

THIS INTERVIEW WAS RECORDED WITH MR. ROBERT BROPHO AT 112
HELENA

STREET, GUILDFORD ON MONDAY 16th SEPTEMBER, 1991. THE
INTERVIEWER IS ANNETTE ROBERTS.

AR Robert, can you give me your full name and your parents`
names?

RB Robert Charles Bropho, that`s - my mother says that
there`s a "o" on the end of Bropho and my father used to
say no, there was a "y". My mother`s name is Bella,
Isabelle Leyland she was, maiden name.

AR How do you spell that surname?

RB Leyland - I don`t know.

AR Oh, Leyland.

RB Yes.

AR Yes.

RB My father was Thomas Brophy as he said, and he come from the
Umbulgarri community. North west of Wyndham.

AR And where did you mother come from?

RB She came from the Busselton area when she was very young and
was taken to Moore River Native Settlement, passing
through Sister Kate`s at Victoria Park in the then
existing years then. And she went to Moore River Native
Settlement. She married young, sixteen so she claimed.

AR Do you know what year she would have married?

RB Not really.

AR Can you give me an idea of when roughly?

RB She born my eldest brother is dead now, Thomas Nathaniel
OH2552/5



-Brophpo, in 1928, and her and my father got married at Moore River Native Settlement.

AR So it must have been -

RB And her history is still clear in her mind, she's still living today and my father's dead.

AR So your father was at the settlement as well, was he, if they were married there?

RB Yes, my father came down, or was brought down rather in the government existing days in his time at a very young age and he was schooled to some extent at the Swan Boys' Orphanage, north of Midland in the Middle Swan area. It's Swanleigh now. And he spent some of his earlier days there and then he was moved on to the Moore River Native Settlement where he met my mother.

AR You mentioned that your mother had been to Sister Kate's as well.

RB Yes. This is coming through from when she was taken away with her other sisters, by the Native Department then, for being neglected in the Busselton area. It was like a holding pen at Sister Kate's and then she was sent through to Moore River Native Settlement.

AR How did she feel about all of that? How did she feel about being taken away?

RB Well I suppose as all children of all groups and ages, be they Aboriginal or non Aboriginal at the time, I s'pose she felt bitter, same as I felt bitter which I'll explain further on in this tape. All her sisters are dead, and they had sons and daughters which are bloomed

into grandsons and granddaughters now. There`s a huge crop of people if you like, or children came out of all her sisters and her few brothers.

AR A really large extended family.

RB A large family. She`s mother of seven sons and four daughters.

AR Can you give me your brothers` and sisters` names?

RB Well the deceased now is Edward Arthur Bropho`s dead, Albert George Bropho`s dead, Thomas Nathaniel Bropho`s dead, Ruth Bropho`s dead, Dorothy Bropho`s dead, John Timothy and Leonard William and June were the two brothers and one sister who died at a early age where the international airport is now in South Guildford. It was a reserve then.

June Bropho was my sister and she was the child who died in my mother`s arms when she was waiting for a permit to be written out for my mother to walk through the streets of East Perth to West Perth where the Princess Margaret old hospital was. While that permit was being written out my sister June died.

AR How do you mean she needed a permit?

RB Well it was out of town days of six o`clock which was -

AR There was a curfew was there?

RB Yeah, it was in force then by the then government. It was to control Aboriginal people from becoming nuisance around the towns after hours, the night. I can remember well that my father used to ask for a permit from Mr. Neville who`s long dead now. The last existing encounter with Mr. Neville was between, in Murray Street on the same side as

where the old fire station's still now. The building's still there but the people are gone now, like Mr. Neville. My father used to go there to get rations and he had to get a permit to be on the safe side, 'cause if you were stopped by the police at the time in them days, and you didn't have a permit, you could be arrested.

AR So did you need a permit each time you came into the city?

RB A permit had to be given by the Native Department in them times, but I don't know when it went out of -

AR But I wonder, would that permit have lasted for a month or just for that day?

RB Just for the day.

AR Just for that day.

RB Yeah. So it was in them days that that sort of permits was, under those conditions that my sister died.

AR So what did your parents feel about that?

RB Oh bitter I s'pose, same as I myself feel today that I'm adult man now and I've crossed many rivers and I've travelled many roads through my life using up my youth and my days.on now I feel bitter about it because it's denied my sister the right to live out her full girlhood leading up to her womanhood, and denied her the right if she was going to be married, to have children of her own.

AR This is the sister who died.

RB This is the sister who died.

AR From the lack of the permit.

RB This is my sister Junie that I speak about now.

AR What age was she when she died?

RB She was - I can't recall now but I remember the names. I remember my mother crying and I remember going to the cemeteries, so it's there. It's like I remember a lot of things. The older I get the brighter my memory becomes. My mother's life was a hard life around the metropolitan area.

AR Can you tell me about that?

RB She lived in the Swanbourne, Claremont area in the sandhills amongst the pepper trees. We had old bits of building put up there with bits of bag and tin over the top for roofs and things, and we lived around bush breaks, which is you cut some bushes from the tree and you make some sort of a wall that we call a break, and you make little fires and you lay around it. We've done that around the Bayswater area, on the Beechborough Road area, round where all the Chinamen gardens were - it's all gone now round the Bayswater area. Now Cresco's there. Round the Morley area.

AR So you'd be moving around, as a family?

RB Yeah, well Aboriginal people in my youth days were constantly moving because progress was slowly but surely moving Aboriginal people.

AR So you were forced to move.

RB It was a forced move and you could never be able to plant a tree or make yourself comfortable. While we was doing that we was on the move constantly. `Course there was no social services around them days. It was just rations -

flour, tea, sugar and bread, milk and porridge and whatever.

AR Did your father have any work?

RB Well in those days the work was very, less then, but at least you had sympathising community of people living in areas where Aboriginal people dwelled in their camps and whatever.

AR You mean white people?

RB White people, and mainly -

AR Do you feel that people were more sympathetic then than they are now?

RB They were sympathetic then, in them days but my Dad and his friends had to cut sticks which is props to prop up white people's clotheslines and things, and they sold those for 2/6 pence and three shillings a prop - that's for one stick. They used to carry six sticks, three on each shoulder and if the day was good they'd get rid of them quickly and of course in those days the food was oh, two shillings in them days which I'm guessing now, twenty five cents or thirty cents or whatever now, you could get six or four loaves of bread or whatever. But work was scarce for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people did a lot of seasonal work, following around. They had to travel. Travel was - they had no transport, they had to just get on the road and hitchhike rides to travel to country towns and areas where the seasonal work took place for a short period of time - three months to four months and then it closes down. Aboriginal people were like the weather I

s`pose, changing from one to another. They had to do that to survive, because the progress and the fencing off of their land forced them to do this. Kangaroos and emus were getting lesser and lesser. The fencing off and the clearing of lands made things scarce for Aboriginal people. Where wildlife food was plentiful, now it was less.

AR Was your family still catching wildlife?

RB Well in the Dandaragan area, Moora area where we used to travel from the Perth area with my father to do contract work, clearing, you had kangaroos there in those areas, but the further you went out you`d get kangaroos. The more closer in to the towns, these animals would never come there.

AR Mm. So you went out working with your father?

RB Yeah, my father took on many contracts in the Dandaragan, Moora area, Watheroo areas and round -

AR What sort of age would you have been going with him?

RB This was back in the fifties maybe, the late fifties. We did a lot of -

AR How old would you have been then?

RB We did a lot of contracting work. I was born on the ninth of February 1930 at a place called Toodyay, that`s slightly north east of where we makin` this tape now in the Swan valley.

AR Your parents had left the Moore River Settlement by then?

RB Yeah, my father and mother left Moore River Native Settlement and they went on their travels of good fortunes

as Dad used to say to us when he was alive. Seeking happiness, seeking peace of mind. And they travelled through the Culham area which is slightly south east of New Norcia Mission, going through the Toodyay area. They did a lot of clearing around there and I was brought into the Swan Vall.. - I was born at Toodyay near the Currinji wine saloon which has been relocated now, the Toodyay town itself, but we've yet to find out the exact area where the old Currinji wine saloon was, where I was born. I was brought into the Swan Valley when I was two years old and I've been here ever since, in and around the Swan Valley, the Caversham area, the north of Lockeridge area, the Eden Hill area, the reserve at South Guildford, the Daglish area, the Shenton Park area, the Claremont areas, the Swanbourne areas, so I've been around all this metropolitan area and I've travelled south seeking work following the potato seasons around the Roelands, Brunswick Junction areas.

AR Did your father find the happiness he was seeking?

RB No. All he found was hardships. He did a lot of work for the Bell Brothers contractors who's long gone now in the Guildford area. Because old Bell started up his contracting in the Guildford area here. He used to have a old horse and cart, the old drays, just carting sand around and gravel and he got bigger and bigger. My father worked for him for two pounds a day, that's five pounds a week in them days.

AR What sort of period would that have been? The thirties?

RB That would be in the late thirties, into forties I think.

AR What did your parents think of the Moore River Settlement, from their time there?

RB Well Moore River Native Settlement, Dad used to tell me that he was employed there with a chap called Jimmy Sandy. Now Jimmy Sandy was a huge giant of a man, he was a real heavy set person, maybe thirteen, maybe fourteen stone. He married my mother's sister, so Dad and Jimmy Sandy was, they was into the family.

AR Was your father a tracker there? If he was employed.

RB No, my father was a, he was a jack of all trades, he was a community man. He wasn't a violent man. He was a person that could make - he could walk into a room where people were sitting down feeling frustrated and felt they couldn't go on with life, and I guarantee that he'd make 'em laugh. He'd tell jokes, he'd be serious with people, he'd fight for people - not physically but through his education and talk, to try and better things. He was constantly getting up out of his surroundings where he lived, and spoke for Aboriginal people. He'd like to see 'em having sport. He'd even go in and join into the church services on Sundays. You've only got to walk along outside the church and you could hear his voice on top of everybody else. So he was a man that believed that sharing with people was the right road to go. But he found it hard, a very hard task like I'm finding it, as speakin' for my people, and I know now what he must have

went through, the frustration and the disheartment, and people like him, his friends who stood up for Aboriginal people in their time and spoke. But Moore River Native Settlement, the first encounter of myself going there was - you see I have a great reward given to me! I know who MY grandmother was and I know now where my grandmother IS.

She lies sleeping in the sandplains at Moore River Native Settlement. The bushland that was once there's all gone.

There's patches of bareness - it's like havin' your hair, the top of your head cut off and some of your hair left.

But my grandmother lays in that cemetery.

AR What was her name?

RB Her name was Clara Leyland and I've shared some part of her life, handing over her life round the Daglish area where she camped. Her last place of leaving us to go Moore River Native Settlement was north of Widgee Road. There was an old reserve out there that we were shifted from the south Guildford reserve where the international airport is now. When they wanted to build that they said "well you Aboriginal people got to move from there now and go to Widgee Road". That was north of Lockeridge. And my grandmother -

AR When would that have been? What sort of age might you have been then?

RB Er, I was in a remembering age. I guess I was twelve.

AR Oh, so as far back as that they were planning on the Perth airport.

RB Mm. I guess I was twelve years old. I could have been

less. But I remember my grandmother used to sit around the fire, and my uncle Ned Mippy who is my mother's step brother - one mother and two different fathers. Now my grandmother was staying at this place called Widgee Road, it was a reserve, a replacement from the south Guildford cemetery. Man's and woman's toilet was put up there, and a windmill put in the ground, and no houses. "You Aboriginal people can live there now". And my grandmother was living in a old tent, and my uncle Ned was there with her and she got that old that she used to, had a vision of seeing little people comin' round the fire. This is black fella talk now. The little visions of these little small people round the fire, what she saw and was telling us, we know that that was spirits of ancestral people comin' back to her. And she used to say to Ned - that's my uncle, Ned Mippy - "Ned, I want you to tell those little people to go away because they're watching me for my tea". He'd give her a plate of food to sit down and eat near the fire. So when she started talkin' like that, my uncle Ned and his other brother Jack Leyland who's dead now, and my mother and my father and some of the other old people in the community that was living there at the time, decided that this old lady, my grandmother, was coming to the last days of her life - we'd better see if the Native Department can do something about her. Well, they went in and seen the Native Department and they said "well the best thing is for her to go to Moore River Native Settlement. There's a hospital there, they can look after her there and let her

live her life out there". So that was agreed. She went up there. They taken her away. I was sad at the time and so was my oldest brother Tom who's dead, and my oldest sister Ruth who's dead. We was, it was a very sorry day for us to see her taken away, or bein' escorted away to go to Moore River Native Settlement.

AR Who took her?

RB The Native Department decided that they would help my uncle Ned and the other brother, and taken this old lady to Moore River Native Settlement. And she was taken away and my father and mother, then somehow, as the years went by we moved to Muchea, it's a place up past the Pearce airdrome in Bullsbrook? Muchea was a shop there on the corner, and we was east of there. Dad took up a job for a contractor, burning jarrah trees and whitegum trees to make charcoal for the gas producers on the cars in them days. The gas producers was -

AR Was this during the war (second world war)?

RB Yes, when the war broke out there was a depression on, clamp down on petrol, so the gas producers was put on the side of these cars. It was like some sort of a heater. You put the wood in and boil it, get the steam to come out. So these gas producers used those charcoal. Now how they got that goin' we don't know, but my father used to have a big hole dug by the contractor, and we had to put all the wood in there and we had to burn all the wood. When it cooled down, Dad used to bag the bags and we was getting so much a bag.

AR How would he have taken that to the contractor?

RB Well the contractor used to come there and take it from us.

AR Ah. He would come.

RB We was workin` there and we used to have our stores there, and I remember this day very clearly. Then through the bush came the old sergeant and the police constable from Midland police station, the old T model Fords then. Come chugging through the bush and pulled up and "goodday Tommy". Dad was a tallish man and he (the sergeant) said "where`s Bella?" And Dad said "oh, she`s over there sitting in the camp". "Can you bring her over here Tom?" Anyway Dad sung out to Mum and Mum come over and he said "Bella I`m very sorry, but your mother" - that`s my grandmother - "your mother Clara Leyland`s very, very sick in Moore River Native Settlement and Ned your brother`s got the word through to us and asked us would we come and tell you that he`d require all you sisters to go the Moore River Settlement because Mum, your mother" - my grandmother - "is on the last days of her life". So away they went and automatically Dad, when the contractor`s come out Dad told him about it. We needed money so that was that. We all went and got on the train at Muchea. My mother`s sister Clara was staying around the Maylands area - she came through on the train with her husband Tommy Higgins. Old Tommy`s dead. All these sisters that was living, all decided that a beeline had to be made to go to Moore River Native Settlement. Now this is the first encounter that I`ve had with Moore River Native

Settlement.

AR You hadn't been there before.

RB I hadn't been there before. I could have been ten, twelve or whatever, I don't know, but I remember CLEARLY. So we all arrived at the Mogumber railway station and the truck came in from the Moore River Native Settlement to get all these bags of vegies and things from the train. It had little room left so what they did was put in the older people that couldn't walk, squeezed them in, and the younger people had to walk.

AR What, they were on the back of the truck or in the cab?

RB Yeah, on the back of the truck.

AR Yes. Who was driving the truck?

RB I don't know at the time but it was some person from the mission, from the Moore River Native Settlement. Anyway in them days the road's not what it's like, like it was then, now, because it's been all upgraded. It was just a gravel road, a bush track, and it was fourteen miles to walk from Mogumber railway station in a slightly north west direction - to Mogumber Moore River Native Settlement. Sandplains.

AR So you would have been walking?

RB We walked and it was a huge human column of people in different groups, walkin`.

AR Summer or winter?

RB I remember the day (laughs). It was very cold and windy. And we got to One Mile Hill. One Mile Hill is one mile out from the mission. When you come to a rise it sort of

rises up from the sandplain. When you get on the hill you can look down, you see the pine trees. Well most of the young kids, the boys and girls there that weren't goin' to school, all started to come up along the road to meet the people coming. `Course we all arrived there and we bunked down for the night. My grandmother was in the old hospital which is knocked down.

AR Where did you stay?

RB We atayed with my auntie I think it was, Betty Sandy.

AR Was she in the camp?

RB She was down at the camps then, and Ned Mippy was there. They had all moved in to wait the passing away of my grandmother. I think we camped there for one day and one night and then the following day in the night I remember coming out of my sleep - I could hear the dogs howling. Well when dogs howl, it's someone died. It was my grandmother. Mr. Webb, I remember his name real clearly, he was the superintendent at the time there, of the Moore River Native Settlement. Anyway, my grandmother died and a funeral was arranged then, and her, carrying of her from the morgue at the back of the hospital, there's a old building there, the old morgue's still there - they're using it as a washhouse now, I've been back there lately - but the old hospital's knocked down and the church's still there but - anyway, the hearse car was brought around, it was a old T model truck, there was no hearse car then.

AR It wasn't the truck that had collected you at the station?

RB Yeah, yeah.

AR The same one.

RB Yeah, the same old truck. Anyway, they brought, they nailed up my old grandmother in this box and they put her on the back of the -

AR Was it a proper coffin?

RB Yeah. They had a coffin there, old plain boards. None of these you see today, shiny boards and things and shiny bloomin` handles, fancy handles on these things.

AR Do you think maybe it had been made at the settlement?

RB Oh, I believe that it has been made there, and anyway they put her on the back of the truck. They put a old union jack (flag) over the top of her grave, over the coffin, and then there was no priest. Mr. Webb had a bible in his hand and he was in front of the old truck, and we all started walking. It was a reasonable long walk from the compound there to the old cemetery which is still there now. The old cemetery`s graves and tins are still there, and shells - it`s growing wild with stinkweed and blackbutt trees. I`ve been back there not so long ago. Anyway -

AR What was it like to go back? What sort of memories did it bring back?

RB It hurt. Anyway, we were going up the hill and this big long column of black fellas all cryin`, Mum was crying and we were just walkin` along, zigzagging up the hill like a big long snake. We got to the grave. It was a hot day up there (put face in his hands) when the hole was dug Mr. Webb was reading from the bible, and sand was falling in

on my grandmother's coffin. They buried her there. They cut two banksia sticks from the banksia tree and put a rope around `em and stuck it up on top of her grave then we all went home, back to the compound. Then we come back down to Muchea. From there my memory's blanked a bit. Where we went from there I don't know but I been back there when I was fifty eight years old. Now that's a long time in my life, and I took my grandsons and my granddaughters and Uncle Ned came with me, and my Mum came back in the bus with us but we couldn't get her up the hill because it was all fenced off. She had to sit in the bus and she was crying because she was upset, she couldn't come back to the last departing area of her mother, which is my grandmother. Anyway I walked up there, carried some of my grandsons on my back, and all the time I was walkin` around, lookin` around amongst these old tins made as a cross and old enamel cups was layin` there and old bits of shell. Now and again I'd get a tag on the leg. That was one of my grandsons. (whispers) "Where's your grandmother?" And it hurt me because I couldn't say to him "this is her here"! And my other granddaughters come over said "where`s your grandmother, Pop?" Pop is, I'm grandfather to them. I said "oh she`s somewhere here, somewhere here" and I looked over at my Uncle Ned and he - I think that he was disgusted too because the place has grown wild, it`s neglected, and my grandmother lays there. And my sons and my grandsons and granddaughters, she belongs to them too. Now it`s all fenced off. There`s a

long square bit of block of land still with a bit of scrub around it but very soon it's goin` to be gone like the rest of the paddocks all around it.

AR They`re not trying to restore that area?

RB Well, as I said, I went back there when I was fifty eight.

It`s a long time ago between visits there and the place has REALLY rundown right then when I went there to see it.

All that Ken Colbung got was - Ken`s a spokesman for the Nyoongah people that Gnangarra, Wanneroo area north of Perth - in his time he got a bit of a big pine piece of wood put down in the ground with a silver tag on it to pinpoint that there is a cemetery there. The cemetery itself is all gone wild, so -

AR Can you just - can you remember at all what Mr. Webb was like?

RB Oh he was a middle aged man. He wasn`t a skinny man. He had - (final words obliterated from tape).

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

AR We were talking about Mr. Webb. Could you describe him as a person at all? His type of personality? What people felt about him?

RB Well I never had that much to do with him. You must remember that I`m at a small age but I guess that he was that sort of a person - wasn`t a skinny man, he had a bit of muscles about him. When he talked he talked with a bit

of authority in his voice. S'pose he had to do that because he believed that he was given that task or that role to make Aboriginal people do what they're told. He wasn't talking in a nasty way but from the times I've seen him. That was my first encounter with the Moore River Native Settlement. I've heard a lot about it and then strange as it may seem I was returned back there when I was returned back there when I was sixteen years old.

AR Why was that? Why did you go back then?

RB Oh for being in the company of adult Aboriginal men older than myself, receiving stolen clothes, and we all went to the Bunbury court in Bunbury. That was south of Perth. I, they went to the adult court, and when I went into the children's court I was confused because I was confused with the words which I didn't know then but I know now, what the difference is. Institution and execution is two different words. Execution is you gonna be, you gonna be done away with, or you're gonna be killed! Institution is put away into some place because you're under age. And I stood in the court and I was sentenced to an institution which was Moore River Native Settlement. I comes back into the prison yard where the older boys were and they said to me "what happened to you?" And I was quiet, 'cause I said "they're goin' to execute me!" (laughs) I was real quiet. and I said "I think they're gonna execute me" and then they all busted out laughing because they knew and I didn't know! And they sung out to one of the police constables to come and, get him to explain it to

me. So he come and told me. Well, I was sentenced -

AR That must have been a terrible feeling.

RB That WAS a bad feeling because, then I was transferred from there. The older, adult men was brought up by escort to the Roe Street police station which doesn't exist no more, but the building's still there, the court building. They was put in there ready to go to Fremantle. I was in a different section of that area there, not far away in another closed cell, but it was for teenagers. Then I was put on the train with a escort and my in-law, grandfather, which was old Arthur Mippy - now as I said before earlier in this tape that my grandmother lived with two old men. One was Harris or Leyland, or Harris, and Arthur Mippy was the father of Ned Mippy. Alf Mippy was dead in Melbourne if he was dead. But one mother, old Clara Leyland, my grandmother. That's my mother's mother. And the father to my mother and all her sisters is another old chap. I don't know whether it's Gilbert House or Leyland, but if it was Leyland then it was my grandmother's maiden name. And that's how my mother became a Leyland. I'm predicting and believing that. Anyway, I was put on the old Midland M.R. railway steam trains then. This is before they went out of business and the State government took over. It was a private run railway from Midland Junction, but Midland's changed now. All the old Midland station's gone but we was taken from Perth by the old paddy wagon, myself and my old grandfather Arthur Mippy.

AR Why was he being taken?

RB I don't know. He was ordered from some area in the Perth area or dunno where, but he was on that train. Now in them days the Native Department could order, if they felt that you were a risk to the Aboriginal community where you living in, if you had sickness or whatever. If you committed an offence they could order you to be put from there to Moore River Native Settlement under escort. Well I'm presuming that my grandfather, old Arthur Mippy, was under sentence with being sent to Moore River Native Settlement by the Native Department.

AR How did people feel about that law?

RB Well I really don't know. They didn't have a say. It was just "do this or else".

AR So you think in a way perhaps they just accepted this was the way life was?

RB Yeah, they had to accept it. Anyway, he and I was on this train with this prison, or this police officer and we was taken from Midland. We journeyed to the Moore River, to Mogumber railway station, we got off there, the truck was waiting to pick us up. I was sixteen now, I'm going back. This is after my grandmother died there. And I arrived back at the Moore River Native Settlement and I don't know who the superintendent was at the time then, but he asked me did I have any relations there. He said "do you know a Betty Sandy?" I said "yeah. That's my mother's sister". He said "well, Betty and Jimmy's down there and they cooking for the camps", 'cause they had a old tin kitchen built for 'em there and they was given all the bread and

the meat and things and the vegetables to make soup.

AR That was quite separate from the children's kitchen?

RB Separate from the, yes, separate from the main compound.

The main compound was, the superintendent was there, he had his house, the main house with that chalk cliffs, the girls' and boys' dormitory, and he's had several white people and womans workin' with him at the time, and he had trackers there from the Aboriginal side of it, to go down to the camp if anybody was to be brought up for some medical treatment or whatever. The doctor was visiting from Moora to the hospital there. Anyway I went down and stayed with my auntie and my uncle for a couple of days and then the trackers were sent down to get me. I went up to the main office and the superintendent said to me "well look" he said "I've got some work for you now" he said. "You've got to go to Shannoway Farm". That's down the Moore River Native Settlement. Mr. Donnegan, he was the white fella, and his wife was down there then, and this is where I met Ralph Dalgety. So Ralph was down there and then I had to go down to join Ralph and his wife and Dojen Scott, Jock Yates, Caesar Jackson, they all dead - Henry Ford. Anyway I arrived down there and straight away Ralph made me feel at home, asked me where I came from, and we all camped in the one old mud brick building near the pig sty.

AR Were you all living together?

RB We all lived under the same thing, because Ralph and his wife was cooking for all us young fellas. See, Caesar was

-
AR Did they live separately?

AR Ralph lived in one room, we lived in the big room near the fire place. We had the kitchen and we had a verandah.

AR And there were what, about half a dozen or so young fellows working there.

RB Yeah. I was a young bloke there then, sixteen. Dojen Scott was a young boy, Caesar Jackson was older than me and Dojen, and Jock Yates, we was the three youngest, and Henry Ford. And our job was, some of the boys had to feed the pigs, some had to go and feed the fowls, collect the eggs and look after things.

AR What was your job?

RB My job was collecting eggs with Dojen Scott and Caesar Jackson.

AR So were there a lot of chooks there?

RB Yeah. There was fowls there, and the eggs was transferred from there on a fortnightly basis up to the Moore River Native Settlement, to the main compound. Because the eggs would be used then for feeding the boys` and girls` dormitory and things.

AR How many eggs would you have been collecting every day?

RB Well they had a huge pen there, but I believe at the time when I was there that it wasn't doing so good. Because you know, the environment. It was sandy country.

AR So would you have been collecting maybe two dozen eggs or six dozen eggs each day?

RB All I know is that we had a lot of buckets takin` these

eggs, and we had to put `em in boxes and `em in one shed.

Mr. Donnegan used to take `em.

AR Did you do that once a day, twice a day?

RB We had to do that every day.

AR Every day.

RB Cleaning out the things, that was our work.

AR You had to clean out the chook yard as well?

RB Yeah, Monday to Friday.

AR How did you do that? Can you just explain to me?

RB We had to rake all the fowl manure from the things and wash it down. We had to make sure that the, where you put the wheat and the pollard in, and the old chopped grass we used to get from the river, to mix it up. Had to be all cleaned out. That was our chores every day and then through, after doing that if there`s any time between twelve and mid afternoon, if there`s any fences to be repaired, we had to go and do `em. Like round the, for the few horses they had there. There was no cows there. And sometimes Saturday Mr. Donegan and his wife used to say to us "well look, we`ll all go out for a picnic now and I`ll take you fellas, you boys out for a ride and we`ll shoot a kangaroo". I didn`t mind going for the ride and the picnic, but I didn`t like the kangaroos being shot. It was real sad. Anyway, I stayed there. Mr. Donegan got very sick one night and his wife didn`t know what to do, so the duty fell on all of us to make a decision. Ralph suggested that we, he didn`t have the right to drive the vehicle. He said "well I`ve got to drive Mr. Donegan and

I don't care what they do to me" so we all went over, we helped him out, we got him onto the thing and put a mattress down, we covered him over, we had lanterns, and we got his wife and put her in front with Ralph's missus and Ralph. We all jumped on the back. We had to go with Ralph because in case he got bogged on the bloody road. It was only old bush tracks. Anyway, we travelled with Mr. Donegan right up to the compound in Moore River Native Settlement. We woke the superintendent up and he praised us to some extent! For what we did! He asked Ralph could he, we stay there, he said "stay there the night and you take the boys back home in the morning." So Ralph drove us back in the old, it was a old chevrolet ute then, the old 1930, end of the 1930s or the mid 1930s vehicles in them days. We did a lot of road work there, Ralph and myself and Dojen, Dojen Scott and Jock Yates and Caesar Jackson. We used to have the horses dragging farrows along makin` bush tracks and digging stones out of the road so the vehicle could come through.

AR Did you have to put any gravel or any type of surface on it?

RB No, there was no gravel there in them days. Just had to make bush tracks.

AR It was really just clearing a track.

RB Yeah, wheel ruts in the sand. I stayed there and when Mr. Donegan came back, then I decided it was time for me to go. I couldn't swim so I bided my time. I watched the weather and I watched the rising of the river, the water coming up. `Cause the water was coming from the east

direction. I waited for the water to cover the old, the stone track going across the river, and I watched the big logs laying across. When the water started to just tip over the log I decided that I must make a break. I waited till nearly dark when the sun went down, then I went down and I took a chance 'cause I couldn't swim. I crossed this log with a stick balancing myself and this water was up to there, I could feel the water was up to my ankle. I could feel with my toes.

AR You were going over the log.

RB Yeah, going over the log, takin' a chance. If I fell in there I'd have been drowned. I got across, then I knew that the attitude of the black trackers in the settlement, they was pretty good in tracking. I knew that they could gallop along on a horse and track you through the sandplains, so most of the night I was pickin' my pace on how to go, and I was treading on, I was making sure to tread on scrubs to cover my tracks. And when the morning came I was real prostrated, I laid sleeping for a while in the scrub. The sun rose and then I guessed that I was south of the Moore River Native Settlement, I had to speed up. So what I did was took my shirt off and tied it around my waist, and rolled my trousers up and I tied my boots around my neck with the laces, and I started to run, and I was jumping from bush to bush to get to Mogumber railway station. 'Cause I knew the goods train was coming through. I laid down near the railway station and waited for the goods train to come late in the afternoon. As it

come past me at a pace I run along the side and jump on the old goods train and I rode it right into Midland. Jumped off there and I walked back home to my mother and father up at north of Lockeridge. I was a escapee then. But the police used to come from Guildford. The Guildford police station was in existence then but it's closed down now. Constable Cassidy used to come out. It had to be on a bike or a old Harley Davidson motorbike in them days. Well where we had our camp at Lockeridge, which is way up in the north of Lockeridge, Widgee Road, we had a good view of the old gravel road at the end of it. When the police used to come I used to run around the swamp and climb up the tree. Well they did it so many times they got sick of me, and to this day I haven't been taken back to Moore River Native Settlement to -

AR So you're still a runaway.

RB Yeah, so in a sense I'm still a wanted man. I'm sixty now.

Sixty years up. But take away sixteen years of that.

AR So how long do you think you might have been at Moore River settlement?

RB Ah, I'd say all in all it would have been three weeks, might have been four weeks or something like that.

AR Just a fairly short time.

RB Very short time. But I've been back since then again with some friends of mine, which is, I'm an old man now and my friend is an old man, he's living out at Scarborough now.

We went back just to have a look. We went up along the old highway on the back road and then we went up the river

towards Moore River. We ran into a old bloke there that was workin` at the time then. I don`t know what year it was but we went there and old Donald Flowers, but Donald`s dead now. It was all changed then. All the old people was gone. But Moore River Native Settlement is, we like, the Aboriginal people, we like diaries. Our minds have got it locked away in there. It`s there all the time. I guess that I`ll always be at Moore River Native Settlement because my grandmother`s there. If any dangers was to destroy that resting place of hers, then it`d be people like me that`d stand up and say "no, stop. It`s my grandmother there. You can`t destroy her. She`s dead. Leave her alone." The people who are laying there with her has a right to be protected. This is why I was pretty pissed off if you like with the handing over of the Moore River Native Settlement to other Aboriginal people who came onto the scene.

AR Why was that? Why were you unhappy about that?

RB I`m unhappy about it because we believe now that Moore River Native Settlement should have been talked about more thoroughly and more people that went through the agony, the tormentment of being there, a lot of people still living today and they should have had a input into it. Like a say in how and what Moore River Native Settlement should be used for. Now we believe that the handing over to this Moore River Native Settlement to people that we believe might turn around and close the gates to people like us. It`s not jealousy, it`s factual things that

we're looking at.

AR Why would they want to do that?

RB Well for a, right now we know that rules and regulations have been set down by Aboriginal people, rules and regulations which are along the lines of the attitude of the government on how to control and run Aboriginal people. Now the rules and regulations would be, you've got to get permits to go in there. You've got to have permission to go in there. The gates are going to be locked. And the signs that we're very disturbing over now is a white man's sign on the gate saying "keep out. Trespassers will be prosecuted. To enter behind this gate, permission has to be gotten from so and so" and blah, blah, blah, blah. Now, why would I have to ask permission to go and see my grandmother? This is what pisses me off. And why would my grandsons and granddaughters who are aware of where my grandmother lays, and my mother. Now, if my mother wanted to see her mother, she'd have to put it in writing or ring up such a place to get permission to go to that gate on that day and be let through to travel through up to see my grandmother. Now, there's another way that we could do it. We could go around the other way which we'd be breakin' the white man's law, get off on the side as we said and walk up through the gates, through the fences, unknown to these people. And if we was there lookin' around for our grandmother and they come onto the scene and said "hey, what are you doin' here. You've got to get permission".

So Moore River Native Settlement, Arnold Franks is a man that's really pissed off with that handing over because a lot of Aboriginal people did go to that meeting that day and they was disgusted because they never had the chance to say and talk about how Mogumber should be run by the Aboriginal people. It should be a place for everybody to be able to come and go there and see the place or have an input into it, in what it should be run for, and how it should be run. A lot of people are worried about it now, and mainly me, I'm worried because my grandmother's still in the ground and I still love her. It's part of me that, through my mother, through my mother to her, that worries me. But Moore River Native Settlement is my father's home to a lot extent. My mother's home.

AR How did they feel about it? How did your parents feel about their time at the settlement?

RB Mum was very bitter about it when she came away, and she'd sit around the fires talkin' to us about havin' bread and fat given to her, and she had to live under the rules and regulations.

AR But then you mentioned that they looked on it as home at the same time, so it was a mixed feeling was it?

RB Yeah, I guess my Mum saying it was her home because her home was broken up. She was taken away from her, the foundation stone of her home, that was her mother. And now her mother's laying there. She moved away from Moore River Native Settlement when she was at that, after she born my brother Thomas, and they moved in that direction

that I said, they moved in that circle of through the Toodyay area down in the Swan valley, and being here all their lives in the metropolitan area.

AR How did people feel about the white staff generally?

RB Well I really can't answer that, not for my mother 'cause I haven't heard her vision of it, how you know. It'd be just guess.

AR How did you personally find them?

RB Well as I found the people living in my time of being sixteen years, they seemed just like people being there to carry out their duty, their job, and carried out to the best of their ability. That's the way I've seen the people running the place in my time, but from other instance that's been interpreted on to me from Mum, Dad and other people, they probably have a different version of, because it's a different time age that they went through things there.

AR What about the trackers there. How did people feel about the trackers?

RB Trackers, we've had information that they were, trackers in each time of their trackin' there, some were good, some were bad. We've heard a lot of rumours that in chases of girls bein', tryin' to run away, they're caught out in the sandy plains and trackers would try and force to have sex with them, and boys who were found, belted and brought back. In any case, people that ran away and who were caught before getting off the sandplains, they'd be kept in the old lock up for a certain time and some of them, if

they did it all the time would be taken up to Moora town to be tried up there in the white man's court just to scare the living daylight out of 'em. But in Mum's time, Mum said that it was a screening out of girls going in there. This is for the, all the girls that's been taken there, be they full blood or quarter caste or half caste, it'd be a screening out day, a certain time that people'd come in there and say "oh this one, that one there, this one there, they can go over to New Norcia mission for another time then they can go from there out to service. Service means going to some farm to be a housemaid or coming right away back down to Bridgetown or wherever, Bunbury, or Roelands or whatever. So that sort of thing did take place. I've got a cousin who's still living in Saunders Street who was taken away and went through years of service in the Bridgetown area, but she's back here now. She's told me -

AR Would she have had training at the settlement?

RB Yeah, she would be. She 'd be, she was taken away. She was taken away from my mother here when HER mother died. My mother wanted to look after her and the Native Welfare, the department at the time said "Tommy and Bella, you can't keep Clara and Kathleen", the two girls' names "because you've got enough kids of your own and you can't look after 'em so we've got to take 'em". And they was crying and they was taken away from us. Bur Clara's dead, Kathleen's still living. She's my mother's sister's daughter. I can take you to her mother's last place of

camping, and her father - that's in the Caversham area - and Kathleen's father was the last known Aboriginal person in the metropolitan area to see the waugul in the Swan River.

AR He actually saw it? Can you describe it?

RB I can't describe it to you, for Aboriginal reasons.

AR MM.

RB That's my encounter with the Moore River Native Settlement.

I could go on and on and on of the many tales that my Dad told me about happenings, of things in Moore River, say at the settlement at the time that he was a baker there.

AR Could you -

RB But I'd rather not go into that now.

AR Why is that? Why would you rather not talk about it?

RB(sighs) I feel bitter to a lot of extent and the things that he did to help people and he was given no recognition. He was just Tommy Bropho, or Tommy Brophy, a little black man with a pink tongue and he knew too much, from a politician's point of view. And I'd like to close down my conversation now to you with the Moore River Native Settlement. It's my grandmother's last restin' place and I guess that I'll always have ties to the Moore River Native Settlement through my grandmother being there.

END OF INTERVIEW