INTERVIEW WITH ALICE GORRINGE
7 June 2000

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

SIDE A

I **This is Tape 10 on DAT, we're 18 minutes 27 seconds into Tape 20 on camera. It's 7 June 2000, Trish FitzSimons recording, Erica Addis on camera, for the Channels of History project, and we're interviewing Alice Gorringe.**

So Alice, tell me where and when you were born and what your name was when you were born.

R My name is, or was, until I got married, Alice Murray Bates. you know, how Mum took after Grandma's name in those days, and I came to Queensland. I think I went to school in every state in New South Wales, every town more or less, seven schools in all, so we didn't get very far in schooling because we were moved so much. My Mum's uncle was a fencer so he moved from property to property, from town to town, and you just went to those schools. But I don't remember going from Tibooburra, I was born in New South Wales in a place called Tibooburra, is the proper name, but we call it Tibooburra, and I don't know, what was it, on the 7th of the 25th, '35. So during the war they moved us over to what they call [Wunaring?] but uncle wasn't satisfied there so they saved their food for months and months, because you wasn't getting very much rations, you wasn't allowed to go out and hunt or anything like that, other than on the river where you were in view. So one month they packed up their camel wagon and cleared out. So they used to travel at night. They were good bushmen, they used to travel at night. We ended up at Underfoot, through the border up there, is the Queensland-New South Wales border. So we lived in Queensland then and I think we had two, one more child in Queensland.

Camels – I don't like camels from that day to this because they were camel wagons and they seem to complain continuously, camels do. So Cunnamulla was the first school I went to, so I went to school there for, I don't know, probably a couple of weeks, then you move on. We ended up down at what they call Wilcannia and there we had another baby by this time. We moved from there to White Cliffs, that's back north again. We used to have a whale of a time at White Cliffs because we had goats there. Oh, we lived with cousins, like family lived with families during the Depression. Poor old Dad was an alcoholic but that's how you lived them, in them days.

So my Grandma got it in her head that we had to go home so they had a horse and buggy, so they came across and picked us up. We all went back to Tibooburra again then. Dad worked on the sheep stations around, pulled himself together for a little while and … so I used to spend most of my time with Grandma and Grandad. He wasn't my real Grandad but I used to spend time with them, out on the border fence. We were allowed to have pet kangaroos, you could have anything you wanted because there was only one child in the family by this time. And the other kids stayed with Mum in town. But Gran got sick so I had to come back to town and we ended up in Broken Hill, another school. I think I must have been Grade 3 or 4. You leave school at that age and you go to work. We ended up going to Arrabury then. Mum's met up with this other guy, she's left Dad in the meantime, so we've got to get up there. We had an even bigger backyard to play in, with horses as well as cattle then. So we had a whale of a time there.

I So, am I right that at one stage, the stage when you went off with the camel wagons, you were actually, your parents were escaping a reserve?

R Yes, they didn't like the reserve life. And the old uncles had the wagon so they left. And no one ever caught up to them because they'd only travel at night.

I So Aboriginal people in New South Wales at that time could be put on a reserve and not allowed to leave? Could you tell me how that system worked because I don't think it's widely understood.

R Well, you was put on these reserves and given rations every fortnight or every month, I think. I was too young to understand but there was hundreds of us there and I don't know about meetin' boys today and girls today that was there when I was there but I didn't know 'em. I didn't know 'em at the time. Because you stayed in your little family groups and, not only that, you were a different tribe of people from different places and you were inclined to stick with your own tribe mob. Not that we had very much tribal thing in our days, you know, as children. Oh, we learned to talk the language and the swear words when we got up to Arrabury because there was a lot of full-bloods there. Chew their tobacco, you know, you just burn the ashes of the leaves, shake it out and put a bit of tobacco with it, and you'd be able to spit out of the corner of your mouth and that sort of stuff. But then again, there, we mixed with the both sides there but, bein' half-castes, if the blacks didn't like us, they was tellin' us, 'You're only a half-breed'. You know, you used to go back, if we did something wrong, but we learnt quickly.

I So your family in New South Wales, do you know where your traditional lands would have been or has the family moved round so much …?

R Yeah, around [Tinnanburra?], what they called [Tinnanburra?]. It's down below ummm Cunnamulla, down in through that area there somewhere. That's where Grandma really come from in the beginning, in through … I think it's [Tinnanburra?] they call it. Never went home to have a look when I was down there. and Dad's family's all around Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Cobar, in through there. So I was only readin' the *Reader's Digest* the other day and there's a Dutton in there. We were related to the Duttons as well. What welfare's done to this Dutton boy. So welfare's definitely no good for you. You know, you could get out and work.

I Your family, then, was, even though your father was alcoholic, your Mum and your Dad were determined to get out of the reserve and find work?

R Yes, mmmm. Yeah. Yes, he did and he was away from his family, I think that was his problem. You know, he had no family other than Mum's family and, believe it or not, in Mum's family there was two girls and between 'em had about 15 children, eh? Or more. 'Cause Aunt had five or six and with Mum's 11, there would have been 12 or 13 there. Most of us did live. That's a great big family.

I So tell me how you came to be Alice Gorringe, how that came to be your name.

R Well, that was my stepfather and when we came to Arrabury we all went under the name Gorringe. You know, well I think I was nine when I came up there and it's just as easy to be a Gorringe as a Bates then, so it just went on.

I And Bill Gorringe had a good reputation, didn't he? Tell me a little bit about him. Tell me your stepfather's name and tell me a little bit about him.

R His name was William, William, I don't know what, Henry I think, and Gorringe, of course, and he was one of the top ringers around the place. He could do almost anything but read or write properly, you know, then, it wasn't schooled. And ride, he taught us to ride like he did, break our own horses in and try and ride bulls and all this sort of stuff but it didn't work out very well. Roping and everything else you had to do. We could kill a beast ourselves. It took three of us to kill a goat, at nine year old, but we finally did it.

I So tell me about killing a goat, Alice. What …?

R Very terrible, it was. They're not like sheep. They're not very quiet. You can cut a sheep's throat and it'll just grunt, but a goat, he screams all the way through. And Mum was saying, 'Hold it, hold it. Can three children hold a goat down and cut its throat?' We'd have been better off shootin' it in the head and then making it unconscious and cuttin' its throat. Oh, if Mum was near I think I'd have strangled her but Mum kept out of my way. I must have had that killer look in me eye. So, we had no meat, we had to do it.

I But your parents, your mother and your stepfather wanted you to acquire skills as a kid, like you had an education in bushcraft, is that right?

R Oh, yeah. We could live off the land, just go out and eat whatever. We ate, more or less, whatever cattle ate, and horses. We never had very much veg in our younger days but we grew up okay. We had all our teeth and everything else. No sweets, no soft drinks, nothing like that. We'd never seen a take-away until I was in my twenties. I think I was 22 when I saw the first take-away and said, 'Oh, yummie, this is good'.

I So are you talking about, you were living on bush tucker or you were living …?

R No, we were living on the stations. We had … we'd go to get groceries every six months, go into Arrabury and get a load of groceries and if anyone came out and you wanted something, they'd fetch it out. Mum could make bread with potato peelings, make a yeast out of potato peelings. We'd have bread. We learned to cook very early in life, used to make chips and that sort of stuff, cook your own while Mum's away.

I So there was plenty of potatoes?

R Plenty of the basics like cabbage, potatoes, pumpkins. Very seldom that you got carrots but you could grow your own during this time of the year and the soil was reasonable.

I And tell me about the story of actually … do you remember coming to Arrabury Station for the first time?

R Yes, we came up on a mail truck. You sat up the back, Mum with five children sat up the back, and they made a bit of a hollow in the loading, the groceries, so you sat back in there. And it rained. That was funny. It rained so all I had to cook a big feed in for all of us, was the two truck drivers, there's about eight of us I think. So they emptied the gallon tins, you know the ordinary four-gallon tins. No one ate anything till you get a rabbit so he threw this rock at one and killed it, so we had veges on and we stuck it in with … oh, if you've

seen a kerosene tin, it's that big, isn't it? I put the rabbit in there after we cleaned it, potatoes, pumpkin, everything we had. That was a stew for two or three days till the ground dried out so we could move. That's the biggest stew pot ever I'd seen, I reckon.

I So this mail truck. Where was it coming from and where was it going?

R It was coming from Broken Hill to Arrabury and all the stations in between. You'd have Naryilco, Oriantis (?), ummm, Nappamerrie, Innamincka, and then you came on up to Arrabury and it's done all those round, over to Cordillo just through the border. So it was a long run and one of those old cratey things that travelled what, 20 mile an hour or something like that. It was monstrous, or we thought it was, you'd have to go to the toilet, you'd have to climb right down again and I think Mum ended up making a potty of some sort so she wouldn't have to stop every five minutes with five children. So we get up there and we'd never seen many really full-bloods before until we got to Innamincka and there was a lot of them there, lived on the river. So Mum had some of her babies at Innamincka so we used to go down there, there's this nice so we used to mix with them. They used to sit in this little dish and row across like little ducks, eh. It was really neat. I still can't swim. I was reared on the Cooper and I still can't swim.

I Why is that, do you reckon?

R I don't know. Because girls wasn't allowed to swim sort of thing. It was sort of understood that you didn't swim. Mum didn't swim. We bathed, you know, you got down and had a wash and from that day to this I don't have a cold shower, even summertime, I have a warm shower. That water is so cold and you've got goose pimples on your goose pimples when you're trying to soap yourself.

I Do you think that was a traditional Aboriginal thing?

R I don't know. Because a lot of the other girls can swim. But we wasn't allowed to. And you weren't allowed to swim in mixed company or anything. Even with shorts or trousers on, you still wasn't allowed.

I So your mother brought you up to be very modest?

R Yeah. When we wasn't workin', we went to church. Needless to say, we used to like to go to work a lot instead of goin' to the church. Well, Mum was probably modest too, eh? All those old ladies were. Even the men of my generation. They were, too. They wouldn't …

if they walked inside they'd take their hat off, always. They never walked inside with a hat on.

I Alice, I read somewhere, you would know probably much better than I do, that there's a pretty ugly history of Aboriginal women being subjected to sexual attention that they didn't always want.

R Yeah, mmmm, yeah.

I I read somewhere that Aboriginal people responded to that sometimes by becoming extremely modest as a way to try and protect themselves. Do you think that was going on in your family at all?

R Oh, I know we always wore trousers. Always wore trousers. Regardless of what was going on, you wore a pair of trousers. So we wouldn't, I don't know what it was. You wasn't allowed to sit a certain way or anything else. You always had to sit like so, you know.

I Not with your legs open.

R No, no, no. That was too vulgar to sit like that. And, I don't know, it was just the dress. 'Cause you bent over a lot around the camp fire, you know, you did a lot of bending over, so a pair of pants and a long shirt was even better. As for the other episode, it still goes on, let's put it that way. When I was in The 'Curry, I often tell one of my friends, if ever they, the police pick me up for something – not that I'm a police hater, I've got granddaughter that's a policeman – even if they lock me up I'll scream out to you 'cause you stay in the shop across the road and if you don't get me out, when I get out I'm going to beat you up. I used to threaten her because it still goes on in these small places. If anyone wants sex, they just go to the jailhouse and that's it. Like I said, it still goes on today.

I So you're saying that you had to learn young to protect yourself and part of that was to be aggressive when you needed to be?

R Yeah, that's right. Oh, I don't know how to put it. Like I said, the boys did know us from the … any stranger come along, they didn't know we were girls 'cause could you imagine riding along behind cattle and cattle dust your hair, it'd be just the same colour as the boys' and we've always had sort of long hair, but plaited, and it's just all matted with dust anyhow. It took 'em a while to find out what we were, which was good for us, we didn't

mind. They could swear and carry on behind us, we didn't care, as long as they didn't come near us. And if they turned out … most of them turned out okay, you know, you could stand and talk to them. Even tried drinking with them once but Dad caught us. It wasn't very good. He boxed our ears and kicked our backsides. That was the way it was.

I And your Mum? Tell me about your Mum making undergarments for you. What would your mother do?

R Yeah, well she must have … I've been thinking of that. I might try and make them when I go home. They were really good. They tied in the front. You could pull them as tight as you like and I think they were tied on, the brassieres were tied on top as well, so you'd just pull yourself right up, you know, a bit like a pair of stays I suppose. Because riding a horse all day long is a bit rough on your breast part, anyhow. So I find now the elastic doesn't last long enough so I'm thinking of making me own once more.

I So your Mum would make your brassieres?

R Yeah, mmmm. I had a pair that fit me and … you had about three pairs, I suppose. Because you didn't get to change that often out there because you'd have to do it in a swag or go down behind a bush somewhere to do it, because regardless, there's always men in the camp, always. Same as the bath. You bathed in the moonlight somewhere, you know, and just hope no one was watching you. It was unreal. In the bore drains, we used to love going south. There's hot bore drains. You could jump in there and wash your clothes, then you've had a bath at the same time.

I So what had taken your family to Arrabury Station?

R Oh, Mum met up with Bill then, see, the fellow we came up. Mum used to find it hard to cope with five children and no education and that sort of thing. So Arrabury was good, good for us, she stayed home and looked after the radio, the younger children. We all went to work. They used to send us for killers and we used to chase emus all day. Come home and get another hiding. We used to swim our horses to get the sweat marks off 'em. Didn't make no difference. When they're dry the sweat will come out.

I So from what age do you reckon you were really contributing to the work of Arrabury?

R Oh, I don't know. Ten? Ten onwards, I suppose. We used to go everywhere. We went everywhere with the old guy, that's all we knew was stock work, till I was about 17 and I

got in … I don't know, I [bailed up?] I didn't want to do this any more so I went cooking at the pub in Windorah.

I And how was your family paid? Like, were you paid a wage working for the station?

R You'd be joking. In clothes and food. I done that for 14 years and I got a car that was worth $300. Three hundred pounds in them days, yes $600 for 14 years' work. I don't know, I was quite happy with that. There was also me, I was the oldest, and then there's John and then there's Peggy. So us three used to be together all the time, more or less. Different jobs but we'd see a lot of each other and have lots of fun as well. And fights. We used to fight as well. If you got into a fight, they let you fight until you couldn't stand any more, so … that's the way it was in the camps. Me and John had a fight from five o'clock one afternoon till nine o'clock at night, I think. We couldn't stand up so we had to give up. It made no difference. I can go and see John today and we're still the same as we used to be. We can only see something funny and look at each other and we just start laughing again. Poor Dot, John's wife, if we want to go to the pub and there's anything on, we just look at each other and just go like that. And all of a sudden we'll disappear and we're down the pub having a beer then.

I Okay, so this is camera Tape 21. We're still in DAT Tape 10. The DAT is on 2407 and this is the second tape that has part of Alice Fortune, previously Gorringe nee Bates's interview on it, and we're in her son's home in Mt Isa.

So tell me, your stepfather and mother would have been paid by the station, were they Alice?

R No. Only Dad. Mum wasn't, although Mum manned the radios and cooked for them when they came through. Oh, if you attend a muster … in once place, say they attend a muster at Arrabury, so they'll come into The Planet, a group of men, most of them will eat down at the camps but a lot of them would come, like the head stockman and that sort of thing. Mum would cook for them. Some time you'd have about 20-25 men there at the station.

I So what was the exact job that your stepfather was doing for Arrabury and do you know how much he was paid and how he …?

R No. I never knew how much he was paid. It was a question you didn't sort of ask, you know. Well, he was the manager of an outstation. Arrabury was an outstation. Nulla was

an outstation but Nulla wasn't manned when we were there, but that's what they were. You took care of the stock in that area around there. So that's what he was. He could sign his name but he couldn't read well or write well.

I Do you think he was getting cash wages or was he getting wages in food and clothes?

R He was getting money somehow, yeah, but probably into his bank account or something. He had a cheque book so I could say it went into that. He could sign his cheque book but he couldn't write out the amount so we used to have to do that, or Mum only she wasn't always home. Not that we had that much education ourselves, you know. I went as good as Grade 3, Form 3, or whatever it was in those days. But it's okay, you do learn to read and write. We had jam tins, syrup tins, and what have you.

I And did you learn … you obviously learned how to do stuff with animals. What's involved in breaking a horse? Tell me about the first time you broke in a horse, Alice.

R Oh, first you've got to get it into the yard. We broke in brumbies mainly, that's what we practised on. You'd run them down and rope them and sneak 'em into a yard and well, you'd have to get from the rope round his neck to a halter on, or a bridle on, if you were game enough to get that close. From there you'd sort of, what they call bag him down to make him a bit quiet, and eventually get a saddle on him. And eventually you'd get on him and hope for the best. And we used to have to do that if we wanted horses. The best ones we ever found was the brumbies on the Cooper. They were really passive horses, never even bucked with you or anything. You could pull 'em in today, rope 'em, do something to their mouth so you can turn 'em when you want to go, jump on 'em and ride 'em away. They were quite good. Some of the brumbies are really rough. They used to wait till you got outside and throw you off, but you didn't dare get thrown off because you'd lose your saddle. So you just hung on to whatever you could and it's no fun riding bareback with your tail bone on a horse. You soon get a sore backside from that.

I Now you were saying that girls didn't swim and yet breaking horses is something that in lots of families they would have said that wasn't for girls. Other than not swimming, was there anything on the work of the property that was sort of not for girls?

R Not for girls? No. We weren't allowed to salt meats at a certain time of the month, that's about all. If you had your periods, you wasn't allowed to corn meat, wasn't allowed to touch the meat. But no doubt cooks in the kitchen handled meat all the time. Well that's

just different there. You could cut your own beef [strap?] and that sort of stuff but on certain days of the month you just didn't do it. Send the meat bad, so they reckon, so that was their little thing.

I How about vehicles? Did you learn mechanical skills?

R Don't talk about that. We broke an axle when I was about twelve, I suppose, in the old Ford thing they used to have. So we had to change it. Needless to say, touch wood, we haven't broke one since.

I So, Alice, I don't know that I've ever broken an axle but I've been driving for 20 years and if I did, I wouldn't have a clue how to change it. How did you work out what to do?

R Oh well, Dad supervised. He lay down and had a smoke and a cup of tea and so we pulled it all off one day, one afternoon, and went back the next morning. He just sat there and supervised again. There's all these cogs you put in together to change it, yeah. And they're a separate axle, you know, they're an axle about that long, you put 'em in with all … so you can put all the cogs in, change a tyre. We changed a tyre the other day. My grandson thinks I'm marvellous. 'The wheel, the wheel, Nanny,' he tells me. And you had to do it, though if I'm doing it again. But mind you, we couldn't see over the top so one'd do the clutch and the brakes and the other one'd do the steering, that was taller. And of course the gears were here, well you didn't do that. If he sung out 'the gears' while he's down there pushing the clutch and the brake in or whatever, ' the brakes in'. Change the gear and

I So whose vehicles would these have been that you were driving?

R The station's. The station's vehicle. Did you ever see those old 1920 Fords where you could put the top down? One of those.

I Like a Model T?

R Yeah, yeah. Those. I often tell the kids that's what I used to learn to drive. I learnt to drive in one of those. And they had 'em in a ute version as well, you know.

I And so, were you sneaking away to drive this vehicle, or you were encouraged to drive it?

R We were encouraged to drive ‘cause Mum didn’t drive. It was a case of have to. If anything happened to Mum, we had to get on the radio and meet someone at a certain place, so you had to drive. All my kids, I taught all my kids to drive at ten, eleven too, for the same reason. We’d go camping and if something happens to me or Dad or whatever, you’ve got a driver. If you can’t drive one on the highway, you can drive to the highway, that sort of thing.

I So it was a survival thing?

R Yeah, more or less, yeah. Same as Mum … we used to travel around mainly in a four in hand buggy with rubber tyres – a bun cart they used to call them. They’ve got … they’re just a trailer car with wheels on that just rolled freely. The horse drug them. So Mum used to drive a four in hand. Quite neat, she used to be. If they bolted, she’d stand up and pull it in. You’d have reins through here and there, see, both sides.

I And how would you, like in that country you would quite often have had different channels, wouldn’t you? How would you cope with the channels?

R Oh when we got into the channels, see out on Arrabury there wasn’t any channel country there, other than down on, I don’t know what they call that creek now, near Betoota, but in the Channel Country Mum used to drive a four in hand. She’d go down and back here, drop all the children off at the top, usually about four or five of those, drop them off at the top, go along till she could find a place to get up, might have to turn around and come back and go up the high, up the creeks, up the lower part of the rivers. You’ve been down to the Cooper country?

I I’m going down there soon.

R Well take note of the banks, how steep the banks are. The banks are like that and Mother used to get across those okay.

I So that would have been, the Model T wouldn’t have coped with that but your mother could do it with horse and cart?

R No. Yeah. Horse and bun cart. But we didn’t have the Model … we wasn’t on the then, we was out on Arrabury. And the same thing with the creeks, you used to get out with a shovel and a crow bar, that’s all they carried, so you’d cut the bank down

and get across. Ant beds are marvellous things for that, to make a bridge. They last for ages, too.

I So what, you'd … tell me about how would you use the ant beds? You'd take the ants nests?

R Yeah, you know those big ones you can see? They're not as big as the Territory but just throw them in there and break 'em up with an axe and drive across 'em. We used to do that out here … Bill was working in the Railway, my husband, out at . We went out one night and we had one of those old T Model Fords – we couldn't afford anything else with a couple of children on fettler's wages – so we went out and, not checking the lights before we left, we get out there and coming home just on dark, no lights. I think we had two blankets, one pillow and five kids. And that's how we used to get across the creeks anyhow, just pull up an ant bed as well. The things you learn, it's unreal.

I And tell me about what relationships you had with white kids on Arrabury, because you were on Planet Downs, weren't you?

R Yeah, we were at the outstation there. It was always okay with us. If they had any problems, we never heard of them. We used to play with them. Very seldom we seen children so, if we did, you played with them. There was another family over on Tambo, which we didn't get to see anyhow, only … I think we went to the race meeting in Windorah once. Suddenly there's kids galore to play with. When we were at that age of 14 and 15 well you wasn't allowed to run around with the kids any more then anyhow. That was the thing. When you got to the teens you were supposed to be like a lady then – other than riding horses and fallin' off and everything else.

I So what did being a lady involve? What parts of your behaviour or dress had to shift when you were 14 or 15?

R The shift was more or less your behaviour, that's all it was. You didn't go shouting or running around with the children. You more or less helped Mum in the kitchen in your spare time. I remember the first time I There was this mare called Daisy and I had to ride her, she was a chestnut. This was usually in the bush races. I knew she was fast but that's what I wanted and we had an old Aboriginal Long Ted, he used to look after us kids more or less, you know, he was an old full-blood. Ted said to me, 'You can't ride it, it's just too strong and it'll take off'. 'But I must ride it.' Okay, he let me go and

we were up at the creek, changed horses, I rode Daisy back from up there. Horses on stations are playing and race into the trough, buck around, and Daisy took off because she thought it was a race meeting. I ended up over the trough. [Tracey? Daisy?] come and I'm trying to pull her but she won't let me, she's just shakin' her head and yelling, so she propped and I went straight over the top. And Mum came running. She could hear the commotion and poor old Ted, he can't get up. He's laying on the ground holding his stomach.

I I'd love you to describe a race meeting at Windorah, Alice. Picture it in your brain and tell us all about it.

R They're very good. Ummm, I only went to one there. Can I tell you about the one at Betoota?

I Sure.

R By this time my brother George has got this horse, I don't know what's the name of it. Anyhow we lived at the Planet and never went to Betoota Races in my entire life so we're there and everything. You're bettin' on anything and everything that moves. So me cousin's got to training this horse for me brother and she just threw herself down, she's a real hyped up thing, so here's Spinny trying to get her up – that's Spinny my cousin – and I'm lookin' for a piece of wire. I'll get her off the ground, I'll just it under her tummy, just flog her, and just as we got the wire all sorted out, George come around – that's me brother – 'Come on darling, get up,' and he pulls it up. We could have killed him with the piece of wire as well. That was it. And race meetings are good. We didn't dance, it was antisocial more than anything. But Windorah Races are good. You can go to dances and dance with Tom, Dick and Harry there if you wish to and we all had those big flared skirts in them days, remember? So many metres in a skirt. My aunty made me one of those and I thought I was just it. A pink polka dot, it was.

I And would Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people all mix together at those dances or would there be kind of the Aboriginal bit and the non-Aboriginal bit?

R No. What I can remember, everyone came in, but the boys mainly went to the pub and Mum and the kids came to the dance, you know. Until the pub closed and then everyone else came up. What I used to like about those days, if they had a difference they'd tell it by fist. They'd have a fight and get it over with. And that's when you see 'em all walkin'

round arm in arm, mate this and mate that. You know, there was no grudges whatsoever. No, the Aboriginal kids used to come as well to the dances, although there wasn't that many there. There was only us and aunt's family, I suppose. And me other aunty and uncle had one or two. So there wasn't that many kids but we all played together. They all went to school together, all fought together and, well the boy next door to me now in Windorah, he was about when I left home, going to school. Even now I give him a lip bashing over the fence, you know. He comes in for a cuppa tea and it's that way in Windorah, you know, you just walk in to anyone's place and if you want something you go in and take it, leave a note to tell or say who it was, and that's it. You drive into their properties and do the same. You just leave a note – 'Just come to look. I come to borrow this' you know, whatever it is, and you're gone. I find them there really good but I got the shock of my life when I went to Bourke when I was younger and you had to go in through a side door to go to the movies. You wasn't allowed to … you can buy your ticket at the front door but you couldn't go in there. But that was only once or twice you went down. You was too tired to go to the movies anyhow.

I So you're saying that growing up in Windorah it wasn't a big deal?

R No, I didn't find it a big deal. Arrabury either, for that matter. But just when you went to town, oh there were small towns like Charleville, Bourke – we used to go to Bourke with cattle – and even the properties we didn't find anything. I remember they never used to like us puttin' our horses on their sheep feed in the next paddock and we feed them up with a bit of beef or anything else, you know, if they went home to bed, we'd let our horses into their yard. Just cut the fence, undid the wire and put 'em in. They didn't like it, but if they wanted beef they'd have to let us do it. Yeah. That's all there was to it. They were our stock, they were our living, so we had to feed them.

I So was there a way in which you felt yourself to be kind of living on land that was yours when you were at Arrabury?

R Mmmm. Yeah, I suppose so. We used to do a lot of things on the land there and it made no difference to us. Like now, we've got a land claim in at Glengyle, not me really, but you know, it's for the other kids, like my younger sister, see, 'cause her father comes from there. He was born there. But it's a free land. If you get a land claim, let 'em use it. They've been using it for hundreds of years now, why not let 'em use it? You've not going

to go out and camp on it, you're not going to live on it. That's what it is, it's just open range still.

I So what area is that where you've got a land claim?

R In through Glengyle and Birdsville, in through that country, because … but he's still using it for the same reason they've always been using it. I don't believe you should put a land claim and bar anyone from it. If you're not going to live on it, work it, let it go. Let 'em use it like it's been used all the time. That's what I reckon.

I So let's just say your land claim was successful. What would that mean? Like what, in your understanding, does a successful Native Title claim involve?

R Well, it'd make you feel free to go and live there if you wanted to. But still, I don't think I'd bar the stock that people have got it now. I still wouldn't bar 'em. I'd like to have a little corner to grow some veges, fruit trees, probably put up a little house. That's what it'd mean to me. And that'd be home.

I So could you imagine, if your land claim was successful, would you imagine that you and the white people currently living there would continue to both live …?

R Oh, I'd hope so, yeah. Like now this land claim's in, there's a few of them in it, and I think I'd like that. 'Cause like I said, white people really haven't done me any harm. There might have been a few things way back in your childhood but what's the use of living in the past really? It's now, the present, more than anything. Our other two sons married white girls. One's a German girl even. And I get along quite okay with their mother. She talks a little bit of English, I talk a little bit of German, and we can talk, us grandmothers, mainly sign language, but we can talk.

I So am I hearing are you slightly perplexed by all this politics?

R Yeah, I think it's silly. They'd even go back to the hard and fast ways they had before but, you know, like they was using people, but why can't we all get along? We all live on this planet and fighting's not going to improve anything, is it? Look at Fiji. Look at New Guinea. It's doin' no good.

I I know talking, for some white people who have owned or leased land, Native Title feels like a real threat. You know, it seems like this land that they've considered theirs could potentially be taken away from them.

R Yeah, I realise that too. And they paid a lot of money for their land so I say why can't they use it, you know, for what they're using it for? Well, Aboriginals are not going to use it. They've not used it, have they, for years and years. This is the way I look at it. Like the Diamantina, the Georgina, whatever it is now, there's cattle on there. You're not going to go down and put two cows on it or something, or three cows or half-a-dozen, whatever I can afford, and run them there. That's crazy. 'Cause you'd need a little paddock to hold 'em in anyhow.

I So I'm getting a bit confused here, Alice. Are you saying land claims should only go on to land that white people aren't currently using?

R No, no. I think if they want land, why can't they pay for it like everyone else, you know, or live on it and work it? Down home there we had a loan in an Aboriginal, a loan for a house. Everyone sort of built their home. It's a self-help, you know, you help your … we put up one of these and you had what you liked inside, and then you're supposed to grow plants to make it look respectable, eh? Like, you're living in a house, why not do it? But a lot of people didn't do that. They didn't want to do that. They didn't grow one tree. And they was whingeing for someone to come and do their gardens. They're able-bodied, why can't they do it? You know, the house is a reasonable price. This is stupid. If you want a garden, get in and put a garden in. No one's going to come along and do it for you. No one's got that sort of time either. You grow what you want. Like you wasn't allowed to paint it until you got permission and all this sort of rubbish, too, but I went ahead and done it. I said I'm buying, I'll do what I like and that's it.

I So independence is important to you? Doing things for yourself.

R Yes, yeah. I think self-help offers the best thing out. Look, we can go on the dole. Go on the river bank. You got to have a bit of pride in what you do, I reckon, in yourself as well, in your family. Sure, my kids all went to high school, boarding school, on a grant. That's all I wanted, just to put 'em, education for 'em, something I never had. They came out reasonable people.

I So we actually, I need to get that bit filled in. How did you meet your husband?

SIDE B

R Droving, where else would I? He was around, you know.

I Could you just tell me that again? Tell me how you met your husband.

R Well, when you're the only girl, or two girls, in the entire countryside, you get plenty of proposals, naturally, but you don't want to take 'em all. I wanted to give us a home so I took this one. That's the only reason I can give.

I And so where did you meet your husband?

R Windorah. That's him up there when he was in the Army. Not that we get along very well. In the meantime, a lot of things happened, so we don't get along very well.

I How old were you when you married?

R Well, I was 22 but the mind was about 15, I suppose, yeah. 14 or 15. Very sheltered family life sort of thing, you know. Within the family, you didn't work outside. I think I worked outside the family for about two years, that's about all.

I So was your husband from around Windorah?

R Cloncurry. Julia Creek area.

I So what had brought him to Windorah?

R Stock. He used to come down with stock from up here. and another place up in the Gulf.

I So he was a drover?

R Yes, he was one of the guys on the … he didn't own a plant but he was one of the guys, you know, working with the drover. You always had about four or five men with you. So … when you're fetching a couple of thousand head of cattle you've got to have five or six men.

I So, 22. That's 35, so 1957 when you met your husband?

R Yeah. So we ended up coming up here in that car, that 300 pounds car that we had. I took it when I left. My wages for the 14 years.

I So who gave you that car?

R Ah, I threw a bit of a tantrum because I wanted a car of me own down in Tibooburra so I drove it back from there, in this souped up model of a sedan. Needless to say, we had a car at home that, if you went courting you took all your sisters and brothers with you to push the car when you stopped it. And you parked on a ridge like this so you could, so they'd have easy pushing. You could start it going down.

I Because they didn't have a starter motor?

R It had a starter motor on but goodness knows what was the matter. I think we put it together ourselves.

I So when you say you had a tantrum, who did you have a tantrum with and …?

R Me stepfather, 'cause I really wanted wheels and I really liked this thing. It was a Super Snipe, eh, one of those … the policeman had one. had one in what's-a-name so we knew they were fast, they used to race the buggies and the rest of the cars down home. So once we got that, we used to all go to the river for tea. Black and white and everyone. And from there, the seven miles home we'd race. Even the policeman, sorry. He did too. So horse and buggy or whatever you had, you'd be racing. It was a wide road, good wide road, so we was going to battle along with this car. We ended up doing it too.

I So who came up with the 300 bucks?

R Dad did. Me stepfather did, yeah.

I So when you say it was wages for 14 years of working on Planet Downs …

R No, no, no, not Planet Downs. As drovers. We left there … when we left Planet and I was about 16, 15-16, we went droving straight away. Dad had a lot of horses so we used to have, we had 30 horses on plant, or 25-30, and we had a spare at home, and when we came back we picked that one up and leave the other one. By the time we come back, they'd be rested and we'd use them. It was a continuous thing. You just went round and round.

I So where were you droving?

R From morning, we'd go to the next one at Glengyle, Mount Leonard, in through that country. Waverley, it all depends what was available and you took.

I And where would you be droving them to?

R Bourke. Bourke, Quilpie, . You'd take a load of cattle up to and you'd fetch a load of bulls back or something. The bulls, they travelled in about three or four hundred, they'd do that once in a while, you had to take a load of bulls back. So it was continuous work up and back as well.

I So that would be you and your sister and your brother helping your father?

R Mmmm, stepfather, yeah. It'd be nothing for the boys to get on the grog at Windorah or something and you'd lose them. They'd all get huffy and pull out and so you'd do half a night watch for the next fortnight or three weeks. Two on, two off, you know. All because there was only four of us besides cooking, and no one liked cooking. Not over an open fire anyhow.

I And going on those droving trips, when you'd get to Quilpie or Bourke or whatever, are you saying that you would encounter racism then?

R Yes, mmmm. Especially Bourke, yeah. Well, Quilpie you used to phone the taxi driver. He used to take the poddies, like the calves just born close to town. He used to take those and rear them, but he'd give us bread in exchange and take care of us girls when we hit the town. We'd go to the movies but Mr Greenie would be waiting there. As soon as we walked up, they rang a taxi and you're home. So to amuse ourselves, Quilpie's got very hot bore water, so you'd fill the tub up and we'd soak ourselves and get all the dirt that's on us for the 12 months or … we wasn't allowed to go anywhere from the movies. Greenie would be waiting for us.

I Was Greenie Aboriginal?

R No, he was a white guy. We used to stay with them.

I So he would be keeping you safe from men?

R Yeah, mmmm. He'd pick us up and take us home. It didn't matter how much water we used as long as we … it wasn't outdoors, you know. The boys, very seldom we camped down the stockyards where the men were. If we did, Mum was with us, sittin' on it. So it was, you know, reasonable. You didn't have to worry too much.

I And was there a sense that being a Gorringe was something special?

R Yeah, to everyone it was. Even, like, in later life the proper Gorringe family, you know the younger children, used to say, 'Well, you weren't Gorringes anyhow' and the young sister-in-law. They said, 'Oh, but he chose us and we turned out better men than your husband did,' you know. Even the men part of it. My sister would always throw that in their face now, 'But he chose us. He didn't have no choice in you guys'. You know, that sort of thing. Yeah, I suppose it was, eh? Because he was known all in that country for his horsemanship and what he could do with a horse and he brought us up the same way. A bit like Bulloo Downs mob, you know, you was brought up the same way. You knew how to change a tyre. Even at home, and the boys are home with me, I've got four boys, had four boys, we've got to pull the engine out of our cars and everything. Even I can get down and undo the nuts and pull my engine out and have a look at it. And put another one in, or whatever. That's what you was brought up like. And I found in later life my husband didn't like that at all but I felt he married me for those things I had. To put up a fence, a chook run, or anything else. And then at the end of it, he didn't sort of like it.

I What didn't your husband like about that?

R My independence and what I could do. That's what I felt anyhow. He said I was only puttin' him to shame. I said, 'Look, I've been doin' this fencing and cuttin' posts and everything all my life. This is about all I know'. I can put up a chook run, you know, it's no problem. I might inside behind my netting, but I can do it. He used to get very annoyed with it. Like movin' me gas bottles and things. That's the sort of life we lived. You're independent and you do it. It's got to be done, you do it.

I Now your stepfather Bill, when he went droving, he had his own plant?

R Yeah.

I And so you and your sisters helped him. When you were married, what happened then?

R But I didn't. I married in Cloncurry and I didn't go home. I didn't go home for 30 … I've been home … for 15 years before I went home, and just to let the family see the children. My eldest boy was about 14, 15 then, and … I never went home for 31 years or something

like that, to live or anything. See, my children were at school, I couldn't afford it. Our kids in boarding school. And you had your husband at home then to after and everything.

I So did your husband keep droving after you were married?

R No, no. He went into the Railway. Came up and got a job in the Railway. We lived at Duchess, we lived at [Koonjabbie?]. Seven years at [Koonjabbie?]. I don't know, four or five years out here at Duchess.

I Because if your husband had kept droving, he wouldn't have been able to take you with him, would he, because the …?

R Not with the children in school. But my sister could tell you a story about her and her husband droving. Peg, just ask her about the droving trip. She went on doing it with her husband. Her husband was a fencer drover too so she done a lot of it.

I So what was your life then, after you got married, Alice? Give me a glimpse of your life in Cloncurry.

R Ah, we moved to Duchess. When I got married we moved out to Duchess just up the creek here. It was okay. I had my goats, you know, animals still. Had a little garden. I already had a child by that time. I had Patsy, she was about six. Sent her to school, walked to school with them. You had the school house on the rise over at Duchess, eh. The kids lived over here and the school house was over there, over on the hill on the other side. So if the creek was running, it'd be running a bank so you'd have to piggy-back the kids across the water up to here. It was strong so you had to.

I So you're saying it was your first child that had a different father?

R Yeah, mmmm. So, and after that, we had more children and used to walk round the hills with the kids all the time. Even my teenage boys, we climbed every hill between here and The 'Curry. It'd take us a full day to come up here from The 'Curry 'cause you'd take lunch. You'd have a barbecue lunch and climb all the hills, all the way.

I So you were about … how old were you when you had your first child? Can you tell me a tiny bit about that, how that happened.

R I was, uhhh, about 16. You just met someone, like the boys were out all the time, you're inquisitive, and that's what happens. But after that, I had … I missed by kids, family, so much. I think I had six, five more, just to make up for the family. I had my own kids to walk around the hills with and Christmas time and Easter, make bunny tracks everywhere and all that. So I thoroughly enjoyed 'em all. This is two of them up here now, you can see. That's George in blue there, and this is David down here with the baby.

I You've got family all round you on the walls.

R Mmmm. And he's a friend, that little guy up there. Very good friend, Dean. And there's another group around the corner. That's my family. You know, you put away the big frames and one family's in there and another family's in another.

I So what brought you back to Windorah, then, Alice?

R Well, I always told my kids, when they grew up and finished school, I'm going home. If not home, I'm going to Western Australia. I couldn't afford Western Australia so I went home.

I Where was the West Australia dream? Why West Australia?

R I don't know. But my nephew won a, you know how you win a holiday for two. He won a holiday for two for the America's Cup when the America's Cup was over, so I've been over to the West then. We went over there for a fortnight, my sister and I. The plane leaves over there at six o'clock in the morning or some ungodly hour, so we go out to the casino, pack our bags and leave 'em at the door in the motel, and go to the casino, ordered this great big flash meal, didn't know if we were going to be able to pay for it, and we thought we'd be washing up when the plane left anyhow. But it worked out okay. Yes, okay. I'll give you a bit of water. No, you don't want water. Do you want apple juice? Here, have this.

I If you need to stop, we can.

R I'll have to, yeah, and give him a drink.

I So this is camera tape 22, it's still DAT tape 10, and it's now 1 hour 2 minutes and 18 seconds. We're interviewing Alice Fortune, previously Gorringe, nee Bates. It's 7 June 2000 and this is the third camera tape to have part of Alice's interview on it.

So tell me about coming back to Windorah then, Alice.

R Yeah, well, we were always glad to go past then my home. We call it home. It's still home to me. And the closer you get the faster you get, that seems to be the way. You look down at your speedo and you're doing 120, 130 or something. Something you shouldn't be doin' at all. I can't wait to get home again now. You just sit on the river bank and fish. One of my friends said, 'Yeah, murdering little fish all the time'. I said, 'But I don't kill 'em for nothing, I eat the darn things,' you know.

I What is it that you love about Windorah?

R Mainly it's the freedom, getting' into the country once more. I've been away for 32 years, you know, so I've got to get around and have a look again. We ran out to the Jaycee and I took one of my friends out there and me, in the meantime, bought all those big stations down there, and to clear a homestead site, they just dig a big pit and throw everything in it and cover it over. They had some camp ovens that are good for chook water, or dog water dishes. I went there looking but couldn't find them so this friend of mine, she's a very little la-di-da lady and I said, 'Come up, we'll have another look at the dump, I'm lookin' for ovens and things'. We get up there and see a big old collar, you know, to put on a horse if you want that horse for draggin' a cart. They're good if you're do 'em up and put a mirror in 'em. They look really effective on the wall. I could see them under there but they were under a sheet of tin so I've got Maureen leverin' the tin and I'm trying to pull this collar out. She said, 'If my sons could see me now, they'd kill me, scraping around in the rubbish dump'. I said, 'But it's a good cause. I want to put a mirror in it'. We had some fun there then. She likes a little beer. She loved to take a six-pack or a dozen with her, so she sits along and drinks and tellin' me yarns and I sit along and drive, and laugh like hell at nothing.

I So is Maureen, is she a relative?

R No, she's just a friend, yeah. But she lives in that … she came out from Brissie somewhere as a girl of 18 or 19, into that bush life, eh, cooking on an open fire, poor thing, and Eric, she lost her husband there, so … I overnight with her some nights, we get on the beer, overnight, camp over at her place. She camps at my place. So we don't want to drive through town, the policeman's half way through. Catch us for DD, us two old people in town.

I So is she a Murri?

R No, she's a white lady. She's cooked, and she's done everything. She's taught her kids school right up until they went to, you know, high school and all that sort of stuff. Like I said, I can get along with anyone. She's got a chihuahua now. I don't like sleeping with this chihuahua, so I don't like sleeping up there. She either comes to my place and leaves the chihuahua at home. The chihuahua will jump all over you all night long. It'll lick all your face.

I So had you and your husband … did you come back to Windorah with your husband?

R No, no. We separated earlier, yeah. And I worked around here for a while, worked in for a while. Didn't like the counter life so I went out cooking on the station. I started cooking when I was about 18 out on the stations, so it was a good thing to fall back on to every now and again.

I You were saying when you went droving that nobody wanted to cook.

R No, but who wants to cook over an open fire? You've stood near one of those on a summer's day? Unreal. Cook your face. We had the most wonderful cook. His name was Archie. Archie , you know, that's his son in the book. Oh, he was marvellous. We used to have wild duck stuffed, fritters for lunch, and all sorts of things. You could only carry 'em in a little bag about this big, eh, that's your lunch.

I So he was a Chinese cook?

R Mmmm. No, he was part-Chinese, I think, come to think of it. And made beautiful bread in a camp oven. Oh, lovely.

I Where was this, and when?

R He came cooking for us, Archie , that's Jack in the book, remember, his father. He done most of his time with us. Us girls wouldn't cook. He used to cook. That's what he was. He was the cook.

I This was when you went droving with your father?

R Droving, yeah. He always told me I was the hardest woman he'd ever known how to please. And he must have liked me in a way because it used to be cold like this weather, he

used to let me sleep in the campfire, cook break, you know where the break is. That's something. You've got to be very privileged to sleep in that. I used to come off watch about nine or ten o'clock, see I'd have to do the first watch because I'm getting' the horses at four o'clock in the morning, and he said, 'Girl, you're cold'. He'd chuck my swag in behind there. I said, 'Yeah, I know'. And you'd sleep with your boots on because you don't want to take 'em off, you know, your feet just get cold. So he'd chuck my … 'There, go to sleep there. Don't put your back towards the fire, it'll cook your kidneys' he reckoned. 'So what, you're goin' to cook my face? It's ugly enough as it is.' He said, 'Oh, do what you like then'.

I Where would your Mum have been during these droving trips?

R Home. Home with the children at school. Windorah, in Windorah.

I So your Mum had a second family with Bill and she'd stay home with them?

R Yeah. Yes. There was another six or seven needed school, see. Odd time she'd come, must have been school holidays. From one year to the next, it wouldn't make any difference to us. But she used to come once … and if we were short-handed, she'd come and cook and leave the children with me aunt. She could come back half way down or something, when we got another cook. But once we got Archie, it was pretty safe for her, she didn't have to cook. We ran across the river once at Tanbar, and Tanbar's got that big waterhole . It's spooky as hell, eh? It's real spooky and …

I Why is it spooky? Why is the waterhole at Tanbar spooky?

R I don't know why. It is very spooky. Nicholas, I'll smack you in a moment. And Mum's standing there, she's growling away. She'd probably been sick for years and years, this poor old lady, eh, and she's down there growling. We've got a light, you know those lights you put up, up on the top, we used to drop the sideboard of the bun cart and she's there and we're saying, 'Don't move, Mum, don't move', and she's saying, 'Well don't tell me what to do and what not to do' and she went to step like that and there's this big brown snake coming through. The cattle just got on camp and it's all private country and it's and snake, and she's going … and she chucked the light. We had no light for weeks. And screamed at us and said, 'Why didn't you tell me it was there?' We couldn't get a word in edgeways, and we didn't want to laugh either because it looks like Jolliffe'scomic books, eh, things that'll happen. So we

all decided we had to go and watch these cattle. and we were killin' ourselves laughing . But poor old dear must have been sick and she was rousing on the younger ones besides us, and the biggest snake ever I'd seen went between her legs, eh. So when she stepped back, she could just see it going. But even to this day, we don't go fishin' at by ourselves.

I You don't go fishing?

R No, not by ourselves. No.

I Did you ever get to know much about Yamacoona and the traditional Aboriginal stories from that country?

R No, no. Just talk, more or less, you know.

I Do you think there are Aboriginal women that do understand that stuff a lot?

R I don't know. Probably old Fanny and Dolly and them, but they're all gone now, see, all those old ladies. I know down in the sand hills down around, bordering on Mount Leonard, at The Planet, you'd see skeletons down there, skulls and everything layin' around. And they reckon in the Channel Country, again, there's still skulls in there. Didn't realise Aboriginal skulls would be that thick, eh. Unreal. They'd have to be if you're going to hit each other on the stick in a fight, eh. And some of them are coiled up. They must have been burial grounds, you know. On the burial grounds they use mica. They stick it in the fire, cook it up and it goes powdery. They powder it up in their coolamon and make balls. They had all these balls. If you see a heap of balls round like that, you know that's a grave. Just don't go onto it or anything.

I You were saying, I think, when you arrived at Arrabury, that sometimes as a part Aboriginal woman, full-bloods would be thinking less of you.

R Yeah. Mmmm.

I Was there a lot of traditional Aboriginal people round the Channel Country?

R Round then, yes. Round Innamincka there. Like I said, there was about 100, 150, if not 200, down there. That's the Harris boys now. That's some of them and I never knew what happened to 'em. Arrabury had their own little mobs, you know, the goat ladies, the

cleaners that done the laundry. But Maggie, Maggie – that's who you ought to talk to, is Aboriginal. Maggie, she lives in an old people's home in Cunnamulla. She's from up here at Tea Tree near Alice Springs. When I was talkin' to her, she's an old medicine lady of some sort, she got me a song, a power song for women. I think I might have the tape in the car. I never thought of that. And it's about me. She was sittin' at home at one day and I drove in – long grass – and I just drove in, parked, and hooked under my caravan, and I stopped and I opened the door and I looked out and there's Maggie sittin' there. 'Maggie, why didn't you move? Why didn't you let me know?' I could have ran over her. She said, 'No, girl, you was right. You drove past me'. And, oh, now she tells me.

I So Maggie, where had Maggie lived her life?

R Maggie's come from Tea Tree, outside of Camooweal … ummm, Alice Springs.

I And where has she worked for her life?

R She worked on the opal fields down there and before that, I don't know. Maggie was an older lady when I got to know her, and yeah, she'd be the one. She told me what happened at … I asked everyone I knew that I ran across, 'What happened to all those people?' They said, 'Well, missions'. Aren't you goin' to send 'em to a mission in New South Wales? So one night they got it in their head, they just packed up and left. Some went to ummm up that way, some went to Alice Springs, and some went in between. Up in Western Australia. They just walked away overnight.

I So if people thought they were going to get gathered up and put to a mission, like your family they'd clear out?

R Yeah. Clear out overnight, yeah. So that's what happened to 'em. Whether they all got through or not, I don't know. Maggie said a few turned up at old Tea Tree. They wouldn't go into the town like Alice Springs or nothing. They'd just go round those. So some turned up at … Tea Tree is just a shop, a little outpost there. So some turned up there and she was talkin' to us and she said others went up to Western Australia and back over to Port Hedland, that way, Port Augusta rather.

I So, Alice, there's a kind of, how would I describe it? Your traditional country is down near Tibooburra, Alice Springs, but it's not …

R No, not Alice Springs.

I Not Alice Springs. What did I say? Broken Hill.

R Tibooburra, yeah.

I But it's around Windorah that is home because that's where you spent your life.

R Yeah, yeah.

I What do you think of the Native Title system that's been set up?

R Well, really, I don't think it's right. I think you should be able to settle, like we'd love to settle in Windorah. We'd like that as our tribal land. 'Cause my brother John, he's left there for about two years. He's been there since he was ten, if that, and he knows that country like the back of his hand and, at the moment, he's caretaker of all those Aboriginal sites and everything there. No one's come to see 'em. He knows where they all are. He lives off the land there. He's worked there all this time. I think we should be able to own that, you know. I don't want half of Windorah or anything else, just the block I'm living on, most likely, and the rights to go fishing. Cotton was coming in then and trying to keep us off the rivers. But the rivers is all, what do they call it when they put cattle down? It's like a common, you know, where … a stock route. The rivers are all stock route and they can't keep us off the rivers. Up at Currareva, they bought Currareva, it's up the river, not far, and it's all ploughed ready for cotton, to put cotton in, and we're still fighting that 'cause it won't give us green beef any more, you know. Our market's good for green beef at the moment, not that we're makin' millions out of it or anything else, but our fishing is good, that's all that interests me. And we'd like to keep it like it is. All that land there. And we run into an inland lake, we don't run into the sea or anywhere else. There's no with our … it's just going to all build up in our system there, in our river system. They reckon they're going to build a wall. The Cooper rises 25-30 feet, 40 feet, sometimes. How are they goin' to build a wall that high to keep, you know, the cotton fertiliser in?

I So you feel passionate about the environment of Windorah?

R Oh, very, yeah. Yes, I do. They're still fighting it. They'll probably beat us in the end but we're going to give them a good run.

I So there are Aboriginal people who do have Native Title claims around Windorah?

R Windorah, yeah. That's me sister-in-law, yeah. Me sister-in-law's got that. And Angela's aunt. Believe it or not, Angela and them came from around there too. Off, you know where Glen, where Linwood is? There's a place there called, what's that? We was lookin' at it the other day. That's where Angela's grandparents come from – great-grandparents. Her Mum's mother and father come from there. Ray, Ray, that's where they was reared, so …

I And how about, I think, has Jocelyn got claims down …?

R Jocelyn's got claims from McKinlay down to Mirra Lake, Yamma Lake. She couldn't walk that in ten years, let alone live on it. It's just too, the area's just too big, and there's two or three tribes between.

I But I guess the Native Title system is based on traditional connection to the land, isn't it, not actually where you've lived?

R Yeah. No, no. It's got to be way back and Dot can do that 'cause she's, not Gorringe, 'cause her family's lived all around there all the time, and Dad's still alive. Although Dad is white, more or less, he's got a mother is Aboriginal.

I So Dot's got a land claim round the Windorah area?

R Yeah. She's supposed to be getting a big grant for that too. So Shirl was sayin' this morning. Shirley Davidson can tell you more about that.

I So what do you see in the future for yourself, Alice?

R For me? If I wasn't so lazy, I'd get up and do something with me life but … they wanted to re-educate me but I don't like cities, I like a bit of freedom. I've worked all my life. I reared six children and put them through school. I'd like to do what I want to do now, and that's just sort of laze around. I do a lot of patchwork when I'm home, you know, for my grandkids and stuff like that.

I And what are you doing here in Mt Isa?

R At the moment I'm baby-sittin' till these kids … they've got a court case pending over George's ankle. His ankle is had it and he's tryin' to get somethin' out of the mines which is very hard. So that court case is still goin', I'm just tryin' to help 'em out so they can

work to get enough money to go to Brisbane for a court case. Why can't they have it here? They know the people have got no money. You know, like travelling expenses, like that. So he went to Townsville and they put it off again, so they'll have it in Brisbane this time. So that comes up next month.

I And do you do this kind of thing a lot? Like you've been here for several months.

R No, no, I don't. I've been up to Darwin and stayed with me daughter up there, stayed with me granddaughter in Townsville. I've been tripping around. I've got a daughter in town here, stay with her. I just divide my time, if I'm not doin' baby-sittin' like this. I had a week over at David's, a week up at Patsy's, and … call me marmalade, I just spread myself around. Yeah.

I And how do you travel around these days?

R With me car.

I You've got a four-wheel-drive?

R Yeah. It's very clapped out but it still gets me from A to B. Just … the boys said, 'Turn your cassette off, Mum, and listen to the motor sometimes'. 'Yes, dear.' Turn the cassette up and away you go.

I And do you still work on the mechanics of your car?

R Yeah. I do a fair bit of it, yeah. I can change a tyre, me oil, change me water, and that sort of stuff.

I You wouldn't change an axle these days?

R No, not on these modern things, I don't think. Just wait for help. I've got the what-a-name on the RACQ so they can come and do it for me.

I So, Alice, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think it's important that I understand to understand your life and, through that, women in the Channel Country?

R I reckon my lifestyle is very rough, very hard. You worked hard and it's just, I reckon it just proves that hard work don't kill anyone. And I still do it. I dig up my yard. I around home, into a smaller area. I still dig up half the yard at home.

I Now, I've forgotten exactly where we were up to. You were just saying hard work didn't hurt anyone.

R No, I don't think so. And all of the kids, children today, you know the teenagers, they get on my goat but I reckon fair is fair, eh? You've got to try and understand their point of view on things as well. They've got it rough compared to us, I reckon.

I Why is that?

R Because everything's just handed to them. They haven't got to work for a thing, you know, although Mum and Dad is working. Well, we always had Mum home, regardless, one way or the other, and we was always with Dad, I suppose. We worked hard but we had, you know, you sort of felt secure all the time. Now these children these days haven't got that, eh? My sons … I've always been home for my children too. I babysat a lot as for extra money but I never left home.

I So when you say they get everything on a plate, what are you talking about?

R They get monetary things, like, but not much affection, I reckon, the children, and I don't think that's fair to them. That's my way of looking at it. They need Mum and Dad home to give 'em that little whack now and again and I'll give 'em that cuddle when they want it, and … and that cuddle is important. We fight like cats and dogs, me and him, most of the time, but I think he loves me. His Mum says, 'They're goin' to hate you Nana'. I said, 'Yeah, well this is me. If they can't accept me like I am,' you know. It worked for me. I wasn't as rough on my children as they were rough on me. Now we've got a stock whip down the back or if you're in hand's reach, you just got that and, you know, just back-hand 'em. You didn't stand there and all the time. You didn't dare. You was told once and if you didn't take any notice, you'd get the whip. Often get the whip across the backside, and it hurts, through clothes and all.

I So who would whip you?

R Dad. If you didn't listen, that's what he … he said, 'I'll tell you once, twice, you've got to live or die by these rules and that's it'. Which is what it's like in the country.

I Were you ever whipped by white people?

R No. They wouldn't dare whip us because they'd have to fight the whole family then. Mum as well as Dad.

I And tell me about your relationship with the Debney boys and Irene Debney.

R Irene Debney, yeah. Okay, yeah. Irene is nice but she was overworked and underpaid too, I think, like we were. The Debney boys. We used to outdo each other on horses, try to be the best camp drafter, or the best pacer, the best galloper. And me and Scott used to … Ross used to argue the point over a horse here named Hook. Hook was a very fast trotter, you know, like trotting, like harness horses. I wanted Hook right or wrong but he'd never give me Hook, till the very last year when he got married, he felt sorry for me so he give me Hook. You could trot for miles on him, you know, and he wouldn't puff out, because he was just a pacer.

I So how did you know the Debney boys?

R How well?

I No, where did you get to know them?

R Well, Planet was an outstation of Arrabury, and we used to attend the musters together. They used to come out and muster there, we used to go in and muster there. We seen a lot of them, you know, a fair bit of them. Nulla was another base. You mustered all round Nulla from there, like Mount Leonard, Mooraberrie, and you'd sort of base there and everyone would take their own cattle home to their own property.

I So the Debneys lived at Arrabury?

R Arrabury, yeah, mmmm. So when you went in for groceries, you'd see 'em. They came out on messages and in car, mainly pack horse and things like that.

I And so Irene Debney, would she be racing you on horses as well?

R No. Irene didn't come to the camp very much. There you are again, see, that's the girlish thing. The girls stayed in the house. See, that was their home so she had to clean it, wash, organise home. But if we came up there, we was allowed to have lunch with them or tea with them. But you set the table, we had to set the table. 'Cause no doubt Irene would be

run off her feet and Irene had someone to do the laundry, I think that's all, for her. You was allowed to have a bed there if you wanted a bed in the house. Like I said, that was the attitude. Even in Windorah now, Crosses. You walk in the side and she's 'If you want a cup of tea, get it yourself on your way through. You know where the cakes are' and that sort of thing. But the other generation, they're very light-fingered. I don't know, why is this so. You couldn't, even my house, they'd come in the front door, I'd make sure they'd go out the front door. You can't let 'em walk through the house or they'll lift something on you. That's your own nephews, nieces and things.

I So you feel like you grew up in a society where there was a lot of trust, including between black and white?

R Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's true. I've had me nieces walk through the house there, and I won't tell you that on the tape, the other one, no. But … and they lift things. Like, I can walk through Gladys's place. I walk through Marilyn's house, that's up the pub, in behind the bar and walk out the other side. They know you're not goin' to touch anything. And that trust, I reckon, is hard, you know, it'd be hard to win back if you lost it. I wouldn't dare take anything. You can get in the bar sometimes and chuck a beer over to whoever wants one out the back. It's no problem.

I Now, going back into the nineteenth century, there were things like there were massacres of Aboriginal people, and probably of whites too, round the and Windorah area, there's, I want to say black hole, but anyway, does that history ever weigh on your heart, that kind of …?

R I think it was quite horrible out … they were grown men, and men alone, that used to round 'em up like cattle and shoot them. I reckon that's disgusting. You know, they could separate the men from the women and shoot the men, maybe, if that's, they were frightened of. But then the women might have been as vicious, I wouldn't know. But the young children and everything else, well they couldn't be bothered with them, I suppose, you know.

I Did that history ever weigh on your heart?

R That's all, I think it's very terrible that that happened, like that, when they came in and just … why couldn't they organise things to cope, you know, together, work together on it?

Language was a barrier, I suppose, but then most likely they was in too big of a hurry to grab a lot of land quickly. But still, it's the mighty dollar, isn't it?

I So the word 'reconciliation', does that mean anything to you?

R It means a lot to me for the Stolen Generation. I'd like to see something done for them because a lot of those children suffered a lot, I think. But then you've got the European you know, the what's-a-name, what did they call 'em when they sent 'em out by the thousands?

I Oh, the English.

R Yeah, yeah. They've got those as well. Isn't it sad to see how they got on, poor things? I know my aunt, that's Dad sister, isn't it. I call him Dad because he practically reared us. His sister was taken from Glengyle to Windorah because Windorah was a way station where they could put them on a cart. She rode from there, a nine-year-old, with pack horses, and a policeman, of course, at Windorah. Oh, it takes me a good six hours in the car, or more, so you can say that's two or three days for her to ride across there so they can put her on a [stage coach?] to send her to a mission, Woorabinda or somewhere, when Father died. See, that was cruel too. Well, why couldn't … they must have had cars in them days, and why couldn't a lady go with her, eh? There's this little girl with all these men again.

I And did that aunt ever come back to Windorah?

R She came back to Arrabury, yes. She died. She's buried over in Longreach now, that old lady, and she was only a little tiny thing, eh. Little tiny pigeon-toed woman. She used to tell us girls, 'You'll suffer when you get old. You'll suffer, all this horseback riding and falling off'. 'We know, aunt', we know now. My back aches. The bottom is your biggest part on girls and so you'll hit the ground on your bottom.

I Last question. Tell me what are some of your mother's sayings, or your father's sayings. Like, what were the kind of things they'd say to you over and over?

R Ummm. They used to tell us to be honest, mainly. You be honest and fair about everything. And Dad's favourite saying was that no one was any good. He wouldn't be any good as long as his bottom pointed towards the ground. That was … I even say that to

the stepbrothers now, 'You'll be no good as long as your bum points towards the ground', you know. That means he's got to be dead before he'll be any good.

I How about your Mum? What would she say?

R Mum used to say the less we knew the better off we'd be, about everything, because she was one of those generation where they was taken as children. But she never told us they used to hide her, but one of my friends told me they used to roll her in a swag and sit on her, and if she sneezed or something, it was all up and gone, you know. They'd unroll the swag and take her. 'Cause she was lighter than I am. And I think that was Mum's problem, see.

I So your Mum wanted to hide you from that ugly …?

R Yeah, mmmm. She never told us much about it. The less we knew the better off we were. That was her favourite saying on that issue. Peg might be able to tell you more 'cause Peg looked after Mum in later life. Like I said, m and Mum were like cats and dogs. We used to fight all the time. We never got along very well, but God I can understand a lot of the things now.

I And what are the sayings that you've said to your kids over and again?

R Oh, a bit of hard work never killed you. I'm still going. And another thing, be careful with your money. Spend it wisely is the main thing. We had a few bankers in the family through boarding school. Joey was a banker

I I'm about to run out of tape.

R Mmmm. Hard work never killed anyone. That's the best one.

END OF INTERVIEW