

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA HODGKINSON

Refers to tapes 76_BC_DV

P = Patricia Hodgkinson T = Trish Fitzsimons E = Erica Addis

T So this is Audio tape – DAT tape number 76, Camera tape number 76. This is the second um – I beg your pardon. It’s still DAT tape 75. It’s the second camera tape in an interview with Patricia Hodgkinson for the Channels of History project on the 10th January, 2002. Trish Fitzsimons on sound. Erica Addis on camera.

T OK. So how was it that the Aboriginal women hadn’t worked in the house before? Like your father wasn’t the first manager at Mt Leonard.

P No. But the had only been two I think before him. Ah but there were no women on their station. Ah Sinclair Scott & Company, that was the company that father had - in the time when they actually lived at Mt Leonard before Poppa was appointed, their wives were in Adelaide somewhere and there hadn’t been any women on the station. White women on the station before that.

T So there wouldn’t have been anybody working in the house then?

P No way. No.

T There – in general, I know I read a statistic that early in the century there was something like one woman for every nine men. Something like that. Out in the Channel Country. Did you generally find it an environment with more men than women?

P Oh my goodness, yes. See, between the ah Mrs Garrett, across the river there, you went 156 miles before you found the next um the JC up there. There was a bit of a pub there, and the publican’s daughter had daughters there. And then you went right ‘til you got to Charleville or Quilpie somewhere. It was just not a convenient or a comfortable place to take women. Up to that point.

T So they –

P But when the cars came in, like when Poppa went to um took over the, the tin lizzie, then you could get women to come out. But otherwise you were just condemning them to a white woman's death.

T What do you mean by that?

P That there was no hope of getting – if you were ill, you either got better or you died. There was no contact with any other woman at all. You couldn't just get in Lizzie and drive 40 miles up the creek to the next station. That was the – the coming of the motor car finally made it possible for women folk and children ah but of course, if they had children, they had to be educated but of course they had to be sent down to Adelaide or Brisbane wherever there were relatives to look after them.

T So the Channel Country that you arrived in as a, as a four year old, what kind of gender balance do you think there would have been? Just roughly.

P My mother, my sister and myself. We were women kind amongst – it took quite a lot of men to run the station at that time. I can't remember but there would've been at least 10 able bodied stockmen. The blacks, to help run the station, and visiting people like saddlers. People – the man who did a round well he came to mend saddles, and ah also a blacksmith. Itinerant people, but no other white women.

T And so when your Mum started to employ Aboriginal women, I'd like you to explain the kind of how it worked. What traditional women – what traditional Aboriginal women did and who worked in the house? And just how, how labour was organised in your house as a child.

P I can tell you that with ah employing the ah gins to come and be housemaids and things, was a failure right from the start. They did not want any part of it and refused to have any part of it. Except for old Judy. The old gin I've already told you who took off with my pink doll, mother still determined that she would come on wash days – on Wednesday – the wash house was apart from the station, because of fires and whatnot, the wash place was right apart from it. And so Judy was sat down. She sat cross-legged, smoking a pipe and she had a tub of water and the first time, she had one pair of my father's moleskins, his riding things there, and she made that one pair of moleskins last

all day and there was no way – so mother just said that is silent – and what do you call it? Her way of expressing disapproval was just simply one pair of moleskins the whole day. And it simply didn't work. So thereupon it was then possible to go - to get in touch with a family in Birdsville. There was a family down there of 13 children. The Hagens. Ohh, very very famous were the Hagens. But there were – I think were 7 sons and 6 daughters. It might have been the other way around, but anyway there were available people that mother – my father at mother's insistence, got a – a couple of the Hagan girls up – maybe one. Maybe two. Their brother Jimmy was already head stockman on Mt Leonard so they came up to be housemaids, which – that was how that situation was overcome.

T And I think you told me – perhaps it was later, that half-caste Aboriginal women would work in, in the house but traditional women only stayed in the um like in the laundry and the outside kitchen.

P Ooh yes.

T Was that later?

P Definitely. Our blacks, the - the women, would have as little to do with inside the house and even for the blacks – now, on – later on when I tell about the wonders of old Joe, a black, oh well into his 70 or 80s in 1945, the way he saved my father's life when he had an accident there. Old Joe had never in his life entered the homestead at Mt Leonard but here was somebody and he was – had to be given attention. And he had to – my father had a – got a broken pelvis. He got – ah my Poppa was in agony, but Poppa would not allow our book keeper to get in touch with the Flying Doctor. He point black refused to because he said don't you know there's a war on? There's more people need the Flying Doctor than I do. And - that was father. But old Joe sat on the stone outside the sitting room door and Poppa called him and old Joe would turn him over or turn his this way and keep him mugs of tea. Keeping going with, with mugs of tea. And all the time, old Joe would say to Poppa laying in agony there, no worries boss. Not to worry boss. Little one comes soon. Little one was me, and Poppa would say you stupid old black bastard. I have to use the language Poppa talked in. You stupid old black

basket. She's winning the war. She's winning the war down in somewhere or other. Down, down south. It's my father's firm belief that I won World War II, and anyway I did. I managed to pull strings and do everything and – ohh, this is good ah to get up to. I ah heard about our telegram from ah Ron Michelle, our book keeper, saying Your father injured. Broken pelvis. Not to worry. He's OK. Not to worry? He's OK? My father? Who are they talking about? I was stationed at Bundaberg I think at the time. I was at Bundy anyway and I had a very good thing going with the CO. We won't go into that but had a good channel of communication going and so the darling man ah had me on a plane within an hour – the plane to Brisbane. It was a Yankee plane. It was(?) shocking journey. And from Brisbane ah he was able to get a – hook a ride on a plane to Cloncurry. That was the head of the Flying Doctor Service then. And I thought oh, it's a cinch. I've only got to um book this Flying Doctor, you know, and money would have to be paid, but it was no worry to me. The money would come from somewhere. Ah I would the Flying Doctor to drop me down at Mt Leonard. That's where I struck trouble. The Flying Doctor refused point blank to take me down to Mt Leonard. I was 100% well. I didn't even have a cut thumb. They were there for sick people and whatnot. So I got on to the telegram to my father's – the owners. Poppa was a partner by this stage – to my father's partner, in Adelaide, and he was a big powerful businessman, and in no time flat, yes! Boarded the Flying Doctor plane. The pilot was as grumpy as he could be because he didn't know where Mt Leonard was. He dithered about and he certainly didn't like (?) so we spat at each other all the way down to Mt Leonard and then, when we were hovering over Mt Leonard, he said 'and where do I bloody well land?'. I said 'oh excuse me. I had the impression you were the pilot of this plane – that surely would know a little tiny detail about where we – '. He said 'I'd like to tell you that the airstrip you're pointing to' was when we had Fox Boss's or something. Now they've got Dragons which are twice the wingspan and whatnot. I said 'I suppose we go circling around' you know. Then we saw this sight of a very tall old black gentleman. Very tall and very straight, and he's waving a kitchen chair which is to tell us, not that side of the creek. This side of the creek. Because all the time old Joe's been saying 'little one come', he thoroughly believed, you know, that I would come. He'd never

seen a plane in his life but he directs the pilot, you know. The pilot threw my suitcase and me out and took off straight away for Cloncurry, and old Joe got himself – he got a horse. A couple of horses into the buggy and he got the buggy and he clip-clopped you know, about – more than a mile, down to where the plane had just deposited me, and up we came and old Joe, his face was beaming in (?). ‘See boss. I bin tell ya. I bin tell ya. Little one come’. Poppa just – he swore for about five minutes, you know, in his elation and his joy, and all I had to – old Joe then said ‘OK boss. I bin go back camp now’. He went back to camp because little one come.

T So your dad and Jo became very close. Going back, what was the – how are Aboriginal people paid in the system that you experienced as a child?

P Oh, here’s a very good and very good telling point, but when Pop arrived on Mt Leonard station, he had to make out the cheques. I don’t know what they got, but they might’ve got ten bob a month or something, whereas the stockmen got a pound or what - whatever it was. Ah, but Pop had to write out the cheques. He couldn’t give those to the blacks. He had to give them to this rotten policeman across – that was there. He was the Protector of Aborigines. Poppa knew that he was a drunken bastard who drank every cent that was – went into his hands but ah, shortly afterwards or about this time, Poppa had to go down to Adelaide for a court case that went on and on and nearly drove him mad. The owners of the station had to pay tax. Mt Leonard was two-thirds in Queensland and one-third in South Australia. Just about Lake Eyre – right up in there. And the fight was with the Queensland Government and the South Australian Government about land tax and stuff, and the case went on forever and Poppa nearly went insane being away from the station all that time. So he used his time very usefully in Adelaide and he’d been – he and all the other station owners had been simmering about this awful thing of paying money over to the drunken cop. And so Poppa, with ah S.P. Sinclair’s help, he ah had interview after interview with the Commissioner of Police, the ah Protector of Aborigines – anybody at all, and the result was Poppa won. He went back to the station and the cheques were paid out to the black fella and handed to the black fella. Now there had to be a witness to these cheques. Poppa would be in his office and he’d write out the cheque. It had to be

witnessed. Well the only witness available was little five year old me, and the black fellow put his black mark on it, you know? And Poppa of course, and witnessed by Patricia – and there it was. But I witnessed all those cheques and whatnot, and the joy of the blacks, you know. They actually had some money of their own. Well of course then there'd be a rash of going ah walkabout. Ohh. They didn't walkabout. They meant borrowing the station buggy and a couple of horses and father, when he's starting the muster or something, but when a black decides it's time to go walkabout, there's nothing on God's earth you can do about it. But I – pink paper. I got walk about boss. I take pink paper. They took that pink paper very readily.

T So it wasn't equal pay but it was direct payment?

P Direct payment, yes. And also, Poppa himself and all the good station masters, they never had to go and spend their money on boots or um shirts or um a blanket or anything like that. Where hereto for the policeman had charged them, but from now on Poppa supplied all their needs. And then they started taking to white man's medicine. They'd heard about – what was it? Croup. Now somebody passing through had mentioned that they'd had the croup or they died of the croup or something and their – our black fellows cottoned on to it and there was a wonderful medicine called Red W liniment. It was actually for horses, for the horses. But they got – after they'd plagued my mother. Missus, you give em red liniment. You give em that, that Red W. I – croup. I got the croup. They all had the croup and they all had to have – if you've ever had horse liniment put on you, you'd jump straight six feet out of your boots, you know. But that was when they - suddenly they took to white fellows' medicine.

T In Alice Duncan-Kemp's books, which were a bit more you know, about a period similar to the one you're describing at Mooranberrie, there's a very – like she depicts a very close relationship between Aboriginal people and – and white people. Does her story – does her depiction of r-race relations ring true to you?

P Not in the faintest. Alice Duncan Kemp's reminiscences were very, very downgraded by – certainly my father and whatnot. He – but her sister, Mrs ah –

T Laura.

P Laura Duncan there, she and Pop – from hating the sight of each other – she's a red headed spitfire and she hated men by then. She could run a station. Didn't need any men working on it. That's how it started off, and they finished up fifty years later absolutely the oldest friends that – were best friends. And he admired Laura so much because she was so capable and she knew what she was doing. But the dear sister Alice, she'd floated off and grew up in Brisbane or whatnot, and the ah Kemp man – fellow, he was fast as betwixt you, me and the gatepost – you'd better not put this in, he was the rubbish man. The blacks called him rubbish man. That doesn't(?). Anyway, as I say, she's drawing on her memory really more because she was never on the bloody station for more than a visit. She and her sister hated each other very much indeed, and Laura would suffer her for about a week or so and then kick her out. So we do not subscribe to the Alice Duncan-Kemp reminiscences at all. They are so different from what we lived with.

T So how would you define the relationship between Aboriginal people and white people on Mt Leonard?

P There was a very simple code. You, we did not invade their space – their camps there. My father made it very clear to all of us, that if we put one little toe in the black camp area, our little pink bottoms would change colour very rapidly. He said they have their way of life. We've got ours. And we do not intrude. My brother tried to break the taboo once and I tell you what, he got a leathering alright. And exactly – so as I say, old Joe way into his 70s and 80s, he sits outside the station there. But there was absolute total harmony with blacks on Mt Leonard because we each went our own way, and Poppa ah just said about ah I think you've read my things, reminiscences about anthropologists and all these galahs that came up from Adelaide and whatnot, they certainly didn't get anything out of the blacks because – anyhow, you've read the bit about Poppa shooting the horse and all of that bit there. Poppa,

having been brought up – rode and brought up with blacks all his life, having – up in the Territory, he knew there was only one way it would work. If you respected each other's cultures, and it worked like a charm. If the ah a black gin down in the camp was sick or childbirth or whatever it was, only in dire straight circumstances would they send up a message by old Joe or Huey or somebody from the camp ah ask Missus if she can send down white man's medicine or something depending on what it was. But there was no childbirth of course, because they were all too old by this stage to – there weren't any little piccaninnies on Mt Leonard, but they would allow – if they – if their black medicines weren't doing the job, they'd send a message up to my mother to – because she was, she was an unskilled, unrecognised medico. You just had to be.

T So what range of things would your mother – range of ailments would your mother treat?

P Well the worst of all – and she treated black, white and – then they had to come up from their camps and they had to lie on the verandas. Just about every summer and in that dreadful drought summer ah what do you call it? Eyes. Um, -

T Trachoma?

P Trachoma was one and the other one I've forgot. But trachoma – see because all the sand – your eyes got sandblasted in the Boulia dust storms and all those things, and the stockmen riding out – and my father too. His beautiful dark blue eyes – they turned watery in the pace of time because they're looking into that harsh sunlight all the time and – but the tracoma was just itch, itch, itch. And mother'd have the five of us in a darkened room and glychothymoline. Goodness me, it's no more than pink water really because there was no antibiotics. Nothing like that. But it was a soft thing we'd ah she put pads of glychothymoline on ours. We lay on beds and she did a round. Never stopped. It'd take the pads about you know, half an hour or an hour to dry out and then she'd put a fresh cotton wool pad with glychothymoline on it to stop you pulling your eyeballs out. And the blacks er women who had it mostly – who had it there, they were laying out on the, on the floor of the verandah and

she did the same thing. She had to bend down and, and things to try and get them some relief. Then when the Flying Doctor really ah got going, they had stronger soothing medicines. But for er quite a few years, when we went to school in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide or wherever we were, we had to attend the ah Eye Hospital for six months after we left the bush because we had try and preserve what was left of the inner lining of eyes.

T And this – thinking now about your childhood, how would – after – once you got to Mt Leonard, what was the rhythm of your days Patricia, as a young child?

T Apparently getting into as much mischief as I could but ah Poppa was terribly strict with my sister and myself, that we were not to go anywhere near the horse yards. Where men were doing, the stockmen were doing fascinating things, you know? On any shoeing horses and whatnot, but in those er a bit later on, when the Depression really started, we had to make our own ah bullets. See, we had 303s for shooting, killing stock – dying stock and whatnot. 303s a mighty big gun – mighty big cartridges and things. It just got too expensive to get the cartridges up from Adelaide so Poppa went down and fossicked around and found that he could buy the shells and the gunpowder and set up on the bench in the – where they shoed the horses, in the horse shoe – shoeing in there, sort of a bench, and one of the young stockmen um no training, no nothing. He just filled the shells and the hooves and there we went. Unfortunately he was larking around with one of the other stockmen. He went over and ah you know, lit a thing off and he got all the gunshot in his eyes and there was a hell of a fight. Got him to Flying Doctor by then and, and saved his sight. But that stockman, he never, ever dreamed in his whole life that he'd be filling for a - 303 cartridges. That was just the necessities of the Depression. But we were not allowed to go wherever the stockmen were – were were not to go. Stockmen, of course, use a very ah basic language – none of it English, you know?

T But you weren't just, just with your mother in the house were you? Like –

P Oh, no. Oh no. And we were allowed to do you know extraordinary things really. I think I've – not too sure I've told you about our riding out with

Poppa to get the killer on (?) night ah coming home and the great thing was to be smart enough to read Poppa's mind to know which of the 14 head of cattle we're bringing there. Which of the 14 is going to be our meat for the next week or so. We had competitions about that. And myself and my three brothers. Oh, there was contention if ever. Ah, I could ride better – the baby who was only the baby, Terry, he didn't ride. Didn't ride at all, ever. He hated the horses the minute he saw them. But Peter and Jack – Jack and Peter and me ah I took to riding like I was born to it, you know sort of thing and there it was. Jack was awful and he got thrown on his first ride and he kept on and he just detested me like mad, because Poppa made things worse. 'For God's sake, if your sister can do it', you know, 'why the hell can't you?'. Anyhow we had our ride every afternoon. We took the ponies out. And we had them so trained that when the slip rail went down, they were off, you know, for the next 60 miles sort of thing. And on this occasion, brother Jack said to me – he'd be eight, nine, and I'd be a bit older. And he said to me 'I'll saddle up for you Trish'. I couldn't believe what I'd just heard. 'Oh, OK Jack. OK'. You know what the so-and-so did? He didn't do up the (?). He put the I get on my favourite Red Wing. My beautiful pony. I go straight underneath it. The goes right underneath it and of course Red Wing keeps on going. The only good thing about that, when I picked myself up was, mother had witnessed it from the verandah and seeing Jack over her knee and really getting it, soothed my poor little bruised bottom. But we had – we rode, but we never rode like dressage or show ponies or stuff like that. You – generally Poppa had some job for us to do. Go and see how the – eight miles down there were um win – the bore. The artesian bores were there, and ah go and see – check on that bore and see that it's still coming through and the cattle are still getting the water, you know. Or go over the sandhill there and see if that creek's – if the creek's getting out or some – he had a job for us to do. But we rode and ah I just loved it. I felt so important, you know?

T And there amongst the Channels, was swimming important?

P Swimming was important to everybody in the bush because that's the way to save your life if you get in a flood. But my swimming career, mother wouldn't allow to get started. At – outside er Mt Leonard, the homestead,

there was a 12,000 gallon tank of water. Now that was the supply for the house and this, that and other. And the little boys, of course, they couldn't swim when they come up from down south so Poppa said to um young Huey I think it was, he said to young Huey, you've got to teach those little piccaninnies to, to swim, and ah and me there, and so mother's watching, looking out from the sitting room door, and the blacks knew exactly what Poppa meant. So they stripped the little boys and threw them in the middle of the dam. Mother had hysterics. You're not going to do that to my daughter. You're – I wasn't allowed to be thrown in. The little boys, like little puppies of course, swam immediately, but I did not know how to swim. And ah a few years later ah Poppa was absolutely furious with her about it and he said alright, if you want your daughter to drown in the next flood, it's up to you, you know. So mother told my oldest brother Laurie – all he did for his entertainment was go shooting and he, he shot everything in sight of course, so Laurie ah – mother said to Laurie that when he went off with his gun and his dog, he had to take a rubber tyre – inner tyre – and me, down to the end of the creek where it nearly fizzled out, and he was to teach how to swim. Now Laurie's method, because he didn't want to do it in the first place, Laurie's method of that was to pop me down on the side of the creek with the rubber ring and I had to sit there and wait until he came back, on dry sand. It might have been two hours. But what he said to me – you say one word to mother about this and I'll fix you, you know. He was a great big – grown up and oh, there it was. So I never said anything and to this day I can't swim. I can go five things there and that's it. But it is so essential to swim. And my father is known far and wide as the most powerful swimmer and he had had to save lives, many a time.

T So were there lots of gender distinctions? Like were there lots of things that the boys could do but you, you couldn't?

P Unfortunately it was the reverse. And deep hatred was borne betwixt my second brother and me. Oh we hated each other so much.

T Because you were good at stock work.

P A natural. Sort of natural, and that was it. I was a natural born rider and I was always doing things I shouldn't do you know? Picking up guns and ooh, I picked up a gun and having checked it first you know whatnot, and Jack was plain terrified of guns. He wouldn't touch one. But I mean, Poppa who wonderful though he was, boy he handled me badly. Very badly. If I –

T In what regard?

P With my brothers, you know? My younger brothers. All this lording of me being you know, such a valiant, brave little person – he was scandalous was Poppa in the way he – everything I did was just simply, absolutely tremendous because I you know, couldn't – could barely stand the boys. It was not a good situation but that's how it was.

T And how about with your mother's world? Where, where did your world, your childhood world intersect with your mother's?

P It didn't. Because I've already said she was a changed person and I think I spent all my young lives being scared stiff of mother and scared I'd do something to displease her. And ah I also know, she was so unjust to me, most likely with very good cause, but I told you thing about the rings. The pudding in the rings?

T Tell me that story.

P Hah! It was um mail day. The police – the postal – the post office man, he came down. He drove down to Mt Leonard. He stayed overnight at the pub and he had to go back to – the next day. So there was furious writing when the mail'd get opened and had to be answered straight away. So in the sitting room piled with papers and whatnot, Poppa's writing one end of the table. Mother's writing furiously at the other end. I go out in the kitchen and I see -- we had a woman cook (which was particularly rare), the woman cook is making a pudding and she was mixing it all up. Ooh, and I remembered about Christmas time and when you cut the pudding, you know, shiny things right there. Oh, I've got a good idea. So I ran into the sitting room where mother and father are you know, said to mother 'can I put your rings in the pudding?' and she said go – yes, yes, yes. Go away. Go away. Don't come back again. She did say yes, yes, yes. So I went to mother's bedroom where

she kept her rings, gorgeous rings that my father had won for her as he was a gentleman rider in the things in their day, earlier days. She had five gorgeous rings and she kept them in an egg cup on her dressing table in gin. That was what you did with rings apparently. So I quickly took the egg cup of her rings. When I got back to the kitchen, the cook is bending over the stove putting a new stick of wood in the things, and I tipped all the rings into the pudding. When she came back again, she just went like that with the pudding. Tied up the calico, you know, that was there. Put the pudding in the pot where it boiled away happily for the next couple of hours. Comes dinner time. My father always served the meat down one end. My mother always served the pudding course up her end. I can see it to this day. The knife – mother had a knife. The knife went in and guess what winked up at her? One or two of her precious rings. She didn't lose the boot. She just said 'Patricia. Go to your bedroom'. And I howled and howled up in my bedroom. 'She said I could put them in. She did. She said I could put them in'. That was the first time that I realised you cannot trust adults. They're liars. My faith was destroyed. Oh boy, did I get a pounding over that one. Poppa of course just roared laughing. He thought it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen. There was nothing he could do. Just howl with laughter, and that made things worse of course.

T But your mother spanked you?

P She – she, she could lay it on.

T And how about – I want to talk about your mum in a minute. I'm going to have to change tapes. But tell me about you and reading. Was reading important?

P Ohhhh, reading was my saviour out there. Because my sister was away ah in ah boarding school in Brisbane. I'm talking one particular summer – a summer – and she was at boarding school but she'd gone off to stay with somebody down south, and my eldest brother – oh he'd finished with school I think. He was stockman somewhere or other. And so it got to me and in that long, long summer I was bored out of my little brain. My father and mother – after lunch, they disappeared out of sight and there was nothing they could do.

They just took the ah ‘The Bulletin’, the red page of ‘The Bulletin’ and whatever, and they disappeared for hours and hours, and I’m left with nothing to do. And then I started on mother’s library, but I’d seen her putting books up on top, and so no trouble to get the kitchen steps out and I climbed up on the top. Ooooh! There was a feast of reading up there and the first book I got out of it, was ah *The Letter A*, Nathaniel Hawthorne. American – early, early American thing. I had no idea – I read it. It’s the lovely cadence of the words that I got. I had no idea that the letter ‘A’ stood for Adultery because it wasn’t – I didn’t know what that was either you know, sort of thing. But the first book I can remember reading was *The Letter A*, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the next one - I got down from the steps and hastily put the book back and then at the proper library out there, I got out a wonderful book called *The Rubiat of Omar Khyam*, because that was full of Persian drawings and it was just gorgeous. I started reading that. To this day, I can say every word of the Omar Khyam. I wait for morning in the gold of night, a lonely star which casts this of light’ and I can go on for the next, say 40 quatrains of that, and it was the rhythm of it - the melody of it, that got to me, and I’ve never stopped reading since. I never got caught. Wonderful.

T We’ll just stop for a minute.

(End of Side B)