

The Australian Women's Register

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JAMES Barbara NTRS 226 TS 581

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Details

Barbara James (nee Johnson) was born in Nebraska, USA, in 1943, and came to Australia in 1966. She lived and worked in Canberra until July 1967, when she drove to Darwin for a two week holiday. When her car broke down on the return trip she came back to Darwin, found a job as a journalist with the Northern Territory News, and eventually married a Darwin lawyer, Geoff James, whom she had met while living in Canberra, and has lived in Darwin ever since.???This interview is mainly about her experience of Cyclone Tracy and its aftermath. She describes her work before the cyclone, with the NT News, ABC radio and the Environment Centre, and describes the lifestyle of those days.???The James' house in Manton Street in the city was virtually destroyed during the cyclone, and she, her husband and his mother had to cross open ground at the height of the storm, looking for shelter. At one point she was entangled in fallen power lines, not realising that the current had been cut off. They eventually found refuge in the old Darwin primary school, which survived undamaged. Most of their belongings were lost.???She recalls events at the ABC radio studios before and after the storm, and describes experiences of her husband's relatives during it. She gives her assessment of General Stretton, and describes the situation in Darwin as she saw it during the first week after the cyclone.???She was eventually evacuated, and while away became involved in citizen's groups, taking part in many meetings of evacuees very concerned at media reports about events back home, and at the extreme nature of new town plan provisions. She actively liaised with Darwinians, the then Department of Urban and Regional Development, ACOSS and the Cities Commission, and with the Environment Centre in Darwin.???She describes the shock of seeing Darwin from the air when she returned after about a month, the permit system, disorientation and the prolonged discomfort of difficult living conditions. She was working for the Environment Centre, and describes a key national conference on Kakadu National Park and uranium mining at Ranger, which was held in Darwin, and various other citizens' meetings which helped seal the fate of the unpopular town plans.???Finally, she describes reactions to subsequent storms, the changes to Darwin since, and assesses Tracy's longterm impact on her life.???The interview was recorded in September & October 1989 in Darwin by Francis Good. Barbara has also donated copies of a number of letters, documents and photographs.

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