



Steve Lynch

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*Were you born here, Steve? On this property?*

Yes. On this spot.

*But not in a hospital - in this house?*

That's right.

*And when was that?*

That's eighty two and a half years ago.

*Did your Dad come here from somewhere else?*

My father was reared just up here. There's a swamp a bit further up the road, and the old house was where the stockyard is on the bend. My grandfather was John Lynch, and my father was Fred.

*So your father was born here too, was he?*

Oh, he'd've been born up there I suppose. I don't know.

*And your Mum?*

She was reared just over the creek here. Crumps.

*She was a Crump ? Was she related to Bill Crump?*

Billy Crump?

*Yes. Aren't there two lots of Crumps - Bill and Cleve ?*

There were two lots of Crumps here in Watagan. Isaac Crump and William Crump - they were brothers. Isaac Crump was my grandfather.

*And did you go to the Watagan school?*

Up here? Yes. Three days a week one week then two days at Laguna, then three days at Laguna and two days at Watagan.

*So they shared the teacher between the two schools?*

Yes. Before that, there was a teacher named Lochran who lived up here just past the school, and he taught in Watagan two days and three days over in Dairy Arm just over the ridge.

*When you weren't at school were you helping around the farm?*

Oh, always.

*Was it a big family?*

There were nine of us. Four deaf and dumb girls.

*The girls were but the boys weren't - do they know why that was?*

Nope.

*And you would have left school when you were fourteen or something like that?*

Fifteen I was, I think.

*And you went to work on the farm ?*

Oh yes. But I worked a lot on it before I left school. I'd get home from school and go and clean corn for the rest of the day. I've worked here ever since, growing corn and getting timber out of the bush - they were the main jobs.

*Was the timber for the mills at Millfield?*

In my time yes, but I think in the earlier days they took timber to Cessnock. But before my time there was a mill here in Wollombi.

*I didn't know that.*

Oh yes. There were even two or three flour mills in Wollombi at one time. In the early times nearly everyone grew wheat. Then they went from wheat to corn.

*Was that because the rust got the wheat?*

I don't know if it was that, or that they went further out and found better country for wheat.

*So did you just grow corn? You didn't run any stock?*

Oh yes. We always had stock. This place here has been a dairy for as long as I can remember.

*Did you start off on cream and then go to milk?*

Yes. Cream and pigs. 'Cos the pigs got the separated milk. And cooked pie melon and pumpkin and the waste corn. There was a lot of pigs reared here at one time.

*Why did that stop?*

Well, when we went on the milk you had to give the pigs up because you couldn't send milk and have pigs too. There was a lot of work attached to the pigs - feeding them two or three times a day.

*Have you ever been tempted to move out of the district?*

No. No, I never got tempted to. There's no place like home, is there?

*And does a tanker come in here?*

Every two days. A fortnight ago there was a blackout here - all up Cockfighter and Yango and all these spurs about here, and we had to let the milk go.

*It just went off?*

Well they wouldn't take it because it hadn't been cooled for such a time. They won't take it now, but we've had it here for four days other times and they still took it. Everything's tightening up.

*And when the tankers came a lot of people got out of dairying, didn't they?*

Well everyone did, practically. We kept on here, and Crumps over here kept on till the last three or four years, and now there's one feller dairying in Congewai, and one in Millfield, and I don't think there'd be another one till you got out Rothbury way.

*But there would have been dozens before?*

Oh everyone. Everyone was dairying. But the younger ones get a sniff of the town, and a bit of a job - and a sniff of the pubs, and they gradually got out.

*Do you think it's got better or worse?*

Well you'd say it's got worse for the district, because one time everyone had cattle, and that was bringing in a bit of revenue. Now, there's only McMullens up Watagan there towards the top where the black cattle are. They've all gone now, and there's all new settlers come in, and all they've got is scrub - no cattle. Now that must be a loss to the community.

*And does this house date back to your childhood?*

No, it does not. I cut the timber for it with an axe. It's not been up that long, this one.

*What do you call 'not long'? How long?*

Oh, it might be twenty years now.

*But you still used an axe? Are none of the rafters and that sawn?*

Everything's sawn. I cut the trees down with an axe, then loaded the logs onto a truck and they were taken to Cessnock and cut up and brought back.

*What sort of species did you prefer?*

Stringybark. It's all stringybark - though there might be a bit of turpentine, but very little.

*And you were a timbergetter yourself?*

Yes, I was. I worked all round these mountains out here for years - me and my brother. We started off with

bullocks, then we got down to the hauler, then the tractor. We've still got a tractor.

*Do you miss the bullocks?*

Oh ...not exactly. Not now, anyway.

*Do you know any of the timber men from over Yarramalong?*

No. I didn't know much about Yarramalong. I knew Lachie Waters - he was a feller about my age. I've seen him playing cricket a few times. Then there was Harry Beavan, Reg Beavan. I had an uncle in the shop just past where Bumble Hill comes down to the road at the bottom - Mick Lynch.

*What sort of shop was it?*

A grocery shop I think. Then there was Martins and Sylvesters. They used to travel through here with cattle a fair bit when I was young. Jim Martin, Tom Sylvester, Charlie Sylvester.

*Were you a cricketer?*

Yes. I played. I played over in Yarramalong two or three times.

*How far afield did you travel for games - into Cessnock?*

Into Cessnock, yeah. We had a team here that was Wollombi and Watagan combined - played in Cessnock for years.

*And nobody ever played football ? Nobody interested?*

No. I can't even watch it on the television. I never knew anything about it and it looks to me like brutality.

*Mmmm. Legalised thuggery it looks like sometimes. Other people talk about the dances a lot. Did you go to them?*

The dances? No. I was never interested in them. They had a hall up here just the other side of the school about two hundred yards - a big slab place, but I only knew it when it was falling down.

*Did you have to go into Laguna to get the mail and things like that?*

No. In my time there's always been a mail run. It's every day now. Until recently it used to be only every second day.

*So you did all your work in the bush before chainsaws ?*

Well, I've worn out a few of them, too. In fact we had one here at one time - the first one - with a blade on it about five foot long. It was a two man saw, and it was cumbersome. They were good when they were going, but they weren't always going, I'll tell you - like all chainsaws.

*What was it - a Danarm?*

I forget what brand it was. It didn't last long, and we got onto the Danarm then. It was a heavy cow.

*I heard that the early chainsaws had different shaped teeth in them. Could you file them sharp yourself?*

My brother used to do it at one time. When he got past that I took it on. I still sharpen them.

*What shape were the early teeth if they weren't like they are these days?*

They just stuck up straight like on a handsaw or a crosscut saw. They were hard to keep sharp.

*And did getting the power on make much of a difference to your life?*

Well it made things a bit brighter of a night!

*But tractors and chainsaws would have made more of a difference to you on the farm, though?*

Oh yes... (Pause). In that other book I see Fred Woodbury mentioned. Did you know him?

*This is the Fred Woodbury that lived up under Flat Rock?*

Yes. Up near The Basin. He was reared up here. He would've been about my father's age. A pretty wild boy, though.

*Was he? What makes you say he was wild?*

Well he was wild. He'd just as soon hit you as not, from what I've heard of him.

*He'd get into fights?*

Oh yes. He wasn't frightened of that. I've seen him quite a bit. He used to ride through the bush here, and he might turn up at eight or nine o'clock of a night. He reared a family out there. Worked on the timber.

*Where'd he go, do you know?*

I don't know what happened to him, but they've been out of over there for along time now. I've surveyed it out there on horseback a good bit looking for cattle.

*Did everybody have to fence their properties, right up into the mountains, or did you let the cattle go and then try and find them?*

It wasn't all fenced in the mountains. Locally it was only fenced where the cattle usually run. We had cattle out on a selection in the bush there - there were a few Devon heifers we'd bought and one day I was out looking around out there and they were coming back in round the creek coming down. I got ahead of them with the dog and gave them a turn back. They were a bit wild, and they went like blazes. When we checked up again there were two missing. We searched about but there was not a sign of them, so John and I - that's the brother - decided that we'd go out Flat Rock way on horseback looking for them, and we found them there. They'd got on the road and went.

*Would cattle wandering around like that ever get duffed?*

We've had cattle duffed here, my word. We had fourteen or fifteen go in a mob one time. There was a good bit of exploring about the bush - policemen and a few more. Even over into Martinsville and Cooranbong and all out that way. There was a show on at Cessnock on the Friday night, and those cattle were brought back over our place and across over into Dairy Arm.

*They brought them back?*

Well most of them.

*Why do you think they brought them back?*

Because they had the wind up, that's why. There's been other cases too, but never anyone got into any trouble.

*So it wasn't common.?*

Oh no. Only isolated cases.

*And did you always run the same breed of cattle?*

Oh no. Not always. When dairying was on first they were mostly Illawarras, then we got through to

Guernseys, and now we've got practically all Friesians.

*And what about horses? Did you ever breed them?*

Oh yes, they used to breed horses here. Draught horses. It was nothing to see six or seven of them out there looking for a feed.

*Australian draught horses, were they?*

Yes. That's what the early farming was done with. Many's the mile I've gone behind a plough.

*Single mouldboard?*

Yes. Then discs. Then they got down to the rotary hoe. It's not much good for crops - if you go over it a few times with the rotary hoe you've got a hard surface underneath.

*Because it only nibbles at the top?*

Mmmm. *(Pause)*.

*You said you cut the timber for this house yourself Did you build the house yourself too, or have it built?*

We had it built. Feller named Gabb built it - Jack Gabb. My brother lived down here in that blue house down on the corner, and he had a son named Bob, and Bob was apprenticed to this Gabb feller. Gabb gave it up a few years ago and Bob went on with it, and now he's supposed to be one of the best builders there is in Cessnock.

*Did you build any of the outbuildings, or do your own fencing?*

I've done all the fencing that's about here, but I've never done much building. I'd build a pigsty or something like that up the back, but not much more than that.

*And were the fences all post and rail?*

Post and rail, yes. Done with a morticing axe and an adze.

*And if you had to build a fence now would you still use those tools?*

No. I'd use a chainsaw now, and I'd use a chainsaw to mortice the posts now instead of the morticing axe... It was a pretty tough job.

*But you enjoyed doing it?*

Well, I wouldn't say I enjoyed it. It had to be done, that was all.

*Do you miss those days now?*

No, I don't miss them - they still crop up a good bit. But electricity's taken over with the fencing. You can run an electric fence from here to the bales - that'd be two miles - with spurs off it everywhere... even with a young calf, if he touches his nose on the wire a couple of times he won't go near that fence again.

*So that saves you money in the long run then, does it?*

I suppose it would. It still costs a lot for electricity, though.

*And did you grow crops like saccolene and that?*

Oh yes.

*And did you make silage with it?*

Yes. We had three pits round there at that shed. It was a stinking job. You couldn't get the stink of it off your clothes or anything. But it was good for the cattle.

*Did you mix anything with it?*

Yes, we mixed a bit of pollard with it, or cracked corn. We grew our own corn, and put it through the hammer mill. Now we only grow hay.

*Why is that? Why don't you grow the same range of crops as you used to?*

It's cheaper, and an easier job, I suppose. The cows are feeding on the improved pasture for most of the year. When it comes up to October you let it go for a week or two and get a good crop of hay off it. We've got an eighty by forty shed up the back there full of hay.

*Why didn't they just grow hay fifty years ago?*

Well they didn't know anything about it in those times. And they're improving the strains of rye grass and clover all the time. You've got a job to keep up with them now.

*So do you think farm management is better now?*

Yes - it'd have to be. There's a helluva lot of manure used on here - super, urea and stuff.

*Does that mean the paddocks would be more fertile than they were in your father's day?*

They're not fifty percent of what they were fifty years ago. The '55 and '56 floods took most of the topsoil away. It was just left bare.

*It never recovered?*

No, not properly. It never will. Those floods when they went through Wollombi made the creek there about five times the capacity it was before. There used to be a shop on the corner opposite the wine shop in Wollombi, and the water practically went over the counter. There was a lot of water went down that time.

If the rain had been general on the Hunter then, Maitland wouldn't have been what it is today. In the '56 flood they got no water from the Upper Hunter to make a flood - it all came from this way. If they'd had rain in the Upper Hunter and it joined in with the water coming from here you can imagine what would have happened! As it was, cows went out to the ocean - one went out on a bale of hay. They had it rough in Maitland there for a week or two. They were calling for help to clean up, and I went there one day and I was put into cleaning an old house out. You get that black mud on the floors.

*Did it stink?*

You can imagine!

*What'd you do? Hose it out?*

Scatched it out and swept it out. As it turned out the house was of no value and wasn't used for anything.

*I suppose we could have another big flood anytime... ?*

We must be nearly due for one because we haven't had one for years and years.

*And if it's a big one, does that mean the paddocks'll get wiped out again?*

It won't exactly wipe them out because they're not ploughed up now like they used to be. If you had it ploughed up and sown with something then it was all loose soil and once it started to go it all went. But now there's not much ploughed up. People have woken up that if you're going to keep on turning it up the

flood's gonna keep on taking it. The banks of the creek would be that bit higher than the flat outside them in most places where it's been cultivated for years and years. And now the wombats have come in, and they're the biggest curse there is because they put great holes into the ground round the creek and water comes rushing into the holes ...And they're protected.

*D'you reckon that there's more wombats now than there used to be?*

You wouldn't see a wombat in my young days about here.

*Is that because you used to shoot them?*

I don't know why it was but they've only been bad for the last thirty years or so I suppose. Now you can't grow corn because of them. They eat the stalks down, eat the corn off it. One time they had fruit everywhere about here, but you can't grow fruit now. You've got parrots, satinbirds...

*But why weren't they just as much of a problem years ago?*

I think it's all the new settlers about in the bush that are frightening them in.

*Weren't satinbirds a problem with the fruit when you were young ?*

No. They weren't.

*What sort of fruit used to be grown?*

Quinces, peaches, apples, pears, nectarines, persimmons - there used to be a lot about.

*Enough to send to market, or just enough for your own use?*

Only for your own use. I pulled some of the old trees out up here twelve months ago with the tractor, and they would have been eighty to ninety years old I suppose.

*They would have had some beautiful wood in the trunks I'd imagine.*

No, that's another pest we've got - those great long grubs. They won't let a pine tree or an elm tree or anything like that grow now - they burrow into them and get inside them - and these apple trees and pear trees were the same. Eaten right out. And of course white ants is another big problem.

*What did you do for white ants in the old days?*

We used to put fire in their nests - that's about all that was ever done. I can remember them being found in this house years ago, and we had a pest control treatment. That's supposed to be done every year. But the area is riddled with white ants. Lift a stone up and there'll be white ants under it. *(Pause)*.

*What did you do to your finger? (The middle finger on one hand is bent at the last joint).*

That? I got that from the axe handle.

*From just using it?*

Yes. It's never been a trouble at all.

*Did you ever have any accidents or dramas when you were in the bush?*

I got hit on the arm with a chainsaw once. It hooked into something and kicked back. You'd wonder how it could kick back enough to hit you on the arm, but it did. And it gashed it in pretty deep, I'll tell you. And I've put the axe into my foot a time or two, but nothing to hurt much.

*No?*

Oh well... I got down to the bone there on my instep one time. The doctor was messing about with it, and I told him I didn't think it was down to the bone. He was a foreigner of some kind - I think he was a German - and he got a pair of tweezers and tapped on the bare bone. And that was the biggest hurt I ever got!

*Were you in hospital for that?*

No. He stitched it up - and it never went against me. I've had all sorts of complaints, though. I got hit on that arm by a wire rope one time.

*Did it snap?*

No. The bullocks tightened up and it picked up - it must've been hooked on something, and it swung onto me. The next day or the day after I was grooving slabs out of an old ironbark log and jarring myself pretty well and it turned into an abscess and I had a month in hospital. Then I got a carbuncle on the back of my neck and had another month in hospital with that. And I've had a couple of minor strokes in the last seven years - but I'm still going.

*Are any of your brothers still in the area?*

They're not alive.

*Did they stay here, or did they move away?*

No, they stayed here.

*So the Lynch family all up must have owned a fair bit of Walagan then?*

Yes. And anything we ever had we've still got... Though that's not quite right because there was one part sold to Woodburys up there at one time - Jim Woodbury. You can see where he used to live from here. He was the father of Fred. He had three or four other sons. One was named Hubie. Another one was Will, who was a bit of a cricketer but he lost one eye. Then there was another one went to New Zealand - I think he was Charlie, but I didn't know him at all. If you start at the top of the creek there was Tom Hams. That's changed down through the years and I think it's all cut up into blocks now. The next one down is where McMullen is. After that was John Cameron. McMullens from Dairy Arm bought him out, and they still own it. One of the Harris boys lived down further. Then we come to Bob Langan's - he reared a family up there. I think they're all gone now and it's all cut up.

Then there was another house over the creek, but I've got no recollection who was in it. We come on down and there was Hockeys, and then there was Hawkins - in fact I think there was two families of Hawkins that lived there at one time. Then you come to Woodbury's... the school... then down to our place. O'Briens over there on the hill apiece, then down to Crumps and Mannix's. My grandmother was a Mannix.

Then we go on down - the Campbells - two or three lots of Campbells, the Diplocks... then you get down to Laguna and Mother Woodbury, Matt Woodbury - he'd be related to the ones over Mangrove and over that way. That's all sold up now, and I don't know how many houses there are on the place now. That brings you to Laguna, and then on up Dairy Arm, Murray's Run, and Fernances Creek and the road to Yango and those places. They tell me there's houses everywhere out that way in the bush. The days the fires came through this year stirred some of them up a bit - burnt some of them out... You hear different tales about the fires, but I don't think it was as bad as it was made out to be in the papers.

In fact, there's two young fellers that worked here two days a week - they went to Tocal college together. One of them couldn't afford to go on past the first year - a terrible handy feller, he was. They got in the Fire Brigade business and they didn't make out that the fires were that terrible - what they seen of it.

Another time when I was in hospital recently with something a feller came in there and he was talking to us. He was reared about here and he was out Boree and Yango way during the fires. He came to a house and there was a fire truck pulled up alongside of it with two fellers sitting down in the shade of it. He asked them why they didn't do something to save the house. "Look," one feller said to him, "we can't do anything till we're told."

There'd be a lot of that. In fact I've experienced it myself a bit. We got a new neighbour up on top of a point just over there. It's steep. One day there was a fire making up to it - a hot, windy day it was - and I thought I'd go over and see if I could do anything. I go over, and there's no-one at home. This house is on top of a knob, and it's nice and cleared down one side, but out the other side is all the timber that had been knocked down to build the house, all lying around. It had been laying there a few years, and you can imagine how that would go up on a hot and windy day. The heat and the fire nearly got me down, but I saved the house. The local fire brigade turned up and I'd had to sit down in the shade. There were two fellers in it - the chief was driving, and another feller. What do you think they done? The chief starts ringing here there and everywhere while the other feller gets a dozen of beer out of the truck and sits down alongside me! The smoke's boiling up all round the house and they didn't have a clue if there was anybody in it or not!

Before that, this feller's parents were up there higher, right up on a cliff, and I went up to see what was going on - whether they were in trouble. A few years before, my brother and I were asked to pull a tree down that they'd built round. It was a grey gum growing straight up alongside the house. We did that, and I asked if they wanted it cut up and pulled away out of the road. "No, leave him there," he said, "I'll cut him up for firewood." Then this fire came through. It came right through from Laguna, right round the ridge, and by the time I got there the fire was really close to the verandah and burning like hell - all old bark just peeling off and laying alongside this tree we'd felled some time before. The old woman that was there has got a bucket, and she's going to a practically empty tank. By the time she'd got a drop in the bucket and got back the fire's gone further than where she'd left it - and that's what was going on when I got there. I scratched all the stuff from around the tree and soon that bit of the fire was out.

*How long ago was this?*

That'd be ten or twelve years ago. And they're still in the same place and it's still as big a fire hazard now as it was then. So how do you help them - when they won't help themselves and won't take any notice of what you tell them?

But we've got good people here though - I tell you we've had good people come here lately. You might have noticed a bigger house up in the gully back here a bit - well this bloke came here and he got a bit of a block up on top of the mountain, and he built a sort of a house there with rotten gum trees and anything he could cut up with a chainsaw - I think the white ants took charge.

A councillor from one of the big shires in Sydney had built a house up this gully here I mentioned, and he was living there for a bit, but he got sick of it and sold out to this first feller. He bought it off him and built that house that's there now - it'd open your eyes to see it - it's a big house. He was a good feller, that feller. He was working two or three mile away doing something, and he was in as good spirits as he ever was. His wife had to take the kids to school and she noticed as she went down that his truck was somewhere it shouldn't have been, but she took no notice then. When she checked up on it coming back she found him in it, out to it. He'd taken some sort of a stroke or a brain haemorrhage or something. The helicopter came in and picked him up and took him to the John Hunter hospital and put him on a life support machine. They had him on it for a day or so. but they had to take it off him and let him go. And that's what happened to Gordon. His wife's still there.

There's been a couple of them died. There was one up here in one of McMullen's houses - a Yugoslav or something. He used to take some sort of mad fits and finished up doing himself over. And there was

another young woman up here recently who got a cancer and died - this is all just in the last few years with these people who have come in here. I went to the funeral service here in Laguna for this woman and it was the biggest turn-out that there's ever been here in Laguna. She'd only been here for a few years, so she must have been alright.

*The newcomers are friendly, are they? You get to know them?*

Oh yes. Most of them are very friendly. You come up against some characters, too.

*Have you known some characters over the years from around the district?*

Oh I suppose so. Hubie Woodbury that used to live up there was a character - he was a bit of everything. He was an auctioneer - had the cattle yards there at Wollombi for years. He liked to run everyone's business - he was that sort of bloke. But they've all gone now. Billy Crump's trying to sell the homestead. That's the last bit of land that the Crumps own, and they used to have from that creek down there to a couple of mile below Wollombi - straight through. It's all gone now.

*And what do you think will happen to your place here ?*

Here? Oh, I dunno. I don't think it's got a big future. The two boys that run it here are both bachelors. I suppose you could say I've reared them here. The young feller's mother died when he was born, and he's been here ever since.

But by crikey there's a lot of people in this district now. You go to anything and you might know about three people at it. I suppose it's the same over your way?

*Mmmm. I bought my land seventeen years ago and I've been living there full-time for eleven years. So I'm still a newcomer myself.*

I've been down that Brush Creek a few times, but not many though. That's the way we used to go to Yarramalong to play cricket. Before my time they used to always go on horseback, but with me it was always cars.

*Did the people get together much in the old days? Did they have many parties?*

Oh yes. Often there were bits of dances and parties about.

*And I suppose a lot of things happened around the church too?*

Yes. The old church down here at Laguna - a bushfire came through there one time. It went through under that church and didn't burn it down. It charred the blocks. They'd still be under it now, but it never burnt down.

*And everybody used to go to church?*

Practically everyone. (*Digression*).

*Did you ever go out around Yango way much ?*

I know nothing about Yango, only... one evening I was down on the creek there at Laguna fishing, and I had an old blitz truck we used to use in the bush. It was standing beside the road where the road goes up over the hill to Yango now and three or four louts came along and got out and rifled the kit tin on it. I followed them that night - and the fellow that was with me, Harry Brown - right out there into Boree. But that's the only time I've been over the road there, other than playing tennis with the Goodwins just over the hill.

*Did you catch them?*

Oh, they put up a bit of a show that night but I went in and saw the policeman, and him and a detective

went out the next day and they talked them into it. Got most of the stuff back, and he got fined or something. I didn't even have to go to court over it.

*And when you were younger did you go shooting much?*

I went shooting a lot. There were a lot of wallaroos around at one time, and the Crumps from further down here had hounds. They used to come up nearly every Sunday morning and we'd go shooting. We were up there one day and I walked up on to a cliff of rocks and looked down, and there's the policeman's horse just down under me!

*And where was the policeman?*

He was somewhere there in the scrub. Another feller who was in the party had got out on the flat down below, and the policeman went down and bailed him up. He just scouted around the mountain and came back home.

*I haven't quite understood that. There was nothing illegal then about shooting, was there?*

You weren't allowed to shoot wallaroos, and especially on Sunday. You weren't allowed to shoot at all on Sunday.

*I didn't know that! Did people take any notice of that? Well, obviously they didn't...*

Oh they do, yes.

*And did you shoot the wallaroos because they were pests, or did you want to eat the meat or have the skins?*

Because they were pests. Last week Jim went over here to do something on the other side of the creek where they've got a bit of pasture, and there were eight big grey wallaroos on it. You know what's bringing them in? I think it's the improved pasture. It's sweeter. And all the houses about the bush now wouldn't be helping, I suppose.

*And when you'd shoot 'roos did you use the skins ?*

Oh one time they were skinned and pegged out and dried.

*And did the dogs eat the meat?*

Oh crikey yes!

*What else did you shoot? Did you shoot parrots for soup or anything like that?*

Oh cripes yes. Foxes, dingoes...

*How long have the dingoes been gone?*

I wouldn't know if they're gone. I'd say there'd still be one or two about the bush.

*What about wild pigs?*

No, they haven't come this far yet, but they're gradually getting down. Up Murrurundi and out that way they're thick.

*Turkeys ? Did you shoot the scrub turkeys ?*

No. I've never shot scrub turkeys. I've only seen one alive, to tell you the truth. There'd be a few of them about still.

*What other pests did you have to cope with?*

Pests? White cockatoos on corn are a hell of a mess. King parrots, rosella parrots, lowrie parrots...

*What did you do to keep them off the crop ?*

Nothing much. Shoot a few sometimes...

*And hope they didn't eat too much?*

Mmmm. Get it in before they eat it all. By crikey, white cockatoos could shift some corn! There's plenty of them about still. There's a feller with a training stable down here at Laguna - you might've noticed the track there just after you come by the old church. That's where the cockatoos live - picking up after the horses about there. Occasionally one or two will come here and start picking around the orange trees. There's a tree up the road here apiece where the old house used to be and they clean it up every year.

*(Changing the subject)* In the wartime there was a plane crashed here in Laguna.

*What sort of plane?*

An American plane. They were all Americans on it. One feller lost his life. It landed in a paddock just the other side of the bridge there - you know the first bridge you come to coming down, before you come up? It landed just over the road from there. It came through from Yango way and Wollombi way, and up the valley, dropping them out in parachutes all the way up. Another one got hooked up in a tree.

*Did the war have much of an affect on you, apart from ration books and that sort of thing?*

No. It never had any effect on us. We got measured up just in case, but that's about as far as it went.

*(Pause)* ... You know, it was the Americans put that road through out here on the mountain to Kulnura.

*George Downes Drive - the tar road? During the war?*

Before that the road used to go down to Wisemans Ferry. It wasn't all that long before that that Hubie Woodbury got a contract to lay poles on the road from Wollombi to Wisemans Ferry.

*What sort of poles? Power poles?*

Telephone poles - telegraph poles. A young feller named Woodbury and myself, we laid the poles from Wollombi all the way out along that mountain with a bullock team. And it was no time after that they pulled it all down again.

*Why'd they do that?*

Put it underground. Pretty wild country through there, and a lot of it. *(Pause)*.

*Looking back over your life, does any time stick out in your memory as being the good times?*

You could nearly say it's always been a good time here. Two or three bits of droughts, but I've had a good time most of my life...

Talking of floods before, the floods took all of Neville Thompson's paddocks over there at Dairy Arm. He'd have only been young then. I think it was the flood in '49. He had a big dairy there at that time, and it spoilt everything. His grandfather was the butcher. He used to cart the meat round.

*If you people killed your own beasts, how come he had a market for his meat?*

They didn't always kill their own - they mightn't have had suitable beasts and so forth. He was another one of the local auctioneers, old Thompson. The local vet, too.

*Did you know Neville's father?*

My word I knew him. And I knew his grandfather too - probably better than his father.

*Did you have many mates when you were a kid ?*

Not many, no. The Woodburys up here, and up further there was a young Langan. But just after he left school he went to the cows one morning and didn't return when he should have. One of the girls went to look for him and found him out to it.

*What had happened?*

No one ever knew.

*Was he dead?*

He wasn't dead then but he died in hospital that day. Other than that there were no young people about here. There were a couple of Crumps over there but they were all younger than me. At Laguna there was a few - the Browns. That Post Office at Laguna I can remember being in three generations of the Browns. Now they've all gone too. (*Digression*).

Back in 1893 we had the biggest drought that ever was here. It was pretty hard times then. I can remember my parents telling me that they were milking the cows there in the yard one morning and the clouds started coming in from over there. The cows turned round, looked at the clouds, and bellowed. You wouldn't think that was possible, would you?

*Really? They could tell the drought was going to break?*

They knew there was moisture coming, anyway. And at about that time my father and a couple of his mates had bullock teams and they set sail to the west. They went away carting wheat and wool - all the way up into Queensland, to Gympie and Charters Towers and those places. All with bullocks.

*Where would they get feed for them on the way?*

I suppose they'd get feed for them along the road, most places. People'd let them in for a night, especially if they were going to cart anything for them.

Then again, in the 1920s and 30s the pits were all going here in Cessnock, and that's when people turned to corn. They had a lot of horses in the pits, underground - a lot of draught horses, and they all had to be fed. I can remember we threshed a hundred bags of corn round at the old shed, and loaded it onto a bullock wagon there one day. Dad and I took that to Cessnock. It was a two day trip to get to Cessnock. At that time the Co-Op had a big store with a big laneway straight through the middle of it. I drove the wagon through it, straight down the middle, and unloaded the corn. It was a dry time then, because I didn't come back with the bullocks for the last couple of miles, and I went down into Wollombi Creek - Congewai Creek they used to call it then - to try and get enough water to wash myself. And I couldn't get any - from there back to where we were camped.

You were asking me about the older residents back in those days. There's one, a feller named Henry Prendergast. He lived further down here where Crumps, Diplocks and Campbells were. He ran as a member of parliament, but he wasn't successful. But that'd be a long way back - I didn't know him. (*Pause*). I think that's about it. I don't think I could add much more that might be interesting.

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