INTERVIEW WITH ISABEL TARRAGO & SHIRLEY FINN
3 September 2000

TF = Trish IT = Isabel SF = Shirley

SIDE A

TF **This is Betacam no. 66, it's DAT no.24, it's time code 1800. Today is 3 September 2000. Trish FitzSimons on sound, Julie Hornsby on camera, and we're interviewing Isabel Tarrago, nee Hanson, and Shirley Finn, also nee Hanson, at Isabel's home in Highgate Hill.**

Okay, so I want to get quite a picture as well as your two lives in the Channel Country, I want to know about your Mum. So what can you tell me about your mother's birth, the circumstances of the birth?

SF Mother was born on Meetukka. She was the daughter of an Irish ummm Scots, was it a pumper, and her mother was a traditional Aboriginal from that area.

TF And where was she born? All the way along in this interview I'm going to pretend that I know nothing because I want you to answer me as if I don't know any of these stories, because I want to then be able to edit it without my stories in. Could you tell me about your Mum's birth, about her Mum dying. I'd like to hear the whole catastrophe.

IT Well, Mum was born at Meetukka and during the birth ummm our grandmother died and Mother suckled on an old bitch dog that was there in the camp and when the old women come over they realised that the dog actually saved our mother's life, and Granny was already passed on, I don't know how long but that's the story that's been passed on from all the old people to us, and she was cared for in the camp from there on. And as a young woman, she learnt, she came up, as a baby she came through and was with the family and the traditional old people and from there on some of the old white people that were in the station areas there … at this time she was moved around many stations as a young girl and I think the age was, we were told, about eight years old, she was actually moving around ummm from different stations with the old people who worked on the stations doing different things. And a lot of station managers' wives took her in ah and she was a very young girl when she was doing …

SF As a housemaid. But then the ah, a lot of the old Aboriginals used to swim the flooded creek and steal her, take her back to the camp, and then you'd have the ummm the white

station owners, they'd come and get her, and that went on for oh several, several weeks, because they expected her to stay in the camp with the old traditional people. But ah … and then the station managers and their wives wanted her to be a housemaid, to look after them.

TF Her father being a white bore operator, was he claiming her at all, because she … to read that article in the mining magazine, it sounded like your Mum was a bit like a football as a child.

SF Yes. No, he didn't have anything to do with Mum. She was brought up … he sort of disappeared out of the picture. He used to … I think he lived in Boulia when he first came out as a pumper. But no, she didn't have anything to do with him.

TF And had it been a long relationship between your grandfather and your grandmother, or was it a more casual relationship? Do you have a sense of the context that your Mum had come from?

IT I don't think ummm, you know Mum always said to us the only thing her father gave her was her name but from where I was coming in as being the youngest of the family, I mean, Shirley, Bessie and Georgie, they had a lot more to do ummm in that area because they were on the properties with Mum and Dad and that. But I think, this is just my own information on this. I really do think Granddad really wanted to know, because he did stay in some of the camps. He was in Dajarra with all the old people but he was so used to being in a traditional camp, I don't think he ever came back at that time and was around when Mum was born because I just think he moved around all the pumping places, you know, round the stations and there was so many. I mean, you just wouldn't get back to find out about anything that's happened. And I think Mum really got angry. Mum was very angry about the fact that he didn't give her anything other than her name. She was very adamant about that but I think, as a young person myself growing up, that I believe Granddad really would have wanted to stay around and I remember her taking me, Mum taking me to Dajarra when he was very, very sick and he was at the old Dajarra camp, and they actually had him in a little shed there because he wouldn't go to hospital. And that's the first time in my life that I saw my grandfather Arthur Daly, and he was very ill. Ummm and it wasn't a very nice sight because I saw him when he was very ill.

TF So he would have been cared for by Aboriginal people?

IT He was there in the camp, yes, and I don't know. Who was Punch, I think. Uncle Jack Punch. Ummm and Aunty Biddie and …

SF Biddie, yeah, Aunty Biddie Punch.

IT They were there. I don't know if they were looking after him but he had a place at the camp and I just think he … you know, for him to actually be there at an Aboriginal camp gave him peace and, well Mum went and saw him so I don't know what went on but I know that she needed to show us. I don't think Shirley ever met him.

SF No, I've never met him.

IT But I noticed that, you know, in the end Mum took us, took me there, and I think that that was a very good process for me and for Mum because that was the last time I saw him.

TF You may find this next question offensive but I've been interviewing white people throughout the Channel Country and I've had said to me five or six times this thing about 'Stolen Generation'. Babies with white fathers, black mothers. The blacks wouldn't have anything to do with them. They'd leave them, left them to die, so therefore there is no 'stolen generation'. White people were saving babies that otherwise would have died. So your knowledge of your family history, how would you respond?

IT I think that's rubbish, Trish. I think it's absolutely rubbish. Pauline Hanson stated that as well in her, you know, political agenda, to say that you know half-castes weren't accepted and, you know, we ate their babies. And I actually gave a talk not long after that and I know Shirley actually tried to ring Laurie Kavanagh about it as well, who never responded to us, because he was on these stations and what he saw obviously was so different to what we saw through our eyes, and we happen to be black. He happens to be white. Ummm they're the sort of things that I think is a whole race connotation behind it. Now I wouldn't … you wouldn't call me full-blood because my grandfather is Scottish/Irish background, you know. And, I mean, I have no bitterness for that, and my mother was very fair, but I tell you what, she was accepted. The traditional camps really wanted her. She spoke five languages, traditional languages. I mean, you don't get that rite of passage of you know that whole connotation, so it didn't happen in our family. Our family took in a lot of what the so-called, the derogatory term of 'half-caste, quarter-caste'. Ummm Glen Ormiston we had so many families mixing, you know, falling in love with each other. I mean, for goodness sake, you know, what do we do about that? You can't do anything about it and

it's not a racial connotation and there were, in some of the areas, Stolen Generations because the Assimilation Act in this state makes that happen. You know, we weren't allowed … I mean, that's how you get your Woorabinda Missions, your Palm Island, your Cherbourg, ummm you know those sort of things is to divide us up on colour. Only by pigmentation of the skin. Now if that Act would have taken place, Shirley and I, just by sheer colour, would have been separated. She would have gone to Woorabinda or Palm Island and I would have gone to Yarraba, and that's how this Stolen Generation really was enforced. It was set up by a policy of the Crown and it is real.

TF Obviously that statement is a really convenient one. I didn't realise Pauline Hanson has said it but it doesn't surprise me remotely and it has its echoes out there.

IT Absolutely, absolutely. And we responded. As two members of the family here, we responded to kill it in the water because no way in the world would my family kill me. We were loved so much and dearly loved right through, you know, and it's just another form of politicising a statement of people and I just think it's so … if they haven't got a mentality to run on general intellect, and then you run on class, and you run on race, well I'm afraid that they've just got no substance, those human beings like that.

TF Going back to your Mum's life then, tell me the stations that she worked on. And this thing of going from station to station, how did that function?

IT Well, this is part of that whole process of the state. Now if you look in the state, we have got policies there going back ah in the 1920s, that Aboriginal men and women were dentured out to do work on properties. Those who were found on properties actually moved in, because we had … we were under the Act, and we are all ummm in that process of … I've got files there that I can show you where my mother and father were actually under an Act and when you're under an Act in this state, you have to do what the state tells you, so the police of the day controlled your movement around the state. You had to have a card, an exemption card if they could give you an exemption card, to move to different properties. And, you know, this is why I always say the cattle industry in this state, and in many other states of Australia, made their money on the backs of blacks, and we are no different. And my family really did make the cattle industry a very profitable industry. But they didn't get a cent. They got flour, water, tea and bread, you know. That's the ration system. And ummm they're the sort of things that a lot of people don't understand.

I mean, the station managers on Glen Ormiston would never have understood that and once the equal pay came in, we were all removed because they weren't going to pay us.

SF But before that, when people … when you were under the Act and you worked for ah different stations and that, you wouldn't get paid. All your money would go to the police. Like, for instance, Glen Ormiston, ah you were under the Act there. Boulia, ah the people in Boulia. All their money went to the police. Then, if there was race meetings or carnivals and that, they'd go down the local store and say, 'Oh, well, here, you go and buy a …'. You might have four children. 'Go and buy an outfit for each of those children,' and then they'd give you ummm if you had the food and things, they'd give you a list. You would not see the money at all. A lot of people worked there, worked for twenty, thirty-odd years and when they lifted the Act, people thought oh well they had plenty of money to buy a house, deposit on a house, buy a car. They didn't even have a deposit for a car, let alone for a house. So nobody knows where that money is today.

TF There's big cases going on, isn't there?

SF There is.

TF Can you tell me the different stations that your mother worked on?

SF She started at Lake Nash, Barkly. Yeah, Lake Nash. Barkly. I think she went to …

IT Linda Downs.

SF Linda … it would have been Linda?

IT No, you've got to do the circuit.

SF What we should have done is yeah. No, we should have started at Monkira.

TF Do you want to start again?

IT Yes, start again.

SF We'll start again.

IT She was only, yeah, Monkira.

SF That's after …

TF What was the range of properties? Tell me the range of properties that your mother worked on.

SF Lake Nash, Barkly, ummm Karandotta. There was quite a range. I don't know whether she went to Roxborough at all.

IT I think she did.

SF But the main stations would be Lake Nash and Barkly were the main ones.

IT Monkira.

SF No, she went to Monkira after she married Dad.

IT But she was working there because in the book that she was doing the ummm peddling the …

SF Oh, she was looking after the ummm station manager's kids as well as doing the peddle wireless.

IT That's where she was there. And she did go to Roxborough because Roxborough is where Dad actually had his first big mustering camp with old Granddad Joe.

SF Yeah.

IT Okay, and the buggy. And old Mary. Walkabout Mary.

SF Mmmm.

IT Yes so Roxborough was the first big camp that our father was head stockman.

TF And if you were overall to talk about the role of Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry, as you know it from your parents and your family, how would you define it? What role did Aboriginal people have in the pastoral industry?

IT Well, the Aboriginal people had in the pastoral industry, they knew where they were going. They knew the country, whereas the ummm … they virtually made the stations today. Ummm there was three big camps on Glen Ormiston station. Our father was the head stockman there and he had a lot of … and there would have been about ten to twelve ringers in each camp when the cattle, when they were mustering cattle for the beef industry

and trucking them away. But I feel that the Aboriginal people, past and present, they don't get … they haven't got that recognition. Nobody gives them that recognition of what they did back in those days. It was hard. You know, now they've got helicopters and motor bikes, where they had the old horses, mustering horses and that, hobbling 'em out and ummm a lot of those Aboriginals couldn't read or write. Ummm our mother and father both couldn't read or write and ummm it was said some years back, the only reason that he couldn't get a manager's job was because he couldn't read or write. He could only sign his name.

TF So when you think back to, say, those three mustering camps at Glen Ormiston, and you said there were ten ringers, what year would you be talking about and what balance of white and black workers would there have been then?

IT Mostly Aboriginals, eh?

SF Yeah, a few jackaroos.

IT Very few jackaroos. You could name the non-indigenous ones on your hand. All the rest were all Aboriginal from Boulia, Dajarra …

SF All family-based.

IT All family-based, yeah.

SF Because language was spoken in the camps.

TF What year are we talking here? What sort of period?

IT Back in the fifties. Yeah, fifties, sixties.

TF So it sounds like in that northern bit of the Channel Country Aboriginal people were working in great numbers in the pastoral industry when further down they'd been pushed out earlier.

IT Mmmm.

TF Do you think that's true?

IT Yeah, because Dad also was ummm asked to go down to Marion Downs when he had finished Glen Ormiston muster, or go across to Linda Downs. You know, that's across the

back of Glen Ormiston. Or Croghan's Peak. Or Carlo. So the numbers ummm that our father had, and there was a comment made recently by Uncle Cliffie Donohue, who's now retired from Boulia. Ummm he actually said to me, he said, 'Isabel,' he said, 'we were having a drink a couple of months back,' and he said, 'and I asked the group who would have been the best cattleman in the Channel Country, out this way,' and they said, 'With no doubt, it was Snap'. Because he said, 'You know, he could drive 15,000 head of cattle during the night and not lose one'. He had this marvellous way of getting his stock ummm to the … and he'd drive all night and rest the cattle all day. So he had a very, I'd say, traditional way of dealing with ummm with the stock as well, and this is stock that had never been driven before.

TF When you say 'traditional way', you mean Aboriginal traditional way?

IT Yeah, I think … I think it is an Aboriginal traditional way. I think it's a way of looking after ummm you know, the animals, of which you're caring for, because he was very strict with us – Shirley could probably tell you more – because he wouldn't let me ride. I was not allowed, and I used to always get cranky with Shirley because she was always allowed to have a horse and go riding and I could only hold it, and lead it. And my father said, 'Well, you're just not equipped' because I was so thin and so frail, he said I wasn't equipped to manage it. And yet Shirley was always allowed. I mean, she was not much thinner or fatter than me but she was taught to deal with the stock and maybe she can answer that. Because he was very strict with all the camps.

SF Yeah, we couldn't go into the camps because, well ummm certain times we'd go, when we came home from holidays, because we all … both of us went to boarding school. We both went to St Anne's in … I went first. At six years old I was sent to ummm Black Heath College in Charters Towers and ummm then both Isabel and I went to St Anne's in Townsville, and we'd only come home at Christmas time, because you had the May holidays and the August holidays, and you'd only have two to three weeks, and we wouldn't come home so we'd come home at Christmas time and ah we'd go out and visit Dad in the mustering camps ummm and we'd only see our father once like at Christmas when he came in after all the mustering and that. And I used to look after the horses when he'd have them at the station. Feed them for him.

TF So going back a bit, because this is going to connect to Granny Brown and I want to fill in that story. What kind of stories did your mother tell you of her relationships with white women as a child? What was the range of ways that she was treated?

IT Our mother was very grateful. Ahhh, she never had a mean streak in her body because it was from those station managers' wives that she was taught how to work. For a person growing up, didn't go to school, and couldn't read or write, ummm she knew how to work. And I think she was grateful for that.

TF I want you to tell me how did she get to know, because the woman in that photo you came to call Granny Brown. How did that relationship between your mother and Granny Brown develop?

IT I think Granny Brown was on old Glen Ormiston, on Meetukka.

SF No, she was on Roxborough.

IT Was she?

SF Mmmm. Old Dave.

IT Davey Brown.

SF Dave and Nell, they were both on Roxborough.

IT And then went down to Glen Ormiston.

SF And then … actually I don't know where they went then. But then Bill Robbins come. I think it was just that when …

IT She met up with them when she was very young.

SF Yeah, ahhh Dad went across and ah I think it was that ummm Dave and Nell Brown was on Roxborough and I think our father met them first. And then, I think, no she might have been working at Roxborough at the time too.

IT Yeah, she was.

SF Yes, because I think that's where Mum and Dad met first.

IT Yes. Through the keyholes of the pantry door.

SF Yes, they did meet at Roxborough.

IT Yeah, they did.

SF Because old Granddad Brown and Grandma Brown were there managing at the time and from there I think that relationship grew ummm even though Dad was still under the Act ummm she followed him then, he was brumby shooting and he was shooting brumbies all over the stations, all over the Channel Country.

IT And I think the partnership of those two women, Granny Brown actually took over and reared Mum up as a young girl and consequently all, Aunty and Aunty Tup, they're all the daughters of the Brown … they had a big family.

SF Yes.

IT And I believe that Grandma Brown saw no colour or anything and she just said, 'Well, Topsy, you're one of ours'. And everywhere, when we were in boarding school, we used to go and stay with the …

SF Mr and Mrs Brown in Charters Towers there.

IT Yeah. And Aunty Tup and ummm you know, we became as a family and I think she had a big influence on Mum. And she actually taught her how to cook and do a lot of things and we've always been friends and we've always classed her as our grandmother.

TF Do you think that kind of close relationship between black and white was unusual or was there a lot of that?

IT No, a lot of it, because you know when you're women in the bush, colour didn't come into it. I don't think so.

SF No, I don't think …

IT And ummm I believe that the companionship and the friendship and I believe … in some of my tapes that I … I'm still trying to write this book on my parents, on my Mum. Haven't done it yet, but … all the tapes that I interviewed, non-indigenous women, and Pat Fennell was actually on Roxborough a long time and Mark Fennell, and I said to Pat, I said, 'You know, what do you really think about Mum and how did you get to know her?' and she said to me, 'Isabel, when I was a young girl and I first married Pat,' her husband,

'and he brought me out in the desert here with a brand new baby, brand …', you know. She said, 'When I saw your mother, your mother just said, "Give me the baby, you go an rest",' and this was in the desert. She said, 'I'll never ever forget your mother,' she said, 'because I was …'. She was exhausted with just having this new baby in the desert, driving miles, no air-conditioning, nothing, and yet here was an Aboriginal woman at the end of the road ummm taking care, and I think this was the whole thing. There was that caring and nurturing that women do very well.

TF Yet it wasn't all so pretty, was it? There was at least one woman that … I seem to remember in that mining magazine article, there was at least one woman that treated your mother badly as well before she …?

IT Yes. Yes, that was ummm I think that was at Koorabulka when Mum was flogged with a … because she kept running away to the camp. Every station had an Aboriginal camp, basically, because that's where they were born and that's their home, and I think – I'm not quite sure …

SF Barkly.

IT Barkly.

SF Barkly or Lake Nash it was, one of those stations.

IT She was flogged with a thorn tree.

SF I don't know what you'd call it – Parkinsinia it was …

IT Yeah.

SF Yeah, with thorns anyway. She used to ummm …

IT Run away.

SF … run away and ahhh as a little girl ummm Mum didn't know, you know, anything and she wanted to go and play with the children but wasn't allowed to. She was being cared for and had to do the housework for these white managers and that and then when they'd go away to the races and that, they'd lock her in the pantry and get, ummm whether it be the ummm cowboy or whoever does the cleaning, to feed her through a little pigeonhole. And, yes. But …

IT That didn't sour …

SF That didn't sour her, didn't say a bad thing about anybody.

TF It's interesting, isn't it, like those two stories, and I'm not disbelieving either for one minute. They're two sides of the same coin. How do you resolve that kind of contradiction, if you like?

IT Well you can see the difference, I think, Trish, you know just looking, analysing it from my perspective now, that station manager obviously just didn't … because Mum could pass for, really, a very fair person, you know, and obviously that station manager really didn't want her to mix with the real blackfellas and learn the language and be a blackfella and that's something you can't do. I mean, you've got to come to terms … and I think Mum did come to terms with it but she didn't hate that woman. I mean, she eventually moved on to another place and ummm but she had enough experience in her from Grandma Brown and I think … I don't know if that came after or before. I think it was before, actually, so you know, after Grandma Brown's absolutely ummm affection, ummm you do let those nasty things go by. I mean, and Mum used to show us the marks on her back where the thorns were. She was flogged.

SF And she used to tell us, too, that ummm she used to go away and ride Shetland ponies as a little girl. There were six of them one day on one of the ummm Shetland ponies and ummm she was on the back and when she fell off, she had that big mark between her throat and sort of middle part where he kicked her, and that was all bruised and that. 'Course, and Mum could sit down and laugh about those things then, you know, to say she wasn't no angel, she was just a little girl growing up.

TF One of the things about race relations, after being out in the Channel Country for three or four weeks, finally struck me, and I'm interested what you make of this. It seemed to me that from what people were telling me out there, that certainly from the white perspective – and I don't know how this relates to Murris, being not racist out there was associated with just not seeing colour, almost not noticing somebody was Aboriginal. Whereas it seems to me that in the city, reconciliation agendas or non-racism is more associated with recognising and respecting differences. Can you make any sense of that?

IT Yeah well, reconciliation, I mean, that's one of the things, I mean, you just look at the photo with my Mum and Granny Brown. I mean, that's reconciliation, that it's … Well, it

wasn't fashionable, you know, you didn't have to go up and say, 'You're my friend,' and you know, 'I'm black and you're white,' and 'what have we got to bond?' I mean, there wasn't a need for that because that bonding was already there. And the bonding is through our kids and it doesn't matter what colour you are, you know, out in the bush the kids get together anyway. They didn't see a difference and nor did the men in the camps. They were there to do a job. They were there to be mates with each other. They had to get a job done. The women have to be in the stations on their own, so they have to come together. It's not an issue and that is very true, Trish, I think. When we were growing up, we didn't know, well I know, as the youngest of the family, there wasn't any racist connotation and I still say that, that reconciliation's a fashionable process now because we have to really work at something. Things aren't going right for us. Ummm and that is a political process. So when you're living in the bush and you're driving miles ahhh you know to do things or go in and get some things for the station and things like that, it's not a big deal because (a) we all drive the car, (b) we all mustered, we all ate the same food, we all, you know, that's towards my time, but even before that the old traditional people and the camps, they had to come to terms. But they didn't like coming in to eat …

SF No.

IT … in with the others. I mean, sometimes when you get us together, we'd like to stay on our own, but there are … What are you …?

SF Yeah, you've got like, on Glen Ormiston station there was only three women. That was our mother, Isabel and myself, and ummm you had three camps, all men. Then you had the big Aboriginal camp which was right down the back, walking distance, and you had the old ladies that … old Mary and Mary that used to do uhhhh come up and help our mother do the housework. But other than that, everybody was one big happy family. There was no alcohol on the station back in those days. The only time they had the alcohol there is at Christmas and once that was over, there was no alcohol on Glen Ormiston station whatsoever.

TF **So this is Betacam no. 67, it's still DAT tape 24, the DAT's on 36 minutes 9 seconds, and this is the second Betacam tape interviewing Isabel Tarrago and Shirley Finn at Isabel's house, 3 September 2000.**

Another part of relationship between black and white, certainly reading things like Dawn May, who's written about the history of Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry, talks lots about sexual relationships between black and white – a lot of it pretty ugly. She talks about a history of station gins and … but going back to the period that you're familiar with, how did things go?

IT Ummm on the station, we didn't have that much problem, I don't think on Glen Ormiston, but throughout the Channel Country you'd have ummm, you'd have people … you'd have big camps, for instance, in Boulia. We'd come in for the races, come in for the rodeos or whatever carnival you like ummm and a lot of people used to ummm talk about the managers from different stations going down to the blacks' camps, so to speak, just on dusk. They'd go down there to see one of the nice girls, fool around and probably stay there, and then just on sunrise you'd see them going. Ummm a lot of that happened and ahhh and when these girls had the babies and all that, weren't helped. They were forgotten. They had to rear the kids up to themselves and ahhh you know a lot of people don't know these things but there is a lot of people out there – managers probably, drovers, you know well-to-do men, that have been down that road, been to the blacks' camps just for the young girls.

TF And did that set up, then, a competition between the white wives and the black women in the camps, or was this more something that was when white men were out there single? Because I know, for instance, now some of the women, like the managers' wives would talk about bad blood, bad feelings between they and young women now working in the stock camps. I'm wondering how that influenced relationships between women, black and white.

IT A lot of the men were married men at the time. Ummm I think there was some ill-feeling there towards them but a lot of them, I think, just got on with their lives ummm and sort of forgot that it happened.

TF So it was just accepted. It was just part of the …?

IT Yeah, and I think, you know, what you're talking about, Trish, I think there is some part of the ummm women in the stations who really can't accept that their husbands did fool around and I guess that's something, you know, that you have to come to terms with and, yeah, it does leave a nasty feeling in your blood, I guess. I mean, it's one of those things

because most of these job camps never had the women other than … black women were very good stock, stockwomen, and they were actually helping ummm the family too, you know, because you must remember that in those days they never got paid and it was family basically getting together in groups. And some of the women did go out and help and ummm you know, like my mother, for instance, but it wasn't an instant there that she fooled around with the men and that but she was actually in a situation where she could have, could control the process, and well she was in a powerful position too because she was normally the cook. And, you know, when you're in these positions, you're in a powerful position like the cook. I mean, because if you didn't cook, I mean, no one would get fed and …

SF I believe that …

IT She had young girls working with her, our mother …

SF She used to bring them over to, from Dajarra …

IT Or Boulia.

SF From the camp.

IT From the camps and that and I mean …

SF She virtually ran the station while the manager was away. He'd go away ummm to the bores. A bore might break down. He'd be camped out there for a couple of days and she was left on her own at the station with nobody.

TF Where would the manager's wife be?

SF Well, he didn't have one.

IT He didn't have one.

SF He didn't have ummm he was a single bloke ummm and ummm …

IT And the companion … the wives, you know, managers start I don't know when, but the managers started getting married and coming on stations, you know. It was a fairly lonely lifestyle ummm and managers started to bring their wives on board then, which really did

impact on Aboriginal women because women were already at the stations, so the wives took over the jobs …

SF As cooks.

IT … as cooks, so there was, you know, not only ummm relationship processes sexually, there was a economic relationship that white women were taking over the role.

TF So Granny Brown, having been out there much earlier this century, you're saying would have been unusual, and that the standard practice of managers having wives came later?

IT Yeah.

SF I think, in the early part when Mother was growing up there was a lot of the older ones, the older managers and their wives that were there and then down the line ahhh you got the single ones, the young ones, who ummm have just taken over from the older managers ummm and they've married ahhh people like … people from Boulia and the manager now on Glen Ormiston ummm yeah, well they do everything. There's no need to have ummm Aboriginals out there working.

TF What you're talking about there, I think, is that the pastoral industry over the last five or six decades has come to employ fewer people.

SF Yes, that's right.

TF Do you want to talk about how did the pastoral industry shift over the last fifty years?

IT When we were on the stations, ummm they were dentured by an Act, you know. All the Aboriginal people that lived on stations were under an Aboriginal Act which is that that whole process of welfare, ah of money being sent in to your nearest police station, Boulia, Urandangie, whatever, and really those stations were built on labour, on you know free labour.

TF Now what's shifted that?

IT What shifted that was the equal opportunities of wages, equitable wages for everyone. And what shifted there was what you've just heard in the last couple of weeks, Malcolm Fraser give the memorial speech on Wavell Hill, the Goorinji elder. Now he was the man, the Goorinji elder, that changed the face of Aboriginal people working on properties, on

pastorals, and he challenged, because they were all … they all went on strike. So that history of Wavell Hill actually changed the face of pastoral employment, which meant that they had to pay Aboriginal people for their service. And that's what Malcolm Fraser was talking about. He still didn't realise that, you know, stations were under this process of Crown, you know, politician … oh, Crown what do you call them, Crown legislation. When that case came to fruition, it was evident that managers, these station managers, who own these stations, could not afford to pay all of us, you know. They could not afford, so what they did, they removed everyone '65 we packed the old red Dodge.

SF Yeah.

IT But we went up to Jimborella.

SF That's right, yes.

IT That's our new state place that we stayed and Arthur Price was there. An old station manager.

SF And Barrum Nathan.

IT And Barrum Nathan, so Barrum was an Aboriginal man and worked with our father and he sort of said … you know, because this was a shock to our family. Well my Mum and Dad worked thirty years and never got long service, you know, of all that. So we went to Jimborella, what, about six hours' drive or … it's on the other side of Roxborough. So we all arrived up there with our, just a truckload of things, and then my Mum and Dad stayed there but I think when that happened my father's heart just collapsed. I mean, he was a man that worked all these stations and when equal pay, they couldn't even look after him. Didn't even make an effort to look after my father and mother. Not even an effort. So we moved.

SF And from there we …

IT We went into the … she went in as a cook, that's what she learnt. As a cook, she took up all the hotels.

SF Hotels. She cooked in Mt Isa, ummm …

IT Boulia.

SF Yeah, Boulia.

IT Cloncurry.

SF All that, all over. Went to Mt Isa and that's where we sort of settled, there. We went to ummm Isabel from there she ummm …

IT I didn't go back to school.

SF … she ummm went to Batoni's chemist and worked in Batoni's chemist. Both of us worked in Mt Isa Mines in the mess and ummm …

IT '65 I think, wasn't it?

SF I think it was the sixties, yeah.

TF Going back, to understand this you've got to go back. Where was your mother's traditional country and where was your father's traditional country?

IT Glen Ormiston. They were born and bred on Glen Ormiston.

SF On Glen Ormiston station.

IT My father's down number six bore, down near Carlo, and my mother was born at Meetukka. So that's our traditional ground. So, you know …

SF Glen Ormiston is our home.

IT That's our home.

TF And did your parents participate in any way in traditional ceremonies associated with that country?

IT Oh, yeah. They were the leading … My mother was the leading ceremony singer and my father was a senior law man.

TF So where was your parents' traditional country? Your Mum and your Dad?

IT Glen Ormiston station. Ummm my father is born number 6 bore, that's down near the Carlo end of Glen Ormiston ummm where all the is. That's our dreaming. And my mother at …

SF Meetukka.

IT … Meetukka. Old Glen Ormiston. So where Glen Ormiston's sitting now, that's the new Glen Ormiston.

SF Because they had a big Aboriginal camp there.

TF And did your parents, either of them, participate in traditional responsibilities for that Glen Ormiston land?

IT Oh, yeah. Very, very … my father was a senior law man. Ummm my mother was a ceremonial woman who ummm did all the songs and danced and … yeah, we're from very, very high law people and all our family, my Dad's four other brothers, all law men, and ummm …

SF Well respected.

IT … well respected.

TF So how did they manage to combine those traditional responsibilities with their work on Glen Ormiston?

IT Well, they worked it ummm and these are all family in the camp. I mean they were all law men in the camp. This is how my father had his ummm mustering camp. He had all the law people and that there. They did all their station work and when the season finished they all went and did ceremony. And they were already there, you know, they were in the bush. They could just move and gather there for ceremonies and that. We've been, Shirley and I have been to a big ceremony there.

SF Big dances when we used to go up to Jimborella for ummm Christmas ummm not often we used to go away because ummm at Christmas time on the station, one year all the ringers and that, they'd go away to their homes because you had jackaroos there who'd come from Sydney, Brisbane ummm that couldn't even ride a horse, and Dad, our father used to teach them shoeing, mustering ahhh getting to know the country. And many a time you'd get

jackaroos out there that would go off on their own, get lost and ahhh you wouldn't be able to find them and Dad would go out and find them and they'll tell him, 'Oh yes, we've killed a cow, ate the raw meat, killed something else, ate that raw'. Had no matches or anything like that. Then, of course, you couldn't light fires either because it'd … sometimes there we'd ummm it wouldn't rain and you'd have bushfires and everything like that. But yeah, we'd go down the big camp, watch the ceremonies down there, and ahhh we'd always … the old ladies would walk us half way because it was really dark. They wouldn't let us go on our own.

TF What you're saying is there'd be times of the year when the pastoral industry didn't need the labour?

IT Yeah. It stopped on certain areas because you had to have time for the cattle to fatten up, so you don't, you know, you don't muster all year round and certain times of the year, you know, cattle would just be on grazing and everyone would just leave and just, you know, get your break, have a break.

TF Dawn May has had instances where stations have actually given Aboriginal people big carts to go off for ceremonies. Did you ever hear anything like that?

IT No, we had the sulky. We had our own sulky.

SF Yeah, we had our own big wagon.

IT And that dray, it's there at Glen Ormiston. It's out the front. That's my father's …

SF Big wagon.

IT … big wagon out the front.

TF So how would they have bought that without cash wages?

IT That was ummm … this was that exchange program that I call in the bush. And Dad used to do a lot of work for a lot of managers and people like Sandy Anderson, his father, old Bill Anderson, wasn't it?

SF Billy Anderson.

IT Billy Anderson who owned Tobermory, now Sandy would confirm that. Like Bill would say to Dad, send word over to Dad to say, 'Come in, we need some help with all these cattle,' and he'd go in and, see, people like that would give. Dad had his own, you know, own horses, his own stock, and ummm I mean I don't know where the sulky came from but I'd imagine that it was given to him ummm in exchange of him doing some sort of work for them. Because they weren't allowed to pay him.

SF See with that wagon, big wagon they had, was a ummm he used that for brumby shooting and they were both, Mother and Father were both drovers as well. So that was a way of getting around because they didn't have cars.

TF When you said your mother was a significant … I don't know whether you used the expression 'law woman', but you said … what did she have particular responsibility about? I'm wanting you really to just explain about

IT Well, her significance, my Mum is from … she's a rainmaker and that's her dreaming and she started the ceremonial songs. Someone has to start them, so the ceremonial song is your first place of entry, and that's an important process because you really have to do a lot of work for, you know, the songs and these are ceremony songs so it's only heard for ceremony and you've got to know a repertoire of songs. And our mother could just, you know, she spoke five languages, so she had such a ummm an intellect of language and yet she couldn't write English. I mean, that's irrelevant. But this, you know, woman was the pinnacle for any ceremony.

TF And she had responsibility, was it

IT No, that's my mother's father.

TF Right, what is

IT Pituri is a narcotic drug. That's in the white terms of reference because Pam Watson told me. I didn't know that. Pituri is a narcotic drug but pituri is also a ceremony drug and it's my grandmother … my father's mother's dreaming, and it is our dreaming now, and we are the holders of that law. And I know for a fact that people do go down and try and cut . When we last went down to the place, there was nothing harvest because no one's using it now ummm and I know Pam went down there to try and get the seeds to

try and propagate it so, you know, it can be grown out of the area, but it just didn't survive. So it must need that whole sand dune, you know …

SF Sand hills.

IT Sand hills to grow but it also needs a harvest. We're not doing that ceremony any longer. Shirley and I have got the song. My mother sang my grandmother's songs. We've got it on tape. We know the songs. It's on tape, recorded, so you know. The people can't claim that area because that's our area and it's the significance of that.

TF The Georgina River was very important to the pastoral industry but could you explain. It had significance too for the trade in pituri didn't it?

IT Oh yes. Pituri was traded across traditional boundaries and in our ceremony, we have two dreamings - and the . a dog and the dog actually carries the in its mouth and it travels the sand dunes right up to Lawn Hills. And that's where that dreaming track goes. It goes along the sand, the old Simpson Desert rabbit fence, right along the sand dunes, right up to the Lawn Hills National Park, and the significance of that is dreaming pathways. Now for the white people, the Georgina never dries. It's always a water that passes through there and it runs into the Mulligan, it runs into many other, Diamantina, many other rivers that it goes into but it's a significant place for pastoralists because it's always the watering hole for their stock. But it was also significant for us because it was our survival. We travelled the Georgina to do our ceremonies and ummm it's that, you know, where's there's water there's food. So it is a pathway of two cultures.

TF So white and black have valued the same places.

IT Yeah, for different reasons. And once the pastoralist takes the reason that their stock is more important to human, well then that's where the rivalry starts. But it hasn't because we've all used it and I think we can still use it if we understand our terminology of how do we learn to handle the landscape in which we live in. Because that's the fundamental reason why pastoralists, in our time, got on so well. Because they could understand the reason. When our family wanted to go and do their ceremonies and be very proud Aboriginal traditional people, we were allowed to do it but it's when someone says you can't do that is when they overstep the mark and says that my, you know, the white culture is more superior than the black. It's when we get into trouble.

TF The picture I'm getting in my head, and I'm interested whether you agree with this, is we're not talking progress here, we're talking with complex mixture, like when your parents were working on Glen Ormiston they were under this horrific Act, they weren't getting cash wages, somebody could hit your mother with a bough switch or whatever, and yet on the other hand, they were living on their traditional country. Now, there's wages, there's legal rights or whatever, and yet you two don't go to Glen Ormiston.

IT No.

TF How do you understand that passage of history, positive and negative?

IT With sadness, I think, but it … the thing that really helped us was that they allowed ummm like the company stakeholders, or shareholders … Glen Ormiston's shareholders actually allowed, because Bill Fraser was on the managing board of directors then and I said to Bill, 'We've got to take …' well Mum actually told Bill. Mum knew Bill very well because Mum actually gave Bill the history, you know, he's a young fellow ummm that didn't know much history of the stations and Mum said to Bill, 'You make sure my ashes go back home, Bill,' and he said, 'Topsy, I'll always do that'. So that's when we went, when Mum died. I think that was ummm something that allowing her ashes to go back to her birthplace was a very significant ummm process for us, but even for her. But I think our, you know, with the new managers and that, you can't go back. They can't go back into that history because they don't know it, they didn't live it, they don't know it. And I don't even know if it was safe for them, you know, the new managers. But ummm …

SIDE B

TF Let's go back a bit. Who owns Glen Ormiston? Legally owned, leaving aside traditional owners. But when you were kids, who owned Glen Ormiston?

IT Mrs Fraser from Muldoolin owned Glen Ormiston, owned it. So that's where the Fraser family ummm but Bill senior, because he was the, he was one of the elders.

SF Yeah, I think it was Collins and White.

IT Who they married into.

SF Yes.

IT That reign of ummm will give you the history.

SF Yes it was Collins and White Company but then it was broken down into a pastoral …

TF NAPCO took it over, I think, didn't they?

SF Yes, but it …

IT Yes, but that's after she died. Mrs Fraser owned it. In her will she said never to remove the blacks from here. They are always to have a place in their, Glen Ormiston, because I think that she realised way back that, you know, when somehow through that whole history of families when they bought it, and when, I think when she died – she was killed at Muldoolin just down here near Beaudesert in a car crash – not long after that, I think they kept it on for a while but then they sold it and shareholders took over. I don't know the history all that much.

TF She was a relative of Malcolm?

IT Yeah, she was Malcolm Fraser's aunty and that's how Malcolm came out to Glen Ormiston all the time because Mother kept saying, you know, when Malcolm was Prime Minister ummm …

SF He was only a young fellow then.

IT Yeah, when he came out.

SF Actually I didn't know that until I read it in the book.

IT Yeah. Well Mum used to show off with him because I used to work in Foreign Affairs in Canberra and I said ummm … he'd say, 'Bring your mother around,' because he was Prime Minister, and she'd go to Parliament House and he'd be showing off like a, you know, prized peacock in the House, at Parliament House in Canberra, and he'd always acknowledge Mum. And he took her to, you know, the very posh dinner place up there, Parliament House dinner, you know, where they have the … Mum would be welcome and see one of the things, Trish, when Aboriginal women looked after these young charge kids, young kids, they spoke language too. There's another friend of mine that, who's the major of Burketown Shire Council, she had an Aboriginal woman working. All of her kids speak so it's nothing unusual for the young white kids to come out and

talk language with all of us, because they weren't ostracised, you know, they were embraced, and I think Malcolm felt very, very ummm at home with my mother because he was always very fond of her and so did Bob Katter senior. Mother looked after his kids and, you know, Footes from Mt Isa Mines, Batoni. These are all the people …

SF Tony, Tony McGrady.

IT Not Tony, we didn't have Tony McGrady.

SF Oh not out there but she worked with him in Mt Isa.

IT Yeah, she worked in Mt Isa but didn't look after his kids. But old Bob Katter senior …

TF So how was it, if Malcolm Fraser's aunt has said the Aboriginal people are always to stay here. That wasn't what happened.

IT I don't know, Trish. That's what my Mum told me and I think, in the end, you know, the Fraser family ummm I mean these stations are so huge and so big and I guess, you know, they've got a business enterprise to think about and it's quite hard to maintain the stations as they were and, you know, the beef I think too, at that time, that things … the dynamics just changed. I mean, I wasn't very interested and I don't suppose Shirley and those, we all went our different ways.

SF And I think, too, you have ummm ummm the old station manager, old Martin Hayward, at that time, when he left he knew all the Aboriginals like the people in the camps, they moved away. Ummm everything sort of changed with new managers and the way they managed things. Helicopters took over. Motorbikes took over. There was no need ummm for the Aboriginal stockmen, or any stockmen. Maybe just the odd jackaroo who wants to come out and learn how to ride a horse, you know.

TF So the pastoral industry came to need much less labour in total?

SF Yes, I think so.

IT I think you find that everywhere. But it was very sad, Trish, that, you know, our parents couldn't even get long service and …

SF Yeah, Dad worked there thirty years Mum was the cook. Our mother was the cook for twenty-eight years.

IT And you have got that and, you know, that's what I keep saying to Shirley that even our sister Bessie, I mean you know you don't hear much of us talk about Bessie because she was already gone …

SF Yes, she was …

IT … and moved on into another station. She was at Roxborough with Mary Robbins …

SF Mary and Bill Robbins.

IT … and then moved into …

SF Then after they left there, she went to Cloncurry.

IT … Cloncurry. You know, so she had another life.

SF And our brother, he – George – he went, he lived in Boulia because he was one of the first Aboriginal jockeys ummm to do the country. He never rode metropolitan or anything like that. He was out in Boulia, Dajarra, riding horses there.

TF And you said, Shirley, that you went off to boarding school when you were little but you ended up doing stock work as well. How did that work?

SF Well, I used to … when we used to go, went to boarding school, I'd go home during Christmas and ummm help Mum in the house doing odd jobs and that for pocket money and things and ummm we used to just … every time Christmas came, we'd just go horse riding, you know, mustering cattle with Dad and things like that.

TF So what year would we be talking now? Approximately.

SF Probably back in the fifties. Fifties and sixties.

TF Was this riding just for pleasure or was it part of the work of the property?

SF Pleasure and part of the work ummm and helping Mother ummm in, because she was the cook. She was the only woman other than the camp that ummm was in charge of the station and ummm to help her out and … because in those days you didn't have washing machines and it was a big boiler that you put all the clothes in, stoke the fire up and you'd starch everything. You'd starch sheets and all those years they weren't coloured sheets, they were white sheets and, you know, in the red dust you'd be racing around trying to shut

the house up to stop the dust from getting in. But, yes, I'd help Mother on the station many times at Christmas time. But then, of course, we'd only come home at Christmas time. We wouldn't come home three times a year.

TF Were you paid for that work?

SF Yes, a little pocket money. We'd get … that would be our Christmas … we'd go into town then and buy ummm our Christmas, do our Christmas shopping.

TF And how was it, you were at private schools, that obviously took cash. Where did the money for your education come from?

SF Mum and Dad worked.

IT And then we got …

TF So this is Betacam tape 68, it's still DAT tape 24 and we're on 1 hour 11 minutes and 7 seconds. This is the third Betacam of an interview with Isabel Tarrago, nee Hanson, and Shirley Finn, nee Hanson, and we're at Isabel's house.

So how was it, given that your parents didn't get any cash except what went to the policeman, how was it that you two went to private schools? Because that would have cost dough.

IT Well, I often said this to Shirley too. It's a mystery. I really don't know the answer, Trish, but I tell you what, there's more to it. My brother and my sister went to Brisbane Grammar School and that's the most elitist school you could possibly go to and I think, from when we were talking, that my sister was the first Aboriginal girl ever to go to Grammar School, and my brother. So all of us went to boarding schools. So somehow, with … I don't know. I can't answer it. Our parents never told us. They wanted us to have the best education that they could possibly give us. They said, and it was very clear, we had to live in the white man's world now and you had to use the tools that they use. And, you know, our father was a very ummm very astute man, and our mother, very hard-working, and they did have, you know, they had a lot of friends in the pastoral industry, a lot of friends. So I don't know. I mean, we were there, we were all educated, we were very well educated. We've all had jobs. Never unemployed.

TF Do you think it might have been that the fees were paid … because the station owners couldn't have paid your parents without upsetting other station owners, could they? Do you think it might have been the station owners paying your fees? What do you think? Where do you think the dough came from Shirley?

IT Collins and White? I don't know.

SF I really don't know. I think it's just a mystery, you know. It's hard to say.

IT One would hope that it is remuneration for the hard work that our family did.

SF That they did on the stations.

IT And I think, if that's the case, then we're pretty happy with that, you know, because four kids got highly educated out of a process where education was not the flavour of the month, you know, because we weren't really into all that but …

TF And why were you two educated in Charters Towers, whereas your elder brother and sister came to Brisbane, do you think?

SF I first went to … first of all, before we were sent away to school, we were taught correspondence and then, because Mum couldn't read or write but managed to keep us sitting at the table and did a bit of correspondence at the beginning, and I think it just got sort of hard for her and ummm with the help of the managers and ummm I think just sending us away was a lot easier. But, of course, then I went at six years old but Isabel didn't go until she was …

IT Five.

SF … oh, yeah. Probably seven, I think, Isabel started.

TF But why Charters Towers?

IT Oh, because it was closer, because Brisbane was really a bit hard. Because Mum used to like bringing us back and I think she didn't like … well, the train, you know, the station manager used to drive us into Dajarra and we'd get the train together. I think she enjoyed that, the train ride, because she actually was able to take us back to the school and settle us in and then do her other thing, because she was a great gardener, and she enjoyed … because the train, I know sometimes when she'd go home she'd have all these plants, all

the cuttings and everything, people used to give her. But I think because our brother and sister went away to Charters Towers, it was a bit hard for her. Ummm Brisbane.

TF You said when I interviewed you before that you thought it was because Granny Brown was in Charters Towers.

IT Yes, she was.

TF That's probably what I'm fishing for.

IT Yeah, yeah. Granny was. Yes.

SF She lived in Charters Towers, old Grandma Brown. But also the climate …

IT Yeah.

SF … too, probably, and a lot of ummm, a lot of kids from Boulia and the stations went to Charters Towers as well, because you've got ummm old Mr Katter's sons. They both went to Mt Carmel College and I think, you know, they were from Cloncurry. I think it was just a close-knit where others were going.

IT Yeah. And, yeah, I think Granny Brown had a big influence because we used to go there for weekends and …

SF Yeah, and she'd come down to see her and, yeah, and you know take us out for the weekend.

IT Aunty Yeah, and Uncle Doug, that's the other eldest daughter.

TF I went to boarding school at eleven and I bawled my eyes out for three months but I can't imagine doing it at five. Did you feel cut off from your parents and the land, or did you accept it?

IT Well because Shirley was there, I was all right. I had an elder sister at the school so I felt comfortable but I think when she left it got, you know, it got a bit hard for me too, because it's ummm you're on your own and then you just don't get home or go anywhere, and I think one stage there I got so ummm anxious that I think Shirley and Mum had to come to Charters Towers and live for six months, which I remember.

SF Yes.

IT Because I just fretted so badly.

TF You said that your Mum didn't read and write English but spoke five Aboriginal languages and was highly educated in traditional ways, do you think there's a way that you got a white education at the expense of an Aboriginal one, or do you feel like you managed both bits? Do you know what I'm saying?

IT Yeah, I know what you're saying. Ummm they were very strong traditional teachers. We, I mean, this façade that you've got in front of you now, it's very traditional. My mother spoke, and we learned a lot. Ummm we can't practise it here but still today our aunties and that come from Boorooloola. At they came down and they just ceremony and that in the house and we can, we can move into cultures very comfortably. Because we don't speak the language all the time, but if you're sitting around long enough, it comes back. Not as fluent. It'll come back because we learnt it as small kids, small, and you don't forget that. But, yes, I regret that I can't sit down and speak a fluent language and ummm that's a compromise, I think Trish, we had to do because that's what my father was talking about. We have to live in the white man's world now and he always said you've got to be twice as better than them. And we've always been like that, you know, you have to strive but that didn't sacrifice our traditional values because I think Avalina is very, very instilled and Shirley's young girl, Jackie. I mean there's a choice there as well because there's so much that you have to hang on to and it is very difficult because you've got to step in two worlds.

TF Clearly your parents were both skilled at stepping across those two worlds.

IT Mmmm.

SF Yes, that's right.

TF One argument could say you two are doing it just with a different balance and I'm interested in that.

IT And I do regret, but I do think that Shirley and I are heading back home. I mean, we're just down here, and I always say I'm down here on someone else's ground. I don't feel comfortable, Trish. I need to go home where my spirit and my soul and my beliefs are stronger. And I think that's coming because … it's taken us a long time but you don't have a choice in your process, I think, if you really want to get somewhere today. You have to

really educate your kids and yeah, but I think that I can learn the language like my Mum and Dad. You know, I can get back there because my family is still speaking it. We haven't lost it. It's still, ceremonies are going in the … you know, women's and men's ceremonies are going, it's just that we haven't attended. But they don't forget us. Ummm but you still can gain it. It's when it's lost, completely demolished, that you can't go back to anything, but I guess that's what keeps us going because we're very strong black women.

TF I'd like to hear now, from each of you separately, the story of your family leaving Glen Ormiston. What you remember, what stage you were at in your life, what you remember hearing. And we talked a bit about it before but I think it's important. So Isabel, you first. How did your family come to leave Glen Ormiston?

IT Well I believe that ummm when Martin Hayward, the manager, brought in a woman by the name of Mary Robbins to take over the role of my mother, my mother politely said to Martin, who had been with my Mum for a long time, ummm 'That's it'. She saw the writing on the wall.

SF Yes, that was virtually it. Ummm you, Mary Robbins came ummm, 'Topsy you take a holiday now, I'll do the cooking' and Mum turned around and said, 'I'll be taking an extended holiday' and we packed the truck up and away we went. They never looked back.

TF Did you know at the time? I've got goose bumps. Did you know at the time that this was a really significant event?

SF Well, I thought ummm …

IT I was too young.

SF After cooking on a station for twenty-eight years ummm and running the station when the manager was away that a woman should come in and say to the person, you know, 'You take a holiday' and, as Mum felt then, she wasn't wanted.

TF And why wasn't she wanted? Why do you think that happened?

IT Well, there was a relationship building with this manager who didn't have a wife and this woman who left her husband. I mean, don't forget that we knew the background history –

well not me – but my family knew the background history because this woman was the woman that took my elder sister away in Roxborough and left her in Cloncurry, so there was no love lost with my mother and her, because she wanted to come back to a station life and Martin, I thought, did a very dishonest thing there and just said, 'Well, Topsy, if that's the case …'

SF 'And you take a holiday.'

IT Yeah. And it also, it didn't even get … it wasn't only my mother, it was my father who really had never lived in a city, whereas my Mum was a very flexible person, very flexible woman. But my Dad was never. He lived all his life on a cattle property and the minute we brought him into a town situation, he just crumbled. So they really destroyed ummm a life ummm very quickly.

TF So did your Dad … I mean, Mary Robbins was coming to take your mother's job but did your Dad, would he have still had a job?

SF He went back. He left with us ummm and then he went back to Glen Ormiston but could not work there under the conditions, whatever those conditions were. Ummm and he came to us, he came back to Mt Isa to us there, and then he went to a place called Marquar Station and …

IT Uncle Davey Brown.

SF Dave Brown.

IT Granny's …

SF That's one of the sons. And ummm he worked there right up until he died.

TF So in the end for your family, then, do you think it was more … how did the equal pay story relate to the Mary Robbins thing, do you know?

IT Didn't come into it. Didn't come into it. Ummm I would say, you know, Martin She ended up with, he ended up with her eventually when he retired in Charters Towers, and he was a great friend of, you know, our Mum's.

SF Yeah, he was a great friend of the family.

IT Family. Great friend. But, I mean, they didn't want to do anything. I mean, you could have probably taken it further but what's the point? Ummm it was one of those things that …

TF And all the Aboriginal people in the camp at Glen Ormiston?

SF They had gone. They had gone prior to that. They were just ahhh some of them were just moving away and not coming back. Eventually there was no camp at all and you only had the Aboriginal workers ummm in the ummm in the camp there – the ringers ummm all the stockmen.

TF And what was driving that process from the Aboriginal end, do you think? Why …

IT Why me?

TF Were they being made less comfortable or …?

IT Yeah, equal pay. They would have had to cater, under the Human Rights, from the Wavell Hill, under Human Rights and Protection on equal pay, they would have had to, you know, either organise social security … it was just a minefield. So there was a lot of connotations to keeping Aboriginals on properties. They would have had to feed them and administrator, you know, the money and do all that sort of thing. So it became such a minefield. It was a lot easier under the Act. The station, you know, the police stations could manage that but under real issues, it was best to have any, you know don't have any of them there. And I think that made a big change. The dynamics changed ummm for Aboriginal people and we started, I guess, you know, started talking about how indigenous people made the pastoral industry because there's a big gap between ummm what they were paid in ration, and I think some got paid as a wage, but not many. I think if there was an evaluation done around the ridges, you know around the communities now, to see exactly how many people did get it, there'd be very few.

TF Well I remember in a book by Ruby she talked about being paid as a drover but then told that when she was on stations she mustn't let the station Murris know she was paid or it would create trouble so you can get the sense of …

SF Yeah.

TF … a lot of subterranean stuff.

SF Yeah, yeah.

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

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

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

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

SF No, I don't think you were.

IT Yeah, I remember packing that red Ford.

SF Oh, okay.

IT The old truck.

SF Yeah, the red truck. Yes.

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

SF Big swimming hole.

IT Big swimming hole. We had big fun because that's where all the corroborees, ceremonies, were and I had a ball because see all the women used to look after me and I could just have … it was just paradise for me. And I thought, 'Oh, we're going up' and all I was worried about was my old dog. The old black dog.

SF Yes.

IT I can't even remember her name now.

SF Poossum.

IT Possum.

SF Poossum.

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

SF It was for real.

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

SF Yeah, it was an old shop front.

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

SF Australian Hotel.

IT … hotel.

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

IT We lived in Dorothy Street then.

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

IT Well you got married in Mt Isa.

SF Yeah, got married in Mt Isa.

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

SF Went to Winton to live.

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

SF Yes.

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

SF No, you were in … you were in Sydney at the … we'd left. We had all ummm all left. Mum had gone to ummm Townsville to live, Isabel had gone back to ummm Sydney but it was ummm really very funny because ummm Mary Robbins, who was the partner of Martin, his daughter came up, Heather Mills. Heather and John. And ummm they were university students, or teachers, at the time and ummm I still don't know how it ever happened because Isabel was only 16 at the time when she left with Heather and John to Sydney and ummm she ended up working down there ahhh became very good friends with ummm Yvonne Cawley, Goolagong Cawley, ummm and I went and lived at Winton. And I had got a phone call, then, to say a Mr Hanson had passed away. Then I thought, 'Oh, it must have been a brother' but when I had rung Mum, she had said it was Dad who ummm he always ummm said that if he ever passed away, he wanted to do it riding horses and mustering cattle and we had sent a telegram to Isabel. Isabel flew up to Townsville. We drove from Winton across to Townsville and ummm he had passed away mustering horses and ummm he must have got a pain in the chest and got off his horse and lied down under a tree with his hat and boots on, and the horse was tied up under a tree. They didn't find him, I think, for three days.

TF So your Dad did not last long after leaving Glen Ormiston.

SF No.

TF And how about your Mum? Can you just sketch briefly your mother's life from then till she died.

IT Oh well, she ended up with … she was with Shirley and the kids because that basically kept her going.

SF Kept her going with the three children.

IT Yeah, so ummm …

SF And then we moved. Isabel was still in Sydney at the time and I moved down here and virtually Mother was between Brisbane, Mt Isa and Sydney, and she was just probably a Madame Butterfly, fluttering here, there and everywhere.

IT And enjoying it.

TF She continued to cook in Mt Isa?

IT Yeah, and in Sydney, and here. I mean, she worked for the …

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

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

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

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

IT Yes, she sort of said to Bill that she wanted to go back home. She said, 'Don't ever bury her in someone else's country because she'll come back and haunt us' and she died, it'd be twelve years last Thursday, 31 August. In '88 she died and ummm ummm Shirley's eldest girl Avalina, Ray my husband and myself took her ashes back to Glen Ormiston and ummm along the way, you know, we stopped and told everyone and they were pleased that, you know, she had her wish to go back there. It wasn't a very … going back to Glen Ormiston, we hadn't gone back there for so long and I thought, 'Oh, well, this is not … we can come back and speak to the manager' and that, and Bill Fraser, Mrs Fraser's son, organised everything so we didn't have to do a thing and I didn't even know … I knew the managers were there but he organised everything and said, 'That's fine'. And the board of directors, obviously, I don't know, the word didn't get through or something, so we arrived at the station, the homestead, and we wanted to get some water and they just didn't want to know us, really, and we said, 'Well, we're taking Topsy's ashes back to Lake …

SF Wanditta.

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

SF Acknowledge.

IT … acknowledgement has to happen.

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

TF Did you know the managers that were there?

IT No. I never heard of them.

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

IT The ones now?

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

IT Yes, the new ones.

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

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

SF

IT … anyone that came to the station …

SF Was welcome.

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

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

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

TF Was it Liz Debney and Mal?

IT Yeah, Liz and Mal Debney. And, I mean, they were just so young and so, you know, I thought, wouldn't have known much of our history anyway. But, you know, not even to be offered a cuppa tea, which is a … it's a recipe of entry. It's a bush entry and no matter who you are, and I just thought, 'Oh, well, I got a message'. A very distant thing. And I thought, 'Well …'. I just said to Ray, 'Get the water, let's go. We'll have a cuppa tea down the road'. So it was very sad but I had a feeling.

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

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

SF You were made welcome.

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

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

IT I don't know whether … I think I just said to them, you know, that my mother and father made this station and left it at that and I didn't really feel like engaging because I thought if you can't do it from the bottom of your heart, in respect ummm, well there's nothing I can do. And I really didn't feel like engaging with them after that so it left a pretty well ummm sour feeling in my mouth because that's not how you treat people in the bush. It doesn't matter that I happen to be Aboriginal. You just don't treat people like that in the bush. That whole ummm management of the old style has gone forever and I said to Bill when I came back, and he said, 'Well, there's nothing … what can I do?' He was sorry but he did his job. Bill actually did his job to get my mother's ashes back, and that was it.

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

IT At Wanditta.

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

TF *You Can't Make it Rain*.

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

TF They didn't talk to Aboriginal people?

IT Aboriginal people.

SF No.

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

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

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

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

About *You Can't Make it Rain*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SF Yeah.

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

SF What will happen now.

IT … what will happen. But I'm hoping that … these managers need to really understand, and I'm quite frank on that, they need to understand that they are only managers. They are only managers of a station that is caring for a station that has been built upon our family and I think we'll go down fighting to reinstore ummm the position of our parents because

they really made that station. And we need to have that acknowledgement, not for us but for what our parents did.

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

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

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

SF Pat and Mark Fennell?

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

SF No, certainly not.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

END OF INTERVIEW