Full transcript of an interview with

REV. BILL EDWARDS

on 24 October 1997

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

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Bill, where and when were you born?

**BE:** I was born in June 1929, and born in the small township of Lubeck.

That's in the Victorian Wimmera?

**BE:** In the Wimmera, yes. It's about halfway between Stawell and Horsham, and it's not on the main highway but it's on the railway line just eleven miles south of Murtoa.

And tell me a bit about your parents, Bill, that you came to be born in Lubeck.

**BE:** Yes, my Grandfather opened a store there in 1878, and he'd come out from Wales. I think first of all as a boy, and he was in Ballarat probably for the gold mining, coming from Welsh stock, and my Grandmother came on the same boat. They were quite young. He moved up to Stawell and worked in a grocery store in Stawell, and evidently when Lubeck farmers were settling around Lubeck and the railway line was developed to extended on its way to Adelaide, and farmers there asked him if he would come up and open a grocery store - or a general merchants store - at Lubeck, which he did in 1878. He died in kind of mid life, having nine children. My Father was the sixth, and one of three boys. My Father worked in the Bank at Nhill when he was a young man but I think while he was still young he went home when my Grandfather had died and took over the store. It remained in the family hands then till 1953. So it was in the family hands for 75 years.

What was it like growing up in a country store as a very young boy?
BE: It was a great experience because it was in a sense the centre of the town life. Everybody came to the store. The population was small. We used to count - when I was a boy I think about 70 people lived in the town and then about another 70 or 80 in the farms roundabout, so you had a population that would come into the store of about 150. You had the Railway Station, hotel, Post Office. There was a small little fruit shop. Had the school. Most of the people worked in those little industries or in the Railways. There were three families would've been Railway families running the Station, and then you had several people working as gangers or fettlers on the Railways. So that was basically the make-up of the little town population. From as young as I remember I would be in the store. My Mother, of course, worked there. We had a cow, we had chooks, so she was up early morning milking the cow, looking after the chooks, doing the housework, but she would be in the store quite often. And Friday afternoon the country people would come in. We thought it was quite busy with people coming in with their weekly orders. From very young I would be in the store making up the orders, making up the quarter of potatoes, or going out and getting the bran and pollard in the sheds we had at the back, and working in the store, especially on that Friday. Saturday mornings when it was busy. My Father and Mother, of course, could never go away on holidays together so I would go away with my Father for holidays occasionally to the beach, and Warrnambool, or Apollo Bay, or somewhere. My Mother would look after the store. She would go away - she had two single sisters in Horsham so they would go away on holidays together. A lot of time was spent just in perhaps sport. We had a yard at the back. I was the youngest of four and my nearest brother was five and a half years older than me so I guess I played mainly with my peers. There’d be a couple of boys, one or two girls, about the same age. There were about 20/25 children in the school. We’d spend a lot of time in the backyard kicking around a football, playing cricket.

Just coming back to the shop, Bill, could you describe its physical appearance to me? Not so much outside but what was it like inside?
BE: Inside there were counters each side of the shop and one side - the main side where we had the till - there would be the papers, the cigarettes, tobacco and so forth, and a line of the main grocery items.

On the other side was the haberdashery. There were small stocks of that but there was a little bit of clothing, and that was a counter where we'd have some materials and a few items of clothing and haberdashery items. In between, there were some other counters on which we might've stacked up some jam, and there were lollies and so forth.

On the side, just behind where the papers were, was a small office where my Father did all his books. He had a lot of documents there. His wall was plastered with old newspaper cutting about Lloyd George and Billy Hughes, and he was a little bit of an artist. He used to do some little cartoons. I remember, too, he'd have these little cartoons he'd drawn himself around the office. But a lot of historic cuttings pasted on the wall of that office. And he had his safe there, and the desk, and he did all his book work there.

Now, running along the back of the store was a long room in which were the potatoes, the coffee grinder - I still remember this big hand-turned coffee grinder and the smell of that - and the cartons of food were kept in there. Separate to it were a couple of sheds. In those there would be the flour, bran and pollard, and the bigger items were kept in these two sheds outside.

There was a petrol pump, of course, to the side, and that was an old hand pump. Petrol was about two bob a gallon I think, from memory, and I'd spend a bit of time pumping this - it was one of these cross stroke pumps. Opposite our store was a dam, and I think that dam was probably dug out I would imagine when the railway was built. That the earth from the dam was used to build the railway platform. And water came down from the Wimmera/Mallee water supply - Lake Lonsdale near the Grampians. And of course that supply went right up through the Wimmera and Mallee with a system of channels. Quite a remarkable feat. In fact, one of my aunts married a man who was an engineer in the Engineering and Water Supply at Murtoa. His name was Rupert McNab, and he worked on that.

About once a year, about April I think it would be, water was released from the dam and would flow through the channel and fill this dam. And several of the houses in the town - when I say several, a few - perhaps five or six - had a windmill. We had a windmill. And we would pump water from that dam that supplied our main garden with water. We'd be dependent on tanks around the
house and the store for our drinking. We had an underground tank so once a week we'd again do a pumping action to bring the water up and fill the tanks that supplied our bathroom and some of the drinking water. And of course, there were a few fish in the dam so occasionally we'd go over and sit on the banks of the dam and fish for the perch.

Did you grow vegetables and fruit at home?

BE: We had a few fruit trees. Apricots, and I think some citrus. We had the - I forget the name of the other one. But a few fruit trees. Mainly my parents' interests were more in the flowers. They had a very good flower garden. In fact, any spare area in front of the house and behind the store was just filled with flowers, and they were very keen on gardens. They'd have a few vegetables but not a great many. I think the emphasis was more on the flowers.

Well, coming back to your sport, Bill, that you said as a child you enjoyed it so much and you played it so much, was that a great part of the small Wimmera community?

BE: Yes. I would think that the cricket was the main kind of social occasion on a regular basis. Lubeck had a cricket team in what was called the Dunmunkle Cricket Association. My Father was President of that for 25 years. And that included Murtoa, Rupanyup, and it had other teams playing in the cricket - like, Ashens and Marnoo was in it at one stage. Banyena south, Minyip, and some other teams. But farmers from roundabout and some of the local gangers and so forth.

There was one ganger who was known as Sid O'Connor, was a good fast bowler and his brother, Les, was a slow bowler. Bill Kinsella, who you've met, was noted as the spin bowler of the team.

The Gellatley family were a well known farming - there were a few families of Gellatleys and some of them were - Col Gellatley I remember as a very good cricketer. Had been to Ballarat College, went to the War in the Air Force, played in an Air Force team against people like Dennis Compton and so forth in Services teams at the end of the War. Came back and was the leading batsman in that competition. Probably could've made it in Grade cricket in Melbourne but stayed on the farm. Became a Merino breeder. And
unfortunately he died just in kind of mid life of cancer. But Gellatley's were
centre of cricket.
I remember every Saturday we'd have our bath. After lunch we'd be given a
penny and we could buy ten lollies at the lolly shop, which started in the 30's
next door. My Father had built this Post Office and a lolly shop attached to it,
and a young lady ran that. And he also built the Postmaster's house - or
Postmistress it was then in the 30's - and we'd buy our lollies there, and we'd
go to the cricket if it was on the oval. The oval was right in the middle of the
town. It was next to this dam. The other side was the Railway Station. There
were tennis courts the other side. So it was right in the middle of the town.
And we'd watch the cricket. Everybody would be in there. The ladies brought
in lovely afternoon teas. There was a copper filled with water and the tea
would be made in this copper.
When the War ended I was about sixteen, and I remember then my Father who
had played cricket, he started a seconds team at Lubeck, and it was mainly
some school children and one or two of the older ones who joined them. We
used to go around to these centres playing in the Lubeck Seconds then in
about 1946/7.

So it was a strong community, too, wasn't it, Bill? I know from being
there and what I've heard from people like Carl Loeliger, it was a very
strong community.

BE: Yes. A good strength during the War. I remember again a lot of effort put
into what was the patriotic funds, and they ran fetes, flower shows, and these
were strong community endeavours raising money to help the troops. There
were several people, of course - my two brothers both in the Forces. A lot of
people from the area. These flower shows still continue, I believe, as annual
events, although there's not much of Lubeck left.
Again, the Churches. The Presbyterian Church was a strong little church. The
Methodist Church was only a few folk. The Anglicans had a few. Catholics
had no church building but they would meet occasionally in the hall. The
Kinsella's would be some of their members. The Methodists and Presbyterians
shared buildings. The Methodist had had it till the early 30's, and then we used
to go to Sunday School there every week. I mean, the Aumann ladies, they
had a farm at Ashens, about five or six miles north, they would drive their
buggy down. One of these ladies wrote a book on that family history, which I
would have somewhere. It's a very interesting book. They were a German family. For some reason they were involved with the Presbyterian/Methodist cause there.

Another Hateley(?) family had a farm up in the north east side. And these people would come and take Sunday School.

And the Church Services were in the afternoon. During the 30's, the picture I showed you of the bullock waggon dragging a haul from Rupanyup to Lubeck, and that was the Presbyterian Church which then the Methodist shared fortnightly. So it was Presbyterian one week and Methodist the other.

My Mother had come from Scottish people from the Horsham area. My Grandfather had come out from Portpatrick in South West Scotland. It was interesting. He stepped off the train evidently at Lubeck when he came out there, because cousins of his had settled out west in the wheat country to the west (out towards Horsham), and the first man he met and asked directions as to where to go to the Mathesons happened to be my Grandfather. Later their children, of course, married. Bit it was just a coincidence I've heard about.

Anyway, my Mother came from Presbyterian stock and my Father from Methodist so we had to go every week whereas most people only went once a fortnight.  *(Laughter)*

But the Church was, again, a strong centre. The fetes - the churches had fetes every year, and these were some of the big social events. They were in a barn that was on the edge of the town. Mr Daggart(?) was a farmer who had this house and the barn right in the edge of the town, and his barn was used for these church fetes every year, and the Anglicans had one and I think the Methodists and the Presbyterians. They were, again, social affairs.

I remember we used to try and save up a couple of shillings. I used to take the caterpillars off the grapevine and my Father would pay me a penny a 100 for killing the caterpillars, and I'd earn - I don't know that I always counted accurately but I'd earn a couple of shillings and spend that at the Church fetes. And then there'd be the Harvest Thanksgivings with an auction sale on the Monday night in the Churches after that. The auctions would be in the little hall. These were the kind of social events, and a very strong feeling of identity from that farming area and people in the town.

*Did people sense that that rural community was parochial or was it just a natural thing?*
BE: I guess we always felt Lubeck was a kind of centre of the earth. There's a bit of parochialism there. But we were dependent, too, on other places. Like Murtoa. We had to go there to get our bread. My Father would go up there once or twice a week and buy the bread at the bakery and bring that down. We depended on these other places for our meat supplies, and medical services. Perhaps the doctor at Murtoa or the Horsham Hospital. In fact, we had aunts in Horsham. We'd go up there on holidays.

And then I had this Grandmother from the store who retired to Stawell, so we had a lot of contact with Stawell. I went to High School - because we had eight years of primary school at Lubeck. And then the train - there was a train left from Dimboola, I think it was, and went to Melbourne every day and came back at night. So we would hop on this train and go 25 miles by train to High School, where I went from 1942 to '44. We'd miss the first period of high school because the train didn't get there till about half past nine. So we always missed the first period. And the train didn't get back till about seven or eight so I would go to my Grandmother's for tea. So we had those necessary connections, which saved us from being, I think, too inward looking in Lubeck.

It was largely a wheat area I guess, Bill, was it?

BE: A bit of mixed farming. The land just around Lubeck itself isn't good land. It's crab holey kind of land. As you got out west, across the Wimmera River into what was called the St Helens Plains and out towards Horsham, it was very good black soil. Very good wheat country. And going east there was a bit of rough timber country. Some wheat farming but quite a bit of sheep farming. So it was really mixed farming.

During the 30's the silos were built at Lubeck. I remember that being - and this was, you know, to have something that went up 100 feet or 90 feet in the air for Lubeck, it was great.

So every year - of course, they were dirt roads. Very corrugated when the wheat trucks would come in bringing the wheat in. In the early years it was the stacks of wheat, and there were stacks of oats and so forth - and we would go and play amongst these and the Railway sheds - but then the silos where the wheat came in. So there was a lot of movement, a lot of dust on the corrugated roads.
And then, of course, the shearing roundabout September where, again, the farmers would bring in their orders to the store. I remember the Gawith's, who were Murtoa people, but they had a farm out of Lubeck. And the Gellatley's and others, they'd bring in their orders to the store - the big orders for the shearing. And, of course, the wool coming in. That could've been - the roads could be quite wet at times. People'd have integral(?) chains on. Even going to Murtoa, it was all dirt roads when I was young there.

There's still a few there now, Bill.

BE: There's still a few, yes. There is a bitumen road goes straight through the town.

Did you perceive in your younger years that you were apart from the city in a sense? I mean, I guess the nearest largest town was Horsham - the big town?

BE: Yes.

Or Stawell.

BE: Yes.

But did you ever think of Melbourne in any sense or were you really quite removed from that as a young person?

BE: When you're young - Melbourne, we used to say, was 175 miles. We had the train connection. Also connection with Ballarat. A lot of my Father's ordering would be from Ballarat firms there and the goods would come up to the Lubeck Railway Station. It was a distant place and yet my Father, he used to go down occasionally. He would take the cricket team down for the Country Week Cricket - was a connection every year. He would manage the team going down to Country Week Cricket if he could. I had an aunt on my Mother's side who lived with a family - she was kind of sister who looked after a child that had been ill and she stayed with this family. And as a child I occasionally went down for holidays to stay with her at North Brighton in Melbourne. That was near the beach and that was a great occasion.
And as I said, I had other aunts that I didn’t visit on my Father’s side but my Father would go down occasionally. As I said, I was the youngest and my sister was twelve years older than me. And the next brother a couple of years younger than her. They went to Horsham and boarded there at High School so I didn’t see much of them at home. They worked - my sister worked in a Bank at Horsham. My brother went to Wangaratta as his first job in a Bank, and then he went into the Army. My sister, during the War, went to Melbourne and worked there. She was one of the very first to work on the counter as a teller - a woman in a Bank. That was because of the War. The men had gone to the War. She remembered one of her nicest customers was Crosby Morrison. Remember him? The naturalist.

Yes.

BE: He used to talk on the wireless. We had those links with Melbourne. So while we felt very much country, and that it was a long way away, we did have links with it.

Now, when you came to the age of - maybe we’ll leave the education side of your life, Bill, because that was largely local, wasn’t it?

BE: Largely local. It was Lubeck and then Stawell. Stawell only went - an interesting fact to note - to Year 11. There was no kind of Matriculation or Leaving Honours, or whatever it was then. None of us, I think, in that area would’ve thought University was an option. Even at Stawell High School. Those who were perhaps not so academic went off to work in the woollen mills or in the Railways, and fitters and turners and so forth. Went into just local industries. Others thought you could go into the teachers college in Ballarat. The High School was seen as a kind of fodder factory for the teachers college in Ballarat. (Laughter in voice) The Headmaster went crook at me because I turned down a teaching scholarship to Ballarat, and he couldn't see why I would do that, but my Father said, 'No, keep your options open'. But you could only go to that level. And there were restricted opportunities. It was banking, or teaching, if you got to that level. Or going to your family's farm or other business. If you weren't academic, it was these other things of Railway worker, Post Office, or something.
I was only fifteen when I finished this - because I'd started school at four. Because my brother was going to school and I was home. I went with - so I started school at four and went through. So I was fifteen - finished Leaving. The War was still on. So my Father applied to Geelong College and I got in there, and I went down and did Matriculation at Geelong College. And I stayed on the next year because jobs were hard to get. The War was just finishing. A couple more terms, and then got a job. But that was interesting because here I was mixing with people who were going to be doctors and lawyers and newspaper correspondents and just a whole range of things that had never entered my ken previously. Anyway, as I say, there was quite a difference there. Opening up through -

Did that change your view of Lubeck in any way?

BE: My nickname at school was Lu - Lubeck. In fact, years later I'd meet people and when I'd say, 'Bill Edwards', they'd say, 'Oh, I thought your name was Lu'. (Laughter) I mean, several people were identified - like Werrimull and (couldn't decipher words) - by their towns. They seemed to be a bit kind of exotic or remote, and I was Lubeck. So I guess coming back - yes, so I was still fiercely Lubeck. I suppose the model I had of life was my Father, and I thought I would love to follow and run that store in Lubeck, and play cricket at Lubeck. And he was largely my model. He could see that there was no future, I think, once bitumen roads came. The farmers would go to these bigger communities, and so he didn't encourage any of us to go into the storekeeping. So I had to be looking further aside. When I finished at - well, at Geelong College I got the Matriculation the first year that I went back, and a job was coming up at Ford Motors - an accountancy. In fact, I was kind of being offered that. I was sick and in the College Hospital with some flu when my Father got word there was a Bank job at Murtoa. So he came down, picked me up, took me home, took me for an interview at Murtoa, and I got the job in the States Savings Bank. So four of our family all went into Banks.

It was seen as secure employment in those days?
BE: Secure employment, yes. And there'd been some family - a couple of uncles had worked in Banks. My Father, as I said, had started off in a Bank. It was seen as secure. So I went to Murtoa for two years.
Now, again I say with the - Church interest. I was in the Presbyterian Fellowship and soon became President of that. Active in Church activities. And in the cricket and football. Playing cricket and football in Murtoa. Then I played for a year at Lubeck but then my Father said, 'You'd better play for Murtoa'. So I played for Murtoa first.
Then I went to Kaniva for 15 months, and again it was just Church activities. I'd entered into a deeper religious experience at Murtoa. I'd say my conversion experience. And so was very involved in the Church at - did my first preaching at Kaniva. And played cricket and football. I also played golf and tennis in spare time. I just enjoyed that country life. And I felt the call to ministry towards the end of that time.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

Bill, as we were finishing that last side you were talking about your movement in Christian life, but you were also just saying as we were changing the tape that the life at Lubeck really was highly egalitarian.

BE: Yes, in some aspects I see this. There were one or two farmers around the place who I suppose were considered to be fairly well off. I guess we were kind of middle class, having the store, and yet my Father never earned great riches. I think he told me not long before he died he probably never earned more than about £20 a week, and he just had to exist in his last years. I think he got some pension. I mean, there wasn't much value in the store and so forth when he sold it. And some savings. He'd been fairly frugal. The other people around us - our neighbours on one side was a family - a ganger had six children. They were fairly poor. My childhood was just after the Depression. These were the kids I was playing with. Another family who'd worked as a woodcutter had eleven children, I think. And some of those were the mates I had at school. And then there were the Railway people.
So the people around the town were not well off by any means, and yet I think there was a feeling that things were shared around, and people would've looked upon it as a fairly happy time. There was no sense of any class divisions from my memory of that. We played around together in the cricket teams and so forth. And I think that was an important aspect of that country life.

Of course, the thing about that, some of those people who came from those families were able to struggle through. If they performed well, some of them got into these teacher scholarships and became teachers. And most of them would've settled in to fairly comfortable middle class life. Some entered the Railways as fitters and turners and so forth, and had secure employment in those days in the Railways through their working lives.

That little town did provide opportunities for people then to go on. There was employment available for most people - unless they were farmers who went into the family farm - I would think in every case. One man stayed on there. His father ran a wood cutting - he had a saw mill at the Railway station, and that lad stayed on there. He was about the same age as me, and he died just a few years ago, but he went back to Lubeck and stayed on. Probably ran a few agency commission - agency businesses. But for most of us we moved out and went on to other places.

So, Bill, reverting to Kaniva, you had a call to ministry there. You felt that call?

BE: Yes, I was given opportunities at Kaniva to do some preaching and I was leading a Presbyterian fellowship group and Superintendent of Sunday School, and my interest deepened there. And I started to make the first overtures. And then I was transferred, I think it was, in November 1949, having been at Kaniva fifteen months. I was transferred to Melbourne into the Bank and I worked there for about four months. But in that time I further negotiated with the Church and went into Melbourne University and Ormond College. Accepted as a candidate for the ministry in 1950.

Now, it was only that that kind of led me into University life. Just for my own (couldn't decipher word) enculturation in that country town. I don't think anything would have led me there but it was through the call to ministry that I went into University.
You found that an enjoyable life?

**BE:** I enjoyed - I had seven years in Ormond College doing Arts, Theology, and then I stayed on to do a Diploma of Education. I enjoyed that life. I looked on it as a privileged life. You're living next to the University. About 140 students. It
staff worker for this movement so I visited mainland cities. That was 1954. I made a lot of friendships through that, which I still retain. I've got people in several parts of the world. People still in Melbourne. People who have moved over here. Very strong attachments that have lasted from those days of University life. So I enjoyed that.
taff worker for this movement so I visited mainland cities. That was 1954. I made a lot of friendships through that, which I still retain. I've got people in several parts of the world. People still in Melbourne. People who have moved over here. Very strong attachments that have lasted from those days of University life. So I enjoyed that. Having had three and a half years out in the bush, I hadn't kept up study by any means. I did a little bit of reading. So it was a bit of a shock to get into University life there. But I applied myself hard and I think surprised people at the end of the first year results I was able to attain, and I kept going through without failing anything there. But it was mainly just hard work. A lot of dogged research. But I enjoyed just that life there at the University. I kept up the contacts - I used to go home to Lubeck over the first three years. My parents sold the business in 1953 so I used to go home, and I enjoyed going home. And then when they retired to Stawell - least my Grandmother had - I'd go home there and occasionally take friends. We'd go bush walking in the Grampians. Bushwalking became an interest. In the Grampians, going up to Queensland, Tasmania, and so forth.

Did you find that your love of that Wimmera area was retained?

BE: Retained, and I still like it. When we go there through to Melbourne, I still like to call in at Lubeck even though there's nothing there. I still have an attachment. Keep up contact with people like the Gellatley's and Carl Loeliger. And there's a part of me that is still very much there in that Lubeck area.

How, Bill, did you come to work with Aborigines in a very different part of rural Australia?

BE: There was, of course, little contact with Aborigines at Lubeck. As a boy, I think I remember a couple of occasions - there were the swaggies that would come. We haven't mentioned the swagmen but they would come through and, of course, come to the house occasionally. My Mother would give them some
bread and tea and they might be asked to cut a bit of wood at the wood heap out the back. And I spent a lot of time cutting wood when I was young, too. In fact, if you look to your right, you'll see a boomerang. That my Father got from one of these men in the 30's. Just a couple of them were Aboriginal people who came through the town. We were never told anything about Aborigines of the Wimmera. It was all 'Major Mitchell went here'. It was all the explorers. Bill Kinsella, I remember him coming into the store and having some Aboriginal artefacts once when I was young, and Bill had a bit of an interest in the artefacts. Not, I think, so much the Aboriginal people as people, but to some extent the artefacts that were around, and these signs. No attention was given when I was young to that.

In the 50's, there was a little bit of growth of interest. Doug Nicholls was prominent in Melbourne. There was a growth of an ABSCOL(?) - the Aboriginal Scholarship Movement. There was no provision in Government for scholarships for Aborigines but the students started a fund, and I became involved through this EU movement - Christian movement at the University. I ran an effort to raise some money through that.

In 1954, when I was over here staff working, the Queen was visiting Adelaide -

Yes.

BE: - and the Ernabella Choir came down. And I went to the Adelaide Teachers College the first day I was in Adelaide on that trip, and heard the Ernabella Choir sing. *(couldn't decipher name)* who was the Superintendent then, and spent some time with the choir rowing them on boats on the Torrens. *(Laughter in voice)* I've got a couple of slides still of the choir here in Adelaide. Went up to Dr Duguid's rooms to let him know that they are ready to leave. They came down in a truck - on the back of a truck - from Ernabella on the dirt roads. And so I had to run up and tell him that the people were about to leave North Terrace to drive back to Ernabella. So that was probably a significant little meeting with those people.

Then 1955, I joined an ecumenical work party to go from Melbourne - or people from New South Wales/Victoria. We drove again on the old roads to Alice Springs to put down the forecourt at the John Flynn Church. They had budgeted for the Church, didn't have enough to build this forecourt which was in the plan, so they - Fred McKay got in touch with folk, and we drove vehicles
up and we worked for about twelve days. Dug the rock out of the hills and laid that forecourt.

**How did the Alice strike you on that journey?**

**BE:** Oh, interesting. I mean, that was remote and exotic then, and it was small. The trip up was fascinating. It was a wet year. We went through long stretches of water. In fact, we found people bogged, and seeing there were 29 in the party we just picked their cars up and carried them out of the bogs. *(Laughter)* Yes, the flowers were fascinating. Just fantastic country. So, again, that trip made an impression on me.

I met some Ernabella people on the road. In fact, one of the men I met in the choir, we met on the road near Mount Cavenagh Station, and we met a couple of staff at Alice Springs. So my interest in the outback was growing. Even in the readers, I think, at Lubeck school I'd seen photos of Simpson's Gap. I always remember that in an old school reader. I had some interest in the outback I think from what I saw in school books. Those experiences in the 50's reinforced that.

There was no opportunity of studying anything about anthropology or Aborigines but I started to do a little bit of reading about the outback. Deepening interest in the Aboriginal work. There was that debate about the Giles weather station. Doug Nicholls going over the Western Australian *(sounds like, Grey-don)* debates about the atomic bombs and so forth, and the effect of this.

So as I was finishing my theology I mentioned to the Secretary of Missions in the Church that I was a bit interested, and I said, 'Look, I've got the chance under a scholarship to do a Diploma of Education. Is it worth -' He said, 'Get any qualifications you can'. So the next year I did this Diploma of Education, and during that year I approached them and they thought they might send me to north Queensland and then suddenly there was an emergency at Ernabella and they asked if I'd go there. Well, you couldn't have held me back.

Ernabella was the place I'd read about. I was interested its policies. And I did a linguistics course early '58 for eleven weeks - Summer(?) Institute of Linguistics. And then in May caught the train, came through here and up to Ernabella.
How did you find the people there?

**BE:** Oh, very great - I met two men who were down here. One for medical treatment. Gordon and Alec, and they were on the train with me going up. Meeting the folk up there - I found the children particularly attractive. In those days they were *(couldn't decipher word)* and unsophisticated - naive in some ways. They would just come around and touch you - this white skin - in a very unobtrusive way. They were just delightful. I spent a lot of time learning languages sitting with the children. And then I had some more formal instruction with this man Gordon, and one of the staff. I found the people just friendly.

It was a small staff at Ernabella. Only seven staff. There was a Superintendent. There were two men and a sheep worker. Another who helped in the sheep work but also in the trucks and maintenance. One Sister, one teacher, one craft worker. That was it. So you were much more dependent on your relationships with the people.

Although there was the Mission compound area where we lived and the people lived in a camp, and there was some demarcation, and these camps would move around the area as the earth got a bit soiled.

Yes.

**BE:** Go to another *(couldn't decipher word)* if somebody died. And there were rules. People weren't supposed to just hang around the Mission compound at night. But they had their own area in which they were independent and, you know, happy, and we allowed them that freedom in that area. They came up, worked, went to school and went to the craft room in the compound area.

People were working in our houses and our gardens. We had a lot of really good contact with the people without the pressures there are there now where there are so many white people, and administration, and bureaucracy, that I think it just affects that relationship we were able to have then.

We were very remote. We had a mail coming up once a fortnight from Finke which was about 200 miles east. We would go in on the other week to get our supplies. A truck would go in to get the flour and the sugar and the petrol and so forth. And we would bring out mail ourselves on that. Otherwise depended
on telegrams through the Flying Doctor Service base, and then the radio communication for the medical emergencies. So it was remote. We had few vehicles. We had one truck that did the Finke trips. We had a 30 cwt truck that was used for fencing and some of the sheep work, and a Land Rover used basically to go out to the sheep camps. One of the staff had a utility which he more or less kept there till he went on furlough every three years. He didn't use that around the place much. So we were very limited in movement.

Our contact with the Stations was a bit limited. It was more through the radio. Or as we went to Finke on these trips, you would call at the Stations on the way and pick up their mail and have a cup of tea, and we had quite a good relationship with the people on those Stations - Victory Downs, Kenmore Park, Mount Cavenagh. And then as we went out west sometimes, Mulga Park, the Station where the Fogarty's lived, and we had quite good relationships with those Stations, but limited relationships.

Fogartys, had they been storekeepers at one time?

BE: No. There was Wallace(?) Fogartys in Alice Springs and that was the store in Alice Springs. Heenan's was the milk bar and Wallace Fogarty's the store. Heenans was a little store and running(?) the milk bar place. No, these Fogartys came from out west of Katherine, and they bought this lease at Mulga Park and established it - built it up in the 50's.

There was always, I guess, problems - I mean, sometimes those people would've wondered what on earth were we doing with those blacks, you know, they're a hopeless lot. And yet, the fact that we had the sheep work and then from 1961 we started a cattle outstation, those people were impressed that we had the people working, and they could see we had staff who worked in a sense like them. We had cattle men and sheep men. I think we were respected by those cattle people, and we had quite good relationships, although at times there would be problems arising in that we would want to stand up for some of the rights of these people.

These cattle stations would employ people from Ernabella. They'd get on the radio and say, 'Look, we're having a muster', or 'we're tailing some cattle into Finke', which was done in those days, 'if you've got half a dozen men who'd like work -'. We'd just go out in the compound and say, 'Anybody want work at
Mount Cavenagh or Umbeara', or somewhere? And they'd say, 'Oh, yeah, we'll go'. Either our truck would be going and they'd go in, or the people would say, 'We want them soon. We'll come over and pick them up'.

The fact we were going in to Finke and the contacts we would have, built up these relationships, although our life was so centred on the Aboriginal people that this would provide a bit of a barrier at times. For instance, if I had Aboriginal people with me going through some of these stations, I'd be invited to a cup of tea but you just assumed that the Aboriginal folk weren't welcome in that kitchen.

Now, most of those places, this wasn't a problem because there would be a camp of Aboriginal people, and my mate would've preferred to go to his mates anyway. So he would just hop off the truck and go and have a cup sometimes with some of the part Aboriginal - the mailman at Finke, for example, Frank Quinn, who would come out. He was a big old Irishman. Had these old trucks and he would come out every fortnight. He had two half caste children. He had an Aboriginal woman as his partner and he found it difficult if those boys came out. If they came to us, they came in with him but on some of the Stations they were not welcome in the - he'd be welcome for a cup of tea but not the boys.

So those Stations were dependent on having that Aboriginal camp around them to get their labour for their house work, for their stock work, but the people were always kept at a bit of a distance. I've often described the situations as being kind of fairly feudal. This is the Lord of the Manor and these were the workers. If they did the right thing, supplied the employment and so forth, they would get some benefits. Meat, a bit of money and food and so forth.

And it depended - the stations varied. Some had some quite good relationships. Women especially who cared. Provided very good medical attention for the people in the camps. There were others where they were a bit tougher and the attitudes were a bit more polarised. So you can't stereotype what the situations were.

I understand that.

BE: Mrs Fogarty, for example, was very good in her relationship with the people she had.
Bill, this is a bit philosophical, but Lubeck is very much a rural area. When we talk Ernabella, is there a distinction between - even though it is rural in that it's non urban, you call it remote.

BE: Yes.

And there does seem to be a distinction even there. Even though it's part of rural Australia, it's beyond almost.

BE: Well, we're talking about the outback. And that's a term that's never been defined. I would've thought perhaps once the outback was where the bitumen ended but, of course, now bitumen is all over the place. I'm often surprised. They talk about some of our sportsmen. 'Oh, so-and-so, he comes from outback Australia'. And you find that he comes from somewhere near Dubbo or somewhere, where I wouldn't think is particularly outback. (Laughter) The term's never really been defined. I would've thought once it was beyond Woomera somewhere, where the bitumen ended in those days. But as we say now, the bitumen goes through. And the whole context - I mean, there are telephones on every gum tree almost as you go through that country now. It's changed. But I'm thinking about it as it was in the 50's where you were dependent on these radios, telegrams. It was remote.

Now, I'm just going through - these are letters I wrote to my parents, and I found that my Father had kept them. And he's numbered them. I'm up to number eighteen now. I'm putting them on the computer. The emphasis on these letters, 'on the truck that's going to Finke. On the mail, and I'm getting a newspaper'. That was a wonderful thing - to get a newspaper. But I think that kind of indicates that feeling of isolation.

The coming in of another vehicle was an event. The kids were, 'Hey! A truck. A truck, A truck'. They could hear a vehicle coming in and that was quite an event for somebody from outside to come. So it was fairly remote.

**Bill, the definition of relationship between black and white in rural or remote Australia, was it pretty rigidly defined in the late 50's/60's or was there a lot of room for manoeuvring really?**

BE: I'm foreshadowing so far that it was a fairly strict barrier around the Stations. Yes, and even in the settlements. I mean, if you look, that was
nearer where the Government was starting a number of settlements but it was very much putting people in the Papunyas or the *(sounds like, Inda-moos)* and there was a separateness even the way these places were set up. This is one of the incongruous things - the ambiguities about assimilation. This is the time when we were training the people for assimilation and yet the Government built these very strong centres where there was a staff centre and then the peoples camp. Anything but assimilation. And yet it was supposed to be training for assimilation.

But I think that symbolises that there was a kind of barrier there. I mean, it's exemplified in the towns of Alice Springs and other places where - I mean, Aboriginal people weren't allowed to drink anyway so they couldn't come to hotels. But I think in the stores, there were often places that were known as the Aboriginal places, and Aboriginal people - now they're free. You go into Coles and so forth in Alice Springs, Aboriginal people will be half the people in there. But they would've been very reserved in going in to what was Fogarty's in those days. They would've had the Gaps(?) Store, the Lutheran store, which was seen probably as more their territory.

I found when I went to the Kimberleys - I spent one year ('72, early '73), the Board of Missions asked me to go there, and that was the era when we were changing from assimilation and handing over the places that had been Missions and Government settlements to the people, incorporating their communities. I found the attitudes in the Kimberleys - I went to Mowanjum to get their community incorporated and the attitudes were even more polarised. I found Kimberley's a harsh area. Physically, the weather was always hot - oppressive - and I found the attitudes of these relationships even harsher.

**Bill, that's interesting because speaking to people like the Durack's, you get a sense up in that area that the relationship between the camp and the house were very strong. Almost blood link.**

**BE:** Yeah. And there were blood links up in a lot of those places. Places around the Centre which often, of course, were not acknowledged.

Now, the Duracks were a bit the other side of the Kimberleys to what I'm referring to. I'm referring to the Derby area mainly. But, I mean, there were some horrible things happen on that other side. I mean, you had the Forrest River massacres and so forth earlier. And these things had left a heritage. So I wonder whether there isn't a bit of romanticism in the - I think some of the
problems the Duracks have got into recently might indicate that. Elizabeth Durack's painting, you've heard of that?

Yes.

**BE:** Certainly around that Derby area, I just felt the attitudes were harsher than I'd experienced in the Centre.

So your experience at Ernabella would be there was a strong relationship between the black and white people you were with.

**BE:** Yes.

At Ernabella particularly?

**BE:** Yes. And that continues. I mean, what started in '58 for us. I mean, we had Aboriginal people in our house last night. Somebody who's studying down here and she brought her daughters because her relatives in hospital and she came to get us to ring the hospital, and she's been a couple of times to pray and to talk about the problem of health(?). I mean, we have a lot of that continuing contact with people. When we go up there as I did last month - and that was over the death of somebody else. And just going into the Church at Ernabella - a Memorial Service - I mean it was a moving experience, and the way I was accepted. They wanted me to be there. They're asking all the time about our boys because our boys were part of the fabric of their society as being born and knowing them as small things. And other missionaries who were there then have experienced this, where you have that link. Problems arose, and you had arguments with folk at times, and there were times when you could've gladly walked out of the place in frustration. But that happens in all situations. But I think from Ernabella especially, there was a very strong link.

**TAPE 2 - SIDE A**

AUSTRALIAN RURAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.
Bill, we've talked about Ernabella a little bit and probably that's beyond the scope of what we are doing now - the whole story of Ernabella - but I'm very interested in your views on the relationship of black and white people in rural Australia.

BE: There certainly - while a lot of the European land use supplanted indigenous Aboriginal land use, the Aboriginal people played an important part in the industries. Even Victoria. Here in South Australia. Point McLeay people being very involved in shearing teams. And Henry Rankin, and I'm trying to think of the other man - I'll find his name soon - who headed Tandanya. And he was Chairman of the Aboriginal Lands Trust for many years. (couldn't decipher name) Wilson. Garnet(?) Wilson. These people, I think, were all part of shearing teams around here.

In 1948 when I was at Kaniva, the first weekend I was there, somebody was away from Kaniva and they needed somebody in the football and they asked me if I'd come and play for Kaniva against Keith, and came over. And I found that a lot of Aboriginal people on the boundary who were barracking for us because evidently they were working on a railway gang at Keith but weren't allowed to play football. So it indicates that here was a group of Aboriginal people being employed in the area but not being accepted socially into the town. And that made an impression on me as my first meeting with Aborigines in South Australia in 1948 at Keith.

But Aboriginal people through ability as shepherds - I mean, at Ernabella we had them working as shepherds because they could track the sheep so easily and that enabled them to go and do some of their traditional hunting at the same time. And that was done, as you say, at Bungaree and other places.

And their work in the cattle industry. Anne McGrath has written *Born in the Cattle* or *Born to the Cattle* is the title of her book, and she's written extensively about this use of Aboriginal labour in the cattle industry. Certainly in many areas their work was a very important part of that. But it would seem often their labour was used but there was still that kind of social barrier.

Yes, I've often wondered how it must have felt to be black in Australia and to know that you've been pushed out of your land - boundary-wise at
least. Pushed right out into other territory. The link that had actually held you was severed to some degree.

BE: Yes. People found this very, very difficult. I mean, in the closer areas a lot of people - their societies just collapsed under the strain and groups of people died out. And there must've been a lot of resentment built up. I mean, it was things over waters, for example. Waters that they'd been - just depended on and had been part of the fabric of their lives. They had their stories associated with that. Then suddenly they're kicked away from these waters and cattle, sheep and so forth are using them. So that led, obviously, to a lot of bitterness on the part of people. But a lot of feeling of helplessness and powerlessness. If they resisted, then they were just treated - even by so called native police and so forth. So, suffered.
The history's written - there's one on Aboriginal people in Western Victoria which gives quite a number of examples of that. Just can't think of the author's name but you may - it's something about murder. *The Field of Murder* or something is the name of the book.

Oh, I know the one. *Great Day for a Picnic*, or something.

BE: No. No.

Oh, yes, that's New South Wales, isn't it?

BE: Central(?) Australia, I think, yes. *A Distant field of Murder* by Critchett - Western District Frontiers. So, I mean, there's a lot written on all of that.

So, Bill, was there a feeling like that at Ernabella or was that quite different?

BE: Well, the fact that Ernabella - people still had a sense that this was their land. Problems would come up at times because they wondered why - I mean, here was these white fellows, and we were regarded as the bosses, and that would cause resentment at times. But in those early years, I think the fact we were a small staff - often the image is given - well, the missionaries went and we kind of did away with their traditional things and we imposed, but in actual fact at Ernabella there was minimal interference and we spent a lot of time just talking to people. I mean, the sheep men would be out driving trucks and there
was a lot of just informal interaction. So while the people didn't have formal
councils or ways of making decisions regarding the running of the place, there
was a lot of that informal feedback coming in. And generally, I think people
were happy.
They would certainly have seen that it was different to the cattle stations, and
this is reflected in probably the histories of Point McLeay and all those places.
There's something different here. And the people responded to that. And
always felt that, you know, this is our place. This land is still ours. So that was
different to what was happening in the areas where they had been pushed off
and where the whites would've been claiming, This is our land. This is not your
land. This is white fellow land now'.

Bill, in all those years you grew up at Lubeck and then spent - up in the
bush at Ernabella - places like that - did you always have a feeling that
those areas were quite distinct from urban Australia? That there was a
difference with the people and the place? I mean, the place obviously.

BE: Yes. Growing up at Lubeck, I guess we had a bit of a pride in being
country people. I suppose, again, you always have these images, you know, of
country people are friendly, and there's a bit of versatility and, yes, I think we
would've felt something of that. That we had something that urban people didn't
have. In just something of character. And, you know, bred this sense of
friendship.
And then at Ernabella, obviously you felt there was something different. There
was some mystique about the outback and so you were part of that. There
were characters of the outback that you were coming across. Like this man,
Frank Quinn, the mailman. And McDougall, the patrol officer, who came
through from Woomera. You're in contact with people like that. And just the
fact that you were in contact with another culture and this cross-cultural
experience - another language - so you felt it was quite different.
Now, you felt the disadvantage. I mean, I felt the disadvantage. I mean, I'd
have loved to have gone on and become a country cricketer and really, like my
Father, had been able to play a lot of cricket. As soon as I went to Ernabella,
that was the end of cricket, and my sporting opportunities were limited. We
had an ant bed tennis court we'd put down with bringing in some ant bed from
roundabout. And a tree roller. A bit of a gum tree and rolled it, and we played
a bit of tennis there in Saturday afternoons. That's the only sport we could get.
You felt the distance from parents - from family. From music. I mean, I like going to music things here. So you felt the lack of some things but there was a commitment. I mean, I think we all - you didn't feel deprived in other ways. You just felt in other ways this was a lovely country to be living in. It was good working with the people.

We had a good feeling between the staff. We had our problems at times but I think that Ernabella staff of the period was a staff that held together. We regarded ourselves as family. We were uncles and aunts to the children of the others. We were very much a supportive group.

**Perhaps that isolation makes that happen, too.**

**BE:** It does. I mean, you are - if things don't go right, then you're in real strife, and that does happen, and some people left because they couldn't hack it. But you are so dependent on the kind of support.