

## INTERVIEW WITH NARELLE & BRONWEN MORRISH

19 June 2000

Timecode refers to tape 43\_BC\_SP

### Topics in Bold

TF = Trish NM = Narelle BM = Bronwen JH = Julie Hornsey & BOB

TF Um yes. **This is Tape No. 42 (43). It's still DAT Tape 16, the DAT's on 1210 and um we're with Narelle and Bronwen Morrish out on their property at Flooden Hills, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2000. And this is the second video tape. 43\_BC\_SP**

JH OK.

TF OK. So let's talk about education then. What um what – first tell me what your philosophy of education – what's your philosophy of education was for your daughter Narelle, and then let's talk about how you kind of put that into practice.

NM 19:02:00:00 Well I, I guess for Bob and I with our backgrounds, we really wanted the best for her. That, that we could offer. And um so early on, she seemed a fairly bright eyed bushy-tailed kid. Um and she was exposed to books. Um we decided that because of her remote location, obviously distance education was the essential ingredient there to have her educated. And um was just merely a matter of contacting the school, the Distance Ed school in Longreach, to enrol her in pre-school and now she's doing Year 10 with them. And she's enjoyed it.

TF So tell me your memories Bronwen. From what are your earliest memories around education?

BM 19:02:59:10 One of the earliest was with um the first school radio and I can remember trying to rig it up um my parents trying to get it sorted on the, I think it was on the – Mum's work car. Just putting it up and seeing if we could hear through all the static. And then another one was later when we used the school caravan um just a small caravan, just put the radio in there. And I can remember um there was a steer or a bull it might have been, shoving the caravan about so it was rocking all about during an air lesson. So I called into the teacher and I said um – I've forgotten her name but it could've been – yeah, but Miss Lilly, there's a bull rocking the caravan and she said that's very nice.

NM That's nice dear.

BM Obviously couldn't hear so –

NM But that was extra curricular so –

BM Yeah.

NM That wasn't the actual school lesson.

BM No. But, yeah – I quite enjoyed it.

TF How did you combine working – like we were just watching the Groves ? today and we were kind of thinking, God, how does Julie keep her daughter going with schooling whilst also doing all the political work and so on? So how did you balance that?

NM **Education**

19:04:14:20 Well especially – um, it be – it becomes stressful at times, trying to juggle it. Because I guess I really want the best for Bronwen. She's um would like to go to uni and, and um complete her education and um so I try not to rip her off whilst try – whilst trying to juggle everything else. But somehow, we've, we appear to have got away with it OK. It's a lot of effort but I think most parents manage to.

TF Do you feel Bronwen that your education has been as much about the conversations you've overheard from your parents and the meetings you've observed and that sort of informal education, as, as formal, or, or – you know, I guess what I'm asking is, you've probably been incorporated into adult lives - ?

BM Definitely.

TF Much more than much kids. I want to know how that feels, positively and negatively.

BM 19:05:15:12 Well, it's good because you can just sit there and listen and just um sometimes take part and just listen to say scientists and find out that way.

TF When you say listen –

NM and .....

TF To scientists, explain that.

BM 19:05:32:10 Um there's been some scientists coming out and researching the wet lands in um Coopers Creek and so sometimes on Springfield so, a few times I've got ahead with the school work and joined them and had quite a bit of fun with that.

TF So how would you define kind of speaking of wet lands, how would you two define – what is the Channel Country? Where does it begin and end? Yeah, I'd like to start with you Bronwen. Where does the Channel Country begin and end –

BM Mmm.

TF And, and what does it mean to you as a, as a land system?

BM Yeah.

NM She can speak much better on this than I can. Thanks Bron.

BM 19:06:12:20 I'm not quite sure about the boundaries of the Channel Country but I think just as far as the Cooper Channels go and like out around Kyabra Creek and along the main Cooper Channels it goes um through Queensland and South Australia. But um yeah, just where the Channel is and the surrounding land.

TF And what does it –

BM And where it ..... out.

TF What does it mean as an eco system? Like what does, what does the Channel Country mean for the humans that live in and around it?

BM 19:06:45:10 It's – the word is basically what you're living on um without the water, without the rain um in the Cooper Channels. And when it floods, that's what you base the sheep and cattle on. And that's how they live.

TF Narelle, what would you add to that?

NM 19:07:02:06 Oh and the wildlife – the birds. Without the water there's none of that ..... In fact, it's very arid out here and um people really rely on that water so – otherwise there certainly wouldn't be settlements. If it, if for some reason it was irrigated and, and the creeks – the Cooper dried up –

BM Suddenly a lot of people would lose their way of life and -

NM And at the moment there – wonderful bird life um – at, on Kyabra Creek where we are at Springfield, there are about 200 pelicans at the moment and cormorants and just wonderful – brolgas. It's just a picture to watch.

BM 19:08:00:04 And during the, during the wet season – oh, during the rain near Christmas up here, we had um I'd say about 500 ibis. Straw necked ibis. That was really interesting to see them. They were coming for the grasshoppers.

TF So what happens in the nine years when they're not here? Like does that really change your farming practices? I guess Narelle this is one for you.

NM 19:08:23:20 Well it does. Um with, with the stock because – I guess that's why we, with the help of the Bank, bought here. Um, because we had agisted for a number of years and often that wasn't even in Queensland and that's a lot of yeah, a lot of effort and um and I guess we thought by getting the other property, because Springfield is barely a living block, um that having this then we wouldn't have to agist, but last year um by um August, September, Springfield was totally de-stocked.

BM Mmm.

NM 19:09:06:02 And we also had to send cattle from here on agistment so – but hopefully that won't repeat itself too often.

TF So is what you're saying that land here has got like a long cycle to it and that if you, and that they're a different kind of land, like the sand hill country or the actual Channel Country? So you thought you'd buy two different kinds of land to balance things out?

NM No, just, just the fact that it was more, more land.

BM Mmm.

NM To, to have the stock on.

BM Sort of spread the risk. If one place was totally dry, then the other might, somewhere on the other place might have rain and good feed.

TF So Bronwen, it's my perception that in one child families, often that child gets – regardless of whether they're doing School of the Air - gets caught into kind of adult discussions and you know, is almost like a mini-adult. I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean in a positive way –

BM Mmm.

TF Do you feel that you've been, like for how long do you think you've been aware of discussions around land and the way it's used in your family?

BM I think just about from when I was born. Like my –

TF Give me examples.

BM **Inter-generational**

19:10:19:08 Well, like during the drought, I wouldn't be sent off to another room just because like, say my parents were discussing how the stock were dying and that they were either going to have to agist or sell them and, and during the good times who to, like when we're mustering. Discussions about that. I'm not sort of sent away. It's quite good.

TF So have you grown up doing a lot of stock work?

BM **Correspondence**

Um actually with the, with the school work, I guess my parents have - sort of school work comes first and then like say if I finish my school for the day, then I can go out. Or if I get ahead, then I can do mustering or stockwork or drafting or – yeah.

TF So how might a typical week go for you? Paint, paint a picture now you're in secondary school.

NM Chaos.

BM 19:11:13:06 Mmm. Complete chaos. Like I guess we can be at – I can be at either place but during, during the day, school days, I mostly just complete the papers. Perhaps one hour to an hour and a half with on air ah with my teachers, and just um perhaps some days I might be checking bores with my parents or going out mustering in the car and on the weekends I basically relax and read.

NM And catch up on school work.

BM I don't catch up on school work at all. Um ring friends.

TF So where do friends come from? I guess for most kids, you know like if I think of where my kids have come, friends have come from, it's fundamentally it's like it's child care, schools, soccer.

NM Mmm.

TF Where, where, what, in what contexts are you with other kids Bronwen?

BM 19:12:12:00 Ah about twice a year now in secondary there's um a mini school for the secondary students and I, we all meet up and have a week together, and so you make friends there definitely. And on camp as well. It's a week long camp and sometimes just through um just through penpals. I've got a few pen pals overseas so it's quite interesting to find out what their life is like.

TF By email, those penpals?

BM No. Just by snail mail. Yeah.

TF So you're 15 now?

BM 14. I'll be turning 15 this September.

TF     **Correspondence/Education**

OK. Narelle, tell me about the, the decision to keep Bronwen at home um for secondary school.

NM     19:14:10:10     Well um it wasn't really our decision. Um Bronwen seemed to thrive on Distance Education. It suits her. She really enjoyed it. And so she asked if we would let her trial Year 8 um to see how High School went and she, she's loved it and she's now Year 10 asking if we'll let her trial Year 11 and 12 through Brisbane Distance Ed which is a little scary but if she can handle it, I'm sure that um the curriculum they offer, it's wonderful. The set up. They do, do a tremendous but the child has to be very motivated and fortunately she hasn't um burnt out yet or – and still very eager so that's, while she keeps enjoying it, I guess we'll keep supporting it.

TF     What's the pull to learn for you Bronwen? Like what keeps you doing it? If you have to do it independently? Because mostly it'd be teachers saying your homework's due tomorrow.

BM     19:15:14:10     Well there is some of that. Like the teachers do say you've got get um assignments due by a certain date, but um sometimes there's just the will to learn. Just finding the, finding the material interesting enough um sure there's some papers that I'm not really interested in but just get that done and move on to something – and I sort of, all the subjects are favourites.

TF     Twenty years from now? Where do you reckon Bronwen Morrish is going to be age 34?

BM     Mmm. That's a good question. I know I want to go to uni but I'm not definite about what I want to do there. Perhaps research scientist.

TF     What are, what are some options?

BM     Research scientist maybe. Um, some days an artist, musician, um just a wide range. Or perhaps a pastoralist but yeah. I'm not sure.

TF     And Narelle? Twenty years from now for you.

NM     19:16:15:18     Oh, I hope I'm still well enough to be able to enjoy life. Yeah. But getting back to um distance education, I feel that they are wonderful. The wide range of extra curricular activities um that they have available for the students, plus they also include them in the uni exams for the year levels under State, well worldwide exams. Um, and the children see how they go in certain subjects um within their year level and um they come up very favourably.

Plus they also um make available Tournament of Minds if the children are interested and Bronwen's competed a couple of times in that and actually won, come second with her team twice.

BM In the States.

NM In the States so yeah, they're not too deprived.

BM 19:17:19:20 It's interesting? to see actually because um we, when we were doing Tournament of Minds, the students – we didn't get together until about the week before the actual competition so, we did pretty well to just practice a couple of times with the – practice the play. Working together. But most of the time it was just on the radio.

TF And Narelle, do you want to talk about your illness or do you want to pass on that one?

NM I 'll pass.

TF So – so if I was to understand, what – what strikes you, like women of the Channel Country you've known and yourself, what's, what's at the heart of being female in this environment? Maybe Narelle. You first.

NM Um I guess your vibrance, personality um that's not really answering it.

TF Well what strikes you as diff – like when you've been away to Brisbane or whatever and you come back here, what strikes you about the women here?

NM 19:18:34:06 Um – oh, they're all approachable and fairly friendly. Sometimes I feel that I don't have a lot in common with some. Um whereas in Brisbane, you can seek out people that you have a lot in common with. Um, that's a bit of a downside sometimes.

TF 'cause am I right that you and Bob would have a more intellectual approach to life than would be common out here?

NM Oh I guess so. For some people, they um there's still a lot of people that can't read and write around which is rather sad that they've slipped through now. And um for – a lot of people don't put much value on education.

BM Mmm.

NM Not perhaps like we do. But who's right?

TF How about you Bronwen?

BM 19:19:32:10 Mmm. Well, being female out here, I suppose um you work alongside the males and just – you're not always very feminine – just try and

be yourself and um like make friends – you can make friends with the males just as easily.

TF In collecting stories around here with women, alcohol culture – is it –

NM I've heard that.

TF How um, how do you find that? I mean – and it rears its head and would – you know, I've heard stories of the pubs with the kind of the skid row for the men out the back and so on. Is alcohol – have a big impact on your life out here?

NM **Gender Relations/Domestic Violence**

19:20:22:16 Yeah it does unfortunately. Um that seems to be the main entertainment and I notice now that violence seems to, to occur more than say twenty years ago. A lot more domestic violence. Maybe it's more public now but um yeah, sure.

TF And is alcohol often – I mean I guess –

NM Often the trigger. Mmm.

TF So without naming any names, give me a kind of a – an example in which, in which you think domestic violence is occurring out here.

NM 19:21:00:10 Oh, I – in a lot of the bush places um drinking is a very common weekly, common weekly occurrence. At most activities. Um – I mean people either choose to drink or not drink. But um because it's so readily available and, and um accepted, I think that often it um yeah, it's caused a fair few fights. Um – look, one other thing too, a downside, for a lot of people in the bush or I mean it's just an issue, um, that especially women have young children. No family support. I guess that's – if you're lucky enough to have relatives around, that's great. But otherwise it's – yeah, you're really rear the child yourself.

TF And is that often isolating?

NM Ahh, no, I guess because there's always young Mums around with bubs and that so there's always people that they can talk to.

TF 'cause I was asking a young woman who's managing a property further west, who's got a two year old and is pregnant –

NM Yeah.



TF And I said did she often see other families, and she said they were around but no, it was sort of too far. And I thought wow! It's, you know, this would be, this would be tough.

NM Yeah. Yeah, that's Nicky.

TF Oh you smartie pants! What's the toughest side of life for you out here Bronwen?

BM 19:22:35:20 Um perhaps like I don't get to see friends unless I'm in Longreach for a mini school but I do talk to them on the phone and write a lot.

NM Definitely.

BM The phone bill's quite a lot. But um that's a downside. Um I don't mind so much the isolation as in missing shops but I do mind like missing out on movies or plays. Um, but um perhaps also snakes. That's a bit of a downside but yeah.

TF Droughts? Would droughts –

BM Droughts.

TF Would droughts enter that list?

BM Mmm. Yep. But apart from that it's pretty good.

TF How about you Narelle? How would you – what's, what's the toughest call?

NM 19:23:33:08 Oh we could. Um, oh being Mr Fix-it for everything. When it breaks down, that's – yeah, that um really tests people. But ah in, in a town you just call someone to fix things but no matter what breaks down, mostly the men attempt to fix it or you do if you're the only one there at the time. Ah that's a bit of a downside. Sometimes it's great because you actually do fix the item. Um a positive is the um technology that's come along and ah I can't imagine living without a computer now, or a fax.

BM But the downside with that is sometimes with email or internet, ah we don't get the same internet access right now. It's a lot slower so –

NM 19:24:24:00 And the telephone um not so long ago, but we've quickly forgotten, we were on the party line and that meant that when the phone line went out, those on the party line went out and fixed it. If it was your turn, you fixed it, come hail or high water. So I just hope that with Telstra doing such a good job servicing, that it's not totally sold out. Because we really enjoy having a telephone.

TF And just tell us about – in , I gather your family is involved in what, would one call it an environmental battle between cotton farming –

BM Yeah.

TF And organic beef?

NM Yeah.

BM Irrigation.

TF Do you want to just talk about a bit.

BM Yeah.

NM I'll leave that to you Bron.

BM **Channels Country/Ecology:Cotton**

19:25:13:02 Me? OK. Well with irrigation um what was the year? Um some cotton farmers – they were planning on planting cotton so they bought a place called Kurrareeva ? and they were planning on irrigating cotton. And they also bought another place called Hammond Downs and um planning to irrigate – um, take that licence and put it on Kurrareeva. Um and we're opposed to that ah with taking the water out um to protect the natural eco system and the river and I suppose our livelihoods depend on that river and if someone takes it out this end, then also the people as it goes down, there wouldn't be so many floods.

TF So how did you go about battling that and, and what have been the results to date?

NM 19:26:08:04 The community um were quite shocked when the idea, when they were approached with the idea. So they formed a group, the Cooper Creek protection group and I guess we've had a fair involvement with it because Bob's been spokesperson for that group. Chairperson. And ah at the moment um they haven't gone ahead and irrigated.

BM And they're not allowed to transfer the licence from Hammond Downs to Kurrareeva so – but yeah.

NM But it's still fairly political at the moment.

BM The battle's not won yet but –

NM Yeah.

TF I don't understand this licence system. Do you know a licence in order to take water?

NM Extract water.

BM Yep.

NM Mmm.

TF And historically, have there been no licences? Like has there not been –

NM They have –

BM Little licences.

NM Yeah. But they've never really been used.

BM But they're still um some of them are still there and could be used in the future.

TF And why are you so opposed? I'd like to hear from Narelle at this point, why you are so opposed to cotton and, and how what you're doing – like there might be a perception that pastoralism ah that's raped the land for 200 years. What more can cotton do?

NM 19:27:24:10 I guess um the water is the issue and if someone takes what goes past, it, it doesn't go further even though they think it's only a tiny amount. But the other thing are the pesticides involved and out here, it is naturally organic beef and um even though they reassure us that none of the endosulphens will, or any of the chemicals will destroy um will have an effect on the beef industry, that's not, not really correct. Plus the fish tend to die when that's introduced and um also, the town of Windorah is so close. Um, they rely on that water. It's their recreation. Swimming in Coopers Creek.

TF It's what they drink too, isn't it?

NM 19:28:21:14 Yeah, that's right. And their life depends on it so ah – while it's sad for people um that had these big plans, in an arid country like this, it's really asking a lot.

TF When you say that beef is naturally organic, I want you to explain – I want you to explain stuff like how you don't cultivate here. That's sort of thing. Because I don't think that's widely understood.

NM Yeah. Do you want to do it?

BM 19:29:51:16 Pardon? Oh well we don't spray, I mean we don't spray pesticides around and neither do we um dip the cattle or – like they're just – there's no chemi, well yeah no chemicals involved with the cattle production.

NM There's no need for the chemicals.

BM No need for it.

TF And why is there no need? Like why are you not planting grasses and that sort of thing that then need fertilisers and chemicals? Do you want to explain that Narelle?

NM 19:29:22:14 Well, water! Um, because it is – when it receives rain, it is so lush, the varieties of grasses. It's already there. It just needs the rain. Um, I, I think one or two people over the years have planted um and hoped to irrigate but obviously it, it hasn't been a success or else we've all missed it. Um ..... just hang in and hope for the next good season. And ah – 19:30:01:14