

**INTERVIEW WITH ISABEL TARRAGO & SHIRLEY FINN**

**3 September 2000**

**Timecode refers to tape 66\_BC\_SP**

**Topics in Bold**

TF = Trish

IT = Isabel

SF = Shirley

**SIDE A**

**TF      This is Betacam no. 66, it's DAT no.24, it's time code 1800. Today is 3 September 2000. Trish FitzSimons on sound, Julie Hornsby on camera, and we're interviewing Isabel Tarrago, nee Hanson, and Shirley Finn, also nee Hanson, at Isabel's home in Highgate Hill.      66\_BC\_SP**

Okay, so I want to get quite a picture as well as your two lives in the Channel Country, I want to know about your Mum. So what can you tell me about your mother's birth, the circumstances of the birth?

**SF      Race Relations/ Intersex**

00:01:21:20    Mother was born on Meetukka. She was the daughter of an Irish ummm Scots, was it a pumper, and her mother was a traditional Aboriginal from that area.

**TF      And where was she born? All the way along in this interview I'm going to pretend that I know nothing because I want you to answer me as if I don't know any of these stories, because I want to then be able to edit it without my stories in. Could you tell me about your Mum's birth, about her Mum dying. I'd like to hear the whole catastrophe.**

**IT      Childbirth**

00:02:10:24    Well, Mum was born at Meetukka and during the birth ummm our grandmother died and Mother suckled on an old bitch dog that was there in the camp and when the old women come over they realised that the dog actually saved our mother's life, and Granny was already passed on, I don't know how long but that's the story that's been passed on from all the old people to us, and she was cared for in the camp from there on. And as a young woman, she learnt, she came up, as a baby she came through and was with the family and the traditional old people and from there on some of the

old white people that were in the station areas there ... at this time she was moved around many stations as a young girl and I think the age was, we were told, about eight years old, she was actually moving around ummm from different stations with the old people who worked on the stations doing different things. And a lot of station managers' wives took her in ah and she was a very young girl when she was doing ...

SF As a housemaid. But then the ah, a lot of the old Aboriginals used to swim the flooded creek and steal her, take her back to the camp, and then you'd have the ummm the white station owners, they'd come and get her, and that went on for oh several, several weeks, because they expected her to stay in the camp with the old traditional people. But ah ... and then the station managers and their wives wanted her to be a housemaid, to look after them.

TF Her father being a white bore operator, was he claiming her at all, because she ... to read that article in the mining magazine, it sounded like your Mum was a bit like a football as a child.

SF **Race Relations/ Intersex**

00:04:31:14 Yes. No, he didn't have anything to do with Mum. She was brought up ... he sort of disappeared out of the picture. He used to ... I think he lived in Boulia when he first came out as a pumper. But no, she didn't have anything to do with him.

TF And had it been a long relationship between your grandfather and your grandmother, or was it a more casual relationship? Do you have a sense of the context that your Mum had come from?

IT 00:05:08:08 I don't think ummm, you know Mum always said to us the only thing her father gave her was her name but from where I was coming in as being the youngest of the family, I mean, Shirley, Bessie and Georgie, they had a lot more to do ummm in that area because they were on the properties with Mum and Dad and that. But I think, this is just my own information on this. I really do think Granddad really wanted to know, because he did stay in some of the camps. He was in Dajarra with all the old

people but he was so used to being in a traditional camp, I don't think he ever came back at that time and was around when Mum was born because I just think he moved around all the pumping places, you know, round the stations and there was so many. I mean, you just wouldn't get back to find out about anything that's happened. And I think Mum really got angry. Mum was very angry about the fact that he didn't give her anything other than her name. She was very adamant about that but I think, as a young person myself growing up, that I believe Granddad really would have wanted to stay around and I remember her taking me, Mum taking me to Dajarra when he was very, very sick and he was at the old Dajarra camp, and they actually had him in a little shed there because he wouldn't go to hospital. And that's the first time in my life that I saw my grandfather Arthur Daly, and he was very ill. Ummm and it wasn't a very nice sight because I saw him when he was very ill.

TF So he would have been cared for by Aboriginal people?

IT 00:07:06:10 He was there in the camp, yes, and I don't know. Who was Punch, I think. Uncle Jack Punch. Ummm and Aunty Biddie and ...

SF Biddie, yeah, Aunty Biddie Punch.

IT They were there. I don't know if they were looking after him but he had a place at the camp and I just think he ... you know, for him to actually be there at an Aboriginal camp gave him peace and, well Mum went and saw him so I don't know what went on but I know that she needed to show us. I don't think Shirley ever met him.

SF No, I've never met him.

IT But I noticed that, you know, in the end Mum took us, took me there, and I think that that was a very good process for me and for Mum because that was the last time I saw him.

TF You may find this next question offensive but I've been interviewing white people throughout the Channel Country and I've had said to me five or six

times this thing about 'Stolen Generation'. Babies with white fathers, black mothers. The blacks wouldn't have anything to do with them. They'd leave them, left them to die, so therefore there is no 'stolen generation'. White people were saving babies that otherwise would have died. So your knowledge of your family history, how would you respond?

IT      **Traditional Aboriginal/ Race Relations/ Intersex**

00:08:33:10 I think that's rubbish, Trish. I think it's absolutely rubbish. Pauline Hanson stated that as well in her, you know, political agenda, to say that you know half-castes weren't accepted and, you know, we ate their babies. And I actually gave a talk not long after that and I know Shirley actually tried to ring Laurie Kavanagh about it as well, who never responded to us, because he was on these stations and what he saw obviously was so different to what we saw through our eyes, and we happen to be black. He happens to be white. Ummm they're the sort of things that I think is a whole race connotation behind it. Now I wouldn't ... you wouldn't call me full-blood because my grandfather is Scottish/Irish background, you know. And, I mean, I have no bitterness for that, and my mother was very fair, but I tell you what, she was accepted. The traditional camps really wanted her. She spoke five languages, traditional languages. I mean, you don't get that rite of passage of you know that whole connotation, so it didn't happen in our family. Our family took in a lot of what the so-called, the derogatory term of 'half-caste, quarter-caste'. Ummm Glen Ormiston we had so many families mixing, you know, falling in love with each other. I mean, for goodness sake, you know, what do we do about that? You can't do anything about it and it's not a racial connotation and there were, in some of the areas, Stolen Generations because the Assimilation Act in this state makes that happen. You know, we weren't allowed ... I mean, that's how you get your Woorabinda Missions, your Palm Island, your Cherbourg, ummm you know those sort of things is to divide us up on colour. Only by pigmentation of the skin. Now if that Act would have taken place, Shirley and I, just by sheer colour, would have been separated. She would have gone to Woorabinda or Palm Island and I would have gone to Yarraba, and that's how this Stolen

Generation really was enforced. It was set up by a policy of the Crown and it is real.

TF Obviously that statement is a really convenient one. I didn't realise Pauline Hanson has said it but it doesn't surprise me remotely and it has its echoes out there.

IT 00:11:11:18 Absolutely, absolutely. And we responded. As two members of the family here, we responded to kill it in the water because no way in the world would my family kill me. We were loved so much and dearly loved right through, you know, and it's just another form of politicising a statement of people and I just think it's so ... if they haven't got a mentality to run on general intellect, and then you run on class, and you run on race, well I'm afraid that they've just got no substance, those human beings like that.

TF Going back to your Mum's life then, tell me the stations that she worked on. And this thing of going from station to station, how did that function?

IT **Race Relations: Act / Pastoral Industry/ Aboriginal Wages**

00:12:04:18 Well, this is part of that whole process of the state. Now if you look in the state, we have got policies there going back ah in the 1920s, that Aboriginal men and women were deputed out to do work on properties. Those who were found on properties actually moved in, because we had ... we were under the Act, and we are all ummm in that process of ... I've got files there that I can show you where my mother and father were actually under an Act and when you're under an Act in this state, you have to do what the state tells you, so the police of the day controlled your movement around the state. You had to have a card, an exemption card if they could give you an exemption card, to move to different properties. And, you know, this is why I always say the cattle industry in this state, and in many other states of Australia, made their money on the backs of blacks, and we are no different. And my family really did make the cattle industry a very profitable industry. But they didn't get a cent. They got flour, water, tea and bread, you know. That's the ration system. And ummm they're the sort of things that a lot of people don't understand. I mean, the station managers on Glen Ormiston

would never have understood that and once the equal pay came in, we were all removed because they weren't going to pay us.

SF 00:13:44:04 But before that, when people ... when you were under the Act and you worked for ah different stations and that, you wouldn't get paid. All your money would go to the police. Like, for instance, Glen Ormiston, ah you were under the Act there. Boulia, ah the people in Boulia. All their money went to the police. Then, if there was race meetings or carnivals and that, they'd go down the local store and say, 'Oh, well, here, you go and buy a ...'. You might have four children. 'Go and buy an outfit for each of those children,' and then they'd give you ummm if you had the food and things, they'd give you a list. You would not see the money at all. A lot of people worked there, worked for twenty, thirty-odd years and when they lifted the Act, people thought oh well they had plenty of money to buy a house, deposit on a house, buy a car. They didn't even have a deposit for a car, let alone for a house. So nobody knows where that money is today.

TF There's big cases going on, isn't there?

SF There is.