ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: GLADYS WATERS

INTERVIEWEE: GLADYS WATERS

INTERVIEWER: KEN LLEWELLYN, RAAF PR

SUMMARY:

DATE RECORDED: 9 NOVEMBER 1993

RECORDING LOCATION: GLADYS WATERS'S HOME

ACCESSION NUMBER: S01665

TRANSCRIBER: DIANA NELSON

TRANSCRIPTION DATE:

BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE A

Identification: this is an interview with Gladys Waters, the wife of Lenny Waters, at her home at House 3, 51 Hampton Street, Durack, in Queensland on 9 November 1993.

Gladys, can you tell me something about your early childhood?

We lived in Charleville, there's three girls in the family. My father was a professional dingo catcher and fisherman. I went to school in Charleville, that's the only school I went to. My first job was when I was eleven years of age during the school holidays at Christmas time out on a property.

What year was this?

That was back .... War was declared in that year, September, and I was out on Wyoming Station at Lurnea siding in Charleville. I was caretaking kids. That was my first job. The following year I was at Halton Station with Calcinos and I did that each holiday period for years. In the meantime, of an afternoon when I used to come home from school, instead of going home I used to have to go up Corones, my mum was working there, and I used to sit and do all the ironing on the big machine at Carones in the afternoon because us three girls used to eat there and it cost nothing for my mum to keep us there. That's how I lived for years until I went to work.

Were both your parents Aboriginals?

No, my mum is white, my dad's dark. My dad's got Aboriginal and Indian blood. His father was a man called George Victor, and Indian hawker, and his mum was Aboriginal - Dad's mum. But

I can't understand why because her mother come from England and her name was Sarah Pye[?] and she was white and she came out here to Australia and then my grandmother, she's dark and Dad's dark and two of his sisters, and the rest are all blond, blue eyes. My daughter is doing a family history and I said, 'How come there's three in the family are Aboriginals - got the Aboriginal blood - and Granny Saunders has got - my father's name was Saunders - and I said, 'How come Granny Saunders is Aboriginal?' And my daughter said, 'Do you realise that one of the Aboriginals when they first shifted out here - because she knew the name of the ship that the grandmother came out on - the great grandmother came out on - she jumped the fence and that's how the Aboriginals came to be in the family'. But my mum's white, she was a McEwen and her family come from Ireland and Scotland.

It must have been very rugged for your mother.

Well, no, my mum, she was a very tough person in this way. She worked all her life. Dad was a heavy drinker and a violent drinker. In the end she had to leave him because he was very violent in his drink. When Dad would go away to a shed or out in the bush or anything like that us three girls used to get into Mum's bed and it was nothing during the night, Dad was supposed to be probably out at Quilpie working and we'd be in Mum's bed and the next thing you'd look up and Dad would be sitting at the end of the bed sharpening a cut-throat razor, saying, 'I say I'll cut your throat' and he was drunk. We didn't know whether he was going to cut our throats or not. I got him gaoled a couple of times because he lined my two little sisters up - this was during the war – lined them up on the step and was going to blow their brains out with a 303 rifle, and he was drunk and I really thought he was going to do it - the two sisters. Anyway, they took him and put him in gaol but I had to do something because I couldn't stop him. But oh dear, he was violent. He was a violent man.

How did your mother cope with this violence?

It used to be terrible. We'd be sound asleep. She'd be sound asleep and it was nothing for him to hit her with something. But I don't think she was game to leave him at first and in the end I think the police must have advised her to leave him.

He wasn't violent when he hadn't been drinking.

He was a lovely person and the most spotless, clean person I've ever come in contact with, and very, very proud. You never saw my father outside that place unless he was dressed to the nines, and his shoes, you could see your face in them. He loved to dress up and he was really good looking. He was a good looking man but he loved that grog. Oh dear, he used to scare me and I used to say to him when he used to come home - he was supposed to be out at a shed or out in the bush somewhere - and you'd wake up at midnight and he'd be sitting at the end of the bed or he'd be hiding in the house somewhere and you'd hear this [heavy breathing] and you didn't know whether it was a burglar or what. Anyway, when I started to grow up I said to him once when he was flogging Mum, because I used to jump in to try and stop him, I said, 'One of these days I'm going to be a young woman and you're going to be an old man and I'm going to flog the hell out of you'. Oh gees, he gave me a hiding, an awful hiding over saying this to him. And then another time he flogged me with a stock whip. I was up the mulberry tree and he kept telling me to get down and I'd say, 'In a minute, in a minute'. I didn't get down when he told me and oh,gees, didn't he flog me. I had to get treatment for the stock whip.

He hit you with the stock whip?

He flogged me. My sister that's down here now, she said to me, 'Oh, that will live in my mind forever', because she was crying, she was trying to stop him but he wouldn't stop. He wouldn't take any notice. I wouldn't get down out of the mulberry tree when he told me and oh dear, oh dear, when he used to go beserk, he'd go beserk. But I got even a few times.

That must have really affected your judgment about alcohol.

It did. It made me a very, very, very bitter person. I had a very good friend and she gave me a good lecture when I started having my family and they started growing up. They were at school then. And this lady said to me, she said Gladys, and she was 'Scotch' and they are taught to drink, they have drink from when they're small, see - she said, 'Gladys, you're doing the wrong thing by your family. You are so bitter and you are trying to rear those kids - because Len was always away and I had to be mum and dad to them. And she said, 'You're trying to rear those kids and with your bitterness and hatred, you're doing the wrong thing. You've got to educate a child to the drink, how to live with it, how to grow up and accept it and all this sort of thing. Well, I'm very fortunate, she's one of these ... she's so good a friend, she didn't say things behind your back, she said them to your face and whether you liked it or not you had to accept it. But what she told me was the truth; everything she told me. And to this day I'm very thankful that I listened to her because Donny doesn't take much drink. He has a drink but he doesn't take much drink. The girls don't drink, they don't smoke - oh, Lenise smokes.

These are your children?

Yeah. Lenise smokes but the rest of them don't. Julie will have a social drink with dinners but nothing else. You don't see the girls out drinking.

Did your dad drink with his fellow Aboriginals or did he ...?

No, he was a very popular man. They had a hotel in Charleville called 'The School of Arts' and these two old ducks used to run it and he always used to drink there. No, he was .... In fact one of the policemen out in Charleville, George Lewis, him and Dad were very good friends and say somebody drowned in the river they used to always come and get Dad because Dad had the boat and they used to use him to go dragging the river because a couple of times they brought the bodies back at home when they come to have something to eat before they took them up to the morgue.

Because as a professional dingo hunter he must have been away a lot.

Yeah, he was a very cunning man like that. He used to let a dingo do all the damage that .... The people might have wanted a dingo catcher but if they wouldn't pay Dad what he wanted he wouldn't go out and he used to let the dingo do as much damage and then he'd get his price. He'd get his dog - always. Always get the dog no matter what and get his price for it, too. He was a smart man.

He was a good tracker.

Yeah. They used to use him up at the police station. George Lewis, the policeman, they were really thick. In fact they used to even raid the Chinaman's garden taking the watermelons, the both of them.

So you had a very mixed upbringing. There was obviously some happy times but some really bitter times, as well.

My dad was a very clever man. He come from a very smart family. Dad was in the circus.

He was in the circus part-time, was he?

Well, this is when he was younger. I don't know whether you know of the Colleanos, they had a circus here in Australia. In fact they're doing a show on it shortly - and they're related to Dad and Dad was with them. Dad was very clever. He used to show us tricks and acrobats. One of his cousins, he walked the Niagara Falls on a tight-rope - and Dad was telling me all of this. He used to show us .... When he was sober you couldn't wish for anyone better to you but, oh God, you'd wish him in his grave if he was drunk.

Did he recognise that he had this alcohol problem; that he shouldn't drink?

Well, I don't know whether he recognised it but he wouldn't have done anything about it. He wouldn't have done a thing about it because when he came down here .... Before he died in '64, he was working for a chap out at Charleville building a roof - putting a roof on a building - and he started working for this bloke and he fell (this is eight o'clock in the morning) he fell from the top of the roof onto a cement slab, flat on his back. The bloke raced up and the plumber was there, Jim Lang, the plumber, and this lord said to Jim Lang, 'Oh God, I haven't got a man insured on the place'. And Jim Lang said, 'As from now, George is employed with me, as from eight o'clock this morning - that was when he fell'. Anyway my father, he died not long, in the July - that happened early in ... and then he died in the July - cancer. I still think it

could have been the fall that could have caused it because cancer ate both lungs out. But he was down here - he came down and he was staying with me. Dad and I hadn't talked since the day peace was declared. We were still fighting because he told me that if ever I ... if ever he caught me with a beer in my hand or he ever caught me behind a bar serving a drink, he'd drag me across the bar. And anyway, the day peace was declared I was working at the 'Australian' Hotel and, of course, when they said - the couple of days before peace was declared - my boss said, 'It could be over any time'. I said, 'I don't care what I'm doing. When they announce peace is declared, whatever I'm doing I'm going to drop and go' and I don't drink but we did do a pub crawl that day. And it was Len's brothers and his sister and we all went on a pub crawl. I was working in the dining room and my boss walked in - I was serving breakfast - and my boss walked in and he said, 'It's all over'. I said, 'So am I' and I walked out. Everybody is sitting in there waiting for their breakfast. Anyway, we started on this pub crawl. We even had the decency to go up and visit all the people in the hospital. But my father was in St George. He arrived in St George and I was lucky. I was always one pub ahead of him. I was lucky to keep out of his road but that was the last time I'd even seen him until he arrived in my house in Inala here in 1964. So then I said to Dad, 'Dad, I don't allow Len drinking in the house and I'm not having you drinking in the house'. He said, 'No, mate, I'm just happy to see you. I won't drink in the house but would you put this in the fridge and if I need a drink when I'm in pain would you let me have it?' It was a bottle of gin and it was in the fridge. But unbeknown to me he had one under each leg in the bedroom of the bed and up on top of the wardrobe and underneath the wardrobe and he kept me awake there - it was two nights. He never went to sleep, just drinking. So I told him, I said, 'That's it'. So he went down to Eventide. A mate kept ringing me up from Eventide to come and sign him in because they wanted to sign him in to Wolston Park and I said, 'No, I'm not signing any

papers because I feel that Dad and I didn't get on and it wouldn't be right for me to sign him into the 'mad house', besides he's not mad.' They said, 'No, but he's very cunning'. So anyway, this doctor from the South Brisbane Hospital, he phoned me up six times in the one day and he said, 'I want you to come and sign these papers to put your father into Wolston Park'. I said, 'No, I'm not because I don't feel that it's the right thing when you're not real pally with him'. Finally he got Dad to sign it himself and signed him in. Then I contacted Dad's sister in Sydney and they came up and got him and took him down to Sydney. Well, he played up on them and in the end they discovered that he did have this cancer and they put him in the Church of England home, it's just like Mount Oliver here, and you stay there till you die. He even set fire to that place. What he used to do, he used to go to all different doctors and get tablets and then have a few beers and these tablets and the doctor from South Brisbane, from the P.A. hospital, was telling me he even had them hidden in his socks - the tablets –he said, “he's very cunning”. I said, 'He's not mad'. He said, 'No, but he's very, very cunning'. I said, 'Yeah, over the drugs'. But I didn't realise that he had cancer. If I'd have known that ... because I took him up to the Terrace and I saw five specialists with him because he had that fall and I said to Dad, 'You're entitled to compensation'. So the compensation office sent him up to the specialists and I took him up and this specialist said there was nothing the matter with him, it's only in his mind. So I believed them whereas it wasn't, it was very serious; the cancer ate the both lungs out.

How do you feel about your dad in retrospect, now he's passed away?

I'm very, very sorry I'm not educated to handle people that drink. You've got to know how - it's a sickness - and I'm not educated enough. You've got to know how to handle people's

things like that but I'm not and apparently if I had have been I might have been a lot more useful to him. I know he was sour that I was girl instead of a boy because that's what he wanted, because my cousin that's in Sydney, he idolised the ground he walked on and he sort of took my place - my cousin. Like everything my dad talked about it was about my cousin. But he was sour I wasn't a boy. I did all the things that a boy should. I used to have to go out during the winter months - he used to do fishing during the winter months - he was a professional fisherman. But you used to drag nets to drag bait and that, and I used to have my fingers and my feet bleeding from the cold water. One time he took me out, we were out near Cunnamulla fishing, and Dad rowed the boat and we went across the river and he was shooting at the same time, shooting kangaroos, like making extra money, getting the kangaroo skins. I remember this particular time we went across and he shot this big kangaroo but he didn't kill him, he wounded him and the kangaroo come at Dad and Dad picked up this big stick and he was hitting the kangaroo and I'm crying and I'm trying to hold his hand to stop him from hitting the kangaroo and I'm singing out, 'Don't kill him, Daddy, don't kill him, Daddy'. I can remember. I was saying, 'You're cruel' and going on and he never ... he just threw me and I fell and, of course, I was crying and I was giving him cheek, too, about how cruel he was but he didn't reprimand me there. On the way back in the boat, we were crossing the Warrego River, in the boat, and I couldn't swim and when we got in the middle of the river he threw me out of the boat and he said, 'Swim, you bear[?], swim'. I was drowning. My mother had to save me. I'd have drowned in that river. That's all he did to me for crying over him killing this kangaroo.

It's amazing you have any love for your father, at all.

But, as I said .... Isn't it terrible, though. I know was wrong stopping him from killing the kangaroo-because the

kangaroo was getting stuck into him-because I had a pet kangaroo and I had it from when it was little and it grew up, and when I was living in Charleville I didn't live all the time with Mum and Dad - this was when the kids were real small - I used to live at Heinemann's place and I used to live with Aunty Al and Uncle Charlie Heinemann. Anyway, I had this kangaroo as a pet but it got really big but Mum and Dad lived next door at Richardson's and if Mum wanted anything from the shop, she'd sing out for me to go to the shop. And this day I didn't want to go to the shop and she made me go and I was crying because I didn't want to go to the shop. And this damned kangaroo - my kangaroo - started following me so being a nasty little piece I turned around and I smacked the kangaroo's face for following me and it got stuck in and nearly killed me. Gave me a hell of a hiding, so they were going to shoot it. Anyway, this crippled boy, this boy of Richardson's, he wanted it so they gave it to him and, damn me, it did the same to him. In the end they had to shoot it. I lived with these Heinemanns when I was younger. This Doodie[?] Heinemann, she was a real character, of a morning when I'd wake up she used to say to me, 'You go over and you tell old Georgie such-and-such' - calling my father names. And I'd go over and I'd say what Doodie told me to say to Dad and I'd cop a hell of a hiding. To this day, my young sister that's down here, she said to me, 'God, you were a terrible kid. No wonder Dad used to get stuck into you.' But I said, 'How would I know? Doodie used to send me over to say these things to Dad and I'd go over and say them and get a hiding.' But they liked Dad. It wasn't because he was dark or anything. I never ever or I don't think he's come up against it either, any of this black business - my dad. I can never ever .... Wherever he went he was always accepted.

He never spoke about racism.

No, never. You'd never hear of it. I'd never heard of it all the time I ever went to school.

He was accepted openly by whites and blacks.

Yeah, by whites and blacks. But I never ever heard of it. Mum worked at Corone's there for years and years cooking, in the laundry and we were like .... Papa Corone had two daughters and it didn't cost Mum anything to clothe me because Nina and Nita's clothes came to me - you know, it all helped Mum - and the same with Estelle Calcino. I can remember all Estelle's good silk frocks and that used to come to me. I was the only one that had .... Dad spoilt the second daughter, Betty. She wouldn't wear anything second-hand. Money was tight back - that's back before the war - and Dad spoilt Betty rotten. No matter what Betty asked for she got. Joanie and I - Joanie's the youngest one - well, we weren't spoilt like Betty. It used to make me a bit sour that Dad sort of gave to Betty; everything went to Betty. But anyway we got through, we got through life and I'm lucky, I suppose.

Gladys, when did you first meet Lenny?

He came down on leave from the Islands and he was at the pictures one night with his mum and on the way out from the pictures his mum stopped me to introduce me to her son. He was in uniform and I looked and he was very nice. She had told me about him beforehand. Her and my father were very good friends and she called at the hotel when she knew Gladys Saunders was working at the 'Australian' Hotel to introduce herself and to tell me that her and Dad were very good friends and she'd like me to meet her son, Leonard. So when he came home she introduced me to him. Well, he was only home on leave shortly then. When he came home on leave in 1946, when he got discharged from the Air Force, he was in St George and he came to my birthday party on 4 February as a guest.

How old were you then?

Seventeen. He came to my birthday party on 4 February at the Greek's cafe in St George and then he took me home that night and that night he asked me to marry him and we got married on 16 February.

The first night you went out.

Yes. He told me that he had planned that when he saw my photo when he was up in the Islands - that we were going to get married. And for years and years and years when he'd get a bit cranky with me he always said to me, 'You never even had the decency to say, yes, that I would marry him' (laughs). I treated it as a joke. I thought it was a young bloke home on leave, thought he was going to be a real smart alec and take me out and thought he was going to be smart but I wasn't ready to be a play toy for the Air Force. So he asked me to marry him but he always said, 'You never even had the decency to say yes'.

What did you say to him?

I got that stunned, I couldn't believe it and he said that he had it in his mind when he first saw my photo when he was in the Islands that I was going to be his wife and I said, 'Oh, we'll wait and see'. Anyway, the arrangements were made. It was that quick.

So you didn't accept but the arrangements were being made.

The arrangements were made for 16 February. There's no Church of England minister in St George; we had to get married in the Presbyterian Church. I mean I didn't know him and I thought he was fooling. I didn't think he was fair dinkum. I honestly didn't think he was fair dinkum but he was. Anyway, it was at a time when the coupons - you had to use coupons for material -

so I had to get married in a short frock because I didn't have coupons for a wedding frock. I got married in pale blue. A friend of mine made my frock. That had to be done in a hurry when we started talking. He used to come up morning, noon and night to the hotel. I was working in the dining room and he was always at one of the windows - at the dining room window.

What sort of courtship? Did he send you flowers or letters or cards?

No, Len was never one to buy presents, never ever. All our married life he's never bought presents, never. Never bought presents. I never even got an engagement ring.

What did your mum and dad think?

My dad, he had no say in it. My mum she objected strongly. Oh, she hit the roof. See, I had to get permission to get married and she wasn't going to sign the paper for me to get married. In fact it was the very last day, the day before the wedding, the paper arrived that I could get married; she was in Cunnamulla and she was very much against me marrying him.

Just going back a sec, when you first met Lenny he was in uniform, he was a RAAF pilot. Did that have any weight?

Well, he looked very smart and he was really handsome. Anyone would have fallen for him. He was lovely. Yeah, I liked him. I liked him from the beginning but I thought he was going to be a smart alec and spin me a tale. I thought he was going to just spin a tale and then leave you. Love and leave you, sort of thing; that's what I thought. That's the very ...

You thought he might want to take advantage of you ....

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You thought he might want to take advantage of you, then disappear up to the Islands.

Yeah, and I wasn't coming into any of that. And honestly I really thought that but then when I realised that it was going to be fair dinkum and it was going to be so soon, when I told my boss, my boss hit the roof. She said, 'No, Gladys, I can't allow you to get married because you don't know anything about him and it's too soon'. She said, 'No, it's the wrong thing to do'. Then his mother changed. Before I was real nice girl (laughs) but then when she found out we were going to get married, I wasn't a nice girl (laughs). I was marrying the 'snowy-haired' boy of the family. So then his father came up to the hotel and I was sitting in the office with my boss and we were talking. Anyway, his father came up to see me and he came up to the office. He said to me, 'Do you know something? I just thought I'd like to come up, make myself known and accept you into the family and tell you how proud I am to have you come into the family as my new daughter'. And anyway, I don't know whether the 'old girl' [inaudible]not that the old man did. But the old man was a lovely person. There was one thing I liked about it - about our family. Like my mum was white, Dad was dark and Len's - there was no .... It was a suitable marriage. We were both the same.

You had no idea of the significance of Len in the Air Force,as being the RAAF's only Aboriginal fighter pilot.

Oh hell, no, no, that was something that we've never ever .... That never ever come to light until Bob Hall came up to the house, came up to Inala. He rang and came up from Canberra;

that's the first we knew of that. No, that was years and years and years after we married. All our family had grown up and married and shifted away from home. No, that's only happened in the '80s.

Can you describe the marriage itself?

Well, we've had some marvellous times together. We had a lovely life.

When you actually got married, though?

When we got married. We got married in St George. We had a nice wedding. It was down at Len's mum and dad's place. And then we went to Goondiwindi for three weeks and, of course, I'd given up my job at the hotel against my boss's wishes; she didn't want to lose me. So we went to Goondiwindi and Len was on leave. Regarding an engagement ring, I didn't want that. I said to him, I would rather he spend the money .... Well, we had a good time on the money, put it that way. We went out to everything that was on and we enjoyed our life together that way. Three weeks we had a nice time.

But on the honeymoon you were really both quite naive, weren't you?

Oh God, yeah. Well, we went first to 'Goondi' we went to the cafe. We booked into a boarding house and then we went to a cafe to have something to eat and that was - Len always had a drink before his meal but this is the first I knew of it, see. So we were at Pullos's[?] cafe in Goondiwindi and he said to me, 'Well, order the meal and I'm going to go down to the hotel and I'll have a drink'. So he went to the hotel - well, I used to smoke and that's one thing he didn't like, he hated women smoking because he didn't smoke and he didn't like me smoking.

So while he was away down at the pub I could have a .... I didn't object to him going to have a drink because I couldn't smoke in front of him, he didn't like it. So that suited me fine. This cafe we were going was owned by the Pulloses,the Greeks, and so the chap said to me, 'You're a stranger in town, aren't you?' and I said, 'Yes, I just got married in St George and we're here. We're going to have three or four weeks here.' He said, 'Where are you from?'. I said, 'Originally, I come from Charleville'. 'Oh', he said, 'My best friend is in Charleville'. And I said, 'And who might that be?'. He said, 'Jim Chicalas'. I said, 'Oh God, what a small world'. He said, 'In fact Jim and I, we go away on holidays each year'. I said, 'You wouldn't believe it, guess who minds Jim's cafe each year when he goes away on holidays for the six weeks? - my mum. And I go and help, too' - at the cafe. This Pullos said to me, 'Would you like to work here in Goondiwindi?'. I said, 'No, I don't know what we had planned'. We didn't talk about any work or what we were going to do after we .... We were just out enjoying ourself and, of course, all Len's family lived at Toomelah Mission which is at Boggabilla, just from Goondiwindi. So he wanted me to meet all his people and I'd never been on a mission in my life. So he wanted me to meet them all and, of course, he took me out to meet them all. They were very nice people. The people that I met were really lovely. There was one old bloke there, old Charlie Dennison, and they call him 'Grandad'; the Waters called him Grandad. Well, he died at 110. I met him there, too. All his family, all his relatives and that, and they were all lovely people but a lot of the women - there were a lot of women there - that I admired. Gee, they were clean - their yards. I'm a terrible person but I noticed there wasn't a weed or a bit of rubbish or a leaf; they swept them every day and it was lovely and clean and I passed the remark to Len, I said how good they were. And then we went back to St George and who should send for me as soon as they knew I was in St George, was my old boss. She said, 'Gladys, we want you to come back and work at the hotel till we get a

cook from Brisbane; the cook's left us and we want you to come back and cook at the pub for us on the condition we'll give you flats in the hotel for you and Len. Len had a job offered to him at Independent Motors, next door to the hotel. She said, 'What the arrangements will be: as soon as Len walks in for his meal, Len is to be served first and the board and lodging is free as long as you'll come back and work for us'. Anyway, I put it to Len about it and he said, 'No wife of mine is going to work'. I said, 'Don't be stupid, we've got nothing to stop us from working and it's a good opportunity, we can save. We could live on one wage and bank the other, sort of thing', because my wages were good at that time, plus free board and lodgings. And I used to take in washing and ironing from the travellers that go through, too, because I used to love to dress. I loved spending money on clothes. [Inaudible.] Anyway, I finally talked him around to it and we went and stayed at the hotel. We stayed there until I had Lenise, the eldest girl. I had to leave when I had her. I had about two or three months off work. I was living in a house. I had a room at this house. Len had gone back shearing by this time because the garage man, he had a man that was qualified with a ticket and Len had to give up the job because Len didn't have a mechanics ticket. Len had to give up the job whether he liked it or not for union rules, so he went back shearing. Anyway, I was in this room and I had Lenise. My old boss come to me again: 'Gladys, will you please come back to the hotel, we need you? You can have a room at the hotel blah, blah ...' 'But', I said, 'I've got the baby and I'm breast feeding the baby and I've got the baby into the habit. I like to bath the baby at eight o'clock - between eight and half past - of a morning.' 'Look', she said, 'You can do anything you want. We'll organise everything so long as you'll come back and work for us'. Plus, I'd have the room there. She said, 'If the baby cries, whatever you're doing, drop it and go to the baby'. What could you do? He's out in the bush, so I went back. He didn't like it at first but I said to him, 'Hell, you know, as

long as the baby's all right'. Plus, the hotel family - her daughter was there with her kids and they took Lenise like she was one of theirs. They treated me like if I was one of them. They really did treat me well.

Did Lenny ever talk about his Air Force life during that time?

Well, yeah, he used to talk about his mates and things that had happened on their travels around. Len was engaged to a girl in the Air Force. A girl called Margaret Jones - she's from Strathfield in Sydney - and they were very, very serious about one another and he kept all her letters, had them all done in a ribbon and he still had them after we were married and it was only after Lenise was born that he got rid of them, but they were very serious. The only thing is that stopped anything coming of that was Len's mother. She wrote to this girl and she told her that she didn't think it was right that a white girl should marry an Aboriginal. Well, the girl didn't ever see Len's family. She was from Sydney. She was in the Air Force. And I think that was a bit tough. It did hurt him a lot because apparently they did like one another a hell of a lot. In fact I met a couple at Kempsey that knew Len really well, right through his Air Force career - it was Rona and Ralph Rudder. They live in Kempsey. Well, Ralph's dead now but Rona is still there. We still call there when we go to Port Macquarie - we call and see Rona on the way through. And they even came up to Brisbane to see us. They told me that he was very serious about her but his mother put a stop to it.

What was Lenny like as a young married man?

He still liked to be one of the boys. I was working. I had to work until eight, half-past eight at night. He'd have his meal as soon as he came home from the garage. He'd go and have his

bath and get dressed. As I said, my boss said he had to be served first for dinner at night, same with his lunch and his breakfast. So he'd have his meal and then he used to go and play pool with the boys. He was always with the boys of a night-time until I finished work. Now, he still lived a single man's life. See, that's what spoilt both of us, I think, because every dog fight that was on we were at, sort of thing. We were at all the parties. We loved dancing. We'd go to all the balls. We'd go to all the football matches around: Dirranbandi, Cunnamulla - travel around, and he liked being with the boys. Well, I didn't stop that because, as I said, I was working until eight, half-past eight at night. I used to have to finish up and clean up in the kitchen and that. We worked it out. That was pretty good. Nothing upset our life until I ended up giving up work. The first Christmas, I think it was, I gave .... I was down at his mum's place and he had to go and do some shopping for himself. I asked him to pick up new singlets, underpants, socks, handkerchiefs and he took the money to get it all but he arrived home that night with nothing but he was tanked and I was at his mother's place. I was fuming. I was fairly 'spitting chips'. Now that's our first good fight.

How long had you been married then?

That was in the December, that would be ten months, that’s our first good fight. And I started to go crook on him and his mother said - and his sister said - 'Leave him alone' because he was the snowy-haired boy with his mother, he couldn't do any wrong. I was fuming. I didn't care whether I was in Buckingham Palace or where I was. They didn't like me going crook on him and they said leave him alone. So I told them to shut up, that I was married to one in the family, not the mob. With that he went and walked out the front door and he went. So I thought, damn it, I'm not putting up with an alcoholic. This was the first time that he'd ever got like this. So I

went up to the post office and I was ringing Corone's Hotel in Charleville to see if I could get a job back there because that's what I was going to do. I was going to leave and go back there. To this day, I'll always hear this: I was in the phone boxes waiting - you used to have to book your call with the Exchange, this is going back years, book your call and then wait for them to get the call through - and I heard this 'seven beers with the wrong woman'. It was Lenny over in the pub and apparently they all had him standing on a chair or a table and they were all around him and this is what he was singing to them, 'seven beers with the wrong woman' (laughs). Gee, every time I hear it I always think of that night.

How did you get back together again?

Oh well, when he sobered up and then he came home. He said he wouldn't do that any more to me. He knew he'd done wrong.

He always had a very deep affection for you, didn't he?

Oh yeah. Oh don't worry. I idolised the ground he walked on but, as I said, I couldn't beat the 'stubbie'. If I could have beaten the drink, we would never have been apart. When we worked out in the bush, when he used to go out and do bush work, I used to go out and live out in the bush with him and I used to even work with him out in the bush - help him with the fencing - and I didn't mind. The only time I ever got wild in the bush - really ropable. I don't know whether you know the place where Princess Anne, when she came out to Australia and she went out to Cunnamulla and she was out at this place call Talbarea. It's a beautiful property and it looks like a city but everything is painted white. Anyway, we were out there building fences but there were huge bushfires all the way around but we had to cart water to where we were camped. We were in a marquee tent. I had all the kids.

How many kids did you have with you?

I had five with me then. Maxine was born down here in Brisbane. But I'm out in the bush, out at this Talbarea and these bushfires all raging all the way around and the Len and the man that was working for him, they decided they were going to go to town. Now, there's only one vehicle and they go. They were away for a couple of days on the grog. On the Saturday night, and they got back early hours of the morning. I was so wild. 'Right, pack the truck up now' - this is early hours of the morning - 'Pack the truck and turn it around and you're taking me and these kids back to town', because I was terrified. What say .... I wasn't near the homestead, near the station, I had no truck, nothing and if those fires had have come anywhere near us, anything could have happened, so that was my trip out in the bush. So I went back to town and I bought a block of ground in Cunnamulla and I put the tent up in Cunnamulla and I lived in the tent. I bought the block down the back of the Oxford Hotel. It ran from one end of the street to the other and my mum lived over there, too. I bought that and I lived there till I shifted back to St George. Then I went back to St George and I went into a Housing Commission house there. We did a lot of bush work. We went out to Walmsley's at St George, building yards and fences. And then we were up at Rossmore, that's when I thought he was going around the twist with all his mates up there. They have what they call - all these station owners' sons - and they called them the 'Moonie Loonies' and he got involved with them. They used to just come and get him, too, and the station owner that we worked for, he was just as mad as the lot of them. In fact the station owner that we were working for - my uncle he was the announcer at 4GR in Toowoomba - he introduced Darcy Thompson to his wife and she was a lovely person. She had to put up with what I did, too, with these ratbags. They used to get up to some terrible mischief - oh, you've got no idea. If they came to Rossmore when I was at the homestead, I used to

make them sit on the verandah where I could see them because you wouldn't trust any of them; you don't know what they would do to you. They were absolutely raving mad. These Moonie Loonies, one of the blokes - one of the blokes working our their property - he was in bed, poor devil, and dozing off to sleep and one of the blokes raced in and he put a revolver in his chest. He said, 'How would you like to be shot?' and the other one fired another revolver and the poor bloke (laughs) didn't know whether he was hit or not. They used to have grog - they'd have cartons of grog - planted out in the property, all around the property, and tell their father that they were going out mustering. Len used to be with them. He was just as mad as them. Darcy was with them, too. The day that I was to go to hospital to have Julie, the next day was a public holiday, and Darcy Thompson came up home to pick Len up and I said to him, 'I'm going into hospital tonight'. And Darcy said, 'Well, what we'll do is Len can shear tomorrow and being a holiday he'll get two for one, if he'll do the shed tomorrow - shear tomorrow. And if he shears tomorrow and you have the baby tomorrow, I'll make sure you get the cheque - the full cheque'. So damn me, I had Julie and, of course, I said to the sister and the doctor, 'That's the first time I've ever got paid for having a kid. I'm going to get this cheque; Darcy Thompson is going to make sure I get the cheque.' They came in with a sad story. They decided, seeing that I was going to have the baby, the Moonie Loonies, Len and Darcy, they decided to go target practising and they never worked, none of them worked, the rotten things; they went on the grog. I got nothing. I was real sour.

But Lenny got mixed up with the Moonie Loonies well before you got married when he visited the house of ill repute which I think you know about.

He told me, yeah, things like that. He told me about things like that. Yeah, I know all about that. Nobody can .... There's nothing he's done that he hasn't told me.

What do you think created this intimacy between you, because you had a special relationship in spite of the fact later on in life that you did split up?

The only thing that made me split up from Len was I couldn't bear - I didn't like him drinking because I reckoned it degraded him.

It's really a direct reflection on what happened with your father, too.

Yes, but also I reckoned it degraded him. I didn't mind - it was all right him having a couple but I didn't like him .... I've got this thing about, I don't like to see an Aboriginal person drunk. I don't care about anybody else. It's just something; I don't like to see. I reckon it's very degrading.

Why do you think there's a perception amongst many whites that Aboriginals have a problem with alcohol?

Well, they have because they get to the stage where they drink wine. I don't like it but Len never ever drank wine. Len only ever drank whisky when we first got married. Well, it never used to affect him because he was used to it. It didn't affect him. When he started out in the sheds then and they started drinking rum and beer, it was a different story. I'm one of these - when I got married, you get married for better or worse no matter what and I don't believe in broken marriages. I hate broken marriages. That’s something I never ever wanted in my life. In fact I did everything I could possibly do to try and stop Len from drinking. I went to all the doctors. I even

went to the doctors here. They even done blood tests. They even told him that his liver was going through drink. I did everything. I begged and begged and begged. And people that he thought were friends that drink - I don't think they were friends. We had nice friends but they never ever got to that stage and he never ever got to that stage where he didn't care where he was or what he was doing. As I said, fancy him hitting that sister in the hospital at Cunnamulla; you know, that just goes to show. He had about four or five trips to the Cunnamulla hospital through grog and each time it was getting me down because I couldn't do nothing about it. I couldn't stop it.

Did the doctors believe part of the problem may have been his war-time experiences?

They never said anything like that. They never said anything like that. The only doctor that ever said anything about any war-time experiences was the doctor here that used to see him here and said about his knees - see, Len had two artificial knees - and he said that could have been caused through his war … jumping off the planes on the tarmacs. That's the only time that anyone ever said anything.

How was he looked at by fellow Aboriginals? I mean, he achieved a very great status.

He's very, very popular with everybody. The people here in Inala, now, they were very, very sour over the point that there was no death notice in the paper to let them where Len was getting buried; they would have been at Len's funeral in St George. They were very sour over it. In fact one man, Ray Thompson - he lives up here at Durack - and he said people came over to him at the civic centre: 'Where's Len getting buried?'. One chap - his son is a Queen's Counsel; I think he was the

first Aboriginal barrister and solicitor and Queen's Counsel, McDermott[?]. He lives here in Inala and him and Len were really good friends. They were all running around trying to find out where Len was going to get buried. I said to Maxine, 'They were very sour that there was no notice to say where he was going to get buried so that they could have attended his funeral.' Oh no, he was popular with everybody. He was very popular.

Do you believe it was fate that brought you together?

Oh yes, it has to be because I'm not very well liked. When I went to St George, I kept to myself but I had a terrible habit - I used to walk with my head in the air. I don't think I'm anybody but, I mean, that's me. I used to stay to myself and a lot of people didn't like me the way I used to stay to myself and stuff. For Len's mother to find out who I was - that I was George Saunders's daughter. She came to the hotel and made herself known; introduced herself to me. Well, I didn't know anything about her and she said that they grew up together, in fact she was Dad's bridesmaid at his first wedding. I didn't know anything. She invited me to her place and in her home she had all these lovely photos of Len and all the family. She was showing me everything and all the things that he'd sent and bought her. She found a photo on the wall of Len in his civilian suit. I fell in love with it and I dearly loved it. I used to go there just specially to look at this photo. He was in a civilian suit.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

It's not so many years ago, finally I got the photo but there was only ever the one but I still idolised that photo. I think

it was absolutely beautiful. He said to me, 'I've never known anybody to fall in love with a photo', although he reckons he did with mine; the little one that his mum sent him up to the islands of me.

It brings out this fate business.

Yes, I still think that we were meant to meet and we were meant to get married because he was determined when he saw the photo up in the islands that I was going to be the girl he married but I liked that photo on the wall at her place but I didn't say nothing to her because I could see the way she talked that he was 'mumma's boy'.

Did you ever have a telepathic communication?

I don't think so.

Did ever feel as though when he was in trouble that you had a feeling about ...?

Oh yes, I knew when something - I always had that feeling when something was wrong with him. A few times when he was away shearing and he'd got sick a couple of times I sort of had a warning that something was wrong with him.

What about when he died, did you have a feeling about that?

I had quite a lot of nights that I've been out there before he died that there was something wrong but I didn't know what. I had a warning. Like, I got a shock that he'd died. It was a shock that he'd died but I knew something was really wrong but I thought it was his sickness. I'm sour that I'm not qualified

that I couldn't help him but I wouldn't have been any use since last year when I was operated on; I wouldn't have been any use to him. I got to the stage when I was out in Cunnamulla where lots of times he'd upset me, I knew he was having a drink. You could tell it in his eyes and his speech and I didn't want him coming near me like that because it upset me. Len was a very smart looking man and I just didn't like him going down degrading himself. He was a really smart looking man and I did love him very much. I did.

Gladys, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW