**Wooragee Landcare – Oral History Program**

Transcript of Oral History with Pauline Carson and Tess Lucas (Inaugural Committee Members)

Interviewee – Ashleigh Giffney (Burke Museum, Beechworth)

Observer – Karen Bowley (Current Secretary)

Ash – Alright it’s recording. So my name is Ashleigh Giffney, and I am the Collections Manager of the Burke Museum and I am doing an oral history here today with Pauline and Tess. Todays date is the eleventh of the eleventh twenty two and it is approximately eleven am in the morning. So Pauline, I’ll get you to introduce yourself.

Pauline – Oh my name is Pauline. Do you want the surname too?

Ash – Yep

Pauline – Pauline Carson, and umm I was involved with Wooragee Landcare when it was first formed.

Ash – Perfect. And Tess

Tess – My name is Dolores Lucas but I’m known as Tess. I first came to Wooragee in nineteen sixty three, to a very run down property, so I know the work that goes into restoring a farm that’s full of rabbits and bracken and blackberries.

Ash – Ah fantastic. Well let’s start off with umm how did you both find yourselves working with Wooragee Landcare?

Pauline – Well umm Landcare had been a new movement that had been developed through the collaboration between the Victorian Farmers Federation and, and the Victorian State government, and so there was starting to be a…. groups starting up, and there had been a….. there was an interest in such a group setting up in Wooragee. So they held a meeting at the hall and umm invited Tony Ransom from Springhurst Landcare Group to come and talk to land umm landholders in Wooragee to talk about potentially setting up a Landcare Group in our area. Umm what date was that – that was nineteen….

Karen – nineteen eighty…

Pauline – Eight?

Karen – Eight because you formed in nineteen eighty nine

Pauline – OK

Karen - Is that right?

Pauline – Yeah. This was umm yes, that.. Tony Ransom came and spoke to the meeting and then after he left we had, you know, put it to the vote and decided yes we’d like to have a landcare group in our area and, and then we….a committee was formed and they called for people to ahh be involved in that and that’s how Tess came to be the first President, Dot Stelling was the first Treasurer, and I put my hand up to do the Treasurer ship. I was fairly new to the district, we’d only arrived in nineteen eighty six, December eighty six umm so I didn’t feel qualified to….to be involved …. you know, umm with the nuts and bolts of landcare activities ‘cos you know I was still new, and had come from the city, but I had experience with ahh book keeping and finance so I thought I could probably look after the finances for them, when they asked.

Karen – So Dot was the Secretary – is that right?

Tess - Yes

Pauline – Yes Dot was the secretary, yes

Karen - So who, who organized that first meeting? Who was the mover and shaker?

Pauline – Would that have been Bert?

Tess – I’m not sure. It didn’t come through the Lands Department did it? Like ummm

Pauline – ohhh and Dennis Martin

Karen – Dennis Martin..

Pauline - was from the DSE I think they were at the time.

Tess – Yes, that’s most likely

Pauline – cos They had a number of title changes over the years but I think at that particular time they were called DSE, yeah, and they were in that building next door. Uhh, no wait a minute….what’s the telegraph station, the back part of that was where they used to have their offices, yeah

Karen – And Was Springhurst the very first Victorian Landcare group, and Wooragee would have been the second?

Tess – Not sure about that

Pauline – No I’m not sure, but look you’d have to say that Springhurst was one of the very early ones without knowing, saying it was actually the first but it certainly one of the very early ones. And it was from their experience and their success that we sort of piggy backed off that to get ourselves running. And we identified weeds and rabbits, was the, as Tess said, about particularly on your property and it was, you know, lots of rabbits and where you are now Karen that was a …….

Karen – ….rife with rabbits and weeds.

Pauline – rife with rabbits and it was a purple patch, your place. (To Tess) Not.. I don’t think you were, you were more blackberries weren’t you?

Tess – Not, not really bad, it was a lot of rabbits,

Pauline – just the rabbits more

Tess - Because the farmer had turned 80 and he’d stopped farming quite a few years before that

Ashleigh – So that was some of the first activities that you did as President?

Tess - Exactly

Ash – so, you know, tell me more about these hmm first activities that you did

Tess – well we did concentrate on trying to get rid of the rabbits. Ummm there were people in the district very reluctant to do anything when it come to lasing….laying ten eighty poison umm some people couldn’t do it, their fences weren’t good enough to keep their stock out, and so the poor man next door that was doing his best kept getting reinfected because the fences weren’t rabbit proof and that was very disheartening. But umm yeah we overcame a lot of that, so that was helpful

Ash – So what is it like today?

Pauline - Well I’d have to say I feel, that you know, I can drive through Wooragee now and you don’t see any purple

Tess - No

Ash – What does the purple mean?

Tess – No you don’t see many

Pauline – Patterson’s Curse

Tess – There were huge areas of it

Pauline – Yes…quite a number of patches through the Wooragee valley and you could see that if nothing was done about it it would become a major problem. Because also it gives the cattle, and horses, hmm particularly the ones with white faces, it burns their skin and you know gives them problems

Tess - Horses especially

Pauline - Yeah horses particularly

Karen – They can cure horses can’t they?

Tess – Yeah I believe so

Pauline – Ummm the umm I think the Herefords, they’ve got the white faces that I think they could have been affected too

Ash – Is it a introduced species? Or is it a..

Karen – Yes

Ash – Yeah

Karen - It’s a garden escape.

Tess – Umm (laughing)

Karen - A lady in Albury apparently liked it and imported it for her garden

Tess - Yes, I think in NZ it’s called salvia I think, is it?

Pauline - Salvation Jane

Tess – Yes that’s right

Karen – Oh in South Australia it’s called Salvation Jane

Pauline – Oh yes you’re from South Australia

Tess – Oh but the beekeepers love it they were right against it being destroyed because the bees made a lot of honey out of it

Pauline – Yes, so you had this conflict between, you know, the interests of one group of farmers wanting ….um because it tends to have a very big weed, you know, it comes up with a lovely purple flower but it takes up a lot of ground area so it minimises….takes away pasture for the….for what the farmers are trying to do, to you know, feed their cattle, feed their sheep

Tess – There’s a lot of seed that just keeps on coming and coming

Karen - Yes

Pauline – Yes once it gets in it’s sort of hard to get rid of so they urr I think they used biological control as one of the things that was done, wasn’t it

Tess – Yes I don’t think that it was successful

Pauline - Was that the, was it a beetle?

Karen – Yes it was some sort of beetle

Tess – Your thinking of ummm St John’s Wart.

Pauline – Oh right yes.

Tess - That had a beetle that was very effective but I don’t believe so for….

Pauline – For Patto, ah no

Karen - So how did you get rid of Patto? Did you spray it?

Tess – Sprayed it, dug it out, patrolled the areas every year, dug out the new plants by hand if possible, hmm that was the surest way of doing it, but it took many years to really do it

Karen – Yes

Pauline - Yes

Ash – So was it quite common to have these conflicting interests between different farmers and different umm properties in the area, umm and you had to try and resolve a lot of those groups, was that something quite common?

Tess – Umm I always had this feeling that when we started holding our meetings, which were probably monthly at the start…

Pauline – Yes

Tess - …three ladies sitting up the front, in front of these very old weathered farmers, we had a lot of work to do, but the fact that both Dot and I had been farming for many years did help and no doubt they could see the results that we were getting on our farms so they knew we’d, we’d actually achieved what we set out to do

Karen - And you knew what you were talking about

Tess – Yes exactly (laughing)

Pauline – Where as I was the, the interloper if you like, but ah, I mean I still went around, we’re only on 20 acres so ours was, you know, it’s a lifestyle property, certainly not a farming property. And ah but still and all, I’d still go around with a feedbag and go around and just pick out patto and now I don’t see any on our place

Ash – Tess, umm so you, so you have a farming background? Is that right?

Tess – No I didn’t until I married

Ash – Ahh OK and so you moved here and married here in Wooragee?

Tess - No, no, I grew up in Box Hill, Kilsyth area, worked in the bank. Umm Geoff was born into a farming family and he was milking cows in Nathalia with his family when we met, and we were married and moved up afterwards to Wooragee

Ash – So you used to help out a lot hmm?

Tess – A fair bit. Yeah yeah a fair bit. Things I used to do now, I’m glad I’m not doing them now, you know being out in all sorts of weather and feeding sheep and having lambing, and…but I loved it, it was a good way to bring up a family

Ash - Yeah

Pauline – It was always sheep wasn’t it?

Tess- Yes we got into cattle later on

Pauline – Later on, yes

Tess – Our land is more suitable to sheep. Fine wool hmm. But in the last couple of years we’ve changed to fat lambs because our sons took that over and it’s been very profitable, everybody has to eat but not everybody wears fine wool

Pauline - Everyone likes a leg of lamb…..(laughing) if they can have one, yeah

Ash – And Pauline, what brought you to Wooragee?

Pauline – Well both Graeme and I are city born and bred, we escaped from Melbourne basically we wanted to move out of the city, but also it was important to find somewhere that… don’t go just because you wanted to be away from Melbourne, but to be positive about where you wanted to be. And…. we’d always umm enjoyed coming up into…. away from Melbourne to have holidays and weekends away and things like that and so we decided that we’d like to move to a country area, and we liked it up this way, we liked hills rather than flat country. So we looked around and found Wooragee. And so we went straight from Coburg in Melbourne to Wooragee so we didn’t even… a lot of people these days they’ll sort of move from the city maybe to a town like Wodonga or Beechworth even or Yack and then perhaps move out into a farming district but we just made the (slapping noise). Umm but we, we never had a farm, as in….we had some sheep, some coloured sheep actually, we actually got into black sheep.

Karen – Cos you were a spinner and weaver aren’t you?

Pauline – I am, yes but that happened once we had the sheep and I thought what am I going to do with this wool, you know (laughing)

Tess – You can’t waste it

Pauline – (laughing) You know, you can only put so much under trees for mulching and, and so on. So that’s when ahh ummm Poyntz…not Garry ……Henry Poyntz had a little session going down at the Wooragee school to, to learn how to spin. And that’s how I first started learning to spin actually and I’ve continued doing that. But yes, so we had a rural lifestyle but not a rural living. So I actually worked in Wodonga and Graeme, we had a business initially making manufacturing beds and bedroom furniture, and then eventually Gra…we sold that because of…. or closed it down, we didn’t sell it. Closed it down, and Graeme stayed to develop the home front if you like and I kept on working

Ash – So did you two know each other before Landcare?

Pauline - No

Tess – No, oh we probably met before Landcare

Pauline – Oh yes yes …..

Tess – maybe through tennis…..

Pauline – Or yes

Tess - ….or things like that..

Pauline - or ummm the Probus association

Tess – Yes, I think that’s where… we had that background of belonging to a….

Pauline - .…of being in the community .

Tess and Ash – Yes Yes

Pauline - Well when we came, being new people to the district, that was the best way to, you know, start to feel a sense of belonging, being part of the community was to actually get involved in things and it always puzzles me even today why more people coming to the area don’t do that, you know unfortunately

Karen – There are a lot of new people coming into Wooragee lately

Tess – A lot

Pauline – Yeah but you don’t, sort of see them coming along to be involved in things.

Tess – When I first came to Wooragee they were all traditional farmers, there were dairy farmers mainly, but now it’s totally different and I think because things got very tough in farming , a lot of farmers did sell off small acreage to just get some cash money in, and that has changed Wooragee

Pauline - And the fact that Wooragee’s commutable distance to Albury Wodonga…

Tess – Yes

Pauline - ….so people can go and work there but still live out in the rural area

Tess – Yes our two boys went out working, we couldn’t afford to pay them on the farm umm and I think it did them good to go out anyway and be working under a boss. And they both did very well. Yep and they brought their skills back to the farm. Like they were in a business that built high rise supermarkets and chalets up in Mt Buffalo so they had all those sorts of skills. And Warren even took over a manager type umm situation so he had all those types of skills too.

Pauline - Had managerial skills

Tess – Yes and from that he’s developed the Lucas Mill, our whole family did that. And that was a great turnaround financially for our business. We could put up electric fences right round the boundaries to keep out kangaroos and what have you. Wombats are a bit of different story (laughing)

Pauline – (Laughing) Yes, no they’ve done very well

Ash – So when you first put Wooragee Landcare together, tell me about some of the first activities as a group that you did, umm I know you had lots of events and had lots of speakers come in. Can you recall some of the earlier things that you put on?

Tess - I know we visited other landcare groups to see what they were doing…

Pauline – Yes we did a bus trip

Tess –….. on erosion and different things like that, which was very enlightening. Umm I think the biggest thing we went to was the conference down at Phillip Island and we all had submissions we could put in and I remember I had to do a 5 minute speech and I wasn’t used to public speaking and there were about 500 people in that hall, and my husband said write down what you want to say, so I did that, and the only time I ad libbed I couldn’t find where I’d ….you know the page umm but we got through that and we actually won a silver spade which is now, in the…. was in the school. Have they transferred it to the hall?

Karen – I think it’s at the school.

Pauline – No, it’s at the school

Tess – So that was a big thrill, to think, you know, the first time we ever went we took off this prize

Ash – I think we have a copy of that speech…

Tess – You may have (laughing).

Ash -…..in the archive at Wooragee Landcare

Tess - And the other was when we launched the Junior Landcare

Pauline – Yes we had a big day there.

Tess – Yes we did, and that was a wonderful day

Pauline - That was when we had Heather Mitchell and Joan Kirner both came up

Tess – Heather Mitchell anyway, don’t know about Joan did she come?

Pauline – There was plenty of those trees, those three trees down the back….

Tess – Was that the same day?

Pauline - ….that have since got buried at the back of the tennis courts

Tess – Yes, yeah. That was the same day wasn’t it?

Pauline – Yes, I think so.

Tess – And all the school children came, they were dressed up as earth worms and they sang a little ditty and yeah it was a great day

Pauline – Yes it was a big day. Of course, yes then the junior Landcare they umm got a lot of kudos being the first ever like Junior Landcare and the kids got to go up to Canberra and meet Bob Hawke, at the time, Prime Minister at the time. And he put on a t-shirt and had, with Wooragee Landcare on it, and had his photo taken with the kids. So…

Tess – Yes Graeme Missen designed these t-shirts for us

Pauline - Yes

Tess - We thought they were very smart, you could wear them with green slacks or a skirt and we…

Pauline – That’s right we did

Tess - ..we stood out

Pauline – Yes they were great. It was Graeme Missen who first had the concept idea of ….

Tess – Landcare

Pauline – ….of Junior Landcare

Tess – And the teacher….

Pauline – And Graeme of course, at that initial meeting, he was the vice President wasn’t he? He was the token male.

Tess - Yes

All - (laughing)

Tess – And he was not a farmer either? (Laughing)

Pauline – No no

Tess - I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when the old farmers were discussing this new fandangled landcare mob run by a mob of women you know

All - (laughing)

Pauline – Yes we thought that was rather special that you know that we had a sort majority of….

Tess – And Dot used to bring pretty table cloths to put it on the table

Pauline and Tess together – With a vase of flowers

Tess - So we had the feminine aspects (laughing)

Pauline – (laughing) The lady’s touch

Tess – Yes yes. But no - we did meet a lot of people, umm I’ve got some old tapes, I suppose I should get them changed now to a disc. Of umm I remember walking along the creek, in what was Jim Elliot’s farm, and looking at the erosion and…

Pauline – So that would have been the sort of thing…that we were looking at what was happening in the area – as far as you say erosion?

Tess – Yes

Pauline – There was that creek area opposite Barry and Pam’s place over on the creek there wasn’t it

Tess – Yes that was Jim Elliot’s Place

Pauline – Yes that was Jim’s at the time.

Tess - There were different ideas about how to stop it eroding, one wanted to keep all the cattle out which made it a problem for them to get water and others wanted to put a heap of stones in, and there was a bit of conflict in how to do that

Pauline – Yes

Tess - The farmer didn’t want to fence the creek off and so that got a little bit hard to work out a situation

Karen – So how did you resolve it?

Tess – I don’t know that we ever did to be honest, I don’t think we ever did.

Pauline – No I don’t know we did

Tess – There’s still a lot of blackberries along the creek there

Karen – And the erosion? Is the erosion better?

Tess – I think it might have got slowed down a bit umm silt and that built up over that time too. But of course there were rabbits in the banks and that wasn’t helping.

Pauline - Of course now this last year we’ve had so much rain, the creek would have scoured out quite badly in some places I wouldn’t be surprised. When, when it all subsides we’ll start to see where ummm you know vegetation has held the banks, and where it hasn’t.

Tess – I know we did a lot of work planting trees in the section of that creek between Edmondson’s Lane and where it goes under the bridge in Rankin Rd. But the few years on they started pulling out the willows they said they weren’t really helping.

Pauline – Yeah because sometimes some of them break off and then they go down and then they sort of become a problem further down.

Tess – Yes

Pauline – So where it might help here it causes a problem down there, so….

Karen – But that was the policy at the time wasn’t it?

Pauline – Yes, yes it was

Tess – Yes it was

Pauline – Yes yes

Karen – Whereas now it’s the opposite

Pauline – (laughs)

Tess – Cos I thought the willows and the roots and that would hold the banks in when we were doing it. We also planted a lot of other shrubby things along that creek section

Pauline – Yes yeah

Karen – Natives? Natives?

Tess and Pauline together – Yes yes

Pauline – And I can also… there was also trials of various types of tree guards to sort of see which worked…..

Tess – Yes

Pauline – ….and I’ll always remember Ivan did a little patch up at his place, on from you, there’s this group of trees now, and he tried various things and they all look roughly the same now….

Tess – Yeah it’s amazing

Pauline – ….you know. After well, be at least twenty years or more and yes, they might have been a bit different in their growth habits in the early days, but then they’ve finally all grown up. Now we also, Landcare helped us, Graeme and I put some plantings in that gully that goes through our place, and that, you know, stopped… that was quite badly eroded. It was an old sort of mining race. Part of it, ‘cos that was also part of the historical part of the problems with Wooragee was that it had been a gold mining area, particularly up the Magpie Creek end of the valley. And so there was a lot of earth disturbance and a lot of timber was cut down. So any trees that you see there are more regrowth, there’s none of those really big gum trees that you see that are hundreds of years old. Umm yeah, and there’s still traces of the mining works through that bush in behind us.

Tess – Yep yep

Pauline – But yes, so we had, I can remember us planting there and also putting down carpet and tin to just on the banks, just to hold the banks, and now you just wouldn’t recognise it. And one other thing that we were involved with was we wanted to have a shelter belt on the West side of our property because it was fairly exposed to the weather coming in from that South West, and our neighbour was happy for us to put the trees on his land ‘cos, that was Ivan, put in three shelter belts there, and now they create really really good soil protection, plus other things have grown up since then. But you know, it was a way that two neighbours worked together. I mean I think the Department might have provided the trees or the guards, and we did the planting and Ivan allowed us to put it on his land. So that was a…

Tess – Plus

Pauline – ….an example of cooperation between landholders.

Karen – And so did you have any paid co-ordinators to help you, or was it all volunteer work?

Tess – We did have co-ordinators

Pauline – Ummm I was saying to Tess I can remember when we were interviewing for our first co-ordinator and it was, nine….September about September nineteen ninety three. And Dennis Martin had just retired from…umm, was he the one?

Tess – DSE?

Pauline – No no, trying to think if I’ve got that right? No, no Dennis Martin had been there and he retired, moved away, and it was the next chap, umm

Tess – The name’s escape ya now don’t they?

Pauline – Big tall young fellow, Lachie…

Karen – Lachlan Campbell

Tess and Pauline together – Yes yes.

Tess – Yes that’s the one

Pauline – Yes, yes I think he was the one, that was the one that when I was asked to be involved on being on the interview committee, and at the same time I was applying for a job myself and I thought well here I am on one side of the table and then here I am on the other side of the table

Ash – So do you have any paid co-ordinators today?

Pauline – No

Ash – No?

Karen – Well we have, we get about two and a half hours a week with a Mid Ovens Landcare Consortium facilitator who looks after seven landcare groups. They all get about two or three hours. He’s employed for twenty one hours a week for seven groups

Pauline – Right, so there’s not much to share around is there?

Tess – No, no

Karen – So in the good old days, I mean Lachlan would have been employed for what, three days a week

Pauline – Yes, yes, it would have been about that

Karen – Whereas now its three hours a week

Pauline – Yeah yeah. So where’s he based? Or who is it anyway?

Karen – It’s Jim Blackney

Pauline – No, I don’t know that name no

Karen – Yes so its different times in terms of funding

Pauline – Yes. Well certainly I mean we had, I remember the membership when we first started, was set at five dollars, now its twenty two

Tess –Yeah

Karen – Was it five dollars a property or five dollars per person?

Tess – Hmm I only pay the one twenty two dollars so

Pauline – Yes I’d say it’s per property

Karen – Yes

Tess - Hmm yes, cos that really wouldn’t be fair would it if the one property had a family of six living on it and

Pauline – Yes and the other one….that would be…I’m sure it probably would have been that way and I mean one property might be quite small and another quite big. No they all pay the same.

Karen – So did you get a lot of members to start with?

Pauline – I think there was enthusiasm for it

Tess – There was yes

Pauline – It was taken positively amongst, amongst the residents of the valley

Ash – And were they more older, younger members, or was it mixed?

Tess – Probably a mixture

Pauline – Yes

Tess – The farming community was an older community when we moved here

Pauline –Yes yeah

Tess – A lot of them were probably over sixty or more so their children had moved away, there just wasn’t the money to keep them on the farm. A dairy farm was somewhat different because

Pauline – Yes

Tess – There was more a steady income from that….

Pauline – Yes

Tess – ….a sheep farmer, you know, you shore your sheep one part of the year and that money had to last another 12 months, or same with cattle a little bit. Yes, so not many young people were able to stay, like our eldest son wanted to, but I knew for his sake he needed to go out and do something different. The farm was there to come back to, which he’s done.

Pauline – Yes and he’s back now

Karen – So there were a lot of dairy farms in Wooragee. But how many are left now?

Karen – One?

Tess – Nankervis, Arnold’s were the last to go

Pauline – Yes Arnolds dropped out, what…12 months ago?

Tess – About that

Karen – I thought the Nankervis’ were going to stop too?

Pauline – I think they are

Tess – There’s talk of it

Pauline – Yes there’s talk of it

Karen – So when they drop out there’ll be none?

Tess – No

Pauline – That’s right and yet in times gone by, just about everyone had a dairy cow according to, stories I’ve heard

Tess – I had one cow I milked

Pauline – Ohh, alright OK (laughing)

Karen – For household use, yeah. I’ve often thought about doing that myself but I’m not sure I could get up early in the mornings to do it (laughing)

Tess – Yes (laughing)

Ash – I’ve never milked a cow, so

Pauline – I can’t say that I have, but yeah

Ash – I have a bit of a tangent question , ummm this year we’re experiencing, you know pretty extreme weather changes, especially in November, then we’ve seen lots of floods, lots of rain, lots of cooler weather, can you recall when you first became Wooragee Landcare, what the climate was like and do you think there has been quite a change in the environment since you first begun?

Tess – Well I think when we first came here you pretty much had wet winters and hot summers and that was pretty standard

Pauline – Yes

Tess – There wasn’t the extremes, that we’re getting now. Geoff could usually start cutting hay in October, November, regularly, but now I would not like to be making hay this spring

Karen – No

Ash – Why is that?

Tess – You would never get it cured, cos all this rain it would be rotting on the ground after you cut it, it would be too wet to mow

Pauline – Even if you’d been able to get on the ground to cut it.

Tess – Yes well that’s right, no things were more stable back then, and I am a believer in climate change

Pauline – Yes certainly somethings changed

Ash – Were there many initiatives when you began to build this awareness about climate change and global warming, or has it been more kind of more recent years that there’s been more I guess?

Pauline – Not in my time of being active in landcare

Tess – No, it’s been something in the last ten years of so

Pauline – Yes, yes it’s been more recent

Tess – Cos they’ve got to keep records I think for ten years at least, to see what the big picture is. I mean you don’t get climate change by being ten degrees yesterday and forty today, that’s not really, that’s just what’s happening now. It’s got to be taken over a series of years to work out if that average temperature is going up.

Pauline – Yeah, I mean there’s natural variation….

Tess – Yes

Pauline – ….from one day to another, then when you look at the bigger picture then you to really see whether there has been a change now

Tess – And of course with all the vehicles now in the world, everything fumes, the planes are more, you didn’t have it way back in the sixties. So you know we just didn’t just….aeroplane travel was for the wealthier group of people, where now teenagers can flit off around the world on a plane if they’ve got the money to do it

Karen – And you didn’t use plastic bags when you….

Tess – No

Karen – ……went to do your shopping?

Tess – No, no you didn’t. The plastics really come into its own

Pauline - It’s a big problem

Tess – Yep

Ash – And you did a lot of your own composting, your own gardening, growing produce as well?

Tess - Yes

Pauline – Tess is a great gardener

Tess – Yes, I like gardening

Pauline – And cooking

Tess – Yep not so much. But you can’t eat it if you don’t cook it

All – (laugh)

Pauline – Yeah, that’s right.

Karen – So how long were you two involved, actively on the Landcare Committee?

Pauline – Gee

Tess – Well I sort of started working in the factory in the nineteen nineties and that kept me pretty busy all week. I probably eased out of that a little bit by then

Pauline – Ummm yeah, I think when I got that job at TAFE, then I sort of had to..cos I was still involved. Ummm, yes, I remember doing the interview for a co-ordinator at the same time as I was applying for the job which ended up working at the Wodonga TAFE. And yes, I think about that time I had to ease out and not take on that role…

Tess – Yep

Pauline – ….and Bob Stelling took over being the treasurer

Tess – And I think David Palmer might have taken over from me as President

Pauline – As president, yes

Karen – Sorry, who was that?

Tess and Pauline together – David Palmer

Pauline – Yeah and Robin Warner

Tess – Yeah I don’t know how long I was as the President for

Pauline – No I can’t remember exactly Tess

Tess – No, you forget these things

Karen – So you didn’t have any trouble though finding people to replace you on the committee? Cos we have that difficulty these days.

Tess – I think you always have that difficulty

Karen – (laughing)

Tess – People think, oh you know, no I can’t do that. It’s not what I want to do.

Pauline – You had to kind of twist their arm a bit

Tess – Yes, yes you did. I mean it was the last thing I saw myself as doing when we started off I didn’t really think that would be my part to play, but it was.

Ash – So how many years were you President?

Tess – Just trying to think, and I can’t can’t remember

Pauline – Well … it would be at least perhaps five years wouldn’t it?

Tess and Pauline together – Yep

Tess – It would have been a few years

Ash – Yep back to back for five years?

Tess – Umm well I guess we’ve got all the minute books haven’t we?

Pauline – Yes, yes the groups got them

Karen – Do we have them in the cupboard…the archive cupboard?

Ash – I feel like we do?

Tess – The minute books – where are they Pauline? Do you know?

Pauline – For the landcare? No I don’t know where they are.

Tess - Oh

Pauline - I think they’re in your compactus, or whatever you’ve got in the storeroom down there.

Tess – Yeah OK

Pauline – What’s stored in the cupboard in the foyer of the hall is more sort of tennis club. The Progress Association is up in the top shelf. Yeah.

Ash - So tell me some of your fond memories of Wooragee Landcare. Are there any funny moments that you can remember, or any particular shining time?

Tess – It was a great time with Heather Mitchell when she came, the way she went with the children, and really reacted with them that was a great thing I thought.

Pauline – Yeah

Tess – Yeah that she spent time with them. And we had a teacher that was very involved and orientated to look after the land so she encouraged the children and I think that was… helped a lot. Ummm I guess - funny moments Pauline?

Pauline – Henry Poyntz with his truck with his rabbits hanging around it?

Tess – We had a double page spread in the Border Mail didn’t we?

Pauline – Yes

Tess - Of that opening. Umm photos of the children

Pauline – This was the Junior Landcare

Tess – Yeah, I had that for a long time, but I’ve misplaced it or lent it to someone. But that was a great day.

Pauline – Yeah, yes. This chap who had an old like a model T Ford car and he decorated it with rabbits, hanging around it…

Tess – ….and rabbit traps

Pauline – ….and rabbit traps and things like that you know, and the kids thought it was great

Karen – To show the children?

Pauline – Yeah yes, you know I think they were

Ash – Were they real rabbits?

Tess – I think they were

Karen – There wasn’t a shortage of rabbits

Tess – No, no there wasn’t

Pauline – Well that’s right, he was just emphasizing the fact that rabbit control was one of our major things. That was a highlight, and look I think umm the fact that the Junior Landcare, you know, got the kudos saved the school.

Karen – Ohh

Tess – Hmmm I think it did too.

Pauline – Absolutely.

Tess - As a spin off. Yeah,

Pauline – Yeah, just the fact of that, even when they had to merge with Yackandandah because the numbers at the school had got so low, umm the fact that it had been where the first Junior Landcare started gave it that extra sort of recognition and the teachers were very good at promoting it. I’m thinking of Di Tyrell

Tess – Yes, she took a cut in pay just to become a teacher not a head mistress at the school

Pauline – Yes she’d been the principle at Wooragee and she had to be lower down..under the

Karen – Because there was too few students?

Pauline – Yeah, I mean the number had got down to about eight or ten, something like that. Maybe I forget, now its seventy

Karen – Yeah I know

Tess – It’s incredible

Pauline – Amazing.

Karen – It’s wonderful.

Pauline - So you know I think it was something about the fact that Junior Landcare, I think there was not a direct land care issue necessarily, but it was something, a community issue, that Landcare really, you know, helped for that school to be saved. I mean we did have a big meeting in the hall…

Tess – We did

Pauline – ……to ummm sort of protest, and I think we had pollies out as well to sort of try and say look you know this is ridiculous, this area is going to change over time and there’s going to be more demand, and closing it down isn’t the way to address that issue, but….

Karen – So do you think that Wooragee Community has got a reputation if you like, for being, really proactive and, and with a community feeling?

Tess – I think so

Karen – Of being able to pull together and take action when required?

Tess – Yes

Pauline – Yes it’s a can do community

Karen - Yes

Tess – Yes, I think you’ve only have to go past the school, the tennis courts, the hall, the fire shed to know that we look after what we’ve got and try to provide….

Pauline - Yes

Tess - ....the amenities

Pauline – And know the story behind each of those. Like the tennis courts have just recently had that wonderful upgrade there and you know it took community effort to do that. The hall was…you know, it had been quite a….

Tess – We used to paint it and renovate it and do all sorts of things without any help from the council, when we first….

Pauline – Yes

Tess - ….had it

Karen – Hmmm

Pauline – The council reckon they own it

Tess – Yes (laughing)

Pauline – Legally they might, morally the community does

Karen – And Wooragee Landcare is a part of that?

Tess – They are

Pauline – Yes yes

Karen – Really a close knit community

Pauline – Yes yes absolutely

Karen – An active community. Alhough it’s just a small group, really…

Tess – It is

Karen – ….of main movers and shakers

Pauline – I think there always is. You know, I mean life has changed you know, the people are busy busy busy with all the things they do these days and they just haven’t got time and they don’t necessarily see the benefits that you can get from being involved like that

Tess – Putting all the old photograhs in the hall was a great move

Karen – Yes

Tess – A lot of history in those photographs around the hall

Pauline – Yes

Tess – You see people come…

Pauline – Yes

Tess -…come and look at it

Pauline – I was really pleased we got that. Yeah we wrote a grant application to P.. R.. O …

Ash – PROV

Pauline – PROV, yeah the public records crowd, and we got the initial thing and then we actually put in a second application and got some extra things as well too.

Karen – Did you put many grants in for Landcare?

Tess – Hmm

Pauline – I don’t remember doing any in my time as treasurer

Tess – No, it wasn’t as widely available I don’t believe

Pauline – No possibly not

Tess – I mean even with the hall we had to borrow money off the shire to put the new windows in, which we paid back

Pauline – Yes

Tess - I think we bought shares and we had to pay the shire back cos they’d funded them

Pauline – Yes

Tess – Not much was given to us

Karen – hmm

Pauline – No, no, I mean my memory of when we first came to Wooragee was that the hall, the eaves were open and the birds used to come in….

Tess – Possums

Pauline – ….and sit on the rafters inside the hall, and so yeah

Tess – It was cold

Pauline – And there were louvre windows, so it wasn’t the warmest place. So you went to a meeting down there in the winter time and you’d stamp your feet (stamping sound) and hope it finishes early, and I mean that also deterred people from coming out

Tess – Yes yes yes

Pauline – It’s cold, I’m not coming out tonight I’ll sit here by the fire

Tess – So now once we more or less handed the hall over to the shire to become a Section Eight-six

Pauline – Yes

Tess – They now give us money every year to pay for electricity and that sort of thing

Pauline – Maintenance, yes they call it an asset maintenance grant

Karen – So did you have many guest speakers at your Landcare Meetings in the early days, or did you just meet as an executive?

Pauline – I’m just trying to think

Tess – Yes, I’m just trying to think, that’s where those old minute books would be really handy

Pauline – Yes, Dot might know more on that, I’m trying to think …no-one really jumps out at me as

Tess – No me neither, I mean as I said we had those bus trips away to places like that

Pauline – Yes yes, we did have farm walks and creek walks

Tess – Yes we did

Pauline – Particularly looking at that section behind the school there. Yeah I remember there’s a photo of Ron and Viv Payne sitting on a log having a cuppa. There was always a cuppa and something to eat…

Tess – ….scones

Pauline – Which was nice, yeah. And I think the Landcare did come down and help plant our back gully on our place. But there was a little bit of an issue there that sort of, you know, the Landcare shouldn’t be doing things for people, they, you should be encouraging them to be do the things themselves

Karen – Oh I see

Pauline – You know it could be seen as favouritism, a little bit, yeah. So yeah there wasn’t a lot of that sort of thing I think. Our little bit was probably one of the few that happened like that. I mean, yes advise people and educate people on, you know, the way to do things, but they actually do it themselves. Like with the fumigating

Tess – Yes

Pauline – Umm yeah, we had rabbit fumigators, and I think we did have field days to sort of show people ….

Tess – True

Pauline - ….how to operate the fumigator thing

Tess – Yes we did have that sort of thing. But I don’t remember people coming to the meeting as such

Pauline – No, no

Tess – They were more so

Pauline – That initial one where Tony Ransom came

Tess – Yes

Pauline - But other than that, no nothing that I can recall

Karen – Cos we have that problem today, like do we just have the executive or do we get guest speakers, it’s a bit of a balancing act isn’t it?

Pauline – Well we do with neighbourhood watch too

Tess – I think there’s more money available for Landcare grants now than back in those early days. There seems to be a lot of money…

Karen – There’s not as much money now. We’ve been here for eleven years and prior to us coming there was a lot of money

Pauline – Yes I was going to say

Karen – But the last ten years have been

Pauline - I think actually there was virtually no money initially, then all of a sudden there was a lot of money, and now it’s dropped away

Karen – Yeah

Pauline – That’s my impression

Karen – Yes

Ash – So what kind of fundraising umm did you do in the early days?

Tess – I don’t believe we did fund raising

Pauline – no I don’t think …apart from the five dollar membership

Tess – No, no I don’t think we did

Pauline – No

Tess – We did fund raising for the tennis courts but not Landcare

Pauline – No, that’s probably why we didn’t have guest speakers, we didn’t have too many activities other than just things within the valley, because we didn’t….you know as they cost money to a hire a bus, or that you know unless there was some sort of …the department were perhaps helpful in some ways with getting a bus

Tess – Yes

Pauline – But umm yeah we didn’t have a lot of money to throw around for that sort of thing in the very early days. So we had to do it ourselves more

Tess – Like in the early days we painted all that hall, it was all done by volunteers

Pauline – Yeah yeah now you’re talking back to the progress and all of that

Tess – Yes, and the avenue of the trees

Pauline – Yes, Tess is talking about when the Progress Association, that was started up in nineteen fifty seven to bring electricity to the district of Wooragee and that was the initial impetus for that

Karen – Wow

Pauline - And you know they got a lot of community effort went into that, particularly through Bert Nankervis

Tess – So there’s always been a community effort for whatever is needed….

Pauline – Yes

Tess – ……in Wooragee, and I think it’s lacking in a lot of places

Pauline – Yes one thing actually, a farming issue they had the conservation group

Tess – That’s right, yes

Pauline – And that was where they had some farming equipment, mainly sort of a bailer

Karen – Ohh that was the bailing group

Tess – Yes yes

Pauline – They had a bailer, the bailing group, yes that was a cooperative that worked to share equipment amongst the farmers because all of them couldn’t afford to have a bailer so they shared it. But of course it also did I mean they actually worked out quite a good way to share it, you know it depended on how many shares and it depended on the size of the land that you had .

Tess – Yep I think it was the size of your land

Pauline – Yes cos we were never involved in it

Tess – Mr Rankin had shares

Pauline – But the stories up in the hall about it

Karen – Yes, that’s where I’ve read it

Pauline and Tess together – Yes yes

Pauline – Yes, well Bert Nankervis had written out that history and basically I just transposed that and got it done up on that board, and they…umm the last piece of equipment they had they donated and it was sold, and the money that they got from that ummm they donated to the hall

Tess – Ummm. I know when we came they were a bit worried Geoff was a hay bailing contractor, that he was going to come in and take over Wooragee….

Pauline – (laughs)

Tess – ….but he had contracts all back at Nathalia on the irrigation channels, yeah on the irrigation properties so he had no intention of doing any bailing….

Pauline – Oh yeah, alright

Tess – ….in ah Wooragee

Pauline – Cos they had one chap, but that was Harry Poyntz wasn’t it?

Tess – Yes

Pauline – He was sort of ….he co-ordinated it you know - OK it’s yours for now. Cos, the other thing is that they often the crop all ripens at the same time so they all want it….

Karen – All at the same time

Pauline - …yesterday, or you know

Tess – Yes, and the funny part I think is they used to get Geoff to repair it

Tess and Pauline together – (laughing) Yeah yeah

Tess – If something went wrong with it

Karen – And so are you proud of what Landcare in Wooragee has become?

Tess – We are, aren’t we?

Pauline – I think so. Yes, as I was saying, I think I put it in that little article, it’s lovely to think that you go through the valley. I said remember Magpie Lane. My nephew used say it should be called Rabbit Lane cos there were so many rabbits running across there

Tess – There were

Pauline – From your old place, from where you are Karen, umm particularly, but all around, and you know purple in a lot of places, and the blackberries and the St John’s Wort, and now most of that is gone

Tess – There were lots of cattle, lots of cattle used to get out on the road, a certain neighbor who wouldn’t do their fences

Pauline – Ahh yeah yes

Tess – Their cattle would roam up and down that road, and it wasn’t until they really tightened the law on having cattle out on the road

Pauline – The legal responsibility for having cattle out on the road was….

Karen – There’s still evidence on our property of warrens being ripped

Tess - Yep

Pauline – Ahh yeah – rabbit ripping

Tess – ripped

Pauline – Yes sorry, fumigating and ripping, they were the main techniques for rabbit control

Ash – What does ripping involve?

Tess – A big, sort of a hook and it goes deep into the ground so it rips most of their homes up, so to speak….

Pauline – Yes

Tess – …. rabbits in there would be killed

Ash – Yep yep

Karen – So we have lots of places on our property where you can see where it’s all been ripped so it’s all sort of….what would you call it?

Tess – Yep ploughed up

Pauline – Oh yes

Karen – ….even though it’s got, you know grasses and stuff you can see that it’s been all turned over

Tess – Well yes, it should have been left levelled off

Karen – Yes

Tess – Geoff would always level it off afterwards, but huge burrows – you know the whole hill….

Karen – Yes yes

Tess – ….would move with rabbits

Pauline – Yes yes, I mean you see some of the old footage from the nineteen twenties and thirties and that, and yeah it’s just rabbits just running everywhere, not here in Wooragee, but

Tess – You know the swagman, they used to get a live rabbit and take it along to the next water hole, and they you know had methods for catching rabbits, so that kept them going while they were walking, but they spread a lot of rabbits just by doing that

Karen – Ohh

Tess – it was fairly knowledge….

Pauline – Was that like the Susso’s?

Tess – Yes, well just even, you know, swagmans in the old day

Pauline – Oh Yeah, yes yes

Tess – Waltzing Matilda and they’d be travelling around looking for work, but it was well known that they would catch live rabbits, release them further up

Ash – Why, why did they do that?

Tess – So that when they were travelling they knew they could get a bunny at that waterhole and put it on the camp fire that night and cook a meal

Pauline – Yes, they’d have a meal….

Ash – And so is…

Pauline – ….a bit of mutton, yeah underground mutton

Ash – Is that how the rabbits came to Wooragee or…

Tess – Not necessarily, no

Ash – So you don’t know how they…

Tess – I think they just went fump

Karen – They breed like rabbits

Everyone – (laughs)

Pauline – Yes, there is that phrase for a particular reason, isn’t there

Tess – Geoff had an Aunty who had six children and a father, husband was killed, she said that she um she reared that family on rabbits. They had no money and wasn’t like the dole or child support back then

Pauline – Yes yes

Tess – So you know they did play a part in um in our history, but they did a lot of damage too

Pauline – Yes. I can remember umm before there was a house on your land Karen, one day we took a couple of horses we had at the time and we thought we’d get along there and ride up on that hill there and we had to get off the horses because there were so many rabbit holes….

Tess – Yes yes

Pauline – ….we were worried about the horse falling down and injuring itself, or us

Tess – Yes

Pauline - …so I always remember that about your property, plus the purpleness of it

Tess – (laughing)

Karen - No

Pauline – Sorry it was quite a mess (laughing) it’s not now

Mumbling

Pauline – No the, but yes definitely feel a sense of..

Tess – I mean I’ve got a lot of respect for that rabbit, he’s a tough little fellow you know, we’ve thrown all sorts of things at it and they still seem to survive. I wouldn’t swear that we wouldn’t have one on our property somewhere, particularly…

Pauline – I saw one recently run across our (inaudible) and a fox

Karen – Foxes, and there’s still a lot of foxes

Tess – Yeah

Pauline – Yes

Tess – We did do a fairly big program on poisoning foxes too there at one stage

Pauline – Yes, they weren’t one of the initial ones

Tess – No

Pauline – But It was something further down the track we did, and then of course you started to come into the species identification

Tess - Yes – we recently drove to Walwa, along the Mitta Valley, and there’s a little town up there called Granya, and as we drove in, I think I saw twenty rabbits, and that was something I had not seen for a long long time

Pauline – Cos they brought out this umm calicivirus….

Tess – Yes, yes they did

Pauline – ….and that knocked those back dramatically

Tess – And myxo too

Ash – ohhh yes

Pauline – They had myxomatosis,

Tess – long time

Pauline – In the forties was it?

Ash – (inaudible)

Pauline – She was born in Beechworth.

Tess – Yes, they also had the rabbit flea, um and the cats used to come home with their ears absolutely covered in this little black flea, and it wasn’t supposed to hop onto other animals, but it did, hmm

Pauline – Yeah yeah. Anyhow, I feel the work we set in motion is something that’s been of benefit to the community, and hopefully it still is today

Ash – I think it definitely is, yeah

Pauline – Yeah

Ash – It’s been really lovely chatting to you both and hearing all about all your activities with Wooragee Landcare

Tess – It will be interesting to see what other people say too

Pauline – Yes, the different memories. Graeme Missen, and possibly Owen Gemmel, did I hear he is one of your interviewees

Ash – Yeah, I think so, we are going to conduct a few, just three this year, and then next year we’ll do a bunch more

Pauline – Right, oh OK right yep

Ash – Yep

Pauline – Mind you this year’s nearly gone, it’ll be next year before we know it

Ash – Yeah definitely. And before we wrap everything up, was there anything else you wanted to put on the record?

Tess – I think we’ve covered it pretty well

Pauline – Yes, yeah, I don’t think there’s anything else that needs to be said really

Ash – Beautiful, well I will stop it there

Pauline – Thank you for the opportunity

Ash – It is eleven fifty am and I am now turning off, thank you

Pauline – OK