

## **INTERVIEW WITH BID CAMPBELL**

**Recorded 2 June 2000**

**Updated 15 December 2009.**

**Timecode refers to tape 06\_BC\_DV**

**Topics in Bold**

**Okay, so this is camera tape 6. This is still DAT tape 2. It's 2 June 2000, interviewing Bid Campbell at her house in Mt Isa.**

### **Tape 06\_BC\_DV**

Okay, so we were just talking about history and ...

R 00:01:19:00 The only thing that I can remember that stayed in my mind was the Min Min Light. It seemed to be the only thing people seemed to be arguing about a lot, you know. Did it happen? Didn't it happen? And I can remember sitting on you know, at the top part of Maxland and watching a light sort of coming from Boulia to Schofield's letter box and fading out, and then later, you know, sort of come again and fade away, and there was no cars in those days. That was say in 1926, '24. So there wasn't any motor cars in those days. Today there is motor cars everywhere but not in those days you wouldn't see any.

I And what did you make of that?

R Well, we didn't worry about that much because we thought, 'Well, it's just one of these things. It's the Min Min Light' and that's all you'd say about it. So whether it was the Min Min Light or what, there seems to be a lot of controversy about it, isn't there?

I There's going to be a documentary on SBS very soon about the Min Min Light.

R Yes.

I I haven't asked you, Bid – we'll finish very soon – but floods. Tell me about what experience you had of floods, either as a child or as an adult.

R Oh, well, at Strathalbert my husband was always terrified of floods. Every time, you know, big floods would come – the home was in, right on to the river.

I Which river?

R **Floods**

00:02:46:00 The Burke River. And then there was a creek come around here like that and the home was in here, and every time it rained he'd get very nervy, you know, about this flood, because it was going to come over the house or under the house or whatever, and once it rained and rained and rained. It was very heavy rain, so he decided we had to go out onto this ridge. So Len was a little fellow. He can remember it. And he walked and we put a, like a bed, and we put Lyn and Jenny and Terry which were the little ones on that, and here Frank and my cousin, my nephew, carried the bed and I hung onto Len. We had to cross this creek to get out onto the ridges and we were out there for three days, I think, in a tent. And Lindy was a baby and I had two nappies on her and oh it was a terrible turnout. Terrible turnout. We had some potatoes, I think, we used to cook in the ashes and we lived out there for three days.

I And did the flood go into your house?

R No, it never went into the house at all but later years, after he died, it did come up to the house. But apparently when he was a child, his mother told me, he was around the Clermont area and that big flood that came through, and probably, you know, it's still in his mind that water will go anywhere. And, of course, I'd never seen water going                      Once he was in hospital and he kept ringing up every day saying, 'How's the flood waters? Are you going to leave? Are you going to go out on the ridges?' 'Yes, we're going,' so we eventually told him we were going, took the phone off the hook, to give him peace, because he used to be terrified of water. Always afraid that the water was going to go over that ...

I So do you regard Strathalbert as Channel Country?

- R Yes. Yes, it is. It is the
- I So it was Channel Country but the channels in your part didn't really break their banks?
- R No, no, no. It was more of a river. See, as it goes down further it spreads out, doesn't it? It spreads all out into swampy areas. No, it's just a big river, and very big. Big rivers are very big when they're in flood and they're in full flood they are.
- I So is there anything I haven't asked you about, Bid? I'm wanting to learn about women of the Channel Country, past present and possibly future.
- R 00:05:11:10 Well, you know it's a pity that a lot of these people are gone, see. There is a name I can give you in – if he's still alive – I'll go and get that.
- I Let's just finish and then I'll unplug you and then you can get it.
- R There's a name the Howard family. They were in the Boulia district before Mum and Dad, like, and if you could get ... well old Tim did have a lot of photos and things which Charlie put in his book, but you can take the book and go through it. See if you can find anything you need. Probably find a lot of things in there.
- I How interesting. Oh is this a yellow book? Because Annette Gordon has two books about the McGlinchy's. She had the one of yours and then she did have another book.
- R Yes. A red book. That's the family reunion book. No, this was one that Charlie wrote on the Boulia Centenary, I think.
- I Oh, wonderful. And that was your brother Charlie?
- R Yes, a stepbrother, Mum's oldest son. Yes. So that book ... and there is a lot of, well there's a lot of history in it, you know, past, when Boulia first started and how it started and everything in there. It's a bit dry but, you know.

- I Charlie was Shire Clerk at one stage, wasn't he?
- R Yes. He was ... no, Charlie Robinson was really a wonderful man when you come to think of it. He had a family and he used to ... he was shearing and he'd studied to be the Shire Clerk. He used to shear during the day and study at night.
- I And he was the one that took all the photographs? Is he the one? Because I know in Boulia we're going to see a collection of photographs that were taken by the Shire Clerk – a Shire Clerk – that were very highly regarded, but I don't know the name of the photographer. Would that be your Charlie?
- R Could have been.
- I Did he take a lot of photographs?
- R Not that I know of. Charlie was more ...
- I No, so it was probably another ...
- R 00:07:08:20 Another Shire Clerk that was there. But no, Charlie was more of a ... he was a dreamer more than anything. He'd walk past you, you know, and you'd say 'Hello' to him and he'd get a few steps past you and he'd swing round, 'Oh, hello. How are you?' So he was a sort of a dreamer, sort of a man, you know. His mind was way up somewhere else.
- I One last question, when you look say, at your daughter or your niece Nina, when you look at men and women living on the land now, what do you think has shifted since the days of your childhood?
- R Well, for a starter, they've got all these amenities that we never had, like they've got washing machines, they've got TVs, they've got a phone. We didn't have a phone. We didn't have a washing machine and, as for TV and even radio, like it was during the last war that I first heard a radio and my brother was over in Alexandra and Mum got an old wireless from somebody and it was full of static, you know, you could only hear it now and again, and

that used to come over that ... was it Sally Field that used to sing her songs, you know?

I Gracie Fields.

R Gracie Fields. *The White Cliffs of Dover* and all that, and that'd come on, you'd hear part of that and sometimes the soldiers, there'd be a message and we used to try and listen to that message to see if Len's name was in that message.

I So it was the First World War when you first heard a radio?

R Yes, heard the radio. Yeah, you never had any of these amenities. They've got all those now. Like, it's like my granddaughter out there at Creek, she's got a fax machine, you know, and she's got a computer. We never had those things. Never had nothing, really. If you wanted to communicate with somebody, you wrote a letter.

I And do you think that's actually shifted life and relationships between men and women a lot, those amenities?

R **Washing**

Oh, I think they've got them closer together, I think, you know. Once the woman's place was in the home and you just looked after the family and cooked and things like that. The women don't have to work like they did like in my day. Like washing day in my day, you'd get up, you'd start in the summer, you'd start about four o'clock because you used to have to scrub like this and then put it in the boiler and boil it, you know, and you'd try and get it done before the heat of the day came on. Otherwise it was too hot. See, they don't do that now.

I Would that be a Monday, washing day?

R 00:09:53:00 Yes. A Monday or one day a week you'd have for your washing and then the next day you did the ironing. You ironed with the old iron. Well, they wouldn't iron with those today. They've got electric irons today. No, no, I think it's a big difference. They've got more leisure time.

They go into the towns a lot more, which we didn't do. The only time we went to, when I was a kid, went to Boulia, was when you got sick. If you got sick you went to Boulia.

I So it was 16 miles away but you only went there when you were sick?

R Yes. Mmmm. If you got really sick that Mum couldn't help you, you went into the hospital, but I never was sick enough. I never got to the hospital. My sister used to get in a few times because she had bronchitis bad. She used to have to go in and she'd spend a week in Boulia and I used to be so envious. I used to think, 'Why can't I get sick?'

I That sounds like *Angela's Ashes*.

R Mmmm. Yes.

I The bloke is so happy to go to hospital and have just a simple warm bed.

R Yes. You know, you look back now and think, God you were lucky you didn't get sick.

I So when did you first see cinema, Bid, and what films ... did you ever see films like *Girl of the Bush* or *On Our Selection*, *Wild Daughter*?

R **Real Bush vs Film Bush**

No. Yes, I've seen *On Our Selection*. I think that's just a lot of rot, I think. I think that's ... I don't ... we didn't lead that sort of a life. Like they sort of make out in those movies that you, you know, you're just a mug or something, you're uneducated, uncouth and that, don't they? I don't agree

I Especially the Ken G. Hall one, the 1930s one, yes.

R 00:11:26:04 Yeah they go too far, I think, just like, you know, that play they had they made a big thing of. What was that play? Oh it was ... it was with shearers anyway and it ... I can't ...

I Not *Dimboola*?

R No, no, not *Dimboola*. Before that. You know, he spoke with that ...

I *One Day of the Year*. No, not *One Day of the Year*.

R No. That Aussie, you know, ocker language and that. Well the average Australian don't talk like that. You don't hear, you know, I've never come across them and I mean I've lived out in the west most of my life, so I don't know.

I So you didn't think that the films that were about the bush were much ...?

R No, I didn't think they were true to the average bush person. No.

I Did you ever see *Girl of the Bush*?

R No, I didn't see that one.

I A very good film.

R Is it? I'd like to see that. I've seen the, what's that one, the *Seven Little Australians* is it? I liked that. Yes, that was nice. That was a good movie but I can't think of that damn but it was a play anyway.

I It'll come back to you.

R It was a play. I went and saw it in Townsville and I thought, 'Oh, God, what a terrible image to give the average person who lives in Australia'.

I So, Bid, this tape's going to run out in a minute and I'm just going to stop taping but it's been fantastic.

**REMAINDER OF INTERVIEW TRANSFERRED FROM VIDEO (NOT DAT)**

**VHS2 05.23.50.11 TO 05.27.26.01**

I So Bid, we were just talking about -

R **History**

00:23:45:22 The Corroboree Tree. Yeah. You know the, the ah tourist brochures. You know they put out a brochure. There's a galah, old galah

tree out there by the school in Boulia, out in the Stony Ridge, and, and they've got a plaque on it to say this is where the Aborigines held their corroborees. Now I can remember back to 1923 and that's when I heard of corroborees and it was down on the river. Down at the One Mile. Where, you know, where they all lived. And yet the tourists have got it there. But when it comes to somebody backing me up, there's no one round to say well that is true that this happened then, not then – corroborees.

I And are there Aboriginal people in the Boulia area that are your kind of age that –

R Oh no, they're all dead. And all the younger ones have taken over the University degrees and that and they just, you know, right down. No, I don't, I honestly don't think Aborigines EVER corroboreed out on the Stony Ridge. Damned if I do. Usually around waterholes. That's where they mostly lived.

I And the One Mile that you were describing –

R That's a big water hole.

I Near Boulia.

R Below Boulia.

I Right. And was that like a reserve for Aboriginal people?

R **Water**

No. Just where they camped. The, see they used to camp. They have big camps on the, on the big waterholes and that's where they lived and when it drained, of course they went walkabout down the rivers or up the rivers or whatever. Up to the Togo ? Ranges, you know. It's only after big rains. They wouldn't go otherwise and ah, that's you know, I often think why do they want to change it? Why, why not stick to the truth? I mean, who'd want to go out in the Stony Ridge to have a party when there's a big waterhole just about a mile away?



- I So what do you think is leading to those distortions?
- R 00:25:33:06 Dashed if I know. Money I think. Yeah, money I think. Mmm. Like anything. Once money comes into it. You know, a bit of corruption comes in too, doesn't it? So, can we make something out of this sort of thing? It's like, you know, nobody wanted the land. Nobody wanted to go out in the bush and – but now if they find a mine, suddenly it becomes sacred ground. Like when they say that's where their burials were. They never buried their Aborigines. Get Dr Harvey Sutton's book and you'll see where they stick 'em up in the trees. And yet they're sacred burial grounds. So –
- I So in history and the kind of the history of Bouliia, is that important to kind of tourists in the region now?
- R 00:26:27:24 Oh well, I suppose it's a story isn't it? It's a story, you know. It's a tree that probably somebody was hanged out of or somebody died under or something or other and make a big story out of it. Jazz it up. Oh we'll have to go and see that I suppose. Like all things like that.
- I Did you ever see any burials in trees?
- R No, I can't say that I ever but there is, there is in ah in ah that book, ah of Dr Harvey Sutton's. Have you ever read that book?
- I No.
- R Well - ....., – what's the Harvey Sutton's name?
- ? I can't remember.
- I I can ..... ..
- R A legend, a legend in his time is it? Harvey Sutton?
- It'd be pretty hard to ..... easy to find.
- R It's easy to find Dr Harvey Sutton.

I OK.

00:27:22:12

**END OF TAPE**