

**INTERVIEW WITH JEANNIE REYNOLDS**  
**16 June 2000**  
**Updated 15/01/10 Timecode refers to tapes 31\_BC\_SP**  
**Topics in Bold**  
I = Interviewer R = Respondent

**I**      **Okay, this is camera tape 30 of the Channels of History project, DAT tape no. 12 is at 1325. It's 16 June 2000 and we're interviewing Jeannie Reynolds out at Morney Plains Station, and this is the second camera tape of the interview.**

Okay, so how long did that Charleville life go on for and what caused it to shift?

**R**      **Romance**

07:01:15:00    Three years I spent in Charleville until Peter came along, and I guess he was looking for a wife and I was looking for a husband so we jumped at the chance and moved back out to Morney Plains.

**I**      I'm going to ask a blunt question and you can give me a blunt or not blunt answer, but were you looking for a husband that lived in the Channel Country?

**R**      No. Oh, I just needed somebody. Ummm but, yeah, Peter and I were friends before I even married Warren so it was sort of easier to take up where I left off. If it came to finding a total stranger, I don't think I could have done it. So, yeah it was easier to find someone from the Channel Country.

**I**      How did your kids respond to having a new Dad?

**R**      07:02:10:14    Ummm okay, the kids and Peter got on well, except for the eldest one. I think he was at that funny stage that needed a little bit more time, ahhh and he only had that twelve months here before he went away to boarding school, so I guess it was a fairly big adaption for him, a new Dad, new home, all in twelve months sort of thing. But the other kids and Peter get on really well.

I And so what had happened to Moothandella while you were in Charleville?

R Ah, my nephew came out to run it for Dad and is still there.

I And Peter was here at Morney?

R That's right, he was manager here at Morney.

I And can you just explain your awareness of the history of Morney, its pattern of ownership and all of that? Give us a little potted ... tell us about Morney Plains Station.

R **Pastoral Company/Kidman**

07:03:07:22 I started on the history of Morney. Ah, it's a Kidman property ummm and has been for a long time now. A lot of the Kidman records were destroyed in a fire in Adelaide in the office so it's a bit hard to find out a lot of the Kidman – ah the Morney history – but we're starting to look into it.

I And so when did Kidman acquire Morney and ...?

R I can't remember.

I Am I right, I think, having read that John Costello book this morning, that John Costello was the original squatter here and then sold it?

R So he ... yeah, he took up the land for John Collins.

I Oh, was it John ... let's start that again. I want you to tell it to me in your words but do you know the history of how Morney came to come into white hands?

R 07:03:57:20 With John Costello who took up most of the land in the Windorah area, and he took Morney up for John Collins, I think, I can remember, yeah.

I And then how did it become Sidney Kidman's, do you know?

R Oh, then it went to somebody else, I can't remember, and then I think even to somebody else before it finally went into Kidman hands. We're still researching that little bit.

I And so your husband Peter, has his whole adult life been a Kidman manager?

R He was born in Isisford, ummm came down to Morney Plains in 1968 as a station hand and, except for a couple of years on the main road from Windorah to Bedourie, he's spent all that 30 years working for Kidman, yeah.

I And having experience, I take it that Moothandella was leasehold land that was in your family for those two generations, how is it different? How is the relationship to the land different, if at all, being on land that is your family's as opposed to it being a company property?

R **Women/Land**

07:05:16:16 I don't know if there's really that much difference. To live out here, you either love it or you hate it. You can't just put up with it. Ummm so you make it home. It is home, so you sort of treat it as your own. Otherwise you won't be here for long anyway but, yeah, I guess Moothandella's always got the sense, you can always go running home if need be, ummm but Morney's still classed as home.

I And so when you came here to Morney, what did you find?

R **Pastoral Company**

Totally different to Moothandella ummm being a small family place coming to a company larger place. I guess all I ever wanted out of life was to have a little block of land with my own little family and live on my own, and all of a sudden I'm surrounded by strangers living together.

I Now why is that? Can you explain that? Why did coming here to Morney mean being surrounded by strangers living together?

R 07:06:21:20 I guess, well usually there's twelve or thirteen men work here ummm and live here, and we all live together, work together, I guess play together. So, yeah, you aren't really in the middle of nowhere on your own.

I And as the manager's wife, what were the parameters of the role and the work that you found here?

R 07:06:52:08 Oh, you did everything that no one else wanted to do.

I Like?

R Well, I guess, paid position was cook, etc. All the other jobs, the gardening jobs, ummm the office work that Peter didn't want to do. When I first came here there was no telephone. I found that a bit hard to cope with, only having the Flying Doctor radio as communication. Ummm ...

I So what year are we talking about?

R '89. Beginning of '89 I came here. I can't remember when we got phones.

I And when you say 'paid job was station cook', what were you paid for exactly? What's involved?

R 07:07:35:18 In cooking, was cooking. Cooking and cleaning I guess is, yeah, what I was paid to do but everything else just fell in as well. Same as any domestic work, I guess.

I Well I guess what I'm interested in, I know you completely take it for granted but what's involved in cooking and cleaning? Does that mean you change all the sheets? Does it mean you're up at 6 a.m. to take them cups of tea? Does it mean ... I mean, what's involved? Enlighten us.

R **Work: Station Cook**

07:08:13:14 Well, I guess, I always tell them they're worse than babies. They get fed every three hours. A baby only gets fed every four hours. Yeah, three meals plus two smokos a day. Ummm that's when they're in at the station. When they're out in camp, they'll go out for a fortnight or so at a

time, ummm that leaves me here alone to make sure that the motor – because we still generate our own power – to make sure the motor's sort of in working condition and full and goes and ummm the stores are kept up to date, ummm most of the smokos that go out to camp I make here so you keep a stock of smokos to send out to the camp.

I      What sort of things? Okay, what else is involved? What other jobs doesn't anyone else want to do, Jeannie?

R      07:09:00:18    Oh, feed the pigs and the chooks. Ummm, make sure that any horses that are at the station have got their water and occasionally when you're sort of, if you're down, a man or two ummm have been known to be made to check the bores, and that's an all-day job driving round checking all the water, make sure the cattle have got water.

I      What range of food do you produce here? Obviously you produce your meat. I'm thinking about all the stuff I've seen out the back there.

R      Oh, ummm, yeah, okay, for our own consumption? We usually keep a couple of pigs for variety with pork, chooks for the eggs, citrus trees, try to grow a vegetable garden. Crows usually beat you to it, though. Ummm, I don't mind sharing with them but they like it when it's green. Ummm, and that's all. Go fishing occasionally.

I      What are the fish like in the rivers here?

R      To eat?

I      Mmmm. Are they plentiful I guess is the question.

R      07:10:07:04    Oh, they'll pick and choose when you're allowed to catch them. You can usually only catch them on a line after the creeks run, if it's been sitting for a while. We've got a couple of holes here you can always go out and catch fish, usually bream, though. Very rarely you'll get yellowbelly until the creeks run. But there's nothing wrong with eating the bream.

I And that question, do you experience this land as ... what are the cycles of this Channel Country as you experience them?

R **Women/Land/ CC Environment**

07:10:38:04 Well it can either be dry or it can be green. You've got to learn to live with it. You can't sort of ... you can't get what you want out of the land, you've got to wait for it to give you what it wants to give you so you sort of learn to live with the land the way it is. If it's green, you make the most of it. This year's been a really good year, so you make the most of it in gardens and fat cattle and whatever else, and then prepare, I guess, for the dry times.

I And when the dry times come, how do you deal with that?

R **Drought: Water Conservation**

07:11:19:10 I guess it's a bit like going into hibernation. You sort of, you cut down, you cut down your cattle numbers, of course, because you haven't got the feed, because if you cut the cattle numbers down, well all the work sort of cuts down and, yeah, just try and keep water, I guess. And so we sort of grew up as kids ummm, yeah, shared bath water, you don't sort of stand in the shower for an hour at a time, sort of thing. Mainly baths rather than showers, it uses less water. Washing machine water used to go onto the fruit trees, you didn't waste that. They talk about recycling. I guess we've always sort of virtually been recycling.

I And electricity, which is a different thing. Do you have electricity 24 hours a day here?

R No, no. We have ... we generate our own power and usually turn it off when we go to bed at night time and start it in the morning. When they're out in camp, I normally don't start it sort of until later in the morning when they're not here.

I I was going to ask you about that. You described living here with twelve men, living, working, playing together, and I see you here on your own, what's the story? Where are the men?

R **Gender Relations/Muster Pastoralism**

07:12:34:00 They're out in the stock camp at the moment. Ummm, will be for two, possibly three weeks this muster. The reason they don't come home is it's too far away. I think the camp they're at at the moment is at least 60 kilometres away from the house, so when you work from daylight till dark, and then add another hour or so travelling onto that, it makes it too long for 'em.

I And so what are they doing out there?

R At the moment they're mustering cattle to brand the calves and take the weaners away from their mothers so that they'll grow up bigger and fatter and quicker.

I And how often ... what's the kind of cycle of that?

R They try to completely muster the property twice a year. I guess the first time's mainly to brand and the second time is to find whatever fat cattle are ready to go to market.

I And how long does each of those mustering cycles take, approximately? Six months?

R Ummm, yeah, about four to five months each cycle takes, I suppose.

I So are you saying that for eight months of the year, you live here alone?

R 07:13:42:12 Try to, yeah. Yeah, oh they usually go out for say, two, three weeks and then come home and have a week by the time they sort of get fresh horses, ummm shoe the horses, do whatever maintenance work needs to be doing, and then go out again, yeah.

I In most of Australia, mustering by horse has long since disappeared and it's kind of the trusty Land Rover or whatever. What is it about this country that means it's still done by horses?

R 07:14:15:22 It's probably an individual thing. Ummm, Peter likes, he's a horse person. He believes that it helps keep the cattle quieter. They use helicopters a fair bit today. When you use helicopters, you do need motorbikes because the horse can't keep up with the helicopter, but still use the horses to take them to the yards because sometimes it can be a full day, two days, to get cattle from where they've mustered to a yard to hold them.

I And when I interviewed some company managers' wives up round Boulia, they were NAPCO properties and there the different properties were each part of the production chain, you know, one ... Is that how these properties are organised?

R **Pastoral Companies/Kidman**

No. No, most of the Kidman places, well most of them are in the channels, which is good fattening country, but also good breeding country, so we sort of breed and fatten all on one place.

I And is that in any sense a good thing from your end? Are you happy taking the whole process through or ...?

R Ahhh, it doesn't sort of worry me but I think Peter's happy breeding his own and fattening them, yeah. I think so. I think most, yeah, well I think so.

I And for you, Jeannie, you joke about you try to keep the men away for eight months a year but for a lot of women, they would go quite mad living here on your own and possibly even more mad when twelve men came back. How do you deal with the cycle of your life?

R **Work/Gender Relations**

07:15:52:04 I'm not an organised person ummm, very disorganised, so I guess ... you learn to take it in your stride, I guess. It doesn't really worry



me. I ... it's just that after they've been here a while, you start to get a little bit behind in what I have to do, the extra cleaning that ... when you're preparing five meals a day, the extra cleaning, the windows, the walls and that sort of get left behind a bit so it's good to get rid of them so I've got that time to catch up.

I And is there a sense that you are being employed to keep the place to a certain standard? Is this your home or do you have your quarters and then that front bit is like company ...?

R 07:16:35:12 Kidman pride themselves in the standard that they do keep their properties and they don't transfer their managers. Ummm, if a manager is quite happy to stay in one place, they leave them, so it does, I guess, develop a sense of it's your home, it reflects on you how the place looks, yeah.

I So what's the heart of what you ... well, are you happy in your life here, I guess, and if so, what is the heart of that, and if not, why not?

R **Retirement**

07:17:18:12 Yes, I'm happy here. Ummm, Peter and I often talk about retirement and then we try not to because it usually ends in an argument. Ummm, he's, I guess, when he retires he's quite happy to go down the coast and catch up on all those things that he feels he's missed out on but I'm quite happy spending the rest of my life out here. So, yeah, I ... as I said, you either love it or you hate it. You don't just live here because you're asked to.

## **SIDE B**

I You said that before. You said either you love it or you hate it and you couldn't just put up with it. Why not? What is it about this land that requires you to be one thing or the other?

R **Women/Land**

07:18:11:12 The way of life. Ummm, some women I know just can't cope with not being even able to go to the shop and buy a bottle of milk, where I

wouldn't know how to go to the shop and buy a bottle of milk. Everything's done by mail order, all the groceries and that. And I think it's those little things that, yeah, they can't cope with. Ummm, I guess a lot of them feel insecure, not having other people around, even though I think out here everybody knows what you're up to and what you're doing anyway, so I don't think there's any problem if sort of something happened and you didn't do what you were expected to do. I'm sure somebody would come looking or sticky-beak to find out why.

I That think of loneliness. I've forgotten the woman's name but there were some memoirs from South Australia and it went something like 'I ached, almost physically ached, to hear the sound of another voice, especially another woman' and I've had women in this project tell me about their mothers, that they had to leave the land because they were lonely. Are you often lonely?

R 07:19:26:06 Not ... yeah, I guess not today, with telephones, better roads, better cars. Ummm some weeks I would just wish for a week at home alone ummm, instead of having to run off to Windorah to either a meeting or craft day or something, and more so when the kids are at home doing correspondence, you're always sort of tripping to Charleville or somewhere for the kids with school. So, yeah, no I definitely don't find it lonely.

I And how is it that there are twelve men who live here but one woman? Do those men not have partners?

R **Gender Relations/Pastoralism**

07:20:04:10 No, we have ummm, the head stockman's wife, she lives here too, in her own little house. Ummm, up until the kids left, I always had a governess here so it's only the last couple of years that I have spent time on my own. There was always a governess and children running around somewhere. So it's just at that stage at the moment. Ummm, as far as the men go, there aren't married quarters available. There's only the single quarters, whether they be men or jillaroos, it doesn't really matter.

- I So some of the men who work here have wives that live in town, then?
- R No, they don't. Ummm, it has been known to happen but this year it isn't. No, they're all single guys.
- I And are there Aboriginal men on this property?
- R Not this year. Ummm, we had a couple last year but this year they're all European.
- I So do the stockmen, is there a big turnover of staff?
- R 07:21:03:18 There is at the moment. Ummm, we're sort of racking our brains as to what to do there. I don't know what the answer is but there don't seem to be those dedicated young fellows. Well, I guess you're better off down the coast, even on the dole, than you are out here working sort of twelve hours a day for the same money, sort of thing.
- I So is that a general problem?
- R 07:21:28:06 Through the pastoral industry, I think so, yes, from what ... you know, you get the odd one that can't find a job anywhere else and they don't stay long anyway. You get those that work their way around. We've had lawyers, we've had school teachers, all working as station hands, so we've had some interesting station hands.
- I And jillaroos? Have you had female lawyers and female doctors?
- R **Women/Land**  
No, I've had female jillaroos. Jillaroos are usually ummm, they are women that want to work on the land. They are interested in the land. Where, as I said, a lot of the men, they work because they can't get a job anywhere else. But usually the girls are interested in what they're doing.
- I And so is there ever a sense, when you've got all those people around, that you want them to all go away so you can have your sort of family place to yourself?

R 07:22:18:04 Yeah. Ummm, I guess, like anyone, you can only live with strangers for so long, I think. Ummm, but they've got their quarters, their recreation room. They spend ... you know, you've still got your own space, even though you are all living together.

I So you and Peter have that building over there that's separate? That's your spot?

R Yeah.

I And would any of the other men ever come into that or is that like ...?

R 07:22:47:20 No. I think that's our bubble. Ummm, same as I don't go down to the men's quarters there. That's their area. I think everyone's got to have their own space, even with the governesses. Ummm, they've always been part of our family, went everywhere with us, ate with us, sort of ummm, yeah, spare time was always spent with us, but they always had their own quarters so that they did have somewhere to go to get away from us.

I And so what was it in your life ... you had more children, you and Peter?

R No.

I No. So the governesses, what was it that meant that when your eldest kids were little, you were their teacher and as they got older you had a governess. Is that about the economics of managing a big company property?

R **Pastoral Companies: Owners**

07:23:35:20 Yeah, that's right. At Moothandella we couldn't afford to have a governess, where on the company place they provided a governess, which was good because I don't think I could have coped with teaching and ... and the kids, well, the first governess, like she stayed for four years and the kids still have a special relationship with her. And, yeah, I think kids do get a relationship with their teacher that you can't have with your Mum.

I As a young woman, presumably a young single woman here with a lot of single men, is there a way that you feel like a kind of a matriarch or, you know like watching out for her, that kind of thing? Is that part of the role?

R **Gender Relations**

I used to but, no, you let them look after themselves today. Ummm, yeah, out of four governesses, only one didn't leave here with one of the fellows off the place. So I guess there is something to be said about going west and finding a man.

I This is a funny question but just in this research project I seem to have come across a huge number of women who came from the city and married out here and I'm sure there are girls that grew up here that go to the city. Is there a way in which, because the country girls don't inherit the land, many of them end up going to the city and then the wives are coming into this structure from the city? Is that a pattern or is that just the limits of where I've so far researched?

R 07:25:17:14 Ummm, I don't know. There are women that have stayed out here but I don't know of many, I guess, that grew up, male and female that have both grown up here, I think because we are too close, growing up as a teenager in this area, yeah, there were only about two or three girls. The rest were guys. And out of the three of us, none married those fellows. We've all found someone from outside. I think it's because you do get too close to them and become mates before ... so you do look outside.

I Talking now, Jeannie, about those things that take you to town. What is it, when you say you're going to town for meetings, tell me ... I'm interested in talking now about the community side of your life.

R **Volunteer Work**

07:26:12:10 Ummm, yeah, I guess my love for the area, heavily involved with the community. I'm secretary of the Arts and Crafts and coordinator of the Windorah Development Board that's just started up, trying to develop the

Windorah area for those things that we miss out on. So I spend a lot of time working for the community. Ummm, my husband sacked me over it, from cooking. He took me off that job and gave me the book work but I'm not sure whether that was punishment to me or ummm his benefit, because it took him out of the office, so ...

I And when you say your husband sacked you over it, are you wholly joking or is there a way in which he's the Kidman, he's the one that's getting the full wage? Do you know what I'm saying? Is there a way in which ...?

R 07:26:12:10 Oh, no, he ... yeah, we are husband and wife and I guess it does have the advantage of being married to the boss but you're still ... you've got to learn to know which hat you're wearing, if you know what I mean. Ummm, he felt I wasn't home enough to put five meals on the table each day so he thought it best to take me out of the kitchen and put me in the office.

I He thought not one more reheated lasagne, that sort of thing?

R Something like that.

I So who now does the station cooking?

R **City Girls Go Bush**

We have a girl at the moment, who is also camp cook, so when the men go out, she goes out and cooks for the men out on the camp.

I Right, so how old is that girl?

R 22.

I Wow. How does she cope with that?

R Do I have to answer that one?

I You can pass.

- R No, she's adapting well. She's a city girl and had a fair bit to learn but she is learning.
- I Because menus and things. It'd be no use putting wasabe noodles on the table, would it?
- R 07:28:12:00 No, you stick to fairly basic meals, occasionally give them something exciting for a variety, but oh the first camp she went out, she filled up the motor with diesel, only she put it in the radiator instead of in the fuel tank. But she's learning.
- I At what stage did you start to get involved in community stuff and what was the pull for that?
- R 07:28:37:14 Growing up in a small community, I think, you grow up being community-minded. I notice it now, especially with the kids in Brisbane. When they grew up, they spent a lot of time helping out at gymkhanas, catering. The kids knew, you know, how to cope with catering for the large numbers before they learnt to cater for themselves, I think. And you notice that the kids in the city sort of miss out on that community work. Ummm, so I guess I grew up with it. But it wasn't until the kids got old enough that I had the time to give to the community.
- I What was the pull to get involved in things community?
- R To make it a better place for me to live in, ummm, a better place for ... yeah, a better community, number one. I guess I got heavily involved when the last child went to boarding school. All of a sudden I had this big blank in my life, ummm, so it was one way of filling that blank. And you do get satisfaction out of seeing something that you've achieved, ummm yeah. A bit like the multi-purpose building has taken us five years to raise and find the money for that.
- I Can you explain that? What do you mean by the multi-purpose building and tell me about that project.

R      **History/Museums**

07:30:28:14    Well Arts and Crafts started up as an arts and crafts group and I guess women together got a bit carried away and decided to move further into the museum area ummm, because there isn't a museum in Windorah. All our history is leaving, either disappearing or leaving the area. So we started with a little hut and then decided we needed a building to house our museum, so for five years we've sort of looked for funding and raised money for this multi-purpose building to be used as an arts and crafts workshop, museum, information centre, and everything else that Windorah doesn't have at the moment. And we finally got it.

I      Tell me about that because that doesn't just happen. How did you make that happen?

R      07:31:14:04    Well, I wrote to every funding body there was until Centenary of Federation came up and they ... we were successful with them, and we raised \$20,000 ourselves in that five years, with catering, car rallies, ummm seniors days, anything else that we could come up with that was an ingenious way of raising money. I thought I was going to look like a steak sandwich before I finished, but ...

I      And how many of you have been the core of that?

R      07:31:47:02    Probably six continually. Ummm, when we first started I think we had something like 18 members. A lot of those have been older women that have now left the area, which leaves the ... I guess at the moment, see it's a young generation with young families around so they haven't got the time at the moment, so we're probably left with six staying members and the others sort of come and go.

I      Do you feel as if it's your turn to do this? Is that part of it? Are you saying ...?

R      07:32:18:18    I think so, yeah. Ummm, once you get a job, you seem to keep it forever but eventually, yeah, I guess it goes around in circles. The older ones sort of let go and the younger ones finally have the time ummm



once their families get up a bit and they're settled and time on their hands too, to carry on.

07:32:38:22