



Transcript: Peter Bondfield Interview

FULL TRANSCRIPT

So we've got quite a few questions for you.

Yes.

So there's 15 I think.

Oh.

They're short. So –

Start from the very beginning.

Where were you born?

I was born in Queanbeyan on - the nursing home it was in Queanbeyan on 4 July 1928.

Wow okay.

How's that?

Yeah that's good. Thank you. And what did you do when you were little, like a boy?

When I was little?

Hmm.

Well, I was dyslexic, I hated school and all I ever wanted to do was own a horse and a dog. So when I was about 12 I managed to buy a horse, unbroken, and my uncle gave me a dog. I kept the horse in my mother's chook yard. So I used to go riding whenever I could. And I always wanted to be with horses.

How did you buy the horse at 12?

Well the horse cost me 7 pounds. But when I was a young fella going to school I had two jobs: one job was delivering papers all over Queanbeyan and the other job was delivering milk. We had a milkman there. I thought he was god because he had a big black horse that stepped out and rattled the milk cart. And he pulled up one day and offered me a job when I was 13 years old.

So I used to get up at half past three and go on the milk cart from 4 o'clock till 8, and then go to school. So when he saw I was keen on horses, although I was only 13, he got his milk carts converted into breaking-in gigs. That's long shafts and brakes on them so the horse bucks he's not kicking

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the bottom out of your cart. So we used to leave at 4 o'clock in the morning.

And those days there was no milk bottles. They were all measures. You had a vat in the bottom of the cart – a 20 gallon vat. You put two of them in the milk cart and you'd turn a tap on and hold a measure under it and then you'd run into the house – nobody locked their houses those days. People were all honest. So you'd sometimes run into the kitchen and you'd pour that milk into a billy can they left on the table – probably take six pence off the table – and that's how – otherwise they sometimes left it on the back step but very often in the kitchen.

And I was getting big money for that. I think I was getting about 2 pound 10 for that a week. But it was seven days a week. And I was delivering papers as well. So when I was 13 I was getting 3 pound 10 a week and going to school. And when I left school I went jackarooing and I got 2 pound 10 a week jackarooing full-time.

So when did you move to Queensland and why?

When did I move – oh gee you've got a great big gap there. You've got a very big gap because we had friends and relations in Bombala – that's 200km south of Canberra on the Victorian border. That's where my mother had her family property, was on the family property, and Valerie was living there – my wife – she was living down there too.

And we started playing polocrosse when Valerie left school so when I was courting Valerie I had to ride a horse 30 miles through the bush when I was courting Valerie. So I did that – had to do that on Saturday morning and ride back home Sunday night. And we used to play polocrosse and that's where we met, playing polocrosse.

And I proposed to her those days, and I then I asked her, I proposed to her, I said "Oh forget about it because I've got no home or no security here to support a wife". And it was after that, that I was offered the job to manage Palgrove from the Rogerson family. So I thought well here's a chance. So I came up here with my little Vauxhall car and a couple of dogs, and my mother came with me to help get me started and cook. So we settled in here.

And then when Valerie came up for Christmas to Pikedale – you saw the photo of Pikedale – she had Christmas there with her mother's family – I proposed to her then again and she said yes! So we didn't muck about. We got married – that was in December. So we got married in January and that was in 1953. So we've been married for 60 years this coming January.

Oh wow!

That's our diamond wedding. So I've got to look for a very cheap diamond to give Valerie for our diamond wedding.

So who taught you how to plait?

Well that's an interesting one too. When I was 16 I was jackerooing on a property – you won't be very far from it when you go to Jerrabomberra – a place called Lanyon. And my great grandfather, he came out from

England with a man called Lanyon and they settled on adjoining properties. But Lanyon had to go back to England with family problems. And so my great grandfather took over Lanyon and he built the first homestead there.

You'll see it when you go down for your holiday. In fact you should see it because the foundation of the original home is still there.

Anyway I was there for a year and there was an old fellow that drove a horse and sulky, and he had a big handlebar moustache. And he would drive the horse and sulky into Queanbeyan for his goods – about 16 mile it was – convert that to kilometres about 30 I s'pose or 28 – and he'd drive the horse and sulky into Queanbeyan. He'd get all his stores, put them in the sulky and he'd have quite a few rums while he was in there. He'd manage to get into the sulky and he'd go to sleep and the horse would go 16 mile, take him home all the way to Lanyon.

Anyway that old fella taught me the basics of how to plait and I was pretty rough but all I ever wanted to do was leather work. I used to make bridles and do a lot of leather work. So he taught me the basics. And when I went further south jackarooing on my mother's family property, I used to plait rough whips for the Snowy River men down there – 'cause that's the Snowy River country. And they were pretty rough but they were very good, they were very effective. So that's how I learnt; that's where I learnt.

So when did you start plaiting and why? Well of course, you wanted to do it.

Yes well that's when I started plaiting.

So 16 I think you said?

I was 16. And I used to plait whips. They were rough whips but I loved leather work and I loved plaiting. But then after meeting Valerie and when we were married, we were very busy. We had four children. I didn't plait any whips for 40 years – might've been 50 years – and then an old fellow in Warwick was plaiting whips and he got me in there and I used to give him a few tips and he'd give me a few, then he'd get me to try his whips out and see how they were and we'd crack his whips in the backyard and all the women would put their heads over the fence and complain that their dogs were under the bed and running away and all that sort of thing. But it was a lot of fun.

So how long did it take to make your first whip?

To make my first whip – oh that was pretty rough. It probably took me a full day to do that, to cut it out and plait it properly. But those days it was all kangaroo hide then. But the fact that they were pretty rough, you know, they had their weaknesses, but they were very good to use and the old bushmen liked them.

What was the award from the Queen for?

Oh that was an OAM – Order of Australia Medal. I'll show it to you if you like. That was the OAM – Order of Australia – and the reason for that one was I did 45 years commentating at the Stanthorpe Show and I was very involved in the Show Society – in fact the whole family were. We used to

ride horses and David showed his cattle there and the whole family were involved. And also the Apple & Grape Harvest Festival, I think I did about 20 or 30 years commentating in the main street for that.

But my voice, I was renowned for my ability to throw my voice out and make it heard. We went into some musicals. The acoustics weren't good in the Civic Centre in Stanthorpe but my voice – I could always be heard because my voice would go out and everyone could hear me when I was singing or talking or whatever I was doing.

So were you in any plaiting competitions and if you were, how many?

Oh that's a good question. No I haven't been much in plaiting competitions. I've put a couple of whips in, in Clifton, and I got a first prize there two years ago I think it was. But I haven't been in many plaiting competitions. Mainly because the competition now they're so strong and the plaiters are getting so good that my whips, although they're good working whips, they don't stand up in the competition.

There was a Stanthorpe Champion Whip for a few years though?

Oh Stanthorpe – I've had Champion Whip in Stanthorpe Show for about five years in a row. What was it Valerie? Champion Leather Article or Plaited Article in the hobby section, yes. In the leather section.

In all of the plaiting competitions, what was the best prize?

What was the best prize? Oh well there weren't any great prizes. I think probably Stanthorpe every year and I got the Champion Plaited Article there for about five years in a row.

It was \$5 prize money?

No it was \$20. It was \$20 for the championship.

He told you it was \$5! Gave you \$5 and kept the rest.

\$25 and a trophy and a ribbon, a sash, champion sash. That was all.

So what's your favourite type of whip?

My favourite whip is a 2-tone plaited kangaroo hide whip, 12-plait 2-tone kangaroo hide.

The actual body of the whip is 2-tone?

Everything's 2-tone. It's the one Valerie's got there. So you must be nearly at the end of your questions are you?

Just about. Yeah we're on the last page.

Oh goodness.

Oh wow look at that, it does look like a snake. Looks like a red-bellied black. Do you just plait whips or do you do belts?

I used to plait a lot of belts but seeing I've had a stroke I might now start – belts are easier than whips – I might get back into plaiting belts again. I also plait neck ties and I'm known as 'The Guy with the Plaited Tie' because I'm the only one that plaits ties. Valerie if you've got five minutes you might get

one of my plaited ties, the one that's not done up at the moment that I had – and also the OAM things.

What was the hardest thing you've made?

What was the hardest thing I've made? Oh that's a good question. I think the 12-plait whips, 2-tone whips, they were probably the hardest, but now that I've done a few they're getting easier.

So they're getting easier now that you've practiced with one or two...

Yes, yes.

Have you done anything for anyone famous?

Have I done anything for...?

Anyone famous?

Oh anyone famous? Yes. Guy McLean who just won a horse breaking competition in America against the best horsemen in the world – Americans and Canadians and Guy McLean – I plait his whips and he does a whip plaiting exhibition in all his shows and he uses my whips 'cause he prefers them.

Excellent. Do you have any nicknames and if so how did you get them? Well we know you're 'The Man with the Plaited Tie'.

Yes.

Do you have any other nicknames? And how did you get them?

Well I had a nickname at school because my family all had big ears and I was christened Donkey at school, but we all had big ears. They stuck straight out and so all of my relations have big ears that stick out. But they hear very well.

So you said you had 'The Man with the Plaited Tie' – when did you get that moniker?

Oh I was nicknamed 'The Man with the Plaited Tie' probably ten years ago when I first started plaiting neck ties and I've plaited a few for different ones, and I've given people some to take overseas. Friends of ours took a horse team, a pony club team, over to America and that was his pride and joy. He took one of my plaited ties and he gave it away to the American coach of the American team.

Do you think there's a future for plaiting?

Oh yes. Plaiting is more popular now than it ever was because there are lots of competitions for whip cracking. In Queensland we have the Queensland Championships at Clifton; in New South Wales they have the New South Wales Championships there at Glen Innes; and then in Sydney Royal Show they have the Australian, the National Whip Cracking Competition. So whip cracking they are very, very good. With two whips. They have whip in each hand and they can crack so fast it sounds like a machine gun. They're very clever.

What about for working-type whips though? Do you think that people are still going to be using whips to drive cattle and stuff like that?

Yes. Yes see years ago every bushman, his pride and joy was his stockwhip and he didn't ever go out on his horse without the whip over his arm and he used that for mustering cattle and sheep. And they're very handy if a bull starts to look at you as though he wants to charge and you give him a clip on the nose with a whip and he changes his mind then.

And people still are using whips for that sort of thing?

Yes. They still use them, and old bushmen still use whips. In fact we had a man managing Valerie's property down at Bombala and he would never go out without a whip over his arm. Milking the cows in the morning he'd have a whip over one arm and the milk bucket in the other arm. But he'd just carry it. He felt undressed without a whip. And when he was breaking in young horses he would always get on the young horse with a whip over his arm and he learned that the whip was a diversion on a young horse. The horse would get confused and he wouldn't think about bucking because he was too confused with the whip cracking.

Well, I think that that is it.

Oh.

That was painless. Thanks a lot Mr Bondfield.

END OF TRANSCRIPT