

INTERVIEW WITH LINDA CROMBIE

17 June 2000

Updated 15/01/10. Timecode refers to tapes 35_BC_SP

Topics in Bold

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

I This is camera tape 35, we're still in the middle of DAT tape no.13, the DAT is 2500 and this is the second Betacam of the interview with Linda Crombie on the verandah of her house with her granddaughter Kayla Crombie with her as well. And it's 17 June 2000.

R My birthday on ah 2nd June, pass.

I So how old do you reckon you turned?

R 70.

I 70? So it's a big one, Linda. How did you celebrate?

R Hey?

I Did you have a big celebration?

R No. I don't worry about that.

I So do you actually know the exact date you were born or you just ... it's approximate?

R No, I only know how old I am, but I don't know where I was born.

I So how long did you work with the Mortons, then, on their property?

R 11:01:36:16 Oh, we've been out there for all our lives. Stayed over there. Dad was workin' with the family over there in Durrie, George Crombie.

I Is that where you got the name Crombie from?

R Yeah, from Frank Crombie.

I And is that because he had a child with an Aboriginal woman or because your family just took their name?

R **Race Relations: Intersex Relations**

11:02:06:00 No, no. He had a child. He had an Aborigine woman for a girlfriend. Old Granddad did. Then he found, that old woman then found my husband, old Frank Crombie. Then from there all the Crombies now, everywhere.

I So did the white and black Crombies know each other, all the one family?

R Yeah, all the one family. All my kids everywhere, some in Alexander and some at ah, the other side of Mt Isa, two boys. Back at Windorah. At Durrie, Bedourie. I guess everywhere.

I How many children did you have in total?

R 5 (makes sign with hand)

I I thought, from what your daughter said, you must have had many more than five. But you had five kids?

R Yeah, two passed away.

I So, Linda, could you tell me about that?

R Hey?

I Could you tell me about your babies dying or children? What happened?

R **Child Death**

00:03:21:10 Well, kids had pneumonia, passed away. There's no cure for pneumonia. No, my other son passed away here too. He had a kidney trouble.

I So how old were your children when they died?

R 11:03:40:20 Only oh about ten, I think. Oh, poor little thing catch the flu, pneumonia set in. But you can't cure that, eh?

I So did they die out in the camp or you came in to the hospital?

R Ah, took him to Charleville Hospital, passed away there.

I When you started working with the Mortons, can you tell me how were you paid then? What did you get from the station in return for your work?

R Pastoral Industry/Aboriginal Wages

Oh we'd get ration and that, and clothes. They give us, it might be a hundred dollars, and we spent that in the clothes. She had a lot of clothes and you'd buy it off her.

I So you'd come into the policeman to get the hundred dollars?

R No. They'd give it to us. Because when you come to the policeman, you've got to be signed on, put your thumb print on it, and sign them.

I And you didn't want to do that?

R 11:04:48:24 No. You can get pocket money and then we'd get pocket money, and clothes for kids then. Them old people they sent away and get kids' clothes and grown-ups' clothes, get a material, Mum make you some dress.

I So along the way, Linda, did you ever learn to read or to write?

R No. Wish I can but too big now. Can't do it.

I Did you often feel at a disadvantage because of not being able to read and write?

R Aboriginal Education

That's right. I feel like that, you know. Oh, gee, I should have, Mum should have sent me to school. But the school was only lately. I was big then, grown up. I had a kid when the school starts here.

I So when you were young, there wasn't school?

R No, nothing.

I So what were happening to white kids in this area for school?

R 11:05:52:17 Well, they sent 'em away to Adelaide, some to Brisbane, white kids. After, they put a school here, school house. Teacher come out, well all the kids go to school here then. And one of my, young son, he went to Brisbane, Redcliffe, to go to school.

I So you must have been happy when your kids went to school.

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- R 11:06:22:10 Yeah. Joycey and Jean, they went to school here. No high school then. This man came out from Brisbane, he said, 'Are you Mrs Crombie? You'll have to send your kids to high school'. I said, 'I wouldn't mind'. I sent one, Bob Crombie. He went to high school. He went right up to 12, Grade 12, and he do everything now - welding and down the mine. He works up in Mt Isa in the mine.
- I When did you start getting paid cash wages from the Crombies?
- R Ah, well, no, they didn't give us that.
- I So you were never paid?
- R No, that goes into the food, the and everything like that.
- I Till when do you think you worked out for the Crombies? Do you know till what year?
- R **History**
Oh, well we work, work. I don't know. We never used to count them years. We just work and all.
- I Do you remember the Second World War, for instance, Linda?
- R Mmmm.
- I When the war was on, were you aware of that happening?
- R Yeah. They'd give you tucker and the coupon for a, coupon, they'd give you coupon clothes and sugar, tea, flour, all that.
- I So was there less tucker when the war was on than at other times?
- R Mmmm, that's right.
- I Did anybody explain much about the war?
- R No.
- I Did you know what it meant?
- R **WWII: Rations**

11:08:17:06 Yeah. Me cousin went away to the war. Jack Hughes. They went to the war. Had to cut the food down, eh? We used to work for these Mortons and they said, 'We take the margarine and the butter, we give you less, more sugar and flour'. 'Yeah, all right.' Just sort of a swap.

I During the war you got less fat and more sugar?

R Yeah, more sugar and more flour. So we didn't go much on butter and jam and all that. I shouldn't do that, they might see me on the

I When you started to get food from the station, did you still eat traditional food as well?

R Yeah. Still.

I Like what sort of traditional food would you get?

R Well we get meat and all that, you know, from the, onion and potato. Sometime we grew our own garden.

I Like what would you grow?

R Cabbage and things, you know. Mum used to grow a lot of stuff. Cabbage, water melon, pumpkins, rock melon. Oh, terrible. Tomatoes.

I Would you get given a whole beef or would you get given the scraps after the Mortons had had the meat first?

R 11:09:55:04 No, they salt the meat. Cut it up and salt it. And when you ask for meat, they give you salt meat, you know. And you could take a couple of pieces of salt meat. You can boil it up and cook it.

I Good?

R Mmmm. Yummy. Good.

I What were the jobs as life went on, as you had more and more kids, what work would you do for the Mortons?

R No, I stopped workin' then.

I Where did you live after you stopped working for the Mortons?

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- R 11:10:38:06 We went down to Pandie Pandi. Can't turn old Pandie Pandi down. Went down and stayed there.
- I Your husband came back to Pandie Pandi as well?
- R Yeah.
- I What made you leave the Mortons and go to Pandie Pandi?
- R I don't know, just the habit of it, I think. We're ridin' a horse, carryin' one little one in the front, me oldest son. Sometime we goes back to Mum and Dad to, they're there.
- I Did you have a cart with the horse?
- R No cart, nothing.
- I Was it the same family? When you got back to Pandie Pandi, was it the same family there then that had been there when you were a little kid?
- R Mmmm, yeah.
- I So who's that?
- R That's my husband's mother and father there, my in-law, my uncle and aunty, they was all there.
- I And how about the white fellas? Was it the same white people?
- R Yeah. They was German there then, you know, German come up. When the war finished, the German come up and workin' then.
- I Did Pandie Pandi feel like home to you then, Linda?
- R **Women/Land**
11:12:08:20 Yeah. It was like a home. You would goes away and come back, go away and come back, and go ... no matter where you go, you've got to come back to Pandie, so it draws you back.
- I What was it about Pandie that made it special?

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- R 11:12:27:06 Well, there's a, just the homestead for us, you know. Stayed there, so we liked the white people there then. Stayed around there.
- I Who were the white people that you knew well at Pandie?
- R Oh, [Leurys?], he's a German. And Mrs Rees, all of those are German.
- I Did they have children?
- R Yeah, two girls. They had two girls, Betty and Peggy.
- I And do you think Betty and Peggy are still alive now?
- R Oh, no. One got killed with a car. The youngest one got killed by a car. She was backin' out and this man come fast.
- I So were you friends with the Rees girls, or was it more like ...?
- R 11:13:20:10 Yeah, oh, yeah, like a black fella them girls was. Go away all day playin'. One time used to come up and look for us. God, they was nice girls.
- I So what would the Rees girls do with you?
- R Sit down, we'd get a rabbit, cooked him in ashes, and have a feed, and we fish, cooked 'em in ashes. They'd generally come down with the pepper and salt, had a big feed down there.
- I So the little girls would come down from the house with pepper and salt and you would have the tucker?
- R 11:13:57:10 Yeah. They come down, we can cook, you know, Mum cooked damper in the ashes. Catch a fish, cooked it in ... them days we don't cook fish in the ... get a tree leaves, you know, put it on just like alfoil, like that, and pull it out. Oh, gee, it was nice and clean here.
- I So when you went back to Pandie Pandi when you had lots of kids yourself, Linda, were you working for the Rees's?
- R No. I wasn't workin' then.
- I How about your husband? Did he work?

R 11:14:38:00 Husband works, yeah. Just goes out places called Napperman(?) work.

I So what work was your husband doing for the Rees's?

R Chasin' cattle. Go around the cattle, shifting cattle to the water. 'Cause no water was there then. Take 'em into Pandie Pandi for water.

I A couple of nights on the road. Were they happy for you to live there, even though you weren't working for them?

R Yeah, they was happy. They was nice people. Some of the people went from there to and then to missionary. Just stayed down at the mission.

I Did you know Jean Smith from Bedourie?

R Yeah, we was kids together, ridin' around. She was cookin' at the pub here.

I Tell me what you remember about Jean.

R **Race Relations/Friendships: Jean Smith and Linda Crombie/Braided Channels**

11:15:40:10 It was me and Jean, we go for a ride all the time. She was cookin' here. One of the two boys said to her, 'Aunty,' – calls her aunty – 'Aunty Jean'. 'Yeah?' 'You cook some bread and meat for us, eh, bring it down tonight,' and then the boy'll say, 'I'll get the horse up early for you and Mum'. 'All right.' So she cooked the bread and things and meat and all that, and packed it down at night when she finished workin'. And the boy, away they go with the horse the next mornin'. Mustered the horse up and bring it back for us and we goes out on the hill out there and, just ridin' around. We goes everywhere ridin' horses.

I You and Jean?

R Yeah. And she showed me the saddle what she had. I said, 'Oh, yeah, this old saddle, and I don't ride in it now'. She said, 'Linda, no ...' We used to go for a ride, me and old Jean. We're just like good friends.

I So was it hard to be friends with a white girl in Birdsville then?

R Yeah.

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- I Would people say to you, 'You're no good, you're black'? Or did you encounter racism?
- R Yeah, they was sayin' about it before.
- I So what would people say to you?
- R 11:17:06:10 No, them kids was there playing Chaplin kids, they're not to say you're black. They'd give the mother Mrs Chaplin give the kids a . We're all the same. But they got different, they told 'em, oh yeah. / That girl runned away again.
- I Do you want us to go and find her? Missing Transcript (pituri)
- R //Francie, Mollie's place here. And a bloomin' motorbike went past me and knocked, nearly knocked me down and spin me round. I got giddy.
- I So Linda, let's talk a bit about Native Title. Do you remember when Mabo, the Mabo Decision, happened in the courts?
- R No.
- I Or Wik? So what do you know about Native Title?
- R I don't know anything about it.
- I Have you got a land claim?
- R Yeah.
- I Tell me about that. How did that happen?
- R 11:22:57:04 We got it out here but I don't know when they're goin' to start again. Don't know when they're goin' to start. The people from Alice Springs come over for that.
- I What do you want from the land claim? What do you hope happens?
- R **Native Title**
- I want my land back, my father's land. Get it back, if I can now. I don't know worryin' about it now. I don't know why.
- I So it's a slow process?

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- R Mmmm. Must be slow.
- I And which country is it that you've got a claim over?
- R Up here in the desert.
- I Simpson Desert. And so, if you got your land back, what would you do with it?
- R 11:23:47:20 Well, I'll get my sons on and work. I'm trying to get an office to put it over here so I get some of the girls to work here. You know, office workin'.
- I And so the land that you're claiming, land that white people are running cattle on at the moment or is it desert country?
- R No. Desert country. No land. But I'd like to run the cattle on it.
- I Would it hold cattle?
- R Well they've got to find the water first before they put the cattle and everything on it.
- I So have many of your children worked in the pastoral industry, Linda?
- R The girl, that Joycey. And the other boy down there workin'. He do it because he went to high school.
- I Tell me what your children do, what work your five children do now.
- R 11:24:56:04 Well, one's gradin' up in Alexander. Well the other one who was speakin' to you just a while ago is finished work up there now. I don't know what he's goin' to do now. And they come back and this young lad of mine, Bob Crombie, he's workin' down the station down in Brookie's country.
- I David Brook's station?
- R Mmmm. Ummm [Mumpyawi(?)]. Bob Crombie works.
- I And your daughter?
- R Bedourie. One daughter here, she works on the council. One son works on the council.

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- I So Linda, I think it's true to say that not as many Aboriginal people work in the pastoral industry now, work on the stations?
- R No.
- I Why is that?
- R Don't know.
- I Why do you think?
- R 11:25:53:00 Well I reckon they just want to sit down. Sit down and talk. Dad used to be workin' to look after us.
- I So you think it's that the younger people don't want to work on the stations?
- R Mmmm. My young son over there, Harry Crombie, he's workin' on a station. The other one's down, oh he's workin' on a station. But he's a grader driver, gradin' roads and all that. Oldest man.
- I Going back in history before the time when you came here to Birdsville but there were massacres. There were bad things, I think, went on.
- R That's right. Yeah.
- I What do you know about that?
- R 11:26:45:00 Well they fight and all that. Aborigine used to. Fight and ... one mob will be over here and they want to fight them mob. Wanbarra(?) want to fight ... Arowda(?) want to fight
- I So there used to be trouble between ...
- R That's right.
- I Do you know much about when the white people first came to take up the land and the battle with Aboriginal people then?
- R Yeah. They used to fight. White man was comin' over with the boat. White man had to shoot some down.

I Do you know much about what went on in this area when settlement first began? Like in Pandie Pandi or whatever? Do you know what the Aboriginal people there did when the whites came to take the land?

R **Race Relations/Pastoral Industry**

11:27:42:22 Yeah, they used to run away when they hear the shot goin' off. Run away, then next day the white fella goes up, 'Come on, I'm only tryin' yous out' and wants 'em all back again.

I Do you want, say, Kayla, do you want her to understand a lot about that history?

R Yeah. I teach her now and again, you know, but she plays all the time now.

I Some of the history of this area is pretty ugly, you know like when the stud gins, the women who were kept in cages for sex with the men. Do you know anything about that?

R No.

I Would you teach your grandchildren, do you want them to know that sort of stuff, the trouble between white and black?

R Oh, yeah, I suppose later, when she asks me I'll tell her.

I What do you think about reconciliation? Do you hear about that word? There's talk that white and black need to talk to each other more and get together in Australia. What do you think about that?

R Oh, that's all right.

I Do you see a big problem between white and black?

R That's right. They're comin' down now.

Hands 11:29:35:10 – 11:31:37:00