INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA HODGKINSON

Refers to tapes 79_BC_DV

P = Patricia Hodgkinson T = Trish Fitzsimons E = Erica Addis

T **OK. So it's the 9th January, 2002. This is DAT Tape No 77 and it's Camera Tape No 79. We're interviewing Patricia Hodgkinson, so this is the fourth camera tape. Is that right?**

E **Fifth.**

T **Fifth camera tape interviewing Patricia's third DAT tape. Trish Fitzsimons on sound. Erica Addis on camera.**

P The end is nigh.

T And the end is indeed nigh.

E I'm nearly ready but not quite.

T Are you rolling?

E No. OK.

T Um one of the Aboriginal women that I interviewed um in Mt Isa, …… **(?)** said, and she's a woman of maybe 55, she said that it, it was very clear to her that she must never work on a station, because if you worked on a station as an Aboriginal woman, you'd be subject to kind of sexual demands basically. Do you give a – a, an opinion like that credence?

P The world never changes dear, particularly in matters of sexuality. If it's there available, of course. But not in our case at Mt Leonard. There were very old men and women and almost nothing – no little piccaninnies, and no luscious little belles – black belles – black velvet. No. Of course there were around Birdsville and whatnot. Half the population of Birdsville was half-castes. Anywhere where there was a centre, yes. Men, you know, but they had – just couldn't take any recourse at Mt Leonard because as I say they'd be flat out trying to find anybody younger than 60.

T Now over the century, I mean, you're describing a lot of people, Aboriginal people, working on the property. Now there's very few. What's your

understanding of what shifted over time in terms of stations employing Aboriginal people?

P Because er the war, World War II, had many affects and one of course was all the men – white men, and half-castes, and some Aboriginals, went off and joined up. And of those, a great percentage never came back to the bush again, because they found out, black and half-caste that there were very good jobs to be had in factories and putting labels on pickle jars like my fate was. But so many never came back and there was no work for them anyway. See before the War, like so referred to so many times to musters, musters were done on horseback and done over a period of three to six weeks or so, depending on the size of the spread, because there were no fences. And if a man wanted to send a mob off to market in Adelaide in August, they had to have a muster starting way back in June somewhere or other, and they had to go all over Mt Leonard and surrounding stations to get L three n's – our brand – LNNN. To claim LNNN so they could send a mob off to market. When the War was over and things started settling down, they had to ah they, not even Kidman was rich enough to pay to have all those fences put up. We used to have people called boundary riders and that man's job, he had a humpy right out on the rim of the boundary, and his job was ride daily every week around the boundary fences to try and tell the boss where big holes were in the fence, that Mawney;s **(?)** were coming in and whatnot. After the War, Kidman just decided that ah yes, you didn't have to put up fences – you had electric portable fences and all that sort of thing. So musters weren't needed. But before the War, in my father's time, and he was all for it, road transport came in. Road transport could shift a mob of cattle from Mt Leonard and not more than two days later, or two and a half days later, into the sale yard in Adelaide. The same thing – when the cattle left Mt Leonard, it'd be nearly three months before they got to rail at Maree. When they got to rail at Maree, it was a painful business, filling up all the cattle trains there. I, my sister and I, a couple of times, we travelled on a cattle train ordered by my father to take LNNNs down to Adelaide, and we go in the hot – we'd be into South Australia desert country. Hot as Hades. But everybody out and my sister and I had to get the same long stays and you had to get the cattle on the floor that'd

been trampled. Get them up again to keep them alive. Heavy …… But one incidence that – I was 17 years when – Helen wasn't there – going back to college on the train from Maree to – nearly to Adelaide, and ah we came to a stop. The train wheezed out in the heat anywhere, anytime the driver felt like a cuppa. You know, boil the billy at the side of the thing and you had a yarn and something, then the train proceeded again. So on this occasion, Poppa had hired the railway thing, we wheezed out into the South Australian sun. There wasn't a blade of grass. There wasn't anything. All of a sudden, to my astonishment, I saw little children. Little people. Oooh, I'd say about 17 of them. Like little rabbits you know, all over. And I said to the ganger who's working on the train, I said goodness me. Where do all these little children come from? Without a smile on his face he said working man's recreation Miss. Without moving a muscle, you know? Working man's recreation Miss. I was so embarrassed I did not know where to look.

T So these would've been half-caste kids?

P No, no, no. These were gangers. There would've been some half-castes amongst them. Railway gangers, who spent their whole life out in the desert waiting to hop off the train and cattle and this, that and the other on it. And they didn't object to their life because when they weren't jacking up ah railway carriages, well they were jacking up the population, and that was it.

T So what you're saying is that the whole form of pastoralism changes?

P Absolutely. Absolutely changed. And ah later, great plans were being formulated by the British Government principally during the War, because Britain was down on its knees. The population's starving after the War. Weren't staving. There was heavy rationing and things were pretty crook so Britain had to get going fast and try and find overseas in their dominions. We're now talking about all the red bits on the, the British Empire – all there. And so the British Government ah they tried, they called them ground nuts – peanuts in Africa – it was a dead failure, right? Even Joe Blow could've told them not to do that but the British Government sank these millions and the peanut thing flopped in ….. **(?)**. So they formed a body straight away and they went out to the Channel Country. My father and all the station owners were

summoned to a meeting with these heads of the Ministry of Food in England, to discuss possibilities of how Britain could grow something that would give them a hedge against future disaster like the thingo – that nut. And ah this Dr John Bradfield, who built the Sydney Harbour Bridge, he was one of the leading lights in it because even after he finished the Sydney Harbour Bridge, his great dream was to divert the great rivers of the river – you know, up there – the Roper and the Fitzroy and whatnot, divert those into the centre of Australia and take over – because he said then that the um artesian bores were expendable. They weren't going to be spouting out water forever and there'd come a time when they would need water. What this driest country on earth needs is water. And they agreed totally with Dr thing. He said all you've got to get, you've got nuclear power and you can put up pumping stations and things and fresh water flowing into the inland. Oh it was a great and wonderful dream, wasn't it? And ah that all they had to do is to bring those waters down. So the British Government representatives packed up their attaché cases and back they went to Whitehall and those plans were put in a pigeonhole and have never been seen since. And it really knocked my father. He said they – for years he was on about it – he said there they are, the brains of Britain, and they can't even see what is so obvious. There has to – water has to come to the inland. Trish, the other day ah on Countrywide or something like that, I saw a Countrywide session on the artesian bores and I couldn't believe my eyes. In my home country there was a trickle of water, where as I say, where we used to be sent out on our ponies to see millions of gallons of water going up in the sky and filling the tanks for the cattle there. In some places in South West Queensland, they've dried up already.

T Now it's about 60 years since you lived in the Channel Country full-time give or take. How much do you think of it now? You know, what place does the Channel Country have in your life now.

P Yeah. It has no part of my life now at all. And all I am very sorry and regretful about is that my first sight after all these years ah of going with ah my brother and his then – his lovely wife who's since died ah, Bernie, and we went back to see Mt Leonard again and to see Pop's grave you know, and things. And ah great mind. Ah just after I came down here, and I was

thinking oh God, I must be getting old because I've got a great desire to see Pop's grave and my brother rang from Yarraman, Queensland, where he was and chatting away and he said Trish, you ever thought about going back to Mt Leonard? And I said, what do you think? I beat you to it. 24 hours ago I thought about that. So I said I'll provide all expenses if you like. You are a fabulous driver. He is, a wonderful driver and a brand new car and whatnot and he said well you can keep your snooty nose right out of it. We're going to share. We'll share the trip there. Oh great. So he did. He's a wonderful driver. Very comfortable car. And out we got. And we stayed at the – we didn't stay at the ……**(?)**, I think we stopped and had a, had a beer there or something or other and then the great moment came when we had to go round the bend of the river and see Mt Leonard which has been sold a couple of times since Pop and his partner sold it, and it was – we were told it was owned by a wealthy butcher from Adelaide who never went near the place. He just had a manager on it. And the manager's wife said wasn't there because she was taking the kids back to Adelaide to put 'em back into school. But ah the mad, mad pub - ….. ….. Simon? Yeah. Simon actually had a rare sober moment and could recogni – or said he recognised me and whatnot, and he told us this. Anyhow we drove across the ri – ah the river to Mt Leonard and it was all so different. All those gibbers that I fell off into and whatnot, a huge dam had been made there. A vast dam. And most of the gibbers had disappeared from there. And looked at Mt Leonard. In my father's day, every tool was put back in the shelf, every – no bit of piping laying around, nothing. You didn't – you couldn't have breakfast, dinner or tea until you'd done your share of putting everything way. There's a place for everything. Everything in its place. It was always clean, neat and tidy. Because there's no-one there to care and the manager certainly couldn't have cared less, he was away too, there was truckloads of old piping laying across the front door and whatnot. It was all so different and it just showed that nobody cared. That upset me and whatnot. And I – it doesn't matter. Pop's up there and he's spinning them yarns about the great muster of 1934. He doesn't know about it. It's only you and I who will mourn for the days when this was – our station was known for its good management when Pop was there. We've just got to face facts. Nobody cares.

T You say that the Channel Country doesn't have any part of your life now and I understand that physically and actually, but how about in the life of your mind? What part does the Channel Country –

P Ohhh, it's just the memories of it and my anger, my terrible anger, when um, the Cooper comes in flood and there's no more controlling that huge flow of water in 2002 than there was in 1927 or '37 or something. All that wonderful water just flowing over the desert whereas in – as well know, in three years time, the cattle will be dying for want of water. These sort of things weigh in my mind. It should have progressed instead of going back. If Menzies and – yes, Menzies was in ……, with the great Snowy Mountains Scheme, you know whoever thunk that one out or anything, I think it was Hudson, whoever thunk that one out, look what a difference that made to the availability of water in three States, because oh it's important isn't it, for city farmers? Not wanting a thing ….. ….. There's that waiting three or four years for the Cooper to come in flood and then it all wastes away and I cannot believe that there can be people so stupid.

T And how about the writing? What's, what's making you write stuff down about your childhood?

P Oh I've told you that before, that it was just my grandson Toby that I was telling something to, and he looked as bored out of his little brain, and my daughter Christine saying Mum, get a computer. Start writing it down because Toby'll be the very one who'll be mad as hell if his kids grow up and ask him where did grandma oh and things there. That put it into my head, and as I say, when I finally got to the word processor and everything, oh that was a doodle. And I'd be doing the washing up over the sink and I'd think about that spectacular muster in ah 1934, this huge muster that I knew all about because I was riding with it. Not allowed to go more than 10 miles away from the station, but I was riding amongst this mob you know? It was a most fascinating, exciting thing in the whole wide world and so I'd go inside and go bash, bash, bash, bash, bash, bah – two pages. Print 'em off. And then I'd be right for the next two months or 'til the next thing struck me. Then YOU came into my life or I came into yours, whichever it was, and there was the inspiration I really needed. That was ah about when people came into it.

Before that I was only thinking of Mt Leonard as one isolated part of my life, but when you came into it, I could think about Birdsville and all the – Maree, and all the whole of the Channel Country. That's what enlarged my horizons, as we say.

T Is there anything I haven't asked you about you think um –

P I hardly think so dear.

T OK, enough already. Thank you very much.

P I don't know dear, whether you make sense of it or not. I – that's not my business, you know? That's up to you.

End of interview