

**INTERVIEW WITH EDNA JESSOP/ZIGENBINE**  
**Recorded on 02 June 2000**  
**Updated 15 December 2009. Timecode matches 02\_BC\_DV.**  
**Topics are in Bold**

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

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

VHS1 01.45.46.14 to 02.12.48.20

**TC from 02\_BC\_DV**

I - sometimes resenting you being the boss drover or whatever, let's talk about now with your husband. You said you met your husband in Winton.

R Mmm.

I How did you meet him and, and how did you and he end up then running a droving plant?

R **Inheritance/Romance** 00:00:49:22 Oh, it's a bit of a sad story in a way because ah when I was – Dad left me. This is my side of it. My father left me see and I had nobody to help me really. And um anyway I met Johnny, me husband and ah I thought oh well, everything'd be good and ah he was, done a lot of droving himself. He knew what to do. So I reckoned it'd be alright and so um I ended up marrying him and Dad, Dad did the wrong thing by me. He left his – he left the droving plant to me in his Will. That's all he had anyway in the world. But that was – he did the wrong thing by me then, my father did. He did a terrible thing to me I think. Because he left me with the droving plant and um – I, I had to pay people money. I had to pay people money that he promised in the family, I said if I promised you some money, and when I died I had to give it to you, you know, like out of your Will and um I had to give my brother money. I had to give my sister money. And I had to look after him until he died. Ah which was a lot of money all the time, giving him money, money, money, money.

**GenderRelations/Alcohol**

So I reckon when he left the plant to me, I reckon - Johnny was my husband now, was my husband, would've been a good mate but anyway we got on well – along. But he was a bugger for drinking and we just used to fight a lot but only over grog. But he was a good man and ah – how the – eh?

I So what was your life with your husband? What was your life with Johnny?

R **Education**

Oh it was alright. It wasn't too bad but – only for his grog. Only for drinking it was alright. Then we had a baby and things didn't alter. Didn't change much. And ah I dunno what was

wrong with me. I was a, sort of a stubborn bugger. I'd pushed away me own when I was sort of – I had a mind of me own always I guess but – so I came here. I got me kid. I wanted to give me kid education that I didn't have and I did the wrong thing by myself there. I did the right thing by him but – by Jacky – me son. I came and bought this place and give him education and – but in the meantime, my husband took me plant down at Winton and sold it on me. Sold me horses and me truck. I didn't get nothing out of it. I ended up with nothing. So Dad done the wrong thing by me there. Poor old fella. He left the Will to me but – but that's my side of it anyway. That's the way I feel about it but – then I came here and bought the house and I've been here ever since. I've just got a – I was lucky I got that job in the Council and it was great.

I What was your job?

R **Women's Work- Pound Keeping**

00:03:59:12 Pound keeping horses – pound keeping. Just – mustering stray getting in ..... stray on the street, like horses or cattle or goats or anything like that, I'd pick up and pound them. Put 'em in the yard. Leave 'em there 'til someone come and claimed them.

I So what was it – what were the kind of animals you were mostly impounding?

R Horses mainly. Horses mainly. They were the mainly thing that, that's roaming the streets but I had goats and I had bloody cattle, a few cattle while I was on the job. But um it was great. Only that they ah the Council done the wrong thing by me. They retired me when I didn't want to retire. It just ended my life more than anything. I had to give me horses – get rid of me horses because I couldn't afford to feed 'em and I just sort of ended me – I don't know what I could call it. Bugged me life anyway.

I So Edna, going back to that decision, to give up droving, to move to Mt Isa – and that, that was when you and your husband separated as well?

R Yeah.

I You said –

R **Gender Relations-breakdown**

We more or less separated then and we were almost, already separated then and he went into Winton, he delivered the cattle we had on the road and he sold, delivered the cattle and then he sold all the plant and then drunk all the money. Drunk the money that he got for the plant and come back here and that was it.

I So you'd had to pay out your brother and sisters their bit of the inheritance –

R Yeah.

I And then your husband –

R Yeah.

I Sold the plant and drank away the money?

R Yeah. That's the way it went. But he ah -

I So you said that it was the right decision for your son but the wrong decision for you, coming back to Mt Isa?

R **Women's Work**

0:06:00:02 Well it was right for him I suppose because he got education out of it. But I lost out of it because I got nothing out of it but I still, you know I did things out of it. I got a job and I was alright. I never looked back really. I always had work and I've always been pretty steady with money and I got along alright but I just lost all me horses and me truck and everything. It just went. Don't even, don't know even who bought it. He just sold the lot.

I And how was it for you moving to, to live in one spot after always travelling?

R Oh, it wasn't too bad. I had Mum here with me for a while. She was with me. It wasn't too bad. I didn't think it was anyway. I got a bit of work and doing a few saddles up for people and a bit of leather gear. I got, I counterlined a few saddles for the stations and – and I used to take in washing and ironing for the truckies and get a bit of money that way 'til I got the job pound keeping. And when I got the job pound keeping I was right. I had the horses. I still had a few horses on Enleigh ? Station out here. A couple of – a few young horses. Unbroken stuff. They're lucky they weren't in the plant. Oh, they were just unbroken stuff and when I got the job pound keeping, I went out and got them and broke 'em in. Broke the horses in that I – the young horses I had out there and broke 'em in and had them then for working horses for meself here. Sold what I didn't want and kept a couple of good horses for myself.

I So Edna ..... life droving, would you describe yourself as loving the land? Or is that a ridiculous concept? Like how would you describe yourself as, as feeling about this land of Western Queensland and the Northern Territory?

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**R      Women/Land**

Ooh as far as I could, with me and my son, it was great! It was great! It was a great life. I, I used, we used to like it, you know. We enjoyed being in the bush. It was a great life. But he, we always – I don't know what I could say there because it was just a good life and we all – nearly always together and always had something to do. But um –

I      You referred to your sister getting pregnant when she was young. I mean, there were many many more white men than white women. Did you feel yourself kind of under pressure sexually a lot?

R      00:08:45:06 No. Never worried me. Cause Dad always kept an eye on us and um – no, it didn't seemed, I don't know, it just didn't seem to worry us. We just went along with the flow, you know? Just – probably chase good sorts but – we could find. We've got to get away from the old fella, old Dad, but if Dad wasn't around but we had our sling I suppose but –

I      Your sling? Like your sling shot?

R      Yeah. We had our boyfriends but not known to Dad but Dad kept an eye on us.

I      What were some of your father's sayings Edna? What were the things that he'd kind of say to you about life?

R      Oh I don't think can remember them the buggers. I don't know.

I      Or your Mum.

R      Oh poor old Mum. I don't know whether she had any sayings either. I don't think – I don't – you know when you're young, you don't seem to worry about things like that, that goes through the old people's lives you know? You just – you don't seem to have time to worry about the poor old things. You just - I don't know. Dad used to – he always called me 'girl' and I had a nickname 'Muggins'. I had that, that was a name of mine. Muggins. I had that for years. And he used to call me 'girl'. For Christ sake girl, do that right or do something right, you know, but you know? But ah – we'd have, we'd, me and Dad'd have a row and Dad, Dad would say to me you, you're too much like me girl, he'd say. You've got too bad of a temper like me. We could, he could never win an argument with me, Dad couldn't.  
.....

I      You were tough?

R Oh yeah. I had to be I suppose but I always used to beat him arguments. Yeah. You're too much like me he'd say. But oh I don't think we had any slangs. Oh we probably had 'em but I can't remember them.

I Did you have friends on the track?

R 00:10:52:24 Oh yeah, we had our friends I suppose. We had, we had ah – no, we never had money. We had friends when we come to town and I suppose we had friends but I dunno. We, we were always mates on the road. We had to be mates. We worked with one another. We always had to be pretty good – you know, get along easy. Get along together good. Me and me sister Cathy were very close, 'til she got married. We were always close. Right up – way back and I could just remember me and her. We were very close together, one another. But ah –

I So when she married and you were boss drover, did you miss having other women around or the men around were your mates?

R **Droving**

No I don't think so. I had – I don't know how I went then the ..... I often think it myself how I felt but I um I had a lot of worry I suppose but I just sort of went along as you go from day to day. You just had to do it. It was just had – the jobs had to be done. You just had to do it right and you had to get the cattle there. You couldn't just walk away and leave 'em. The cattle had to be fed and watered and watched and you had to get 'em there. And that was your job. You didn't have time to ah worry about anything else or friends or mates or anything like that. As long as you got on with your people, that you were working with you. As long as you got on with your men, they were working for you. You didn't fight with them. It was only me own brother I fought with but he, we used to always fight. Me and him. Since we were little fellas.

I And financially, you'd get paid according to how many, how many bullocks you could get to Dajarra would you?

R Yeah, we got paid ah so much per mile per head. We used to get paid by oh per – you know, so many mile, a mile a head – something per head a mile or something. I just forget how to put it now. But we got paid so much a mile, it was, you were paid, a head for bullocks. Or whatever you were droving. What beast you were droving.

I And would they count them literally every one and work out how many you'd used as killers or it – or it –

- R Oh they always put killers in for you. They always give you ah, always give you 7 or 8 killers. When you took delivery. But half the time you wouldn't kill 'em anyway 'cause you had to keep trying to keep as many as you could. You'd kill somebody else's wild bullock if you could find a good fat one. On a station you never killed your own anyway unless you really had to.
- I Because you were going to get paid for how many you could get to the rail head.
- R 00:13:54:10 Yeah, how many – how many that you delivered. Yeah. How, how much a head you see, you had to get your number there.
- I And would they give you some of the money before they started?
- R I don't know how, how that went. I think that er see you only wasn't, wasn't the boss when we took delivery. You only took over me after but I think you um you knew what you were going to get I suppose. I suppose and you used – you had to, you had to eat. You had always had to have tucker. You always – you'd get a load of tucker to, to take you from there to there – where you were going, you know?
- I I guess what I was thinking is, you had to pay wages along the way and –
- R Oh yeah. Road wages. Yeah. You had to pay wages. Well there was always money. I think that um er the fellow from the station did put money in your bank, so much in your bank. So if a man pulled out on you, you had enough money in there to pay him wages, you know? But by the time you got to the end of the road, well – the end of the trip, well you had plenty of money in there then because – when you finished up your trip, you'd, you used to have to pay all your men off. Like other - any other job.
- I And Edna, did you have to deal when you were droving, with floods in the Channel Country here? Like the Georgina flooding or anything like that?
- R Oh we had it going out with – before cattle but we never had any trouble coming in with cattle. With – well we had rain. We had a lot of – a few times rain but terrible nights, it storms at night time. While we were on the road, going along in the day time but oh, we used to have a few rainy nights but no big floods you know? But we had a few rainy nights. Bloody rainy nights.
- I And then you'd just batten down in your tent and just ride it out?
- R **Droving – Physical Conditions**

Oh you had a tarpaulin. You always had a big – we had a big tarpaulin. We'd put it over – well, when we had pack, when you had packs. Well you'd just cover them up as most, best you could. And got under your bloody swag cover but if we had a truck, well you had your tarpaulin over your truck and got underneath the truck when it rained but you had to be out there with cattle. You had to stay out there with the cattle to keep 'em on camp. No matter what kind of weather, your lightning, hail or bloody shine, you had to stay out there with the cattle to keep them on camp. So they wouldn't get away on you.

I And so what would be involved at night? What was the work at the night, in the night, in a droving camp? Wet or dry?

R 00:16:35:10 Well you had to do a watch. You had a, if you had 5 men, you had – or 4 men – you had 2½ hours to watch. If you were shorthanded, you might have to go to 3½ hours. But you watch. Everyone had a turn at watching. Everyone did their turn of watching. You used to have to go – you had a night horse. All of you had night horses. We used to call 'em night horses. Tie 'em up, poor old things. And everyone done their round. They used to have to ride around and round the cattle to keep 'em on camp. They always laid down for you. It was just like putting them in a yard. They got used to it, you know, at the finish. They used to come on a camp in the afternoon and all lay down and then you'd just have to take your turn and watch 'em. You just rode around and round 'em and keep 'em on camp. Anything poked away.

I And did you ever have cows that stampeded?

R Yeah. Oh yeah. We had a few stampedes. Bullocks. Had a couple of rushes of them.

I So you call them rushes. Tell me the worst one. What was your worst moment droving with a, with a rush?

R Oh well, the worse night we ever had was ah was ah other side of Newcastle Waters with rain. It was raining there – bad rain. We had a terrible night. And -you couldn't see. Couldn't see nuthin. Only time you'd see the bullocks was when the lightning flashed and they rushed in toward the bull ..... scrub. Me and me sister was on watch. We stopped 'em before they got to the scrub but oh you just got to yell and scream and scream and yell and – the best you can and – just hope for the best to block 'em. But we lost a few that night. We lost 70 I think off the lead but Dad – me father and me sister went oh next day and tracked 'em down and brought 'em back. Brought 'em back. That was on the black soil at Newcastle Waters. It was a terrible night, that was.

I So do you remember at moments like that, terror? Is that the right –

R **Droving – Fear**

00:18:44:00 Oh yeah it would be I s'pose. If 1500 bullocks are rushing. Heading for a bloody bull..... scrub. It's a bit terrorising. You don't know if you're gonna stop 'em or not. And you can't see. You can't see a foot in front of you. All you can – all you go by is sound. Sound of the cattle.

I You can't see because of the dust?

R You can't see because of the dark. The dark and the rain. It was raining, pelting down rain and thunder and lightning. And the only time you seen the cattle was when the lighting struck and you used to have to go by sound. And the poor horse had to too. They, they could see I suppose. They're born to see in the dark but them poor buggers, they had to, they, they knew what to do. You used to have to sit down and yell and scream to try and make the bullocks turn. Turn 'em off the scrub or wherever they was – turn 'em back on to the camp.

I And in that kind of crisis, was being female any different than being male? Either in how you saw it yourself or in what other people would say to you? You know, like –

R Oh, I don't know. Don't think so. I don't think so there because you, you don't know one another's feelings really. It was, I, I suppose when you're born to do it, it just comes natural. You just – you don't think these things when you're out there. You don't think of – when you're young, you don't think of these sort of things. You just go along with the flow. Day after day, and it's only when you get old you start thinking. What happened and what didn't happen and what you should've done and –

I So you never expected to spend your older age having people tracking a path to your door to find out about when you were young and if it was unusual?

R No. Well see when you're young, you don't worry about these things. You just go, go, going all the time and – if you kept a diary of yourself it'd be alright I suppose, but you don't. You don't think of, thinking things. You remember a lot of things but you don't think what you'd like to be or – I don't know just why.

I So as a young girl, you don't remember having kind of particular dreams about the future? It was just going along day to day?



R 00:21:22:20 Yeah. We always wanted a station. Me and my eld, my el, not me eldest sister, but Kathy. The one – the second – oh um older than me. We always wanted a station but Dad wouldn't buy one. Get on to a land for us. But ah we just had to go with him.

I Why did you want a station?

R Because we loved it. Loved the cattle. And loved horses. We just wanted to do that instead of droving all the time. Droving, you drove, you drove. It's a good life. It's a good clean life I suppose but every year's the same old story. Like everything else I suppose in life.

I How about your Mum? Was she happy to be on the track or did she also dream of, of stopping?

R Ohhh, I think she dreamed of stoppin'. I don't think – she, she got sick of it, poor old thing. And when she was young, she was alright I suppose but when she had too many kids she was a bit sick of it I think. Poor old bugger. I think she would've liked to live in a town. Rear the kids in a town.

I So Edna, I know you don't want to talk for too long. Is there anything I haven't asked you about, that you think is very important to understand, I guess particularly about droving here in western Queensland?

R **Droving – Daily Routine**

About droving in – well, it's all, I think it's all wherever you, wherever you drove, I think it'd be the same situation. It just – it's the same pattern. A droving's the same pattern. Don't matter where you are. I don't know everyone does it the same. I don't know. Some people might do it different, but there's no way of doing it different because you just – you get up in the mornin'. You, you've got your cook and you've got your horse taylor. They're out first. The boss does the last watch. The boss always does the last watch and he calls the cook and the horse taylor, then when the cook's got the breakfast cooked, the horse taylor calls – ah the boss calls the men and you get up and get your horses saddled up and have your breakfast, cut your ..... and you go. It's just the same old pattern day after day. It's just no different. Some days are dry. We used to call 'em dry days for cattle and next day they'd be watered. You know, water one day and you'd – and next day'd be a dry day for cattle but you always had water for your horses and the plant and ..... and yourself.

I I was reading a story about somebody who took cattle down from South Australia and there just was no water and the cows got madder and madder and then died. Did you ever experience anything like that?

R 00:24:23:08 No. Well if that was the case, that might be all bullshit. Bull dirt too, because if a man, if it, if it was that bad, might have been in the old days. I know cattle did have to go. Some of the old drovers had to go but a bullock won't last any more than three or four days without water. But we had a lot a – we had dry day. We used to call 'em dry days. We'd come to a bore. We'd water. We'd come to a bore today. The bore'd be up there. It might be up there about three or four mile. You'd take your horse on and water 'em. You'd fill up at water and you'd come back to the camp. And the cattle'd have a dry day. We used to call 'em dry days. They'd have no water. Next morning you'd feed 'em off camp, you'd feed 'em to about 10 o'clock I suppose. Half past 9, 10 o'clock. Then you'd cut 'em into water and give 'em a drink and you'd have 'em on the bore for dinner. We'd have 'em on the bore for dinner and they'd all have a good drink and then after, at 1 o'clock you'd take a walk and you'd go on about four or five mile again, and next day'd be a dry day again. It was just the same old pattern all the time, you know? And if it rained and there was plenty of water around – but all the bores were about – some of them were 14 miles – 15 – all apart, you know? And you couldn't do – couldn't do any more than about 9 or 10 mile a day for, with 'em, with the cattle. That was your plan – that was your stages. You, you just had to keep your pattern.

I So Edna, you ended up moving into town to educate your son, and in fact as you were saying, droving stopped pretty soon after then.

R Yeah.

I Anyway, didn't it. So it's a life's that's really gone, isn't it?

R Tis. Gone. Yeah. It's gone. They ..... the only way it'll come back, I don't know but the drovers today, they just do – they're just, they're just not the same as the old ones used to be. They'll have a couple of men and two or three dogs and a couple of motor bikes and I mean, I just don't know how they do it today but that's – it seems so silly today, the way they do it.

I Do you know any women doing it today?

R Oh there might be girls working. I don't know. I don't think so though.

I Mmm.

R 00:26:41:20 I don't think there's any boss women, boss drovers. Because there's not enough to be doing it. It might be inside. There might be a few short mobs in patches or something but I don't think so.

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I      What do you mean by inside? That's –

R      Down inside.

I      .....

R      Yeah. Down inside there. Around Longreach and them places. But I don't think there's any much on at all now. There was a mob come in the other day, or a few months ago, but he had ah only had about two or three men and ooh I don't know how he went. He had a couple a men and a few horses. I don't know how they do it today. It's just a bit stupid. Stupid – a boss wouldn't give you a station. Wouldn't give a man – wouldn't give a drover a mob of cattle in the old days if he, unless he had five or six men and a full ..... of horses, say 50 – 55 or 60 head of horses and a full ..... of packs and 10 or 12 packs, you wouldn't, you wouldn't get a job. But today, they give 'em some today with, with a motorbike. There's changed a lot.      00:27:46:04

I      It has changed.

R      Mmm.

I      Well that's fantastic Edna with the interview. Could we do a little bit of filming with your hands?

(End of interview)

Edna's Hands at end of tape