – ah water-air conditioner. And it, it ah worked reasonably. Not, not – it was nothing really and I mean the butter'd still melt and the – things'd still go bad. And I remember my cousin saying they – whenever they killed a sheep or a bullock, there'd be a mad rush to get as much everything cooked or corned – you know salted, as they could before it went bad. That was specially in the summer and it'd still go bad sometimes over night. So then when I was about 8 I think, the first refrigerator came. Well it was about – ooh, it was on the lines of a, of a ah deep freeze, you know? It was lifted up at the top and the – do you want to hear all this?

TF Yes.

FH Yes. There was a thing in the side, the freezing unit. The part hung down inside. That was the freezing part. And then another part came over through a pipe on the outside and that hung down on the outside. And there wasn't an awful lot of space in there. As I say, I was small. It seemed bigger to me than it was, but there couldn't have been an awful lot of space. Well to get it going, this whole thing would have to be taken out to a little tank on the verandah. Oooh, a little tank about, I suppose, a yard across and a yard deep, and they'd put the – they'd put the freezing part into the tank and light a little flame primus stove thing under it for about twenty minutes. Then they'd put that out. Take the thing out of the water. Put the freezing part on to a little stool and the other part that had been

over the primus, into the water and then the freezing part would start to frost up. But I can remember I used to ride around and round the verandah on my little tricycle watching it frost up. Oooh, it was as exciting as television. Then they'd take it out and put it in the fridge and that'd stay there for another 24 hours and keep the butter cool and the milk well and the meat from going bad and then the whole performance would have to go through again the next day. And it took two women to lift it, or one man. But – I – I was small, I used to think now what about a place where there was only one woman in the house and the men were out camping. How would they get on then?

TF And you were probably very lucky, your family, to have this contraption.

FH That's right. Yeah. Ohhh yes. Oooh, it was a big deal. It was – oh a great excitement when it arrived and, and there was a little tray, about that big I suppose, with about a dozen little – space to make about a dozen or – maybe more – little ice cubes and we'd have some little ice cubes every day and on very special days, we had home made ice cream. Like Christmas and birthdays and things like that.

TF And so when did convention – what we now consider conventional refrigeration ….. …..

FH Just before the War. The, the, the proper sized ones. Like that one. Yes. The kerosene fridge. That was, that one came just before the War. There was another type of fridge in between that didn't have to be taken out. The, the, the tank was in the air over the fridge held up. It didn't do much for the decor of the lounge but it was a big improvement as far as the grown ups were concerned.

TF And how did these changes of refrigeration influence daily life then?

FH Ooh it was so good because the – I can remember when I was really small, the butter on the table was always sickly yellow oil in the summer and the, the meat. We didn't have anything much in the way of meat except corned meat and it would go bad and, you know, there was a terrific lot of waste. And then, sort of

all this, this stuff, you know, got so much nicer and, and the food was able to be kept well and the butter was always hard and the, and the meat never went bad. And you know, there were so many other things that you could have. It was probably much better for people's health too.

TF I know that there were some women and it sounded like your um stepmother was among them.

FH Yeah.

TF Who never really adjusted.

FH No, well she didn't. No.

TF To life out in the Channel Country.

FH No. She didn't. No.

TF And, and kind of – what do you think divided the women that, that made a happy life there from those that couldn't wait to get away fast enough? You know, what?

FH I don't know. Maybe it was the – ohhh, yes. Maybe it was the isolation or you know, they probably couldn't take it. Or – she wasn't popular, of that one. Yeah, in that case. And others – yes, I have heard of others. The, you know, that went out there, and they couldn't take the isolation and um –

TF Patricia Hodgkinson's mother. Do you remember her? Now, she – this is Mt Leonard Station. Her father was called Pop Roberts – Pop Richards I think.

FH Pop Richards.

TF She would have been Patricia Richards.

FH Er.

TF And – it doesn't sound like you knew her. She's about 83, so she's a bit older than you.

FH Mmm.

TF But her mother was never ever happy out there.

FH Yeah. Now wait a minute. Mrs Richards. Yes. Yes, that's the one – was she Richards? Yes I think she was. I think she lost her marbles.

TF Yes.

FH Mmm. Yes. I, I don't know. I was too small. I remember her coming and visiting at the place, you know. And ah to me she, you know, seemed quite alright but the others said you know, she wasn't right.

TF Yes. Yes. No, she did. She was then institutionalised.

FH Mmm. Yes.

TF So is there anything else before we finish Francie, that, that I should know.

FH Not that I can think of. Gosh, I've talked myself blue and you too. No, I can't think of another thing really. I think I've told you everything and I'll think of it after you've gone.

TF Thank you very much. It's terrific.

END OF INTERVIEW