



Charlie Lauff

Charlie: At one time round here, wherever you looked there was a fruit tree of one kind or another. There was a beautiful patch of trees over there - Williams pears, granny smith apples ...The bloke that bought that property before Jimmy Blundell got a dozer and pushed everything over. Everyone had a quince tree ...they were good eating. There's a beautiful quince tree over at Keith Fernance's, and a pomegranate, but they're horrible things, pomegranates - you only chew a bit of skin off the seeds. There's not much in 'em - you couldn't make a soup out of them, or boil them or anything. But the old quince made good dumplings. (Stops to go and hand feed a tame thrush)...

Bill: Was Lauffs Lane named after your father?

Charlie: Yes. When they bought that it was all scrub. Ron Le Sueur lived there for a while on 40 acres. There used to be a terrible big orchard there at one time. Battled through till the Depression come - oranges wasn't worth nothing - nothing was worth anything those days.

There was hardly any work, but the funny thing about it all was that when I was cutting sleepers for the railway the war broke out, and by the Jesus then there was work! There was work everywhere! If you had an old draught horse you'd go and get lumps of wood - poles about ten foot long to send away for tank traps and that... not that they never used them - they laid around the railway. Me and Keith Fernance, we couldn't get away - you couldn't leave the sleepers. They wouldn't let you go, even if you wanted to. You could say you'd cut no more and get out, but if you tried that they'd send you to Queensland on the CCC.

Bill: What was the CCC?

Charlie: I dunno - some bloody job or other. But the railway sleepers were number one priority, you see, because there weren't many trucks those days. I know there wasn't because when we were cutting sleepers the only trucks around were little old Chevs, and the odd International or two. Come a shower of rain all you'd be doing was going round with oak poles putting them in between the wheels at the back so you

could get out, up these hills and over on these points. And by the ghost, when the war was over they brought a truck out here - I dunno what sort it was, but it was a four-wheel drive, and Jesus! you could go up a cliff in that! That was one thing that the war done - it helped that way.

Bill: And you said you were born up at Lauffs Lane?

Charlie: Yeah. I was the first one.

Bill: And was it a big family?

Charlie: There was six of us - two sisters and four brothers. We all went to Wyong Creek school. I was still going there when the bricks were put on it. In earlier days hailstorms had done all the roof in - before my time. By the Jeez that's an old school. Holy Ghost, you know, you turn the television on and see that Zorro, the bloke on the horse with a black sort of a cape on? Well we didn't have a doctor, there was only one old doctor in Wyong, and he was an alcho - if he didn't get beer he'd put a needle in himself - and every time I see that Zorro I think of old Mrs Dryas, the old midwife. She had a white looking thing round her head swinging out, and she'd be goin' flat out on the horse up and down the bloody road delivering babies!

When you first go up Lauffs Lane there's an old place on your right, and another place on your left where Carl Stackman was once, but doesn't live there now. Jack Dryas built that - that was her son. But funny - I'll never forget it, I was starting a job up here - I was only 14 when I started my first job at the mill up here, the first job I got. I went home one weekend and seen Mrs Dryas going over the gully. I get home, and Mum's got a baby!

Bill: Your mum?

Charlie: Yes. (laughs). I thought: "That's funny." I often think about it, you know. Christ, kids nowadays, you see 'em on television and they're only so high and they know all about everything!

Bill: And you didn't even know she was going to have one?

Charlie: No. I didn't know. You knew nothing about it. You weren't even game to think, or the old man'd have you by the ear and he'd screw it off you. Yeah! I often wonder what'd happen if Dad had some of these kids you see on television. By the jesus he'd lash 'em!

Yeah I was 14. There were no high schools when I was going to school. You only went to 6th class. You had a sort of exam thing at the end of it. There was eight of us, and it wasn't too hard - it couldn't have been or I wouldn't have passed! But you didn't need education - all you needed was common sense. You didn't have any place to go except the bush, or into a mill. There was not too many wanted to farm.

Bill: And did you work in timber all your life.

Charlie: Yes.... Oh, the last eight years I done on the council. I couldn't carry on in the bush - it was too heavy. Sleeper cutting, girders - yeah, it was pretty hard going.

Bill: You'd have been working before they had chainsaws, I suppose?

Charlie: Oh christ yes! I got a chainsaw practically when they first came out. A Danarm. They seemed to weigh about ninety pound - by jeez they were big things!

Bill: And did you have to go up and camp in the bush much?

Charlie: Oh yes, I did in later years. Yes, many a time. Often you'd do your crosscutting by lantern - cutting your eight foot logs off of a night time so you wouldn't have to waste that time the next day. Of course you weren't insured then - and there was no holiday pay. You had to get your sleepers in to the railway, alongside the railway, stacked. And the pay used to come every five weeks, usually on the Mon-

day at Wyong - Tuesday at Morrisset. If it rained and you didn't get them in you got no pay. They were pretty strict, back then...

The people round here now, they're terrible nice people, though I don't see them all that much. They've got Mercedes and things that they drive now, but in those days jeez it was rough! All down these hills they used to have logs on the road - corduroy they called it. It was a rough old ride in the sulky! You'd have to leave home at half past seven because it'd take you the best part of two hours to get to Wyong by horse and sulky. And you didn't get in there too often, either.

Bill: And did you work with bullocks?

Charlie: Yeah. I had two goes. I had one team with Paul Stackman, and another with Steve Waters, up in Ravensdale. I had about three years at it, but it wasn't much of a job. You know, bullock driving just wasn't for everyone. I was kind to 'em - I could handle 'em.

Bill: They were pretty tricky to get to do what you wanted, weren't they?

Charlie: Yeah. But if they were broke in properly they were alright. We'd have twelve, thirteen, sixteen in a team. For one man twelve bullocks was all you'd need to handle 'em. It's a good job they're gone though - there was too much cruelty with 'em. It was terrible! Oh my god they'd harm them - belt 'em...

Bill: Really? But they were useful working animals. Why didn't they look after them?

Charlie: They were just that type of people. They had no feeling for animals. And horses! They'd leave 'em just in a bit of a yard. On the weekends the kids'd be riding them up and down the hills. And the dogs'd get that poor...

But all the cows I look after now down there, I've got 'em all named. I go and talk to them, and if anything happens to them it's like losing a member of the family. But my god there's a lot of these newcomers, they're cruel with them, too. They'd have four acres and put forty head of cattle on 'em. I was reared with animals. I don't suppose in seventy-odd years many people'd see more animals than I did. Apart from about six weeks in all that time I'd be looking at them every day - that makes a difference.

The people up here now are sort of stars. They go to Wyong every two days - every day, sometimes twice a day, some of them. Holy ghost, I might've had to go every five weeks! When I was doing sleepers and we had to go to Morrisset we used to ride the horses up Ravensdale, over the top into Dooralong and then into Mandalong - it wasn't very far.

We might have had no money, but we had plenty to eat. More than we've got today. What you grew yourself. You had a bit of everything - vegetables, and fruit.

Bill: And who used to grow them, Charlie?

Charlie: You grew 'em yourself.

Bill: You'd do that in your spare time?

Charlie: Yes. The wife used to have a small garden here, and another piece up the back. She did all the preserves, and jams.

Bill: And was it the women who looked after the garden?

Charlie: Oh yes. We had plenty of everything. We grew a lot of corn, and you'd get a bag of spuds and put 'em in, in between the corn. And we had pumpkins. Those days you had bark roofs on the sheds. You couldn't nail bark on - only here and there, because the nail'd go through, so you had to get a piece of leather about an inch square and put a nail in it. The pole'd stick out from the shed, and you used to have three over the top and you used to put your pumpkins and grammars on that. They'd do you right through

the winter. But they're not much good in the hot weather.

Then your sweet potatoes - you'd have them in. And what you'd have to do, as soon as the first frost come, you'd just go round and cut the vines all off at the stalk and let it go. If you don't, it'll kill the vine, and it'll go through into the spud and make 'em spoil. There wasn't too much that you bought.

A lot of them used to make their own bread but I didn't like the homemade bread. It was only sixpence a loaf - and that was delivered too, so you couldn't do much better. And the only one I ever see made butter that was any good was old Mrs Bowen at Wyong Creek. The wife tried to make it a lot of times, but it always had buttermilk in it and a sort of sour tang, you know what I mean. It wasn't the best sort of stuff to eat.

Bill: And you killed your own meat?

Charlie: Oh yes. We had pigs - had a couple of suckers all the time. Kenny Smith down here, his father used to kill his own pigs. He'd kill most of 'em around here and clean 'em for 'em. And we had fowls - a lot of 'em up here had fowls, and them old geese, and guinea fowls. You had to have a shotgun to get them - by jesus they could go! Then of course the old cows - you couldn't sell 'em, there was no market for them. Only Jerseys, or Guernseys - mainly Jerseys they had. You'd fatten it up a bit and go and kill it. It was all salted stuff. You'd make as much soup as you could out of it, but it was that tough you had to chew your soup. Jesus!

We used to have a big meat safe - they all did. You'd have it hanging up in the corner on a wire hook and the old blowflies'd be around it. We had big plates to put the meat on - big oval ones - you don't see 'em much nowadays. You'd cook a big lump of meat and have all the vegetables piled round each end. It was all put on the table and you took whatever you wanted - provided you didn't poke a fork into it that you'd had in your mouth - then you'd get nothing! You'd have this old brisket in the safe that still had the bones in it, and it'd be hot, and the fat'd be all melted into the bloody plate, and the bones'd be sticking out!

Bill: And where did your dad come from, Charlie?

Charlie: Rockdale. Old grandfather Lauff had a terrible big market garden in Sydney - he owned half of it. But he came from Germany, the grandfather. A woman came here last year to find out about the Lauffs - she got onto me through a solicitor. There was no problems or anything - she just came to find out if I knew where he was. She found out where both grandfather and grandmother was born over there but I wasn't much interested. These people chase these family trees, and I said: By jeez, you don't put 'em all in! I mean there was the odd one or two in the family that was a bit yonky, sort of thing, in the head, and you wouldn't want them in the bloody thing!

Where we was lucky, see, was if you wanted bread, or butter, or if you wanted a pair of boots or a bag of chaff, Chapman's cart came up here three days a week. And it went up Brush Creek. It had two horses - a wagonette it was. It used to come from Wyong. Chapmans started that store in there back at the turn of the century. They had a branch store in Yarralong here and one over at Dooralong. But old Luke Jurd, he was the driver, and it didn't matter what the weather was like he... jeez it was a horrible job. Up here three times a week and up Brush Creek three times a week. Forty eight hour a week job they was back in them days. We were pretty lucky that way - with the deliveries. You didn't need to go nowhere.

Bill: What about the social life in the community -
cricket, parties...

Charlie: Well, there's a cricket pitch up at Brian Anderson's and there was one down here at Yarralong down at Reice Palmer's - there's still one there. And there's one down at Wyong Creek, down where the bloke's got the goats down this side of Lauffs Lane. It's not there now, though.

Bill: Did you used to play?

Charlie: No. I did in later years, after I'd been married a good bit. I could run well - just as well, too, because every time I bowled a ball they'd hit it to the boundary for a four and I'd have to go and get it! I loved it, though...

But tennis courts - there was a tennis court up at Yarramalong. There was another one at the school up here, and there was one over the top of the road over there. Old Jan Fernance had it there. There was one up here where that bloke lives... I think he's a bus driver - he's got a trotting horse, just up the road here. And there was a tennis court over there near Lammi's. I used to play there. I loved tennis. All the way down the creek there was tennis courts. Well, you had nowhere else to go of a Sunday evening, like. Everyone'd gather round over here, and you'd see wide straw hats round the thing. I've played there, and up at Gavenlock's, up there where that painter lives now - Voight.

Bill: How long has Brian Anderson been up there?

Charlie: I'd say it'd be thirty-odd years. Of the nookies, as I call 'em, he's been here the longest.

Bill: The nookies?

Charlie: Oh... the townies. I dunno. Christ.

Bill: And did you move straight to here from Lauffs Lane?

Charlie: No. I was camped up with mum's grandmother for a while - I was boarding up there till we got married. Then I was living over in a place up in Brian Anderson's - a big old house at the foot of the hill. And then I shifted down to Stan Jurd's - that's where Roy Agar's living now. Then I bought this.

Bill: And how did you meet your wife? Was she from the area?

Charlie: She was born up here where Neville Wran's big house is now. She was a Bailey. There was only Baileys, Jurds and Fernances that lived here. Those days it was no good anyone going to Sydney or Wyong and getting a girl and marrying her and bringing her home. She wouldn't be with him six weeks and she'd be gone.

Bill: Didn't like the life?

Charlie: Oh well they couldn't put up with... Mum and Dad wouldn't allow it, see. She'd have to go and get a bit of firewood to put in the stove, and they'd say oh you can't do that you poor child, come home and Mum and Dad'll look after you, you know what I mean? I know this for a fact. There was only ever three, sort of thing ...divorces. But it won't work. No.

Bill: You mean you've got to grow up here to know how to live here?

Charlie: Yes. Things would be different now though ...(pause)

Bill: And what did you do to your fingers? A logging accident, or...?

Charlie: No. I shot 'em off.

Bill: You shot 'em off?

Charlie: Yeah. I got bitten by a death adder. Yeah.

Bill: What? A shotgun?

Charlie: Yes.

Bill: Jesus! That was pretty drastic, wasn't it?

Charlie: Mmm. Saved me life though.

Bill: Did people get married young in those days? Going by the big families I suppose they got going pretty early, did they?

Charlie: Well, there was nothing else to do! (laughs). You know what I mean. They had too big a family, a lot of 'em - eight and nine - Knights up here had twelve. And they were big people! Old J.M. Fernance, who lived where Robert Penny is, holy ghost they were a big family - four or five men and two girls, and they weighed 13, 15 stone - and not fat either! Then there was Joe Fernance - that was Keith Fernance's father - there was Keith, and Toby, and Allan - holy ghost there were some big people. Like the Braithwaites up here. They were big people too.

Bill: That's where I live now - on the land they used to own up the top of Brush Creek Road.

Charlie: This side of Bowen's Pinch?

Bill: Bowen's Pinch runs right through my land.

Charlie: I went to Wollombi with Brian Anderson once and we came back through Murray's Run. I wished I hadn't seen it now. I used to go down there when Chris Sternbeck had the big place over there. Old Jimmy Sternbeck, the uncle, used to own seven miles from the first gate as you went down, down to the Old Northern Road. Holy ghost he used to have beautiful cattle. And so help me god now it's all cut up - you've never seen the like! And floods swept a lot of that.

They had a big storm one time that took out the flats and made the creek wide. The same flood took all the mangroves out over at St Alban's there - though we didn't get it here. Chris Sternbeck owned up to where... you know where Flat Rock is? And then you cut across and they've got houses now out at Bucketty. That belonged to Chris Sternbeck, too. Well when you went down from the Flat Rock, before you started to go down - there was a big brick house on your left. That's where old Chris Sternbeck used to bring his pigs up - half a load of pigs, and put 'em in a yard. He couldn't bring 'em all up. He used to drive his pigs from Murrays Run over into Wyong, to the railway station. But I never ever seen that - it was before my time. They used to camp down in the Yarramalong Reserve - used to be down there near the bridge - and bring some corn over in the cart for 'em.

But then, when you go to the top of Bowen's Pinch - I worked all over that for pulpwood for a long time...

Bill: What? Just taking the scraggy stuff?

Charlie: Oh anything at all. CSR bought all that mountain from Braithwaites. There was a point we called Kurrajong. Up the top of Bowen's Pinch there's a long point comes down to your right - got a lot of kurrajongs growing on it. Is there any houses on that?

Bill: No. There's a bit of a shed and a caravan. That changed hands a few times in the last few years. A bloke called David Lance has it now. He's going to build something on it.

Charlie: Kenny Smith down here that owns the mill - he's a lovely bloke. He goes with a girl - I thought she lived down on Kurrajong - she lives up on the mountain, don't she?

Bill: Yeah. But she lives on a road that goes out to the left at the top of Bowen's Pinch, not to the right. Going up, that is.

Charlie: Oh. Well the one I'm talking about is out to your right. We used to have a big dump for the pulpwood on the top of Bowen's Pinch. Big logs. And there's nobody up on that Yorkie Shelf there? Jesus there's some beautiful flat ground on it! The old road used to go round from Yorkie Bridge and come round and come out just this side of Bowen's Pinch.

Bill: Yes. There's an old road still does. My daughter used to ride her horse up it when she'd ride up from

the valley. I think Betty Le Sueur still does.

Charlie: Well there's a big shelf there with some flat ground in it - it's about halfway up the mountain. We used to get logs from there. Used to take the truck round on that road - '39 Chevys they used to have. I don't suppose anyone's built on it.

Bill: No. I don't think they have. How long since you've been up that way?

Charlie: Oh it's a good while. Last time was when I came down with Brian Anderson. There used to be a beautiful reserve there at Yorkie Bridge. Not very big, but with grapevines, and... people used to go in underneath. Years ago when we used to go to Murray's Run shooting you'd get up there the first day. Old Tommy Fernance owned that bit this side of Yorkie Bridge and we used to be able to put the horses there overnight, then go on down to Murray's Run. But the council went in there and knocked it all down with a bulldozer. Jesus! I was wild!

Bill: Why'd they do that?

Charlie: Just to clean the bloody place up. They can be destructive if they want to be ...(pause)

Bill: Considering how dangerous working in the bush was, were there many serious accidents?

Charlie: No. We were pretty lucky that way. We're getting more nowadays because they're not bushmen that's in the job, you know. They're townies. Not that I've got anything against townies, but...they're just not as careful. It'd be like me going into town and getting a job. I'd get run over!

Bill: And of all the jobs you did, what was the one that you liked most?

Charlie: Cutting girders.

Bill: What? Squaring 'em up with a squaring axe?

Charlie: Yes. I cut a lot of girders. We used to cut a lot of stuff for New Zealand - sleepers, transoms, girders. But those fence posts - jeez I didn't like that. Just splitting fenceposts, you know what I mean, with the old hammer and wedges - they didn't look anything. But when you squared a girder it looked beautiful.

Bill: And when you came here, did you build this place?

Charlie: No. This place is aw...85, 86 year old. Old Harry Beavan down here, he built this place. I only came here in 1953.

Bill: The Beavans' owned a fair bit round here, did they?

Charlie: They did. They owned a good bit of Yarramalong - but there was a good many Beavans' about.

Bill: But they would have come later than the Jurds and the Baileys?

Charlie: I think they might have done, yes. There was a Beavan lived over there near that new house of Mark Lammi's - he was a blacksmith - done all the blacksmithing for the bullockies and one thing and another. He was the bloke made that grindstone I've got down there. And by the Jesus, I'll tell you what, you have a look at the bearings in that. They were handmade in a forge! I remember George Smith - his brother Merv owned the mill down there - he used to do blacksmithing. He'd get me on the handle. He done all the big anvil work - drawing stuff out. I dunno what the sandstone was for, but you had to put it on, and when you did all the sparks'd come out. But that grindstone down there, you'd think it impossible for a man to do it on a forge. Kids and that over the years have got at it - chipped bits out of it...

Bill: And that house that Jim and Sue Blundell bought - that would have been an old house too, wouldn't it?

Charlie: Oh yes. Jimmy built on to it a bit. They're nice people. They're nice to me. (Digression).

Bill: It's a nice view from here Charlie. It's a very pretty part of the valley.

Charlie: Yeah. One of those real estate blokes came to see me about selling once, and he said he could get me an extra fifty thousand just because of the view. I said I didn't own all that, I only own to this fence down here, but he said he could still get me the extra - just for looking at! I could've got a hundred and eighty here two years ago, but I don't want to shift out of here.

A lot of these old fellers that was here, most of them shifted out - they're nearly all gone. They went to Wyong, but christ, they're only there three weeks - they go down the street and buy a few papers and have a pint of beer, and then they've conked out! But I'm satisfied here, even though I've seen it before and I'm sick of the look of it. But I wouldn't want to go where someone is peering at you through a paling fence, like only a few feet away - oh christ! Where we're lucky here is the houses are all built about the right distance apart.

Bill: And did you have kids?

Charlie: Only one daughter. Yes.

Bill: You were a bit of an exception to the valley rule of big families, then?

Charlie: Oh yes. We didn't have to go through what some of them had to go through with all those mouths to feed.

Bill: Yes, it must have been hard with some of those big families.

Charlie: Oh jesus it was hard. The clothes and that. Of course they'd hand them down... I see on the television the other night here about the average wedding costs 17 thousand dollars. Not if you're reared about here it don't! They showed a \$250 wedding dress, and it had three places where it wasn't sewn up!

Bill: How did they handle weddings back then?

Charlie: A lot of them used to use the Yarramalong Hall. When my daughter got married she had a turn-out down there. Everyone got in and cooked a cake or two, made a few sandwiches - chucked in, you know what I mean. But nowadays they spend thousands and thousands of dollars. But I couldn't do that, 'cos I was only earning the change that was leftover from the boss, sort of thing. Yes... we used to help each other.

These birthday parties - you didn't have that sort of thing. I never bothered when Beverley was 21. But you couldn't get anyone better than the people in this valley to help each other, like if something was on, or somebody got sick - then jesus they'd be there. Oh yeah.

Bill: And that's all gone now?

Charlie: Yeah ...(pause). There's a good programme on TV comes on in the afternoon - Totally Wild. There's three young girls in it, real natural - there's none of that Nicole Kidman sort of stunt with them, you know. They're totally natural. They're the sort of ones that if you'd take 'em along to a farm they'd stay. I don't think Nicole'd stay for very long - you'd just about get home and the next morning she'd be gone. The bed'd be cold where she's supposed to have been!

Bill: There've been some good nature documentaries on lately, haven't there?

Charlie: Yeah. But I can't stand that *Quantum*. I suppose it's alright, but they've got stuff on that I can't understand. It's too far in front of me, you know... or I'm too far behind it, one or the other! And I don't like that poor bloody rat going round that circle all the time, either! Bad enough to see one crawling up over the wardrobe sometimes of a nighttime - especially if it's had a good feed of Talon!

The other day I was sitting here and I see a bluetongue lizard in the middle of the road down there. Anyhow, a car come along, and run over it. Any other time, if I could get about better I'd have gone down and I'd have poked him off with a stick. But then later another car come along and there was another one on the road and the car went right over the other side of the road to run over it! Christ I was wild!

Bill: What about things like black snakes and that, do you leave them alone...?

Charlie: Oh well... I do now. You don't see any, that's why. About ten year ago you killed about twelve or fourteen of them in the average year. I didn't like them that much. Like the dog ticks - you don't get the old killer dog tick, them hard shellback ones as much now either.

Bill: Why do you think that is?

Charlie: Dunno... there's just as many cattle. The ticks used to love getting around underneath the blue gums and roundleafs where all that bark falls on the ground. You've still got the big gums here, like. I dunno why it is.

Bill: I suppose you must have learnt a lot of stuff, especially about timber, that you wouldn't have got from school, eh?

Charlie: That's right. I'd be the youngest of us lot of bushies. I mean there was old men, the likes of my father's age, you know, when I started there. You learned a lot off them.

Bill: Did they tell you or did you ask 'em?

Charlie: No. You watched 'em. A lot of men worked around here, but you'd get perhaps one out of every thirty that was out on his own. But I was one of them that was more down the back of the cart. (Digression)

...I always found that a left handed squaring axeman was always better than a right.

Bill: I wonder why that was?

Charlie: Don't know.

Bill: I suppose that's a skill that not many people have got these days.

Charlie: That's right. But when you've done 25 years at it you should be alright at it.

Bill: You said you had plenty of meat. Did you go and shoot any of the wildlife?

Charlie: Oh christ, them old flock pigeons! They'd be here four and five hundred in a flock. We used to have a camp up the top end of Ravensdale where there was a lot of brown beech, tickwood, and bangalow. You'd get six or seven pigeons with one shot off a bangalow. And the bloody black ducks - we never let up on 'em!

But now I wouldn't touch 'em. Wouldn't kill anything.

Bill: And when did you start to think that way? There's been a change in people's attitudes to...

Charlie: Oh the last ...getting towards twenty years, now I suppose. If I go down here now and see an old black duck on the bank, I just stand there and look at it, and think: "Jeez, you're beautiful." Pigeons'd be down here feeding on the brown beech and lillipilli down here - there was a big flock there last April - and I stood in the culvert and just looked at them. I couldn't have pulled the trigger if I'd had a gun. And them old scrub turkeys - by jeez we used to shoot a lot of them, up the creek there.

Bill: Are they good eating?

Charlie: Not the meat, but they made the best soup you'd ever get. But not the meat - it wasn't very good.

We all had dogs. I had a red kelpie dog, and he'd chase 'em and put 'em up a tree and sit there and bark. I saw one over there the other day scabbling about under a wattle tree - they like the wattle seeds, but I couldn't have shot the thing. These old wonga pigeons, there was two of them down here yesterday - and those long tailed brown pigeons, they'd be down here. I can't kill them now.

But back then the magpies and the satin birds would be there in their thousands. Wherever you looked - pigeons, king parrots, rosellas - in the corn. They were a pest, and you had to shoot 'em.

They used to grow a lot of corn here. It was hard work too - especially when you were threshing. Chapman's used to take it back in the cart - they'd buy it. We used to send it in ten bags at a time. But it was hard going. No machines them days...

Bill: And what do you think's going to happen to the valley, what with Laws, and Nifty and all these people moving in?

Charlie: Well, Lawsie's not too bad. He's got Bub Fernance and Wade there looking after it for him. They were reared on farms - but Laws wouldn't know nothing.

Bill: So that part's being looked after alright then?

Charlie: It is up on Laws', yes. But the newcomers aren't cut out for this sort of country. Nobody is.

Bill: Except a handfull of originals.

Charlie: Yeah. And they're battling ...(pause)

The seasons have altered too. One time, when they were growing a lot of corn round here, you'd put it in at the end of July - you used to put all your vegetables in the end July, but you can't now. Your winter still goes till about the end of September. I don't know why it is.

Bill: What about fires? Anyone been in any strife with bushfires?

Charlie: No. They won't let you do it now, but years ago, when we worked about in the mountains, you'd burn it after Xmas, towards the end of January, to get that good green pick.

Bill: And what about floods? I suppose you've had your share of floods, have you?

Charlie: Oh yeah.

Bill: Were they regular?

Charlie: Yes. Every Easter time. The biggest flood we've had, in 1927, was at Eastertime too. But by jeez we've had some big floods. One time you could bank on 'em. They used to have the Wyong Show in the middle of February, and every time they had it, it rained both days. I don't think they have a show at Wyong now - I'm not sure. But it used to be a big turnout. I never liked it - couldn't be bothered. But old Johnny Braithwaite and them would all be in there with their cows...

Bill: And you said everyone got on together OK. Were there any family feuds, or...

Charlie: No. The worst seemed to be within the family, between sister and sister, or mother and daughter... not so much between families. No, people got along well with each other. I get along well with them too, but I can't stand anyone entertaining themselves by talking about their next door neighbour. I get a bit lousy about that.

Bill: Ken Smith was telling me once about finding evidence of where aborigines had cut steps in trees and things. When you first came out here were there ever any aborigines in the area?

Charlie: No. But when I started up here at the mill, the only two white people working there were me and

Stan Jurd. The rest were aborigines. The Stewart brothers. And by the jeez they'd work! Lovely people. They came from La Perouse.

Bill: But none came from locally?

Charlie: No. Over the years I met people who first came here, and nobody ever mentioned anything about aboriginals.

Bill: Yet there's a lot of caves and rock carvings up round Wollombi, isn't there?

Charlie: That's right.

Bill: But not much around here. Yet you'd think it'd be a lovely place for them...

Charlie: Down at Wyong creek, there's a big old turpentine been burned out, and part of the big stump had axe marks in it like you'd put in to put a peg in, and no white man had done it - it was an aboriginal turnout. Up in Jack Stackman's gully - Bailey's Gully, there's a big cave there that's aboriginal so they tell me. I didn't bother going to the thing - I wasn't interested in it.

There's a big rock somewhere up round Wollombi that they put stakes round, with a chain, to protect the aboriginal stuff on it. And someone with motorbikes come and took the chain down and tore it to pieces riding around on it with bikes. They should have smashed all their bikes up - and broke the legs off them! I've never seen people be so destructive!

Bill: And how far afield did you go when you were working in the bush? Did you ever go out round Boree, and Yengo...?

Charlie: Never worked there. I knew people lived up near Big Yengo - Knights lived up on the top end of it, about as far as you could go. The valleys are bigger than here, and the mountains were higher at the end there. But it was pretty poor sort of country.

Bill: And you mentioned Flat Rock. Wasn't there a small mill up near that at some stage?

Charlie: Old Fred Woodbury lived there, just down from Flat Rock. They had a big family there. It was pretty hard going for 'em. To buy a loaf of bread, Mrs Woodbury'd have to walk over three miles down to Braithwaite's, where a chappie used to leave her bread.

Bill: Are they related to the Woodburys of the Inn and that, from years ago?

Charlie: Not too sure. Old Bill Woodbury - we used to cut a lot of timber, and he was a big timber merchant, old Bill. Then Ken his son took it over later on. He used to have his office down there near the Court House. Used to get orders for New Zealand, poles for Queensland - he done a lot of timber work. He was a nice bloke, Ken. So was his father - a nice old feller. Ken never ever done no work. He had a big place out there at Mardi but his father owned that and left it to him - a big sort of farm place there. But it would've been long sold now. It was straight opposite where you turn to come back down towards that Rest Home place there. It'd be cut up into a few bloody blocks too, I'd say. But old Bill used to have a lot of cattle on it. Jesus they used to get flooded down there! Especially when The Entrance was blocked up, they'd catch it. Another place too where there was no outlet was below the Wyong River going towards Tuggerah there - they only had a couple of little culvert things going beneath the railway line. The water used to all go down to where Needham's are now, 'cos there was no way for the water to get out. That's lower down there in that area towards Tuggerah railway station than it is up at the Wyong River.

Bill: And did you used to go out to The Entrance and that much?

Charlie: No, not much. Didn't like it. I'd as soon take the gun and get a feed of satin birds or something like that. Those days you had to chase everything. You had rabbits, possums ...we had traps to catch them.

They'd eat everything. And the rabbit - he'd eat your peas and beans.

Bill: Did you say you couldn't eat the possums?

Charlie: No. I wouldn't eat them. I wouldn't eat wallaby either. Christ they used to stink! And the look of the meat! I used to skin 'em for the old beagle dog - we always had three or four beagles. They used to help keep 'em down a bit. There's a lot of wallaroos here now. I wouldn't even skin it now. Bloody stinkin' stuff it is... And the old possum - God he's got a sour smell! We skinned them 'cos we got a few pence for the skin. It was awful to kill 'em, you know. You had the black one, you had the grey one, then you had more of a ginger one. Jeez they were beautiful. Brush tails.

Bill: And when you said wallaroos - are they the real dark ones?

Charlie: The buck's black and the doe's a greylooking colour. Jeez there used to be a lot of 'em here.

Bill: Are they the same as a swamp wallaby?

Charlie: No the swamp wallaby's something like a black wallaby. It's terrible hard to shoot a swamp wallaby. We used to go out Chapman's Swamps there, out towards Warnervale. They used to be thick there one time, and they were eating people's corn up there. But gee they were hard to shoot! They used to jump about two feet up in the air higher than a black wallaby, and you used to shoot under 'em, sort of thing. I've certainly missed a few of 'em!

Bill: I suppose you would have been a pretty good shot, though, wouldn't you?

Charlie: Oh not too bad. Well,, reasonable - well back in the car.

Bill: What sort of guns did you have?

Charlie: I had a double barrel, and I had a combination under-and-over 20 guage - that's a 20 gauge on the bottom with a .22 rifle on top. But you wouldn't use it round these flats here - it was too dangerous. You'd keep it till you got up into the forest. We used to use the short bullets to get the old catbirds. Fancy eating them! I couldn't eat 'em now. Catbird soup ...(long digression).

Bill: ...You mentioned cutting pulpwood before. Was that to make masonite out of?

Charlie: Yeah. CSR.

Bill: And did they take good logs to do that?

Charlie: Anything at all that they owned. Cripes it was a shame. There was bloody piles there sixty and seventy foot long - turpentine - just fall 'em, knock 'em down. It wasn't too long after that that the pulpwood shut down and Lammi over here was getting them for piles anyway.

Bill: So CSR actually did log all that Braithwaite property? They got into it, did they?

Charlie: Oh yes. For pulpwood, yes. They took out timber for logs and poles and piles and that later, after the masonite finished up.

Bill: I suppose it was a bit lucky they didn't start clearfelling?

Charlie: Well a lot of it there was too tough. You had to cut it into three foot ten blocks - they wouldn't take it to four foot because it had to make eight foot on the truck. But you'd get big logs and it was tough splitting 'em and you didn't want that - you wanted something that a couple of wedges'd split. You didn't want to put in half an hour splitting some tough old ironbark. We was only getting twenty eight shillings a ton for it, those days.

Bill: They must've bought a lot of land when they bought all that up there, the Braithwaites.

Charlie: But it was no good to 'em though.

Bill: What'd they do? Run cattle on it?

Charlie: Dairying. They dairied all their lives. All they done was to chase those Jersey cows back and forth to the Sydney Show. Wherever there was a show they had them there. They had beautiful cows. The only place that made them up a bit was when they bought the stone house. I think Keith Fernance might have got a couple of blocks of it, too, beside the creek on the flat. That was the best ground, that flat from Keith's up. One of my wife's sisters lived in that house for a good while. You'd go there around twelve o'clock and Jesus! the dew's still on the ground round the house. All the clothes inside the house used to go mouldy. The moisture comes through the stone, see?

Bill: That's been there a long while, hasn't it?

Charlie: Yes. Christenson's bought that.

Bill: They weren't still around when you came, were they?

Charlie: Yes. Old Eddie was.

Bill: Still making cheese and stuff?

Charlie: No, not then he wasn't. Then he ended up down at Wyong Creek. He only had the one child, Eddie. I went to school with him. And one feller, Bill, got killed up here with lightning. Just where the bridge goes over to the house there was a big turpentine. He got underneath it and got killed.

Bill: The tree came down on him?

Charlie: No. The lightning got him. That was Bill. I didn't know him - I knew old Eddie. They used to make cheese there, and bacon, but that was before my time, too.

There was quite a few people used to sharefarm on dairies and one thing and another over the time, but they didn't last long. You were flat out making a living dairying on your own without sharing it out with someone else. Christ! Your milk only went twice a week, and then you had to separate it and you only sent your cream. They used to make the butter at the factory. What I could never understand was that any old bit of a bloody shed at all you'd be milking in, and a bloody rat'd get into your cream, and you'd get him out and heave him through the bloody window. But at the finish here you had to have everything frozen, and you couldn't even sit down in the dairy! But christ there's more disease about now than there was then. You never seen the like of it - kids'd be playing in the dairy - you often had nowhere else to put things but in the dairy, you know what I mean.

Bill: And it didn't go off?

Charlie: No. It didn't matter if it did. Any time the cream went in to Wyong - they were only small cans - the bloke in there'd stick his finger in and taste it to test it - then he'd spit it back in! That's the honest truth, that is! You'd think they'd have had a tin there for him to spit it into, but no. Ptui!

Bill: How long since you've seen Keith Fernance?

Charlie: He was going up here in a truck a few weeks ago and he stopped to have a yarn to me. He's a nice bloke. You won't find better. And a better piece of human flesh you won't find than Kenny that's taken over the mill here. He used to follow me when I'd go with his father to get logs. Kenny was only a young feller, but he was with me all the time, chasing me about, showing him how to chop. I had no boy, and I sorta... you know what I mean.

... We were talking about floods before. I remember one night - it was only back in 1989 - it was raining heavy and I was coming back from up the road. There was no water here on the flats at all, but it was

getting up on the banks of the creek a bit. I'd just got back home when I heard a horn tooting down here and I hear: "Can I leave my vehicle here?" and there was a feller couldn't get round the gully! That's how quick it came up.

I said to Brian Anderson years ago, when we were living down there in an old house that's burned down now, that I've seen the creek come up, and it looked like somebody had a big bulldozer pushing something along - this water'd come across the flats. Brian said that's what happened this day up there - it come out of Gavenlock's gully and it stretched from one side to the other and it was just boiling.

One night at that particular time I could hear this roar - and god it was raining! There was a good bit of water, and it was twenty past three when I left here and walked down to see what it was like, because Robert up here had his cows down there and Jimmy Blundell's cows were here on the flat. I went down there and holy ghost it was boiling. Jimmy lost one calf. It was really raining - like three or four inches in an hour or so.

Bill: I remember the 1989 floods. It was round Easter, wasn't it?

Charlie: Yeah. And before. Always Easter. You had a job to get out of here. I remember Charles over here and his sister and her husband, they were buggering about fishing over here on the flats. They caught a few eels...

Bill: They were fishing in the floodwaters?

Charlie: Yes. They used to walk through water up to their waist, and then if you come down this side you can get up to dry land there. They were catching eels, 'cos you could see them in the water.

Bill: Big ones?

Charlie: Oh yes. Fair lumps of things.

Bill: Have you done much fishing in the creek?

Charlie: Yes. Used to a lot, one time. Used to catch a lot of fish, too.

Bill: What did you get, perch?

Charlie: Good perch, yes. They were good eating, too - a perch about a pound, pound and a half. But once you got over a couple of pound, three pound, they got a funny smell about 'em.

Bill: You got them that big, then?

Charlie: Oh yes. Kenny Smith's been catching a good many here. He was up here about three months ago and got three good fish.

Bill: So they're still there. And was it mainly perch that you got?

Charlie: Perch or eels.

Bill: And what did you use for bait? Worms?

Charlie: Worms, grubs. White grubs are good for perch.

Bill: The ones you get in trees?

Charlie: Yes. You can get the white ones in the garden - sort of blue looking colour, but you put a hook in them and they go black. They're no good. But the witchetty grub things you get out of the wattle trees - they're a good grub.

Bill: That's if the cockatoos leave 'em in there for long!

Charlie: That's right. Yes, I see it a lot of times up the gully where you get a lot of those bluegum saplings, you see great bits chewed out of them where the birds get at the grubs. How in the name of Jesus they know they're there beats me!

I used to make axe handles here one time, where the vise is down there. And the shavings off it - the grubs used to get in them. And the old jackass'd get down there and dig, dig, dig. By jeez they'd dig holes down three or four inches. Christ they earned everything they got.

Bill: What did you make axe handles with? A drawknife, or a spokeshave?

Charlie: No. I chipped 'em all out with a tomahawk, and then rasped, and rasped and rasped. I used to use a lot of glass bottles, too. That used to scrape it off good. Old beer bottles you could break, and you'd get real sharp bits and they used to scrape real well. But the bottles that you get nowadays, when they break they've got no sharp edges on them. Different stuff. Not like the old glass.

Bill: And when you made stuff like that, what did you finish them with, Charlie?

Charlie: Linseed oil. On its own - straight on. I hear the other day on *Burke's Backyard* that if you put turpentine with it it soaks in better. I tried it recently, but it didn't seem to go in much better than the oil on its own. All we used to put on our handles years ago was a bit of mutton fat. Your boots were all done with mutton fat, too. Didn't have salt in it, though. It wasn't too good to wash off the bottom of your trousers after you'd had 'em on over the old hobnails, though!

Bill: What did you wear in the bush? Just big heavy boots?

Charlie: Always hobnails. With heel plates and toe plates on 'em. Not a reinforced toe - they didn't make 'em then. You used to be able to buy the greasy boot. They were greasy when you bought 'em. Jesus the wife used to complain! She'd have the bloody old Sunlight soap trying to scrape it off. It'd get round the bottoms of your trousers, see? But unlike when chainsaws came in, we had no trouble with chips, then. We had the old crosscut saws, and we always had the trousers coming down over your boots.

I never wore shorts in my life, though a lot of 'em do. I worked with Tad Lammi over here on the pulpwood on Braithwaites, and over here on Tom Beavans', and he had a sort of a thing with elastic in it that went over the top of your boots to keep the chips out. Those old Danarms used to shoot out the chips - they'd cut a bloody track that wide!

Bill: They were a bit hard to sharpen, weren't they?

Charlie: You had to know what to do. Yes. The main thing to do was to make sure you didn't hit a stone. You hit a stone and the tooth might chip to half way back, and you'd have to file all that out. But we got used to sharpening them. You had to, when you were at it all the time. I used to sharpen the chainsaws down at the mill here, when I was working there. I used to split the big logs when they were too big to put through the saw. Earlier we used to split them with the squaring axe - groove 'em down so far, then split 'em with the wedges, but the chainsaw was easier. But you had to get the angle right when you sharpened them - that makes a lot of difference.

I saw Kenny Smith down here one time when he brought in big white mahogany logs to split for posts he was selling. I never see a saw as fast. It had a 30-inch blade on it - some big Swedish brand. Jesus it was fast, and he could walk along these logs six feet through ...(digression)

Bill: ... There was no dole when you were a youngster, was there?

Charlie: Yes, there was. When I was going to school when the depression was on - by Jesus things was crook! People were on the dole everywhere! My father had a horse and dray - working on the main road for the council. It was before I left school, and I used to take him down in the sulky to where they were putting in that new cutting down there near Burbank. There used to be a big two story place near there

that they used to camp in. I used to take him down Sunday evening and go back Friday evening and get him. There was quite a few was on the dole. But they was only getting six and ninepence a fortnight. You didn't get no money - you got a card instead. A bit like ration coupons.

Bill: And what was the normal sort of wage then?

Charlie: Well, I know what Dad was getting. Three pound fifteen and tuppence a week, but of that there was ten bob a day for the horse. They were getting hardly any money at all. It was awful.

The Knights up here, they were big lumps of lads, and they were on the dole. Nobody'd given 'em a job because they were sorta big overfed fellers. They'd issue you with a pair of boots and trousers and a shirt. One feller ended up with a pair of size fourteen boots, and he only wanted sevens! It was awful - I think they done it on purpose. Another bloke got a pair of trousers that wouldn't have fit old King Farouk - they had about nine folds down the bottom, and the fork came down below the knee! They'd think: "That'll do 'em, they can put up with it." - you know what I mean. Awful.

Bill: From what I can gether the people weren't all that religious in the valley? Is that right?

Charlie: There were some were those days. There was a church about a mile the other side of the hall at Wyong Creek on your right. Then there was a church just the other side of Lauffs Lane. And one down here where Jennv Piner lives - a Methodist one.

Bill: That's the one Le Sueur re-erected on his place.

Charlie: Ken's father Lin used to keep his vehicles in it and one thing and another... But we never bothered with church, and Dad and them didn't bother, either.

Bill: Were the Stinsons still around when you were a boy? Did you have anything to do with them?

Charlie: I did with old George. Wonderful old bloke. Lived down here in the gully. He used to come here every fortnight on a Saturday, but he was living out at Kulnura then. He walked down, and then he walked back. He had a small place not too far down when you turn to go down into the forest from the top of Bumble Hill. He was a nice old feller, old George. And old Tom was a nice person, too, the bloke that had the butcher shop down here a bit further along from Stinson's Lane. There was a slaughteryard a couple of hundred yards further on down by the fence there.

Bill: What about Eddie Stinson, the schoolteacher? Did he teach you?

Charlie: No. He was teaching away, most of the time, but he did finish up at Brush Creek for a good while.

Bill: And when you were at school, you had the one teacher all the time?

Charlie: Yeah. Little old feller. There was 43 kids there and one teacher. Only a little feller, too.

Bill: Was he any good?

Charlie: Oh well, we didn't learn nothing. Didn't want to, either. But he always had his hand on the cane. By jeez he'd drop it onto you!

Bill: Only the boys?

Charlie: Didn't matter. He had a habit of clouting you on the knuckles. They had to be pretty strict.

Bill: Did you kids muck up?

Charlie: No. 'Cause you had to put up with it when you got home.

Bill: Was there a gang of kids that all used to run together and play at weekends or did you..?

Charlie: We had to work at home. We had to climb orange trees and pick oranges out of the tree and throw 'em down to old Uncle Norm, and he'd put 'em into a bucket. Holy ghost there was big orange trees up at Lauff s Lane, especially those old Jaffas - they were the winter oranges. You could get 'em with a ladder up at the edge of them, but it was easier to get us kids up there... But you had to be careful of old Governor Tom Hely, you only had to put your foot off the track and he'd sool you. You had 'em all round you down there - you didn't only have Dad to deal with. And old Governor'd see Dad and he'd say: "By Jesus Will you're gonna have to take these kids in hand a bit." We was hardly ever out of his hands, only when he was bloody well eating!

Bill: So he'd dob you in?

Charlie: Oh yes. He didn't like kids much - only got 'em like dogs, you know, to make 'em work. Had no love for 'em - would never sit down and cuddle 'em.

Bill: And so you didn't get a chance to get up to any mischief?

Charlie: No. You wouldn't have been allowed to.

Bill: Did you have chores to do around the place every day, or...?

Charlie: Yes. I had to go and chaff feed. Had to carry a corn bag or a chaff bag a couple of hundred yards, and come back and milk two cows. That was morning and evening. 'Course you didn't go into school those days till half past nine - and you come out at half past three. I'd have to milk the cows, and feed the pigs. My brother had to feed the horse. In the evening you'd go and get your saccolene or your corn stalks - whatever you was cutting up. A lot of that saccolene was big. You couldn't carry it because it was too long. It'd get about 14ft high - we used to have to cut it in half.

Bill: And what was this stuff? Saccolene, did you say?

Charlie: Yeah. And sorghum. The saccolene was usually only about seven or eight foot high, with a big top on it. You'd get the old sorghum - the White African they used to grow a lot. When you got the frost on it in the wintertime the leaves'd go, but it'd get about as big as a fishing rod and be full of juice. A bit like bamboo, with a big seed on the top of it. You'd p'raps have a bit of the skinless barley - you'd go and cut a bit of that to mix in with it. No... you had chores all the time. On the weekend you was always going. All your vegetables growing there, you know, everything that you wanted. And the pigs had to be fed.

Bill: It must have been hard with the big families to keep tabs on all the kids to make sure they did their jobs.

Charlie: Yeah, we used to have a roll call.(laughs) Worst part about it I found was that every Sunday you'd have a roll call, and there was a castor oil bottle there. We all had to have it. The old boy gave it to you. Made sure it went down your throat, too. He'd hold your bloody nose... You could have it with a bit of sugar. I remember my sister Shirley used to always have hers with a bit of orange juice in it. And if you got a cold - once you started to sneeze or anything, out'd come the old kerosene. Kerosene and sugar. Just a few drops. But recently I was talking to the chemist and he said not to use the kerosene we've got now. It's not the same as the old Laurel kerosene. It's green now and got a different smell to it. But the old Laurel kerosene - it was alright. Yes, it and the old Friar's Balsam...

We used to get all our own honey. You'd go and find the trees, and you'd spend a day fallin' 'em. Then you'd get the old native bee nest, and you'd take all the wax. You used to boil it, and roll it up into a ball like a cricket ball. It was reddish looking. There was a big mantelpiece over the big old open fireplace, and you used to put it up on that.

See that finger there? My brother cut that right through with a tomahawk, and it was hanging down. There

was no going to the bloody doctor with it - it was only rolled up with a bit of beeswax and a rag. It wouldn't matter how festery your sore was, you only had to cut off a bit of beeswax and put it in hot water and you could roll it out like tissue paper. You'd just roll that round it and there's nothing I ever see that would take it out cleaner.

Bill: Makes you wonder how they ever found out that it was good for that...

Charlie: Don't know. They was always meddling about with something, you know what I mean. Don't know.

Bill: You said that you didn't go in much for birthday parties. Would there be parties at people's places...?

Charlie: No... Well, some families might, but we never ever did. We'd keep separate. When the wife was alive - we'd just eat here. That was it.

Bill: And when you used to smoke you'd roll your own I suppose, did you?

Charlie: No, I smoked a pipe. Christ, I've got a drawer half full of bloody pipes in there! I wouldn't get rid of them.

Bill: What sort of tobacco was it? Can you remember?

Charlie: I used to smoke plug tobacco, but it went off, and I smoked Champion, or Havelock, or Signet. You used to get it in four ounce plugs.

Bill: And cut it off with a pocketknife?

Charlie: Yeah. Cut it round, and you'd take the corners off, and you'd take it round there, and you'd keep on goin', and it'd come out round as anything. Jesus it was beautiful!

Bill: And how long would a four ounce plug last *you*?

Charlie: I used to do a bit over two ounces a day. About a pound a week.

Bill: Jeez that's gettin' through it, isn't it?

Charlie: Oh, I'd often do more than that. When the old black tobacco went out, unless you bought some of that American stuff and it was old tanglefoot- looking stubble - I wouldn't have it. Log Cabin was the best I found. It was only a medium tobacco and you couldn't buy the dark in it. It had two ounces written on the outside of it but you could've put three times more in than was in the little pack. They never used to pull the stalks off it. I used to love it! Holy ghost man I'd sit down and puff away! Christ! It was good! But in the finish it was like smoking dog hair. It had a taste and a smell... I just couldn't put up with it,

Bill: Nobody ever tried growing tobacco did they?

Charlie: Oh yes. We used to make grandfather's tobacco. And old J.M. Fernance up here, he used to have it.

Bill: What did you do? Once it was dry did you have to press it all together?

Charlie: Yes. We used to make it for grandfather when I was about 11 or 12. He was crippled so he couldn't do it. It was cigar leaves. When the leaves started to go yellowish you'd pull 'em off and thread 'em all together and pull 'em out and let 'em dry. Hang 'em in the shed. He had a copper in there, with a thing soldered over the top of it with a pipe. We used to put it up so a little steam'd get on it. When you had to pull the stalk out, if it was a bit on the moist side it would tear easily. You couldn't do it when it was dry or it'd all fall to bits. You'd pull the stalk clean out of it and be left with the two sides - a bit like a filleted fish.

Then he had a box, about 12 inches by nine by an inch thick. And there was bit of canvas went down in that, then you'd start putting your leaves in it. Then you'd put in a little bit of treacle, then close the box. And there was your clamp come over the top over the lid that fit in snug, and there were two big thumb-screws - one each side. Then you'd screw that up, and you'd keep doing that for about a fortnight - and it'd come out the same as a bloody plug of tobacco that you'd buy. Just as firm. Mind you it wouldn't be as good, but...

Bill: Did they add different things, like honey, or...?

Charlie: Only treacle, grandfather used. Just a smear.

Bill: And was it common for blokes to smoke pipes? Did you smoke them on the job, or only at smoko, or...?

Charlie: Oh no. Like Dad, he always smoked a pipe on the job. It was never out of his bloody mouth! Old grandfather, he started us off smoking - me and my brother. We were about seven. He bought some old clay pipes. They didn't have much of a stem, so he used to bind them with a bit of string - used to look something like a bat handle. I can still remember how it was done. Or else he'd go and get a corncob, cut it off, and bore a hole in it. Then you'd get a cobbler's peg and put a hole down that and put it in.

Bill: And what about drinking? Were the main things rum and beer?

Charlie: Yeah. We drunk the Red Mill rum, and by jesus it was good.

Bill: How'd you have it? Straight?

Charlie: No, no. I only used to have one drink, but every few weeks I'd have a burst. I'd get a dozen of beer if I wanted it. I used to like getting down the creek and get on my own. Or have a rum if I was doing something round here. I'd take my bottle of rum, a billycan with water in it, a bit of sugar in a little bottle like I used to have up on the mountain, and my spoon. I'd boil up the water, and have boiling water, two teaspoonfulls of sugar, and rum half and half with the water. By jeez it was good! I never liked it any other way. For years and years it was only twelve and sixpence a bottle, that Red Mill, and then it went up to nineteen and threepence. Then, when it jumped in price it went in leaps and bounds. I don't know what it'd be nowadays... But I haven't drunk for years. I have nothing to do with it. (Long digression about the cost of booze today).

Bill: And you never tried making your own beer?

Charlie: No.

Bill: Oh, but it was illegal then, wasn't it? I was forgetting that.

Charlie: A lot of them, when they really got down to it, went for the old metho bottle. A bit of shoe polish to give it a bit of colour. But you're getting crook when you get down to that. You want a rope with a noose in it when you start that, Christ! Funny thing, though, most of 'em up here up Ravensdale never had a drink in their lives - the wife's grandfather, and all the uncles and that. And the Gavenlocks up there - a couple of the boys might have a drink. And the Knights - they'd never drink at all. Keith Fernance - he'd have a go. I dunno about his father, but Toby'd drink, and Bert.

Bill: Did people get real drunk - iron themselves out?

Charlie: Oh no. You'd have a bit of a booze-up now and again, you know.

Bill: There were never any coppers up here, were there? Where was the nearest police station? At Wyong?

Charlie: Wyong. They'd just leave you to look after yourselves. You had no need of 'em. We used to

know one or two of them. There were a couple of nice policemen in Wyong. Most of them was nice... 'course you'd get the odd one ...(digression).

...I used to nearly live up that main creek up there past Laws'. In the wintertime I used to camp up there for a couple of nights at a time and shoot pigeons and them old scrub turkeys. Jeez you'd have a load coming back! And you had to eat 'em like hell, 'cos we had no refrigerators to keep them in. It was open slather on the soup bowl.

Bill: And what did you have, tents to sleep in?

Charlie: No. Only had three sheets of turpentine bark up on a pole. Fairly long bark. And no bed or anything. You just had to lie on the ground with a couple of bags. You'd have a big fire going to keep you warm. By christ in the wintertime the wind used to come out of that mountain and it used to be cold. 'Course you had your boots still on.

Bill: And up at the crack of dawn. (Yes, oh yes). And I suppose you're an early riser, are you Charlie?

Charlie: Oh yes. Always was. I can't lay in. (Digression).

Bill: Charlie, you were talking about the working conditions the timbergetters worked under, like no pay if it rained and all that. With so many blokes in the industry, did anyone try to unionise to do something about the wages and conditions? *Charlie:* In the finish they did. But if you tried they wouldn't have nothing to do with you. The state railways, see, if you tried to unionise they'd kick you out. They did form a timberworkers' union but it was weak, you know - didn't get anywhere. It was only in the latter part of the time that we got insurance - they did get a little bit.

Bill: Did this start here or in Wyong?

Charlie: Well we had a union rep in Wyong. There was a lot of people used to work cutting sleepers and that. Mind you it's only recently that you got holidays and insurance down here at this mill, too. When Merv owned it you had no holidays or insurance. If you got hurt, then bugger you! Get going, and we'll get a new bloke, sort of thing. Yet we never thought nothing of it.

Bill: So the bosses were always pretty tough, eh? Were there any good ones?

Charlie: Merv was a good boss. He was tough, but he was a good man. That's the way things were. You accepted it. What you had to do was stay there. You had to work - you wouldn't go there if you didn't. Wasn't much of a place if you didn't like work. You had to be a bit stupid, humping four by threes thirty foot long!

And those sleeper days - by jesus they were tough! If you didn't get into Wyong on Mondays every five weeks to get paid you had to wait another five weeks. They wouldn't give your cheque to no-one else, see? Once I went ten weeks without a pay. If I hadn't been able to get tick with Chapman's I'd have been in trouble. (Digression)

Bill: When you said that you kids always had chores to do - did you never get any time just to sort of play together as kids?

Charlie: We used to play a game with big old horseshoes and a peg in the ground. We used to enjoy that. But that was about all we had in the way of games. And you couldn't go down to Thompson's and play because they had more work to do than we did, because they had a big dairy and a heap of pigs. Dad used to have two or three sows. You'd eat your own suckers, sort of thing, and sell some of them. Dad didn't have a boar. Mick Quinn didn't either - he lived next to us. You only had to take your sow down there to the boar once. The next time, you let her out and she'd go for her life down there by herself! Governor or someone'd let her into the yard, and the next thing she'd be back home again!

Bill: Go down and get herself serviced?

Charlie: Yes. The best I ever seen. They were good! The thing is you could drive them, too. Put a half hitch in a rope round one of their hind legs just above the trotter, and you could take them along. There was an old two wheel track along there, and the pig didn't like to go in the wheel tracks. It used to stay in the middle bit, and saunter on down.

Bill: And the girls had chores to do around the house too?

Charlie: Oh yes. You'd see the small ones there, they'd have the bucket out, and the scrubbing brush. I used to have to go and get sandstone for 'em outa the dam up here. Dig it out with a pick and flatten it off so they could stone all the floors.

Bill: And did they scour the tops of the tables with it too?

Charlie: No. Only on the floors. There was a dam up here used to have beautiful white clay in it. I used to get that and she used to paint the open fireplace and the stove place out here with that. It was a long way better than that whiting stuff you used to put on. Last a long time. I used to make the brushes. There's a tussock grows around here pretty high, and it's very fine. You'd cut a bundle of them off and get a string round 'em and tie it tight in the middle, and that used to be the brush for the pipeclay.

Bill: And did they put blacking on the stove?

Charlie: Oh yes. They used to buy that. That old blacklead, they used to call it. It was in a small round tin,

Bill: So do you reckon it was a hard life for the women as well as for the fellers?

Charlie: Oh, well ...you couldn't find anything happier. I remember here - my wife used to go sometimes - I'd be coming home from work up here and they'd be all round the tennis court. There'd be stacks of 'em sitting about on logs and they'd get there of a Sunday evening to have a bit of a yarn. They was as happy as you could ever get 'em. Lot of them weren't there to play tennis, just to sort of get together. They'd boil the billy, and they'd have a scone there, or a few old dates or something.

I remember Mrs Gabe Bailey up there. It didn't matter where they went - she was sorta crippled - you'd go down to pull corn or something and somebody'd throw her up on the back of the cart, and while you was getting the corn, she was husking it into the cart, sorta thing. She was happy, though she was in a lot of pain.

Bill: What was she crippled with?

Charlie: Arthritis. They didn't know what it was those days...

We'd have these great big plates, and big cups - I've still got one, it used to have "Father" written on it. The tea was in a bloody great big teapot, you never see the like of it - it'd take two hands to lift it! Then they had the milk, out of jersey cows, with the cream about half inch thick on it. Put it in and she'd be floating on it. And old Gabe Bailey, the wife's father, would always tip it into this big saucer - big enough to bath a baby in it looked, and his bloody great big white mo would come out both sides, and when he'd drunk he'd get his fingers and roll his mo down and he'd suck it off with his bottom lip. By Jesus I can still see him!

Bill: (after another digression) Do you know why Bowen's Pinch is called Bowen's Pinch?

Charlie: No, I don't. Most of the places around here is named after people. There's all these points - Waters' Point, then Pitt's Point, Bridges' Point - up opposite where Wran is now, that was old Ben Bridges' point. The place that's got me beat - they always called it Grey's Gully round here, but now they call it Bunning Creek. But that's only recently - it was always Grey's to me, 'cos a bloke by the name of

Grey was one of the first blokes ever was up there. It was called Willden's Gully for some years before that when old Cyril was there.

Bill: What about Yorkie Bridge?

Charlie: Old Yorkie Waters. They call it Yorkie Gully there. Him and old Dollar Waters - they was two brothers. They weren't nicknames, they were their proper names, but they were before my time. I know the other brother, Joe - he used to come up here to Knight's. He was the younger one.

They spent most of their life up there cutting sleepers up on that big Yorkie shelf I mentioned. They'd get up there and they'd put in a full month, never stop, then they'd load all the sleepers on a bullock wagon. Old Bill Woodbury used to buy their sleepers. They'd take 'em in there and he'd pay 'em and they'd go straight and buy a new suit for three pound ten from Chapman's. They'd pay for a bit of tucker, then go down to the pub and drink the rest. They wore that suit to work, too. You had nothing else to wear.

Bill: And that was just the two of them.

Charlie: Yeah. They just worked it there all the time. Some of those old fellers they'd just work to drink. Done nothing else... And those Braithwaites up here, they never drank - only Arch.

Bill: The bottles were different then weren't they? You could buy quarts couldn't you?

Charlie: Ah yes. Two shillings a quart. It was draught they had, and the two shilling one had a wire clip round it, and a stopper made of porcelain with rubber round it. Remember them? A heavy bottle. A beautiful bottle.

Bill: And did some have glass marbles for stoppers?

Charlie: That was lemonade. The stuff today's in too much plastic. I hate the look of plastic. Mind you, earlier the jam used to be in a tin, and you'd put that in the fridge and in a few days it'd have mould on the top like the old homemade jams used to - and get a sort of tinny taste.

Bill: I notice there's a rabbit down there now, Charlie. Were rabbits ever a problem in the valley?

Charlie: Yes. Still are, a bit. They get into my garden, those little fellers. But up at Brian Anderson's they used to be thick - you could see a couple of hundred up there. But there's only about a dozen here now altogether. They used to tend to get thick in places, though.

Bill: What about foxes?

Charlie: Always a few here, yes. There was one here the other day....

Bill: At least we don't get those mouse plagues like they do out west.

Charlie: Yeah! Holy ghost I've seen 'em out west where they were going over the top of each other. Tens of thousands of 'em!

Bill: You mentioned possums before. But what about all the little bush animals they reckon are getting a bit scarce - things like rat kangaroos and so on. Ever see much of them?

Charlie: No... you don't see much like that at all. One time you'd see the little ringtailed possum about but you don't see them now. And I haven't seen no bandicoots about, either - not even their holes they dig.

Bill: I've got bandicoots and wombats up where I am.

Charlie: Yes, but they're not here. I don't know why.

Bill: Would there be more people living around here now?

Charlie: No. I don't reckon there's more to what there was. They're nice people that's here now, though - they've been good to me...(Digression about television programmes and "The Greatest Little Whorehouse in Texas")

Bill: Talking about the *Greatest Little Whorehouse in Texas*, with all those blokes employed in the timber industry along the central coast, was there ever anything like that in town?

Charlie: Yeah. They had a couple. One old lady - when you went to get paid at the old Forestry Office - you had to pay your royalty there, too - they used to go and see her. She was getting on a bit, but it didn't seem to make too much difference to 'em. There was a few of 'em in there, sort of thing, yeah.

Bill: There would've been a lot of unmarried fellers then, wouldn't there?

Charlie: In the sleeper business there was, yes. And those sleeper cutters, they were tough! You had to be tough. You were swinging a bloody fourteen pound hammer most of your time - or a ten pound squaring axe. By Jesus it was tough. And you had to work in all sorts of weather. You had to work in the bloody rain to get your billets out. You couldn't square 'em in the wet 'cos you couldn't get your chalk line on 'em. No sleepers, no pay...

They were eight foot sleepers in length, by nine by four and a half. You had a board nine by four and a half - they had to be square - and you'd put that on him and hold your file up to plumb it up. Then you'd mark it out, scribe it out with your file. Do the same the other end, then put a little nick in and put your chalkline in it. You'd get... apple bark was the best, that'd just been burnt. You'd get that and rub the black stuff on the string. You'd do the same to your girders, and they might be forty or fifty foot long.

Bill: And then it was all the way down with the squaring axe?

Charlie: Oh you'd cut into it first with the chopping axe and take the spalls off. But you couldn't put an axe mark in it, like, or they'd throw it out. They had to be perfect.

Bill: And nobody used adzes?

Charlie: Some did. Old Gabe Bailey used to square his girders with an adze. But not sleepers. He was the only one I ever knew that used an adze. The squaring axe was more common. Gabe used to do the mortices in post and rail fences, years ago.

Bill: How did they mortice them before they had chainsaws to stick the nose in?

Charlie: With a morticing axe. Looked like a big chisel thing. It had a hole in to put a handle in something like an axe. He'd just cut it in and take it out, then go down and take the edges off. But the ones they put up these days with a chainsaw - the rails fall out, 'cos the hole's too big. Old Gabe, by the Jesus his were neat! With him, where the rail went through he'd always cut a little bit out so the rail'd drop down and it couldn't fall back. There's an old fence up here on Brian Anderson's that Gabe built - been there I suppose about eighty-odd years or more, and it was built like that. It's still there, and the rails haven't fell out ...(digression)

I used to work with Tad Lammi about thirty years ago, before he was married. He came from Kulnura. His father had 100 acres of orchard up there - old Gus Lammi. Many years ago Kulnura was all passionfruit. There was bloody acres and acres of it. They was worth big money. Then something got into 'em and bugged 'em all up.

Bill: They all came out from Finland, didn't they?

Charlie: Yes. You couldn't understand old Gus, or Tad's mother. His brother had the garage up there, but he died a few years back. He was a nice bloke.

Bill: And did the people down here have much to do with the people up on the mountain there?

Charlie: Not much. They were nearly all foreigners, mostly. But by jesus they worked!

Bill: Was it all bush up there before they cleared it for orchards?

Charlie: Yeah. But it was a pretty good place to clear, because you only had that old red gum, and bloodwood, and white gum. You'd go along with the dozer and push 'em over. They were only sitting on top of the ground.

Bill: What's white gum - scribbly gums?

Charlie: No. You get big lumps of things on the butts - a real white thing they are. It's no good for nothing. You might burn it and that's about all - it's rubbish. And the red gum's not much better either. Best timber you'd get outa there we found was the bloodwood - it'd grow into a fair lump of a thing, but the only thing was it was so bloody dirty. They wouldn't take it at all in the finish 'cos it had too much gum in it, you know. One time they'd take anything, but later times you had to have pretty good timber before they'd take it off you.

Bill: And how were your dealings with the Forestry? Did you have much to do with them?

Charlie: They had a couple of inspectors used to live out here on the mountain - old Les McKenzie and Tom McCormack we had for years - out near that pine planation. There's still a house out there where Tom McCormack used to live, about where the road turns to go to Cessnock - I think it's still there. That was about the end of where the pines went to.

Bill: That would have been pretty remote those days, wouldn't it, to live right out there?

Charlie: Specially when you only had a horse to work with. No vehicles. The first vehicle they ever got was when the war was over - a little jeep looking thing it was.

... You know, thinking about it - I told you wrong before. Dad's wages when he was working on the cutting at Burbank was three pound and tuppence a week, and he was getting fifteen bob for the horse. I got mixed up.

Bill: And that would have been when? Before the War?

Charlie: Oh christ yes. I wasn't married then, and I was married a bit over fifty three years ago.

Bill: There's a few things I realised I haven't got straight, too. When did you say you were born?

Charlie: 1920. I was 73 last July.

Bill: And you stayed at Lauff s Lane until you were how old?

Charlie: Just on 14. I had my 14th birthday up here.

Bill: The whole family moved up here?

Charlie: No. I was on my own. Old George Bowman was up here - he was reared down next to us and he was a bit older than me. He was married, and I lived with them.

Bill: As a boarder, sort of thing?

Charlie: Yes. Just boarded there. Ten shillings a week and I used to have to help milk - and do other work, too, when I wasn't working at the mill. 'Course you was working a helluva lot, too. There was 48-hour weeks then. You had five nines, then you went back till eleven o'clock on Saturday.

Bill: Gee, that didn't give you much time to yourself, did it?

Charlie: No. And you didn't get much money, either! I was only getting six bob a day.

Bill: So once you came up here at 14, you stayed here all the time.

Charlie: Yes.

Bill: And how long did you stay with Bowman's?

Charlie: Oh, it wouldn't be that long, because I went from them over to old Gabe Bailey's place. That was the wife's grandfather. I boarded with them for a long time. Then I got married and we shifted into an old house up the creek there opposite Brian Anderson's. It got burnt down in later years.

Bill: And your wife was Gabe's granddaughter?

Charlie: Yes. She was from Ravensdale - born up here near where Wran's house is now.

Bill: And what did you do in those days? How did you go about courting her, Charlie? I mean, you couldn't go out in a motor car or anything...

Charlie: Didn't have a bloody motor car. We'd go down the creek and do a bit of fishing. Just do a few things together.

Bill: Did you knock around for long before you got married?

Charlie: Oh yes. A good while.

Bill: Did you get engaged?

Charlie: Yes, we was engaged for about twelve months.

Bill: And where was the wedding? Was that in a local church?

Charlie: Yes. In the Church of England in at Wyong. Went in there - there was Mum, my wifeto-be, her sister, and her bloke, and that's all that was there. They witnessed it and that was it. Come back home again. Matter of fact Rita - that's the wife's sister - her bloke had the taxi in Wyong and that's how we got home.

Bill: Bit of luxury that day, eh? And did you have to get dressed up? Was your wife, like, a bride?

Charlie: No. Mum only had the ordinary dress. I had the suit.

Bill: Would you have needed to wear a suit much in those days?

Charlie: Always had a suit.

Bill: But you wouldn't wear it much through the week.

Charlie: Oh no. The suit I had I got it tailor-made. Old Harry Hanson was the tailor in Wyong then. It cost three pound ten. Handmade. You had to go back twice. The first time I went back it was all bloody bag and stuff hanging out of it, and then you had to go back again.

Bill: Keith Fernance was saying that when he was a kid they never had any boots.

Charlie: No, we didn't. When we was going to school we used to come across the hill from Lauffs Lane to the school - old Squatter Thompson had a dairy there, and you'd come across and the cows'd be layirn' there so you'd hunt the cow up and stand where it was layin'. It used to be warm for a bit. When you was kids there was no chance of having boots. Couldn't afford boots. But there'd always be a pair or two of sandshoes in case you had to go out.

Bill: When I was a kid I used to go to school in summer in shorts and no shoes with just a Bonds athletic singlet on top. Did you as kids wear shirts and hats or what?

Charlie: Yes. Always had a hat. Always had a shirt, but we never had singlets much. A lot of people used to go without their shirts. A few of 'em up here, Keith's wife Jeannie up here, her brother Albert - I worked with him a lot - he was a big man, and he never wore a shirt. But working in the bush chopping I always liked a shirt. You'd have the sleeve rolled up and you could wipe the sweat out of your eyes. Or you'd have a rag hanging in your belt - a handkerchief wasn't much good to you, though they had a lot bigger handkerchief than they have today.

Bill: And they didn't get sunburnt with the shirt off?

Charlie: No, they didn't. I remember one time at the mill down here when old Menzies was the Prime Minister. Every year round about June the mill would close down for about six weeks. There'd be no orders. Everything went kapootie till the budget came out. We'd go cutting pulpwood - Keith Smith down here, and Pop Smith. We used to go up the old road - up Yorkie, and I left my hat off. I got sunburnt on my bald head and by jeez it hurt.

And I never ever wore shorts. I put 'em on once, but I never wore 'em again. I felt as if I had nothing on me. The prickly bush was scratching and.... no, I just couldn't be bothered. I always wore long trousers.

Bill: And how old were you when you got married, Charlie?

Charlie: Twenty. Mum was eighteen.

Bill: And then you had your daughter soon after?

Charlie: Yes. About ten months after. Mum had a bad time of it and we never had no more.

Bill: And your daughter went to school at Ravensdale, did she?

Charlie: Yes. Then she went to High School from here. She was lucky - there was a high school. She lives down at Wyong Creek now - been there ever since she got married, down near where Ashley Palmer keeps his buses in that big shed.

Bill: The Palmers have had the bus line here for years, haven't they?

Charlie: Since the beginning of time. Old George Palmer, the old grandfather had 'em - the horse and buggy sort of turnout. It's been a good service. It'll be 59 years come Christmastime that they've been bringing me my meat, and they never miss it. I ring the order up and they go and get it. Of course with Reice Palmer one time, that was his main living, getting parcels. He'd have the bus full of groceries - everyone's. It was all threepence a parcel, then it went to sixpence. I give Ashley five dollars now to get my meat each fortnight... Yes, old Reice - oh christ, he must've had it sixty years or more, then Ashley took over. Dunno who'll take over from Ashley - he's got no sons so I don't know what'll happen.(Digression)

Charlie: ...Yes, I got put off from cutting the pulpwood for CSR up there on Braithwaites when CSR closed down in Sydney. They went out Oberon way and used pine sort of stuff.

Just before you get to Bowen's Pinch there's a bit of a flat you go along and then you start to climb. We used to call that George Street. Well, just at the end of George Street you can go around to your right and go around a big shelf and it comes out onto that Kurrajong Point. Jeez that's a long point.

Bill: And why did you call it George Street?

Charlie: 'Cos it was flat. The rest was uphill.

Bill: Back this way, sort of at the start of George Street, but in to your left, there's a bit of a spoon dam there. Would you know why it was put there?

Charlie: No. No idea. It wasn't there in my time. Kenny Smith and them would probably know about that. (Digression)

...There was a painter, old Silvani, used to be here for years - he used to put a lot of his time in up that way. He lived for a while in that old house just where you go in to Kingtree there. It'd have fallen down by now - it was only an old slab place. Ended up he died in a little old house in near Wyong just this side of the butter factory.

There used to be a lot of people came to paint. There was one couple, they painted this place three bloody times - painted in all these vines and everything. I said to the bloke one day that he should paint that place over there,(points) because it's new, but he said that they were only twelve pound ten a dozen, but old places like this one were the ones that'd sell - the ones that people wanted. I don't know how they could do it - they'd only put in a day at it, sort of thing.

Bill: And who lives next door, Charlie?

Charlie: Old Mrs Fernance. She passed away last week. She married one of Keith Fernance's cousins. She was a Walmsley, from Jilliby. They were like the Fernances and Beavans were here - they took up most of Jilliby, the Walmsleys. She lived there on her own. Her Dard died getting on thirty years ago. (Stops to feed the birds). They're beautiful, these birds.

Bill: Ever see any koalas round here?

Charlie: No.

Bill: Not up in the bush?

Charlie: No. It'd be over fifty years ago since I seen one. They're gone.

Bill: Going back to when you were first married, there wouldn't have been any television. Did you used to sit round and listen to the radio at night?

Charlie: Yes. I had a good wireless. It was a bit more than we could afford. I know it was fifty three pound. An HMV. It wasn't a big cabinet, but jeez it was nice. You'd have a thirteen volt battery. I found that Vestas was the only ones that was any good. You used to send 'em in to the butter factory - you had to have two batteries, and Ted Fernance the milkman used to take the batteries in. We used to pay him. He'd take 'em in to the butter factory and they'd recharge 'em, then he'd bring 'em back. First time I sent one in to be recharged some bugger shook a heap of 'em! I know who it was because he got caught afterwards and got put in bloody gaol. Linnie Smith, Kenny's father - he got me a battery from the central coast, but all you were doing was buying new ones of those tit things you used to hook onto the terminals, 'cos the acid used to eat 'em out. The Vestas didn't do that.

Bill: And what programmes did you listen to then?

Charlie: Oh, Jack Davey, Bob Dyer... they was alright. But I wouldn't watch 'em today sort of thing. They was alright to listen to.

Bill: You wouldn't have had the power then would you?

Charlie: Oh christ we didn't have power - not up the creek - we didn't have it till after we shifted down here. That was in 63. It came to Wyong Creek, then they brought it out to where Denny Lee lives, at Palmer's old place down there. It was there for a long time before they brought it up here.

Bill: So what did you have? Hurricane lamps, pressure lamps?

Charlie: We did have one pressure lamp, but most of the time we had those ones with the wick in them. I've still got one there I have to use when we get a bloody blackout. I had two good lanterns and I give

'em away, thinking I'd never want 'em again. I got another one later that was made in China - only a small thing. A while back we had a blackout and I lit the thing up. I put it down and I couldn't find the bloody thing! That's how good it was! There's a big refrigerator out there in the kitchen - all clean and shiny, and you could just make out a bit of a blob. The big old lantern we used to have, you could see, you know. I got a candle out there now. I find it the best.

Bill: Nobody used to make their own, did they?

Charlie: Old Mrs Gabe Bailey used to make 'em, yes. I don't remember how, though. And she used to make all her own soap. It was stinking old stuff, about the size of bits of three by two - cut off in blocks. I don't know what she used to make it with. Those Baileys up there, they'd only get out sometimes, but every show day they'd never miss. On the Saturday Reice Palmer'd go up in the bus and pick 'em up, otherwise they couldn't afford to go. It'd be a real day out.

Bill: And when cars came in, did you ever own a car?

Charlie: Oh no. I never had a car. If you give me a million dollars now, I couldn't start one. Never interested. I hated the sight of them.

Bill: Was that because you couldn't get used to the idea of them?

Charlie: Oh I could have. But I just didn't need to. Never go anywhere much, sort of thing. No. (Digression).

Up George Downes Drive there Collins' used to have a big house there on the left hand side, with all fowl sheds on the right. We used to go down through the fowl sheds to go down to the top end of Yorkie.

Bill: Did you get up that way much?

Charlie: A good bit, when we were working out there. Yes, we put in a lot of time there. Then I worked down Andrews Point there cutting logs for the mill here, and down Boomerang Creek.

Bill: You went pretty far afield, didn't you?

Charlie: Oh yeah. But you could nearly always see home, wherever I was. (Crunches up more Jatz for the birds).

Bill: Charlie, the soil down here on the flats, it was always pretty good, was it? You didn't have to do anything to it?

Charlie: No. Sometimes you'd add a patch of manure just where the corn dropped out. Mainly blood and bone we used to get. The ground was good enough those day to grow things without it.

Bill: Is it still good?

Charlie: No.

Bill: You'd think when the floods come they'd replenish it.

Charlie: No. The floods don't. They just tear everything off it. (The talk turns to corn).

Bill: How did you used to cook it, to eat?

Charlie: We'd boil it in corned beef water and eat it off the cob. With butter. It'd be dripping everywhere. If you wanted to have a real good go you'd sit out in a paddock on a rock somewhere. The bloody stuff would be all over the floor if you didn't.

Bill: You said you used to eat a lot of meat and vegetables. They'd be baked, would they?

Charlie: Baked or boiled. A lot of the time you'd have both.

Bill: Must have been a lot of work for the women.

Charlie: Well, they knew nothing else. The Baileys up here used to have a big old stove - one called the Beacon Light. We used to have a No 3 Waratah. They were all cast iron.

Bill: Did they have wetbacks on 'em to heat your water?

Charlie: Nope. All they used to have was a five gallon fountain. You used to have an open fire going most of the time. You had a chain thing come down over the open fire with a hook thing, and you could lift it up and down. It had a tap on it, and it used to hold five gallons, so you had hot water all the time. You used to fill it up with a bucket.

Bill: So you had an open fire as well as your stove?

Charlie: Most of the time, yes.

Bill: All through summer?

Charlie: Yes. You see, it wasn't in the main part of the house. They used to have a twelve by twenty four room, most of 'em. It joined on to the house. That was where you got things ready, and you'd bring it in and eat it inside the main house.

Bill: It must have got hot, did it?

Charlie: But they didn't worry about that, though. Didn't seem to know any different. You had no choice. They had big families and needed lots of hot water, and you had to have a fire to get it.

Bill: How did the big families handle having a bath, or a wash?

Charlie: A lot of 'em would go and jump in the creek. Others wasn't all that keen on having a wash at all! Old Mrs Gabe Bailey up there, and Vesta Waters, too - down below the house there was a beautiful sandy place on the creek - they'd have their copper and everything down there. They had a slide, and they took their washing, and away they'd go down there. I can still see old Maria. Holy ghost she used to love them old washing boards! She'd scrub away with a big cake of soap. Holy ghost they loved it! Washing day. They'd be up before daylight to go down to the bloody creek to wash. It was sort of an outing. All from the one house... there was three families of 'em.

Bill: And your house water would be what you got from the tank?

Charlie: Yes. No pumping up from the river or anything. They were still washing in the creek after the War... well, Vesta Waters did, but most of the others didn't by then, because there was only the one household and they weren't such a big family.

Bill: Vesta - that's an unusual name.

Charlie: Yes, there was a few of 'em. Vesta, that was a woman. And there was Oc.

Bill: Was that short for Oscar?

Charlie: No. Oc. Oc Waters. (*I found out later that Oc was short for Octophilious - he was the eighth child. WB*). Then over the creek there was Cornelius Stackman. Then the bloke down the road was old Ike. Ike Knight.

Bill: And Gabe was short for Gabriel?

Charlie: Yes. We always called him Gabe. Then there was old Shaddy - his real name was Evan... and Herb. There was five of them there.

Bill: And now there's only Squatter and his son left, eh?

Charlie: Yeah. They've all gone. What happened was a lot of 'em was old here, but they had to get out - the kids couldn't stop on my generation's home ground here. The next generation went, and they never bothered coming back. Same thing has happened over Dooralong. My daughter went to a funeral over there recently and she said she was surprised there were so many of 'em were strangers. Ashley Palmer's mother died the other week. She was one of the ones born at Yarramalong too. She was a Waters.

Bill: This is Reice's wife?

Charlie: Yes. Lyall Waters' girl. You know those Waters, most of them weren't that old. Lochie died down here - at the shop. He wasn't that old. Quite a few of those Waters' died pretty young. Funny thing, that. They was all big people. Old J.M., the father, he was a big man - a lovely man, and he died at 96. But Dard died at 53, then Fred died, and Clarrie died - none of 'em got to their sixties.

The Stackmans was the same. There was Tom, Paul, and Jack - they all died in their fifties. But good old Bill Stackman, the father - he went through to round about his nineties. I don't know why that is... I dunno.

Bill: I suppose you must have seen some changes in this mill down here, over the years.

Charlie: Oh Jesus, man! I worked in the old mill down here for a while - matter of fact I was living there with Merv and his wife...

Bill: This is H.M. Smith?

Charlie: Yeah. Young Harry, I used to call him. Old Harry Smith, Merv's father, had a fellie mill over at Mangrove, and he shifted it here and was cutting fellies down here first. Then he went to the sawn timber.

Well Merv wouldn't buy anything for the mill. When I was down here working, if you wanted to shift a big log you used a hand winch with two handles and you had to wind it through. If you wanted to load timber - like thirty five foot bits of four by three you had to hump 'em up your back and throw 'em up on the truck.

But now Kenny's running it, and last Christmas he said I should go down and have a look at it now. So I went down. So help me Jesus they've got nothing to do! Nothing to do only press a button! The bloody wood's coming back and no-one's touching it - it comes back along the thing and there's a little saw on its own down there, and the next thing you see the wood flying out! I said that if old Merv came back and saw that he'd be gone again straightaway. The cost would beat him. He wouldn't spend nothing. But he'd go to the bloody dogs and do a thousand dollars on a dog, though - he had two or three dogs.

Bill: Where'd they race dogs?

Charlie: In at Wyong. But he used to go all over the place with them. He'd take a week off. He had a bit of a utility there, and away he'd go ...He won a lot of races with 'em. Yet he was one of the last to get a chainsaw. Merv didn't waste anything. Then of course, Pop and Keith took it over after Merv.

Bill: Squatter also said his old man said that the first racecourse in Wyong used to be down on the flat at Tuggerah. Do you remember that?

Charlie: Yeah. I remember they used to have trotting races over there more or less where the Pioneer Dairy used to be.

Bill: So even though horses were important in the valley, people didn't go in for racing much, then?

Charlie: No. All your horses here were working horses - saddle horses. And you always had a pair of draught horses to plough and cultivate with - and to snig logs, you know what I mean.

Bill: I wonder why donkeys and mules never took on in Australia like they did in Europe?

Charlie: Oh, I've seen a few of 'em. You could be going along with a donkey and everything'd be going all right, then he'd think: "Bugger this." - and he'd lay down! And you couldn't get him up! I remember up at Foster there, at my brother's father-in-law's - he had a donkey. It'd get down when it was in the milk cart and it wouldn't get up. He used to have a little bit of paper he'd twist up and he'd light it and put it under the donkey's backside. Then it'd get up!

By the Jesus, speaking of donkeys - I was down here at a funeral, down at the bottom cemetery, and Adams was the old minister there. There's a few donkeys down there in the paddock adjoining the old cemetery - I think they're still there - and there was an old apple tree no further than from here to the fence away with a donkey under it. And it's braying away while the old Reverend is goin' on - and it's got it's bloody pizzle stuck out about three feet! You never seen such a sight!

Bill: It must have been a bit hard to keep the dignity of the occasion! (Pause while he feeds a black satinbird). And have these cattle in the valley always been the same sort? When they had dairy herds what did they have? Jerseys?

Charlie: Jerseys - and Guernseys. Back years ago, you only had two days when you sent milk - the rest had to be cream. Then it got to where the cream went and they were taking milk all the time and the cattle got to be Friesians then, 'cos they'd give you five or six gallons of milk. With the Jerseys two gallons would be pretty good going.

Bill: And what are those down there now?

Charlie: They'd be a mixture. It'd be a bit hard to say. Some's got Friesian in 'em - and Baldy - they're a mixed lot. But anyone had cattle here - the likes of Vesta Waters - she always had a Devon bull with 'em. Cornwall's had Baldies.

Bill: Baldies? What are they?

Charlie: Illawarra Shorthorns.

Bill: And those down there aren't for dairying, these days, are they?

Charlie: No. They keep 'em to sell the calves. But they don't know what they're doing these days anyway. They always have too many cows. They'd be better off if they only had six instead of sixteen... (Digression).

Bill: When did the Forestry Commission start to have a say in what timber you could take?

Charlie: Ever since I can remember. Ever since I had a licence.

Bill: And were people pinching trees in those days? It must have been hard for the Forestry to keep tabs on things.

Charlie: You couldn't keep tabs. There was more shook than was paid for!

Bill: Weren't they supposed to be branded or something?

Charlie: Yeah. They'd do 'em after you'd pulled 'em out. Tom McCormack and Les McKenzie'd come down there - they used to ride a horse in the first place - then they had old Jeeps they'd come down in. I was getting poles out here with Paul Stackman, and the Forestry fellers were supposed to put "RP" on them with a hammer brand sort of thing. They'd do the ones along the road, and get the others when they came out. We wasn't game enough to send anything away till they were branded. But the way a lot of 'em would do it, they'd have four up on the road to be branded - but there'd be ten down over the bank. But I couldn't do that - I was too frightened I'd get caught. "RP" meant royalty paid.

Bill: Was the royalty much?

Charlie: No. About five bob on a pole. But you was only gettin' thirty shillings for it. A post used to be threepence. I know, 'cos I used to split a good many out here for New Zealand. Anything that wouldn't make a sleeper you'd get two posts out of it. We used to get ninepence a post - and bugger me if today they're not six dollars fifty - for a bloody split post! Stone the crows!

See, if you got caught shakin' anything, you got caught shakin' it off Her Majesty's property. That was what the Forestry was supposed to be protecting. The Queen's property. That's why you'd get fined. You couldn't do that to her! (Digression)

Bill: Do you know Teralba, up on the mountain? Cottees old place?

Charlie: Yes, well Cottees got that off old George -Downes. He was one of the old people out there. Big man. Owned a lot of land up there. It was just past there that Collins' had their place. It was the last house on your left out there when I was out there. Then you'd go from there out to Andrews Point. Holy ghost that goes a long way down into Mangrove - it's a long point. There was nobody lived beyond Collins' at all then - Lin Hart was the only one on his own on the right hand side. There was a lot of land along the road opposite Andrews Point that we cut pulpwood on - on the same side as Lin. Anyway, old George Downes had a big place there where Cottees is now.

When the dole was on, we was only getting eight shillings a day. I remember a bloke was going with Keith Fernace's sister Irene - George Buckridge. A lot of 'em used to go out there to Cottees and they used to get a shilling an hour chipping in between the passionfruit and that. They'd work twelve and fourteen hours a day, and they was richer than what we was, you know. It didn't last long though. But that was good money in those days - to do twelve hours and end up with twelve shillings. A beer was only sixpence. They used to always drink pints - never drunk anything else. But when decimal currency came in in 1966 they was two shillings. (Digression).

Bill: How did you know Lin Hart? Did he come from down here originally?

Charlie: Yes, he came from just the other side of Yarramalong. He had a big lump of a place there. I worked with him out here on the pulpwood - out on the mountain. He knocked himself about working too hard. But it's pretty poor old country up there that he's got. Even the stones were sunburnt. But he's a nice person, Linnie.

So is Ken Smith. A real nice bloke. Always whistlin'. You couldn't find a happier sort of feller. But his father was a more serious sort of bloke. You couldn't get better than Lin Smith, either. Oh no. I couldn't understand it when he conked out so early. I worked with him for bloody years. We used to work up on the mountain out here. He had a big Ace truck - he could crawl up the side of a bloody hill with it - go anywhere.

We're lucky. They're all nice people.
