

INTERVIEW WITH JEANNIE REYNOLDS
16 June 2000
Updated 15/01/10 Timecode refers to tapes 32_BC_SP
Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

I So this is Tape 32, so the last one wasn't 30 it was 31, and the DAT is now on 1 hour 2 minutes 25 seconds. This is still DAT no.12 and it's 16 June 2000 and this is the third tape where we're interviewing Jeannie Reynolds on the property at Morney Plains.

Okay, so we're talking about the multi-purpose centre, it sounds a bit like the multi-function polis. Whose idea was it originally and what was the dream?

R 08:01:13:12 A museum for Windorah was the first step towards it and then we thought well, if we were going to build this building, we may as well get the most that we can from it. So it became an arts centre as well as an information centre that was missing in Windorah, and eventually housed the library that hasn't got a permanent home at the moment.

I The library's at the Post Office.

R 08:01:39:04 At the moment it is, yeah. It was shifted from out of the school because they ran out of room for it and dumped in the Post Office and they don't really want it. So we've got to find somewhere for the library.

I From one perspective, one could look at Windorah - and I'm being facetious here - but one could say Windorah needs a café and Windorah needs a gym and Windorah ... why a museum?

R **History**

08:02:03:00 There's a lot of history. I guess there's a lot of history in every area too and, again, I guess it should be preserved in all these areas, but at the moment ummm I guess we're at the stage where the older ones are dying and the history's dying with them. There's no sort of written history about this area. Ummm, I'm not sure how other areas go, whether it's just a forgotten area that no one's done anything spectacular to be recorded.

Ummm, but it's important, I think, to the area and to the people left here, that it is preserved.

I Actually, this is an area where there are books like *Kings in Grass Castles*, *The Life of John Costello* and Alice Duncan Kemp's books. What else comes to mind? Pam Watson's book. This is an area where there has been some history done but are you talking about the more recent history that hasn't been recorded?

R They're books, I guess, that touch on years gone by but not so much a bible. I think they've made good stories out of things that have happened but, yeah, not history as such.

I So if you were to define, let's say, four or five things that seem to you essential in the history of this area, what would they be?

R I guess the pioneering families. Ummm, different buildings or areas that were sort of, I guess, the foundation stones for the area. Ummm, the reason why Windorah's there.

I Which is?

R 08:03:57:08 Ah, I ... in flood times there were the Whitman Brothers who were camped on the Stony Ridge and sold all their wares to the neighbouring people and decided it was a good place for a store. Ummm, that was, I can't remember. They were there a couple of years before it was gazetted as a town as such. Ummm, and Windorah, population has gone up, population has gone down, but never really sort of got any bigger than it is so it's sort of sustained for the last hundred or so years anyway.

I It's interesting the way Windorah is laid out because it's like wherever you are, you're almost looking at bush. And in that sense, it's not dissimilar to Aboriginal communities I've been in in the Northern Territory, just in the spacial layout, you know, lots of space around. Do you know what I mean? Instead of all the ... I'm not talking about other physical elements which are completely different, but I'm talking about the way that ... if you were to put

all the houses of Windorah close up to each other, you would have, what, one and a half streets?

R City streets.

I City streets. Yeah.

R Oh, I don't know. There's no reason to put them on top of each other. There's plenty of space. Ummm, but also I think country people have got a bigger bubble and need a bit more space. I guess.

I Interesting. Boulia is similar too. They're different from country towns I'm familiar with from New South Wales or closer in, I suppose. I don't know, do you think there would once have been more houses that got burned down or something?

R **Women/Land**

08:05:50:10 No. No. Those blocks have always been that size. I never really thought about it like that but country people definitely do have bigger bubbles. You can tell if you're talking to a country person or a city person as how far they back away from you when you're trying to get up close to them. And I guess the further in your go, even though there are small country, oh small towns, closer to the coast, I guess their bubbles aren't so big. I don't know.

I Is tourism an important part? Is that part of the nexus, like you're involved in the museum and, I think you said, the Windorah Development Board. Is tourism an important reason for Windorah to have a museum?

R **Race Relations**

08:06:39:18 I don't know about for the museum. I think tourism for the museum is secondary. Firstly it was to preserve our own history ummm, especially, I guess, how the Aboriginals and the white man learnt to live with each other. You hear so much how they didn't, where I think in Windorah they always have lived side by side. Ummm, so tourism comes secondly to the museum. But it seems to be a growing industry. We're lucky we've got

Birdsville sort of the other side of us. Ummm, they all go through Windorah to Birdsville so we can catch them on the way through and in this day and age you need to find new areas to get some money from. I don't know. There's more and more people leaving the bush and I honestly don't know the answer to bring them back.

I That thing about in Windorah black and white have lived well side by side, you're by no means the first person that's told me that and I've heard it from black as well as white. What do you think that's about? Do you have a historical understanding of that?

R **Race Relations: Reconciliation**

08:07:50:12 I guess as country people you're friendly, like on stations you live and work together so it becomes part of life. I guess it started a couple of generations before we came along that black and white lived together. I grew up with black kids and never had a problem with them. They were just another kid to me and I think it sort of brought it more to the surface now that there seems to be the thing about Aboriginals and white people and the reconciliation and all the rest, where I think it gets our back up out here. We don't need it. There's never been a reason. We're happy living together as we are. There's no need to reconcile.

I It was an Aboriginal woman that first said that to me. She showed me a picture of her mother and a manager of Glen Ormiston with their arms round each other, and said, 'That's reconciliation'. It's also true, as I understand, the early history of settlement, like even just reading that John Costello biography, you'd be aware it's full of murderous blacks or, you know, Mrs Durack holding the gun when the Aboriginal person came threatening her when the men were away or whatever, how do you relate those kind of stories of the early history of Windorah with your experience?

R **Race Relations**

08:09:35:22 That the same ... that there were good in ... there's good and bad in all races. Ummm, okay Mrs Durack held a gun at an Aboriginal

fellow but her best friend was also an Aboriginal. I just ... the colour just doesn't mean anything. There's good and bad in all. Yeah, there were a lot of whites that did a lot of wrong things. There were a lot of blacks that did a lot of wrong things. Some of them are good people too.

I When you say you grew up with Aboriginal kids. Where was that?

R Around Windorah, yeah, sort of social events, etc. Yeah.

I I must say Windorah feels to me like there's a kind of a calm around race that you don't always experience in Australian country towns. Have you ever been to Moree or Brewarrina?

R Been through them.

I Yeah, well you know what I mean.

R Yeah.

I And Alice Gorringer who we interviewed, Alice talked about that things were fine round Windorah but when you got to Bourke you wouldn't be allowed in the hotel and you'd be treated completely differently, and I suppose I'm trying to understand where this difference came from?

R 08:10:59:04 The difference, where it stops and starts. I don't know. Maybe it's the different tribes. I'm not sure. Or maybe it was the way they were educated or the people that had respect for 'em, I guess, their ancestors.

I So now this is a question you don't have to answer but a word like 'boong', would you have grown up with that sort of word?

R 08:11:21:10 Not 'boong', no. I remember Ashley when he was little and we were at a social thing, everyone was sort of talking nice and quietly – he must have been about three at the time – and he went up to this, one of the dark kids, and quite openly said, 'Why are you black?' and of course I just about fell through the floor and everyone else thought it was a huge joke and this poor kid couldn't answer him. He didn't know why he was black and why he was white. But it just, it didn't mean anything, colour.

I And does it mean anything now?

R Yes.

I So that's interesting. What's shifted?

R **Race Relations**

08:12:01:04 Not so much with the people involved. Ummm, I think the government has sent a lot of people racist. I've still got no problem with dark people.

I When you say the government's sent a lot of people racist, what do you mean?

R 08:12:18:10 I guess the way they're treating them differently. Give the Aboriginals everything and not the white person, or feeling sorry for the Aboriginals. Yeah, we should be treated equally.

I They're huge questions for this country. And so as you're getting this museum together, how are you working out what bits of the history will go into the museum? Is that a committee or are you going to employ a historian or it's who donates what? Tell me what your vision for the museum is.

R 08:12:59:14 Well, we've got that little bark hut in there ummm that was originally a Rabbit Board home. Also one of the pioneering families, the Costellos, were the people that lived in there so the pioneering family are also related to the building itself, and we've moved that building into Windorah and, hopefully, restore it as ummm an 1800's homestead around here to, I guess, show the next generation how they did live a hundred years ago. And, at this stage, beg, borrowing and stealing whatever we can find that sort of belongs to that era.

I So that's the heart of it is that the hut will be ...

R The centrepiece, yeah.

I And when you were talking about, one of the strands where you talk about how black and white came to live together, how do you imagine that happening in the museum?

R 08:13:53:14 Ummm, well there was a little humpy there that we've sort of set up ummm with the Aboriginal stones. There's a lot of stones been given to the town by an old fencer, he used to collect as he went around fencing everywhere, so there's a stack of Aboriginal stones, and have got the Aboriginal people sort of explaining these stones and that to us. But it'll be in the museum side by side, the same as the, I guess, the pastoral history beside the storekeeper's history. It'll all be there together.

I That's another interesting thing. I find class confusing in this area. How do you understand class functioning in the Windorah district in the year 2000?

R **Class**

08:15:31:22 I think it's breaking down. Ummm I know what you mean by class. It used to always be the town versus the country. I think it still is to some extent but because, yeah, there are townspeople moving out to the stations and vice versa, stations moving into the town, it is breaking down. There was also the difference between managers and their wives than owners and their wives. Ummm, again I think it's breaking down, more because you don't keep up appearances any more. You just be yourself. You're either accepted for who you are or you're not.

I And is that particularly a shift in actually the women, do you think?

R Well, I don't think it ever existed as much with the men as it did with the women. Women are definitely more bitchier and classy than what men ever were, in my time anyway.

I I suppose what I mean by that is, like I'm talking about Patricia Hodgkinson's mother saying 'You've got to keep up standards'. I suppose I think maybe those class distinctions were partly expressed in what your china was like and whether you put your milk container on the table or put it into a jug or whatever. I'm interested in how things are functioning here.

How is class difference to how it works here now than it did, say, when you were a kid?

R **Pastoral Company/Class**

08:17:07:10 Yeah, that's ... it's not there. It's breaking down. The class distinctions aren't there any more. I guess, ummm, in days gone by, as a manager's wife I would have to be called 'Mrs Reynolds' and be spoken to politely and my place was in the home and that was it. Where today, if I want to, I can get out there and be one of the boys and they can abuse me the same as they abuse anyone else if I push the cow the wrong way. And I think that's how it's breaking down.

I Although it's interesting, when we were setting up for the interview you made a joke. What did you say? 'I wouldn't know what the cows were like.' I forget what you said. How do you define your role on this property? What's the heart of what's your bit here?

R 08:18:06:20 To me, I guess, ummm, domestic's probably the wrong word because that also covers, I guess, a bit wider areas than the normal domestic household things, but I think to run a smooth place, to keep it running smoothly, and harmony and those sort of things, and I guess be there if anyone needs you.

I And the community? Is your work in the community part of what this family gives to the region or something like that?

R 08:19:16:10 Yeah, I guess subconsciously it does. Ummm, a marriage out here, I guess it's more a partnership than husband and wife and wife has her role and husband has his role. I guess your best friend is your partner and therefore you work as a team and if he can't do something, well she does, or vice versa. Yeah, we usually take turns in different community functions, etc. Ummm, and I guess in Windorah, with such a small community, it works the same as what the stations do. I think, yeah, people work together in trying to keep harmony amongst the little town.

I And when you were talking about your kids, Jeannie, I think you said you went away to boarding school and came back but your kids have gone away to boarding school and not come back. Do you want to talk about that a bit?

R **Depopulation: Younger Generation**

08:20:11:10 Well they didn't come home. They left home at the age of 13, never to be seen again. Ummm, it's hard, I guess, yeah. You've only got your kids for 13 years. Ummm, to think that they're down there in the city going through all those teenagey things on their own, as well as learning to be very domesticated, etc. The three boys are living together in a house in Brisbane and one week with them sent me grey overnight. Ummm, but I don't think I want them to come back. There's nothing out here now for the younger ones. They're probably better off ... number two wants to. He's doing boiler ...

I When you say there's nothing out here for them, why's that? What's shifted?

R 08:21:01:06 I don't know the answer to that one. Ummm, I don't know. If we knew, we'd fix it. Ummm, but I guess today's young people are out for the adventures, do everything today. You definitely don't wait till tomorrow to do anything. Ummm, the second boy, he wants to come back to the land but, hopefully, he'll spend his teenage years in the city where there's more than just the pub. They're into sport. He's just bought himself a speed boat which I try not to think about. But, yeah.

I So how old are your kids now?

R 23, 20, 19 and 14.

I So the 14-year-old, presumably ...

R Is still at school and wants to be a racehorse trainer.

I And so when you say there's nothing out here for them, is it that that's the attitude they're reflecting back to you, or is it that that's what you see?

R 08:22:05:18 Both, I think. Both. Although the eldest one, he's a city boy and it's funny, it wasn't, I guess, until the second and third one came along that you realised that his heart wasn't in the land. You could see it at the age of five that he just didn't have the interest there, but number two had. He was always, sort of had an eye for a woolly sheep or a bore that was broken down, where Ashley would drive around with his, off with the fairies, I think. But, yeah, so it's, I don't know, it's something that's just there.

I And you've got a daughter?

R Yes.

I And so what does she want for the future and what do you want for her future?

R 08:22:5:08 I want whatever she wants. I don't really care what the kids do as long as they're happy and achieve what they set out to do. As I said, I'm hoping boarding school will teach them that there's a little bit more to life than horses but, at this stage, she just wants to be a racehorse trainer.

I So that's interesting that you never liked horses and your daughter adores them.

R Yeah, well two out of the four kids are horse-mad. The other two take after their Mum.

I So if you've got two of your four kids that adore horses, and one wanting to come on the land ...

R Four strange kids, yeah. Individuals, put it that way.

I So when you say there's nothing for them, are you talking economically or ... what bit of it is yours? What bit of you doesn't want your kids to do what you've done?

R **Gender Relations**

08:23:40:20 Yeah, economically. There isn't the jobs out here. There isn't the variety out here. Ummm, I guess when I left school, you were sort of fairly limited to what females were allowed to or expected to do, ummm, where today there are just so many more jobs that weren't even thought of when we were going to school and I think even Shannon, there's probably jobs haven't even been sort of invented that she'll probably end up doing when she leaves school. The eldest one's into computers and, as for the second one, he's boilermaking but wants to come back to the land. Ummm, the third boy, he's an apprentice chef at the moment so there's sort of really not that much that they can do out here.

I So is it that actually it's not that diversity has gone from here but that it's the city has become more diverse?

R 08:24:44:20 I think so. I think, yeah, like technology, ummm I guess kids today are more aware of the world, not so much in my time but, say, my father's time. This little bit of the land was the world. There wasn't any access to the outside world in his time, where we're sort of slowly getting more, I guess. And communication breakdown is just, it's not there. There's just right through.

I Somebody's here?

R No, it's only Gina.

I She's the stockman's wife?

R Yeah, I don't know what she's prattling on about.

I So are you and she, like she's the closest woman, does that make her important to you or does that make for trouble?

R 08:25:39:20 Ummm, my husband always says three women on a station is always trouble but I guess Gina and I are a lot alike. He worries about her because she's quite happy living in her own little area, inside her own little fence, like most people do. Ummm, and he worries about that, that she's going to get too lonely, etc. but I think she's a lot like me and quite happy

living in her own little world and she comes over when she wants to and I'll wander over there if I want to, but we don't live in each other's pockets.

I So, really, is there anything that you think you miss, being out here? You say your husband wants to retire to Toowoomba for all the things he's missed out on. What, if anything, have you missed out on from the life out here?

R **Depopulation**

08:26:28:20 My kids, I guess. Having them longer, yeah. I would have liked to have had 'em around a little bit longer. I would have liked to have seen them, I guess, change from children into adults. You miss those years. Ummm, not that I've got any complaints of the job that boarding school did with them, but just the little things you miss out on. Peter can't wait to go down there for sport. He's always been a sort of keen sports person, where at the moment I guess, yeah, in our teenage years there were more people around. Ummm, you'd have football matches against neighbouring stations. There were enough people for a football team or a cricket team, where now it seems to be tennis or horse sports and that seems to be about the only sport there is at the moment.

I And that's that there's fewer people around on the stations?

R Yeah, definitely.

I So what's the dynamic of that? What's shifted?

R 08:27:27:04 Ummm, companies buying stations. Even in the ten years that I've been here, we've lost Cuddapan, Arrabury, Palparara. We've lost three, three stations have closed down since I've been here.

I So that's because the companies put together different stations, like you would virtually run Mooraberree as well?

R **Pastoralism**

That's right, yeah. Yeah, well even Mooraberrie, see, used to have a team of

its own. Well now we've only got sort of a couple over there and one man. Ummm, where before they'd have a full team there.

I What's the impulse? That's essentially about the economics of the pastoral industry getting bigger and bigger. What's driving that?

R 08:28:17:14 Economics, I guess. Same as it's not just the companies, either, it's the little places the other side of Windorah who used to always have one or two men. Can't afford to have those one or two men now. They just sort of have casual labour, bring him in when they're doing their muster and then sort of goes to the next place when he's finished there.

I So if I'm trying to understand the travel, not just of your life, but the travel of women's lives in the Channel Country, what impact do you think that kind of getting bigger and bigger pastoral aggregations, I guess is the first word that comes to mind, how is all of that impacting on women's lives out here?

R 08:28:59:24 Further between neighbours. Ummm, yeah, you're getting to the stage where, yeah, you are on your own. You are lonely. I was lucky when I had the kids. There were always other families around where, you know, there's now some of these kids are on their own. They don't have neighbours or ... families are getting smaller too. Before they'd all have sort of seven and eight kids, well now they're down to one and two kids. It doesn't take many before you start losing population quickly doing that.

I So if your daughter married a bloke and was going to live a couple of properties away, would that be a life you would embrace for her?

R If that's what she wanted, fine.

I Is there anything I haven't asked you about, Jeannie, that you think's important?

R Important to what? Living in the Channel Country?

I Important to women living in the Channel Country and you living in the Channel Country.

R 08:30:05:12 Not really. You learn to adapt, or make do, I guess. Or substitute. If you haven't got something, you substitute something else. You learn that very quickly out here.

I Give me an example.

R 08:30:29:08 Oh, don't ask me for examples. I don't know. I guess people in the city, if they were in the middle, or wanted to make some recipe, if they didn't have an ingredient, they'd race straight down to the shop. Out here, you don't panic, you just throw something else in or leave it out. You can't go to the shop and buy take-aways so you just eat it anyway.

08:30:53:08

I Okay. That's terrific. Thank you.

R There's an atmosphere of Morney Plains Station.

END OF INTERVIEW