

INTERVIEW WITH JEANNIE REYNOLDS
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Topics in Bold
I = Interviewer R = Respondent

SIDE A

I It's 16 June 2000, Channels of History project, Trish FitzSimons on sound, Julie Hornsey on camera and we're interviewing Jeannie Reynolds at Morney Plains Station.

So Jeannie, tell me where and when you were born and what your name was when you were born.

R 06:05:27:20 Ummm Katrina Cartwright, and I was born in Toowoomba but only because there's no hospitals out here. I've lived here all my life in Windorah area.

I So give me a kind of, in fact your family, give me a sense of your lineage, Jeannie, like when did your family come to the Channel Country?

R **Pioneers**
06:05:46:16 We're on our fifth generation now in the Channel Country. They came from down Goulburn, New South Wales, to the Channel Country with the Duracks and the Tullys and the Hammonds and my grandmother was a Hammond who married the storekeeper in Jundah. They drew a lot called Moothandella just outside of Windorah, so we've been at Moothandella there for one, two, three, four, four generations, so ...

I So how was it, if you're descended from the Tulleys and the Duracks and the Costellos, they were taking up land as the squatters, how was it your grandmother was then needing to get land in a ballot?

R 06:06:33:23 I'm not really sure. I think it sort of came after the squatters came. They started to draw up the sections of land and, yeah, got them through ballots that way.

I And when you say, you referred to the Tulleys, Duracks, Costellos, I think ... are you descended from all of those families?

R **Braided Channels**

Oh, they ... yeah, that's right, they all sort of intertwined there in the end, if you sort of go back through history there, the Hammonds ... Tulley married a Durack and a Tulley married a Costello and a Tulley married a Hammond, so they all sort of ... and were all big family-orientated people in those days, sort of big families and all orientated and kept an eye on each other, so yeah.

I And how about from your father's side? Or is that your father's side? Or are both your parents from this area?

R **City Girls go Bush**

06:07:32:10 No, my mother was from Brisbane and I'm not really sure how she got mixed up out here. Her brother was a policeman in Windorah at one stage but whether that's how that family sort of came to the area I'm not sure. But, yeah, Dad's family's always been around.

I So as a child, did you always grow up with a strong sense of that history? Who were the people you remember hearing about from that history as a child and how did that relate to you?

R **History**

06:08:05:04 No, as a child, no, I don't think history was, it was more the present families that were spoken about all the time. They didn't go that far back into history. I guess as I got older and got more interested in where the ancestors came from.

I So what year were you born?

R '57.

I Do you know which year *Kings in Grass Castles* came out? It was some time in the fifties. This is not an exam. If it's an exam I'd fail it too. But do

you remember, say, that book? Did that book make any impact on your childhood?

R 06:08:43:18 Not really, no. It was sort of, I guess, part of life to me, that book. It didn't, you know, it wasn't sort of anything out of the ordinary. It was, I guess, most of the pioneers in this area sort of came to the area and lived in the area.

I So your grandparents had taken up Moothandella. What is the context, how were your parents living when you were born?

R Ummm my grandmother had died so Pop was there and Dad was sort of working for Pop and they lived as the family on the plant and it's still being run by family members.

I So what do you reckon is your earliest memory?

R **Childhood/Fire**

06:09:24:12 After the fire, I guess. I sort of haven't got much memory before the fire and, yes, being thrown from pillar to post after the fire, I guess.

I So when you say 'after the fire', can you explain for an audience that wouldn't ... what happened?

R **Mayfield Ladies**

06:09:47:08 There was a homestead fire at Moothandella where my mother and two sisters and my grandfather were burnt to death in that fire, so after that, I guess, you know, I sort of spent a bit of time with this family and the Mayfield ladies. I guess Mayfield would be my first memory and staying with the Mayfield ladies, as they were called. They were four spinsters that sort of ran a property on their own.

I And tell me about those Mayfield ladies. I'm very interested in them. Tell me what you remember. Give me your child ...

R **Mayfield Ladies**

06:10:17:10 They were ladies, you know. I don't know, they were ladies. Even though they were manly in their own way, ran a property on their own, within themselves they were ladies, you know, the proper china and tablecloths and that sort of thing, yeah.

I We might just do that again. Tell me what you remember after the fire. I'm just asking you this again because I was picking up that ...

R 06:10:52:06 Oh, sorry. Ummm I guess living with different families and Mayfield, and the Mayfield ladies. They were four spinsters that ran a property on their own. And, yeah, I guess Mayfield would be my first memory.

I And how were you related to the Mayfield ladies?

R Oh, they were Dad's first cousins. Their mother and Dad's mother were sisters, yeah. So we sort of spent a lot of time over there.

I And when you say they were ladies, what do you mean?

R 06:11:29:08 They were ladies. I don't know, they, they were proper ladies. Ummm, yeah, sort of, it wasn't a smoko, it was always sort of morning tea or afternoon tea with the china and the plates and the cups and saucers and tablecloths, linen napkins and ...

I I'm interested in all of that because you look at the photos and that's clear. There's not a lot, and I mean this with the greatest respect because 'lady' is a word that I have never used of myself, there's not a lot of ladydom about in the Channel Country now, is there?

R 06:12:12:12 No, but I don't know whether there is that many ladies anywhere today, though, in that sense of the word. I think, yeah, they were the last of a kind, I think, yeah.

I And how do you understand that? Where have all the ladies gone?

R 06:12:31:22 I don't think they've gone. It's just a different way of life, too. If I sat you down to a cup of tea with a cup and saucer, would you feel

more comfortable with a coffee cup or a cup and saucer? You know, a lot of people don't like cups or they reckon they're not big enough to start with. But I just think it's just, yeah, a more relaxed way of life.

I It was interesting. I talked to Patricia Hodgkinson who's about 80 now and she grew up on Mount Leonard Station and whose Mum was desperately unhappy out here, and she says that her mother would talk, I forget what the expression was, like keeping up appearances or ... keeping up the standards. That women have got to keep up the standards. Do you think that was what ... how do understand the difference between you and your life and those generations of women out in this same land?

R **Gender Relations**

06:13:26:02 Well, yeah, you're right, I think they did feel as though they did have to keep up the standards in those days but today they work side-by-side by their husbands where before, you know, the lady's place was in the house and that was it. It's a bit like everything, I guess, you've got to keep up appearances or whatever.

I Those Mayfield women sound interesting because it seems like they did both things.

R **Mayfield Ladies**

06:13:52:00 They did, yes. They were a special group of ladies, yeah. But they all had their, I guess, ummm they specialised in different areas. Like, one was the man about the place who sort of fixed the broken pipes and fixed the motor when it wouldn't go. The other one was the bookkeeper who made sure, you know, the accounts were paid and the budget was stuck to, etc. and the other one, she was, I guess, the lady of the house who made sure that, yeah, the linen napkins were folded and starched and that sort of thing. So they had their own role to play within that family unit.

I And so how old were you when you came into their orbit?

R 06:14:37:22 Oh, three. And yeah, no it was just wonderful, I guess, to have four ladies that fussed over you all the time. I used to love going there. You'd sit down for a meal and you'd wait till they were all nice and comfortable and settled down and you'd say, 'Can I have a drink of water, please?' and you'd watch the four of them jump up. 'I'll get it.' 'No, no, sit down, I'll get it' and being an obnoxious child, yeah.

I So did you continue to live with your Dad or you were literally kind of staying this place, that place?

R 06:15:02:16 Oh, no, with Dad, I guess. Ummm, when I started school, of course, I went away to school and came home for holidays and that sort of thing but, yeah, mainly with Dad.

I So at what age did you go away to school?

R I went and stayed with my sister at the age of seven and then went up to Rockhampton to a stepsister at the age of 13.

I So your Dad had married before?

R Again.

I So your Mum was your father's second wife?

R No, first wife.

I Oh, your father ...

R They remarried afterwards, yeah.

I Right.

R But other than school and nursing, I guess, I came home again then.

I So how many years were you away at school?

R Oh, from Grade 2 till 10. Eight, eight years.

I And in that time was this country important to you? At one level nobody could have blamed you if, as a kid, you wanted to just escape.

R 06:16:10:06 I guess, no, going to ummm day schools instead of boarding schools, a lot of the kids couldn't understand why I knew exactly how many days it was till the next holiday from the first day I started school but, no, always this was home.

I And as a kid, what did that mean? What was important to you about this land?

R **Women/Land**

It was home, I guess. Ummm yeah, open spaces and, yeah, being able to be on your own, I guess, where in the city, oh people.

I So as a kid do you think you had a lot of freedom in this land?

R Yeah.

I Give me some examples of that. How do you remember spending time, say, as a five-year-old or ...?

R 06;17:04:08 I guess 'cause most of it was on my own. My brother's nine years older than me so I spent most of my childhood on my own. I don't know, you just wander round and did what I wanted to do sort of thing, within reason. Got into trouble a fair bit for doing things I shouldn't do but ... like all kids. So yeah, yeah, I got into trouble, I think one Christmas Day 'cause I took off with the dogs and forgot to come back for lunch, but there were sort of no restrictions on where you could go.

I And horses? Were they important?

R Not to me they weren't, no.

I Never?

R No. Everybody else could ride. Dad was mad on horses but horses and I just never seemed to see eye to eye.

I So how did you, like you're talking about that spatial freedom, would you be walking?

R Walking, yeah. Just walked.

I So where was your favourite place as a kid?

R 06:18:02:04 Oh, down the creek. Ummm, we've got the bitumen road sort of virtually a hundred yards from the house and there's a couple of floodways there, so underneath the road was a special sort of a place.

I Road trains thunder over the top?

R Yeah.

I That's interesting, isn't it?

R I guess so. You'd make the little cubby houses under there.

I So you'd be heading off in the morning and maybe coming back for lunch, that sort of thing?

R Oh, no, you'd pack your Vegemite sandwiches and feed them to the dog and take a book and sit under there and read, or whatever.

I Was reading always an important thing to you?

R No, not really important. Ummm, you'd pick up a book because you wanted to read that book or ...

I And when you were away at boarding school, did you understand why you were at school? Did it make sense to you?

R **Education/Women/Land**

06:19:05:02 Oh, yeah, I knew that there was no alternative. It was part of life. I guess my kids all grew up with the same understanding that when you get to a certain age, that's it, you've got to go away to boarding school. It's just a shame none of mine ever came home again.

I What do you think was the impact boarding school had on you?

R 06:19:36:06 Yeah, no, I think the same thing. It does, it makes you more independent ummm, it makes you take a bit more responsibility of your own actions and, yeah, I think you become friends with your parents rather than that everyday teenage battle that you have with them.

I So was your stepmother, was she an important figure in your life?

R Do I have to answer that one?

I No, you can pass if you want.

R Thank you.

I So as you grew up then, who were the women that were, in some way, a kind of a model to you?

R Mayfield ladies. Ummm and then another lady, I guess, next door, Mrs Groves, she always seemed to play an important part.

I So would that have been Julie's mother?

R Julie Groves?

I Julie Groves stepmother.

R Yeah, mother-in-law.

I Mother-in-law.

R Yeah.

I And paint a picture of Mrs Groves for me. I guess I'm interested in who were the women that you looked to as a kid.

R **Groves/Childhood**
06:20:38:10 I guess she was, oh you couldn't say the opposite because, again, I think she was another woman that respected her lady role in life, but the opposite to the Mayfield girls who were always there to please and bend

over backwards to do anything for me. Mrs Groves, she was, I guess, she was a very vocal person and therefore sort of ranted and raved – she's got four boys of her own, so it was, I guess, good to have someone that did yell at you occasionally.

I She was the source of discipline?

R Something like that, yeah.

I And how about your Dad? What was your relationship with your Dad in childhood? Because you and he were, what, the only survivors, or ...?

R 06:21:27:08 No. No, no. I had another sister and two brothers. Ummm, Dad, I guess there's too big of a generation gap between Dad and I. I guess I looked at my brother and sister more so than what I looked up to Dad.

I And when you were at boarding school, did you always assume that you were going to come back here?

R **Work**

I guess I hoped to, ummm, but, I don't know. I guess you looked at a career. I went nursing when I left school so I wasn't looking to find a career that would bring me back to the land. I really wanted to be a motor mechanic but they were in the days that women weren't motor mechanics so we had to knock that one on the head.

I And was there a sense that you were going to grow up and inherit Moothandella?

R **Women/Land**

06:22:25:00 No, I never ... no, you didn't sort of think about that. I assumed my brother would inherit it ummm but it was always going to be home. I can't understand people, I guess, that transfer around the countryside that haven't got a home root. It's sort of hard to comprehend that someone could just go from house to house and just not have 'home' to go home to.

I So is Moothandella still home to you?

R Yeah.

I Do you describe this place as home?

R Yeah. Lots of homes.

I And that thing of the boys inheriting the land, do you remember that impacting on your consciousness? Did it ever strike you as unfair or that was just the ...?

R No, it was just, I guess, never really, it was part of life again. I guess it's something that you knew would happen and that was it.

I So was there any sense that for you, if you were to come back to this land, you needed to find a husband that lived here? Was there ever anything so concrete in your brain?

R 06:23:32:04 I ... when I got married, I guess I'd never really thought about coming back here. I was quite happy to live wherever my husband was. Ummm, circumstances had it that, yeah, my brother left the family property and we came back in his place, so it just sort of all fell in my lap, I guess.

I So tell me a bit about how that happened. Where did you meet your husband?

R **Romance**

06:23:57:20 I met him out here ummm, he and his family came out here ummm as carpenters, building houses, and he stayed when his family left the area and worked on the land. And he went back to Brisbane and I met up with him in Brisbane.

I And so what were you and he? What kind of future were you imagining for yourselves at that point?

R I guess living in Brisbane and building a house. But I don't know, at that age, I guess, teenagers don't really sort of rely much on the future, do they?

I So how old were you when you married?

R Ah, 18.

I And was that something that you discussed with your Dad a lot or was there a sense that you needed to make your way in life pretty quickly?

R 06:24:49:02 I guess, because of the mixed up childhood that I had, all I really wanted out of life was my own family, yeah. So the only way I could get that was by making my own.

I So where were you married, Jeannie?

R In Toowoomba.

I White wedding, four bridesmaids, that sort of thing?

R Yeah, the whole ... yeah. Traditional sort of a wedding.

I And so how did it happen that you and your husband ended up at Moothandella? You said your brother left but what went on?

R 06:25:24:14 Oh, my brother had a place of his own and I guess he and Dad had been working together long enough. It was time for him to get out and find his own way in life.

I That's I don't know it from this area but I guess, having gone to boarding school with a lot of girls from the land, I observed that often in families there's a ... like, whilst the boys might be lucky to inherit the land, then they and their father have to negotiate authority and all of that, don't they?

R That's right. I think that they need to learn to live together and work together and still be a family together, yeah. Where I guess it was a bit easier with Warren being the son-in-law, there wasn't quite that closeness there.

I So was this like a dream come true for you to ...?

R To go home? Yeah, I guess, yeah. It was good.

I And what would you have imagined as being your kind of role in your life?

R 06:26:29:06 I guess, well we had ten years there at Moothandella until my husband died and I guess up until then it was inevitable that we took over from Dad after that, but it didn't work like that.

I So your Dad was living with you?

R No, he had a house of his own, but living on the property with us, yeah.

I And kids? How did that ...? You had children?

R I had three boys and a girl and I thought, yeah, that was it. I had everything that I needed.

I And what was your life like? So how many years ago are we talking? What year did you get married?

R I got married in '76 and my husband died in '86.

I So let's say 1980, Jeannie.

R **Education: Home Schooling**

06:27:20:12 I was just about tearing my hair out at that stage with three little boys. Ummm, I guess when I started teaching – I taught the first one for three years and I really felt like I was drowning under paperwork. I didn't know how I was going to cope when the others started school. Number two started ummm so Ashley, the eldest one, he went to Quilpie to boarding school in Grade 5, it must have been.

I So that would have been '86 or something like that, would it?

R 06:27:56:16 It must have been, '86 was his first year? Yeah, it was actually. Yeah. And so I started teaching the second one and then the third one was due to start the next year and I sort of wasn't looking forward to it but there was a lady down the road and she had nine children and taught them all and they all ended up at university, and I thought, 'Now if she can cope with nine, I must be able to cope with three' but ...

I So it was really, you saw yourself as essentially like a teacher with just a smaller class? That was a major role, was it?

R 06:28:31:16 Well it had to be, not that I wanted it to be. I think it ruined my relationship with the eldest boy. I couldn't cope with being a teacher in the morning, then sitting down to lunch and turning round and being Mum. I could still have visions of the maths that he got wrong in the morning, sort of thing, so I'm glad I didn't have to go right through and teach them all.

I And was part of that almost ... I can imagine ... I've got kids and I know the frustration sometimes. Trying to teach my daughter to put 12 into a sequence of numbers has been a challenge. Was there a way in which their difficulties in education were reflecting on you?

R I felt, yeah, if he couldn't do it, it was my fault. It wasn't that he wasn't old enough to do it or he hadn't had long enough to learn it, it was my fault if he didn't get it right first time, so, yeah.

I Okay, so we're painting a picture of life in, say, 1982. You mentioned the teaching but give me the drift of it. What time would you have got up?

R 06:29:36:14 Oh, gee, you're going back a bit. I don't know, you'd get up when the sun came up ummm and race around and make the house look a little bit respectable. Put the washing on and be in the schoolroom by eight o'clock. Ummm, at that stage I had two that weren't in school, that weren't allowed in the schoolroom because I couldn't cope with two running around while I was teaching. David got to a stage, he must have been two year old, and every time you walked into that schoolroom, there'd be an egg on the floor, broken on the floor. I think he was just saying, 'Hey, I need some attention here'. Ummm, I guess it was good as far as David was concerned, when I finally let him into the schoolroom to keep an eye on him, he learnt to occupy himself and still can, as a teenager can keep himself occupied, find something to do with next to nothing at hand. Whereas the eldest one who has always had, sort of, my undivided attention, can't occupy himself. He needs something or someone to tell him how to or what to do. So, in that respect again, I guess you get a little bit of independence a bit earlier.

Ummm but finish school at lunchtime and then it was time to, I don't know, either do the gardening or think about normal household chores that needed doing. 06:31:15:20

I So where would ... your first husband was ...?

R Warren.

I Warren. How did yours and Warren's lives intersect? Would he often be in stock camp and that sort of thing?

R No, he was home for most meals. Like, he'd come home most days for lunch, ummm learnt to get his own lunch. Ummm and, yeah, I guess, either do what needed doing or learnt to live with it not being done.

I So the frustrations of teaching aside, was that a life that worked for you?

R 06:31:38:24 It did. Oh, yes, you learn to accept it as part of living out here. It was just part of life. It was something you had to do, so you did it. You got on and got the job done as best you could.

I Did you have things like electricity, television, hot water?

R In those days we generated our own power. Ummm, TV had only just arrived so I guess the first thing we bought when I started teaching was a dishwasher. But other than that there was nothing special that changed as far as life went.

I And so what happened to that life, Jeannie? What shifted?

R 06:32:24:08 Oh, when my husband died ummm I left the property and went to Charleville to live, to give the kids a better education. There was a high school there. Ummm until I met my second husband.

I So your husband, how did he die?

R With a heart attack.

I And going to Charleville, was that automatic or was there some thought, you know, me and the head stockman will ...?

R 06:32:53:00 No, there was ... it was automatic on my part. Ummm, I had a brother and a sister that lived in Charleville and, of course, they decided that was the best thing for me to do so I was led by the nose and moved to Charleville – and couldn't cope at all, living in there. I don't know whether it was living in Charleville or being on my own with four kids. I'm not sure.

I It's easy to imagine, and a husband just died. Yeah, yeah. So what was it about Charleville as a place that was difficult for you?

R **Work:Childcare**

06:33:29:16 It was probably me that was being difficult and not the place. Ummm I found it hard to cope with, where in Windorah wherever you went you took the kids with you. There was, a babysitter was never heard of and, of course, in Charleville well, you just didn't take your children to meetings or to anything in there, you sort of got babysitters, I found very hard. And, of course, being on my own as well, but I think it was more being on my own with the kids that was the hardest part. Charleville's not that bad, really, except for the cold weather. Oh. 06:34:09:20