

INTERVIEW WITH DOT GORRINGE
15 June 2000
Updated 15/1/10 Timecode refers to tape 26_BC_SP
Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

I Okay, so this is Tape 26 for camera, with Tape 11 for DAT, it's 15 June and we're with Dot Gorringe and the time code on the DAT now is 3250.

So Dot, what made you and Johnny decide to stop working on the road plant? Or was it that the job finished?

R No, the job finished.

I And so what became Johnny's job then?

R 02:01:38:10 Oh, what was it then? No, we went to ummm, I think we went to Lake , that's the property, ummm down on Nappa Merrie, and then after that we, we ah ... Johnny went on the oil rigs then, gas company, oil company, then.

I And so what did you and the kids do when he was working on the oil rig?

R Oh, we just stayed home. I had to stay home with the kids and put them to school.

I So how was that for you?

R Oh, it was good. Yeah.

I Would there have been some of the wives that went with the oil rigs or were all the families in town?

R 02:02:48:10 No, no. No, Johnny, he just worked with oil rigs, yeah. There was hardly any others in town worked on it. He worked down at Jacksons down there where the oil field is, for years.

I And so would he go out just for the day, or he'd be away?

R No, he'd be away for, oh, probably two or three weeks, and come home for ten days or whatever.

I So was that lonely for you after being with him on the road early in your marriage?

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- R No. No, I got used to it. You get used to them things.
- I So how did you see your role in the family, Dot? Like, what was your job when your kids were young?
- R Oh, well, I was just the mother. I had to look after ‘em. Yeah.
- I And was cash pretty tight or was this a fairly good town to bring up kids on one wage?
- R **Work/Pubs**
02:03:42:00 No, it was good. Yeah, it was easy to bring up the kids, yeah. No, I used to work at the pub, too, for years, at the hotel in Windorah.
- I And who was the publican in those years?
- R Joe and Nancy was the publicans then.
- I So what shifts would you work at the pub?
- R 02:04:06:00 Oh, I used to do the cooking there. Just the one cook. We used to do the ... I used to start about six o’clock and go home and come back and cook the dinner then at night. Finish about half past seven or eight o’clock.
- I So who would be looking after your kids?
- R No, the kids used to be with me at the shop, at the hotel I mean.
- I And were there other Murri families in town or were you the only Aboriginal family in town?
- R Oh, no, there was a few Aboriginal families in town, yeah.
- I And how about now, Dot?
- R Yeah, there is a few there, yes. A few Aboriginal families.
- I Have you ever been involved in traditional Aboriginal ceremonies?
- R No.
- I How about your parents or grandparents?

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- R Oh, they probably have, yeah. Yeah, they would-a-done but I don't know nothin' about that, yeah.
- I And have you ever been interested in that or does that feel like the far past?
- R Oh, it's the past but I'm, like lately I've been interested in it, yeah.
- I So do you want to talk about that a bit? What's made you interested in that kind of traditional side of things?
- R Oh, I don't know, I just like goin' out and takin' photos of different things and, yeah.
- I Somebody told me, and I can't even remember who it was now, and I'm interested that some of the council workers would make Aboriginal traditional sites. Do you think there's truth to that? You know, almost for fun.
- R Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't know because I haven't heard of it.
- I You know, like, this was ...
- R You never, you know, you don't know. They probably would and some mightn't. You wouldn't know what to believe.
- I But you've never heard of that going on?
- R No. No. Well, you'd know what it was anyway, I think, if you were ... if they did do it.
- I Have you ever known Aboriginal people in this area whose families have had long, long connections with this land?
- R No. No, not ... oh, there was a few families in town that would have connections with it.
- I Who are you thinking of?
- R 02:07:19:02 Oh, well most of them have shifted away now but there are the and the and Johnny's family, they used to all live around here but most of them's gone now, shifted away.
- I And why do you think that happens, that there's fewer Aboriginal families around now?

R 02:07:49:00 Oh, I don't know, I think they just, when they grew up, they just shifted away and got jobs somewhere else and, yeah, but there wasn't much out here for 'em then.

I So are you saying, has the population of the town got smaller in the last 40 years?

R Oh, yeah, it's got smaller but there's still, you know, still a lot of people around here, mmmm. Oh, we used to have a two-teacher school. Two teachers used to be here but now we've only got the one.

I When did that happen?

R Oh ... oh probably about ten years ago, I suppose. Yeah, it must be about then.

I And was that because the stations are employing fewer people?

R 02:08:47:00 No, it's just, oh well there was a lot of main roads, like the roadworks goin' and there was a lot of families on then. When it got close to town, they used to live in town with their children, and even the properties, they had kids. They used to come into town. There was a lot of kids around. Well, we had two teachers.

I So it's just town has been getting quieter and quieter?

R Yeah, yeah.

I So tell me when you started to get interested in history, Dot. Like, for instance, where did you hear about Alice Duncan Kemp's books?

R Oh, I've always been interested in books.

I Did you have many books when you were a kid?

R No. No, I never. Never had many then. Probably the last ten years, yeah.

I So do you remember where you heard about Alice's books and how did you come to get hold of one?

R **Alice Duncan-Kemp**

02:10:19:00 Oh, I just seen 'em in the bookshop and bought 'em. Yeah, bought a couple of 'em and one, oh what do you call him, one anthropologist gave me, gave Johnny and I a

book to read, and ... he knew we were interested in the country a bit so, in this country, so he picked up a book for us while he was, you know, down in Brisbane, so brought it home.

I You have a bookshop you go to quite often in Toowoomba. Do you want to tell me the story of getting Alice's books?

R No, well I just bought it in a shop down there one day when I was lookin' through the new ... ah, the bookshop.

I How much did you pay for it?

R Oh, that one come from a second hand shop, that was \$60 that one, yeah.

I So it's a lot of money for a second hand book. Had you heard about it?

R Yeah, yeah. Well, there was only a few of 'em made at that time. Yeah, there was only a few of 'em left, or you could buy 'em, so if I wanted it I had to get it.

I There's been quite a lot of debate about Alice's work, about how accurate it is and whether it's a true picture of relationships between white people and Aboriginal people, that sort of thing. What do you think about that? What do you think of Alice's work?

R Oh, well, I don't really know because I wasn't around in them days. Yeah, you wouldn't really, you know, I couldn't say much about it but I like the books and I know some of the country that she talks about.

I And does it seem that she's accurate in the way she talks about the country?

R Oh, yeah. Yeah.

I Did you know Alice's sister Laura at all?

R Yeah, yeah.

I Tell me what you remember of Laura.

R Oh, well, I don't, you know, I wasn't really, oh I don't know ... I didn't know her that well. I'd only seen her a few times, mmmm.

I She probably didn't come to town much.

R Town much, mmmm.

I And how about with the museum in town, Dot? Are you involved with that?

R Yeah.

I Tell me what you're doing with that.

R 02:13:10:10 Oh, well, they're trying to get up and runnin' for an information centre and, oh we have our arts and crafts there too, so I suppose it'd be a bit of everything when it gets goin'.

I And is it going to have a lot of stuff about Murri history?

R Oh it probably will when we get around to getting' something, yeah, yeah. It won't have a lot but it'll have something there, mmmm. Yeah. We'll have to put somethin' in there.

I So am I right, Dot, that all this talk about black and white, to you it hasn't seemed so relevant? Is that ...?

R Oh ...

I Like, how would you describe relationships between white people and Aboriginal people?

R **Race Relations**

Well, I can only talk for meself, but here it's great. Like we all just mix in together out here. It's not like down in the cities. Yeah, no. It's all right out here. It's good.

I And why do you think it's different out here?

R 02:14:32:00 Oh, I don't know, it's just different. Like, a lot of the people have been brought up together out here. They probably have down there too but it's more politicians down that way, mmmm. Yeah.

I So are you saying that Aboriginal politicians haven't helped you, or are you talking here about white politicians?

R Oh, no, they do help you but oh, I don't know how you'd put it. I just don't, I don't know, not just into that, that's the thing.

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- I So say when people talk about a Treaty, what do you think about that?
- R Oh, don't know. No, I don't like talkin' about them things.
- I And reconciliation? What do you think about that?
- R Oh, well, I don't know. Well, oh I don't know. They ... oh, I don't know what to say because I rarely ...
- I
- R Yeah, but see it's not ... I don't know. I wouldn't like to remark on it because I never, never really had anything to do with it, you know, with the ... like now they're talkin' about the Stolen Generation, well that's had nothin' to do with us so, you know, I wouldn't remark on it. Yeah. So.
- I One of the things Isabel Tarrago said to me ... she showed me a poster where her mother Topsy Hanson, so a Murri woman from Glen Ormiston, and a white woman Mrs Brown, had their arms round each other. And she said, 'That's reconciliation,' you know, black and white used to live together, and if you've got to have a big name for it, then something must have gone wrong. Would that make sense to you?
- R Oh, mmmm. Yeah, I suppose. But I don't know, I don't much into that thing.
- I So what are the things that you're into in your life now, Dot? Describe a typical day for you.
- R 02:16:58:00 Oh, I don't know, just sittin' at home doin' things, I suppose. Yeah. Or goin' drivin', campin' out somewhere.
- I Would you go camping with Johnny? Where will you go?
- R Oh, anywhere.
- I Like where?
- R Oh, well, I couldn't just really say because we go everywhere, or anywhere.
- I How long will you head out for?

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- R Oh, a couple of days, I suppose.
- I And so if you were to describe how you felt about this land of this area, how would you give words to that?
- R Oh, I don't know. No, I wouldn't know.
- I Yes, sometimes it's hard to give words to things.
- R Yeah, yeah. No, I wouldn't know.
- I What do you reckon are the most precious places around here, most beautiful or spiritual or ...?
- R 02:18:06:02 Oh, well, there's a few places but I wouldn't like to say. No, there's a few around but ... no, I wouldn't like to say where they are, because I think there's only a few of us know where them spiritual things are, you know, yeah.
- I And so do you want to tell me a bit ... do you have a land claim, Dot? Do you want to explain a bit about that?
- R Oh, yes, it's over round Quilpie area there. Yeah, I don't know much about it over there. They've got, the other families got all that under control. They do all that so ...
- I And in your understanding, if you got Native Title over near Quilpie, what would that mean to you? How would it change your life?
- R 02:19:14:20 No, it wouldn't change *my* life. No, it wouldn't change it. No, it wouldn't change *my* life. It might change the rest of the, you know, a lot of the other Murriss but it wouldn't change mine.
- I Why is that?
- R Oh, well, it just wouldn't. You just keep on livin' the way you've been livin'.
- I Some white people I've spoken to, their picture of Native Title is that it would mean them giving up ownership of their land. Is that as you see it?
- R No. No, I don't think so, not over there, not in that ... not for that lot over there in Quilpie, I don't think. No, I don't think they'd have to give up their land.

I So what do you think it would mean, say, for your sisters? If they got Native Title, what would that mean?

R Oh, I don't know. Just go on livin' the way they've been livin' I suppose.

I But would it mean being able to visit that land, for instance, more easily?

R **Native Title: Intra Aboriginal**

02:20:38:10 Oh, probably, yeah, but I don't know. I don't think they ... oh, not my sisters, they've been out there for years. But I don't think the others, the other ones who put in the claim, I don't think they've ever been out there, so they wouldn't know what the land or the properties look like, you know, wouldn't know. A lot of 'em live in the city and they just put in the claims, yeah.

I So why do you think they would put in the claim?

R Oh, well, that's where their mother or father come from, yeah.

I Alice put _____ of you, that she wished you were able to make a claim around here, that this was the, not you as an individual, I guess she was talking about herself and for the Gorrenge. What do you think about that? Do you think that the current Native Title system is a sensible one for your family, for instance?

R Oh, yeah. Yeah, well I think they are puttin' in a claim for it but I don't know what they've done about it yet so, yeah. So I don't know.

I And from your end, it doesn't sound like you're very involved in your family's land claim, but what's involved? What do you have to do if you have a land claim?

R Oh, gee. There's a lot of things involved in it but I haven't, you know, I haven't had that much to do with it. It's a corporation thing and they've got their committee set up and they just go ahead and do it all, yeah.

I You go across sometimes for a meeting?

R Sometimes, yeah, not very often, no. I haven't been across there for a good while now so I don't know what's goin' on with it.

I A woman called Mary Graham, whose traditional country's round the Gold Coast, she's a Murri woman in Brisbane, she said that it seemed like Native Title was creating divisions between Murris about land that hadn't been there for a long time. What do you think about that? Is that your experience?

R **Native Title: Intra Aboriginal**

02:23:11:20 Yeah, well ... yeah, well it is the experience because, I don't know, you get people that have lived out here most of their lives or another one's come back from Sydney or Bourke or somewhere, and they come back to claim the land too, so you don't know where they come from. If they belong to the country or not up here. So, you know, it's a bit confusing sometimes. The only thing they've got to ... what they want, what some of the ummm, the what do you call it, some of the, like they've got to trace their family trees back to see where they come from, and it's a bit hard. But that's the only way they can, you know, trace their trees, I suppose, their families where they come from.

I So how do people go about tracing their family tree?

R Oh, well a lot of 'em go to the archives in Brisbane, or John Oxley Library down there and find out different things, yeah. Get a lot of information from down there.

I And when you talk about belonging to the country, what would that mean? Like, do you belong to this country, for instance?

R No, not here. Round Quilpie. Yeah, that's where I come from, there, originally, but I suppose you can call it country now, you've been here for so long, yeah. A couple of fishermen over there, must be fishin'.

I How often do you fish here?

R Oh, we come down every now and then when we get a chance or when we feel like it.

I Get a good feed here?

R Mmmm, yeah. Yeah, you get a good feed.

I So is there anything I haven't asked you about, Dot, that you think important for me to understand your life here in the Channel Country?

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- R No, I don't think so. No.
- I Do your kids come? How many of your kids live round here now?
- R Oh, I had two families. Two livin' here in Windorah, two in Quilpie and one in Toowoomba. Yeah, so, and the kids love it out here, so ...
- I So you imagine there'll be Gorrenge around Windorah for a long time to come?
- R I don't know. Oh, there could be and there couldn't be. See, I don't know.
- I How about for you and John? Like, what do you see for the future in your life?
- R Oh, I don't know. The same things, I suppose.
- I So what's John's job now?
- R He's still with the oil company. He's workin' out of town at IOR. Yeah, he works out there.
- I So he just goes out for the day or he still goes out for days or weeks at a time?
- R Yeah, he does three weeks on and three weeks off. Goes out there, stays out there.
- I And you're completely used, now, to having the periods when he's away as well as the periods when he's back?
- R What's that?
- I Well, you must be quite used to having John here and then John away?
- R Mmmm, yeah, yeah, that's right, yeah.
- I Does your life shift a lot when he comes back?
- R No. No. No, it's the same.
- I On a completely different matter, how do you define the Channel Country? What does that word 'Channel Country' mean to you?
- R Oh, I don't know. Don't know how you'd put it.

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- I Well, where do you reckon it begins and ends, for instance?
- R Oh, well, it begins up north here and ends down Lake Eyre.
- I So would you see somewhere like, say, Stonehenge, would that be part of the Channel Country?
- R Oh, I don't know. Yeah, it'd start up there 'cause it's ... yeah, it would be, yeah, yeah. It'd start up there and finish down Lake Eyre.
- I Have you ever been down to Lake Eyre?
- R No.
- I So what's the furthest south you've been following these rivers down?
- R Well, it'd be Innamincka. Yeah. Yeah, down at Innamincka, that's the furthest I've been.
- I And when, in terms of history going way, way back, like there was the big massacre of Aboriginal people, I think, at Battle Hole, near Jundah, is that something that you would know about or that people would talk about very much?
- R No, they don't talk about that much.
- I So which are the bits of the history going way back from round here that people talk about a lot?
- R **History**
Well, I don't know if people do talk about it. I haven't heard anybody talkin' about things, you know, what's happened.
- I I thought maybe because there's a new museum here in Windorah, isn't there? And there's a new one going in in [Jundah?] and it looks like there's a new one in Quilpie. Like, there's probably quite a lot of interest in history at the moment?
- R Yeah, well there's a lot of interest in history but you don't hear people talkin' about it.
- I Is that partly for the tourists, do you think?
- R Oh, yeah, tourists probably want to know about the history and that of a town and different things, yeah. 02:30:27:00

I Okay, is there anything you wanted to ask, Julie?

I Anything else we haven't covered, Dot?

R Ummm, no, I don't think there's anything else.

I Okay. Thank you very much.

R About what?

I About whether cotton should be allowed to be grown.

R No, I don't reckon it should be.

I Why not?

R Oh, well, I suppose there's a lot of chemicals and things that they use, yeah. No, I'm not in favour of cotton so ...

END OF INTERVIEW