



## Bill (Squatter) Waters

*(Squatter's wife Polly was also present for most of this interview).*

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*Squatter:* My father lived to 94, and never had a day in hospital in his life.

*Bill:* And who was that?

*Squatter:* That was Herb. He was born over in St Alban's, by Perry's Arm, they called it - near the Common.

*Bill:* They came over here to the valley with a bloke called Perry, didn't they?

*Squatter:* Yeah, he came over here to work for old Mick Perry.

*Bill: (To Polly)* You said you're related to Keith Fernance?

*Polly:* Yes. Cousins.

*Bill:* And where did the name "Squatter" come from?

*Squatter:* My father. David, my son's got it, too. That's three generations. Don't ask me why!

*Polly:* When the mill was going, people'd ring up and ask for Squatter and we'd have to say, "Which one? Old Squatter or young Squatter?"

*Bill:* And you were born in the valley?

*Squatter:* Well, I was born in Wyong.

*Bill:* And both of you have spent your whole lives here?

*Squatter:* Yes...though many times I was away. I left school at thirteen and a half, and I went to

Carsonville - that's out at Gloucester, to work for Carson, who had a mill on the corner down there where Kenneth Smith's mill is now. I stopped there about four years, I suppose. He named the Post Office up there and called it Carsonville. The kids ask why I went that far away to work, and I tell them that there was no work here. I went up there and I got twenty five bob a week. I lived with my sister up there and paid her twelve and six a week board. I saved seven pound and thought I was a bloody millionaire!

*Bill:* When would this have been?

*Squatter:* Well, I was born in 1926...brings you to 1939 - the war would've just started . After four years I came back here, and I did one season on the ice at the butter factory, then I went cutting sleepers and that in the bush. Then I worked in a mill in Wyong, and then I came back out here and worked for Merv Smith - that's Kenneth's grandfather. The mill was then below where Pop Smith lives now. *Bill:* And that was the first H.M.Smith mill?

*Squatter:* Yeah. And then the brother-in-law died. They lived up the gulley near where Ashworth's are now, and when Frank died I went and lived with them and the kids - they had Thelma and Reg, Marlene and Doris - four... (*Points to his wife Polly*)...and that's where I got tangled up with her - I went into liquidation!

*Polly:* Up that gully at the side of Ashworth's is where I come from.

*Squatter:* At about that time, Merv Smith's mill was playing Morey's mill at Erina - you know, just an ordinary game of football - and I broke my leg. Anyway, it finished up I lost my leg. It wasn't a compound fracture, but the bloody plaster was put on too tight and that cut the circulation off, and gangrene set in. I had nearly six months in hospital. They pulled the toes off down there - I tell people these yarns and they look at me as though they don't quite believe me - all the meat was gone round my toes and under my heel here ...and stink! They took me up to the operating theatre, laid me on the table, threw a bit of a towel thing over my eyes ...I got up on my elbow to have a look but they said I couldn't watch. I never saw a mechanic with as many tools and pliers as they had! They were onto the toebones, and just breaking them off, but I couldn't feel anything - that's how dead it was. I think they got frightened then, and they sent me to Newcastle hospital. That's where they took it off.

When they were unwrapping it - my toes were gone - what was left of my foot was getting bigger and bigger - swelling - 'cos the bandages were that tight. I insisted on having a look at it, and when I saw it I said that the quicker they took the bloody thing off the better! That Doctor Bond was there, and he said:

"If you want it off, laddie, I'll take it off." And they did. About seven inches below the knee.

As I was leaving, I said to the doctor: "You know doctor, I think that if things had been different in the first place I'd be going home with two legs." "Well Bill," he said, "we won't say yes but we won't say no either." They won't go against each other!

*Bill:* So no-one admitted liability?

*Squatter:* No. There was no such thing as insurance back in them times, either.

*Bill:* And you were how old? Mid twenties?

*Squatter:* I had my 22nd birthday in hospital.

*Bill:* And how long did it take you to adjust to only having one leg?

*Squatter:* Oh... I got my licence to drive a truck at... probably 25.

*Bill:* And have artificial legs improved since you got your first one?

*Squatter:* Yes, they've improved since then. The first one was willow, with a different system in the bottom of the foot. It gave its share of trouble. But of course I abused it, too... Then me and Joe Bailey started a mill up there just in front of Brush Creek School. I went from there back into the bush with tractors getting logs.

*Bill:* Was it a steam-driven mill?

*Squatter:* No. Diesel. Then John Curtis and I built a mobile mill and went back to the forest with it.

*Bill:* Was it a portable sawbench?

*Squatter:* Yes a sawbench, built on a crawler tractor.

*Bill:* What were you milling, sleepers?

*Squatter:* All sorts of timber. Then John wanted to get out of it. See, in a way we had two mills in one - so he took that one and I brought the other one home here. I kept building and building this thing at weekends and that till I got it going. David had left school by then and I started cutting timber for the Council with him.

Then I sold this hill up here - that's when interest was worth a bit. I was 62, and David wanted to get out - he wanted to go cutting posts. Back then I could get enough interest money to live on comfortably, so I decided that I wasn't going to work my guts out in the mill only to give it all to Bob Hawke - no way. The mill's still got the licence, and the power's still on to it. You could start it in the morning if you wanted to.

...But I dunno. A lot of people say to me you must have had a tough time with your leg off. But I don't regret it that much. I could do what I wanted to do.

*Bill:* Not like a hand, I suppose.

*Squatter:* Oh christ no... Just over twelve months ago that wooden leg wore my other good knee out with osteoarthritis. I went to see about getting a knee joint put in. I thought: "This'll be good, with this one wooden and a knee joint on the other one!" Because you see, I've had abscesses on it in the past, so you couldn't get (the artificial leg) on for a week, and when you've been off it that long you nearly had to learn to walk again. And so I thought if I'm laying in bed in hospital for a week, it's going to be a joke me trying to walk when I get up, with that. Well I went in on the Sunday, they chopped it out on the Monday, and Tuesday morning they had me up on it, with a walker. It was no trouble whatsoever... But I'm nearly a bloody robot!

*Bill:* And so most of your life has been in timber?

*Squatter:* Oh yes.

*Bill:* And how far did you get? Apart from up at Gloucester, you went all round here - the Watagans...?

*Squatter:* All round the Watagan mountains, and down here in the Wyong forest... never ever worked on Ourimbah. And not so much out round The Basin way - more along that Wyong Ridge and right through. Right out to Boarding House dam.

*Bill:* That's a nice spot.

*Squatter:* You been there? I'll never forget out there one day. Macka was out there cutting logs with us then. There was Macka, and Reg, the nephew, myself... I dunno whether Bob Stackman was there or not. But it was a hot day, and we were camped out there. So we go to the dam for a swim. They strip off and I took my boot off and just stuck my good leg in the water, see? It wasn't no time at all when suddenly a car comes over the brow! There was a scatter for clothes!

But you know, it's before my time, but back in the early days there must have been a power of timber in this valley. I reckon that this valley - this district - practically half-built Sydney!

*Bill:* All the cedar, for a start.

*Squatter:* Yeah. That's right. I dunno whether you're a greenie or not but that's something ...People come here and they say "Oh! Ain't it a beautiful valley, with all these trees!" The first thing I say is: "Look. This is one of the oldest districts in Australia that's been worked for timber. And we haven't bugged it yet!" And they're all saying how beautiful it is. And there's no argument to it, is there? You fall one tree and a dozen'll come up.

*Bill: (To Polly)* Have your family always dairied here, or grown fruit, or what?

*Polly:* Just dairied. From when my father was married till he was eighty or something. (The conversation wanders, and comes back to Smith's mill).

*Bill:* And it was Kenneth's grandfather, Merv Smith that started the mill? Who took it over when he went?

*Polly:* The two sons...

*Squatter:* Merv wasn't dead - he retired and went to Toukley to live. The two boys had to buy it - Keith and Pop. It was a pretty cheap rate I think, but he didn't just give it to 'em. Then they sold it to Kenneth.

Pop still works there every day - says he's just getting old enough to retire. And Governor still does too, part-time.

*Bill:* When you had your mill here, till recently, how were you getting your timber?

*Squatter:* Most of it was coming from Barrington Tops.

*Bill:* Gee that's a long way away. So you've still got a connection with Gloucester in a way?

*Squatter:* Well... Jurd and them used to buy patches of timber up there, and there was another bloke up there used to sell it to the log carter bloke. We did have a scavenger licence here, but not a crown licence.

Kenneth has a crown licence. The way the Forestry Commission's tightened up - they just wanted you to take the rubbish, see? It appears to me that the scavenger sawmiller's got to be a better sawmiller than what the bloke is with the crown licence - if he's going to exist. The Forestry's making it harder and harder. But when it's all boiled down I think the National Parks have got more control over the forest than what the Forestry have.

*Bill:* They don't have special jurisdictions, then?

*Squatter:* Well they still have, but if you find a good patch of logs, it's got to be passed by the National Parks and Wildlife before the Forestry can let you have it.

*Bill:* You didn't use bullocks in your timbergetting days, did you?

*Squatter:* No. We had old blitzes and that. But now the Forestry won't let Ted Lammi - you know, he's getting the piles and that and he's got a crane on the blitz to lift the piles on - but they say that's out! They won't let you use that now because they reckon it's not safe. He had to go and buy another turnout with a grab on it, and... I say to people: "Look, I can go back to when, if you could get enough money to put a deposit on a chainsaw and an old blitz truck or a tractor you'd get a living out of it. But today, if you came here with half a dozen of the best chainsaws, a brand spanking new D8, two new trucks, and half a dozen of the best men in the district - what would you do with them?" See? That's it - the place has gone to rack and ruin. So now... I don't know.

*Bill:* So you reckon the old days were better?

*Squatter:* I really think they were. Back then, you could talk to a Forester and sort out... providing you were within reason, he'd listen to you and then say yes that's OK. Today, they tell you what to do and that's it! I honestly think we've seen the best of it all. I wasn't reared on a farm like, but these dairy farms here reared big families off them. I don't suppose there was money to throw around, but they existed alright, and were fed. Today, well you can't get a living off it...

*Bill:* Would you say timbergetting has been more important to the valley than dairyfarming? Were there more people involved with timber than...

*Squatter:* No, I think there'd be more blokes dairyfarming, though they both played a pretty big part. Not much cattle - beef cattle. That didn't come till the dairying went.

*Bill:* And why d'you think the dairying petered out?

*Squatter:* Well Milton Morris, he started that big Rotolac thing up there at Hexham. He wanted their quota and he wanted their cows, and he'd pay them so much. I'm not sure if Keith Fernance sent his cows - I don't think so. Danny Bailey didn't. Jack Stackman did - oh a lot of them sent 'em. They were supposed to supply so many fresh cows per year, see, then fetch the dry ones home and get 'em in calf ...As far as I know they never got a cracker out of it. Not a razoo. And they couldn't get their licence back to start again. I'd say that's what killed the dairying. Today it's producing nothing, really. Then you get all the new blokes that's coming here - they're going to rear vealers. It won't rear beef cattle - dairying yeah, but it won't run beef cattle.

*Bill:* Why is that? There's plenty of feed, isn't there?

*Squatter:* Yeah. But it ain't got enough vitamins. (*Gesturing to Polly*) She's got a brother who was reared here. He's got a place over at Broke - Andy Fernance. He says: "Those people who buy a place at Yarramalong and think they're gonna grow vealers, they're not right in the head. It won't grow 'em." He's got ninety acres over there, and he's got thirty breeding cows. He'd run more cattle per acre up there than you could here. You go out west and you see old dead grass - you never see it green - but the cattle are fat.

I'm not saying the stuff here won't make milk, though. It'll make milk.

*Bill:* And Polly, you went to school in the valley?

*Polly:* Yes. Brush Creek School.

*Bill:* That's the one near where Terry Crowfoot lives now?

*Polly:* Yes that's the one. And for twelve months while that one was closed I went to Ravensdale school.

*Squatter:* I did my days at Ravensdale, and I did about six months at Yarramalong. When I went from Brush Creek to Ravensdale, Jim Hogan taught there at the time. But I wasn't interested in school. I've learnt more since I left school than I did going to school, that's for sure.

*Polly:* Eddie Stinson was one of my teachers.

*Bill:* Was he? He taught there for quite a while, didn't he?

*Polly:* Yes. And he taught my daughters and my son!

*Bill:* And do you reckon it was better back then before you had electricity and...

*Polly:* Not the electricity.

*Squatter:* Or the tarred road.

*Bill:* What about you, Polly? Were you glad to see the end of the fuel stove?

*Polly:* Didn't worry me.

*Squatter:* But I am. I don't have to get the wood!

*Polly:* We had a woodstove in there, (points) and one day the eldest daughter was sick. Chapmans used to bring our groceries on Fridays. They put the groceries down, and Julie got a tin of camp pie and a tin of steak and vegetables, and put them in the oven, and shut the door up - she was only a tiny little thing. Of course he (pointing to Squatter) makes a fire the next morning and the next thing we hear is Bang! It was just like a double-barrelled gun going off! Cracked all the stove ...and the baby was just walking and had just walked past the stove. I thought someone had fired a shotgun over the roof it was that loud.  
(Digression)

*Squatter:* ...But the people are getting worse. We all bloody well are.

*Bill:* Do you think that's because now they're not all related? Do you think those blood ties did something?

*Squatter:* No... But I can remember when I was a kid - the next door neighbour would kill a beast, and they'd be cutting it up the next morning. The lady of the house would be saying not to forget to keep so and so a nice roast, keep so and so a nice piece... and when you killed you gave it back. If you got a piece of meat off your next door neighbour now, mate, you'd buy it! That's all gone, and in my book it's a shame. It's dog eat dog. People don't help each other as much. *Bill:* But don't you old pioneer families still do that sort of thing?

*Squatter:* No, it's died.

*Bill:* Has that happened only recently, or does it go back?

*Polly:* The last one we killed was just before Dad died. (pause)

*Bill:* What about when you built your houses? Did you all build your own?

*Squatter:* Well, I was a bit fortunate. Uncle Onslow Waters, Dad's brother - he wasn't a qualified builder, but he was a builder - he built half of Yarralong. We had the mill up at Brush Creek school when I built this so the timber cost me nothing. What I couldn't handle ...the uncle he cut the roof and that, see? This back part wasn't on then - it finished there. But all that (describing the extent of the house), with 200 pound for the furniture, cost me 600 pound. I made the first tank, and I made the wooden windows myself - which have all been replaced now with aluminium - but I made them... (digression).

The old mill down here was known as Sagundamarten - the one the grandfather had. The old man always said it was called that because in aboriginal language it means "next to none". It was the first mill that was ever around here ...down behind Denny Lee's there. (digression)

*Squatter:* Old Ezekiel Waters - they came here from Maitland, with the Stinsons. Chasing cedar - that's what brought 'em here. Old Ezekiel came out to Australia to supervise the building of Darlinghurst gaol.

Then he must have went up to Maitland. Maitland would've had a port back in them times - the boats used to go up there. Grandfather quotes that he came here when he was two year old. And his father was Jimmy - Jimmy was one of Ezekiel's sons.

Eddie Stinson mentions in his books about the Pioneer Dinners...

*Bill:* When did they stop having Pioneer Dinners?

*Squatter:* I think they still might have them in Gosford, don't they?

*Bill:* It'd be a good thing to still have in the valley now, wouldn't it?

*Squatter:* Yeah. (digression).

*Bill:* Would Keith Fernance be the oldest one of the pioneers left?

*Squatter:* I only said to Poll this morning, I reckon I'm the third oldest in the valley. There's Keith Fernance, Charlie Lauff, then me.

*Bill:* Were the Stackmans an early family, or did they come later?

*Squatter:* Well, Roo Stackman's mother Jean and Poll here are first cousins. She was a Fernance. No one seems to know where Bill Stackman originated from. There was a brother - Cornelius, who lived up around Gloucester - we're quoting Roo's grandfather Bill now. He was Cornelius' brother. His sister married Uncle Merv Waters. Makes you think they probably were born here - the Stackmans.

*Bill:* And what about the Bradleys?

*Squatter:* They've been here a long while.

*Bill:* Was that the first mill? The one they had at Wyong Creek?

*Squatter:* You mean the first that was ever here? No. The one down behind Denny Lee's was the first in the district.

*Bill:* Has there always been a mill where Bradley's one is now?

*Squatter:* No. Straight opposite where that little plantation is at Bradley's, old Tom Bradley - that's Reggie's father - that's where he had a fellie mill. Then his brother Adam had a fellie mill on the opposite side of the road to where Renie Smith lives now - but I can't remember it working. Adam Bradley would be Reg's uncle. Then, before any of that, I fancy they had a fellie mill starting up Kingtree Gully, at the foot of Brush Mountain there.

*Bill:* Keith said that Carson had an elaborate contraption up the end of Kingtree there.

*Squatter:* Oh, the chute. Yeah. I climbed up that once. Part of it was gone then, though... That's where Freddy Carson was going up it one day to check on everything, and there was a bloody storm. The chute started off through a rocky cutting thing, and then it came down this timber chute. And this bloody great heap of water hit him, and it took him back down it. He reckoned his wife was pulling splinters out of his arse for weeks and weeks! (laughs). Then he had that tramline at Ravensdale. When Carson left here he reckoned the place was bugged, that there was no timber! And he didn't just go up in one place - he logged all over the place.

*Bill:* Did he have a lot of blokes working for him? It must have been a pretty big operation.

*Squatter:* Oh, yes. I just forget how much timber a week they reckon was going down the chute.

*Bill:* And this was all before chainsaws, of course.

*Squatter:* Oh, well before chainsaws. Frank used to cut timber those days - the bloke I went to live with his wife after he died when I was young. He said that if you cut into a bluegum and it had those black pinholes, he said you'd just walk away and leave it - and they were beautiful logs them times. If Kenneth could get logs like them now, in twelve months time he'd be a bloody millionaire!

*Bill:* Was there much communication between the valley and Murray's Run, or up where Sweetman's are? Or were they sort of separate areas?

*Squatter:* I don't suppose there was. There was no way to communicate.

*Bill:* Too far by horse to be bothered, sort of thing?

*Squatter:* Yeah.

*Bill:* Though there are Fernances over that way, aren't there?

*Squatter:* There was - at Fernance's Crossing. That's where Le Sueur nicked that sign and brought it over here to Snooks' (Keith Fernance). I think that's where he got it. When you see him next (Ron), you ought to tell him you've been talking to the bloke who christened him "Bootlace". He'll say: "That's that bloody Squatter." When I was working at the Governor's he'd come down there with his bootlaces all undone and dragging, and one day I said to Governor: "He's a public risk, you know," - having a go, you know. Anyway, it finished up after that I christened him Bootlace.

*Bill:* There's a lot of people with nicknames, aren't there? Do you know where they come from? Was Governor called that before he ran the mill?

*Polly:* I think they used to call him that at school, didn't they?

*Squatter:* Well, Pop was Pop. And then there's Macka - his name's Leonard.

*Bill:* And why is he called Macka, do you know?

*Squatter:* Don't ask me! Sonny... well Jeannie might've called him that as a kid. You could see that one.

*Bill:* And why is Lawrence Curtis called Barney?

*Squatter:* I don't know. I used to be called Humphrey, after Humphrey Bear - he used to be in the comics riding that thing with the toilet sitting up behind it. That's when I had more fat on... But then the Fernances over there - the cousins to Poll: George was Nobby, Fred was Cod, Joey - I think he kept his right name, Jimmy was Pannikin, Roy was Bluey...

*Polly:* Mark was Johnny.

*Squatter:* Yeah. Kenny is Bum - dunno why.

*Polly:* It was Dad who christened me Polly.

*Bill:* And is this common with the women as well?

*Both:* Not really. (long pause)

*Bill:* Did you have any adventures when you were out in the bush camping and that?

*Squatter:* I'll tell you a funny thing happened to me. Me and the brother-in-law were over at Boree, you know, this side of Yengo, getting logs. I was driving the tractor, and I backed into an oak tree - you know, with the sharp acorns on 'em. I used to wear overalls. I winched this log behind the tractor, and when I go to take off I feel this pain in my crotch, and I thought I must be being bitten by a spider. I grabbed hold of my ...knackers, and the more I squeezed the spider to try and kill it, the more it bit me! This is dinkum. And eventually I sort of eased off a bit, and as I eased off it stopped biting. It was a pretty hot day and I had my overalls undone at the top, and one of those acorns must have fallen down the front of them. And there was me with the skin wrapped around it! ...Course you get spiders round those old oak trees.

*Bill:* Good job you didn't need to put a tourniquet on it! Timbergetting seems to be a pretty dangerous occupation. Did fellers get hurt much?

*Squatter:* Well that bloke I mentioned before, Joe, he was killed by a falling tree out there on Walker's Ridge...

*Bill:* But bad accidents are not all that common then?

*Squatter:* No.

*Bill:* (To Polly) And did you used to like it when he went away to camp, or did you miss him?

*Polly:* Oh well, Nina used to come over and stop with us of a night. All the kids were little then. I didn't like staying on my own.

*Bill:* You mentioned Arch Braithwaite earlier. Didn't he own all that up the top of Brush Creek Road where I am now?

*Squatter:* He didn't - Ted and Johnny did. There was Arch, who was the oldest, then Ted, Wally, Johnny, and two girls. They came from Peak Hill to here. They sold all that up there to CSR, who wanted timber to make into pulp for making Masonite. I got logs from in there where you are, under there where there's a shelf underneath. There was some bloody good logs there, too.

*Bill:* Were Braithwaites dotted all over the valley, or...

*Squatter:* Well, Arch went into the Police Force. Wally had a place up Stinson's Lane, and he went from there to Mardi - you know where Porter's Bridge is, just this side of Wyong?

*Bill:* With the stand of giant bamboo on the point?

*Squatter:* Yes, that's it. He had a dairy there. That's where he would've died from. They had two sons and a girl. Both the sons got killed in a car accident... (digression)... I was talking to old Billy Christenson once - he used to live up there towards Kingtree - he's dead now - and he was talking about fencing for Braithwaite on his land up the top there. He said he got tuppence to split 'em, and tuppence to stand and bore 'em!

*Bill:* I believe that road was built up there before dozers and stuff like that.

*Squatter:* Oh christ yes. They'd be there with a drill and a hammer belting the holes down to blow it.

*Bill:* Everyone says that work in the bush was hard, but they all seemed to enjoy working in the bush. What do you think it is that makes the bush a special place to be?

*Squatter:* I don't know. But these blokes that started off in timber - I don't say every bloke, but the majority - they go away into some other field to do something else, and they usually come back to the timber again.

*Bill:* Mills like the ones left in the valley are all being bought out by the multinationals up and down the coast.

*Squatter:* Yes! And these modern mills are no good for the community. They're a good thing probably for the people who own them. They buy out about three or four mills to get their quotas. Then they shut the small mills down, and they've got about as much men working in one mill, when there was three lots of men like that. As a move, it's a failure, I think...

*Bill:* Have you ever been up on Mt Yengo?

*Squatter:* No. They reckon there's about 75 acres on the top, flat as a billiard table. David, the son, was working out there with Steve Marsh once, and he says there's a road right round it. And they reckon there's cedar growing there - I'm only guessing at this, but probably that'd be on the southern side. It's owned by Bowen of Bowen's Transport, Bogas, and all that. (Digression)

*Squatter:* You know that road up there to Murray's Run? If it could talk it could tell a few stories you know. That's what I've always said about down here at Collies - you know where the old inn was - at Woodbury's Bridge? I dunno why they never restored that place, because barring the Old North Road that was the main road all through here. Young Collie, when it could've been restored, wouldn't let it go - they let it go too far. Ned Kelly and christ knows who might have stayed there.

*Bill:* And the stone house in the valley. That'd be the oldest one left, wouldn't it?

*Squatter:* I suppose it would be the oldest one left standing. That was Christenson's - he was a Swede. He used to make cheese, and bacon. And when he got so much made, enough to go in the tilting cart, away he'd go. And he went as far as Morrisset I think it was, then he'd come back and start again. Did they tell you that house is supposed to be haunted? They reckon it is.

*Bill:* Whose ghost? Christenson's?

*Squatter:* I think his son or someone was supposed to have been struck by lightning there or something. To me, there's always an explanation for ghosts. Paul Stackman and Elma were living there one time, and this bloody ghost thing came out or something, and said: "There's only you and me here." And Paul said: "Well, as soon as I find my other bloody boot you'll be here by yourself!"

*Polly:* He went without his boots. He had one boot on and one boot off! (Long pause)

*Squatter:* ...There's that many Waters' - Ezekiels, Jimmys - you gotta watch what you're saying or they get jumbled up. The first bloke of all of 'em was Ezekiel, and then the grandfather's father's name was Jimmy, and his grandfather was William Joseph. But then there was Uncle Jimmy over here. And you go down to the cemetery there and there's another Ezekiel - and I wouldn't know where he fits the picture.

(Digression)... When I was at school, Jim Hogan, the teacher used to give us this homework to do, see? You'd put your book on the desk in front of you and he'd go through 'em. And he came to Lin Smith - Ken's father - and he said: "Linnie, where's your homework?" And Lin said: "It's in the book, sir." He said: "I can't see it. Come out and show me." Lin goes out and opens his book - no, that's right - Lin hadn't put his book out on the table like the rest of us, so when Hogan asked him where it was he said: "It's in Jean's bag." (Jean was his sister). The teacher told him to fetch it, and when Linnie did, Hogan couldn't find the homework. "I can't see it Linnie." he said. "Did you do it?" "Well, do you know what must have happened?" said Lin, "There was a rubber in Jean's bag, and it must have got rubbed out coming to school!"

(Digression) ...This place over here across the creek that used to be Dick Sternbeck's that the Public Works have now - it goes down onto Bunning Creek - that used to be a priest's farm. It's got Priest's Ridge on the map now. They were going to put an orphanage on it or something but nothing ever come of it. The old man said once - it was probably before his time and it was probably told to him - that the cedargetters used to come down into Bunning Creek by what they called the Sliding Track. They used to take the cedar up and out that way on a slide, with a few bullocks or something I suppose. And that's how it got the name Sliding Track Point.

They'd take it out and over to Mangrove, put it in a boat, and then it went to Sydney. The old man reckoned that back then a couple of them thought they'd come for a look out this way to see how far the cedar come, and when they come out here they found people living out here! And they didn't know.

*Bill:* When you were in the bush, did you have any encounters with animals - any snake stories, or...

*Squatter:* Not really. I've seen some pretty spiteful-looking tiger snakes about...

*Bill:* You've never been bitten?

*Squatter:* No. They never get close enough to me! But you know, that's something that's got me beat. The amount of people that worked in the bush - you'd take the rope down, or back when there was bullocks it was a chain then - you'd put it underneath the log, or the pole or the pile or whatever it was - you don't look, yet I've never heard of anyone getting bitten by snakes, or spiders or nothing.

*Bill:* Yes, they're all out there, but you don't actually see 'em all that often, do you?

*Squatter:* Sometimes you'd see a turkey or two, or a wallaby.

*Bill:* Denny Lee was saying about when they put the Ford Pills in his jaffles...

*Squatter:* Oh yeah! Up at Yorkie Gully. Tom and Jack Stackman would do any bloody thing for a joke. Yes.

*Bill:* Did much of that sort of thing go on?

*Squatter:* Oh yes... (long pause but no examples)

*Bill:* I hear you used to stab your wooden leg with a pocket knife.

*Squatter:* Yeah. We was working out the other end of Watagan Mountain and there was a bloke working for us cutting logs - Joe Sekora, who was a Pole. Christ he was strong! Not a very big bloke, but terrible strong. This day it started raining, so we decided to go down to the Morrisset pub because it was too wet to stop in the bush. So down we go and have a few beers. I had one of them all-weather blueys on, you know those big sort of coat things, about three-quarter length.

If you bet Joe two bob, or a beer, he'd grab the beer glass, bite a bit off, and just chew the glass up and spit it out. I used to say: "You know Joe, that's gonna cut your guts out one day". I suppose we'd had a few beers by this, and I said to him: "You think you're bloody strong, but you're not near as tough as I am." He didn't know at that stage I had a wooden leg, so I got this knife out and stuck it straight through my trousers and into my wooden leg! And do you know that yarn got back to the bloody coppers in Wyong.

*Polly:* Who was it lit the cracker and put it under your sister's bottom?

*Squatter:* When I lived there where John Ashworth's is now, after Frank died - I lived there a few years till I got married - Joe Bailey, that's the bloke that had the mill with us first up below the school, and Albert his brother... just adjoining the old part of the house - it ain't there now - there was an old kitchen. That's where you lived - a bit of a rumpus room with a big old open fireplace in it, and we were playing cards there. There was Mum and Dad up there this time, and me, and Billy Herb. And Joe Bailey comes home from Wyong with big crackers. He winks at me, and he gets round behind Billy. He had the matches in one hand and a cracker in the other, and the match had lit the wick and he didn't know! It went off, and I think Joe was the one that got the biggest fright!...

By the way, did I say I was the third oldest around here? Thinking about it, I'm not. There's King Palmer I forgot about. You see there's Keith Fernance, then Charlie Lauff's older than me, then King Palmer, then I'd be next. Ashley Palmer's got the bus run now, and King is his uncle. Old George Palmer had the bus run first, many years ago. They call him King, but Eric's his right name. The mail would have been sorted down where Denny Lee is now - that's where Reice lived, with the buses. Palmers used to own that. Then Reice must have brought that mail up and delivered it up Brush Creek and Ravensdale. King used to deliver the mail on a horse up Brush Creek, up to Bebeah Post Office, I suppose. (Digression).

...I've bought a few tractors. Second hand. I was always lucky I never got a dud. There was a bloke called Frank Sterland - he's still alive - he was a bit of a fanatic, and he had dozers - and I'd go down and sit and I'd listen and lap it all up and learn about them. So I never paid anybody to do maintenance on the machines. I done it myself.

If something broke as far as steel is concerned, round the blade or anything, you'd get someone with a mobile welder. And I thought that was no good, so I bought a mobile welder and started playing with it till I - well I don't say I mastered it, but I'm plenty good enough, anyway. If I hadn't done it all myself I wouldn't have existed back in them times.

A fencepost is what? six or seven dollars now. I split posts, and cut 'em into lengths with a crosscut saw, up on top of that hill behind us there. You couldn't snig 'em with a horse straight down - you had to undo 'em twice and throw 'em over the rock, then gather 'em again, bring 'em down here and put 'em on Reice Palmer to go - all that for a shilling each! And that was a bloody good job! That'd be in the forties...

Back when I was at school, Jim Hogan confiscated the cigarettes once that I had with his son, Jack. Up at the toilet we were having a smoke and there was too much smoke coming out of the top.

*Bill:* When you were kids, did you get up to mischief like that much?

*Squatter:* Yeah. But there was no harm in it.

*Bill:* And were you a smoker once, when you'd grown up?

*Squatter:* I used to smoke a bit when I worked for Merv Smith in the old mill. But I don't reckon I smoked that much. I used to smoke a packet of roll your-own tobacco a day. When I was up there working, or even when I was working for myself, I'd roll them in the morning, put them in the packet, then at morning tea I'd roll more, then at dinner. I never rolled a cigarette in anyone else's time. But I gave it up about four years ago when I got crook, and never had another one since ...(the talk turns to cedar trees) There's a cedar tree at Yorkie Bridge - you know the one? It's got a fair butt on it, hasn't it?

*Bill:* Yeah. I notice that all the cedars that are left are spreading out as they grow. The ones they used to get were pretty tall and straight, weren't they?

*Squatter:* Yes. See, they'd be growing in with other timber then. When you come off Yorkie Bridge coming this way, Tommy Fernance used to own that, and there was a mile of cedar there once. There's quite a few still around - but of course you're not supposed to fall 'em. But I dunno, it never appealed to me.

*Bill:* The timber?

*Squatter:* Yes.

*Bill:* Why was that?

*Squatter:* It's too soft. You run your fingernail over it and you'll mark it. If I had my pick, I'd take rosewood, and then white beech.

*Bill:* Is there much white beech left, and rosewood?

*Squatter:* I never see it, but they reckon there's a big rosewood out in the Watagans, there. 'Course the foresters mightn't even know it's there, these fellers today.

*Bill:* But you guys wouldn't have used much of that sort of thing would you?

*Squatter:* No. Most of it was gone in our time. In the war years, Bob Brown there at Ourimbah had the rights of all the soft wood for Cessnock, Wyong - the lot. And he cut it for the army - I suppose for

ammunition boxes. They'd get it out of the bottom of the gullies with christ knows how many feet of rope. They had two or three blokes on it signalling, they were that far down, half of 'em.

You hear people say the rainforest down there at Tranquillity is good, but when I was up at Carsonville, that was really rainforest - we don't get the rainfall for it here. But up there the brushwood grew on the top of the mountains, and the hardwoods down the sides. That's the opposite to here. But christ man! there was some there! Blue fig, crabapple, coachwood, sassafras, yellow bean, prickly ash, rosewood... it went on and on.

*Bill:* How did you get to know 'em all. You didn't learn that sort of thing at school, did you?

*Squatter:* Oh no. But there's a lot of times you can pick the tree but you can't tell the timber, and there's a lot of times when you can tell the timber but you can't tell the tree. I've seen foresters come here - well, on paper they were foresters. I was out there one time and this young feller came out, and I said: "I think I'll put a road from here down to that forest oak tree." He said: "You mean that rough barked tree?" As soon as he said that I knew he didn't even know what a forest oak was! Them blokes come down here and try to tell you that they know everything and they know bloody nothing!

*Bill:* So they were something to put up with, sometimes?

*Squatter:* I say thank christ that the old bushies were gone when they come, because I honestly think that half of them would've grabbed them by the arse of the trousers and the back of the neck and pitched them. I do. There was a girl from the Forestry used to come here. Ronnie Ward worked in the bush all his life, and he had a couple of big logs down on a shelf, and he decided to put a side track down and take the truck down to load them rather than sniggin' them up - they were too big. Which he did. Jackie - that was her name - Jackie comes out and she flew into him for putting the road down. She was about twentysomething, and she said he should have come and notified her and she'd have shown him where to put the road! And he'd worked in the bush all his bloody life! See, that's what you're up against.

*Bill:* Is he still around?

*Squatter:* Wardie? Yes.

*Bill:* He used to run the RSL at Mangrove Mountain up there, didn't he?

*Squatter:* No. That was his brother Harold - or maybe Ronnie's cousin. Ronnie's son works for the Forestry now, on the branding.

*Bill:* That'd be a bit like going over to the other side, wouldn't it?

*Squatter:* Yeah. But I don't suppose there'd be any thieving going on now compared to what did years ago.

*Bill:* It'd be pretty hard to control, wouldn't it?

*Squatter:* They've got us cornered today. Anyway, there's nothing in the bloody bush left worth taking anyway. All the good logs are gone.

*Bill:* Come on, Pol. You must have some memories. Stop being shy.

*Polly:* No-o-o. (laughs)

*Squatter:* I reckon if Le Sueur had lived here all his life he'd have a yarn or two... He rebuilt that old church he got from Linnie, didn't he?

*Bill:* Yeah. Have you seen it?

*Squatter:* No. I haven't seen it.

*Bill:* Oh it looks great.

*Squatter:* Yeah? What? He's built it the same?

*Bill:* Yeah. Exactly the same as it was. But he's got a coffin up one end with a sign saying "Reserved for Jim Blundell" in it. There's a piano, and a little pulpit and a whole lot of movie posters round the walls for things like the Ten Commandments, and all this sort of stuff. It looks terrific.

*Squatter:* I said to Poll one day that I'm going to make my own coffin - wrap it up and put it under the bed. And when the time comes, get someone with a station waggon to take it down to the cemetery. Anyway, it must've been when Nina died, and I went down to make the funeral arrangements - the bloke there said I couldn't do it. Before he could say any more I said: "I'll lead line it then." And he said that anyone that dies with hepatitis has to have the body washed in a carbolic wash, 'cos when you die, the disease doesn't die. But he said I could have the coffin there, and your wife could ring up and say to come and get the remains, and they'd take over then.

Jimmy Waters' son up here, Russell, did a bit of time with Mackenzie the gravedigger. Anyway, they buried this body at Point Clare, and later it was discovered that it was in the wrong spot. And it was in there about three weeks - Russell tells the yarn. He said: "Oh this one won't be too bad, it's only been down three weeks." And he said: "When we started to get it out, the arse started to fall out of it - out of the coffin." He said everything had gone dark, and he said the coffin turned out to be made out of that compressed board, with a bit of veneer on it. And it was held together with those wrigglenails. That night he was stopping with Mackenzie because they were both keen on country music, and they went home and Mrs Mackenzie had cabbage for tea. "Christ!" he said, "it smells just the same!"

*Bill:* And that was his job, was it? Just to dig graves?

*Squatter:* Yes. He used to dig 'em with a shovel, but he uses a backhoe now, though... When I die, I want Johnny O'Keefe's song "She wears my ring" sung at the church.

*Bill:* Why's that?

*Squatter:* Oh I dunno. Something a bit different to all these mournful bloody noises they come up with.

*Bill:* Keith Fernance said that every few months somebody'd have a party...

*Squatter:* I can remember over home - the house is bloody gone now, but the old man, he was a bit of a party bloke. The front kitchen wasn't lined, and when there was a party on he'd nail these seats around the studs. He talks about a bloke by the name of Derriman - a piano player- and he could throw a sheet over the piano and still play it - no effort. His mother had his fingers insured for I dunno how much. He must've used to come to those parties. But there'd be no piano - I wouldn't think they'd have fetched one. But the old man used to talk of dances at the big barn at the stone house. And you know where Charlie lives near the mill there, and you go up that gully up towards Lawsie's? Well they call that Taylor's Gully - old Ned Taylor lived there. That road didn't go where it does now, straight across - it used to go round. And I can remember there was a shed there that they used to have dances in.

*Bill:* And how did they make the music?

*Squatter:* Oh, squeezeboxes. The old man used to play a squeezebox. But me, I couldn't play a bloody wireless!

*Polly:* But you can bugger'em up, though!

*Squatter:* Oh no. They had parties, alright. I don't say that they was wild parties, but they had a bit of entertainment like that, oh yes.

*Polly:* I've only been to a dance once - in 59 years.

*Squatter:* Wasn't let out! Too wild, she was! *Polly:* I wasn't. You were the wild one!

*Squatter:* Poll's father was an oldtimer. As honest as they come, but no muckin' about! I wouldn't swear in front of him.

*Bill:* Was he religious?

*Both:* No.

*Bill:* Just strict?

*Both:* Yes.

*Squatter:* Old ideas, like. Took a while for me to pick up enough courage to ask him could I marry her. Today they just take 'em without asking!

*Bill:* Did you propose, down on your knees?

*Both (laughing):* No.

*Bill:* How did you go about courting her in those days? I suppose you had no pictures to take her to, or...

*Squatter:* Oh, no. We'd go to the pictures - in at Wyong. One time after we were married, just before Lynette was born, we comes out of the pictures and the bloody car's gone. We go to report it to the coppers, and he asks me what's the registration number, and I couldn't remember!

*Polly:* I told him, though.

*Squatter:* They found it about three days later at Hurstville. There was races at Wyong that day, and I reckon someone had done their bloody dough at the races and wanted to get home. But they never hurt the car, like.

*Bill:* And what was the first car you had?

*Squatter:* An Oldsmobile.

*Bill:* And where did you two meet one another?

*Squatter:* Up at the sister's. She was living up the gully.

*Bill:* Up Spring Gully, you mean? Is there a road up there?

*Squatter:* Yes. It keeps on going up if you go through Ashworth's gate - goes up over the hill. It's a beautiful valley up in there.

*Bill:* And is the house up there still, Poll?

*Polly:* No. It fell down.

*Squatter:* That was a slab house, that house.

*Bill:* So you don't want to tell me about when you were courting. Did you go and park the Oldsmobile up in the hills, or...

*Polly:* No. I had someone's eyes on me too much.

*Bill:* So they kept a pretty tight rein on you then? Didn't they trust you?

*Polly:* Oh, I wouldn't say that. It was just the way it was. I used to have to go in and stop a lot with my grandmother in Wyong, to look after her. (long pause).

*Squatter:* You know, we think we're going ahead. But we're not, you know, we're going backwards. We used to have post offices, and Palmer's used to do two trips a day - dinnertime, and of an evening with the kids. If you wanted a sewing needle and gave him a note in the morning, he'd fetch that back at dinnertime for you. Chapman's came out here every Friday, and if you wanted horseshoes, saddles, a horserug - if you wanted feed, masonite, doors, windows, or your groceries - you name it, it was brought and dropped at your door.

*Bill:* And when did Chapman's go down the drain?

*Squatter:* They didn't. Old Bill Chapman had one son, Owen, and Owen had no son, so there was no one, I suppose, to carry the thing on.

*Bill:* It sounds like such a good business, it's a wonder somebody didn't grab it.

*Squatter:* Oh, well, Four Square bought it. Gearsides. They had a baker used to come here too.

*Polly:* Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

*Squatter:* Yeah. That was Vin Earl. That was from Jones' Bakery. Now if we want bread we've got to go down to Main's at the bottom of Bumble Hill there to get it, see? No, in my opinion it hasn't gone ahead. With the roads it has, and the electricity, yes. But as far as the rest of it, no.

*Bill:* And when you were kids, did both boys and girls have a whole lot of chores to do around the house before you could get out and play?

*Polly:* I always had to do something before I was allowed out. But see I had no sisters. And the boys used to help Dad milk.

*Bill:* And how old were you both when you got married?

*Polly:* I was 21. I was married on the 24th, and it was Bill's birthday on the 28th.

*Bill:* Did you have a big party to celebrate?

*Polly:* No. I had no party at all. I didn't want one.

*Bill:* But I suppose you would have had a minister, those days?

*Squatter:* Oh yes. We had a minister alright. When we went to see him before the wedding he asked: "Have you touched the forbidden fruit?" I said: "Oh, no. No."

*Bill:* As if you'd tell him if you had!

*Squatter:* But that Adams, he would have been the one that married Jennifer - you know Jennifer Smith, Kenny's sister? Patsy said - that's Keith Smith's wife, she would've been Jennifer's auntie - she said to me how Adams had asked them if they had tasted the apple. I said to her: "Oh hell, you can eat apples raw, or you can have 'em baked, or you can make a dumpling!" (long pause)

*Bill:* ...Do you think that the community feeling has gone because there's a lot more people in the valley now?

*Squatter:* I suppose so. It's changed everywhere. One time you could go to Wyong and you'd get sick of saying "G'day", and "How're you going?" Now, you can walk down that street in Wyong and I tell you what, if you knew two people you'd be lucky.

*Bill:* What about those two pubs? Were there always two pubs there?

*Squatter:* Yes. Old Jack Gascoigne owned'em both. The top pub used to be called the bushmen's pub, and the bottom pub was the fishermen's.

*Bill:* Did people from the valley go in to the races much?

*Squatter:* I dunno. The old man used to talk about going to the races down at Tuggerah. That's where they must've had races first. But that racecourse in Wyong, that's built out of sawdust. Goldsmith used to have a mill over there near where the racecourse is now, and - I could have this wrong, but I reckon Goldsmith built the first racecourse and he built it all up with sawdust from the mill.

*Bill:* I see. And I suppose there weren't all the chicken farms around then to take the sawdust like they do today, either. 'Cos it was a swamp, wasn't it?

*Squatter:* Yes. That was a big mill. And he must have had a mill up here at Ravensdale too, somewhere up near Brian Anderson's somewhere. He used to have a steam engine thing that would travel, and it used to have a couple of wagon things behind it to take the timber. And the old man reckoned that if there was any horses on the road anywhere they'd bolt off and finish up nearly at Wyong - and when it went back they'd come back. Frightened the hell out of 'em! (Digression, then the conversation got around to the Sternbecks).

*Bill:* They owned a lot of land, didn't they, the Sternbecks?

*Squatter:* Jimmy Sternbeck owned Murray's Run. A bloke by the name of Murray owned it first - it was a grant to him. He was a bloody slavedriver, and the Governor of the colony give him that, back when they were giving big parcels out. Old Jimmy must've bought it off him, or something.

*Bill:* All up round what's Bucketty now they used to own once, didn't they?

*Squatter:* Out Bucketty paddocks? I dunno. The opposite side of the road to Bucketty paddocks they did, I know. But that Bucketty paddocks - a bloke by the name of Bucketty Knight grew wheat there.

*Bill:* That's the big clearing on the left on your way out?

*Squatter:* Yeah. They used to grow wheat here too, once. And took it over to Mangrove - you know where the mill bridge is, where the grinding mill was? On the road going from Spencer to Wiseman's Ferry? There used to be a mill there for grinding the wheat into flour and that. They reckon they used to fetch it over there. I don't know whether they took it out over the Sliding Track up that way, or what. They reckon that up there at Braithwaites there was a sliding track they came down after cedar too.

*Bill:* It must have been hard work taking it all out uphill.

*Squatter:* Yeah, but the thing was, if it didn't get done today it'd get done tomorrow, or next week.

*Bill:* The only reference I've come across to aborigines was that Bumble Hill was named after an aborigine with a bumble foot. But there's various remains of 'em around, aren't there?

*Squatter:* Uncle Merv, he said that he saw the last of the blackfellers when they used to come through here to go to Wyong. They must've issued 'em with a blanket or two when they come through here each year. Uncle Merv reckoned he used to play with the black kids when they come through here. They'd probably come from Boree or somewhere - I dunno where they'd come from. Then they just stopped coming. Probably died off. But they'd been here, alright. Straight up behind... east of Denny Lee's -

there's a cave up there with blackfeller's drawings and everything in it. I saw 'em when I was a kid. But people went there and drew over 'em with charcoal...

You go out there to Devil's Rock. That's supposed to be the most carving of anywhere in NSW. Bloody big rock, it is. There's an iron post cemented into the rock with a tin on top with a visiting book in it. I've been there a few times. It'd surprise you where the visitors have come from. It says in the book that the best time to see the carvings is with a lantern of a night - to pick it out. There used to be a chalk in the box to outline the carvings, because people scratching at 'em would deteriorate them.

*Bill:* Yes. There's grooves in the rocks up at that waterfall above my place where that girl Sharon Heaven got killed when she fell over. You can see where they used to sharpen their spearpoints and stuff.

(Long pause) ...I did ask you why Bowen's Pinch is called that, didn't I? Nobody seems to be able to tell me.

*Squatter:* Well, it's possible that... you know where Reg Etienne lives, with the little trotting track? That piece of ground went from there up to where Neville Fernance is now. It used to be one lot. Old Palmer owned it. They used to call that Bowen's. King Palmer's mother used to say: "I'm taking the cows up to Bowen's". Don't ask me why that got the name of Bowen's. Up on Bowen's Pinch, carved in them rocks there somewhere is "ABC", for A.B. Campbell - about where the iron gate was. He was a bloke who worked here for Carson's. His son's got an engineering shop in Gloucester now. (the conversation wanders, and gets onto Fred Carson again).

*Squatter:* That old Freddie, he was a progressive bloke. Bloody oath! That traffic and railway bridge at Grafton - he designed that. And he had something to do with the joining up of the Harbour Bridge, too. I give him credit for what I learned when I was working there as a kid. I got on pretty good with him. Every time I asked for a rise I got it. I always said that if he give you a rise then you must have been worth it. He was a hard man to work for, but provided you did the right thing he was right, I reckon. His son Eric lives at Tuncurry now - he's married to Reg Bradley's sister Mona.