

**INTERVIEW WITH BEV MAUNSELL**

**21 June 2000**

**Timecode refers to tape 51\_BC\_SP**

**Topics in Bold**

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

**I So this is camera tape 51, it's DAT tape 19. This is the fourth camera tape with Bev Maunsell. It's 21 June 2000 and the DAT is on 2421 and we're in Bev's kitchen in Jundah. 51\_BC\_SP**

I think we'd finished that thing about medical isolation so tell me about Jundah. What year was it when you arrived in Jundah?

**R Women/Work/Education**

03:01:05:10 We moved to Jundah during that pregnancy, when I was having Raelene, early 1977. Ummm my husband had a truck driver's position on the council and we lived in a council house for probably about four years before he started ... he secured a job with Telecom. He was with them for eight years. We bought this house here. I started work at school as a teacher aide in 1978 and I'm still there. After having made jokes that I'd be there with my grandchildren, I've actually seen one go through the primary school and he's now at St Brendan's in Yeppoon, so yeah.

**I And did your kids go to Jundah School?**

**R They did, yes. Yes, Trish, they completed their primary schooling here and the youngest girl Raelene, she actually did Year 1 to 7 here in Jundah.**

**I And do you think that having taught them out on Currawilla gave you real qualifications for your job? I don't mean in terms of bits of paper but did you learn lots about teaching, teaching your own kids?**

**R 03:02:24:00 Yes, and it was the reason that I actually secured the position, I think. That was the only experience I'd had, other than being a mother, but it most certainly was experience and, yeah. So the home supervisor, obviously, then to work as a teacher aide for the principal who obviously thought that, you know, that was an asset for him.**

**I So you would have seen a lot of principals come and go at that school.**

R      **Education**

03:02:57:20    A lot of principals. How many? I've stopped counting. I stopped counting ummm probably around the 15 which was quite a while back and principals started to even leave during the year, during the school year. Once upon a time they'd stay around. I mean, during the sixties, early seventies, principals were staying three years, two years minimum, but then they, you know, it was very difficult for them to adjust for all of the obvious reasons, yeah. So I worked for a lot of principals.

I      Why is it, do you reckon, that you've done the job for 22 years and, I take it happily ...

R      Yes, oh yes.

I      ... and that the principals have come and gone? What's your perception for the reasons for that?

R      **Education**

03:03:58:10    Ummm it's much easier when you are a local. It would be probably more difficult for a principal to move from inner city to Jundah than it ever was for me to move from Windorah to Brisbane. Ummm quite often they would have families. Sometimes perhaps he may not ummm he may be prepared to stay but his wife may not, or vice versa. Then if you have a single principal, I think loneliness is an issue, so there doesn't seem to be an answer to that problem. There are negative sides to both, single or married. With me, I often joke that it was quite easy to stay in a position when your boss kept moving on, which was what was happening. You know, changing of principals, changing of students. It is a wonderful feeling to go through an entire primary school life, or through a child's primary schooling life with them from Year 1 to 7, which has happened three now, for three generations, and I found here, having done that, that they remain very close friends, those children. Some of them are married now and their children are actually at the school so ... and yeah, so I wonder if my children ever wondered what it would be like to have some education without their mum being around. Yeah, probably different for them.

I Did it ever occur to you to train as a teacher or was there just not that kind of space, I suppose, in your life?

R 03:05:49:06 Well, it was suggested to me actually, because one of our friends, a Telecom technician here, his sister did it and they kept saying to me, you know, 'It's only three years'. This was quite a few years back. I don't really have the answer as to whether I was quite contented just to be a teacher aide, perhaps not have the responsibility. A lot of other things going on in our lives at the time might have been, might have even made it impossible, but I'm not sorry that I didn't do that although you often think of the number of times you could have become a teacher many times over, I guess.

I So it's been a good life as a teacher's aide?

R 03:06:38:06 It has been a good life, I think, and we ummm other teacher aides and myself have noticed that if we attend workshops, conferences or whatever, the work that we do in comparison to the work that teacher aides have the opportunity to do in other schools, we are lucky. We are much luckier as in the fact that we actually can supervise the children, take classes and ummm all work is set by the principal, of course, the principal ...

I I suspect the school's been lucky too.

R 03:07:15:22 Visiting people from the Department often say that, Trish, that the small ... and it is important that the small schools have some stability, especially when you do have principals consistently leaving the small schools in the west. It's really important that they have a mainstay, or a couple of mainstays, which we have at the school now, so yeah.

I Coming back to the ... oh did you want to finish something there?

R No, it's just the permanency thing, you know, and probably direction for the incoming principals, too, assistance to them, you know. Yeah.

I Coming back to Jundah as a town, what struck you about Jundah as a community compared to Windorah? Because they're two towns of

approximately the same size, 100km apart, you've lived in both. What's Jundah that's not Windorah?

**R      Jundah**

03:08:16:08    They're totally different. We've had many conversations as to why. Windorah have now formed a Windorah Development Board, as you'd be probably familiar with. I believe myself that a lot more community spirit, that I believe that there's a reason for that as in the fact that there's more permanency in the town. Windorah residents are, you know, first and second generation or whatever. Jundah is the council town where you have the administration centre here for the Barcoo Shire Council, you know the work depot across the road, and we have a lot more itinerants here – people who are not permanent, who ummm and we don't really have ... and that is why. I mean, I think that's why. Probably fifteen years ago, I think there was a stronger community spirit here, before we lost perhaps the older generation who have either passed away now or moved on for various reasons. Ummm I'm not saying there's no community spirit but it appears to be a lot stronger in Windorah and I think that might be why. Jundah's consistently dealing with people or ummm our community are a moving community where you do have those people coming and going. Ummm a lot of people move here short term, and they're very interested, but they do move on as well, whereas Windorah you have that permanency where they're there year after year and locals with a genuine interest in the local community. The whole shire ummm they're very unselfish people.

**I      How about race relations? How are race relations different in Jundah than Windorah, if at all?**

**R      Race Relations/History**

03:10:41:06    I've lived in Jundah for 22 years and we've only had, to my recollection, one Aboriginal family who lived here. Husband was a grader operator on the Barcoo Shire Council. They had three children that attended the school here and they probably lived here for eighteen months to two years. I don't recall any other Aboriginal people living here. Some people

will say to you that they're not accepted. Some people will say that there's a myth, you know, there are mythical beliefs as to why ... I don't really want to touch on that because I don't know. As a story of a young woman killed here and some will tell you it was by a young Aboriginal. Some will say definitely not, so ummm and give you reasons for that, you know, why it would not have happened and how they, you know ... so I don't know. I'd ... but ummm when I first moved to Windorah there were lots of shanties around the town, you know, the little shanties made of corrugated iron and ummm large families of Aboriginal people there, lots of small children, and yeah ... but, of course, they've all gone now.

I And why have they gone from Windorah, do you think? I mean, there's still a number of Aboriginal people round Windorah but why is its Aboriginal population less now, do you reckon?

R 03:12:30:06 Probably ... my first thought when you asked the question was opportunity, more opportunity, and this is with more awareness of what opportunities there are out there, and before not really been aware. But I don't think that applies to any race as far as the west goes. I think the awareness came to a lot of people out here with improved communications and improved roads, you know, improved vehicles. I mean, once upon a time it was ummm a really big issue if you were going to Brisbane or somewhere whereas now, you know, people fly down in their own aircraft or whatever. It's just not all just drive, it's not a major exercise or ...

I Do you think it's because the stations employ fewer people there was less work for Aboriginal people? Is that part of what you're saying? Same as for white's?

R 03:13:38:20 Yes. Yes I do believe that, again. I also think that ummm they quite often move as a family, even in adulthood, so that if the older generation leaves, if the mum and dad leave, then perhaps even the married children leave with their children, and that can wipe out a whole family of ... yeah ... or families, and even cousins and ummm yeah. So that was something that did happen, from Windorah, yeah, years ago when, you

know, when one family moved away and then the older children moved away, and of course they took their children, so ... yeah, so I think that that has happened with the old families that I mentioned that were there in the sixties.

I So the Gorrenges are the main Aboriginal family that's continued to live in Windorah?

R They are, yes. Yes. And support the town and the functions and the school.

I Up round Boulia I heard the story that Aboriginal people had worked on the stations less after the mid-sixties because the stations were forced to pay them cash wages for the first time but before that they would get part of their wages from the Protector, but that the stations didn't have to pay them full cash wages. Do you know about that?

R No, I don't know anything about that, Trish. No. It's an interesting point but no, I haven't heard that.

I Tell me about the role that you've taken in the Jundah community, other than being teacher aide.

R **Accidents/Shire Councils**

03:15:43:10 I probably played a much ... I did play, both my husband and myself played a very active role in the community when we moved here and we had the three children in school, you know, with the committees and the Catholic church and the school, the P&C and the golf club and whatever. That's gradually changed, I suppose, over the years, with your children leaving primary school. Ummm I think we go through ... there is a difference, too, here where quite often things are left to just a small handful of people ummm and after many years, and if you've passed the stage where perhaps your children aren't at school or whatever or you've been doing something ... and like then I gave a lot of things away that also ummm I lost my mobility in 1993 ummm which slowed me down a lot, around here.

I What happened?

R 03:17:08:02 Ummm we used to go skiing every Sunday, out to Ramulla, a property out here, and my son-in-law owned a boat, a speed boat, and at the end of the day, just before we were ready to take the boat out ummm I was hit by the boat, by the propellor, which severely damaged down the front of my left leg and my left foot. Ummm so it was twelve months before I was walking again, although I look back now and realise I wasn't walking, I only thought I was walking. I was virtually shuffling along. Ummm so I've gradually ... it was only a couple of years after I started to walk again that my husband passed away, so I mean we did get out of the community ummm fundraising and things like that. We weren't sort of going and playing tennis any more or sort of participating in sport and ... as I used to, and he used to play golf. So, I mean, circumstances have changed my role in the community, and they do change as it goes along, too. Ummm for the past three years until March this year I was a councillor at the Barcoo Shire Council. So I think that all permanent residents in a town are playing a consistent role in the community, whether it be to go out to a truck that's broken down or to, you know, you'll quite often get a phone call telling you that somebody needs some help or there's a problem somewhere, or asking you to do, you know take off somewhere and do a little job. Once again, kilometres aren't an issue. The distance doesn't matter. Ummm so ... and I was saying to you before that I think that everybody's always in readiness to play a role, even the unexpected, as happened the day of my accident and you know, all of a sudden ... we didn't have an ambulance driver, we didn't have paramedics. We ... my friends and relatives that were there at the ski hole had to take total control – and did, with much competence.

I So in that twelve months, like I ruptured my tendon so I know what it is to ... who was really here for you in that whole accident ...?

R The community. I think, professionally or ...

I Humanly.

R 03:20:03:12 ... personally, or humanly. Ummm I think the town. I spent two months in hospital so ummm and then when I came home ... it was

difficult to come home because you've become dependent on the fact that you have all services in the hospital and yet, even before I left the hospital, ummm services were being put in place and the doctors were contacting Jundah to ensure that the matron here would do twice daily dressings for, well it was six months or so, but for as long as that was needed. Ummm the kids at school, I mean, if it wasn't for their heel to toe, heel to toe with me, I couldn't walk into school without they weren't singing 'Heel to toe, Auntie Bev', I probably would have never learnt to walk properly. Wherever you go people care and they help you and they might adjust a situation to accommodate you to get in there or whatever.

I When you were describing early in your marriage your husband was working all the time and you were looking after the kids and helping him, did your accident really change your relationship with your husband, and if so, how?

R 03:21:21:10 It certainly changed his role in the home as far as ummm helping in the home. Ummm it changed dramatically, I suppose. He had ... I was in hospital for two months. I mean, he was taking care of the home and whatever. He was in total control for the whole two months that I was away so when I came home, that was ongoing, and he continued to assist with all chores around the place until he passed away.

I Do you want to just tell me a little bit about your husband? Sounds like you got a great smack of bad news in the mid-nineties, Bev. Tell me a little bit about your cancer scare and then your husband dying.

R **Health/Gender Relations**

03:22:12:00 Mmmm. Yes, it did continue but, you know, it does that for many people. It's a sad thing. Ummm probably the years that we were looking forward to, as in that the children were reared and we discussed travel and we had a son in the Territory at the time so we'd been over there enough for my husband to finally get the travel bug, and ummm yes I had a call up, a cancer scare in the September of – my accident happened in '93 – ummm in September '95 and, of course, it was clear but Graham insisted that he take a week off and accompany me to Rockhampton and ummm and all



the while he actually had brain tumours and we weren't aware of that fact, so that's a sad point for me. Ummm and it was just two months later, yes, in November and he came in from work and he had a back pain and a headache and ummm he actually had a stroke here, just he and I that night, at midnight. And we flew to Toowoomba the following day to have the, you know, to find out what caused that stroke and they told us about the brain tumours, and they were inoperable and Graham chose to come home so we did that. We brought him home to here and eight weeks, eight weeks later he passed away, and ummm I think there was an example of strength and ummm the fact that the specialist in Toowoomba actually thought my husband was, Graham was transferred from Longreach Hospital to Toowoomba. He couldn't believe that he worked on the Monday and just arrived after having been bogged and whatever, arrived home that night around eight or something, and sort of suffered the stroke at midnight. So I suppose now I wonder if there were signs that he didn't speak of ummm because, yeah, not ... I don't think that people even go to the Flying Doctor as they probably do attend ummm doctors' surgeries, you know, in less isolated places. I think at times, or I suspect that they might just think, 'Oh, I'll be okay', you know.

I This next question, Bev, I hope you won't find it an offensive one. It's my perception that a lot of men in this community are not very healthy compared to their wives. I feel like I'm seeing a lot of salt, a lot of fat, a lot of overweight, and I'm clearly overweight, and I know that the health statistics for men generally in rural Australia are very low. Do you think that's a big issue? Do you know a number of young widows in this community?

R 03:25:46:10 Ummm I do know, yeah, and I have two friends from Windorah who were widowed young. I don't ... neither of those cases were related to what you just mentioned but I do believe that in the past there wasn't an awareness and perhaps that some of the men, or a lot of the men, if not all of the men, many years ago thought that emphasis on eating salt ummm and things like that, healthy eating was hogwash, for want of a better word, and I think today you would see ... I see a big change in that area where perhaps corned meat and damper have been replaced by fruit and

whatever, and yet I have seen a lot of old people, and including men, who've lived extremely hard lives in this country, have worked out in the hot sun from very early morning until late at night, seven days a week, no holidays, ummm roll their own cigarettes, drank alcohol, and did all the wrong things, and not even having access to fruit, and not often veges unless they were grown on the property, so ... and they've lived till their eighties. So I mean, you know, you do have that ummm I'm not suggesting for one moment that that's a healthy way to live but it is interesting to observe that and be probably in an area where you can, because I admire old cowboys or ringers or station workmen who are aged anywhere between 65 and 80 because they really had it tough and paid very little, and you know.

I      What is it like for you? You're 47, you're a year ...

R      53. I'm 53.

I      You're a year older than my eldest brother ...

R      Uh, uh. Right.

I      ... which is an irrelevance ...

R      Yes.

I      What's it like to be a widow in Jundah? How has it shifted your life and what do you see for yourself in the future?

R      03:28:32:22    The future is probably something that you don't want to look at because you thought you had that all worked out ummm but the word 'widow' is probably a word that I didn't even associate myself with because you don't think about it and somebody mentioned in Longreach ... and it was actually Jeannie that said to me, 'You are', and made me really face that fact. The community, and I'm not just saying the Jundah community, most certainly foremost, but not only the Barcoo Shire but many, many people in the Diamantina Shire and Quilpie supported me through that time. The support was incredible and I will probably write a book on it alone, and that's the case if anybody loses anybody in this country. And the support is

ongoing. I found that too. It wasn't something that they just forget about in a week or two weeks or three weeks, then go on with something else. It's still there now but ... and I'm fortunate enough to have children here, and grandchildren. At the same time, the loneliness is a different loneliness because it is for your husband, it is for your mate ummm and probably, you know, to keep myself busy I realise in hindsight was what I focussed on to try and help me through that. I had no thoughts of leaving here because I wouldn't even consider leaving the security of the home. It's as if you're hanging on to the only thing you have left. I'm not including my children in that statement. Ummm but at the end of the day you are on your own and I know that nobody can change that. I know that the children can't even take it away, or the grandchildren, but it is really lonely, and ummm I think sayings like 'Time heals' ummm there's times when I don't believe it is, of course. There's other times when I realise I've let go of things like, you know, I'd hear the truck coming up the road and I'd, you know, someone else was driving it, of course, and I'd sort of put the kettle on and go to think, 'Oh, what will Graham have for lunch?' and all of those consistent realisations that, 'Well he won't be in for lunch,' whatever, I think, yeah, they don't happen now. That's the difference that I can talk about four-and-a-half years later but I think it does get lonelier ummm and there are times when I still can't believe it, you know, and I know that that probably sounds silly but I just cannot believe that, yeah ... 03:31:38:00

I When we just arrived, Bev, a little kid came to the door and had an invitation. Does that kind of thing happen a lot? Kids that you're not related to calling you 'Aunty Bev' or whatever. I'd like you to talk about that kind of side of your life.

R **Braided Channels**

03:31:54:00 Yeah, I think that, yeah that's ummm that has always been the case that we were very close to, you know, when you think that we moved here all of those years ago – 1978 – and there were even children like at the high school then who later had children while we were here and their children ummm, as they were old enough to speak, started to call both

Graham and I Aunty and Uncle, which is quite common in this area, or in the west. It continued on at school. There was probably half a dozen of them that called me 'Aunty Bev' from when they could speak. It spread ummm and the children called both teacher aides at the school 'Aunty'. Ummm yes, I quite often have children in here after school and they do activities or colouring in, or we make things from cardboard or whatever it is they want to do. We just make a mess sometimes. Ummm and I'll quite often get little notes or letters and they'll just pop in and drop them off or ... and, as you said, the little boy next door, yeah, he came in with an invitation. He was just going to prepare a party or organise a party. Ummm I think they're the things that keep you here. Ummm they're the things that you would most certainly miss if you did leave. Yeah. So, I mean, they're not related but ummm I often wonder what impact you have on their lives, especially, you know, we often recall teachers that, perhaps one we may not have been that fond of, in the classroom, and I quite often will be at a function and just catch somebody's eyes and think, 'What was he thinking when I caught his eye? Was it something that happened in the classroom ten years or more ago?' you know, sometimes that happens, but when you receive these little, like an invitation, just to a little party that they're organising for no reason, just to have you over, ummm you start to hope then that those thoughts are all positive, or mostly positive anyway. 03:34;19:16

## **TAPE 2 – SIDE A**

I        You've lived in this town through the years of Mabo and WIK and Native Title. How have those kind of big national policies and court cases and so on influenced life on the ground in the Channel Country? And I guess really, race relations.

R        **Native Title**

03:34:37:22    Ummm in general, I think they've had a very large impact ummm across the spectrum, as in whether it be Land Rights ummm there's a whole host of issues, as you could imagine, that come from Land Rights alone, ummm you know with the oil companies and the councils and

development of any type. So you open up a whole can of worms there, so there has to be a very large impact. I fear ummm that people may be influenced without, through ignorance, ummm I often feel that I'm listening to politicians speak about these things and I don't believe that they know what they're talking about. Ummm I think it's a delicate issue. I'm a little reluctant to speak about it, I honestly feel that it's so delicate. I also believe that it would be sinful to have people ... Aboriginal people influenced ummm encouraged to ummm become something they're not, or to have opinions that aren't really theirs, to change their personality. They're the things that I fear about it, and that might happen. 03:36:31:00