



## Ivy and Len Andrews

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*Now you were originally a Nichols, is that right Ivy? You were Lou's sister?*

Lindsay's sister, yes.

*You call him Lindsay, not Lou?*

Well, we say Lou sometimes, but we always think of him as Lindsay. If I wrote him a letter it'd have Lindsay - it wouldn't have Lou! (*Laughs*). A very quiet bloke, Lindsay is. He knows all that goes on, but he doesn't talk about it as a rule.

*How did you come to meet up with Len?*

I met Lennie at a dance out at Kulnura, but we'd sort of known the family for years. I went to school in Murray's Run. I used to live where Grays are now, and my older brothers - Lem and Hal - went and boarded with Les Sternbeck's father. I think Hersel might have gone up there for a little while too, but as Mum used to say, you can board one or two children, but you can't board five or six. So my grandfather built a school in Murray's Run. He provided everything - blackboards, desks, the lot. And the children who went there, their parents had to pay part of the teacher's fee. It was called a subsidised school, and so then the boys went there to school.

*He had to pay out of his own pocket for the school and its equipment?*

He had to find the lot, yes. Grandfather used to send cattle through to Wisemans Ferry and Lennie's relatives used to meet my grandfather at the head of Mangrove. Dave Andrews - that's Lennie's dad - said that he had children going to school. Lennie was at school down in Yarramalong and his older sister Eileen was at Spencer, and they weren't able to get a school started up anywhere closer. In those days you had to make applications on special forms, and my grandfather knew about all that because he'd had to get the Murray's Run school going, so he helped Len's father with the application and they had a school within about six weeks. That was at the head of Mangrove. They used one of the big rooms of the house.

*It's not still there now, is it?*

No. The dam is! The dam took all their land. (*The Mangrove Creek Dam*)

*So you left Yarramalong then Len, and went to school at home, did you?*

**Len:** Yes. I was at Kulnura for a while before that, and at Peat's Ridge. I actually didn't get to go much at home because I left school not long after and went to work instead. I went to work with a horse and plough when I was thirteen.

*And how did you come to end up here at Blaxlands Arm ?*

**Ivy:** Well Lennie started to work out our way - up the head of Watagan at the McMullens with his brother George, and he also worked for my brother Hal on the dairy for a while.

**Len:** And I worked for five and a half years on the dairy for Billy Crump.

**Ivy:** But that was after we were married - during the drought. If it hadn't been for Billy Crump and his family we probably wouldn't have survived. We lost all our cattle in the drought and he gave Lennie a job. He had to leave home here at three in the morning, sometimes before, and he didn't get home till around nine at night - and then you had your animals here to feed after that.

*When was this drought?*

**Ivy:** Oh, between twenty five and thirty years ago. My parents didn't dairy at Murray's Run. My father worked on the property that grandfather owned - he owned from where you turn into Murray's Run right up to Les Sternbeck's. He also owned all of this here in Blaxland's Arm, too - from the gate right through up here. There was another 880 acres out the back and another 430 behind the hill here. He bought it as an investment, I suppose, but today it's a millstone around your neck. It has been for us, anyway.

When my grandfather died and the properties went to the family, all of it was divided up amongst the boys, and this here was my brother Chris'. Later on he sold it to my mother, who bought it for me, which is how we came to move down here. But we had moved here earlier anyway and had been doing a bit of dairying for Chris.

*How old were you both when you got married?*

I was twenty one and Lennie was twenty five.

*Where did you get married?*

At Laguna Church. My grandfather (Jimmy Sternbeck) and Annie Thompson were the first to be married in Laguna Church after it was built. My mother was christened there, confirmed there, married there, and her funeral was from there as well. There've only been three funerals from Laguna Church - that's both my parents, and just a few years back was Ruth Thompson - she played the organ there for fifty-odd years.

The school used to be where the church is now. I think originally there was a church school before they had the public school at Laguna. That was built where it is now over a hundred years ago, and my mother went to school there. She went from when she was eleven till she was twelve and a half, I think, and she stayed down at Laguna House which was then owned by her uncle and auntie. She used to milk of a morning, then she'd run to school, and then come back home to milk again in the afternoon. But today, if you ask kids to walk the length of the garden they'd have to get in a car or on a bike or something.

There were eighty-odd children going there to school when she went. There was one big room, with a gallery. The little kids sat under the gallery and the big ones up in the gallery, and they had an extra room out the back which was demolished later and just left the big stone building.

Over the years, when some of my children were going there, the number attending dropped right down. When my youngest started going there, for one year they were down to nine children! They only got through that year without it being closed down because it was a Centenary year of government education. After that it picked up again.

*Was that when more people began to move into the area, in later years?*

No, not then. It was just a phase that these things go through. Actually, Flo Sternbeck sent her eldest daughter to school early so that she'd be on the roll to keep the numbers up enough. She boarded at the Laguna shop because her auntie lived there. But the numbers built up again, but only to the twenty to thirty size. It stayed like that for a good while till people started moving into the district, and then it went up to fifty-odd. I think it's dropped back now to forty-something but the projection's good for the next few years. It must be forty years since my eldest daughter started school, so that's how long I've been on the P&C.

*You're still on it?*

I'm their Treasurer. I would have liked to have given it up this year but they persuaded me to stay on. But I gave up the cleaning last year after I had a leg injury - I cleaned the school for twenty seven years. I did it for a while, then gave it away for a time when my children did it, then I went back again. But it was good. I like being involved with the children. There've been a lot of changes in the area of late, with people moving in and moving out. Not that I see very much of them. I get on extremely well with them but we don't live on each other's doorstep, which I reckon is halfway to the way it should work. However, we're always there for each other if and when the occasion arises, and believe me it has!

*In the earlier days when there weren't as many people here was there a good community feeling. ?*

We used to have the dances then. Wollombi used to have one every three weeks or so in that hall up on the hill there. That really was the focal point of the area. When the war was on we used to have various things like lunches and that to raise funds for the soldiers. There was a fair bit of sport, too. Billy Crump and others used to play cricket, but my family weren't sportspeople. Nor are my children. Rosamond likes it but the others thought it was a wasted day. I still think it was a wasted day! There was also a group that played tennis, but I was never involved in that.

*Were you on the Hall Committee?*

No, I was never social-minded, but if they ran something for the school or the church then of course I was involved. We used to run dinners to raise money for the school, but as new people moved in it wasn't their cup of tea. So after a while, when the last teacher came here - Joanne Clewes - we decided to have an art festival. We'd talked about doing something like this often enough, but there was no one to sort of get it started, but Joanne is a fantastic lady and she just said: "Well, we'll do it!" and we did. This year will be our third one. They've been fantastic turn-outs, and some of the art that turns up there is beautiful - you wouldn't believe it.

I like getting ready for these things. I like the cooking part and all that, but I'm not interested in the actual event. I don't mind the cleaning up after, either. I like them to tell me what they want done, and then I do that.

*So you started off dairying here for Chris Nichols, but once it was yours did you keep doing that or mainly run cattle?*

**Len:** Mainly run cattle. We got out of the dairying thing as soon as we could.

**Ivy:** Then Lennie worked in the bush for years, on the timber. Our eldest daughter worked with him.

*Did she? That's pretty unusual, isn't it*

Well, she wouldn't wash a cup for you, let me tell you, but she'd go out there and cut a log! And she hasn't changed! She's married now with six sons and lives in Cessnock.

*Did you work in the bush round Watagan, Len?*

**Len:** We worked all over the place. The youngest son and I were the senior cutters for pit timber from Gunnedah to the south coast.

**Ivy:** They cut for the Gunnedah pits and the south coast pits. They cut all round Watagan and right through here and Murray's Run. They cut timber on all our own place, and Yango. Our eldest son worked with him at one stage, but he was killed later in a bush accident. He was working in the bush out from Millfield. He felled a tree and it hit another tree and a limb came down and killed him instantly. He was twenty five.

*That must have been a blow.*

It was. But life goes on. He was married and had a little girl. His wife Lynelle remarried and we've always kept in touch - and that doesn't often happen. She feels like she has three families now. *(Pause)* ...I can still remember, back when I was little, my grandfather grew wheat in Murray's Run. That would have been on that property where Grays are - he used to have those flats sown with wheat. I can remember when they first used to cut it with a reap hook - and I can still see my father doing this - he used to take a double length of wheat and knot it, then tie it round the sheaf of wheat and loop it through so it wouldn't all come apart. It went up in stooks then. It had to be packed in a certain way to prevent water going through it and causing mould.

I also remember later - I think it was Keith Thompson who bought himself a stripper that cut the top off the wheat and left the stalk. That was fantastic! So much easier!

*And did the wheat go in to the mill at Wollombi ?*

No, they used it at home. They used to send a bit down to make flour out of at the mill at Wollombi, but mostly they used it themselves for the chooks and the other animals. I can remember when we had sheep, too - hundreds of the wretched things. They'd take off, and they never ever seemed to want to turn round. They'd go from home right up past where Lou lives, then the kids'd get sent to bring them home. They hated that!

*Why did sheep fall out of favour?*

Well, while you had the property big it was OK. But once it was divided up it was hard to keep them where they should be and they'd roam on to other properties. I think that was why. It was very hilly, too.

We used to have wonderful creeks through that valley. Even through here, when my kiddies were little the creek out here was eleven foot deep in parts.

*What happened? Did it just silt up like the others?*

Yes. Although a bit of it started here when one of the neighbours changed the course of the creek.

*And what theory do you favour? Do you think it's the rabbits and wombats?*

No, I don't think it was the rabbits, I *know* it was the rabbits. My brothers, Lem and Hal and Hers and Chris used to do the rabbiting - I don't think Lou did.

I used to trail along after them because I was the only girl after five boys. I know I was a pest, but I used to go anyway. (I was the baby of the family and absolutely spoilt rotten.) I can remember they'd have maybe a hundred and fifty traps set in one place, and then they'd have another hundred set somewhere else. To my knowledge, the most they ever caught in one night from a hundred and fifty traps was two

hundred and sixty rabbits. With that many around, you can't tell me they didn't do any damage!

You'd have your traps set to a pattern - you'd follow a ridge around, or go along under the ridge or whatever, and they used to go round them just before dark, then they'd get up at midnight and go round them, then they'd get up at four or five o'clock in the morning and go around them again. It was all winter work, too. If they were right up the Run they used to take the old spring cart and camp underneath it. And the only light you had was a lantern.

*How'd they carry them? They must've got heavy.*

You used to just keep going back and forth to the cart. *(Pause)*... Earlier on, the milk and cream used to go over Yarramalong way to Wyong. After John Armstrong bought the milk business he was taking the cream through first to Cessnock and later on to Hexham. He used to make a pickup at the Dairy Arm turn-off - everybody took their cream to there - and he used to take the rabbits too. The boys used to have to have their rabbits down there at three in the morning. They used to get threepence for a rabbit, then it got up to fivepence. It was big money!

*It would've cost them a lot for so many traps though, wouldn't it?*

Yes, but the traps weren't that expensive in those days. But if you lost a trap you went looking for it, all the same.

*You'd think they'd be a bit easy to lose in the bush like that...*

Oh, they always knew where their traps were - which amazed me - but odd times a fox'd get in a trap and take it off or something. But then if they caught a fox then that was fantastic because they got paid perhaps a shilling for a fox.

*And they had to clean and skin that many?*

Yes, and I've never eaten rabbit in my life and I don't plan to start. I couldn't stand them. And you had to leave the kidney and the liver in, because if you didn't they wouldn't accept it. If there was the tiniest speck of white on the liver then that was it, because it meant that it had hydatids.

*And Armstrong used to pick up the carcasses of the rabbits, not the skins?*

No. The skins were dried on hoops of wire and sent to Singleton later on in bundles.

*I hadn't realised that trapping rabbits reached such proportions. People actually made a bit of money out of it?*

Well, it was great pocket money for the children. To me, that was the start of the problems with the creeks. There were warrens all over the flats and even up onto the hills, because everywhere was so sandy. But after they put the myxomatosis around, well that finished the rabbit industry very quickly. I reckon the way that those rabbits died was terrible. It took them days to die.

But after, the rabbits... in came the wombats! Now they're as big a pest as the rabbits were. We've got one under the house here - the rotten thing. But they're very highly protected and you can't go round shooting them or anything. And of course the wattles didn't help the banks of the creeks either. Wattles don't live long, and as they die the root system shrinks and the rush of water takes the tree down, and pulls the banks away if they're growing near the edge.

*And what do you think is going to happen. Will it just keep silting up and silting up?*

I don't know. My youngest son reckons that it will just work itself out in time. He reckons it's just history repeating itself, but I don't know.

*And what do you think about Landcare's idea that the hills have been cleared too much, which encouraged erosion of the topsoil into the creeks?*

Well, I do think that was a contributing factor in some places, but it's not the only factor, and I don't think it was the cause in every place. My father did a lot of bush clearing here - probably too much, I'd have to say - and he probably did round in Murray's Run too. But then again, it was a phase of life. We had to have it cleared to have cattle, whereas today perhaps we don't need it as much because a lot of people have not got cattle now.

I do think that in places where there was a lot of clay you got slips. We've got a couple of places up here where the land has slipped down the hill, and this side of Grays', but before you get to Roe's there's also a slip there. But I don't think it was as big a factor as some in Landcare think. I think Landcare's doing a good job at the moment, but I also think that the person that lives here knows more about it than they do.

*Mmmm. When it's dry weather you can't imagine that it'd ever flood can you? You've got to see it to know what can happen.*

This is right. Mrs Baker from Murray's Run - she's one of the teachers at Laguna now, she teaches part time there - she was up here at a craft weekend, (Mrs Hoipo does craft weekends). I was talking to her and she said to me: "What do you mean when you said that you couldn't come down to clean on Monday because there was a flood. I went up there and there couldn't have been a flood because it was as dry as anything!" It can come up, and go down, really quick. You've got to have a back-up in Wollombi to keep the water up here - which has happened at times, especially in 1949.

But we had a flash flood through here once - there was a storm in the afternoon. It must have virtually poured out at the heads of the valleys, because it came right up to under the house at the back here. There was a chap here at the time who'd come up after a load of timber, and he said: "Oh, I'd better be going. It looks like a storm. I'd better get out before it rains". But he didn't get out, and he ended up staying here the night. It went right up over our pig pens and everything - yet the next morning when you got out of bed you looked around and it had all gone down again, and you wondered a bit if it had all really happened! See, being a storm like that there was nothing lower down to back it up.

*Is there anything that comes to mind that you particularly associate with your youth and growing up in the area?*

(Pause). Well... there used to be a lot of hard work.

*What were the fun times? Everyone mentions the hard work, and you only occasionally hear of skylarking or kids playing round the waterholes and that.*

We were never allowed to swim in the creeks or anything - even my brothers didn't. I can't swim, and Lennie can't go in the water because he gets cramps something shocking. My father did too, which might have been one of the reasons we weren't allowed to go in. We've got a dam up the hill here but I won't let the kids swim in it, because if they got into difficulties I couldn't go in after them, and I'd just have to stand there and watch them drown. I hate water.

*Maybe you'd feel differently if you'd learnt to swim!*

(Laughs) Yes, maybe! But I'll never know! (Digression).

*So what are the good times you think of when you look back? Christmas? Holidays?*

Oh Christmas was great. School holidays? They were OK I suppose, but I didn't like school very much - I left when I was thirteen. I suppose I would have gone a bit longer only... having that type of school, one group of the children that used to come there came from way out at Boree, and we boarded them at home.

They used to ride over at the beginning of the school term and they lived with us till they went home at the next school holidays.

*Do you remember any of their names?*

Oh yes! There was Gloria and Bill and Arthur and Bentley - the four Bailey children. Then later when there was the rest of the Bailey children - Heather and Max and Donald... well, you can board four children but there's no way you're going to board seven of them so they moved into Cessnock to live. Then we had the McMullens - Linda, Bert, Jean, Clem and Thelma. They used to ride over the ridge to school. And Neville Thompson's older brother John, he used to ride over to school. He'd been going to a boarding school in Newcastle, but he had a very bad accident, and when he came out of hospital he went to school with us over home. But when the numbers dropped and we didn't have enough to keep the school going, it would have meant that I had to go to Laguna to school, and I didn't have any way of getting there each day so I left school. I stayed home and looked after my grandfather with Mum. He was an invalid then. My Mum lived till she was 96 - she was more energetic than I am now. She couldn't manage all the hills around here and she went to live with my daughter Rosamond in Cessnock, but even up to within a few weeks of when she died she'd go down town to Cessnock and do her own shopping. She was very independent. (Pause)...

*Things are very different now to what they were, that's for sure. What do you think has brought about the major differences? Roads, getting the power on...*

That'd have to be part of it, yes. The technology's different now. Everything seems to go faster now. Everyone has a car now, but when John and Bob Armstrong had the milk lorry and that there were very few people around here who had a car. For your groceries, you wrote a list down and Bob's wife or John's wife would go down town and they'd do your shopping for you and send it back out on the milk lorry in the afternoon. Often they'd pay for it, and you paid for it on your account at the end of the month. Bob used to bring the bread for years. It was fourpence a loaf! He brought it for years and years and years, then all of a sudden it wasn't thought to be hygienic for him to bring it on the milk lorry. So one of the bread people in town - Yeatman's I think it was in those days - they started to deliver bread. They did that for years, too, but it's no longer a viable proposition out here because a lot of these new people around here make their own.

*It's all gone full circle, hasn't it! Have you made your own bread much?*

No. I wouldn't mind having a go at it, but I didn't listen as I was growing up - my mother had a yeast recipe which she always made but I can't remember it. She used to make bread three days a week - seven loaves on Monday, seven loaves on Wednesday and seven loaves on Saturday.

*How big was the family, again?*

Well there was my Mum and Dad, six of us, my grandfather, (my grandmother had died when I was three), and we used to have eighteen for lunch each school day, see? Even though they rode to school, they never brought their lunch.

*Did your mother stand the cost of that?*

Yes. Mum did all that.

*But wasn't that seen as an imposition?*

John Thompson did. When he came to school his mother used to give him a packed lunch. And the ones that boarded paid two and sixpence a week, and for that they got breakfast, lunch and tea. They were part of the family, virtually.

*And presumably they helped around the place as well, did they ?*

Oh yes. They helped with the chores. For a while two of the McMullens boarded, and after that they rode to school, but while they boarded they always churned the butter every other morning.

*Was it fun to be part of a big group like that?*

Well it was. It would have been lonely on your own. They were a terrific bunch. There were never any arguments or rows or anything. I can't ever remember any of us fighting. At school, I got the cane every day for three years - except for one day.

*You got the cane? As a girl they still caned you?*

Gee! Don't you think girls are naughty too? I took the cake for that, don't worry.

*What were you doing wrong ?*

I never knew my work. History! Every day we had history - and geography - I got the cane. It didn't make me learn it any better but it must have improved me somewhere along the line I suppose - I don't know. The only date I could ever remember was Magna Carta - "the great charter of English liberty and rights", and it's never done me a bit of good! Not a bit! I remember Jean McMullen and I were being naughty, but I was the ringleader. The teacher just walked along with the cane and hit us around the legs under the desk. I saw Jean jump, and she got the cane and I didn't, and I was the one that should have! But we never said anything, you know - I didn't tell the teacher.

*This teacher wasn't Mardi was it?*

No. She taught up Murray's Run. She was a lovely lady - she taught for years up there. We've had various teachers over the years - Miss Collins and Miss Graham and Miss Bowditch and Miss Strachan.

*Did they come to teach here from the city?*

Yes.

*It must have been a bit of a change for them, was it?*

I think they probably enjoyed it. We also had two of my cousins who taught school - Neville Thompson's first cousins, actually - Eileen and Iris Thompson. They both taught school at home too.

I said that there was one day that I didn't get the cane. That was because the teacher's sister had died and she'd gone to the funeral. Even so, she set all the work out and my brother Hersel made sure we did those lessons that day. Of course he didn't hit any of us. But the work was there and we had to do it for when she came back the next day. I think at the time I probably wished she had a few more sisters that would have died! (*Laughs*).

If I were a teacher today I'd get thrown out in no time because more than half of the kids'd get a belting from me every day! I wouldn't put up with the way kids behave today sometimes. I really wouldn't. My kids got the strap when they needed it. My daughter Rosamond said to me recently: "Mum, what would we have been like if we hadn't have?" On the whole they were good kids, but if they had to be checked they were checked.

Then they started a bus service for high school. That was a big thing for the kids round here - to be able to go into Cessnock and go to high school, though I don't really think I missed anything by not going to high school. My oldest girl didn't go - she did correspondence from Laguna school, and my youngest boy didn't go because by then I'd decided that I had no use for high schools. Rosamond had gone, and James had gone, and Ronald... and I couldn't see that it had done anything for them. Rosamond did fairly well at school, but the two boys didn't. She and her husband have the Millfield shop now. They live round here in the next little valley, not at Millfield, but my youngest son is at Millfield

*So people don't move far away when they move?*

No! (*Laughs*). My eldest brother lived for years in Murray's Run, just next door to Les and Flo Sternbeck - this side. But he sold out and he lives over at Wyoming now. Hal used to be where Roes are now, but he had a stroke and his daughter took him down to town. And Hersel moved from up here to Scone and started a dairy there, but he died of a massive heart attack.

*Do you happen to know where your parents got names like Hersel and Lemington ? They're not common names, are they? I don't think I've heard of either of them before.*

Well it's funny, because my brother Chris has a brother-in-law who's called Lemington as well! I know where Hersel got his name from - it was after Harry Beavan in Yarramalong. They knew him and just liked the name. Harry Beavan was Hersel Beavan - his name wasn't Harry. We always called Lem "Lem" and not Lemington - he was Lemington James. Hal was Harold Horace. Hersel was Hersel Claude. Chris was Christian Francis, and Lou was Lindsay Cecil. Lindsay got Lou because Dad's sister used to call him Lou-Lou when he was little, and it sort of stuck.

*And what's yours?*

Ivy Elizabeth Pearl. I was very honoured - there was only me and I got three! We named our eldest son James Francis after my grandfather. He was 93 when he died - Jimmy Sternbeck. He had the beef cattle in Murray's Run for many years.

Billy Crump and the family dairied for years up Watagan Creek. His father dairied. They used to do the silage and all that sort of stuff. We never put silage in at home, but there were people around here who did. Ken Thompson and Keith Thompson both had the big cement silos. I don't know that Les' father ever had silage in. They've got a nice farm up there, Les and Flo. Even through the droughts they have plenty of water - they've always been lucky like that and always had lots of water.

*Sounds like if you didn't dairy you had a bit of an easier life. You didn't have to get up as early to milk and you didn't have to get back early from the cricket ...When you're dairying you're a slave to it seven days a week...*

This is true. And you hear people say they want a five day working week, but the cattle don't understand that! It was a family business and that's it. You just get in and do it. I never learned to milk a cow. Wasn't I lucky?

*I don't know. I've never milked one either!*

When I was little I wanted to learn, and the boys wouldn't hear of it, you know. But then when I grew up a bit and they didn't want to do it, I didn't want to learn! And I never learned to drive a car or swim, or anything...

In earlier times cutting wattle bark was quite a busy occupation around the district. Len's uncles used to come into Murrays Run for a long time cutting up wattle bark. They used to have a bark hut on what became my brother Lem's property later on and it became known as The Bark Humpty. It's still called that by locals today.

The Dehns from Mogo also used to cut a lot of bark around the area. It meant stripping, cutting and drying the bark before sending it off to Sydney where it was used for tanning. Earlier it was cut into lengths about 30 to 40 inches long, but as time went on the Sydney buyers wanted it cut into chip-sized pieces. My mother used to tell us how the Andrews boys would buy butter and eggs from them when they were getting the bark, and how they'd dig a hole in the ground to keep the butter firm in the summer. I don't know how much people were paid for the bark but I've no doubt it was quite profitable at the time. Wattle bark is still used by some tanneries today - but of course not to the same extent.

As I look back over the years I don't feel I'd have changed a lot. I love the old days, but I realise my life has been much easier thanks to my parents and grandparents. Everything moves so fast these days and I'm sure this makes life harder for the younger generation. I'm very proud of our little valley of Blaxlands Arm, and I'm proud and thankful for my neighbours, friends and family around me. I couldn't ask for more, really.

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