

**INTERVIEW WITH ALICE GORRINGE**

**7 June 2000**

**Updated with timecode from tape 22\_BC\_DV**  
**Topics in Bold**

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

**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. TAPE 22\_BC\_DV**

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

R        00:01:15:04    Yeah, well, we were always glad to go past Jundah then we're 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        00:01:55:04    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 JC and I took one of my friends out there and Waverney, in the meantime, Holmans, a court(?), have 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. 00:0321:15

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 00:03:56:02 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 an agent for a while. Didn't like the counter life so I went out cooking on the station. Down at Stanbroke, outside of Danjarra. 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 00:04:59:20 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 Gutti, 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 Gutti, that's Jack Gutti 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**

00:06:06:00 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 00:07:10:00 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 Illabenti. It's spooky as hell, eh? It's real spooky and ...

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

R 00:08:01:13 I don't know why. It is very spooky. [*Nicholas, Rory, 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 Tilley 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 gone all holey and we had to trample snakes underneath, 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's comic 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 Illabenti by ourselves. 00:09:22:16

I You don't go fishing?

R No, not by ourselves. No.

I Did you ever get to know much about Yammacoona 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 **Traditional Aboriginal: Burial**

00:09:45:18 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 **Aboriginal Depopulation**

00:11:02:00 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 **Aboriginal Depopulation**

00:12:29:16 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'. They was 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 Port Augustus 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 had done, they'd clear out?

R 00:13:17:10 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 **Native Title**

00:14:28:10 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 Kurreva, they bought Kurreva, 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 flushing 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?

00:16:15:20

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 00:16:37:10 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 Joslin got claims down ...?

R 00:17:13:08 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?

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- R 00:17:43:20 Yeah. No, no. It's got to be way back and Dot can do that 'cause she's, Dot 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 00:18:20:04 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 00:18:49:11 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 **Children**
- 00:19:28:05 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?



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R With me car.

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

R 00:29:57:04 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 00:20:51:12 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 moved my drip system 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 00:21:54:00 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. 00:22:27:16

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

R 00:22:32:00 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 tug, tug, tug 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 **Race Relations**

00:24:03:00 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 **Mustering**

00:24:56:00 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 Cuddopan came, Dunham came, 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 **Gender Relations**

00:25:43:20 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 00:26:56:12 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. 00:27:32:14

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 Jundah 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 **Race Relations: Massacres**

00:27:52:20 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 00:28:22:10 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 **Race Relations: Stolen Generations**

00:29:07:10 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. 00:30:07:00

I And did that aunt ever come back to Windorah?

R 00:30:09:20 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 **History: Mum's Sayings**

00:31:21:20 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 00:31:55:10 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 00:32:21:00 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 00:32:40:23

I I'm about to run out of tape.

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

**END OF INTERVIEW**