



Keith Fernance

(Keith's wife Jean was present for the early part of this talk.)

Keith: My first recollection as a kid was going on a bus ride to Wyong, to the wharves to catch a ferry to The Entrance. I'd say I was a bit over three year old.

Bill: Where were the wharves? At Tacoma there?

Keith: No. This side of Wyong Bridge. You know where the little park is there beside Wyong River Rd? My uncle was with us, and my mother, and a few relatives. He grabbed me and shot me up on the top deck - it only had a rail round it, and the boat's rocking, and christ I was frightened. And then I don't remember much more till we got to the ocean, and I was terrified of it, too. Of course there were no costumes those days and I just stripped off to my birthday suit. My uncle got me up on his back and took me out into the waves and I started screaming, and I ran out. My mother eventually got me back and put my clothes back on. I had the wind up, properly.

But then there's a big blank from there. I went to school when I was four year old. The first thing I recollect about going to school - I was born in Ravensdale and we lived nearly opposite the school, and we used to run across the log over the creek to go across to the school. We were a bit late this morning, and my sister and brother had run across in front of me. Old Isaac Knight was on the road, and I caught sight of him and propped behind a post and wasn't game to come out, I was that shy. He sings out to me: "C'mon little fella, I won't hurt you," and I went like a hare! He was an old man who lived next to the school - or I thought he was old then.

The new school was built over there in 1919. I was born in 1914, and I went to school in the old school. It had a verandah where the old teacher used to put his sulky up - it was only low to the ground. Then the new school was built and of course, being a little fella you had to be busy, so I was helping them shift stuff into the school. And I'll never forget - see that finger? Well, they had a cloak room at one end of the

building and its door was made out of slats - about three by ones with a space between them. I must've had my fingers near the hinge, and one of the big girls swung on the door and busted the bastard! My sister and one of my cousins carried me home bawling.

Bill: And so when that happened there was no doctor to go to?

Keith: Oh christ

no. There were no doctors then.

Bill: And what? Your Mum dressed it for you?

Keith: She rolled it up and put a bit of disinfectant of some sort on it.

Bill: And where did you have to go if something really bad happened - if you broke a leg or something.

Keith: The schoolteacher used to set legs, old Mr Hawthorne. I remember Bern Searl - Dixons reared him and they had a bullock team, and a log shot off and hit him in the leg and broke it. I can remember the teacher getting two palings off the fence to splint his leg up. He went to Sydney after that but they said it was perfect and they didn't have to touch it.

The teacher had a son the same age as me. Ivan his name was, and we were in the first class. We were all given a book - a double-lined book - to write in, and the teacher put up on the blackboard O,A,C,D,E,X, and we had to write that between these double lines. In about half an hour I had the book full! I just kept writing and writing...

Bill: And you can still remember the letters?

Keith: Yes. To this day. And he said to me: "You have to use that book for your sums and all that." and I reckon I was writing for three months in between all those letters! I had to take it out to him once for him to correct or something, even though the big girls from the higher classes used to correct a lot of that sort of thing, and he said, "You've still got that book?" and I said, "Yes, Sir." "Well," he said, "you'd better get another one now." (laughs). They stick in your memory those little things from when you were real small - learning how to swim and that sort of thing.

Bill: Where did you learn to swim? Down the creek?

Keith: Yeah. We used to get plenty of washes in the summertime but not too much in the winter!

Bill: And did you have plenty to do round the farm when you weren't at school?

Keith: Oh yes. When I was eight year old my brother and I used to milk twelve cows, and then separate the cream - there was no milk those times - to send away to the factory for butter. It was pretty tough. You'd get up with the frost on the ground about an inch thick and no boots on. You'd go down and hunt a cow up if she was lying down and stand where she'd been lying, because it was warm - or if she piddled you'd go and stand in that. With no boots on, in the wet weather and especially when you got those westerly winds, all on the top of your instep would be all cracked and bleeding by the night-time. We used to get a scrubbing brush onto them and rub a bit of mutton fat into 'em or something. It was awful. They were criss-crossed with lines from the cold. It was pretty tough, but I don't think it hurt us much. I never had a pair of boots till I was thirteen year old, I suppose.

We used to have two sets of clothes. One set for school and one set for the weekend. If you had an accident they had to be washed that night to wear to school the next day. Then you'd have hand-me-downs for the weekend to knock around in, to tear around the bush.

Bill: And your old man had boots but you kids didn't?

Keith: Oh no. But he had to walk on the roads and everywhere - work the bullock teams out in the bush.

My first trip to Sydney was when I was twelve year old. It was the first time I had a ride on a train. It was in the Christmas holidays, and I was a bit lucky that the old schoolteacher was going down to a meeting of teachers or something. I was going down with my mother and one of her nieces, and he didn't have much to do in the afternoon, and while my mother was taking the little girl to the hospital - she had Pink's Disease - he said that if I'd like I could go with him and go over to the Zoo and the Botanical Gardens, and he took me all round.

Bill: And how did you go into Wyong?

Keith: There was an old bus. But we used to go in by horse and sulky. I think Palmers had the bus.

Bill: And when you left school, what did you go into then? Dairyfarming, or logging...?

Keith: No, when I first left school we weren't dairying then. My father had started growing vegetables. He'd bought a lot of land out here - timber country, in two or three different places. I left school when I was thirteen and a half, and I went straight to work with him. He'd bought this property here - there were fences to go up. All I wanted to do was to work and earn some money but there was no money to earn. Then of a weekend I'd go out in the bush and pick ferns.

Bill: Where did you sell them?

Keith: We had agents here. My uncle was an agent and we had agents in Sydney. We used to pick red stalk fern and maidenhair fern. It was pretty good money for those days. I was making a pound a day so long as I pulled three thousand a day. Packed 'em fifty in a bunch I think it was.

Bill: And what did they use them for?

Keith: We heard during the War the Germans were using them for explosives. I dunno if that's correct.

Bill: And was bracken fern always here?

Keith: Oh yes. As soon as you ringbark a tree the bracken would come. That's why they made a mistake ringing everything. Better to ring the rubbish and leave half the timber still there. But the bracken came in and took over. In those days if you took up a selection you had to clear a certain amount of it. You had to ringbark, and build a dam or a hut on it. You didn't pay anything for three years off the principal, only the surveyor's fees. You had to ringbark to get grass for the bullocks. There was a lot of good timber destroyed, I'll tell you that.

Bill: So when guys took bullocks up to log with them, there was enough natural feed for them?

Keith: Mainly in the wintertime. We'd burn the bush about January and that would grow new feed that'd last right through the winter. They done well on it. But in the summertime you had to have your paddocks down the bottom.

Bill: And you had to take them up and down every day?

Keith: We'd yoke 'em up here and go up to the top of the mountain.

Bill: Oh, so you weren't working out to buggery...?

Keith: At times we were. Right out Walker's Ridge Road. We used to camp out there in the winter

Bill: But you wouldn't go out there in the summer because you'd have to cart feed...

Keith: Yeah. This is right. They used to take turpentine piles from up where you are at Brush Creek through to Catherine Hill Bay. It was a three day trip. Sixty five foot long, fourteen inch tops - they were

pretty big. They had to stand them on their heads. It was pretty rough there and the waves used to smash the piles up - and the ships coming in bashing into the sides of them.

Bill: Was that for coal loading?

Keith: It must've been, in the early days. The mines were there. The place looks much the same still - it's never changed much.

Bill: So you left school and went fencing?

Keith: Oh any sort of farmwork, or bushwork, ringbarking and that. And then when I got old enough - when I was seventeen, I started working with the horses, and bullocks. My father used to say my arms wouldn't get big enough to wind up the brake on the bullock wagon when we were coming down off these mountains.

Bill: And when you were up there logging, how many of you made up the team?

Keith: Only two. It was all hard yakka. Especially in the dry times when the bullocks'd kick up the dust. I used to be just like a blackfeller. One day, up there near Sonny's, a wagon bolted. I wasn't there this day - a cousin of mine was with my brother. He was driving them, or trying to drive them, while my brother worked the brake, but they wouldn't stop for him. Coming down the road was a bit rough, and they were coming off a bit fast, and threw a brake shoe off. It bolted down and killed two bullocks.

I was on the axe, hammer and wedges. I was pretty fit. You'd bring a load of logs off, take 'em down to the mill - then walk back up and cut sleepers.

Bill: And the mill - was that Smith's mill then?

Keith: At that time Carson had the mill - Fred Carson.

Bill: Someone told me that the mill was on the other side of the road then...

Keith: Smith's mill was down further, down near the swamp where the boys grow watermelons. They started a case mill there, and a fellies mill, you know, cutting fellies for the wagon wheels. Carson had the big mill down at Wyong Creek and he shifted it up to the junction where Smith's mill is now. He used tractors, but he would have had half a dozen bullock teams working for him as well in those days.

He had a big traction engine with a big wheel in front, and that had a chain going round the worm. Going round the sharp bends it wouldn't come round. They had a brake on each side and they used to jerk the brake on to make it swing round in front. They used to cart timber with it from the head of these valleys down to Stinson's Lane. It was a Holt, a forerunner to the Caterpillar. It had a beautiful winch on it - it'd hold 1200 feet of rope, I suppose. You'd set it up at the top of the hill and run the rope right down into the valleys to bring the logs out.

Bill: You mentioned turpies for the wharves. What other species were used, and for what. Did they use spotted gum for the fellies?

Keith: No, no spotted gum around here. They used spotted gum for wagons, and for spokes for the wheels. You had to have blue gum for the fellies, and I think they used ironbark and bluegum for spokes. I dunno what the nave was made of - you know the nave with all the spokes around it, with a cast iron box inside it that runs on the axle?

Anyway, Carson started down there and started making fruit cases. You could buy a fruit case for a shilling, and that was with a lid on with two holes bored in it to take the rope and pack the fruit.

My father planted out a fair few orange trees, and they came good in about 1922. It boomed for a couple or three years before the Depression hit. We were getting a pound a case for oranges, and mandarins.

You'd pick up the windfalls after we'd had a heavy frost and wind and put 'em in a dump case and nail a lid on it and we'd get a pound a case for those. You never had to buy manure in those times. There was no such thing as manure. You just worked 'em and chipped 'em, and grew the fruit. We had to spray, though.

Bill: So you didn't fertilise them with anything? I suppose the soil was good enough as it was, was it?

Keith: Oh yes. They were growing their hundred bushells of corn to the acre here when they first came here. And this is what all the flats were used for. When my father came over here, he came over with old Mr Perry. He came over to share farm with him - him and his brother, and their sister came to cook for 'em. There were quite a few share farms. Two and six a bushell I think it was for corn. By christ there was a lot of work in corn! You had to work the ground, grow the stalks, then pull it, husk it, thrash it, bag it, then cart it into the railway. Two and six a bushell...that's about ten bob a bag.

Bill: So Wyong was your main railhead?

Keith: Yeah. The only place. All the timber for Sydney went to Wyong on the bullock team ...and the sleepers. There was hundreds of thousands of sleepers cut, back in those early days.

Bill: You'd cut and split them in the bush?

Keith: Yes, then you'd pull them out with bullocks. It was a boom time before my time, you see. The only work was growing corn and bush work. We used to cut sleepers for China and New Zealand and everywhere. The ones for China were short - only six feet long and eight by five. Our sleepers were eight feet long, and nine by four and a half. And by christ they were heavy to carry! You'd split 'em out with wedges and then you'd square them. Ironbark was worth sixpence more than white mahogany.

Bill: Was that because you were always sharpening your axe with ironbark?

Keith: Well, you could break pieces out of them if you didn't look out! You'd have your axze all nice and sharp and a bit would break out of it and you'd have to throw it away and go and buy a new one.

Bill: 'Cos the wood was so hard?

Keith: Oh christ yes. The ironbark here I think is the hardest - the best in the state. The blue gum was, too.

Bill: It must've been a bugger to work with...

Keith: Oh yes. And when it was down you'd stand out in the sun knocking the heads off 'em...

But we enjoyed ourselves. We knew nothing else. We'd play a bit of cricket on a Saturday, or a bit of tennis. My father built a new house - I'd be six or seven, I suppose, and three-ply must have just come out - and he cut me out a tennis racquet from a bit of three-ply. And that's how I played tennis. They built a tennis court at the school.

Bill: And was the new house still at Ravensdale?

Keith: Yes. They only had a small one before, but when they ended up with seven kids, it was a little bit small. They didn't finish it off, though. They built the shell, and put partitions up, but no ceiling - only two rooms had a ceiling, I think.

At that time when the oranges were good he made a few pounds, that's when he bought the 640 acres here. It was all good - beautiful timber. And the brother owned the one down there where the barracks are for the horse stud now. That was known as Lucy's - Lucy Bailey lived there. The brother built the house there when they got married.

Bill: Did you prefer working in the bush - or farm work?

Keith: Oh the bush. Bugger that pulling peas and beans! Too backbreaking and there was no money in it.

We used to get paid with our tucker.

Then the brother and I sold the team and got an old crawler tractor. It made it a fair bit easier, but you still had to run up and down hill with eight hundred foot of wire rope to flog the logs up out of the bush. There was so much scrub you'd get a whole heap of scrub around the front of the log and you'd spend an hour or something cutting the rubbish away.

Bill: How many bullocks were in a team?

Keith: Fourteen to sixteen. One old fella round here had twenty four. That was a long team!

Bill: And it wouldn't be easy to get them to do what you wanted, would it?

Keith: Well, there's a big knack in it. A lot of people couldn't drive 'em at all, because you had to get them all to pull at once, you know? Just the same it's marvellous what they shifted. The eldest brother was a good driver, but I wasn't much of a hand at driving.

Bill: Are they intelligent animals?

Keith: Oh cripes yes. And you'd get some that was cunning as anything, and they'd just cruise along. But it was marvellous what the leaders'd do.

Bill: Did the blokes working them get injured very much?

Keith: No, not a lot. Occasionally somebody might get hurt - their toe, or an axe in the foot.

Bill: What happened to that finger of yours?

Keith: Which? Oh that one. I cut that off when I was sharpening the wedge for my squaring axe. It was loose in the handle and I was sharpening the wedge on a stump and my feet slipped and I caught my finger. The brother-in-law was there and he picked it up and said "What'll I do with it?" and I said "Throw it down the hill!". It looked like some sort of grub. It didn't pain me at all, at first. I went to the doc's - there was a doctor here then - and I had the finger rolled up in a bit of tucker bag, and when he undone that it spurted blood all over him! But when I came home that night, I said to Jean that I'd hate to have a leg off, going by the pain from the rotten thing.

Bill: He gave you nothing for it?

Keith: No, no. And holy christ it pained that night. (laughs).

Bill: And you said there were seven brothers. Are they all dispersed around the place now?

Keith: No. There was four brothers and three girls. There was seven in the family. There's only three of us left. My sister is in Port Macquarie, and the other brother's in the home at Wyong. He's lost the use of his legs and can't walk.

Bill: And were you near the top or near the end of the seven kids?

Keith: I was the fifth one. They were all pretty big families in those times. I was the first one born in Wyong, in the hospital there - the rest were all born at home. The old grandma was a real old doctor - she could do almost anything. My mother got burnt when she was only a girl jumping over a fire that they'd made and caught her dress alight and burnt all her legs, and grandma grafted that with something. Someone said it was a bandicoot skin but I wouldn't think a bandicoot skin would take, would you?

And then another sister crawled into an open fire and burnt both her hands very badly. A couple of stumps there, and a thumb, and part of that finger. She could hold a pen and write left-handed, but the other was

just stumps. And nothing to kill the pain. Hell! I'm sure her mother must've been mad with anxiety for the poor little devil.

Bill: And it was your grandmother that sort of looked after the medical end of things?

Keith: That's right. Another pioneer of Yarramalong, Jimmy Waters, was my grandfather. He came here with his father Ezekiel Waters back in the 1840's or something.

Bill: What was it like then, do you know? Rainforest everywhere?

Keith: There was a few paddocks cleared. He started a sawmill, the grandfather. He had the first sawmill in the district down at Yarramalong. It was down behind where Denny Lee's house is now.

Bill: There must have been a few mills in the valley over the years...

Keith: There was quite a few. His was the first, then a couple started up near Wyong. There were two more at Wyong Creek, and one further up Brush Creek near Kingtree. They had steam engines and had to be near water. And there was a little one down here just in front of the school.

Bill: And what became of all of them?

Keith: Over the years they went. They started dairy farming and growing fruit, and so they changed their work. Things got a bit better, I suppose.

The dairying was fairly good. It was sure money, even though they didn't make much out of it. Sometime before the 1950's, anyone that had a forty acre block only had to put slabs up, and tar it, and put in a cement floor, and you could dairy! But it was in the fifties that dairying really got going strongest here.

Bill: So the boom in dairying only lasted about 25 years?

Keith: 25 or 30 years, yeah. It might've been a bit longer.

Keith: (Pause) ...They used to have a chute at Kingtree. This old Carson that had the big mill down here, he was a Yankee, and he was into all sorts of things. He blasted a gap in a big rock, they built scaffolding up to that, and shot the logs down from right up on top of this hill. They'd go down through this tunnel and via this viaduct thing he'd built and then out into a paddock. Trouble is half of 'em busted up when they landed... Only a year or two back there were still half logs laying around u there. He was always up to something like that. But it was too far. The logs would do a thousand mile and hour coming down there!

Bill: It must've been pretty spectacular when they landed.

Keith: Oh it was. It's a wonder he wasn't killed a couple of times. They say he crawled up through the tunnel in the rock - they had a ladder up the cliff - and he'd just got out of the tunnel when a log came down! They didn't know he was coming! Another time he went up through it in a storm and it washed him down. They were picking splinters out of him for weeks after! The tunnel used to just fill up with water during these big storms.

He built a flying fox over at Ravensdale, on what they call The Knoll, there. It had a big rope, and he put pulleys on it. He used to tie the logs on under the pulleys, and he had a big winch with a brake on it to lower them down. It worked alright. But then he wasn't satisfied with that, and he made a tramline up there!

Bill: He must've been a pretty inventive sort of bloke.

Keith: He had something to do with the harbour bridge - with the designing of it. Anyway, he built this bloody railway line - a double line, and when the loaded one was coming down an empty one was coming

up. And it wasn't too bad either. He seemed to do alright with that for a good while. It ended up breaking away and bolting, and snaked the sides all up.

He got a White truck about this time, and he carted the timber with the bullocks and with the big White truck. You know the old ones with the solid tyres on 'em? And he used to get stuck everywhere with it. So he put pneumatic tyres on it and that made a wonderful difference. He used to cart a lot of stuff - all the poles, telegraph poles and electric light poles, turpen piles - and he'd cart it all up to the railway.

Bill: And when did the bullocks bite the dust?

Keith: Well Jean's brother had a bullock team, and my brother still had a team back in the early fifties. There are still the odd hobby teams about. They've got a little team up at Morrisset, but they're not making a living out of it. Two uncles had a team each, and they worked off that ridge going down into Ravensdale. You know where Cornwell's place is? The rogue, Snapper Cornwell?

Bill: No. I didn't know he had a place up here.

Keith: That was my grandfather's place. He built that and they used to work from there.

Bill: And what about the red cedar? Was that all gone when you were a kid?

Keith: Oh yeah. There were two trees that were left, out in the middle of paddocks. One was at my grandfather's, and the other was up where Brian Anderson lives now. They were trees that had grown in the scrub and they just had a few bunches of leaves on top - they went straight up. They would've been sixty or seventy feet long, and about a seven foot girth.

Me and my brother - this is when we were dairying - we lost a cow, and we had to go round to my uncle's place looking for this cow, and they were falling this cedar there. They'd dug it out of the ground and cut the roots - so we sat down to watch them. We were late for school that morning!

Bill: So those early ones were big and straight, not spreading like the ones that are left now?

Keith: Yeah. That's what they made the tables out of - all the furniture. Everyone had a cedar table or a white beech table, but we didn't appreciate 'em. We let them fall to bits and threw them away.

Bill: And the sawmills, did they use circular saws or reciprocating saws? Were they steam-driven?

Keith: Yes, vertical ones - with two saws in it. And that was steam-driven. With a steam motor you had a big crank and a big flywheel. Once it got going the big flywheel kept the speed up. They had to have governors on it, of course, or else it'd bolt. They had to fire the boilers, and of course there was plenty of scrap wood. There was no mill offcuts for firewood sold in those times - you cut your own firewood. And they didn't have docking saws to dock it up with. They had a little saw with a Buzzacott motor on it and a crank, and it worked a crosscut. They had those for cutting the logs to the lengths of fellies - 18" to 20" long. You'd start it up, and you had a spring so you could put the tension on the saw to make it cut more.

Bill: I wonder what happened to all those old motors and engines? I suppose they'd be worth a few bob now.

Keith: Yes. You always see ads in the local paper for old motors. They do 'em up.

Bill: You mentioned wedging your axe handle earlier. Did you use adzes and stuff as well, or a broadaxe, or what?

Keith: The broadaxe.

Bill: Were they hard to use?

Keith: Oh no. They were sharpened on one side, and you put a bit of a bend in the heel of it. And the

handles came up high - that was so you didn't break your back. You could stand up straight, and the axe would still be coming down square.

Bill: Did people split shingles much?

Keith: Yes, but back before my time. Most of the old houses would be shingled.

Bill: But by the time you were growing up they were into corrugated iron?

Keith: Yeah. But there are shingle roofs about. A lot of the sheds and that used to have shingles on them. They used to make good firewood. We used to pull 'em out and burn 'em

Bill: What were they split from, she-oak?

Keith: Oak. Forest oak.

Bill: I suppose a shingle roof would've been a fire hazard.

Keith: Oh they would've been, yeah. I dunno how the firefighters'd go now if they had shingle roofs. They'd never let you build. Marvellous how we've deteriorated, isn't it? We've got to get people to tell us what to do now. We can't think for ourselves. If you want to build a house somewhere you have to go and ask the Council can you build it, 'cos it might get caught in a flood or in a fire.

Some of the houses that had shingles they just put the tin over the top of them. Jeez they were cool. My uncle did that. The grandfather owned this property next door, and his sheds had shingle roofs on them.

Bill: And you said that the whole family came over here from St Alban's, didn't you?

Keith: No. Only my father and his brothers. Lots of others came too. It got too thick over there - there was no room for 'em. It was settled clean out. My father worked over there for a few years, I think, till Michael Perry brought him over here with him, and then the rest followed - they all came over. There were nine boys and three girls I think it was.

Bill: And when you were a kid was there a Post Office up Brush Creek there, at Bebeah?

Keith: Yes, where Doctor Pinczewski is now - the bloke that bought Scholberg's. The Post Offices came here about 1922.

Bill: Did you get a regular mail delivery?

Keith: Feller on a horse - three times a week. The mail came up on Cobb and Co., and the chap on the horse took it up to Brush Creek.

Jean: There was a Post Office at Ravensdale, a Post Office here, a Post Office at Yarramalong, one at Wyong Creek...

Keith: I can remember them putting the telephone lines up.

Bill: That must have made a difference, did it? *Keith:* We still didn't put the phone on. We didn't put the phone on till we started dairying - we didn't need it. If we wanted to ring up we could go to the Post Office, but half the time the public phone wouldn't work and you'd have to go inside, and I used to hate that because you'd let everyone know what you were talking about. I think they used to smash it so you'd have to go inside and they'd know what you was doing! We'd be ringing up for timber orders and things like that, and you had a lot of opposition.

Bill: It must have been a rough old road up Bumble Hill before they sealed it, was it?

Keith: That was what they called the Old Road - that was only a horse and cart road. Instead of going round like that when you start up from the bottom it went to the left where Frank Clune used to live

there...

Bill: I never knew he used to live here.

Keith: Oh yes. He brought Namatjira up here, and other painters - that bloke from up Wangi... what's his name?

Bill: Bill Dobell?

Keith: That's him. Clune was a tax agent and used to do our tax.

Bill: And with roads like that, how did they build them? I mean, they didn't have bulldozers...

Keith: No. They'd have a drill, a short one, and you hit that with a hammer while a feller sat on his haunches and turned it. It had a sort of cutaway both sides. That'd get you down so far, then they had a jumper about ten foot long, and you picked that one up and down, to cut the holes so you could blow the rocks out. And after that it was by hand - shovel and mattock. The only other thing they'd have was a horse and scoop or a dray. All that deviation up to your place (upper Brush Creek Road) that was all done by hand.

Bill: Jeez it must have been hard work.

Keith: Oh yes, and when you look what the convicts done over round St Alban's and those places...

Bill: It was even harder for them...

Keith: Well they was in leg-irons. But jeez there must've been some good stonemasons among 'em. And they must have been wonderful surveyors in those times - they had no aeroplanes to go up in and have a look. I think the aborigines took 'em from Wisemans Ferry through St Albans and then through to Wollombi.

There's another road up Yarramalong, up the mountain. It shoots off before you get up to the first gate on the left going up Bumble Hill. Just on the right there there's a road going round. That went right round under a big set of cliffs and up to Kulnura. It had a beautiful grade, but the only thing was it had very sharp bends, and they couldn't get round with long loads. The brother-in-law used to drive the White round there, but he could only put about twenty foot logs on it. It was beautiful with the water dripping over the ferns and that on these big cliffs, and they had a water trough there for a horse. There were three or four troughs between here and Wyong to water your horse. That road is on Lloyd Jones' property now. Whether it's still a road or not I couldn't tell you.

Bill: On a different tack - would you happen to know why the Letter A is called "The Letter A"?

Keith: Yes... Well, it's not so distinguished now, but when you come at it from Brush Creek Rd, there was a short cut going out to the right for when you went out to Bucketty. When they cut across that with the other road, it made an "A" out of it. It wasn't very big - only about 100 yards or so, but you used to be able to see the "A" formed by it. (Digression)

Keith: ...Yes, Jean was a Bailey. She lived in Wyong for 14 years. She was 14 when they came back - I was about 18. I had to wait till she grew up! (laughs).

There were two John Baileys over at St Alban's, and they called one "Squire" and the other "Governor" to distinguish them. And they had 20 kids each - I think one had 21. They had two marriages each, and someone said - I'm not sure if it's true or not - that one of them shot away from there up to Singleton - W.A. Bailey and Sons Auctioneers - and have been up there for years. And five of them fellas married five Fernance girls!

Bill: There's quite a Fernance/Bailey association then eh?

Keith: Yeah. It's like the Woodburys. You've heard of Matthew Everingham? He was sent out in the First Fleet and both him and his wife were literate. Woodbury came out and married his oldest daughter Sarah - he was a brewer. And they all intermarried - all up and down the Hawkesbury, at Mangrove Creek - a lot of them got up past Taree. They all intermarried. They only had a horse to ride, so they couldn't go too far, I suppose!

Bill: Well, I keep seeing Fernances everywhere - not only round here, but on maps all over the place.

Keith: Well, we're all related. Only one Fernance was sent out here. John Anthony Fernance. He was married and had one kiddie.

Bill: It must have been a great day when the brewer came to the area, was it?

Keith: (laughs) It would've been! And spoiled everyone's work...

Bill: When you were younger, did you just buy booze and bring it out from Wyong?

Keith: There wasn't much booze bought, I can tell you that. When I was playing cricket we used to have a drink nearly every Saturday I suppose. But you only had ten bob, and beer was sixpence a mug. I'd only have two beers. Then maybe a couple of us'd buy a bottle of wine for two bob to go to the dance that night, and we'd still have a few shillings left over. You'd bludge a ride in on a couple of old timber trucks that'd be going in, and often they'd give us a ride back home again.

Bill: Nobody had any stills up in the bush or anything?

Keith: No none of that. I don't think there could have been - we'd have known about it if there were. The great grandfather had an Inn at Yarramalong - right there opposite Wally's, at Linga Longa. They lost their licence for serving after hours. Dogooders. But when would the blokes have time to have a drink? They'd work five and half days a week. They wouldn't get home till after lunch on Saturday - and they'd have to cut wood all the bloody weekend to keep the fires going at home to last the week while they was away camping. The only time they had to have a drink was after hours - it was pretty tough for them. But they must've made a bit of money out of the inn because they had properties everywhere.

Bill: And who was Beavans - of Beavans Ridge, Beavandale etc?

Keith: Oh Billy Beavans come here probably just after the Waters' and the Stinsons. He was a pioneer of Brush Creek. He selected that ground just beside the little bridge opposite the mill.

Bill: So it went right back into the hills up to Beavan's Ridge then?

Keith: Oh no. Beavan's Ridge is up here (points). That's Harry Beavans. He bought that off Waters', and put a bullock road up to the ridge.

Billy must've had three sons, I think. My auntie married one of his sons. They must have split the property up and took sections each. One was called Joe Beavans - he was married twice - and I think he had about 14 kids. My grandfather had 17 kids from his two marriages.

Bill: And with that many kids, did they tend to split up the family property between them, or what?

Keith: Lots of times they did, but most of the families were too big. The last bloke might get the property, maybe. How they reared them, I'm blest if I know. There was plenty of vegetables, and plenty of milk and butter, and they'd kill a beast in the winter. There was no vealers killed those times - they were only growing cattle. There was no refrigeration, so you had to salt it down. You might have a roast or a joint in the first couple of days and the rest'd be salted.

Bill: And did you make bread all the time then, Jean?

Jean: No. We were better off then for bread than we are now. You could send your order into Chapman's at Wyong, and they'd bring it out to you in the cart. The cart came out with your order every week.

Keith: That's why we didn't have to go to town very often, because Chapman and Sons, the big shop in Wyong, had a shop in Yarramalong. A wagonette would come out from Wyong every day to Yarramalong, then they had a horse and cart that came up here one day and up Ravensdale the next. The stuff came to your door. You didn't inquire about the price because there was no opposition.

Jean: The baker used to come Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

Keith: Chapman's had everything - hardware, clothes, you could buy anything you wanted.

Jean: The baker would even bring you a reel of cotton, and if you asked him he'd go over to the butcher shop and get you some meat.

Bill: And I suppose there were enough fresh fruit and vegetables that you didn't have to go preserving stuff and all that?

Jean: No, I used to preserve.

Keith: Yes, a lot of preserves, because it was only seasonal - your apples and pears - couple of months and they were gone.

Bill: What did you use? Vacola?

Jean: Yes.

Keith: She had a vacola. Mum didn't - she had a big boiler. She used to boil jam up in that, and the bottles to preserve the fruit. There was every kind of fruit you'd like to mention in those days - figs, apricots, nectarines, all sorts of peaches, all sorts of apples and pears.

Jean: I'd make pickles and that sort of thing.

Keith: Up at my grandmother's we used to go up the mulberry tree - it was forty foot high with great big limbs. You could climb up and sit there and have a feed. The birds didn't bother us then - not like the satinbirds now. I suppose they had plenty of feed in the bush. Now you can't grow anything for the rotten things.

Bill: Wouldn't you have been troubled a lot by animals generally?

Keith: Well nearly every place had a fox hound. They tended to keep 'em away. We were really like Dad and Dave. Have you read "On Our Selection"? Well, we were only a little bit above them I'd say.(laughs)

Bill: And what with electric light and all that now, do you miss... do you still use a fuel stove?

Jean: No.

Bill: Were you glad to see all that go?

Jean: Not really.

Keith: We've only had an electric stove seventeen years. We had a big combustion stove in the other house.

Bill: And although you didn't have the conveniences then, do you think that in some ways it was still better?

Keith: It's too fast now. Everything's too rushed.

Jean: We never missed it because we weren't used to it, see?

Keith: We started off with kerosene lights and we ended up with an Aladdin - the pressure light. They were a beautiful light. Before that we only had a little bracket lamp that we'd hang up beside our bed and read by - or a candle. I think we had a better time, then.

James Waters started growing arrowroot and some sort of cane - farmer's friend or something it was called. He made a big vat - he must've been a pretty good blacksmith - and used to melt this cane down and make syrup out of it. He sent some to Philadelphia and all over the world and got first prizes for it. "Planter's Friend"- that's it. He also invented a half-circular saw to cut the fellies out. He made a saw with a half moon in it so it just run round the circle to cut the fellies. Like a disc plough - a saucer with a dish in it.

They could turn their hand to anything. Old Uncle Merv, he could blacksmith, he could carpent, he could make anything. If you happened to break something - your gun or something - he'd braze it back together again with a little blowlamp or whatever he had. He was the undertaker more or less around the place. He made all the cedar coffins, and got nothing for them.

Jean: If any of the locals died Keith and them would go down and they always dug the grave and that. All voluntary labour. (long pause).

Bill: ...Did you ever use one of those Hagen saws when you were cutting timber in the bush?

Keith: No, I never used one, but a cousin of mine had one. He used to cut oak for the factory boilers. It was a bit awkward to wheel around unless you was on level ground. They were dangerous.

Bill: When you were logging, did you go far enough away that you had to camp?

Keith: Oh yes. We used to do it many times. We lived in Ravensdale and there used to be a big shed - the bloke that owned this before us used to have a big packing shed there and we used to camp in that. We couldn't waste the time coming from over there to here - it's a half hour's walk or more.

Bill: What did you live on then ?

Keith: Corned meat, and vegetables. You had to look out for blowflies. We only had a meat safe - you'd hang it up a tree in the shade and it'd keep your corned beef alright. The possums'd get into your camp and get into your sugar - they were buggers! And the old currawongs and magpies - you wouldn't want to leave anything out on the table.

Most of the camps only had three sides in 'em. You know, you'd stick up a temporary shack with some bark for a roof, and make bunks out of poles with a corn bag on 'em. Two sides were wide open. You'd wake up in the night and the rain'd be dripping down on your head and you'd have to shift your head over because the bark'd curl up and let the water come through.

I can remember when we were up with a bulldozer pulling logs out, and the Annual Ball was on at Yarramalong that Friday night. We had to work till it was nearly dark - five o'clock or so - it was in August. My brother-in-law and I took a short cut down through Yorkie Gully, come down there, over home, then shaved, had a bath, and then straight on to the dance.

I was going to tell you about the water shortage when we were kids. Ours was only a two thousand gallon tank, like most, and you'd be lucky to have that - no pumps. Mum'd have to go to the creek to do the washing - she'd take the copper down there. Either that or, when the forty gallon drums came out, you'd cut the top out of one of them and slide it up with a horse and slide. Other than that they'd have to go down to the creek, dip the water into the copper and boil it up down there.

Bill: Are you glad those days are gone, Jean?

Jean: Not really. It never worried me.

Keith: They had a washing board - well, they still have those today for that matter...

Bill: They seem to be mainly used in dixieland jazz bands these days!

Keith: Yes... they were good days... When I was going to school when I was ten or eleven or the like of that, I'd go into the bush and cut bangalow trees down or something like this for a bit of fun, and chew the middle out of them. Only mischief really. You filled in your Sunday morning with things like that.

Bill: And was it accepted that the young fellers would be good shots by the time they were in their teens?

Keith: Oh yes, but not so much in my time as it was before. My grandfather bought a good gun for all his sons. They were all English guns, beautiful guns, and they all cherished them.

There was a lot of hunting done those times. In those days the blue pigeons'd be around in thousands - you'd go and shoot ten with a shot. They'd be all over a berry tree, - two hundred, up to four hundred in a mob. And the satin birds! They're good eating, too - make good soup. Wild turkeys. Then the rabbits came. Didn't have a rabbit until about 1922, I suppose, and even then they were only in odd patches.

Bill: Were they ever a real problem here?

Keith: Oh they got pretty thick in the finish, but they put myxo into 'em.

But with the pigeons - Mum'd make a paste, like she was making a loaf or something...

Jean: It was like a scone, out of water and flour...

Keith: ...and she'd put that in the top of the soup and the steam from the soup'd go through it, and it'd be like dough - cooked dough.

Jean: Steamed pie they called it.

Keith: It was beautiful, with the flavour of the birds and onions and stuff all through it. It's a wonder we didn't die of indigestion! (laughs). When the sugar strike was on you couldn't buy any sugar, and we used to use treacle or golden syrup to put in your tea to sweeten it.

Bill: Did anybody keep bees much?

Keith: Well, they just had to go in the bush and rob them.

Bill: They'd use bush honey?

Keith: Yes.

Bill: I thought that gave you the trots.

Keith: No. The native bee does. You have a feed of it and a drink of water and you'll be cleaned out! No, but the bush honey was good. We'd go across the tops for a few days, take the horse and slide, and tubs, and rob about a dozen hives, and that would probably do two or three families.

Bill: So they were different to the little bush bees?

Keith: Yes, they had split out from the English bee. Then they got those savage Italian ones. They had brown-looking stripes round their backside - the English ones were just a dark colour. Yeah, I got stung with 'em.

Jean: Yes, but you can't get stung with them now. He's allergic to them now. They said that if he got stung with more than one it'd kill him.

Keith: That's another thing I didn't tell you about - how we used to wash ourselves. We had three tubs - a big one, then a smaller one, then a smaller one still. We used to bath in the big one. We'd have a big open fire and we always had a three or four gallon kettle with a tap on it sitting on the fire. Over at my grandmother's they had a tripod and a crane, and you could swing it in and out. They were big kettles, so we had hot water all the time.

Bill: And did you draw straws to see who went in the bath first?

Keith: We kids'd let anyone go first - we didn't want to get in the thing! When we were kids we'd have a wash every night, but after that it was only one bath a week. We'd come home Friday afternoons after camping out and that, and have a bath. We'd have run out of water if all these kids were having showers...

...With the shooting we were talking about - I could go to the shop and buy cartridges when I wouldn't have any money, and book 'em up. It was all booked up those times, with monthly payments - no cash. I went to town, when I was growing up and starting to buy wedges and axehandles and that. I'd go to three places in Wyong, and book up whatever I wanted - no questions asked. Everyone knew you, especially when you started buying land and that. But we couldn't get credit anywhere now - they don't trust anyone. They couldn't afford to, 'cos half the cheques'd bounce and you'd never see 'em again. They'd be gone...

As far as how much grog we drank - we'd get a dozen big bottles of beer at Xmas. Back when I was young, sometimes someone would buy a five gallon keg, but through the war years we couldn't get grog, and the old publican would save us some for Xmas, you know? But you'd have to live round here to get it. They'd ask you where you lived: "Round Dooralong". "Round Dooralong? D'you know Paddy's Knob then?" "No, never heard of it", "Well, you don't live round Dooralong then, and you don't get a beer from here."! (laughs). He was an Irishman, this fella, christ he was a wild man!

Bill: And when you were young you had mates up Ravensdale?

Keith: Yes, there were the Stackmans, and the Jurds, and the Gavenlocks - there was a whole gang of us.

Bill: Were there a lot of Jurds in the valley?

Keith: Three families. Old Bill Jurd, he lived across from where that new cape cod looking house is built up on the knob there. (interruption)...

Bill: ...Mrs Beavan? Did she live where Blundells used to?

Keith: Yes. Polly Beavan. She was the midwife and used to go round all the families when the babies were being born, and there were very few babies lost. There were two sets of twins. My brother-inlaw had the twins - Perce Dixon - him and Jeannie Dixon. They were born at the turn of the century. Other than that, there were quite a few kiddies died. Especially with that plague that went through in 1919 - what do they call it? Bubonic plague? They had the Wyong School as a hospital - Jean's father was mixed up in it. And diphtheria took a lot of kids away. Irwin Craft had three little girls, and the three of them died within two or three weeks - one after the other.

Bill: Last time I was here Jean mentioned something about you nearly drowning as a kid...

Keith: They say that I didn't die because I was born with a "Lucky Veil" - I don't know if it had anything to do with me not getting drowned or not. I was two year old. Mum was peeling vegetables, and the old cow came round, looking for some peelings, and Mum chased her off. We lived up the hill, and down the side was a big lagoon at the bottom, then there was a break of land and there was another lagoon. One was all reeds and one was clear.

Well, I disappeared, and I don't know how long it was before she missed me, but when she did she went down and looked straight in the swamp, of course, but I was nowhere to be seen. So she run on up the

farm, another two hundred yards I suppose, to where my father was working, and she got him. When they came back I was floating. And the old schoolteacher (the feller that set the bloke's leg - Mr Hawthorne), he came over, and they couldn't pump any water out of me. I had a woollen suit on, and they had to cut it off, it had shrunk that tight. They couldn't understand it, but they got me to come round, anyhow. The old Uncle called me Bullyfrog after that, right up till I was about 14. So I had one life there.

Bill: Yeah. Have you used up any others?

Keith: Well, quite a few near misses... When the brother and I bought the old tractor, to haul the timber out, we worked that for a couple of years, and he built up a poultry farm down there where the barracks are - that was his place, "Lucy's" as I called it before. He wanted to leave the bush so we sold out to Kenny Smith's grandfather Merv Smith - he had the mill down at the swamp, on the flat.

So I took on driving the tractor then. But it kept breaking down - it was an old petrol one and you can imagine how much petrol she chewed through! So then he bought a little TD40 diesel - an International tractor... a crawler, with an Armstrong winch on the back. That was a beautiful little winch, that. You couldn't snig any logs 'cos it was too light - it was only about four and a half ton - but it had a winch on it with two gears that winched ten ton. But it was that light you had to back into a tree or something or else it would've just drug the tractor down the hill.

I was getting a tree out of a gully one day - it was a turpen about a foot through at the butt, I suppose. It had not long died, and the cockatoos had eaten all the grubs out of the bark. So I backed into that. The log kept catching in some rocks as it was coming up, and a couple of times I had a go at getting it past. The next thing I know my mate was pouring water over me out of a water bag! You see, where the grubs had eaten the tree it had broken off half way up, and when you're winching, you watch the winch over your shoulder, so I didn't see what was happening. The dead tree fell on my head and hit my head on the back of the winch and broke that bone under my eye.

We walked out of there, and I couldn't remember where we were until we got out to George Downes Drive, at Cottees there. Did I have a bloody black eye after! I had a couple of days off work and while I was off we went to the Sydney Show, and I had this purple eye! Every bugger was looking at me! ...Yes, that was a fairly close one. I must have managed to knock the clutch out before it hit me. I coulda been down in the gully with the tractor.

I had one of my mates killed beside me, out here on Beavan's Ridge, in a rotten wild windstorm. It was a Friday afternoon and a storm come up. We used to ride to work then and we had three horses tied up so they couldn't reach one another. We were hurrying to saddle up the horses to get going because of the storm when a big apple tree limb came down the side of a sapling and trimmed all the limbs off it as it was coming down, then deflected over and hit my mate fair on the top of the head. Busted his head open. But he was sort of semi-conscious, and I got his false teeth out of his mouth, and me mate went off looking for water, 'cos we'd run out, but we didn't need any water.

When he came back I said he'd better go for help somewhere. The wind was still roaring and I didn't know what to do. I thought he might get killed before he got down to the blasted bottom. I could talk to this feller, and he was moaning and trying to talk back to me, and I wondered if I could get him up on the tractor. I drove the tractor over close to him and I got him up and propped him on the tracks on his back-side. He stayed there till I got up behind him, and then I hauled him up and into the seat. He was about thirteen stone, and I was about nine stone nine! He was a big man. Then we set sail home and met a chap coming up. They took him to hospital in Newcastle, and he died that night. He was a chap named Cecil Woodbury.

Bill: Squatter said that somebody got killed by a tree ...

Keith: Joey Fernance. He lived next door to where Squatter's living now, on the corner where Bunning

Creek Road goes up. He was married and had a family. I think there was a dead tree leaning into the one he was falling. I don't know what happened, but he must've turned around and walked away. He was away from the tree, anyhow, and this dead one came down and caught him. I suppose the chainsaw was still running, probably, and he wouldn't hear it... ..

There've been a few accidents, I suppose, but not a lot considering how many people have worked in the bush ...plenty of gashed legs and things like that. There was a chap named Bill Mullard who got caught when he felled a log and it went into a tree and shot back. Caught his leg. I think he was there for an afternoon and a night before they found him. They took him to Newcastle and took his leg off. A friend of mine went up to see him, Tom Stackman, and he said to Tom: "I wish they'd take this leg off, god almighty it's paining." But the leg was already gone. He died a couple of days after. There was no penicillin those times and blood poisoning set in, gangrene or whatever...

Bill: Keith, what about floods? We haven't talked about floods. They're a feature of life here, aren't they?

Keith: Oh yes. We were shut in here thirteen times in one year once. Irritating - especially when you had milk to go. We used to put it in the utilities, or in the trailer behind the car, and take it out up round your way and down through the Forest Road - right round Gosford sometimes. Oh, there've been some drastic floods.

We had a terrible flood here one time - I think it was the one that started all the banks tearing away, you know, knocked the bushes around and that. We'd already had a flood and it had not long gone down, and me and the mates went up to Maitland to a horse sale. A storm came while we were up there, and I said: "By cripes, if this storm's at home we won't get home! It won't take much to make a flood now."

Anyway, we came home, and there at that little bridge at Beavandale there was no sign of water, but as we came up further, about four houses this side of the bloody bridge, there was the water clean over the bloody paddocks! Right over the lot! By the time we got up to where Ashworth's live, we were walking through water up to our chest. I'd have liked to have seen it come down. Frightening noise, it was, Jean says. She was on her own. It only rained about as far as the turn at Brush Creek - it was all out this way. We went up to Yorkie the next day, and that bridge at Yorkie was just covered in logs and limbs. It went clean over the top of it.

That wasn't the biggest flood we've had, of course. The big one was at Easter 1927 - the biggest flood we ever had here. That bridge at Yarramalong, Stephenson's Bridge - I don't know if they built that one any higher than the old one, could be a little bit - but it was two feet over the top of the old bridge.

Bill: Was that always called Stephenson's Bridge?

Keith: Yes, he built the original one. It was built up high, but then you came into the dip there at Denny Lee's and you'd be cut off there. They rose that three feet from what it used to be - all the flood places have been risen about a metre, from here to Wyong, but you still get boxed in.

Back in my young days, you could say we'd have a flood every winter, then a dry spring and summer. All through the thirties there were blasted droughts - floods in winter then no rain to speak of for the rest of the year. We had the bullocks then, the brother and I, and there wasn't a log that you could get the bark off. They were all stuck tight. It blew roaring westerly winds right up till Christmas. They were terrible years, those years.

My mother and her family, and all the families of her time, they had to walk to Yarramalong to go to school - there was no school at Ravensdale then. I can't remember when the first school was built at Ravensdale. We didn't have the books they've got today. They had to write everything up on the black-board for you. The sums, we used to call it then - mathematics now.(laughs).

Bill: It looks to me like there were plenty of schools but not a lot of churches in the valley...

Keith: All bloody atheists, like me (laughs). But you read “A Hawkesbury Tale” by Valerie Ross, and you’ll see that everywhere the people went, before they had a house of their own really, they built a bloody church.

Bill: Mmm. Well, St Albans has got a lot of churches hasn’t it?

Keith: Oh yes, bloody churches everywhere. Right through Wollombi, and all up the Hunter. A lot of Irish people went there, so there are lots of big Catholic places up there. There was a church at Wyong Creek but they pulled it down and sold the ground there - just past Lauffs Lane on the left.

Bill: And there was that little one on Renie Smith’s that Le Sueur rebuilt on his place.

Keith: Yes, that was a Methodist one. And the one opposite Denny Lee’s place is still there. That’s the oldest church in the district - Gosford and everywhere. Jean’s grandfather was the first one married there - old Joe Bailey. They’ve lost all the papers out of it, though - they don’t know what’s become of the records. Someone says they were sent to Newcastle, but they’ve never been able to find them. There were no Catholic churches here, mostly Protestant. My father was religious - he came from St Albans. He went to church, and was confirmed and christ knows what.

Bill: And you kids didn’t have to go to Sunday School or anything?

Keith: No. We only went there if we wanted to get some of those little pictures they used to hand out. (laughs). We had to walk to Yarramalong anyway - it was too far. I can remember being christened. I was christened with my youngest sister. She’s three and a half years younger than me, and I can remember the old feller putting his finger in the water and doing a cross on my forehead. I’d be four - four and a half, probably. Bit of a thing to do to kids when they know nothing about it. Stupid, I think.

Bill: Like circumcision. You don’t get a say in that, do you?

Keith: Well, if there’s something wrong they might have to do it - if the skin won’t go back. I only know two blokes that ever got done, and they were 7 or 8 years old when they got done. And it’d look terrible in the cold weather - like a blue match head! (pause) People have grown up a lot in some ways, but it’s took ‘em a bloody long time. Tradition - you’re supposed to keep it up. I think it’s like going to church - most times half of them are hypocrites that go there. Even the bloody preacher!

Bill: Yes, well, with all the revelations lately about abuse in religious institutions....

Keith: Yes, it’s getting worse and worse. You know what went on back over the years with all the orphans that was about - like the bloke said to the parson, if he wore his trousers the same way round as he wore his collar there wouldn’t be so many orphans about! (Digression).

Bill: ... I was talking to Squatter about nicknames. Not many people around here have their original names, do they?

Keith: No. My name was Snooks. Bill (Squatter) probably still calls me that. When I was born my mother couldn’t think of a name to name me, and the nurse said to call me Snooks. And Snooks stuck.

Bill: And why is Macka called Macka?

Keith: Oh, I think that feller that was killed by the tree named him Smacka - it was Smacka at the start ...and Sonny’s always been Sonny.

Bill: And the Stackman’s. Did they come into the valley later, or have they always been here?

Keith: They were here a lot of years. Old William Stackman’s father, he must’ve jumped ship or something in the early days - he was Prussian, or something like that. I think they’re buried at Yarramalong. They raised that family over there, and they reared another family - there’d be three or four generations of

them, I suppose - five generations now. There's not many of those left in the valley. Bill Waters and his son are the only Waters left in the valley. There would've been thirty back in my young days - more. Nearly a full cricket team of Waters' and Beavans'. They had one 'stranger' in the team - Jack Smith!

Merv had eight boys. I think there was five Beavans' - big families back then. Like what happened in St Alban's - there was no work - they had to shift to get work. They worked for the Main Roads Board on that Mooney Mooney Road that goes down to the punt at Peats Ferry when they first started that. None of the Stackman's were called by their right name. The eldest feller's name was Jasper, he got called Bill. The next bloke's name was Horace and he got called Tom. The next bloke was Harry, and he was called Jack.

Bill: But this was only the fellers. The women got their right names?

Keith: Yes, most of them did. Of the Stackman boys only Paul, the youngest, got his right name... but they used to call him Little Dog when he was young.

Bill: Did you have any say in what names the kids got? Or was that Mum's department?

Keith: Oh no, you'd talk about it but you generally let them have their way, whatever they wanted. But she wanted to call Judy Jill, and I didn't like Jill - you know, Jack and Jill - so we called her Judy. (digression)

Bill: I can't work out how you can remember all the dates of when things happened.

Keith: Oh, those things sort of stick in your mind when you were a kid. Like the new school built in 1919 over there - it was written on the side of the wall till I left school. And the big flood of 1927 - well that was big, Jean's got clippings out of the papers.

...I was telling you about the launches going over to the Entrance. Well, they run there for years. People would come up by train in holiday times to Wyong and Tuggerah, and they caught that launch out to The Entrance - must've brought their tents and everything with them. And Jean's father Cecil used to cart the luggage down from the railway to the wharf. Long Jetty would be just covered in tents - all over that knob above The Entrance - just a mass of tents. It was a big holiday place. Plenty of fish and wildlife about.

My first recollection of The Entrance was that there was the opening in the rocks close to where the surf sheds are, and it broke away out further and the sea just washed the sand up and blocked it up again. That's what caused a lot of the big floods - the entrance being blocked. Sometimes the high tide'd come in and fill the lake full.

That lake gets pretty rough in rough weather, too. The breakers'd go clean over that old Toukley Bridge. A lot of people drowned on that lake - they'd be out in their rowing boats and wouldn't see the signs of a southerly coming...

Bill: With the pioneering families in the valley, did everyone always get on alright, or were there any things like the Martins and the Coys sort of thing - family feuds...?

Keith: They all got on - in the main. They'd have a bit of a row over kids at school and things like that, sometimes. But the kids'd be back playing together while the parents were still rowing, so they began to wake up to themselves after a while. You don't go rowing with your neighbours over kids. But of course a lot of the people did.

Bill: So by and large it was pretty harmonious?

Keith: Pretty good. Most people knew everyone's business - though. You'd talk about one another, but not harmful. There was a bit of rivalry over some things, like the Yarramalong cricket team'd play the Ravensdale cricket team and it'd be like a test match - worse than a test match! The women were the

worst. They'd get up there barracking for their fathers and that, and get nasty because they got beat.

Bill: Did you play much football as well?

Keith: They started football teams here but there wasn't enough. You had to go to Wyong and play with Wyong when we played footie. The brother played a bit, and a few of the boys from here, but it was too expensive to get in there and get home again ...(Digression).

...That Chittaway Point. I can remember when there was only a hut on that. My uncle Tommy Fernance, and uncle Merv Waters built this hut on a block of ground they had down there. They used to go there weekends fishing, and shooting ducks. It was teeming with ducks and swans and all sorts of wildlife on the water. My father went down with them a few times and used to come back with a bag full of fish and that. We'd be waiting for him to come home to open the bag and look what was inside. Of course it wouldn't keep long, so you had to cook it, or salt it down.

We were down there at Chittaway one time fishing, when some lout there had a bloody rifle, and a poor old swan came flying over and fell down at our feet. He'd shot him. I dunno what sort of fun they were getting out of that...

Bill: Macka said something about you buying a Pontiac at one stage?

Keith: That was the first car I ever owned. I bought it off Jean's grandmother. She had it on blocks and it hadn't been used for quite a few years. I bought four new tyres and tubes and put on it, and used to drive it to go to work with my brother and his tractor. So this day I drove it to work, rolled a smoke, chucked the matches and tobacco in on the seat, and went off down the gully with the tractor. Coming back I see smoke coming up. Christ! I thought, that's near where that car is! The tractor was too slow, so I jumped off and ran. But it was all gone in flames! I must've lit the smoke, dropped the match, and it must have caught the leaves alight. Because we moved straight off we didn't notice. I still owed twenty quid on it, too! I only had it about six months, I suppose.

Bill: What'd you used to smoke? Cigarettes, a pipe?

Keith: No. You rolled your own cigarettes, those times. I never smoked a pipe. Mostly older fellers smoked pipes. The father smoked a pipe. He got a cancer on his lip - it killed him in two years. Ate his face away. He was 62. But Jean's brother was only 21 or 22 when he got a cancer. He had a little hole come out in that soft bit of your nose. Cecil took him straight down to a doctor in Sydney and they cut that bit out. He stayed down there for about six months while they kept an eye on him, then he came home. But it came up again and it ate his face away. Most of his nose was gone - just the bare bone to there. One eye was gone... no face left, no mouth. You'd want to shoot your bloody self!

I used to dress it for him - cover it up with lint and stuff. He must have went to sleep with the door open one day and the flies got at him. He had me picking the maggots out. Jesus Christ! I was frightened I'd hurt him. I had tweezers, and you'd get a bit of - not sinew, but something - and I'd ask him if it hurt, and he'd say; "No. Go on! Get'em out!" Jesus Christ! It got that bad we got the ambulance to take him to Sydney. He died a few days later on. They seem to get into a vital spot, the rotten bloody things.

Bill: And did they start off from skin cancers from the sun?

Keith: Well, father had a little thing on his lip, and some sort of milkweed that grows round the creek bank here, he put the sap from that on it and it went away for twelve months. But then it came back. It grew out, like bloody proud flesh - like a sausage turned inside out. He was going to go into hospital and have an operation. He was all ready to go to Sydney and a bloody flood come the day he had to go!

Jean's father's brother John had one in the same spot and he went to Newcastle and they cut away a whole lot. But he lived till he was 96, so it mightn't have been a bloody cancer anyway. ... My father saw

a chap in Wyong - they'd operated half a dozen times on him - a feller called Ernie Morton - and they cut his face up. They can have that for mine. And how the hell his mother looked after him...right through... slept with him till he died.

Bill: Mmm. Not a pleasant prospect, is it?

Keith: No... Jesus! Still, I dunno - these bloody strokes - I hate the thought of them too. They're worse than heart attacks ...though if you drop dead, you're alright, aren't you?

Bill: Yes. The big trick seems to be to go quick.

Keith: - Yep. There was Ron Greentree, the butcher. He was about 60 when he had a stroke. Only a small one - it left him paralysed a bit down one side. He was starting to come good - he was showing me how he was starting to be able to move his leg - then he had a big one. Took his voice and every bloody thing.... If your line was right you'd go and bloody shoot yourself, or go and jump in the bloody creek and drown, or something. I can't stand pain. I don't like too much bloody pain.

Bill: I don't think anyone does.

Keith: But I'm pretty tough when it comes to a hurt or anything like that...

...We were talking about the doctors earlier. I saw my father's cousin - he was a kid - he put an axe right through his instep. And they weren't near any doctors.

Bill: Jesus! And it healed up alright?

Keith: Yes. Left a big scar up his foot.

Bill: How'd he hold it together?

Keith: Oh, they'd bind it up with a bit of old sheet or something. Young Macka, when he was about three or four year old, I suppose, I'd made a bit of hay, and I was pitchforking it, and loading it on. I sat the pitchfork down to do something, turned around, and there he is with the pitchfork drove through his foot! Out the bottom about three inches! We pulled it out and Jean wrapped it up - she put a bit of turps on the bottom and a bit on top - and he never knew it had happened! There were no set bones - I suppose there'd only be soft bones.

Bill: Has he still got a scar?

Keith: I don't know whether you'd be able to see it or not. I don't think he has. It was a pitchfork that was all shiny and clean - it had been used a lot.

Bill: And can you remember when a doctor did come to the area?

Keith: Well the first was Dr Tomlinson - he was here quite a few years. And an old lady... Nurse Hayes. They only had houses for hospitals in those times. The first one I really remember was Dr Wilson - he was a footballer - played for Wyong.

I had a car accident when I was 21. Me and four mates went down to Sydney - I don't think I'd been back to Sydney since that time when I was twelve year old. It was just after the Harbour Bridge was built. We had a look around, climbed all over the bridge and up the pylons, had a look through the telescope and all round the place. We had a couple or three days down there then we came back home. We stayed in Wyong, and Jack Stackman and I went to The Entrance for a day. He'd been drinking all the bloody time, but I was stallin' and didn't want any.

Anyhow, there was a ball at Yarramalong that night - was it Christmas Eve? - well, it was close to Xmas anyhow. There was half a dozen young fellers coming out, so we come out with 'em. We bought a bit of

beer to take. My cousin had a big Buick car with dicky seats in it. There was nine of us. Anyhow, it got that bloody hot - see it was Christmas time - that I got out and I stood on the footboard, and leant in over the front seat, talking. And this bloody feller comes down the only straight piece of bloody road in the place - we could see him coming, weaving. We had to go right over to the gutter, then stop. He went that close! I said: "That bastard hit me on the ankle!" He'd cut a hole in my sock on my bloody ankle, and took out the front hubcap and knocked the back hubcap off! Then I said: "Jesus Christ! He's tore me suit!" And Jack Stackman said: "Let's have a look." He caught hold of me and he said: "Jesus Christ! Turn round and get him back to hospital!" The door handle on the other car had hooked into my buttocks, there, and tore a bloody great... I had thirty six stitches in it!

Bill: And you didn't even know it had happened ?

Keith: No, I never felt it. He was going that fast. He had a bloody big Buick, too. It wasn't registered, and he never had a licence. He never stopped. His brother happened to be in with us and he said: "Pity the bastard don't break his neck before he gets over Beale's Hill." Beale's Hill is where that place White Gates is now, near Sam McCluand's. Anyway, Fred reported it to the police when he went in and they soon found out. He'd already told someone he'd hit someone out there. And while they were stitching me up he came over and asked me if I'd take it out of the policeman's hands if he'd pay all my expenses. I knew the feller, and I said OK - but I never seen a bloody penny. They let me come home for four days, then I had to go back. By that time it had all rotted and the old stitches had just fell apart. I had to go into hospital for them to stitch it up again. He took a bloody good hold the next time! By Christ, he had a slip knot in the bloody thing to draw it up together! And I had to sit on bloody hot foment - put steaming water in a bucket and I had to sit on that.

Bill: I bet you had to put up with a lot of jokes.

Keith: Oh Christ yes! "The sewin' machine it went so fast, It put nineteen stitches in my arse!" I was a fortnight in bloody hospital. Cost me twenty quid, I think, and loss of work and one thing and another. Never saw the bastard till years after.

Bill: And to go to hospital you had to go to Sydney then?

Keith: No. They had a big house over the other side of the line, the other side of the railway station at Wyong. This chap had a surgery in there. That was back in 1932. There were two doctors in there then - there was a Dr Smith came in there, too.

But you wouldn't bother taking the kids into the doctor for a cut or anything like that. Now it's something ridiculous. Young Andrew scratched his finger and never drew the blood - or it might've just drew it, and they took him from the school out to the bloody doctor and they give him a tetanus needle or some other bloody thing. We just used to rub it in the dirt to stop it bleeding, and keep going!

Bill:(after a long pause) What about bushfires? Have you ever had any problems?

Keith: We generally burn every two years. Everyone lit it and let it go. No worries.

Bill: So there's never been anybody burnt out or...

Keith: No. Never a house or anything been burnt in a bushfire out here. That's what I tell that Swain in there at Wyong (the Bushfire Control Officer): "We've looked after this for sixty years. We don't need you coming round here."

Bill: What'd he say to that?

Keith: Wasn't too happy with me, I don't think. The people that bought that property down there behind Pop Smith's, next to where old Joe Thomas lives - there's a nice little place back in there. Kenny Fernance owned it and he had it cleared and put a dam in, but by now it's grown back up to scrub again.

Swain wouldn't let them build there, so they've got to build on that point next to Joe Thomas' house. I'd have pushed the trees down for a start - and they could've summonsed me - and then built my house there. You ought to see what he wanted Dr Gillette to do! You go in Kingtree and he's got a new place just there on the left. He had to put fire hazard things in, a bloody pump in the creek, sprinklers on and christ knows what, and thin the bush out behind him - he's got it cleared right round his house.

I met him one day (Dr Gillette) and we got talking by the side of the road, and I said: "What can you do for me if I get crook?" And he said: "I can give you a hysterectomy!" I'd already had Dr Pinczewski replace a hip. He's an orthopaedic surgeon. He goes all over the world and lectures.

Bill: Did he do a good job on your hip?

Keith: He did do a good job on it, because I'd ruined it. I'd had it done before, and I thought I was the same as I was when I was a youth. I kept carrying bags of feed, and it pushed the pin down in my leg, and wore the bone about. I put up with it for ages, but it wore the bone away and there wasn't much left to deal with. You oughta see the X-ray of it! There's bloody wires and screws... and U-bolts. He wanted to take another X-ray to see how it was going, but I said it was alright, and that I didn't want another X-ray.

Bill: Squatter was saying that Kingtree's called Kingtree because there's still a big cedar up there, is that right?

Keith: There's a big cedar still there... But I think it was named after the big trees - the big bluegums that grew in the mouth of it. Because they took a machine up there to cut fellies - a big bandsaw with a little steam engine on it. There were some big gums there. But I really couldn't tell you how it got named - it would have been named well before they ever see the cedar - he's way up the top end. They had a road right up into the bush there. Merv Smith the sawmiller took the trucks right up to the junction up there and got logs.

I was gonna tell you. Out your way - near where you live is called Goldsmith's point. The next one over towards Hart's is Harry Smith's point. That's Mervyn Smith's father, Kenny's great-grandfather. He had a tramline down in the gully there. You know where the waterfall is? Well down below that there was a great patch of coachwood. He built a tramline down into it, and he had a horse team to bring the logs up on the tramline - that's how it's called Harry Smith's point. Me and my brother and Paul Stackman used to work there. We cut the coachwood out - it was a beautiful patch. He never took much out of it with his horses.

Bob Brown was a sawmiller at Ourimbah, and he used to cut all softwood. They used coachwood for skirting boards, and architraves - very strong timber. I suppose they built the coaches out of it for a start and that's how it's called coachwood.

Anyway, round past Harry Smith's Point towards Hart's there was a sassafras growing. I cut an eighty foot log out of him - and it was only about five foot two or something like that in the girth. We felled him over onto the cliff, and I climbed out in his leaves from up the top and put the rope down where it was strong enough to take him up, and we took him up head and all - winched him up. He was as round as a bottle and straight as a pencil. It was a beautiful tree. (interruption)...

Keith: ...Yes, Kyola Road. It used to be called the Oil Bore Road - they drilled for oil there. The oil bore's only just in from the road apiece there. I dunno what they got. They sealed her up and off they went to Queensland. They worked there for years. They went down a long way.

Bill: You were talking about sassafras. Is there much of that around?

Keith: Not a lot. There's one growing down there at our bridge. They grow really round and straight. They have a white flower on 'em and it turns pink like a Xmas bush. Coachwood does the same. It's a pale leaf, the sassafras. It generally only has a few limbs up on top of it - a long barrel. It's a creamy

colour - a little bit like white beech only a bit more creamy. There's still a bit around. There's a bit up Kingtree still, and there's a beautiful log over the back of Lawsie's. It's beautiful timber - you can plane it, you know, it's all straight grain - and that soft! You could nail it right in the end and it wouldn't split. You could chew it up with your teeth, it's that soft. At school we used to carve picture frames, and carve all sorts of designs on it. That bit of woodwork you learn at school - there wasn't too much to it.

Bill: Is it softer than red cedar?

Keith: Oh christ yes. Cedar's tough compared to it... Rosewood is another nice timber.

Bill: Does that grow around here?

Keith: Up at your place down in the gully there there's rosewood. It's a jungle tree - a rainforest tree.

Bill: It makes some people allergic, apparently, the dust.

Keith: It could - it's got a very strong smell. Cedar smells pretty strong, too. Rosewood dresses up nicely - it's a red timber. Maiden's Blush is another softwood - it's got a pretty coloured wood like a maiden's blush - it's sort of got a wavy grain in it. The rosewood's just plain...

Bill: Yes. The rosewood I've seen was very regular, but it looked a bit uninteresting to me.

Keith: Yeah. But the cedar's nearly the same unless you get down into the roots and knots and things to get the grain going the different ways. They use it a lot for veneers and things like that.

Bill: I find the rainforest trees hard to distinguish a lot of the time.

Keith: Like me when I go out west. I've asked fellers which is a coolibah tree and they've told me, but I still wouldn't know it.

Bill: They call all sorts of different wattles "Sally Wattle" up and down the coast. I was wondering what's a Sally Wattle round here?

Keith: - I think what they call Sally Wattle here is really a Bagnell. It's got a really thick bark, and if you break the bark it'll pull off like smoke. And it'll split. Matter of fact there was a big one growing just in front of Pat Koopman's down the creek there a few years back, and I rungbark it because it was that tall it would've pulled out the bank of the creek if it went. And that lillipilli - that makes good axe handles.

Bill: Is that a light coloured timber?

Keith: Yes. And then there's the water gum - that makes good handles, too.

Bill: Does that have a smooth bark?

Keith: Yep. Sort of mottled.

Bill: A bit like spotted gum?

Keith: Yes. It's not as white as the spotted gum bark...

...I was a pretty curious kid. I used to get around with my brother a lot, up in the bush with him. He'd be working, and I'd be asking the names of the trees and he'd tell me. Sort of stuck in my mind a bit that way. Especially the softwood.

My mates that lived up Ravensdale, the Jurds and Stackmans, had an old frame of a wagonette - the four wheels and a chassis, nothing else. And they used to take it up the gully and cut softwood. We were just kids - half a dozen of us. Then we'd take it down to Merv Smith's mill and he'd cut cases out of it. We'd put it on this bloody thing and push it and wheel it - whatever we could lift. Corkwood, and coachwood - all the softwoods. He'd give us a few shillings for it, but I used to go just for fun. From right up there

we'd push it, and ride it down the hills - it'd be two miles. We only had a piece of rope onto the wheel at each side, and it had a turntable like, for steering. How he held it straight I'm damned if I know. I had a go one day and she started to go to one side - I was all over the road. She was too heavy.

Bill: They preferred to make their fruit cases out of softwood, did they?

Keith: They were all made out of softwood, those times. They never used hardwood till the war years. They were getting small blue gum then and cutting cases with that. They just threw 'em away at the war as soon as they took the stuff out of them. The hardwood cases were heavy, though, and wouldn't have had much give in them, I suppose.

I remember my father got an immense white silky oak. It was one of those trunks with hips on it, and in the middle it was quite small, so they just split it right through and made two logs out of it. They wouldn't take it for housing timber, so they made cases out of it. They were beautiful cases - all this wavy grain - beautiful. Of course we got our cases back in those times - they were branded and they came back. We stacked them in the summertime near the shed, and when we went to get 'em the next winter there was none of them any good. The borers had just eaten them to bloody bits. In most other things they only eat the sapwood... You'll see a lot of the drawers you used to get in furniture were silky oak.

Bill: What about Forest Oak? It's got a pretty amazing grain in it, but it never gets milled much, does it?

Keith: No. We've sent a few logs in. My brother-in-law, who married the sister next to me - he got one at one time. I think it was only about 8ft long, but it had about a 5ft-odd girth. It was a beautiful sound bit. He got his door jambs made out of it. It polished up and they looked nice. Very heavy timber.

Bill: I wonder why people don't use it more?

Keith: Yeah, well, oak will only split one way - it's like bloody three-ply.

Bill: Yes, I've noticed that. It'll come out alright at the radius, but the other way...

Keith: No way! That's why they made the shingles out of them I suppose - they wouldn't split. You split 'em out one way, but they wouldn't split when you turned them around and nailed them on. When my father built the new house over there at Ravensdale, it had a kitchen that was 24ft long by 14ft wide. It had an open fire on one side and a stove down the other. For the parties the tables were thrown out - and the chairs (laughs). We bought a piano - nearly everyone bought a piano those days - and my sister was learning to play.

Bill: Did you have many parties, then?

Keith: Oh - once every two or three months they'd probably put on a party here and there around the place. We'd all sing. All my uncles'd come. (laughs) You'd have a few rums, and...

Bill: And everyone used to take it in turns, sort of thing?

Keith: Yes. Around different places. And ours seemed to cop it because we had the biggest kitchen.

Bill: Made your own music?

Keith: Yes. Somebody'd have a squeezebox, or a concertina - maybe a piano. Everyone'd sing - everyone could sing those times. My father was a good singer, but christ! none of us could sing! (laughs). And all his brothers could sing. And old Mr Stackman, he had a lovely voice. He made up a song of his own - nobody ever wrote it down - "I'm getting too old for it now", when he was older. They were all singing, taking it in turns, and he came out with this song. I can only remember bits and patches - I never learnt it properly - but I'll try and sing it for you so you can get a bit of the tune, but I can't sing. (*Sings*):

Oh bless me how the years pass away,

It seems but a day or so past

Since I revelled in youth's happy ways.

I thought that the way they would last.

I don't remember the next verse. Then it went: *Oh five noble sons I can boast,* *Such*
daughters the world never saw. *You can*
count them almost by the score. Then I'm lost again...

As a youngster I always came first *And I*
know now I would get the worst *At*
Yarramalong me and the boys *But I'm*
getting too old for it now. *Stood many a spree*

Yes, they weren't bad words. It's a shame they didn't keep them.

Bill: And he wrote that himself? It's sort of a bit sad in it's way, isn't it?

Keith: Yes. Oh well, you think when you're young that you've got all the bloody rest of your life... that there's no end to it. But it catches up on you fast. I tell you what - when you get to retiring age you still think you've got plenty of time - that you can go round and see all your mates, and have yarns, and drive about the place. But then you think: "Oh well, I'll go next year." Then it *is* the next year. The time creeps up on you and you get too bloody old, and you don't do it.

But they used to sing all those old songs - Swanee River and all those - Old Folks at Home, The Old Rusty Bridge, Maggie - wonderful old songs - Kathleen.

Bill: And you don't have a piano now?

Keith: No... How they move their fingers I don't know - without looking! It's beyond me! One bloke from round here was a particularly good piano player who played by ear. He only learned to read music later on, then he bought a saxophone, and he had a dance band in the finish. He used to thump his left foot on the ground and it was just as good as drums.

He went to another dance where they had another orchestra, and they wanted him to play extra while the orchestra had their lunch or something, or supper, and they wouldn't let him get up! He was a bloody sight better than the orchestra! When you find someone who can play the piano properly it's beautiful. He and my sister used to play a duet together, and Jesus! it was bonzer! She'd just vamp on one end, and he'd play the sharp notes...

Bill: And did people dance at the parties?

Keith: Oh yes. We done the square dance and all that sort of thing.

Bill: And where did you learn to do it? Did you just pick it up as you grew up?

Keith: Oh you'd go to the dance and dance with your sister or someone else who could dance. Then they'd go a bit modern with the quickstep. The old Schottese, and the waltz - we'd always get one or two of those... the Slow Foxtrot. But I like a bit of movement - they were too slow for me (laughs). I used to like watching the square dances, with the guy calling: "Allemande left and allemande right, swing your partner doh si doh." Then there was the Pride of Erin ...(pause)

Bill: ...And when stuff was coming out from Chapmans, on the wagons, did they bring the papers and stuff?

Keith: Well ...I don't know. We had papers. My father used to read the papers. They probably came... probably a few days late, with the groceries. We used to get *The Sydney Mail*. It was the size of *The Land* newspaper. It had always beautiful horses, coloured, on the front, you know? And coloured pictures all through it. It only came out once a month - or not very often.

Bill: And radio would have hit the place about when?

Keith: In Bradman's time. In the thirties.

Bill: And did everybody have radios?

Keith: No. Nobody had 'em. My brother-in-law had one but he never bought it. Someone threw it away and he got it. No cabinet or anything - just sitting there with all the valves and wires and stuff. And he got that thing going - Jesus he was a clever bugger! If he'd ever went to school and learnt... He could do anything! And they'd all congregate at his place to listen, when they were over in England playing... sit up till two o'clock in the bloody morning listening to them play cricket. The fellers on air - they'd be half drunk and singing songs and ditties, you know... what were their names? Uncle George or someone they called him, on 2UE or whatever the station was in those times... 2GB, or... When the wireless first came out, they were only for the rich people.

Bill: Yeah. I suppose it was the same for television when it first came out, too. I suppose it was a while before you got reception...?

Keith: Yes. But you could get Newcastle not too bad. Sydney was a bit hopeless. Jean's brother, he bought one, but we couldn't afford one then. Too bloody dear. We'd go to bed!

Bill: And when did you get this one here?

Keith: Oh, I s'pose back when the kids were half grown-up. It'd be since the power came here, that's for sure - well since. We've had the power here for about.... 39 or 40 years. Macka was 14 when we came up here to live, and he's 53 now, so it'd be 39 years since the power came through. I remember the telephone lines coming out, with the bullockies taking the little poles and dropping them all up and down here ...and Ravensdale. That'd be around 1922, or somewhere about then ...(long digression)

You were asking about how Bowen's Pinch got its name. There used to be a bloke called Bowen lived down there where Reg Etienne lives now. It must have been him that Bowen's Pinch was called after. But that road where it is now wasn't the road then. It used to go straight up the point. Have you ever noticed "ABC" branded on a rock there? That's Alan Bruce Campbell. He cut that there when they put that cutting in - when the pinch was diverted a bit to the left. And he'd be about... getting close to a hundred now, if he was alive. I'd say he'd be about twenty years old when he was working there, so it'd be about eighty years since that side cutting was put in there.

Bill: So it's not much of a pinch now, but it was more of a pinch then?

Keith: It went straight up past that shed that's there now. It was steep. It was only a bullock track - a horse and dray'd barely get up there. And down there where Reg Etienne is now - all those houses down there was all one property. But that was before my time. George Palmer bought it then - he must have bought it off Bowen. It was Ted Bowen that married Matilda, Con Stackman's eldest daughter, Frances.

One of Matilda's daughters had thirteen kids. There was a whole tribe of them - a lot of boys. I think there must have been only a couple of girls - or only one, it might have been. Paul Stackman lived down here below the mill where the boys have got the property there now. He went up there when he was a boy with Mick Perry and Billy Perry. They went up there with the bullock teams to haul logs out of the bush up there at Dungog, the Chichester Dam and around that part.

Bill: I notice that Carson went up to Gloucester, Squatter spent some time at Gloucester, Reg Bradley worked for a while at Gloucester, and the Stackman's were on their way to Gloucester and never got there...

Keith: They were on their way up to Coffs Harbour, after the big timber that was supposed to be there. I don't know what happened, but they stopped at Dungog. I suppose they got the teams working there and

they were doing all right so they stayed there.

Bill: And you said before that there's still a working team up at Dungog, didn't you?

Keith: Yes, a young chap from Wyong named Wand bought a team. He's got a fair bit of land up there, and works them just for a bit of a hobby I think. There's three or four teams around there I hear. When they used to have the Canal Jump around Morrisset they'd have a couple of little teams there, too.

Bill: Canal jumping? What's that?

Keith: They used to jump across the creek with a pole like pole vaulting. They'd do that on picnic days - and woodchops.

I didn't finish telling you about my father - you know I was telling you about him being brought up religious? He was confirmed and all that because his mother wanted him to be. When he talked to us about it I suppose he got thinking for himself, and he said that he thought that there could have been some Supreme Being, but he wasn't sure. But he said that he thought the best way to live was if you treated your fellow man the same as you'd want to be treated yourself. This is what he used to tell us, and I think he was pretty right. It reminds me of a piece of poetry that I learnt when I went to school. I was only about ten, I suppose. You might know it - about Abou Ben Adam.

Bill: Yes, my Mum is fond of reciting that.

Keith: Yes. It goes something like:

*Abou Ben Adam, may his tribe increase, Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace And saw
within the moonlight in his room An angel writing in a book of gold. "What writest
thou?" said Adam. "The names of those who love the Lord, " "And is mine one?"
said Adam, "No, not so, " replied the angel. "Well then, write me as one
who loves his fellow man " . The next night it came again,
With a great awakening light, With names of those that God has blessed, And lo!
Ben Adam's name led all the rest.*

I've never forgotten that one. And he wasn't worshipping the Lord, I don't think. (Digression)

Bill: ...Did you leave the valley much at all?

Keith: Well we lived here all our life. Jean and I have been down to Melbourne, and we've been to South Australia a bit. We've done quite a few trips up north - up as far as Toowoomba, but we dodged Brisbane. We had a look at Surfer's Paradise and around there - we went up the coast quite a few times, up to Lismore and over to Ballina and all through Casino and round there. I've got a fair idea of the country. It's got some good parts and some bad parts. But if you drive on the highways you don't see much - it's mostly poor country along the highways. We used to tell people we lived in Wyong. "That bloody place!" they'd say, "Jesus christ! Wouldn't feed a billygoat!" 'Cos they only know it from Wyee in, sort of thing.

I used to go away hunting a fair bit - after the boys grew up. We used to have a fortnight up at Burren Junction shooting kangaroos and chasing pigs. Before the pet meat started the place was overrun - how they put up with the kangaroos I don't know. The first time I went we got to Gunnedah and I thought. "Jesus christ! Fancy coming this far just to shoot bloody old kangaroos!" And we were only half way! Anyway we got up there and we'd go spotlighting.

Bill: What were they? Greys?

Keith: All colours. Blues and reds and greys - mainly greys. But they talk about shooting them out - there's no way. Not in a million years! All the bush from Broke, Singleton, right through the New England ranges is just full of kangaroos. And it was too rough for the pet fellers to get them. The pet food

started a couple of years after we started.

We used to go up every winter. They were getting a bit thinner and a bit thinner - especially the big roos - you know, you'd shoot the big ones and leave the joeys and that, and the cockeys used to roar at us for leaving them 'cos the joeys'd be big roos next year. When a dry time come, they'd just move off and follow the grass. In the '64 drought they were pretty lean. We were up there shooting, and my mate was skinning them. They didn't waste anything. He used to sell the skins.

We used to get a lot of foxes too... And the crows! The crows were there when you got out of bed in the morning, caaarking away till you went to sleep at night. Millions of 'em! They'd get that Sayers Allport, and when a beast died they'd put that in them, and a couple of years later when we went there was hardly a crow left - only about like they are around here. But the galahs would deafen you. There was plenty of them - they'd black the sun out! And those little quarrion parrots. When they were growing the saccolene and the sorghum they'd buy cartridges and get the kids out from town to shoot 'em. I've seen them alight in a tree, and the tree would be just covered.

Bill: What was saccolene, Keith?

Keith: A type of sorghum... sugar cane. You could squeeze it up and get the juice out of it and it was real sweet. You could chew it like sugar cane.

Bill: And nobody grows it now?

Keith: Oh, well... we used to grow it to feed the cows on. It was a winter feed. You'd put it in in the summer, then grow it, and then cut it in the winter. It wasn't so good till the frost hit it because you could poison the cows with it. After the frost hit it it sweetened up and you could feed it to them then. But you'd get a bloody windstorm and it'd flatten it. It'd be laying down, and be tangled up, and then you'd be in floods trying to cut it, and it'd be all covered in sand, and all we had was an old horse and slide to cart it on.

Bill: And it grew quite big?

Keith: Oh it'd grow ten feet high. The big one was the White African - that grew about twelve feet high... beautiful. In the winter the leaves would fall off and you only had the stalk, but that was the main part. And a lot of corn was grown for the cattle. You'd chaff it up cobs and all - when they were green, of course. It was hard work.

Then we found that we were starting to do a bit better, and we started to pay too much tax, so we turned the paddocks out into clover and rye grass, and bought hay. We'd buy the hay in the summer when it was cheap - that's what that big shed's for, there. We'd fill it up full of hay. It was ten dollars a ton, and there's forty bales in a ton, but now it's seven or eight dollars a bale.

In that 1964 drought we were in a bit of bother. We had to get hay from Victoria because it was all used up in NSW. We had big old cornstalks, rushes out of the creek - they baled up anything! Never seen the like of it! It was rubbish, but the cows ate it because once you'd chaffed it and put meal on it they'd eat it - it filled 'em up, I suppose. We got subsidised for cartage when we had to bring it up from Victoria - the government gave us drought relief. But it was pretty tough. That was the worst drought ever I saw.

We used to get a flood on Jean's birthday - the sixteenth of June. We had a flood in June, then we never got any rain ...and the next June we got nothing, and it went right around again to the following March before we got any - apart from a bit of a shower perhaps. The grass was just dead. And we didn't have much kikuyu then, either. There was a lot of paspalum, and it was just black, right down to the water's edge.

Bill: When was kikuyu introduced?

Keith: Oh... round about the fifties or sixties I suppose it was established.

Bill: It comes from Africa, doesn't it? Was it not known before that?

Keith: No. My uncle owned that place over there and he ploughed a few furrows and put it in, and it was no time getting going. It was best if you kept the cattle off it and let it get a go on. Now it's taken over. Of course we've bought a lot of seed and sown it since then - from up at Quirindi - to get it established better.

We were talking the other day about McKays driving the pigs over from Murray's Run. Those two families there at the foot of the hill - the McKays and the Sternbecks, Chris Sternbeck and Jack McKay - they had big dairies. And when the factory started in Wyong they had shares in it. It was only a butter factory then. They brought their cream over to where Braithwaites dairied, and it was picked up and taken to the factory from there - up at what used to be the Bebeah Post Office. They had a wagonette and three horses in it, to come up the hill from the other side. And they had to be up early to catch the cream carters, too. They used to do that three times a week, I think it was.

Then they drove the pigs through. Mind you, I knew nothing of this, it's only what I've heard my father say - he was working at a place down there near Denny Lee, and they'd come with the pigs and camp in the reserve there, and go on to Wyong the next day. There was no other way to get them to town.

Bill: How many at a time would they bring in?

Keith: Oh thirty to fifty. They'd come from half a dozen families probably, and then they'd probably get some more along the way... The only other way they had to cart them was in a spring cart, with a crate over the top of it, but you could only put half a dozen in that. It was easier to drive them because you'd need to do about ten trips with a cart. They'd feed as they went along, rooting and eating grubs and grass.

Bill: It must have been a bit of a sight to see 'em coming along the road.

Keith: They must have had pretty good dogs, too! (Digression)...

Bill: ...Keith, when you were a young man and at your peak, what would your average day be like?

Keith: Well, when I worked for a boss we had to be at work at seven o'clock. And often I'd have to ride way up on the mountain and it might take me an hour to get there. We only had fuel stoves and an open fire, so it took an hour to get your breakfast. By the time we got the stove hot and the kettle boiled and cooked some eggs and bacon or whatever, it was an hour. You'd get up, start the fire first, then go and feed your horses. Many a time I was a bit late and had to gallop to get there on time! The old horse'd be sweating a bit by the time I got there.

Bill: And with a big day ahead you had a big breakfast?

Keith: Oh yes. You'd eat like a blasted horse. We never knew when we were full! When we were in our teens, by jeez we could eat! Mind you, we were working hard. We didn't have any morning or afternoon teas or anything like that - we'd work right through. You'd get the shakes in the afternoon, but you'd have a drink of water or a smoke, and get into it again.

Bill: And you'd get the shakes from working so hard?

Keith: Yes. Your food would run out and your energy'd be gone.

Bill: And how long did you take for lunch?

Keith: When we had the bullock team we'd just sit down, swallow our tucker and go on straight away again. We always had cut sandwiches. A lot of times we'd make tea, but a lot of times we wouldn't - or we'd run out of water. We only had water bags that we'd fill out of the creek to take up with us. On a

stinking hot day with two fellers drinking it wouldn't last that long. Sometimes we'd have two bags, but it was a bit of a problem, the water. You could walk all the way down into a big gully to get some and you'd find it was dry, because the water'd be going underground, even though some of those springs would be still running at the top. Even at Yorkie there, we've walked into there and found there was no water - but at the bottom it comes out again. There's a lot of jump-ups, little waterfalls, and rocky ledges come into the gully all the way down...

Bill: Jump-ups. That's a term I don't know.

Keith: A jump-up can be anything where there's a sharp nip up. Sometimes the springs will change their places. There's a patch in the road round there past where Charlie Lauff lives. In the middle of the road there's a clay hill, and when there's a change in the weather that thing could be as dry as hell, yet water would run out of the spring down the road a piece. Some of the old people would say the change in its position was a sign of rain, but a lot of times it didn't work.

When we were farming, and even when I was working with the bullocks, I had 40 acres that my father gave me - I had to pay it off and keep my younger sister and brother. I used to work that of a weekend, and if you got home from the bush a bit early you'd have the horse and cart going. We had orange orchards, and sweet corn and stuff. It was a bit of a battle then, because we had a bit of debt. See, the father bought these properties and hadn't quite got them paid for.

Then my brother took over Lucy's down there, and my other brother Toby - Warren his proper name was - he had this bush here, and I had the 40 acres over at home. I ended up selling it and I bought my younger brother a property in Wyong - an acre and a half down Rockleigh Street for a hundred and fifty quid. There were six blocks of ground in it.

Bill: And when you were in the bush, what time did you knock off to come home?

Keith: It'd be round about five. Depends what we were doing. If we were trying to get our load down sometimes you'd get home in the dark. Other times if everything went well and you got an easier load then you'd get home a bit earlier. Sometimes they'd go on into the mill with it and unload it, but mostly you'd come down and take it in the next day and give the bullocks a half-day spell.

Bill: And you'd get home to no bathroom, I suppose?

Keith: That's right. You'd wash your legs as far as you could pull your trousers up, and your face and hands, and that would be it. You'd be dirty, and Mum would have some washing with the pillow slips and sheets!

Another thing when we was kids: Mum used to make our beds. She'd buy the ticking, and sew up a bed. And she'd get corn husks - all the soft inside stuff - and she'd strip that all off and put it in instead of kapok or something like that. Not the silk that comes off the tossle, but the two or three layers that were inside that were a bit silky. Those old beds, they'd rattle! Plenty of rustling when you moved. But they were warm under you. In the wintertime you'd be that bloody cold because the old blankets didn't have much warmth in 'em, and with wagga rugs made out of cornbags on top you'd have a job to turn over under everything because it'd all be so heavy! Yes, it was pretty primitive.

Those Braithwaites - I don't think they ever had an overcoat in their life - they used to use cornbags on their shoulders. We often used 'em too, if you got caught by the weather. A corn bag will keep a storm out. And you could make a hood out of one by putting your knee into one corner, then put it on your head.

Bill: My grandfather used to do that. He used to take me into the bush down at Narrabeen Lakes when I was young and show me how to make traps and snares and things. He was a bit of a bushie - grew up on the canefields out of Bundaberg. I often wish I'd taken more notice.

Keith: We used to make traps for catching parrots because they'd eat all the bloody corn. You get a lot of small sticks and lace 'em together and put 'em on top of each other like a pigsty. Then you bring it up to a peak at the top, put your corn underneath and get 'em feeding there. You'd put a spring-stick in that held the thing up, and when the parrot walked on the two bottom sticks when it was feeding, the springstick would go and you'd have caught him. The sticks were heavy enough that he couldn't get out. Sort of the same as you'd make 'em of wire netting.

Bill: So, as well as being tough for you blokes - I suppose the women at home would be kept pretty busy too - especially with big families, wouldn't they?

Keith: Jean always helped. Most of 'em did that had farms. Husking corn was a night-time game, there's no way you'd husk in the day - that was wasting time. You'd go and pull about six cartloads of corn and put it in the shed, and down you went in the night. We often stayed up till ten or eleven o'clock. They'd be kidding us kids - you'd get a red cob now and again - the rest was yellow, and the game was to see who could get the most red ones.

I went to sleep one night in the shed - I was only little. They'd finished husking, my brothers, and Mum was there with 'em. They went to walk out, and they walked over me - I was under the husks asleep! You see, you throw the husks over your shoulder as you go, and I'd got covered by them. They thought I'd gone home!

Bill: Was there a breakdown of jobs between men and women?

Keith: Well back in those days my mother used to come out and help us pick peas and beans and stuff like that. Of course the girls were at home then, the two sisters, and they did most of the housework. Mum used to generally do the washing. But back in her younger days Mum used to help pull oranges - there was only oranges then when we were real young.

But she would have had her work cut out, because there was seven of us. And looking after the house - there were no conveniences. She used to scrub the floor with a soft stone. We had no lino or anything, and it was just a board floor that hadn't been planed or anything. She'd get down on her knees and scrub that big kitchen I mentioned that we used to dance in.

Bill: Beats me how you all found the time to have all these kids! You must have been so buggered all the time I can't see how you'd ever get around to it.

Keith: (laughs) Well, there was no television those times, and only the wireless to listen to, so we went to bed early! Generally every couple of years they had a child. Most of my uncle's kids, he had nine or ten up here, every two years. All my cousins.

Bill: Were kids had because they were helpful around the place or did it just happen?

Keith: There was no contraception. They mightn't exactly plan to have the kids half the time, but there was no way of getting out of it. Of course they liked the kids once they came along. We didn't think about it all that much, I suppose. It was just natural to have your family.

Bill: In talking about life as it used to be, politics hasn't come up much. Was there much interest in it?

Keith: Oh yes. My father and his brothers used to argue the point. Uncle George used to come up from Sydney, and he was a real Labour man - he drove trams in Sydney. He and the father would get on great, but Uncle John was a bit of a Liberal man - though the two Labour fellers'd argue the point about things too. But we didn't give a bugger what happened then. I never took any notice of politics till I was about fifty. You were too busy making a living and trying to get ahead of things to worry about that sort of thing.

Bill: But it wouldn't be a topic of conversation when you were working up in the bush, sort of thing?

Keith: No. We'd hear the old people talking about who they were going to vote for and all that.

Bill: And do you think people tended to vote all pretty much the same way?

Keith: They followed their father. Whatever Dad done, you done - till you started to think for yourself. When I see that bloody mad Whitlam get in there, that fixed me up! I voted to get him in, then I voted to get the bastard out again!

Bill: When you were working for such pittances under such harsh conditions in the bush, I suppose there was no way you could have withheld your labour or anything to try to make things a bit better...?

Keith: Oh no. They'd just get somebody else to take your job over. Anyway, you wouldn't think of that - you didn't want to lose your job. You stayed there, you know. And most of the bosses were cockies around here anyway, and they couldn't afford to pay you much. They'd give you ten bob and your tucker, and perhaps some'd give you your tobacco. And people were pleased to get it, especially in The Depression.

When we bought that place down where the barracks are now... the brother had started a poultry farm there and I bought it back off the chap that bought it off him. We got 500 fowls with the place and Jean looked after that. I filled the feeders up at weekends, and we had water laid on. She'd go for the eggs and make sure the water was right and all that. She used to get the eggs and pack them away in the daytime, or when she had time.

Bill: So your wives were real mates, in a way?

Keith: Well Jean loved to get out in the paddocks, rather than do housework - though she'd done the housework from when she was 14 at home - done the washing and everything else. I suppose she'd had enough of it. She'd get all her work done in one day - even now, though she might leave the ironing till night. But if the boys were out there fencing, she'd be there with 'em shovelling the dirt into the postholes, or holding the posts for 'em. She used to love to get out.

Bill: And was she unusual being like that?

Keith: Oh... Yes, there wasn't a lot of women like it. A lot of 'em would be too bloody lazy to move, you know.

Bill: So did some of the women get it a bit easy, then?

Keith: Well this is right. People that had jobs and had nothing to do at home and probably had only a couple of kids - they got it real easy. But a lot of them would sew, and dressmake, and things like that, and make a few bob that way.

But it was pretty tough back in the early days, when we had no conveyances or anything. I think the best we could do was to go to a dance every fortnight or something like that. And we played cricket - though I only ever played a couple of seasons myself. We played second grade. Back in those days they had a first grade and a second grade team from Ravensdale, and a first and second grade at Yarramalong, and a first and second grade at Wyong Creek. Yet thirty years ago they couldn't raise one team here! Only a picnic team to play Sunday or something. So you had to go to Wyong if you wanted to play cricket, and play in the competition in there.

But earlier, there were that many kids about! They were all born at the one time, you know - that generation when the place first opened up. And Uncle Merv Waters, that's Mum's half-brother, he had ten kids and there was eight boys in them, and the Beavans' had a lot.

Bill: When I first came up here they used to have woodchops reasonably often. Have they stopped now?

Keith: Well, they still have the chops about the district, but whenever there was a picnic on there'd be a

woodchop, those times. It was good - it brought the crowd along. It's about the only game that money has never come into - you know, running dead and all that sort of thing.

Bill: So nobody used to bet on them?

Keith: No. They might've done at the Sydney Show, I don't know - on the championships. But a lot of them would run dead when the Sydney Show was approaching to get their mark back - because if they won it'd put them up another point and it'd put them too far out to win in Sydney.

Bill: Was it a thing that most of the fellers that worked in the bush had a go at, or only some?

Keith: Oh, there's only a few men that were really strong enough, although a lot of little men did chop a bit. I couldn't woodchop. I was a champion tree feller in the bush, cutting logs. I could keep going with most of them, no matter how big they were - with an axe. But when it comes to that fast cutting, I never had the chest, or the arms to give me the power. Even though I was still strong... but not for that. Other blokes my own age would run rings around me on the fast cut. I run second once, when I went in just to make up the number.

Bill: As far as falling trees in the bush, I guess you could drop it exactly where you wanted it to go, could you?

Keith: - Well you'd have to drop it where it would go. You'd have to look at the lean - which way the head of the tree was going to pull it, and you'd put your front scarf in there. But if it was leaning downhill there was no way you could bring it back, unless you used a hammer and wedges and a crosscut saw. With the turpie piles, that's what we done with them. They'd be long and straight, and if you'd fall 'em down the hill they'd break in halves, so you had to fall 'em uphill where it wasn't so far to fall. We'd use a crosscut saw on them with two big wedges and lift 'em up, and fall them into another bush or something so we could ease them down.

See, you get an eighty foot tree - he's falling a long way, but when it's uphill it's not too bad. A lot of them that went back on you - if they had too much weight - they'd end up breaking over rocks or a log or something. You had to be careful. Cutting with an axe, you could hold it a bit, bring it round the side a bit, you know, by leaving a bit more holding on the bottom. Especially when you were cutting sleepers and that, and you wanted to cross cut it all up, you didn't want it so that your saw was flapping downhill. It made it hard. *(The conversation gets around to different tree species again.)*

...Ironbark was pretty reliable. But the rotten old white mahogany often had those water rings in them, you know? Perhaps the ring would be in quite a way - good for sleeper wood, but then you'd take one cut off it and the position of the ring would change. Then there were the ones you'd fall and take an eight foot cut off and it'd be good for nothing. You'd walk off and leave the bastard.

Bill: And it wouldn't be acceptable if it was a bit imperfect, would it?

Keith: Oh, as long as the timber was good in them they could be squared a little bit rough. It wouldn't matter about an axe mark and that in 'em.

Bill: But gum veins they weren't keen on?

Keith: Well gum veins wouldn't hurt them, but it was that open ring - a water ring. It'd fall apart. You could pull it apart with your hands. And the white mahogany is noted for that - it's a mongrel. It's like a bloody onion, you know - different layers.

Bill: How does a water ring come to be in the timber?

Keith: I don't know how the water gets into 'em. I've felled gum trees that were dead sound both ends, and there'd be a water ring in the middle of it and gallons and gallons of water'd run out of it. You'd wait

for half an hour for it all to run out because you'd splash yourself all over if you tried to chop it while the water was still running out of it. It'd gush out! There must be like an air shake up in there, but I don't know where the water'd come from.

Bill: I suppose it would've sucked it up from the ground.

Keith: It must've done, because there was no hollow for it to come down.

Bill: And that was in bluegums?

Keith: Sometimes round leaf. The old apple tree had it in it, too.

Bill: The apple trees weren't much good for anything, were they, except burning?

Keith: Well they were good for making harrows out of - the ones for the horses to drag with the spikes all down through 'em. They'd make 'em on the angle so each spike wouldn't be following one another. For the wooden part that held the spikes they used to use apple gum because it was tough. It wouldn't split. No grain much in it to split.

Bill: Oh that's right. That's why they used apple trees for butchers' blocks, wasn't it?

Keith: That's right. And it was good flooring - made great flooring boards. And it polished up good. There were very few of them that you could get that you could mill though, because they were full of rings too.

Bill: I can remember Governor Smith telling me once that red mahogany is the only eucalypt that doesn't give a brown water stain, and so they used to use it to line wells, and for window sills and stuff.

Keith: Yes, it's a beautiful timber, red mahogany. But it's no good for fence timber. It'll rot off at ground level and you can snap 'em off after about ten years. (Digression)...

Bill: When I first came up here I met a bloke who used to run the Mangrove Mountain RSL called Harold Ward. He used to be a timbergetter. Did you happen to know him?

Keith: There are different Wards about. They were a big family those Wards - reared in Gosford. Their father I think might have been Mayor of Gosford at one time, Manassah Ward. He was a councillor in the first Erina Shire Council. There was Harold, and Bob, and... one of them cut himself in halves with a bloody saw - only a few years back. He was sawing firewood up on a bench saw or some bloody thing and the bloody thing broke and went clean through him. Out in the night-time with a light going, and his wife went out and found him.

Bill: Christ! What a way to go!

Keith: Yes... We were talking about accidents before. Old Stan Jurd - he's still alive in a home there in Wyong - he was using a docking saw in the mill he had in at Wyong with his partners. See, you pull them towards you, and he pulled it too far, and he split his stomach down, and he had to hold his stomach in with his hands - it never cut his gut or anything, and they got him on his back and took him to Newcastle and stitched him up! Holy christ it was close! He was lucky!... There's been a few men killed in the mills, but not very many. I don't think there's been any killed around here.

The benchman - he's in a dangerous position. The tailer-out had two bits of timber to handle when it went through the saw, and there's a knack in holding one down while you sent the other bit back on the trolley. If a piece broke out and it got on the saw, the saw'd just fling it - it'd go through the roof, the iron and everything.... (long reflective pause).

Bill: So when you think back Keith, what's your fondest memory?

Keith: (Another long pause) ...Oh, there've been lots of good times, I suppose, but I was talking about

going kangaroo shooting up there - that's the only time that I relaxed and forgot about the farm. Any other time you'd be thinking, of a night: "I wonder how the cows are going", or something. But up there I'd forget all about it, and have a real holiday. I really enjoyed it.

They were that thick you could shoot 'em from the side of the road - out of the window of the car. We all had automatic shotguns. You could get three with one shot. I got two in a shot a couple or three times. You'd get a mob together and just drive 'em up onto the fences, and we'd just wait, far enough apart so that you couldn't shoot one another. It was murder, but by the christ they needed it.

Bill: Twelve gauge?

Keith: Yes.

Bill: Double barrelled?

Keith: Automatic - five shots. A lot of them had double barrells. My old uncle had a double barrell. But christ they were thick! There'd be two or three hundred in a mob.

Bill: I suppose you wouldn't need to be too good a shot, then.

Keith: Well, you would need to, because they'd be jumping, and as soon as the first shots were fired they'd be doing 45 miles an hour. They'd be going! And you'd see 'em try to jump the fence when they were running along the fence - they'd jump into it. And I've seen them big fellers, after they've hit it two or three times - they'd turn around, go back twenty yards away from the fence, then come back and jump straight over it - just like you'd do with a horse if you were going to jump something. They were pretty smart!

Bill: Would you take more than one carload of blokes?

Keith: We had four blokes for a start. Then we kept getting bigger and bigger, till we had up to seventeen. We'd get four hundred roos in the fortnight. And the skins. We were only getting two and six a skin in them times. If you shot them in the head with a rifle then they'd bring more money than if you had pellets in the skin.

Bill: And then what? The carcasses would be left for the crows?

Keith: Yes, left there. In the wintertime, if you went back in a fortnight's time, where the stack of roos was - they'd bring 'em all up in a heap after they'd skinned them - they'd be just frozen stiff. There'd be no smell. A fortnight with the cold weather and they'd be just dried on the outside, and not a bit of smell in 'em. But when the weather got a bit hotter, christ it'd stink! (Digression about a dead wombat).

Bill: I was talking to Governor Smith the other week, and telling him about how when I first came up here I didn't know which species were good firewood and which weren't. He asked me if I'd heard the saying: "When you've got turpentine and white mahogany to burn, you've always got plenty of firewood."

Keith: Yeah. Takes a long time to go. It's a funny thing, though, if you get turpen that's scantling that's got the sapwood on it, it's beautiful. But it'll burn away too quick. You can split it up into little splinters and it'll start a fire with that sapwood real good - when it's dry a little bit, though - not when it's real green. And it don't take it long to dry - that sap part. But not the heart part - it won't burn. The old roundleaf gum is even worse than it, I think, when you get into the heart. It smokes, and... it'd be about the worst in your combustion stove, I reckon.

Bill: I'd be a bit hard put to pick roundleaf from bluegum once it's all cut up.

Keith: Well it wouldn't be that much different once you get inside of a big block. We used to burn mill offcuts in our big combustion stove here, and it wasn't long before it wouldn't burn, and was smoking and all that. We had a flue going up the chimney, and when I went to get it out I couldn't bloody well lift

it. It was so full of black stuff that the little track left through it looked like white ants had been in it. And it had run down all over the top of the stove. When I went to get it off it fell on my head it was that bloody heavy! We had to put a new flue on it. So we found out we were burning the wood too green.

Then the boys used to cut us firewood. They were always growling about it. Jean never used to let the fire go out. It went for years and years and never got put out, unless we went on holiday or something. It used to run our hot water service and everything.

Bill: What do you reckon is the best firewood then? Oak?

Keith: Yes. Oak's good firewood. Ironbark's good. But I've seen red turpen stumps that's been standing round for years and years make beautiful firewood. But not that mottley grey turpen.

...Talking about the women in the old days, and what they did - see there were no conveniences for them. They'd have to carry the wood in. A lot of times they'd have to go and get some wood if they ran out. It was all hand work - no convenience whatsoever. No water laid on or anything like that - they had to go outside to a tap on the tank and cart the water in.

Bill: How'd you get on in the summer with the fire going all the time. That must have got pretty hot, didn't it?

Keith: The combustion stove? No, it wasn't too bad. It was all closed down.

Bill: And what do you like best about the bush, Keith?

Keith: I used to like to go up the gullies where the water would be trickling down and you could sit down and listen to the silence - birds twittering round - I used to love that. You'd take your rifle up and go shooting birds for soup, and turkeys and whatever you could run across. I used to enjoy that. Half a day was enough, though. You wouldn't keep going every day. I like being up there on my own. I was a real loner when I was about 14 or 15. I used to hate to go to people's places. I was shy. (Digression)

Bill: Did you get up to any pranks as kids?

Keith: Oh we got up to pranks alright. The older brother used to be friends with Gladstone Bailey who was a bit of a funny sort of an old feller. He had a pigsty beside the road, and one New Years Night - it was a dry time and the pigsty was nice and clean - somebody caught this pig and dressed it up and put a waistcoat on it, and something else. Oh christ! The old man was threatening to put them in gaol over it! Then bugger me if later on when we were knocking around we didn't go and do the bloody same thing! I had some armbands I used to put on my shirtsleeves that we put on the pig, and a belt off a gabardine coat round him.

We used to ride through his property quite frequently at Ravensdale - it was a lot shorter than coming right around, so he told my brother I wasn't to ride round there any more. Anyhow, I kept riding through, so he came down and met me one morning and said: "I thought I told you not to come riding over here any more." And I said: "You never told me. I haven't spoken to you." "Well I told your brother." And I said: "Well, that's not telling me!" Anyhow, they put yards around it, and there was a pear tree growing there and he was convinced that we were pinching his pears - which we weren't.

But he got over it later on. I lived down next door to him, and when he bought his first car with a column gearshift he had to get me to go down and show him how to drive it because he had to back it up out of a shed and he wasn't game enough to tackle it himself. He wasn't a bad old feller, but he was one of those sorts who just wouldn't see the funny side.

We'd get up to a few things. Some of the blokes would climb up the telephone posts. I couldn't. Someone would be courting and have their horse hitched up outside the place, and they'd take the saddle off and

take it up and sit it up on top of the bloody telephone pole. The bloke'd come out and he'd have to ride home bareback.

Bill: So how did you go about courting before there were cars, and...

Keith: Well I didn't have to go far. When I was seeing Jean I only had to walk over the hill here. She lived next door here where the stud is now. That was her father's property. Or I'd ride the horse over.

Bill: And how old were you when you started to set your cap at Jeannie?

Keith: Oh, I'd be about 23 I suppose. She was 18. We went together for a couple of years. She was going on for 20 when we got married and I was going on for 25. That was 1939. We were going to get married, you know, when the Germans took into the Pommies - when the war was on. We got married the Saturday before Christmas, and got a room down in Elizabeth Street in what they called *The Menzies* then. We were going to have a couple of weeks there, as Jean hadn't been to Sydney much and I didn't know much about it. Anyway, we went round all the bloody zoos, and the botanical gardens, and the Museum. We got sick of it and we come home in a week. There were three bloody big Jap liners in, and the place was alive with them wherever you went. This was just before they come into the war.

Bill: So you came back to live where?

Keith: Ravensdale. We stopped there for a little while, then the next door neighbour wanted to buy me out. I owed a bit of money on it. We lived in bits of shacks and sheds and christ knows what for a while till I'd got a few quid put together, then I bought that property down there, with the 500 chooks. Then we graduated from there up to here. I had property up the bush. I had 300 acres out there that I bought off my brother when he sold out and went to Wyong. Him and his mate from up here, Billy Christenson, bought 100 acres up here for 1600 quid. He kept 60 and Billy kept 40. This would've been in the war years.

Bill: And were you guys considered as doing jobs necessary for the war effort?

Keith: Oh yes. I was cutting sleepers at the time, when the Manpower thing came in. I'd left my job - I was driving a tractor for a sawmill in Gosford and they were shifting over to Morrisset, and I didn't want to go there. So I started cutting sleepers, and this was when the bloody Manpower thing come in and I couldn't get away from sleepercutting. I wanted to get back with my brother - with the bullocks. He still had the team of bullocks and a lot of stuff was going for the wharves ...little turpen piles - a chap in Sydney had the agency for them and was getting them from everywhere. I wrote to them and asked them to release me, as I'd still be in essential work, but they wouldn't let me out of it.

Anyhow the police called me in. I'd knocked off cutting sleepers by then, and I said to them: "I'd rather go in the army than cut sleepers. I'm not heavy enough. I'm too light. It's too heavy for me." They said: "You're not going to go into the army!" I don't know where they thought they were going to put me - in a concentration camp or something! (laughs). So, I had a friend who was cutting sleepers in his spare time, and he said: "If you like I'll put mine in your name and save you having to cut them". You only had to cut thirty a week or some bloody thing, so I started doing that. I cut a few myself till I worked my way out of it and they forgot about it afterwards. Then the war finished and I got back with the bullocks again.

Talking about accidents in the bush... When my brother sold his bullock team we bought a crawler tractor - that petrol one I mentioned earlier. We got it up at Girvan up near Stroud there - a real old thing that had been round the paddock for years - 150 quid we gave for it. Anyhow we got it home, and it broke down a couple of times. It didn't have a winch on it, so we used to have three ropes of different lengths. You'd run 'em down the hill and join 'em together to pull the log up - you'd snig it up. We'd have a block up in the tree for the rope to run through, and when the join come up you'd undo it, come back, and hook onto the next rope.

Well this log was coming up and it was off the ground - the end of it, and it was going to run into a tree,

and I thought: "While they're coming back to hook onto this rope I'll just change the pull over so it will steer it away from this tree." I'd just got my hand under it when away they went! Lucky it was a turpen and had bark on it. And I'm roarin'! Paul Stackman was offsidin', but he was right up against the bloody tractor and couldn't hear. And then the log started to turn, and I thought: "Holy Jesus Christ I'm going to be underneath the bastard!" I had both hands caught under it.

Anyway, I roared that much that he heard me in the finish, and stopped. It flattened those fingers there. I tore a bit off my tucker bag and rolled it up to stop it bleeding, and I was cutting logs the next day. I never went home - I just stayed there. But I was lucky it wasn't a big log. It was about 800 super feet, I suppose - but it was heavy enough. It was hurting! That was another life I had, I think. If he'd have kept going I'd have been underneath the log.

Bill: You said before that you worked out Yango way - you went pretty far afield, didn't you?

Keith: Well the boss camped out there. I think we might have camped one night.

Bill: Did you have much to do with up on the mountain round Kulnura?

Keith: I camped out there before I was married, in that old slab house that the Historical Society has got now. We worked right through there, down as far as where the dam road goes in. An English feller name of Sam McSparron lived there on his own, and we camped with him.

Old Sam would work for a month or so and never have a drink, then when he got a bit of a pay, away he'd go and drink till it was all gone. He had two hundred acres down behind there, and Jesus we got a lot of timber out of it. He sold a property out there on the mountain somewhere in his younger days. I forget how much he got for it, but he went in and he camped at the pub in Gosford and stayed there till the money was all gone. He said afterwards that he'd wake up in the morning and there'd be three or four whisky bottles under his bed. He never drank 'em - the bloody publican'd put 'em there and book 'em up to him! You couldn't drink three or four bottles of whisky in a night, could you?

He must have got some money from somewhere and got this place off the bank, but he never ever paid the bank anything off it. They were always at him. The royalty we paid him kept them quiet for a while, but he ended up losing it, and George Downes bought it. He lived sort of opposite - and he ended up selling it to Cottees. He had 640 acres', old Downesie. He was a pommy - a nice old fellow. He was a councillor, too.

Bill: When would this have been?

Keith: Oh, back just before the war. It was him that started that RSL - old George Downes. He had no family.

But this old Sam, he was a character. After they kicked him out of there he went down there to that Oil Bore I was telling you about and camped in a hut there somewhere. And bugger me if he didn't die, and they said it was only a few weeks after he died that they got word from England, or Scotland or wherever it was, that he'd come into a lot of money. Poor old Sam - it would have made a mess of him if he'd got it! He used to walk down to the wine shop at Ourimbah to get plonk and that, and he'd get drunk down there and bludge a ride back home. He'd even go to Laguna to the wine shop there to get some wine.

Bill: Has that been there a long time?

Keith: Oh, from before my time. That was a big blacksmith's shop and boarding house. Billy Brown had that.

Bill: Did you go up that way, and into Wollombi at all?

Keith: No, not a lot. We used to drive our cattle over there to the sales at Wollombi before any trucks

were around - it was too far to drive 'em to Maitland. We used to drive 'em over the hill and on to Wollombi - it was a three or four days' trip - and we'd camp there at Laguna the night before the sale. We'd stay with old Billy Brown and have a couple of wines. They used to have the sales on a Thursday. He was a wonderful blacksmith. His son was, too - Stan. He sold out oh... twenty years ago, I suppose.

Bill: Would you go into Wyong for any blacksmithing you wanted done?

Keith: Oh no, we had a local blacksmith. There was one at Yarramalong. In my father's first days it was the husband of one of my auntie's. Tom Beavans had a blacksmith's shop down there near Etienne's. Where that bloke's built that house just the other side - that was a blacksmith's shop. And my brother-in-law, Perce Dixon was a blacksmith. He started a shop at Yarramalong when he got married. He used to build bullock wagons, and cut the big tyres for bullock wagons, and tighten them and all that sort of thing. But no-one could pay him and he ended up going broke. He had to leave it, and go into the bush and cut girders and stuff.

He could make a set of shoes - just measure off the foot both ways and cut a piece of steel off - put it about three times in the fire, and the shoe would be made. I used to do a bit of striking for him. He'd hold the thing to put the furrow round where the nails go. If you hit it too hard it'd go right through, 'cos it'd be red hot. And they just had a punch, and you'd sit the shoe over the anvil, and hit that, and it'd put that toecap on it. One hit. I used to love watching him.

Bill: Did he have foot operated bellows, or what?

Keith: He had one you could wind - a geared one. The old uncle up here, he had one of the big bellows with the hide round it, you know. They were good, too. They've still got them. They've fixed them all up and rebuilt 'em. I think Ron Le Sueur's had some done up over at St Alban's where there's a bit of a wheelwright and blacksmith.

Anyway, when Freddie Carson came with the mill Perce got a job with him driving his truck. He had two Fiat trucks that he used to cart the sawn timber away with - old chain drive ones. He done the blacksmithing there, too.

Once they broke the main shaft going through the mill that all the pulleys run off. One'd run the bandsaw, one'd run the docking saw - and it broke off. It was a three inch shaft, and he welded that, in a blacksmith's fire. He drew it out so it would sort of lap over, and he had to get it dead straight for all the pulleys to run true on. He had half the mill hands out all holding it. They got it out, and jammed it up together, and just tapped the ends, and he tapped it as they rolled it round. Anyhow, it worked! He had to know just how much heat it took to make that steel run - it had to be runny or it wouldn't take. They'd get it that hot that they used to put borax - or he'd crack up sandstone - to throw on it to stop it from burning. Once you see little sparks coming out of it, like those little cracker things the kids walk about with, it's burning, so you threw this sand on it, and that stopped it, and so you would get more heat and you'd get it running more.

Bill: And it was cracked up stone, not just sand?

Keith: No, it was cracked up stone. That white sandstone. It must have had something in it.

Bill: And you said they'd use borax too?

Keith: I think they used borax, but he never did. He used the stone. The kids used to get a shilling a bag for coal - they'd go round the fires where they'd been burning logs and get the coal to burn in the fire.

Bill: Like sort of charcoal?

Keith: Yes.

Bill: So he kept himself supplied with charcoal from the kids, then?

Keith: Yes.

Bill: And there weren't any charcoal burners around?

Keith: But that's different. That's coal.

Bill: Is it? I was thinking of where these blokes'd put the wood in and burn it real slow, and...

Keith: Yes, but that's like coal.

Bill: Is it?

Keith: Yes. That old bloke living along past you on the mountain there with a Ford car - he burns it out there. I can't remember his name but he's often down at Wally's there - he went through here last week. He used to camp out there and he burnt it in a tank, with just one little flue out. It sort of only smoulders - it doesn't flare away. It looks just like coal when it comes out. Takes a few days.

Bill: And he's still doing that out there?

Keith: He does it a bit, yes. You see him going round here taking it round the lakes selling it to people for their stoves. Peter something his name is. He'd be over fifty. He camps out there at what they call Bob's Point - past The Basin. He was burning it constant there one time - not so much now.

Bill: It's not as hard as coal, though, is it?

Keith: I think it would be.

Bill: There wouldn't be many people living out there in the forest, would there?

Keith: I think he's the only bloke left there now. One time there used to be a lot. I don't think the Forestry stopped him - though they might. He wouldn't be able to light a fire up against a tree like we used to!

Bill: Why did you light'em near the trees?

Keith: Well it was like a back log. It'd only be temporary. We'd only be there three or four weeks, and it'd only char the tree a bit, that's all. (Digression)

...When Bradley's had the mill up there near Yorkie my auntie had married Adam Bradley and they had a house there. After they closed the mill down and went to Wyong Creek - Tom Bradley, Reggie's father had started that mill down there - Adam started a little fellie mill just in front of where Kenny Smith's mother lives, on the other side of the road there. But floods used to go through it - Reg Bradley could tell you quite a bit about it.

He was a fine old man, old Tom Bradley. We used to buy orange cases off him. Jesus some of them case makers was good! They'd get a bloody heap of nails, and they'd just whang! whang! whang! They had a thing they used to dig in to the case of nails, and they used to fill it up, and the nails would just run out of their fingers! I don't know what the record would be for making cases in a day but it would be a fair bit. And you had to bore the lid - they had leather hinges - and that'd be tacked in. That was a bushell case. One shilling each they were..

Bill: And how old is Brian Anderson? He's only been here about thirty years, hasn't he?

Keith: That's all.

Bill: So he's only a newcomer?

Keith: Yes. He's only a Johnny-come-lately. He's a nice bloke, Brian. I rather like him. He's a big man - must be six foot six.

Bill: But that mill that was there on his place isn't working now, is it?

Keith: No. It's still there, but he give it up. Have you met Ronnie Deaves that works for Kenneth? He used to work up there with him....

Charlie Lauff used to be a good benchman. He worked at the mill till his back went. He worked at the council and bugged his back up there. He was a good worker, Charlie. Strong man, too, - and fair dinkum. (long digression).

Bill: ... Did Noel Scholberg buy that place that used to be Bebeah Post Office off Braithwaites?

Keith: No. A chap named Gould bought it when Johnny Braithwaite died and the family sold it. He also owned Grice's between Yorkie bridge and the stone house there - quite a few paddocks he'd bought there. He started an Arab stud there and had a Dutchman running it for him. Anyhow, he found out he couldn't do any good, so he sold it all up and he went up to near Coonabarabran. He had a printing business in Bankstown or somewhere.

Bill: But that's a newish bouse that Noel Scholberg built, isn't it? And there's an old dairy sort of thing...

Keith: Up on the top side? Yeah, well where the house is is where Grice's built, and he paid the boys so much to pull it down - a lot of it was real old. It had round poles for bloody ground plates. My uncle lived there all his married life. It had a separate kitchen away from the rest of the house, and a bedroom and lounge room - they used to call it the front room then - like the dining room - no-one ever dined in it, they ate in the bloody kitchen!...

Bill: And did you build this house?

Keith: Yes. We built this here. There was a house here before that burnt down years back that belonged to Jack Smith. He lived here. He was an orange buyer. He used to go around all the orchards and pull oranges himself and sell 'em.

Bill: Was he related to Ken Smith and them?

Keith: Oh, well, you wouldn't know. I don't think so. Kenny's people come from Sydney - from Botany. They had a milk run and a dairy down there.

Bill: What, that's old H.M.?

Keith: No. His father. His name was Harry, too. I don't know what happened, but he must have sold it, and he started a sawmill over at Mangrove Creek, cuttin' fellies and that over there. And then he eventually got over here.

Bill: That'd be back when?

Keith: Oh when I was three or four year old. No... it'd be since then.... I'd be ten year old when they come here. One of his adopted sons married my sister. Roy his name was. The doctors killed him with penicillin. They kept giving it to him and giving it to him because he kept coming out in a rash. Him and my brother had a mill between them - a sawmill, and they were cutting ti-tree. It was something in the ti-tree that was causing the rash, but they kept pumping bloody penicillin into him till it killed him. They didn't know then, of course, but he was allergic to it. He was only bloody forty seven.

Roy died when he was forty seven and my sister died when she was fifty. She got tetanus. She was living in Wyong and she walked through a bloody block of land, and an old dry scotch thistle stuck in her shin. It broke the skin, but she didn't take any notice of it. By the time she went to the doctor it was too bloody late.

Bill: How long did it take to...?

Keith: Oh not long.

Bill: What? Days?

Keith: She was in a bloody coma for about a week before she died. Some horse had died there with tetanus - in that paddock.

Anyway, my brother and him started the sawmill, and young Roger Dixon, my nephew, went up to Comboyne just after with his parents, and he got killed up there unloading a load of logs with a truck. He was driving the truck and a log hit him.

So Roy died with this penicillin business, and twelve months later my brother bloody well dropped dead sharpening his saw. And he was only forty seven. Then my sister died with this bloody tetanus, then the son, poor bugger, died with that bloody tumor I told you about. As a family we've had a bloody rough time.

Bill: I reckon! And then there's people like you that just keep plugging on.

Keith: That's what I said. The young ones are dying and us old bastards are still goin'! Can't die, even if you want to! Not that I'm ready yet! (Digression)

...We had snow here in the valley once, in July... 1965. It was white on the ground in patches, but up in Kulnura they were fighting with it and making bloody snowmen. You been on that Watagan Road - up Walker's Ridge? - where you go round the Bar as they call it, with the big gully down below you? Well it just flattened that. Those wattle trees with all the vines on them - the weight of the bloody snow just crushed it all up. Yeah - all the Kulnura fowlyards only had light roofs on 'em and it flattened a lot of them to the ground, it weighed so heavy.

We went to a dance at Yarramalong that night - and jeez it was a bitter night. We came home about half past twelve or one o'clock, I suppose. Macka came home after us - he had his own car, so he would've been around seventeen. He said this stuff was hitting his windshield and he didn't know what the bloody hell it was.

We were dairyfarming then, and we had a stinking blackout - which I suppose was natural after a bloody snowstorm. The milk lorry come but we couldn't milk because I hadn't used the petrol motor for the emergency lights for a couple of years.

One time there we had a blackout and I went to start the old petrol motor and it wouldn't start. It was one that you could start on petrol and then switch over to kerosene. It wouldn't suck the petrol, so I was standing there and kept pouring a bit of petrol into the top of it to keep it going while the cows were being milked. While I'm dribbling petrol into it the spark plug fell off and into the bloody pot and set it alight! I've got the gallon tin in my hand, and I swing it away from the fire, and it spilt all over my bloody legs, and then my legs are alight! I had to run outside and get in the grass and the dirt and roll in it. Then I stuck the boot into the can of petrol to kick it outside and it burned and made everything worse!

Bill: Must have been like a Mack Sennet comedy.

Keith: They still laugh about me going and rolling in the dirt, to put my legs out. But it never burnt me. I was lucky not to set the bloody building alight!

...You asked me earlier when was my happiest time, and I think I talked about how much I enjoyed going away on those shooting holidays. But when I think about it a bit more, I'd say that my happiest time was when I got engaged to Jean, and when we got married. It was only six months after we got engaged that we got married - we couldn't stay away from each other. We were that much in love that every time it rained I'd be over there seeing her. That'd be the happiest time.

But I did used to get very excited about going away with the boys though. I'd be up at midnight getting my tucker and camping gear ready. The comradeship of the camping was the best part of it, really - telling yarns and having a couple of beers. Not that we drank much, then - I think I only used to take a dozen of beer with me and perhaps a bottle of whisky. (Digression)

...Someone gave me an old pushbike frame when I was young. It had no tyres, so I scratched up the money to buy a couple - I think they were eight shillings each. I got it going and I used to ride it to work when I worked with my father. Then the ringleader of the kids from round the creek, Bill Jurd - Red Jurd they called him because he was a redheaded feller - he met me down at the turn and said we were all going in to the pictures at Wyong, so away we ride. I'd never been to a movie before that, I don't think.

Anyhow, it became a regular event after a while. Some of the nights would be pitch dark and we'd ride back with no lights - never had a torch or anything. And going down Wyong Creek where that goat farm is now there was a culvert next to the road, and one night Ken Gavenlock missed the road and went straight down into the blackberries. Another time we were going over to Billy Bailey's and to get there we had to cross a bridge. Jurd was leading, and when he got onto the bridge he pulls over against the gravel skid and stops. I was hard behind him and tried to miss him, but I ended up arse over head down in the bloody creek - also in the blackberries - with the bike on top of me!

Bill: How far down was it?

Keith: About eight feet. Then there was another time when we were going to school. Our second teacher was named Fred Blades. He was a pretty good teacher, but by christ I was frightened of him! I was about six when he came there. If you made a mistake he used to make you put your finger on where it was and he'd hit you across the finger with a rod that he had. I was eleven years old before I could really get into the schoolwork - you know the spelling and that, because I was that nervous of the bugger. But he ended up a good teacher.

We used to have to do his cooking. For lunch he'd have a piece of steak or a grilled chop. He'd get me and Jack Stackman to cook it for him. We'd have been about ten or eleven, I suppose. One day I had to boil the billy, but he only let me out about five minutes before the rest of the kids came out for lunch. It was raining, and the wood was wet, and there wasn't much to start it with, but I got the fire going anyhow. And you know with a billy when it's only starting to get warm, it gets those little bubbles round the edge of it? Well I thought she was boiling, and I chucked the tea in and took it in to him! He made me go and boil it up properly. I used to run across the creek to go home to have dinner in those times so I missed out on lunch that day because I had to boil the billy again.

Bill: This was the bloke you were frightened of?

Keith: Yes. He had an old Douglas motor bike, and he stayed with my uncle John just down the road a bit. He used to go away on weekends on it and sometimes he'd be late on the Monday morning. We'd all be waiting for him and soon as it came to half past nine and we reckoned he ought to be there and he wasn't, we'd take to the bush and go tearing around the hillside somewhere.

A lot of times his bike wouldn't start and he'd have us pushing him up and down the bloody road trying to get the thing started. He ended up marrying my cousin. He was a bit of a tennis player, too.

They made the tennis court at the school with horses and ploughs and scoops. Hard brown soil that was a little bit gravelly - it made a good surface. After I grew up we used to play tennis of a wintertime - we used to all go down and play on a court down at my uncle's.

Bill: You mentioned Taylor's Gully the other night...

Keith: Oh yes. I was coming home through Taylor's Gully one night in a storm. It was pitch bloody dark and it started to rain like hell. I could just make out the outline of this ti-tree down in the gully - it was

one I knew was thick and I thought if I could get under it I'd get some shelter. So I run down towards it, but I didn't realise that it was the wrong tree and that there was a deep culvert between it and me that I couldn't see in the dark. I ended up in the water up to my neck! I had to laugh when I got out, because I was trying to get out of the rain so as not to get wet but there was no need now, so I went on home.

Bill: You've had a few dips in the creek, by the sound of it.

Keith: We lived in the creek in the summertime when we were kids - as long as we didn't have to pick beans or something. One of the Stackman girls married a feller named Amos Wand from Wyong and he had a young brother about ten year old - he'd come out to stop with Stackmans. We'd made a bit of a hurdle on the side of the creek, and we used to dive over it and into the creek. This little kid's there, and we asked him if he could swim, and he said that he could a bit. He dived over this thing, but he never come up, and we were thinking that perhaps he couldn't swim at all, and we all got in and began to look for him. But the little bugger had swum underwater over to some cumbungi sags over the other side of the creek and was hiding in them laughing at us. He could swim better than we could! He had us worried for a while though ...(digression)

...I should tell you about the horse races we used to have at Yarramalong in the war years - the Patriotic Race Meetings. You know where the bottom cemetery is? Well the racecourse was beside that long straight. It was about three and a half furlongs. It started off with just saddle horses and anyone's horse around the place, then when they started betting they were bringing in old racehorses and all sorts of things! The dairy that's near the road now used to be across the creek then. It was a pretty good track.

They had a bookmaker there, and they had a licence to sell grog, and an eating house. I think they might have held a woodchop there at the same time, too. I remember one time in the eating house there were a whole lot of people in it and someone spotted a death adder on the ground. It must have got disturbed and had wandered in. There was some screaming and carrying on from the women..

Bill: And this name - Patriotic Race Meeting...?

Keith: It was the only way they could get the licence. The money went to the war effort somewhere.

Bill: A few years ago I went to a rodeo down there by Denny Lee's. Do they go back a long way?

Keith: Some of the younger people started them - probably twenty years ago now. It was a good day, with them riding bullocks and calves, and horses. They were a bit rough and ready, though. Peter Waters and a few of the latecomers used to go on those endurance rides, and they started the rodeos up - a couple of the younger Stackman boys and that.

Jean and I used to go round with the endurance riders - Peter was her brother-in-law - he married Jean's younger sister. We used to go round the bush and watch them. We went over to Mudgee a couple of times - up to Casula. That's what I used to like about going shooting - we'd go chasing pigs to Come-by-Chance, Coonamble - all round those places. I got a pretty good knowledge of the country and the land. Like those plains up there round Walgett - I couldn't live there but it was good for a fortnight. You miss the hills and the green.

Tell you what, it's not hard to get lost out there. We'd have been out spotlighting, and you're turning round and round, and in the finish you don't know which way is east, west, or any way else. Every tree looks the same. I've sat my gun at the butt of a tree and gone out to bring a fox back in or something - perhaps two hundred yards away, and when you go to come back all the trees would look the bloody same. (Digression). ... Have you seen a tucker bag?

Bill: Is it something special? I thought it was a sugar bag or something.

Keith: Yes, it was a sugar bag. You had a flour bag inside to put your lunch in, and you'd put a little

orange, or a stone or something in the bottom corner of the sugar bag and you tied your rope round that so it wouldn't slip off. Then you lasso it round the top and tie that and you slung it over your shoulder. Then you had your both hands free if you were riding, or smoking, or whatever you wanted to do. Charlie Lauff could tell you all about it. He used to go into the pub with his tucker bag, and he'd say: "Where's me port?"

Bill: Yes. My grandfather used to call any bag a port.

Keith: Then there's the old Newcastle bag. It was squarish, and the top clipped in. Made of leather...

Bill: Oh yes. My old man used to have one. He used to call it a Gladstone bag.

Keith: That's right, it is, too. But round here they used to call them Newcastle bags. Probably because the first one they saw was in Newcastle.

I meant to tell you about the chimneys in the old houses. They were built out of corrugated tin. They'd be, oh, six foot across inside. You had stone up for a few feet - big stones - whatever they could lift in, and the rest was just galvanised tin with the studs in it.

Bill: The studs never caught alight?

Keith: No. You used to set the soot alight sometimes to burn it out. It'd flare and go but it wouldn't catch the studs.

The women used to have a pipeclay pot - some of that pipeclay that was nearly blue - a beautiful white. They used to get that out of the clay bank and stir it up with water. Then they made a brush out of rushes. You'd double a bunch of it over, and tie the end up and chop it off square and bruise it, and that was their brush to brush the pipeclay onto these stones. They'd do it every month or so. The saucepan would be put aside ready for the next month with the clay left over in it. It'd go shiny in the finish. We used to sit on it beside the fire on the stones.

Bill: You'd get right in the fireplace?

Keith: You'd get round the side - as long as it wasn't too big a fire of course...

...I was thinking the other night about the first suit I bought. The possum season opened over in the branch at St Alban's...

Bill: Did they have a season on possums?

Keith: Yes, back when I was sixteen or seventeen or so - though it was all a sanctuary here on the coast. My brother and a mate of his got a licence. We trapped 'em here, but we had to take them over there to the police station to send them off. I got a few, and got about four pound ten for them. So I went in to the old tailor's at Wyong and got him to make me a suit. It was a beauty. Two fittings - four pound ten. That was the first bit of money I'd ever got, so I thought I'd better get myself something with it.

In those days, if you went to town, you wore a suit and a tie - if you went to see the bank manager or anything like that. Or the Show - a new suit for the Show, and a new hat. That's what we wore to dances. We had no Sunday clothes. Usually the suit had two pair of pants, because the pants would wear out before the coat. Oh no, you weren't dressed unless you had a bloody collar and tie on. And a hat. (Long digression)...

...When we first got married I had twenty quid. We went down to Sydney as I told you and spent four or five quid down there. We bought a suite of kitchen furniture while we were down there - ten pounds! Six chairs, table and a sideboard. Veneer. All stained. It was beautiful.

...Charlie Lauff and Squatter would probably back me up on this, but lots wouldn't believe me. When we

were kids and you'd see the people working on the road on a hot summer's day their boots would be white, the knees of their pants would be white, and round their belt would be white - from the salt out of the sweat. In later years it happened to me. We never wore socks under our Blucher boots, and the white would come out of the holes for the bootlaces.

Bill: Makes sense I suppose - that's why when you sweat a lot you should have salt tablets.

Keith: ... We used to have the Annual Ball at Yarramalong in August every year. You'd have to be done up in your finest regalia for that. Friday night - orchestra, sit-down supper.

Bill: When did they stop?

Keith: Oh... I'd say during the war years. Old William Waters and the sister used to run nearly everything down there - they used to go in the Queen competitions and collect money for the ambulance and all that. And they used to put this Ball on. There'd be three sittings, and us riff-raff buggers would be left till last! They'd call the toffs in first.

Bill: And who used to do all the cooking? Was it catered for?

Keith: They used to buy a bit a cake and that, but mostly it was all home-made stuff.

Bill: Did the CWA have anything to do with it?

Keith: No. Just the hall committee. Sometimes it would be run for the ambulance and the hall as well, if it needed painting or something done to it. But she was a big night, that one.

Bill: Did it go till real late?

Keith: Till about two o'clock. They were the times we used to run off the mountain when we were working Friday to have a bath and get ready for the big Ball. It was something to look forward to. It was the biggest event of the year for Yarramalong by a long way.

They used to have picnics down there when I was a bit of a kid. I think they used to run them for the ambulance too, though it could have been before the ambulance was about. The first ice cream I tasted was at one of those picnics. I'd have been about ten year old. We used to have to walk from home down to the other side of Linga Longa Road - that's where they used to have it. They'd have throwing at the wicket, and stepping the hundred yards - hoopla, anything you could imagine.

Bill: Did you ever get things like circuses come through?

Keith: Wyong did. Wirth's Circus came there... It was a novelty for a while, but once you've seen one you've seen the lot.