

**INTERVIEW WITH BEV MAUNSELL**

**21 June 2000**

**Timecode refers to tape 48\_BC\_SP**

**Topics in Bold**

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

**TAPE 1 – SIDE A**

**I Camera tape 48, DAT tape 18, time code 0, Channels of History project, Trish FitzSimons on sound, Julie Hornsby on camera. It's 21 June 2000 and we're interviewing Bev Maunsell outside her house in Dixon Street, Jundah. 48\_BC\_SP**

So Bev, I'd like you to tell me where and when you were born and what your name was when you were born, your childhood name.

R 00:09:08:14 Yes, well I was born in Pittsworth, a small town on the Downs, just out from Toowoomba, ummm August 1947, and ummm my parents were Vince and Flora Barr and my maiden name was Barr.

I I've come across somebody else Barr. Is there a Jean Barr?

R **Race Relations**

A Jean Barr in Birdsville. She was a Crombie.

I Yes, is she any relation?

R Yes, she married my brother. Yes, she's my sister-in-law.

I Do you find that interconnection unusual?

R **Braided Channels**

00:09:50:02 I don't think so out here, Trish. No. Because ummm I remember when we first moved to the west ummm I was younger of course, but most people I felt were related and yet we weren't related to anybody but thirty-odd years down the track and, as you grow up and some of the family have married locally, and now that goes on where, you know, we do have

members of our family who've married local people and so, yes, it is quite common.

I Because I found an incredible degree of interconnection out here.

R You would too, yes.

I It'd be a bad place to make an enemy I reckon.

R 00:10:33:00 Exactly and sometimes you will actually hear somebody telling a newcomer – I was going to use the word 'warn' but it might be a little strong – but sort of, you know, saying to them, 'Well, she's his niece' or 'He may be her sister-in-law' or whatever else, you know. You'll hear people explaining relationships.

I With Barr, that interconnection between black and white, is that quite common in your experience out here?

R 00:10:58:10: Well probably. I don't know whether common. I mean it's, well yes, ummm has been over the years. I mean, I'm not looking at just recently. You're not asking about recently but over a period of thirty or forty years, yes.

I So just going back, it was just the Barr that ...

R Yes that triggered, yes.

I ... that triggered that. Going back into your childhood, then, Bev, what was your parents' job in life and did you come to the Channel Country with your parents? I guess I'd like you to just sketch your life up until the time that you came to the Channel Country.

R **Women/Work**

00:11:42:20 My first years were spent on a farm ummm a little farm at a place called Captain's Mountain just outside Millmerran. My mother virtually ran that farm on her own. My father and his twin brother had a dam-sinking plant so they'd go off, you know, to various places working the plant. My Mum actually had four children under age three. She had twins

and then myself ummm thirteen months later and then another daughter seventeen months later, so she had four children under three, and ten years after that she actually had twin boys, so my father and all of his sons were twins. But, yes, she ran that farm on her own. I can remember that she used to ... I can't remember her doing it, but telling we children how she used to milk the cows and put the cream can, you know, up on the neck of the horse and ride down to the front gate and unload those onto the ramp even while she was expecting that younger daughter. So then we moved on to another property and we spent a few years there before moving on to yet another property, so most of my life was spent on stations.

I      What would cause the movements, do you know? Why would your family move?

R      00:13:14:14    I think that perhaps then it was a settling thing, you know, I don't know ... in those days parents didn't speak in front of their children about their business ummm whether it be their financial position or ummm they weren't as forthcoming as they are now, I don't think. So I don't really know. My father had a twin brother who was in partnership with him and they just purchased various properties so, you know, we did move quite a bit in the early years, from place to place. And then we went to a property called Cooroora. We settled there for a long time. That's where I first did correspondence school, which is now distance education. It was primary correspondence with Primary Correspondence School in Brisbane but, you know, there was no School of the Air. We did have a governess but we didn't have ummm School of the Air or anything like that. When I was in Year 2 we actually rode ponies to school, to the local school up the road. We rode the horses and they sort of had the paddock there to put the ponies in and that was just a part of your school day, to unsaddle your horse and let it go and then you know, when you finished school, you resaddled it and rode home. Progress to bikes was fairly important.      00:14:38:10

I      Where was Cooroora?

R Cooroora was ummm Meandarra, Meandarra area, which is still down on the Downs, around the Dalby-Tara area. My parents were involved in the community there for years and very active workers in that community.

I So what, then, brought you out here?

R **Channels Country: Arriving**

00:15:01:02 When they were building the bitumen road between Quilpie and Windorah, my father brought a couple of trucks out to Thiess Bros and put them on that job there. Ummm he probably – I'm guessing here because I was at Concordia then, going to boarding school at the time – I think it was probably out here 18 months or so before he bought the home in Windorah and the garage in Windorah and ummm and we moved to Windorah. So, yeah.

I So how old were you then?

R 00:15:36:12 I was 15 when I left Concordia. I didn't actually stay in Windorah at the time. I went back to Meandarra and I worked in a hardware type store there ummm for 12 months, during which I made my debut and things like that, and then I came back to Windorah and worked on the exchange there, telephone exchange. I worked on various properties west of Windorah and I met Graham there, of course, and ...

I Was there a sense that, at the age of 15, if your parents had moved and were running Windorah Service Station but you stayed on the Downs, were you considered an adult at 15?

R 0:16:25:08 No, no, not at all because had I not gone down there to work for friends of my parents, I would not have been allowed to go at all. You know, Mum and Dad were very strict and ummm in that sense, and I didn't know Windorah. I didn't know the Quilpie area. I didn't really know the country that my parents had moved to, which was quite strange, a very lonely and disappointing feeling while I was at Concordia, I think, not to know exactly ... I knew where they were but I wasn't familiar with ummm with the

area that they'd moved to, so I guess there was a sense of loss there and ummm I was focussed on going back to Meandarra where I sort of knew everybody and we had our friends and it was actually my parents' friends that owned this store there, and I went down and I actually stayed with friends of my parents and I worked for friends of my parents. And had that not been the case, no, I would have ummm not been able to do that.

I So tell me your first view of Windorah, then. 1962 you came to Windorah?

R Mmmm.

I So tell me what you saw. Paint a picture.

R **Channel Country: First Impression/Physical Hardships/Dust Storms**

00:17:44:05 It was negative but it's certainly changed since then. Ummm probably unfortunately, we arrived to the house that my father had bought at night time. Ummm it hadn't been inhabited for a long, long time and when they did have somebody in it, it was just some old gentleman who, you know, hadn't sort of looked after it and there was no furniture or anything in it. There was lots of dirt and lots of cobwebs. In those days they had many, many ummm really big sand storms, or they call them dust storms, but ummm so I mean it was absolutely filthy. There was no electricity, which I know that, you know, I soon learned that that was common and you do become quite comfortable with that. Having said that, I know that you can be uncomfortable with it too. Ummm yes, so I don't know that it was ... I was amazed. I really thought that we had lived in the country. I believed we'd spent our whole life in the country and I soon realised that we hadn't. We were now living in the bush. And this was the bush, yes. So ummm ...

00:19:04:02

I So other than electricity, what were the things that made you think, 'Ahhh, this is the sticks'?

R **Dust Storms**

00:19:12:12 Ummm perhaps it was the difference, because I had lived on properties and considered that I lived in the bush but ummm the dust storms amazed me probably most of all, the heat, ummm things that now are not important, I mean, but then at that age and having just moved to Windorah. Ummm probably lack of services. Being so far from Quilpie when, especially when most of that road was dirt. They were just sealing it, you know, I think the bitumen was 68 miles this side of Quilpie on the western side at the time and ummm a lot of the road that wasn't sealed was bulldust so you were looking at many hours. We had conventional cars then, too, I mean we didn't have four-wheel-drives and the vehicles that we have today ummm to travel those roads either. So, perhaps isolation.

I So bogging? Was bogging a common thing?

R 00:20:26:02 It was. You could step from a vehicle and step into bulldust, you know, so deep. Ummm fortunately I was a teenager and saw the humorous side of a lot of those things where I'm quite sure my parents didn't appreciate it quite as much since they mostly had the responsibility of getting us out of there. Ummm but, yeah, I ummm perhaps these things grow on you a little bit and you actually forget exactly what did ummm surprise me the most, but I think, you know, if I was to sum it up quickly, I'd say dust storms and the isolation, the heat, ummm yeah. A lot of the homes then weren't gauzed, you know, they didn't have fly screens, so ummm the Sunday roast dinner was quite a battle and you'd tend to go on holidays and keep doing this, you know, so yeah ...

I Describe your first dust storm. What happened?

R **Dust Storms**

00:21:31:02 I remember distinctly one of the younger brothers, Trevor, one of the twins running through that because he was actually up the street when it hit. But, of course, you can see them coming but we weren't ... or I wasn't aware and I'm quite sure they weren't, being you know so many years younger than I, of exactly how that sand could sting their legs and ummm that it would become so forceful, so thick. I can remember sweeping it from

the lino and my mother doing so and everyone helping and, you know, you'd have quite a lot of sand in the dustpan and you used to laugh and so you'd just sweep it out in bucketfuls, you know. And it would be in waves on the vinyl and going inside the houses and up against the skirting boards around the bottom of the floor. It's quite hard to believe today that that, yeah, older homes too, Trish.

00:22:32:12

I I read a description of a dust storm in the thirties, with people holding their sandwiches under the table.

R 00:22:39:16 Exactly. That was something I'd forgotten about because you could feel the grit on your teeth and you could feel, you would ummm feel the grit in food. Yes, it seemed to just get into everything.

I And how often would this happen?

R 00:22:54:02 That, you probably couldn't put an average on that because you could get perhaps two in one day and then you may not get another one for days, or a couple of weeks or whatever, but they happened quite frequently, yes, and it wasn't uncommon to clean up from one ... and this is without vacuum cleaners and things like that, either. This is virtually with brooms and dustpans and my mother still scrubbed everything on her hands and knees. She wouldn't use a mop so, I mean, it was quite a task for her. But ummm I can remember times when we would no sooner finish cleaning up from one when we would be hit with another, or you'd spend all day cleaning house and it would blow all night and you'd wake up to that same mess in the morning. And the women would start again, and it was an accepted ... there would be the odd moan and groan but it was still accepted. It was an accepted part of living there.

I What did the dust storms sound like?

R **Dust Storms**

00:24:00:00 My description would be simply wind. Ummm we were travelling across – you would have crossed this area – the Morney Plain

once, when our children were small and we had a foreigner with us. Ummm I can't remember from which country he came but we saw the dust storm coming across the plain and it was rolling. It was a great mass of rolling ummm across the plain and actually it was magnificent, and we weren't disturbed by that because, you know, we were quite used to them but when I looked in the back seat and saw this fellow that was getting a lift with us, he was actually leaning forward, you know, over the seat, and he was terrified and ummm he actually thought that there was a vacuum and we had a truck in front of us that was driving into this great roll of dust and he was expecting ... he said to us later that he was expecting that truck to be picked up and to start flipping over. Ummm so he likened it to a tornado or whatever, but ummm ...

I Tell me about dust storms now, while we're talking dust storms. How common are they now?

R 00:25:22:02 They're not. No, they're not, Trish, really. We get the odd one but if ... I would say perhaps if we saw one once a year ... we get a lot of dust, dust blowing in the wind. Ummm there's a terrible lot of dust here because we get the dust blowing off the yards across the way here, the Barkly Shire Council yards, so you could drive up the street and see that my house was just covered in a cloud of dust, and that's quite common. It's a little disheartening too, even though we now have vacuum cleaners, but ...

I So what's changed, do you reckon? Why are there not dust storms any more? What do the locals think about that?

R 00:26:11:04 I have asked that question of several older people ummm in the Windorah area and opinions vary but the most common one, or the one that seems to be ummm acceptable, is the rabbits. You know, you'll notice the ... I'm not saying with the ... windbreaks. Ummm vegetation on the sand hills, and that's not quite an answer to your question, sorry, but ummm you know the sand hills that you saw on your way in, they were all exposed, whereas now most of them, or a lot of them, have much vegetation covering them. They say that it was possibly the rabbits, you know, and now that the



rabbits have ... the rabbits apparently pull the grass, etc. from the roots and ummm they say with the control of the rabbits that the vegetation has now been able to get a bigger go on or whatever, but ... so perhaps with that and ummm trees and things like that. I don't really know why that is thicker but it certainly must have an effect on the control of the dust storms. Well it does because ...

I Ann Kidd thought it might also be related to the move from sheep to cows, because sheep didn't ...

R Oh, right, yes.

I It's very interesting.

R Yes, that's interesting. It is, too. Yes, Trish.

I Had your Mum wanted to come to Windorah or has this been one of your Dad's schemes?

R **Women/Work: Housework**

00:27:52:14 It would have been Dad's scheme, yes. Mum was versatile. Mum was an extremely hardworking woman, very much a lady, and I admired her so much. She worked very hard, as most women did in those days, but she reared six children, having had two sets of twins and ummm she, as I said before, she scrubbed floors on her hands and knees. You know, mops weren't clean. That was Mum's opinion. She made all of our clothes on a treadle sewing machine. I remember her excitement when my father bought her a 32-volt sewing machine on a farm that we lived on. She baked everything we ate ummm as in bread. She made our own butter, or we sort of, I was designated that job in Year 2 I think, but ummm you know, so I mean Mum was a woman who was an extremely hard worker and ummm I think that she would have gone wherever my father decided that we might move or wherever they decided that we might move to, and she fitted in to Windorah very easily. She didn't complain. I mean, Dad went about building, or installing a 32-volt electricity plant and ummm fixing up the

place and making it as liveable as possible, I suppose, with the isolation and everything then, you know, and access to materials and things. But I often thought about her because I thought about what she'd left behind ummm and what she'd sort of moved to, and yet she did that with grace and humour and whatever it took to .... yeah. 00:30:02:08

I Tell me about working on the telephone exchange. Where was the exchange in Windorah? Paint a picture for me. You're 15, 16?

R **Women/Work: Switchboard**

00:30:11:18 Yes, and the exchange was within the Post Office itself. Ummm there was a much bigger building there at the time. It actually burnt down in a fire several years ago. There was just a small switchboard, you know, with the little shutters that dropped down to expose the number that was calling in and ummm I suppose we'll always remember the long short longs and the long and two shorts and the rings that ummm each station or whatever had. Ummm I enjoyed the exchange. I think the exchange was a lifeline. It certainly was then. At night time, I remember, we plugged, we would plug somebody from town into each property and I think the police station ... I'm not too sure if we plugged the police station through to the Longreach Exchange but there was certainly somebody there from town that was plugged through to Longreach Exchange so that we had ... probably people had contact at night if they had an emergency and needed to phone through, and there was also a contact to Longreach. But most young girls from Windorah during that era worked on the telephone exchange at some time, I'm sure, yes. Cheryl did as well, and for many years. But of course it's been replaced with STD and UHF radios are much more common and communication's improved. 00:31:42:20

I Would you run the galah session or did that come with radio and ...?

R **Facilities/Galah Sessions**

00:31:47:02 That wasn't actually a part of the Post Office ummm from property to property. I took part in the galah sessions while at Currawilla

ummm you know it takes ten minutes to call around and each lady on each property would speak to each other, or gentleman, or whichever, and just you know make sure that everything's fine and everybody's okay. Ummm I can't imagine their excitement when the telephones were connected to those properties. I remember the first time I pulled up at Betoota and saw a Telstra phone box in front of Betoota Hotel. I honestly did not believe that I would see the day. It was a wonderful feeling.

I So some people are nostalgic about the galah sessions. Do you think that's crazy or was there a way in which it was linking everybody together?

R 00:32:37:06 I think you can afford to be, once you have a telephone installed ummm but no, during the years when that was your communication, that was the way that you checked on everybody. You knew, even if you had an accident or ... oh, would have called the Flying Doctor base, but if there was somebody called through that needed the next door property to know that they were going to be there in X amount of time, or that they'd left the property that we were on, at least you know that if you can't call anybody that they will be on that session. I remember my husband and I had car trouble once out near Betoota and ummm German tourists came through. They were non-English speaking tourists and ummm I wrote them a note to give to Simon at Betoota and then crossed everything we owned I think, and they did that, and you knew well then that by five o'clock that afternoon that he would be on that session and word would be passed to the property that we were broken down on, so I mean, you put your confidence in that and that was what you had to depend on.

00:34:05:20

I Tell me about ... was your job as a lady's help the next job? You told me once on the phone. What was your next job after being a telephone operator?

R I did go to ahhh ... when I left the exchange, I'm just trying to remember in which order I did this. I don't want to get it wrong. Ummm I worked ...