INTERVIEW WITH JUNE JACKSON
5 June 2000

I = Interviewer R = Respondent

TAPE 1 – SIDE A

I **Okay, so this is Tape 15 and the time code is 19.22. This is Tape No. 8 for DAT, 5 June, Channels of History. This is June Jackson in her workplace which is the Post Office in Boulia. Trish FitzSimons on sound and Erica Addis on camera.**

Okay, so June, tell me where and when you were born, the date, the place and how your birth happened, whether it was midwife or hospital or what you know of the circumstances of your birth.

R 3 June 1944 in Georgetown, Queensland, at the hospital.

I And what was your name then?

R That's a bit controversial because my father insisted I was June Elizabeth and my mother insisted I was Elizabeth June, so I've gone with what's on the birth certificate which is Elizabeth June.

I And was that what your mother said or your father said?

R My mother said, because she said June Elizabeth Wilcox was JEW and she didn't want me called JEW, so I'm Elizabeth.

I So your parents always planned that you would be called June but Elizabeth went first on the birth certificate?

R Mmmm.

I And how had your family … Georgetown isn't actually in the Channel Country, is it?

R No.

I So, I know that your family has got a long connection to the Channel Country. I'd like you to explain that connection and also how it was that you came to be born in Georgetown.

R My great-grandmother was married out here, came out here as a young girl, as Beth would have told you. They drew Maxland and my grandmother was one of

her first marriage children. She was the only daughter to that marriage. She married a gentleman quite 19-20 years older than her and they eventually went, after leaving here, went to several properties and then she and her husband and two of her brothers went up around Georgetown Forsyth, mining, and they had mines up there. So obviously my mother and her two brothers went with her family. She met my father up there and we were born up there, my sister and I, and then they came back out here to this area after the mine failed and they were looking for something else.

I Do you know any of the circumstances … was your father a miner working for another company, or he was in business for himself?

R No. My father was a stockman and that's when my mother married him. Evidently he was up around the Forsyth Georgetown area there. He was working. His parents had properties, I think, or something up there, or holdings or whatever, and he was a jockey and quite well-known horseman, and that's all I really know of them.

I So your father was a jockey. Was that in … because country races have always been important, haven't they?

R Mmmm.

I Was he a jockey just around the west?

R Yes, in the north really. I don't know whether he ever rode out here but he did up around the Georgetown Forsyth area up there.

I Now when I think of a jockey, I think of a man five foot two and five stone. I mean, I'm exaggerating, but was that the kind of man your father was or was he a strapping stockman that also rode horses quickly?

R He was a stockman who rode horses quickly. Yes, he was about six foot, I guess, and quite a big man. In later years, you can't believe how big people can become small, but he was reasonably big in his prime.

I I am clearly getting a little bit confused in the generations of your family. It was your grandfather that had gone to Georgetown to mine, was it, and your mother met your father who was a stockman working up there?

R That's correct.

I Right. So when you said it was the mine failing that brought your parents to this area, how does that work because it was your grandfather that was the miner and your father that was the stockman?

R It brought them back here to this area. This was where my grandmother and my mother grew up so when that failed the two boys that had gone with my grandparents were Brian and Jack McGlinchy. It was Brian McGlinchy and Jack Robinson, and their mother was the one that had Maxland. So they just came back home. I don't know whether the mine folded or failed or what, I really don't know, but I know they then all packed up and came back here to this area, which was home. So they brought their husbands back … the women brought their husbands back home to this area again.

I So how old were you when you arrived in this area?

R I'd say I probably would have been about three, three-and-a-half.

I Do you have any memory of that moving?

R I don't have any memory of the moving. I have several memories of Georgetown or Forsyth. Forsyth, I think. And then I have memories of Kurabulka.

I So your earliest memories, then, are in Georgetown. What do you remember of that area?

R I can remember having my face washed with some sort of soap which I thought would never heal because I got into my mother's lipstick, and in those days I think it was real red lipstick and I painted my face. And I can remember her scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing at my face while I sat in this horrible cold tin tub.

I So that would have been half punishment and half getting the lipstick off your face?

R Well, I think it was just that at that time there was no hot water. It had to come off, so she just sat me in the tub and had a dish cloth and was going like this. I wasn't in cold water. I was just sitting in the cold tub and I can remember saying something like 'It's cold' and sitting in a and Mum saying 'Show me your face, show me your face. I want to clean your face' and sort of I don't even remember how old I was, whether it was night time, day time, but I can remember getting my face scrubbed rather harshly. I don't

remember getting a smack for it, which I probably should have done because I'd say Mum would have had one lipstick and really didn't need to see it plastered all over my face.

I So if you say you were living without hot water, you probably can't remember much of Georgetown, but what do you think were the physical circumstances of life for your parents there?

R Very hard. The water would have been boiled in a copper down the back, I'd say, or on the stove in a kettle. And I can remember, you know, all having a bath, well my sister and mother and I anyway, all having a bath in the one water. Obviously there would have been running water, no doubt, which I don't remember, but I know the three of us used to have a bath in the one water. And then when Dad came home she'd chuck a bit more hot water in there and he'd then put the water out on the garden. I can remember those. I can remember having a birthday party, I think for one of my cousins, under a white frangipani tree, and I have loved white frangipani trees ever since. I can remember Dad coming home drunk one day, one night obviously, and falling down the steps, and I can remember my mother throwing him a blanket and saying 'Well, that's where you've fallen so that's where you stay'. And that's really all I can remember. I have photos of times that I think 'Oh, yeah, I probably remember that' but I really don't think I do. It's only the photo that perhaps brings back memories.

I It's gets hazy, doesn't it? And so then when you came here to the Channel Country, it was to Kurabulka that you went, was it?

R Well, I'm a little hazy. I think my grandmother and family went to Maxland and we probably would have gone with her. Then I'd say Dad may have got the job at Kurabulka as head stockman. Mum was then cook, so I'd say they've got a job as a package, a head stockman and a cook, and us two girls went with them. But I can always remember sort of Maxland was always there, that was just … I don't know whether I'd say 'home' but it was always somewhere there, and that was Maxland.

I So would your grandmother … Jenny was your grandmother?

R No, that was my great-grandmother.

I Great-grandmother. Was she still at Maxland or had it then passed into somebody else?

R I think Uncle Brian and Aunty Bub were there then. I know they were there then but I don't know whether my great-grandmother and great-grandfather were still there or not. I really don't remember too much of my great-grandparents in the early years until we went to Charters Towers to live.

I So would Uncle Brian have inherited Maxland as the eldest son? Was that his position?

R Mmmm.

I And is that usually how inheritance goes in this area? That eldest sons inherit?

R Ah, I'd say probably, yeah.

I So then when you, you know you're not sure whether you came first to Kurabulka or Maxland, but tell me about your childhood at Kurabulka. It was only a fairly short period, wasn't it, till your parents split up? Do you want to just tell me about that?

R Yes. Some of my memories of Kurabulka, having very, very bad eye problems with flies and waking up in the morning with eyes all stuck. And the house we lived in must have been a little way away from the kitchen area because I can remember Mum, Dad, whoever happened to be around, carrying my sister and I over and putting us near the big wood stove until after breakfast when Mum had time to wipe our eyes and get us seeing again. I can remember that. I can remember being near the horse yards once and told to keep very quiet, and skitching the pup onto the horse, which didn't please my father very much because I can remember wearing the handle of his whip around my backside. Ummm, I can remember being in the bore drains, which I think we were told not to go near. In those days they still had the flowing bores with running water for cattle.

I So that would have been hot water?

R Mmmm. And I can remember the mail lady coming. Or mail man, I'm not really sure whether it was a mail man or a mail lady, because my mother was on so many properties and there were so many mail people. I've an idea it may have been a mail man out here and he always brought us a treat like a chocolate or a lolly, because being out there we didn't see anyone except the mailman and that was great that he would bring these things out. And I don't know whether he brought them out all the time or just every now and then. I really don't remember anything much.

I And what do you remember of your parents separating? How old were you and what do you remember at the time and how do you now understand that?

R To be honest, I never even knew that they had separated until I was about seven or eight because, oh I don't know, I think I was just used to men going away and working, and being gone say a week, ten days, a month, and I don't think it ever even clicked until someone told me that my mother and father weren't living together. And I don't even know if I thought too much about it then. I mean, I was in such a, I suppose, close relationship with my mother and grandmother and sister that it really didn't worry me that he wasn't there. I think it was probably when I was about fourteen that I sort of wanted then to make contact with him. I don't think I missed him, to be honest.

I Because you probably would have been seeing lots of other kids around the place who didn't see their fathers much?

R Mmmm. It wasn't a big thing to have a man there all the time, because the mustering camps would go out, probably a month at a time, with the big properties with no fences. They'd be home for a night and they'd be gone again next morning when you woke up, so they sort of weren't a real big factor in your life, I don't think.

I And can you explain what a mustering camp is as opposed to droving?

R A mustering camp is, on these large properties because there's hardly any fences, every twelve months they try and get all their stock together for branding or de-horning or selling, or whatever, so there would be a big camp of could be ten men, could be twenty men, all depends. They'd have a dray or something packed up with tents and food and whatever, and off they'd go and they'd just build yards or whatever while they were out and do what they had to do while they were there. There was none of this bringing them back into the station for this job, so they could be gone for any length of time until they did what they thought was the full muster. And droving is having a herd together, moving them from one place to the other, sort of one property to another or one property here to 2-5,000k away, and that is droving. They're droving them.

I So at the outcome, at the end of a mustering camp, quite likely there would be some then beasts to be droved or to be put onto a road train more recently?

R Yes.

I So do you remember, in the time when your parents were together, how was it when your Dad came back after being away? Would that be a big deal or he wasn't really a relevant personage?

R I think it was more the excitement of everybody coming back. You know, the whole camp. All of a sudden, hey there was lots of people around again, instead of just the old cook and my mother and probably the station manager's wife. I think it was just the fact, the excitement that the camp's coming back and they'd sit down and play their mouth organs and things like that, so the whole place would just liven up again. And that's probably all I can remember about the fact that they were coming back. And I don't even know whether my father was gone for a month, or whatever. I really don't. Time means nothing to children, I don't think, especially fifty-odd years on when you're trying to remember it.

I So as you remember it now, how did life shift from your parents breaking up? Did that mean that your Mum ceased to be station cook on Kurabulka?

R Yes. She and my grandmother moved to Charters Towers, taking my sister and I with her. They bought a home in Charters Towers but then Mum would go out station cooking, so she would be gone, say, six months of the year. Then she would come back and get a job as a barmaid or hotel house cleaner or something for six months. Then she'd go again. Big money on the properties, cooking, and she'd spend nothing, so she was keeping her mother. Well, my grandmother, she was on a pension, and keeping us two girls. I don't think my father ever contributed.

I And did your Mum have a bitterness towards your father or just it was like he'd drifted off into the sunset and you didn't hear about him?

R Ummm, I think the bitterness was the fact that he never contributed to our upbringing and the fact that he just would prefer to pretend that we weren't there, and get on with his life. I think a lot of the problems were that my great-grandmother and her husband, he was about twenty years older than her, my grandmother's husband was nineteen years older than her, my father was nineteen years older than my mother, and I think these men were already in their way. And then to marry a nineteen or eighteen-year-old girl is a big step and a big shock to them, that they've got to do this and they've got to do that, and my father was obviously a pretty heavy drinker all his life, and I don't think that working, you

know, twelve months of the year to support a wife and two children was his idea of what he was put on this earth for.

I So you're saying that in the McGlinchy clan it was … because certainly talking to Bid, that great-grandmother of yours sounded like a rock kind of keeping the whole family together. You're saying that it was quite a female-dominated family in your experience of it?

R I think so, yeah. But I do remember that when we moved to Charters Towers my great-grandmother and grandfather were living there then.

I Was it the Channel Country that your Mum was coming back to work in?

R No, she just worked wherever. Around Charters Towers, Hughenden, Prairie, anywhere between here and Charters Towers. The closest she could get the better because then if they had someone come in for the show, well she might be able to jump in with them and come back and see us girls. But she worked wherever she could.

I And so was being looked after by your grandmother, did that feel like a kind of abandonment? Or you were so close to her you just accepted that that's how things were?

R Oh, never abandonment, no. She … oh, my grandmother was, you know, she was just one of these women that was there. If there was a job to be done, she did it, and like her mother and like her sisters. It didn't matter what needed to be done, she was there. And I think she was just pleased, perhaps, to see my mother get out of an abusive relationship. I mean, I don't think my father ever hit her, but the alcohol wasn't conducive to a happy life for us two kids, and I think she was just happy to say 'Well, look, we'll go to Charters Towers, take the girls and I'll look after them while you get a job'. I mean, she was just always there, my great-grandmother was always there, and I sort of really didn't see a need for men at all. I never missed them and I had a lot of friends, boy friends, you know friends that were boys, and always have, and I've never felt the need to say 'I've missed my father' or 'I've missed my grandfather'. I never knew my grandfather because he and my grandmother had split up before I ever even remember him. I didn't see him till I would have been ten, before I even met my grandfather for the first and last time.

I Tell me about your great-grandmother and your great-grandfather? What were they like as characters? Because I suppose I've heard quite a lot about them from Bid.

R I can only remember bits and pieces, I suppose. I can remember once my father arrived in Charters Towers and took us down town, took my sister and myself down town, and he said we would be gone two-and-a-half hours. I can remember him taking us home after, say, four or five hours and this lady coming out of my grandmother's house and abusing this man, and I can just remember standing behind him, thinking 'What is my Big Gran going on about?' and they thought that he had abducted us, and they had been onto the police and they were just leaving the house when he turned up. I can remember her being like this big lady with white hair just raging. I can remember that and thought 'She's just like a big bull-terrier', you know. And probably she wasn't that big but to a small child, and in such a temper, and my grandmother stood there and my mother, and they didn't say a thing. With my grandmothers, one was … my great-grandmother was Big Gran and my grandmother was Little Gran. So there was no conflict about Big Gran and Little Gran, that's all we ever called them.

I And Big Gran was a tiger?

R Big Gran was a tiger, yeah, because she thought that he had taken us children and she was letting him know, under no circumstances did he ever need to see us again. And he never saw us again till I was about sixteen. So he never came back again. And I can remember Christmases, everyone sitting around the big table like that photo you've seen, many of those, different celebrations. It was always where everyone went to. When they came to Charters Towers, everyone went to Big Gran's. All the children eventually went to boarding schools there so the parents would come down to see the children and they'd all end up at Big Gran's. She lived in one house, which I think was Paul Street, and I can remember talking to the lady through the fence, and this lady had red setters, and I can remember thinking 'I want to live there with a dog like that', and eventually my great-grandparents did buy that home and lived there for quite some years. Then after they died and left the house it fell into very bad repair, disrepair, and then I think it was the Seventh Day Adventists or something bought it and restored it, and it's just great to drive into Charters Towers now and up that street and see this home so beautifully restored.

I **This is Tape 16 of camera tape, still on DAT Tape 8, and the DAT time code is 24.44, 5 June 2000, Trish FitzSimons on sound, Erica Addis on camera, interviewing June Jackson in the Boulia Post Office and this is the second tape of June's interview.**

So we were talking about your great-grandmother in Charters Towers. Just quickly sketch in your life for me in Charters Towers and then we'll get you back to the Channel Country.

R I attended a State School in Charters Towers, then we went to high school at a boarding school in Townsville, came back to Charters Towers, went to a couple of properties governessing for a few years and was on my way to the Territory to governess when I found out that the lady whose children I was going to teach, she had died of leukaemia, so I then stayed here with my Mum and sister instead of travelling on.

I So in governessing, how did you view your future? Like, what were your dreams as a young woman?

R I applied for a nursing post when I left school and they didn't come out till about the middle of the next year, so by the time they came I was already governessing so I thought 'Well, blow the nursing, I enjoy governessing', and probably would have done that for a couple of years. And I think I would have liked to probably have gone teaching but my mother certainly couldn't afford to send me, or give me anything, so I thought 'Well, I'll give myself three years governessing, saving as much as I could, and then try and put myself through schooling. But, unfortunately, I came back here and took on a lot of other jobs and just never left.

I Tell me which properties you were a governess on and what it was like to be a governess and how that fitted in with the rest of what's quite a complex hierarchy on stations, isn't it?

R Ummm, not the first one I was on. That was around Torrens Creek. They had three boys, two of which I was teaching the first year.

I Is Torrens Creek in the Channel Country? Where is it?

R No, that's around Charters Towers. Yeah, and they owned the property and they had the younger brother working for them so there was only the owner, his wife, the three boys and myself, and the younger son. And then the next place was owned by his other brother and they had sort of the same situation, so if there was mustering to be done on one place everybody did those jobs, so there was sort of no hierarchy there. The next place I worked on was out of Torrens Creek, out of Prairie, which is just near Hughenden, and he was the manager there and they had about five guys working there, I think. I don't think hierarchy ever came into it. There was never the 'us and them'. They were just people who

happened to be managing a place and knew that they were managing it, they didn't think they owned it, so I didn't sort of run into any of the problems that a lot of the governesses had where they were classed as 'whatever needs to be done, you do'. I was there to teach and that's what I did. So I guess I was lucky. You hear some of the horror stories from the other governesses.

I What, then, brought you back into the Channel Country?

R Well, my mother and sister and all the family were here and, as I said, I came here in the Christmas holidays going on to another place and the lady passed away so I then stayed here because the children were then off to boarding school.

I So your Mum had moved back from Charters Towers when you and your sister got a bit bigger?

R Yes.

I So was that some sense of your mother having an attachment to the Channel Country as the Channel Country or was it more just that was the way that work took her?

R I think that was the way work took her but she always referred to Boulia as home. I think it's always been home for as long as I can remember because I can remember Aunty Bid, every time she'd come to Charters Towers she'd say 'My darling, when are you coming home? There are so many bachelors out there. We need young women out there' and I'd say 'Aunty Bid, I don't want to go back yet. If I go back I'll stay there forever', so when I was back here well Aunty Bid was happy that she'd got me back here, and I didn't particularly like any of the bachelors she was talking about because they were all about twenty-five years older than me but I just felt I belonged here. I think because in those days every second person you saw, you did belong to in some way or other, so … yeah, but Mum would always say 'There's no country like the Boulia area'. Yeah, you go back and you just think 'Ahhh, this is where I was meant to be' so I think probably that was just instilled in us, listening to them talk about it as home all the time.

I And so the identification was with Boulia rather than the Channel Country. Like, you go to that Min Min Café and it's sort of Boulia, capital of the Channel Country but, for you, or for your Mum it was Boulia as a town and a district?

R I think so. Yeah. I mean, she loved the country, it didn't matter whether it was the Channel Country, the back of Cairns, or anywhere. She just loved the country. But I think I feel that this is God's own country here and … I mean, we've been away and we've come back and we just … you know, it's just the lifestyle, I think, the fact that there's always something happening in the Channel Country, whether it's good or bad, and I think we just associate with the whatever, whether it's Birdsville, Bedourie, Winton, you know, it's just you feel this is your country. You go to Brisbane and you think 'I'm in the middle of nowhere'. Probably sort of once you get to around about Longreach you start to feel as if you're sort of coming back, you can unwind or whatever. I don't know, there's just something magical about it. For people that live here, it is. It's just magic. You know, you can come and go. You can go for twenty years but you can come back and just feel that you can relax or this is where you were meant to be, or something. We've had people come back, not so long ago, and I think it's something like sixty years since he was here, and he said 'There's just a feeling when you drive down the road that "I'm back"', you know, he said you come over the Middleton Channels there and the Hamilton Channels and he said there's something, whether it's the hairs on the back of your neck stand up or you just think well, you're back, it doesn't matter whether it's here or anywhere in the area, and he just said he got about 20k out of Winton or something and said 'I can feel it coming on' and they said 'Dad, the next pub's not till so-and-so' and he said 'No, just the feeling. I can just feel it', so whether it's because you grow up here and you think that you own this, I don't know, but you just feel as if you're there.

I So when your Aunty Bid would say to you there's lots of bachelors, we need you, did you grow up being very aware of being in a minority as a woman out in this area?

R No. No. I've always held my own, whether it's men or women or whatever. Yeah, no, I've never thought of a minority. I think she was just saying that for something to say to get me to come back. Yeah.

I And was marriage something that you've always felt yourself to be heading towards?

R Oh, eventually, but I think because of my grandmother and my mother, I think I decided that my marriage was going to last, so I wasn't going to rush into anything just because my girlfriends had all got married. I think I just decided 'Well, hey, I'm going to be the one that's married forever. I'm not going to wait five years and then say "Sorry, but that's it,

it's over"' and I think I just sort of took my time and looked around and … marriage, it wasn't the end of everything, as far as I was concerned anyway.

I So tell me that story, then, of how work for you in the Channel Country and then marriage, how did that all evolve? The mother of the kids that you were going to governess died in the Northern Territory, you came back here at Christmas time, and then what happened?

R Not wanting to dip into my funds, I decided I'd better find a job. I got a job looking after the children of the people who owned the café at the time, who was a relation of course. So I looked after her three children for about four months and decided that really wasn't what I wanted, so they then said 'Well, we need someone to work in the café'. My sister was working there. She said 'You work in the café and I'll look after the kids'. Well I couldn't jump at that quick enough so my sister and I worked in the café then for probably twelve months or so. She left and got a job at Donohues and what did I do? I think I got a job on the exchange and worked there.

I So was the exchange … like now the telephone exchange is the little temporary building next door. Where was it when you got the job?

R Over against that wall. And the Postmaster sat behind you and said 'If you have nothing to do, here are all these amendments' and he'd plonk a great book in front of you, a ruler and a pencil, and a piece of paper, and you would sit there all afternoon between calls, making his amendments in his Australia Post Journal.

I I don't understand what a Postmaster General's Australia Post Journal would be. Can you explain that a bit more? It sounds interesting.

R It's all the changes that are made from one day to the next, so they send them out to you in a ream of paper and you have to rule out the old ruling and put the new one in. It might be a change of address for where something is supposed to go to, so you change that. Instead of sending you a new volume of something, they just send you the amendments, so you go 'Page 75, cross out "and" and put "it"'.

I So it was just getting the bureaucratic rules?

R Yes. Oh, not just even rules. Just, I don't know, paperwork. It was, you know, just a waste of a whole heap of time, I think, because no one ever read it.

I I might just ask you again, what were the amendments?

R The amendments were changes to rules or regulations that had already been sent out and these amendments had to be made, rather than replace the whole book they would just change the amendments.

I And that's what you'd do when your usual telephonist work was …

R Slow.

I … slow. Describe the day of the switchgirl? How old would you have been and give us the rhythm of a day, when you started doing that job?

R I probably would have been seventeen, I suppose, seventeen-and-a-half. I think the first shift started at something like 7 o'clock. You would then take over from the night shift who was usually the Postmaster or his second in charge. I think they would take it week apart, which meant that they slept here with a big bell. When one of the shutters fell the bell would ring, so they would jump up, put the jack in, and put the call through, then sit there and wait for the call to be finished. Then they would go back to bed.

I It's so ridiculous. I'd never thought that a switch had to keep going at night but, of course.

R Mmmm. So then we'd come to work in the morning, they would go. I think we would work, say, three-and-a-half hours, then we would go for a couple of hours, then we'd come back and finish our shift. The other shift would be the one that came for the couple of hours in the middle of the day, then you would work the night shift. I think the night shift went something like 7.30 to 10.30 and I think on Sundays it was 10 o'clock, and then the night guy would take over again.

I Dick Souter today told me about some grazier's wife that wanted to get all the town's gossip and would drive into town to do a short shift on the switch, get all the news. He didn't tell me this on tape, it's okay.

R Oh, thank God.

I And then go home and share the news. And that kind of fitted in in a certain way. I mean, the world thinks of telephonists as … I grew up in a little country area and Mrs Tolley, we always thought Mrs Tolley knew everything. But how is that from your end?

R You never listened into a call. You would not sit there and listen to a person's call for three minutes or six minutes. At the end of three minutes you would go across and say 'Are you extending?' They would either say yes or no. You put the jack across and that was all you would have heard, the last two words of their sentence, and 'Yes we are' or 'No thanks' or 'Get off the bloody line'. But you didn't … and it was against policy to listen. Him saying that she would get the gossip, it wouldn't have been because she was listening, it would be because people would ring up and say 'Oh, I'm looking for so-and-so, can you tell me where he is?' She'd say 'Well, his wife rang in looking for him and I think he's at such-and-such'. The gossip didn't really come from listening to people's phone calls, it came from people ringing you and saying 'Oh, look, I'll be away for two days so if there's any calls tell them I'm at so-and-so, or to ring me back' and the exchange was sort of like a little memo board, I suppose, and if I was ringing Vicki I'd say 'Oh, hi Vi, how are you? We're mustering today so I'm just ringing Vicki to find out where the men are', so you'd have a little conversation with the telephonist. So then someone would ring and say 'Oh, look, I want to get Elrose', 'Oh, it's no good ringing them because she's talking to June', so that was sort of the thing. It wasn't because you listened in to … I mean, you weren't supposed to, so if they did, they wouldn't be silly enough to say 'I heard so-and-so say something' because it was their job and it was an indictable offence, so no one listened in to anyone's conversations.

I So was it a role that you found pleasurable? Because you're obviously kind of at a communications hub in a way.

R Oh, I think everyone that worked on the exchange enjoyed it. I mean, some people were over the board because you'd say 'Get off the phone, I just want to make my bloody phone call. I don't want to know what everyone in the country is doing'. You know, so yeah, I think, and people expected it. They expected you to know how much rain there was in every place because that was the first thing that happened when there was the rain. Everyone would ring you or you would ring and say 'Oh, Marion Downs, did you have rain?' 'Kurabulka, have you had rain?' 'So-and-so, have you had rain?' Then someone would ring in and say 'Oh, can you tell us how much rain there's been?' 'So and so and so and so and so'. Yeah. I mean, that … it was a centre, I suppose, of information, not gossip.

I I've heard people talk about the galah sessions, as they were called in the lower Channel Country, which sounded like it was everybody talking in on a party line late in the afternoon.

R Mmmm. I think that was more on the radio, the galah sessions. On the party lines, from what I know of here, there were no more than three telephones on a party line. Most of them would only be two, so there wouldn't have been a whole heap of people talking on those. The galah sessions, I think, mainly refer to the two-way radio. It was just open channel and you could talk to sort of anyone then.

I So when you were a telephonist, most stations would have had party lines so that only one of three households could use the phone at any one time?

R Mmmm. Yeah. You could pick up the phone, you'd hear someone talking so if you were polite, you'd put it down.

I So that kind of listening in on calls, I guess, would have happened, perhaps much more likely of other people on your party line, while they were waiting for you to get off the phone?

R Mmmm. The only thing was that you could hear it click when they picked it up and you'd say 'Excuse me, but get off the line', so you'd hear it then. You'd hear them put it back down again. You knew when someone else was on your line.

I Was the Post Office … what other roles were going on in this building at the time?

R There was the Postmaster. There was the second-in-charge. There was a, I'm not sure whether he was called the telegram boy or, there was always a junior guy here. So there were normally three, usually men, working at that time.

I And was that typical that the people on the counter were male and the people on the switch were female?

R Typical of here? Yeah. And I don't think there were any women working here until just before I came, about two years, I think, before I came here they had a young girl working here, and up until all that time, as far as I knew, they were just all men.

I Including men running the switch?

R At night? Yeah.

I But during the day?

R They were women.

I Right. So it was men here on the counter and women over there with the switch?

R Yeah.

I So how long did you do that role on the switch?

R About eighteen months, I think. Yeah.

I And what year would that have been?

R Mmmm, about ’63, ’64. ’63 probably.

I And then what happened? How did your life …?

R Ahhh, I met my husband. He was working in the Territory at the time. They had trucks up there so he was sort of here and then be gone for six months. He came back and worked here for a while and then he and another friend and two of my cousins decided that they were going to Kiabram fruit picking, so they bundled up and left and I thought ‘Well, why am I here?’ so I bundled up and went to South Molle Island and worked there. And after about eight months, ten months, or something, they decided to come home and I stayed at South Molle, then we decided well, we’d get married. I had an accident at South Molle and thought ‘Well, I can’t work any longer so I’ll come home’ and then we got married. Yeah.

I So a serious accident?

R Oh, just a water skiing accident. I ruined my knee so I couldn’t walk on that for a while, so I thought ‘Oh, well, I’ll go home’.

I And what was it about Ray that gave you confidence that this was somebody you could be with for a long, long time, compared to your mother and grandmother?

R Mmmm. I think his family, I think, probably would have been a big influence. Ummm, his father was a bit of a drinker but I saw how you can handle people who do drink a little,

without going overboard, because I always thought that alcohol was just a sin. And I think I learnt then that perhaps it wasn't such a sin, that you can live with alcoholics. And just his Mum and his sisters and … I think just the family. I don't think I'd ever missed it until I saw that and I'd think 'Oh, you know, it's just such a … to be such a part of that', and I never felt not a part of it, from the first time I ever went with Ray, I think. I'd arrive down there, you know, Peg would say 'Oh, come for tea after you've finished work on Sunday afternoon', and the first thing she'd say was 'What are you having for tea?' I'd say 'Whatever'. 'Well, Vic's having steak and onion gravy, Ray's having chops, and Vicki's having baked beans on toast and Kay's having scrambled eggs'. I'd think 'What is this? A café?' So I'd just say 'Look, whatever. I don't care what I eat' because, you know, as children we ate what was put in front of us, and that was it. So I thought 'Here's this woman that on Sunday night is prepared to make six different meals for her family. This has got to be family' and I think I saw the way he acted with his family and that and I thought 'Oh, this is probably someone I could probably live with for the rest of my life'. I didn't jump into it quickly. We were sort of going together for twelve months, I think, then we had nearly a twelve-month engagement, and I think I remember saying to Ray, you know 'This is forever or not at all', and I think we just decided well, that was it, it was forever. I mean, you know, when you're nineteen and twenty or twenty-one or something, forever doesn't seem such a long time, but here we are all these years after, we're still together.

I Tell me about Ray's mother for a minute. How was it, and pretend that I don't know she ran the hotel. How was it that she would even think about cooking six different dinners on a Sunday night? What was she doing? Tell me about Ray's Mum in this town.

R What I remember of her, I can remember her working at Boulia Stores. I remember knowing she was Ray's mother but I didn't remember she was this little blonde-headed girl's mother. I always thought she belonged to the storekeeper. And I can just remember thinking how well-adjusted this little ten-year-old was, or eight-year-old, or seven or something, and then finding out that she belonged to this lady who worked at the store and was Ray's mother, and thinking 'She's working full-time. She's got a beautiful home, you know, and she's got this little girl.' She just seemed to be so organised, always seemed to be doing things. If there was a stall, she cooked. I can always remember those things, that if Peg Jackson didn't make something there was no stall. Tell me if I'm wandering off the track.

I No, that's all interesting.

SIDE B

R And then, she was still working at the store when Ray and I got married and I think it must have been about twelve months after that, she decided we'd have a meeting and she must have said to Ray 'If you come in with me, we'll put in for the pub'. So that's what they did. They put in a tender, must have been, and leased the hotel then.

I Which hotel?

R The Australian Hotel. I was working at Donohues at the time. I was bookkeeping over there, trying to be a telephonist but doing more bookkeeping than telephonist. And they went into the pub.

I So you were then a young married woman whose husband and mother-in-law were working in the pub. Did that mean that you got involved in that as well?

R Ummm, not a great deal for a while, until I become pregnant. After that I gave up my job and then I did sort of become involved, I guess. But only, I was the relief cook for two days. Couldn't believe, but anyway I didn't kill anybody, but that was my job. Relief cook for two days or if the laundress didn't turn up, well I would do that, or … I think I was sick probably for the first six months, I think, of my pregnancy, so I didn't really want to be doing a great deal. But after that I was sort of … after I had the baby we were still living in my mother-in-law's house and she and her husband were at the hotel. He'd passed away. Ummm, so probably after my baby was born, I did become more involved with the hotel. I'd take her over and everyone looked after her and I'd do the upstairs or the laundry or whatever, you know, we were sort of doing it pretty hard so it just meant that … I mean, any money they paid me was then coming back into the family rather than going out of it, so yeah, I became involved in it. I don't know if I ever liked it. Probably ten years later I would have enjoyed it more than having children in the hotel, you know, babies.

I And what kind of role was the hotel playing in this town then?

R Probably a very big role, I suppose, because in those days the properties still had a lot of people working on them. They would have their old cowboys and all their ringers. And that was probably the only entertainment they had. They'd come into the pub. The old

cowboys, they'd probably come in twice a year with a big cheque. They'd hand the cheque across the bar and say 'Tell me when I need a cargo to go home', which meant they'd want a bottle of rum and a flagon of wine and a carton of beer or something, so when their cheque was down to that, or nearly that, you'd say 'You've got two days' and then they'd know that their cheque was nearly run out.

I And in the meantime, they'd stay in a room in the pub and eat meals in the pub, would they?

R At that time, there was a thing called Rotten Row. It was a block of cement, down the back, probably a hundred yards away from the living quarters. I think it was four rooms, tin rooms, each room had two iron beds on it with a mattress – one of those horse-hair mattresses, so that you could poor water through it and let it dry out between users. They would camp there for nothing. They were just allowed to go down there and camp.

I No sheets?

R No sheets, nothing like that. There was a rule that unless they had a cup of soup and two pieces of bread in the morning, they weren't allowed back in the bar. So if they didn't call and see the cook and get their soup and their bread, they weren't to be served. So that at least gave them something to eat in the morning. And I don't think most of them ate for the rest of the day. They'd just drink until they … Ray carted them off back down the back again and then they'd sleep it off and it'd start all over again. And then when they ran out, they'd go back to the property and probably stay there for another six months. The young ringers, they would come in and probably spend the weekend and then go back home again. But that was really the only entertainment that was sort of there, I suppose. In those days, from what I can remember, the Aboriginals weren't allowed to drink in the bar. They could buy take-aways and take them away, so we didn't have the problem of fights and sort of things like that. We didn't really have too many of those.

I Didn't the stockmen and ringers have fights if they were drinking so much?

R Yeah, but you know, in those days you could just say 'Okay, you B—s, get out and fight outside' and probably grab them by the neck and throw them out. Well, you know, nowadays you wouldn't be able to lay a hand on them, so it was just, you know, 'Okay you bastards, get out and have your fight outside' and if Ray didn't kick them out, probably the other drinkers would, you know. So it was just a different lifestyle. There was no worry

about getting sued because you said something to someone which was racist or against something or other, so life was much easier anywhere in those days. You know, they could tick up, so they'd say 'Well, put that on the books', so 'Sorry, you owe fifty quid now. Until you pay that, you don't get any more'. It was just different in those days. The people, you had your characters that would come in and drink and there always just seemed to be so many people coming and going and so many people more around than there is nowadays.

I Women? Were women allowed into the pub?

R Not in the earlier days. When my husband managed the pub, there were women drinking in there. It was unusual for a woman to come in and plonk herself up in the corner in those days. I mean, several of them did but only because, you know, their husbands were there drinking with them and it wasn't … oh, it was sort of frowned on, I suppose. You went into the ladies' lounge and you didn't sit up at the bar with the men.

I And would I be right that there would be much less custom in the ladies' lounge than in the public bar? You know, that drinking was fundamentally a male activity?

R Yeah. Mmmm. Particularly … yeah, we had about five or six shearing teams that were here and each of those would have seven or eight men in them, so you know there were a lot more itinerant people in those days that would be here for two months and then gone, so they'd come in, they'd finish a shed, so they'd celebrate in the pub and then they'd be gone again for a week. And then someone else would be in the next day or something, so there always seemed to be people around in those days.

I This tradition of women running pubs that were basically for men is a long one in the Channel Country. I'm aware of it happening in Bitoota and Bedourie and Windorah and I've seen a poem that was, say, written in the sixties, written by a man where it was almost like he resented the power of the woman running that pub. You know, who maybe wasn't drinking but who held the power to say 'Back to the station' or 'Here's a drink'. What was it like to be a woman operating in that kind of system?

R I was never aware of it. I mean, I was only a latecomer. My mother-in-law had run the hotel across the road for years before that and I don't … I think it really didn't matter who served them a beer, as long as they got their beer or their Scotch or their rum, and I don't

know whether she ever sort of exerted her authority to say ‘Hey, I’m the boss here, you’re only a drinker’. To me, she wasn’t that sort of person.

I I guess I’d heard stories of this Mrs Craigie who I have to do some real digging to find out whether she was here. Nobody seems to remember her.

R No, she wasn’t here. Well, not that my husband can remember …

I It would be from the twenties and thirties, when she would have been around.

R I can remember a lady running the Middleton pub, I think, and the Hamilton, but I don’t every remember a Craigie. I mean, I don’t even remember hearing anyone talk about it.

I There’s supposed to be newspaper articles about her so anyway I’ll have to dig them out. So then how did you land up, because it’s twenty-two years ago since you were here in this Post Office, so how did that come about?

R Oh, after about eight years in the hotel I think we decided we’d had enough and we’d just go for a few years, so we packed up and left and went to a small store, bought a small corner store, and in that there was a small agency for Australia Post, so that went with the shop. After about two years there, we knew this place was then coming up because they were making them non-official, so in a moment of madness, I guess, I applied for the job and was on a shortlist of two, and then when they knew that I would probably die here, and that this was my local town, I think I got the job.

I So the PMG at the time wanted people who were really committed to the town?

R Well, they don’t like their people … they don’t like the Post Offices changing hands very quickly. They like to think that someone will be there for some length of time, yeah.

I And for you to have exuded that feeling, you must have really felt that. What was it that made you want to take on this Post Office?

R Economics. The fact that I could come back here and earn a living and send my children to boarding school and be back home. Yeah, that’s it in a nutshell.

I And so you and Ray took it on together twenty-two years ago?

R Ah, I took on the Post Office and he took on the weather and the night exchange. So we've always sort of probably, I suppose, because of the pub, we've always just worked in a relationship. What needs to be done, one does it, and then the other one backs up.

I Can you explain that commitment around the weather? I had no idea that that was what Post Offices did. Can you explain what it was historically and what it is now?

R I'm not sure about historically. The way I think of it is that the Post Offices were here. They were always going to be something that was here, the same with the Police Stations, so it just seems to be that in all the small places where there is a weather station, it either is associated with the Police Station or the Post Office, and it happened to be with the Post Office here. And that just sort of went with the job. If we hadn't of wanted it, it would have gone to the Police Station, but we needed it economically. It was a good move.

I And what was involved? What was involved twenty-two years ago and what is involved now?

R Oh, can I remember that far? What it involved in those days was walking into the back yard, reading the instruments, coming back in here and either giving a something like a telegram to the girls that were working or sitting down yourself and ringing Brisbane, and saying 'This is the weather', reading off a whole heap of numbers, and that was it. Every three hours you did that, except midnight. During the working hours you would bring it in and give it to the telephonist. She would send it. Three o'clock in the morning you did it yourself and rang it through. Six o'clock in the morning you did it and rang it through. You'd do one every three hours except midnight. Then, after the exchange closed, we then used to make a phone call. Instead of going through the exchange, we'd then make an actual phone call. And years after that we became more automated and we went onto a thing called a WOT machine, W – O – T, which was putting in a series of numbers, which was then picked up electronically from Brisbane.

Then about eighteen months ago, they moved it from the back yard here up to the aerodrome because of all the trees, the grass, the buildings, were making it so they weren't getting a true reading, so it went to the airport up there, and I think there's something like ten degrees difference up there to in town where there's all the trees. So we now drive up there every three hours and drive back and use the little laptop out the back there to put it on and it's picked up.

I And would it be a fair question for me to ask you how much you were paid for that twenty-two years ago, give or take the odd pound or dollar, and how much you're paid now? Is that a really important part of your family economy?

R Very much so. It educated my children. That and the night exchange got them through quite a few years of boarding school. The pay hasn't increased a great deal but it's still a nice little pick up. It's about $1,400-$1,600 a month so, you know, there's very little outlay for that. And it's quite interesting, yeah.

I So when did the exchange close down here?

R Mmmm.

I Approximately.

R It would have to be fifteen years ago. Oh, at least, oh probably more than that. I really can't remember. I should but I can't.

I For those of us who live in the city, telecommunications have changed pretty radically, I guess, in the last twenty years, I don't know. You know, phone cards, computers, email, the internet would be some things that would spin off my brain. Have you seen a huge amount of change in the technology that you're using in this business and how has that affected your role, affected the role of the Post Office and your working role?

R Ahhh, let me think. Well, technology's there to be used and we have to use it. Australia Post is sort of at the forefront of most things that are happening – Australia Post and Telstra – and we just roll with the dice. It's there so it has to be used. It really is amazing, I think, when you think back to sitting there and the first Postmaster that I can remember, I think, was showing me Morse Code. I mean, I never had to send anything by Morse Code but that's how they sent the first telegrams. When you think of someone physically sitting there doing this, then just being able to write it on a telegram and someone sending it by voice, then to put it onto something like the laptop computers, and now you have the other things, I think it's just mind-boggling to think these things have … all this technology has happened in a space of twenty years. It's a bit like Jules Verne, is it, thinking, you know, you can put a submarine down, having no idea of the time that someone would eventually do it. I think it's a bit like this, thinking 'Where is it going to stop?' You know, you've got things you can plug into your phone that'll show you who's calling you. You can see their

photo and it's just mind-boggling to think that I'm only fifty-six and I've seen all this happen in the last twenty years, you know. Just imagine what it's like for people who've been alive for a hundred years.

I When you were describing the plugging in the phones and that central communication role of knowing who was doing what, how do you see that the role of the Post Offices changed or adapted with the times?

R Ummm, well Australia Post became Australia Post and Telstra. They were now two different things and people still can't disassociate the phone boxes out there with Australia Post. Because the phone boxes are there, they assume that I know everything that's happening out there. I really don't know.

I I'm thinking of how it feels from your end.

So this is Tape 17 on camera, DAT Tape 8 is on 105.25 and it's 5 June 2000, Trish FitzSimons recording, Erica Addis on camera. We're recording June Jackson and this is the third camera tape that this interview has gone onto.

I I'm just interested a bit more, not in how the technology has shifted but how your role and your satisfaction in running a Post Office and the experience of it, how that has shifted over that period in which the technology has changed so radically.

R I don't think it's shifted. I think it's a job I love. I think it's a job I'm pretty good at and I think just as changes are implemented, you go with it. I don't … I think it's like any job. If you like it, you just keep improving and perhaps getting better and learning the new things that come along. I don't know if that's what you want but that's how I feel. Whatever they put in there, I learn to use and it's for the betterment of the customers and it's just what we have to do.

I When you were describing being the telephonist, you said 'People would want me to know that Joe Bloggs was out at the Five-Mile or Joanna had gone out to Glen Ormiston' or whatever. Do you still feel you have that kind of knowledge of comings and goings of the community?

R No, nowhere near as much since we lost the exchange. I think that was the big thing. When it finally did close, people would say 'Well, how are we going to know what anyone's doing?' and they'd ring up and say 'Oh, June, how much rain did so-and-so

have?' and I'd say 'I'm sorry, but unless they ring me I don't know', and I think it took a while for them to realise that I was no longer the PMG Department, that I was a private enterprise, that phone calls that were made other than a small subsidy, I paid for, and I think it took people a long time to realise that I was now a business person so I wasn't going to ring twenty-five properties so that they could ring me and find out what it was. They didn't realise that it was costing them a phone call to ring me. It would cost them a phone call to ring the property, so they may as well ring the property and get it first-hand. I think it took the community to realise that things were changing and there was a lot of resentment. Why does it have to close? What are we going to do now? But, like all country people, and people everywhere, I guess, that things change so you find some other way of doing things. So they would then call someone on their two-way and say 'Have you heard what so-and-so had?' so they used the two-ways a lot for a long time.

I I don't think that I realise. So you're saying you're a franchise. You pay for the franchise and then make profit as a percentage of what you do, rather than being on a wage? Is that what you're …?

R Can I refer not to really …

I You don't have to go into the detail of it but …

R What happened was that I purchased the buildings. I'm paid a wage and I'm paid a commission. My wage, I suppose, is I'm paid so much for mail delivery, mail sorting, to be here. I'm paid for those things. On top of that, I earn commission on people paying their bills and doing banking, whatever. I have to pay for all the … I don't purchase the equipment but I pay rent on it. There's a units threshold on things, when you are under that threshold, you then pay for. So sometimes to have this latest technology is expensive.

I So Australia Post has never been privatised exactly but the delivery of those services has been partially privatised?

R Ummm. It's embarrassing to admit but I really don't know. They own … I don't … oh, what can I say? I can sell the Post Office but Australia Post has to … they have to approve of the people that are coming in. I can't just sell it to you. I have to go through Australia Post to be able to sell the business. I can sell you the building but I have to run the business. But I can sell you the business with Australia Post's approval and that takes

some doing. They just won't put anyone in here. I own the stock. I purchase the stock from Australia Post but they own the equipment, the technology.

I And so I can look outside. Clearly this business is a lot of your life, June. I can also see the ironing board in the back room, so you can do things along the way, and I can see a beautiful garden out there. Am I right that you and Ray have got a very integrated kind of working and home life between this building and your house that's just behind it and the gardens around it?

R Most definitely. Yeah. I work of a morning which is when most of the business is done and then he'll come over here and sit with his feet up and read the newspaper, and I will be ironing or whatever, so if he gets a problem I'm not very far away. I don't go away and I don't go to meetings and things in the afternoon. This is my job and if people have a problem, or something that he can't deal with, I feel I should be here because they're entitled to the same service as they get anywhere else, so I mean, he can yell out in the back yard and I'll come up. I don't change out of my uniform until 6 o'clock at night, so I don't actually do gardening. I water the lawns or move the hoses or something, but the gardening is just weekend. And, you know, it's just a relationship. We both work and we both do whatever needs to be done. And it's working.

I And the other parts of your life. I can see big golf clubs, I know you're involved in the Historical Society. I want to get a picture of your life in this town.

R Ummm. I'm a member of the P&C and have been ever since my children started school. Mind you, they have been left school for quite some years. Ummm, I seem to be involved in a lot of things that go on. I don't like something to happen that I haven't really got much to do with. Probably the last few years I'm holding back a little, mainly the Historical Society. I'm still very involved with that. The Golf Club, I have taken on the job as, I think I'm assistant ummm what would you say? Assistant dogsbody, probably, at the moment. I used to be Captain and all of those things and just decided I'd rather play golf. I'm a member of the CWA. Very interested in whatever happens of an afternoon while I'm at work. I like to keep up with whatever committee meetings and things that are on, and that's probably it. I love my golf.

I You've won awards, haven't you, for community service? Tell us what the awards are.

R You're a sticky beak. I have been given an Excellence in Award, presented with an Excellence in Education from the school, just for the years of commitment, I think, for being on the P&C so long and being president for a lot of years and secretary or treasurer or whatever. As I said, you know, I've been up there since my children first started school. Ummm, and I won a Citizenship Award a few years ago, just for commitment to the community, I guess.

I In the little country community I grew up in, it was generally women that were at the heart of all those things that stuck the community together, and my Mum was very involved in that. Is that how things go here? Is it fundamentally women that keep the schools, the hospitals, the churches, the garden club, all those things, going or is there a lot of male involvement as well in that voluntary community stuff?

R Ummm, I'd say all the things that you have mentioned, it's the women. But if you get the Golf Clubs, the men like to be president of the Golf Club. The Race Club, they like to have a man president of the Race Club. The Rodeo Committee, they like to have a man president of the Rodeo Committee. The Camel Race 2000, they like to have a man. I mean, no women have ever challenged them yet. Chairman. I think it's still a little male-dominated area that they like just to have that. Let the women have their CWA meetings and, you know, QGAP and things like that. Any of those sorts of meetings that have something to do with youth suicide and things like that, I think they like the women to do that but they like to do the manly, macho things. I think there's still a little bit of that out here.

I And is there a sense that it's the women, say, doing a lot of work for something like the camel races but it's the man that's the president? Or are the men taking over those areas and then really running with them?

R Ummm, I'd probably have to say, with the camel race it's mainly men. It's only new so no one really knows too much about that. The secretary is the president's wife and myself. We're probably the main women in that but the Race Club, they have a lady secretary. The Rodeo Committee, they have lady secretaries. So it's just mainly, I think because they're jobs that women can't do. They can't do the actual things for the racing. You know, it's men who are the trainers mainly. The same with the rodeo, it's the men who work in the back yards and so they sort of probably have more the say, whereas with the other things that don't take brute strength, I think … see, the goat races, there probably, he's the

president because no one else wants to take the job on. But it's the women that get the prizes and the same with the things like the Claypan Olympics, I think the women run that because that's a kids' sort of thing. But, you know, the men'll have, they'll organise the bike sports for the little fellows on their motorbikes and I think it's a pretty … hey, it works. It's a happy community, so …

I You're describing, actually, an incredibly active community, those things you've just spilled off – the Claypan Olympics, and certainly coming into this town, there's a sense of activity going on here. I'm thinking of things like Min Min and the new council housing and so on. Yeah, is tourism a big new influence on Boulia? Is that what's driving it? This doesn't look like a town of wealthy people but there's money going into the town, if that makes sense. That's how it appears from the outside.

R A lot of the money coming into this town is through the council. The housing, a lot of the housing is council. Tourism, I think, is just taking off. Being a tourist myself, you have a limited amount of money. You budget, so you can't go to museum in A, B, C and D. You go in A and F perhaps. So we've got to have something special that makes the people want to see our museum or our Min Min Centre. I think it's just such a clean, nice oasis sort of town. People think 'Oh, this is beautiful after driving through what is normally a very dusty dry countryside'. There's a lot of town pride. People take pride in their gardens and things. And the council is excellent. You know, they are doing whatever they can, any time. They're responsible for all the gardening we've got here. They get grants for … I don't know where they get money from. It's a money tree somewhere. But they're doing an excellent job.

Ummm, and a lot of things … I think most of the community do things because that's all there is to do, and you're always looking for something to take your children to. So the goat races go off beautifully. I mean, they get, on Saturday morning they run round the countryside and find a few sheep and some wild goats on my brother-in-law's place. They bring them in here, in a truck, chuck them in a pen, you buy a goat and you race it all day. Next day it's chucked in the truck and let go back out on the property again. They auction the sheep off, so you buy a sheep and your kid rides the sheep or gets bucked off the sheep or something. It's just an absolutely hilarious day. No one has trained goats because money just becomes too big a thing. If someone trains their goat, you know, for six months, and wins every race, that's not the idea of it. It's the day out.

The Claypan Olympics is mainly for the children, not just the children but the adults, but it's another thing to get the country people and the townspeople all together and give the children companionship and competitiveness, and it's just a great day. They get prizes from different places and then usually they'll have the goat races in town one day, and then they go out to the rodeo grounds, racecourse complex out there, and they'll have bike sports – motorbike sports – which is a great day. They ride from this side up to the … you know, the ringers and things, they bring their bikes in. So that's a great day. Always food, of course, and a bar, which is a great attraction.

Ummm, we have a Golf Club championship here every year which brings people from out of town, mainly Mt Isa, from Winton, some from Longreach, Hughenden perhaps. That's always a good weekend for the town. Mainly for the Golf Club but then they do use accommodation so that's booked out.

Ummm, the Camel Race weekend is a very big weekend, meaning three days. The races and rodeo, which is held every April if it doesn't rain. They race on … they have a barbeque, entertainment evening on Friday. They race on Saturday and they have rodeos Saturday night and Sunday, which is always our big weekend.

I And race relations? Somebody said that they thought that the town was about thirty per cent Aboriginal now. Would that have been the case all the time that you've lived here and how do you think relations between the races have shifted or stayed the same? How would you define that?

R Ummm, what can I say? I think relationships have changed in the way that once upon a time, I think it was just that it was 'them and us'. Now I think it doesn't really matter too much and I think it's because the Aboriginals are now living more like the whites, if I can say that without being racist. They've got to live in homes. They can't live in humpies or in compounds, they've got to live in town, so the younger girls that are now twenty-five, etc. are saying 'This is my house. This is my family'. It's not all the uncles and aunts and things coming in from the properties and just dumping themselves in a house like they used to do years ago. And I think it's what the government wanted. They wanted everyone to live like our ancestors. All be whites. You know, they keep their homes tidy. I mean, some of them trash them. Hey, that'll happen with white, blacks, it doesn't matter what they are. And, to me, there's no racism in the town. I mean, to be honest, I won't have a barbeque and go and ask four or five Aboriginal families but then they really wouldn't

come and ask me either. Not because I'm white, it's just because I'm not in their circle of friends, I think. I mean, Joe Blow across the road can have a barbeque and not ask me and I don't think there's a great deal of racism in this town that I know of. Talk to other people and perhaps they may say so but I think it's more the Aboriginals with the Aboriginals that are having the problem, rather than the blacks and the whites.

I What problems do you see in the Aboriginal community? What are you referring to, particularly, there?

R As problems? I think one family, one clan family, might resent what the other family does. I think, for some reason or other, the tall poppy syndrome is really rife in Aboriginal families. They don't like to see someone, or they don't like to think that someone's getting a bit above themselves. I have the situation where my son's partner is an Aboriginal girl, not a black Aboriginal, but her parents are, you know, coloured, and she's an Aboriginal. And I just see how different they are to how the Aboriginals are here. I mean, they live in Birdsville and down in Birdsville the whites and the blacks have been integrating for a lot longer than here. I think it's only sort of two generations, even if it's that long, that the Aboriginals and the whites have integrated here. Probably when I first came here, there were no white people and Aboriginals living together, but that has happened over the years and, you know, it's just a common thing now. Nobody makes any comment about it.

I Was that confronting for you, when your son had an Aboriginal partner?

R Not for me. I mean, he could have gone with a Martian and I would have been happy. If he was happy, you know, that doesn't worry me. To be honest, my husband is still having a big problem with it. I mean, she comes up here and he's polite to her but he is polite, he's not over-friendly, but that's just him. He has this thing and, I mean, if he'd have come home with a Japanese girl it probably would have been a little bit the same, but most definitely because of an Aboriginal. But he's happy and she's a nice girl and I've got two beautiful grandchildren, so I'm not going to cut my nose off to spite my face, no way. And, as I said, you know, he is polite to her and she comes home and she doesn't have any problem with that. I think if he was downright rude, which I would be very surprised after all these years, my son wouldn't bring her here for her peace of mind, but you know he brings her home and we're just one big happy family when they're here.

I And does Native Title, has that been a source of great discussion amidst either white or black? I can remember the day I heard the Mabo judgement. I could tell you where I was and thinking 'Wow, something big has shifted in this country'. But is that your view of it? Where does Native Title fit in?

R Ahhh. I suppose because we only have a little block of land out there and when someone did look like wanting to say 'My grandfather is buried on that', I fought tooth and nail to find out where he was buried and obviously he's buried in about six different places, wherever this lady wants to be able to say she wants to own. But we sorted that out and there was no Native Claim on that, nothing, but there's a Native Claim, evidently, on a lot of the properties along this river here and I know a lot of the owners there are most unhappy. I really don't know. I really can't comment too much on it because you hear so many things and someone once said to me 'If the Aboriginals would realise that there is going to be no dollar gain out of it, all the land claims would go away. It's because they think they'll end up millionaires'. But I don't know. That was just one person's comment and, to me, I really don't know. I mean, I talk to Jos's Mum and Dad about it and her father was one of the Stolen People.

I Jos is your daughter-in-law?

R Yeah. To me he says it's not a big deal but I don't know. Perhaps to his family he says it is a big deal. I don't know. He says he probably wouldn't be where he is today if he had been left with his family but, you know, people can say whatever they want to to somebody and then mean something else. I really don't know. I mean, I get on well with them, so I have never sat down and said to them 'You tell me about the fact that you're a Stolen Generation'. I didn't know that until his wife told me and I don't think it's my business unless he wants to bring it up. I mean, I go and stay in their home and she's one of my best friends, so it's like me having a problem with my mother and father. It's none of her business so I think horses for courses, I think. I think it is causing a lot of resentment where it needn't necessarily be and myself, I feel that if the people who are standing up saying 'I'm Aboriginal. I own this' really sat down and thought about it, and thought 'Well, this was a swampy ground. We lived off it. It gave us food, it gave us shelter in those days. It fed my parents and things. It doesn't happen now'. You know, the world just keeps going on. You tell me how many races still live as their forefathers did, other than the African continent. You know, the world has just got to keep moving.

I Does the government come out here or is there a lot of process put into kind of education or getting white and black in these towns to sit and talk to each other about what Native Title might mean?

R There have been a few meetings, yeah. I went to two, I think. Ummm, I think the government does its best. I think it's the do-gooders who probably do more harm. The people that live in the city, they may see the drunks on the corners, they may see houses destroyed. People will say, you know 'Look at all these homeless Aboriginals'. Then you can come out here and see them living in these homes. You can walk into a home and find it's been trashed by someone that's lived here, whether it's black or white. I don't know. I just feel if it would go away, but it's not going to go away. It's just shuffled from one thing to another and it will probably be still around in fifty years' time. I don't know what the answer is, I don't think anyone does.

I Talking of fifty years. The future? What do you see in the future for yourself, June? This will be the last question and then we'll stop.

R Ummm, at some stage we will retire. We have some homes in Toowoomba. Ummm, I don't want to give up work yet. I mean, I'm 56. I've just turned 56. I'd like to see myself still working in ten years' time. Ray wants to retire now but he knows that I'm not prepared to do that so he's prepared to stick it out, I think, probably for about five or six years, probably another five years. Each time another grandchild comes along, I'll say 'When it's five, we'll go'. And then he's a little unhappy that he can't play golf as much as he'd like but I think he's prepared … he's got his children here and, you know, his sister's here, and we have a good life, have a good lifestyle. He goes away to play golf every now and then. He's got a sister who lives in Toowoomba so if he really needs to play golf on grass greens, I say 'Pack up and go for a month'. He's gone for three weeks and then he's back home again. So I think it's when you get to our age that companionship, you've had someone for so long that, you know, if you're gone for three weeks, you think 'Oh, God, I'd better get home in case she's not missing me' or something. I mean, I'll have a trip. I'll go down to Birdsville for five days and see the grandkids there. Well, I'm pleased to come home after five days and get back into work.

I That tradition of retiring away from the Channel Country seems to be really embedded. Why is that, do you reckon? Why will you retire to Toowoomba and not Boulia?

R Oh, I'd love to retire in Boulia. I'm going to be buried here, with my relations at Maxland there. I think it's just something that, okay, you think you've done your time perhaps, so let's go and live where there's grass and things, and a lot of it is because the sons take over the properties so you don't need Mum and Dad there telling you how they did it fifty years ago. I think it's in self-defence that they move away, rather than have arguments with the children about how it should be run and, besides, you know, they've probably done their time. They've done it harder than people of my age and I think there's a little bit of money so let Mum and Dad go and do the things that they want to do. As I said, I will probably stay here forever. If anything happened to Ray, I would most certainly be here, but we would probably go and spend three months of the year travelling around. Probably come back here and spend a month here and go back to Toowoomba or wherever we decide to retire. And it's not that we want to get out of the place. It's just that we feel, well, you know, we've spent such a lot of time here, let's go and see something new. But I think we will always come back here.

I Okay, that's terrific. Thank you.

R I didn't tell you much about my mother-in-law. Do you want to talk to Ray about her? About the pub, or …?

END OF TAPE