INTERVIEW WITH ALICE GORRINGE
7 June 2000
Updated with timecode from tape 20_BC_DV
Topics in Bold

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, Erika Addis on camera, for the Channels of History project, and we're interviewing Alice Gorringe.** **TAPE 20_BC_DV**

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

R **Race Relations: Aboriginal Reserves/Escape from NSW**

00:19:02:04 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.

00:20:51:12 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.

Education/Childhood

00:21:48:18 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 00:23:17:10 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 **Traditional Aboriginal/Aborignal Politics**

00:23:40:20 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 00:25:07:04 Yeah, around Tinnenburra, what they called Tinnenburra. 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 Tinnenburra they call it. Never went home to have a look when I was down there. I inferd(?) to 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 00:26:07:22 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 **Stepdad/Daugther: Childhood**

00:27:12:12 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 00:28:02:06 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 **Food/Women/Land**

00:28:55:10 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 00:29:53:20 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 **Rain**

00:30:20:20 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 **Water**

00:31:29:00 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 0:32:52:22 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 00:33:21:05 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 00:33:39:00 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 00:34:36:08 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 **Race Relations: Intersex**

00:35:02:00 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 **Droving/Clothes**

00:36:17:00 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 00:37:30:10 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 **Gender Relations**

00:38:02:20 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 00:38:46:00 Oh, Mum met up with Bill then, see, that's how 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 **Child Labour**

00:39:30:02 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 00:40:00:00 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. 00:41: 28:00