



Jack & Beryl McKay & Sybil James

(This interview is in two parts. The first part was with Jack and Beryl only, at their home at Woy Woy.)

Jack: I grew up on Murray's Run. I left there in 1937 when I was eighteen years old. It's all very different now - it's nearly all scrub. We had a dairy farm there and we had to keep it all cleared for the grass.

Did the cattle keep it all down, or did you have to slash it? I suppose you didn't have slashers then, did you?

Jack: No we just used brush hooks to chop it down by hand. We'd ringbark any stuff that ...like, if you ringbark a wattle tree it'll die off pretty quickly. But there's hardly any cattle on there now, though Les Sternbeck runs some of his stock up there. In a way, cutting up the top part where we used to own only ended up making Les' property bigger!

And there's no big waterholes there now like we used to have when I lived there. There were some very deep waterholes there then. We had tin canoes on 'em and everything.

What do you call deep?

Jack: Oh, twenty or thirty feet. We used to try to get down to touch the bottom, and it used to get pretty cold on your feet - we used to swim in the nuddy, you know.

Were there fish in them?

Jack: Oh yes. Good fish. Perch. We'd go and turn a bit of cow manure over and get a couple of crickets for bait and go and fetch a couple of fish. Or those Christmas beetles - you'd get a couple of those and just flick 'em out, especially just on dusk. Their wings 'd flutter on top of the water and then, bang! you'd

have a perch weighing one or two pound. That was our main recreation. Plus we had a tennis court. That was down at the school on Les Sternbeck's place. There were plenty of rabbits and ducks and stuff to shoot, you know. We were all pretty good shots. You could buy a box of 50 bullets in those days for one and sixpence.

Beryl: Jack's uncle was an auctioneer, and they used to drive the cattle as far as their homestead and paddock them overnight before they went on to the sales at Wollombi.

How often would the sales be on?

Jack: Wollombi used to be once a month or something like that.

Was it a bit of a social occasion when people stayed over on their way through? Where did they sleep? In your house, or did they pitch tents?

Beryl: In the house. It was a big place - four or five bedrooms.

Jack: Oh yes. That was the grandfather's place. Dad built a place there when he got married - there was him and Mum and four kids, and we had a bachelor uncle who used to live in grandfather's old place, and the visitors used to stay there.

And were you expected to feed them?

Beryl: Oh yes. That's just country hospitality.

Jack: No money passed hands, or anything like that.

And you always had enough?

Beryl: It was just guests in your home, sort of thing.

Jack: 'Cos we used to kill our own beef, and we always had plenty of stuff. They were good, those visits.

Beryl: We used to look forward to them coming.

Jack: When I was a kid was during the Depression, but we didn't know the Depression was on. See, that place gave a living to four adults. When my brother and I grew up, my uncle had two brothers - well, somebody had to get out because there wasn't enough to go round, see?

But we had no idea that the Depression was happening, because we had heaps of milk and cream, pigs, chooks, ducks. You could go and shoot wild ducks if you wanted to - shoot rabbits if you wanted to - kill our own beef...

Could you butcher a beast now if you had to?

Jack: Yes. We used to always kill down at Les'. We'd take our turn with beasts. We'd do one of theirs, and it would be one of ours next time, and we'd share the meat.

So it was a co-operative thing?

Jack: Yes. Because if you didn't, you'd have too much meat.

Beryl: Then they had to salt it down 'cause you couldn't keep it fresh with no refrigeration.

Jack: Yeah. Home-made corned beef. Fine. And if they killed a pig we'd get a roast, and if we killed a pig they'd get a roast.

Beryl: When you think about it compared to today, Christmas would come then and you'd kill chooks and things like that. But today chooks are nothing special - they're on everybody's dinner plate.

Jack: There's a bit of a baldy hill you can see on your right as you drive down to the Run down The Gap hill there. That's where grandfather's old place used to be - well, my great grandfather's really...

And when do you think that would have been built?

Jack: Oh... the bearers underneath that place were squared logs. It wasn't just four by fours like there are now. It was squared logs sitting up on blocks, then a timber floor on top of that. My great grandfather built part of it. He had another place not far away, but lower. He must have moved up onto the bump because of floods.

Did they have any trouble with white ants?

Jack: Oh sometimes. You had to keep your eye on 'em, but they were up off the ground. Those days you'd splash a bit of sump oil around the bearers and posts and that'd clear the white ants out.

Beryl: Reg Bradley mentions dances at Wyong Creek in the Yarramalong book. We used to go from Murray's Run right over the mountain to those dances.

And how would you be travelling in those days?

Jack: I remember when my two uncles bought a car between them. It was a '25 Dodge Tourer. That was the only car around then. Dad didn't have a car. I was ten when Dad bought a '29 Model A Ford.

Both Reg Bradley and Les Sternbeck talk about a Bean truck..

Jack: Oh that was Les' father. I tell you what, before they got that Bean truck, they used to take the cream from the Run to Braithwaite's over past your place in a horse and cart two and three times a week, and bring the empty cans back. The milk truck from Wyong only used to come as far as Braithwaite's. Then Uncle Chris - that's Les' Dad - he bought this Bean truck. And oh gee they thought it was great then. They'd scoot over! The Sternbecks were all reared there where Les lives.

Beryl: It's like two houses side by side.

Jack: Most places in the bush were built like that in those days. The kitchen and dining room and pantry was one section, and the lounge room and bedrooms was another section.

Beryl: And in thosedays all the cooking was done at home - bread and everything.

Jack: Yes. I can remember Mum baking our own bread.

But they wouldn't go as far as making butter, would they?

Jack: Oh yes. Grandfather used to make the butter. Two gallons of cream, and a big paddle. And he used to sit there and paddle and paddle. No churns or anything. He'd just keep paddling till he got it right.

What did you do in hot summers with home-made butter and no refrigeration ?

Beryl: They had a great big underground tank and they used to hang in down into the tank.

Jack: We had underground wells, with a bilge pump on them, you know. The water was always quite cool, because you were pulling from the bottom with the pump. You'd just lift a little trapdoor and hang anything you wanted to keep cool in there. With the butter, you could put it in a screw-top jar and put it right into the water.

And did you put meat down, too?

Jack: Oh sometimes. We had a safe with the wet bagging, too, that kept things cool the way the old waterbag does. And of course there was no power then - only kerosene lamps.

Did you start to generate your own power when generators became available?

Jack: No. We stayed with kero and the fuel stove. No, the only thing we had there was when Dad bought a gramophone ...no, a radio, I mean - a wireless. It was a cabinet thing, you know. Battery operated. 6 volts, I think. Les' brother-in-law was a bit of a mechanic, and he hitched a car generator up to the milking machine motor and we used to take the batteries up there to charge 'em. We'd have one on and one off, sort of thing. You'd milk twice a day so they'd be getting charged twice a day.

I suppose in those days you wouldn't see newspapers all that often, would you?

Jack: Three times a week. They used to come up on the cream wagon.

So it's not as if you were cut off from the outside world, then.

Jack: Oh no. But we only used to go into Cessnock once a month. Gee that was a long way in that old Model A Ford. There was no bitumen in those days, you know. Hard stony roads... and the dust! To go to Singleton - fifty mile away - holy mackerel! To go there and back in a day you'd have well and truly had it by the time you got home. And that road down there past your place, Bill - Brush Creek Road - that's a speedway now compared to what it used to be.

After they stopped taking the cream to Braithwaite's, they'd take it down to Laguna to go to Hexham. Uncle Chris used to take their cream and ours down. That's when we stopped baking bread at home because the cream lorry used to bring it in from Cessnock and we'd pick it up three times a week.

Beryl: It was that old-fashioned bread with the big round top...

Jack: It was about so high. You only needed one slice...

Beryl: I still think they were the best days...

Jack: Oh yes. There was no violence then...

Did you have any need for a policeman?

Jack: Oh the policeman used to come up - from Wollombi. He'd ride a horse. He used to stay the night at grandfather's...

Beryl: Everyone was friendly. If you had a flat battery the NRMA would bring you another one up from Cessnock.

Jack: Yeah. In the old Harley-Davidson with the box sidecar... (*Digression, and the talk turns to pigs.*) ...I remember, say you had a forty weight porker. If you got one pound sixteen for him you thought you were doing well. You could buy a sucker for ten bob. I used to trap rabbits out there of a wintertime. Ninepence a pair you used to get for your rabbits. Now they're four bucks each. The money would buy me my bullets. Twelve gauge cartridges were only four shillings and ninepence for a box of twenty five. Now I had my own pigs there when I was a kid. I used to go over to Wyong Creek when Dad had the Model A with a box on the back of it, and we'd bring a couple of suckers home - you know, one pounders...

I bought a sow there once. It was a bob-tailed sow - you don't see them very often. I don't know what happened to its tail - a dog might have bitten it off when it was a sucker or something. She was in pig, so I said to the bloke that if she had six suckers I'd give him six pound, and that I'd give him a dollar each for any extra she had. I was relieved when she only had six suckers, because I didn't know where I was going to get the money from to pay for any she had more than six!

We used to make pig troughs out of logs, but they used to turn 'em over with their snout to see if there was something left underneath. There was a big sandstone rock where I had the bit of a run for the pigs, so I chiselled out a trough in the rock. I put a slope on one end so the little fellers could run down into it,

you know. When they'd eaten, I'd fill it up with water, and the pigs used to like that. I took my son out there the other week, and my daughter-in-law was so fascinated with it she wanted me to chop it out so she could take it home and put it in her front garden!

But it's all changed so much, Bill! There used to be a drop of about five feet down from this rock, and Uncle Chris used to use it to load the pigs onto his truck. And now there's not much of a drop below the rock at all. All the floods over the years have dumped all silt and sand in there, and I tell you what - I had a job to find it at first. It was fifty-odd years ago of course, and the huge rock had become only about as big as this table. I only found the trough because there was a square of tussocks growing up. When I tugged on them they all came out and cleared out the trough.

When I was out there the other week I was talking to a couple of the fellers that live there now, and I told them I used to live there years ago. After I'd introduced myself, one of them said: "Oh, Jack McKay! Your name's chopped in the rock just round from my place." I'd done it when I was a kid.

How did you work the stone? With a cold chisel and a hammer?

Jack: It's only sandstone, Bill, and you know, you can get at it with just about anything.

What about the big trough, though?

Jack: I just used the back of a mattock - the chopper on the back. You keep chiselling down with it, and once you get a couple of decent grooves you get a gad and a hammer, and you can get a big lump out. (*Digression*).

Beryl: I remember years ago the old swaggies. When the kids were coming home from school, if there was a swaggie they'd pass right away around him, to avoid him, you know - even though there was no harm in them. But it's different today.

Jack: They used to come around, and it was generally tea they wanted, or some bread, or a bit of sugar or something. Some would want to do a bit of work for it. We never used to let 'em work 'cos you never know what pranks they might get up to, or injure themselves, or something.

Beryl: In the Yarralong book Denny Lee talks about getting a job with Kenny Greentree in Wyong. Well, he's us - Greentrees. But all the Greentree boys are dead now.

Jack: Kenny Greentree was my first cousin. Two Greentrees married two McKays - both brothers and sisters. Jack's mum and Kenny's father were brother and sister and Kenny's mum and my father were brother and sister ...The Greentree boys were woodchoppers at the Royal Easter Show.

And did I hear you say, Jack, that you did a bit of timbergetting when you were younger?

Jack: Well when I left the farm me and another feller from Wyong Creek went cutting logs with Keith Fernance. Keith had bought this Caterpillar tractor and he and his brother did the hauling and we used to cut the logs. When Keith got out of it, he sold the tractor to Mick Perry. He bought the tractor and I kept on driving the thing. Then Mick sold out to Sterland Brothers in Gosford and I done a bit for them for a while. After Dad left the Run and we came over to Wyong Creek we still went out on that mountain there hauling logs up the back of Braithwaites there - out your way, between there and Murray's Run.

Was that logs for pulpwood you were getting from there ?

Jack: No. Good hardwood timber logs.

Did those logs then go down to Carson's mill?

Jack: Oh, Carson had been all over that before we did.

And how did you come to meet Beryl, Jack?

Jack: A feller from Mascot married my sister. He'd come up to Ourimbah State Forest to do the relief work that was on in those days. I think it was three days a week he did out on the Forestry making roads and doing things like that. He used to come to Wyong Creek, and then his sister came up, and Beryl was friendly with her...

Beryl: When him and Jack's sister came to Sydney to buy the engagement ring Jack came with them and met me down there.

Jack: I'd never been to Sydney before that.

Love at first sight, eh ?

Jack: Oh no. I'd known her since she was 15. She used to come out to the Run for holidays.

Beryl: And we've been married fifty two years last week.

Jack: So we ended up spending twenty seven years in Sydney, then finished up coming back up here to the central coast.

Talking about daily life back in those days, it strikes me that it was pretty tough going a lot of the time - long days, hard work. Did it ever get you down?

Beryl: But that's just the way life was, wasn't it Jack?

That's exactly what everyone else answers to that question.

Jack: Well anybody didn't know any different. You had to work to exist.

Beryl: That's why I said I think we saw the best of it, because all you had was Saturday night to look forward to to go to the dance...

Jack: I'd ride a horse or a pushbike from Murray's Run to Wyong Creek or Wyong, and think nothing of it.

Beryl: Jack had an old uncle - Uncle Arthur Goldsmith. He used to get the milk lorry as far as Braithwaite's, then he'd walk all the way up that hill, over Bowen's Pinch, right down into Murray's Run and stay at Jack's grandfather's place for a holiday - just a fortnight or something like that.

Jack: He was my grandfather's brother-in-law. He was one of the Goldsmiths who were the original owners of Murray's Run.

And were they connected with the Goldsmith's that ran the timber mill in at Wyong?

Jack: That was Arthur's brother's son ...Oh yes, you had your jobs to do on the farm alright. After all, it's just like running a business - if you didn't work the damn place, well you went broke, and that's all there was to it.

Les' family always had more cows than us. We had the mixed Jersey/Guernsey type and they had Illawarra shorthorns - the red ones. Eighty was the most I think we had in summer, but I think there was 110 or 120 at Les' sometimes there.

Why did you go for different breeds? Just preference?

Jack: People's likes and dislikes I think, Bill. The Jersey/Guernsey breed are a more rich cream-making cattle than any other breed, really - or they were in those days. I don't know what the different breeds are today. And the Illawarra Shorthorns that Les and them had were more beef cattle, although they were good milkers too.

What did they do? Use them for milk and then sell them for beef after a time?

Jack: Yes. When they got to a certain age they'd just fatten them up and sell them.

And did you do that with your cattle too?

Jack: Oh yes. You wouldn't keep them till they were old and crotchety - but I just forget how many calves they'd have had before I got rid of them.

When you were working in the bush - that would've been before chainsaws and tractors and all that had come on the scene, wouldn't it?

Jack: Tractors were just coming in and bullock teams were on the way out. See the bullock teams couldn't get those logs out of a lot of the gorges around your way, but the tractors could winch them up. On that tractor I was talking about we had... oh... 200 or 250 feet of three-quarter steel rope, and another 200 ft of tow rope you could shackle up and put on to that to get the logs out of some of those places. They'd winch them up to a certain shelf and unhook, then the tractor would come up to a higher shelf and bring it up another one... And six foot crosscut saws! Holy mackerel! When you think of it...

You sharpened them yourself, I presume?

Jack: Yes. We used to keep the axes and all that sharpened ourselves.

The saws too?

Jack: Oh we'd touch them up - good enough. Lot of people in the bush did all them things in those days. I had horses - we shod our own horses.

Must have kept you fit.

Jack: Oh gee we were fit in those days - especially riding down 25 miles to Wyong. There's a cousin of mine used to live at Wyong Creek - he was my mum's twin sister's boy...

Beryl: Tommy Bradley, his name was ...

Jack: See, Reggie's my first cousin too. Tom Bradley married my Mum's sister, and his brother married my Mum's twin sister... Anyway, this cousin had a job fencing, digging out gutters, cutting scrub and stuff like that, and after tea of a night we used to think nothing of...of course in those days the damned little light you had on pushbikes only threw a little spot on the road ...we'd ride eighteen mile into Wollombi to get a box of bullets each to go shooting on Sunday, or something like that. It's amazing how much you can see in the dark when you get used to it. It's when you see a light - that's when you're blinded for a while.

Did you have any accidents doing things like that? Did you ever fall off, or run into things... ?

Jack: A couple of times I carried the bike back home. Do you know where the Flat Rock is? I was going down underneath there one day going to Wyong Creek when a piece of stick whipped up and went through the spokes and ripped about six spokes out of the wheel. I went over the bar. Anyway, I came back home then, carrying the bike. I couldn't even wheel it. I carried it from there down into the Ran, but I took the shortcut. Do you know the shortcut? Instead of going right down The Gap and right round towards Les' and back in that way, we used to go straight over the hill and down from beside Flat Rock. If you were on a horse you could do it. If I was riding a horse I'd always go that way home.

Was that down past where Woodbury's shack was?

Jack: They were under Flat Rock there. He had a good family up there, old Fred Woodbury...four boys and one girl, I think.

I got the impression that it was a pretty rough house and a pretty rough existence there. Was it?

Jack: Oh yes. It was all added-on humpies, sort of thing.

Not a proper dwelling?

Jack: No. It was terrible. I don't know why he didn't build a decent house there. I think he might have been a bit lazy, old Fred. His brother, Frank Woodbury had a dairy farm up Watagan. He raised a good family, and he had a nice home and a motor car. But Fred had a bullock team, and I think he'd throw a log on it when he wanted a few bob and that's the way it went. But there was so much good timber around there then. The tractors hadn't been in there and he could have made good money - and he had a pretty good team. (*Digression*)

...When we were only kids the family used to come over to the Wyong Creek Ball or the Yarramalong Ball. Coming back, when it was wet, they had chains, and you'd have to get out at the bottom of Bowen's Pinch - all kids out! Everybody out but Uncle Bill! put the chains on, and we had to push it to get it up Bowen's Pinch! Lots of clay - sticky clay. (*Digression*).

Charlie Lauff used to come over here shooting, with his beagle dogs.

Yes, Les said he used to come with his father.

Beryl: They used to have a lot of shooters come up to the Run.

Jack: Yes, all the young blokes had guns those days, and nobody thought about shooting anybody. Today, you wake up to the six o'clock news and somebody's been shot or stabbed, or... I remember years ago, somebody got murdered, and it was on everybody's mind. Nowadays, you just think: "Poor Bugger. Bad luck." And you know there's going to be another one tomorrow, you know... (*Digression*).

And when you were living up there Jack, was it called Kalongba then?

Jack: It got that name when the telephone was put on. We got the phone on, and we were the exchange, and the telephone people called it the Kalongba Exchange. Les' dad was one of the subscribers ...but I think Lem Nichols was on Yallambie, over at Dairy Arm. If somebody wanted to talk to Les, they'd ring Kalongba and we'd have to put them through.

Beryl: And when we'd get bad winds you couldn't get through on the telephone because the wires would come down.

Jack: When the phone went out you'd each ride along the wire on your property to see if the problem was on your place, then you'd tell the phone people. Sometimes they were just crossed over and we'd separate them with a long bamboo fishing rod or something like that.

And the power didn't come on while you were there. That was after you'd left, was it?

Jack: Mmmm. Be a good while after, too.

Beryl: We had the lamps in Wyong Creek, didn't we? We had a battery wireless. We thought we were made, then.

Where did politics fit into all this? Did people talk politics much?

Jack: Not nearly as much as today.

Beryl: You just went with the flow, more or less.

Jack: You take politics today - it's on nearly everybody's mind. You read about it in the papers, and you pick everybody to pieces, you know the way they carry on. I think the politicians carry on worse than we

do, sometimes. I think they're all in there with big pockets and some don't mind trying to fill them.

Yes, as the old saying goes: It doesn't matter who you vote for a politician still gets in. They haven't got a good image, have they, politicians?

Beryl: I think that's why life was so good when we were young, because you weren't into things like that then. You'd just go day by day, more or less.

Jack: I remember Dad and a few of the neighbours getting upset when they brought in a tax on your income of a shilling in the pound.

Beryl: We were saving up to get married, and Jack was getting six shillings a day. That was doing fences for his uncle.

Jack: That was before I left the Run. But when I was in the bush I was getting a bit more.

So up till then there was no income tax at all?

Jack: I don't know whether there was, or whether they just put it up to the shilling in the pound. I remember when I was a kid people were only getting fourpence a pound for their butter.

Beryl: And then when the war come they confiscated all the guns people had. They took your gun, didn't they Jack? How much did they give you?

I would have thought that would have been the one time they would have been pleased to have the people armed!

Jack: No, no. This policeman I was telling you about that used to ride up to grandfather's and that. The reason for that was that there used to be a bit of cattle duffing went on in those days, though we never heard of it over our side. He used to come up Murray's Run, stop at grandfather's, then he'd ride over the back of the range into the top of Dairy Arm, and then he could go from there over to Watagan, you know, just watching for cattle duffers.

I don't know why it went on, but maybe when the Depression was on people might have been pinching them for a bit of meat, or something like that, to feed themselves. I don't know what it was about because I was only a kid, you know. But maybe that was the reason, because if they sold the damn thing they wouldn't get much for it. Jersey springer heifers out there a few weeks off their first calf - if you got four pound ten for one, then that was top price! Beautiful looking things they were, you know.

Anyhow, the policeman talked to Dad one day about firearms. Dad always had the old twelve gauge shotgun, you know, but I had a .22 repeater. He told us it would have to be registered with the police, so I registered it, and then they called all the firearms in!

Where did they put them all?

Jack: I don't know, but they called 'em all in - everybody lost their rifles. Mine was a beautiful rifle - it had a hexagon barrel. Geez I was cranky about that!

Did you get it back?

Jack: No. It went for ages and ages, then they wanted to know what the value of it was. I said I'd given four pound ten for it - and to a kid then that was a lot of money. Much later, and I couldn't tell you how long it was, I finally got a cheque for four pound ten.

How I came by that rifle - there was a feller used to come up there, he was a builder. If the roof blew off your shed he'd fix it, he'd do all your cow bails and feed stalls - he was a sort of handyman around the district, you know. Anyway, he had this rifle - those days you could buy 'em new for six pound ten - and I

used to love this rifle he had. One day he said that he was going to sell it and buy a bigger one, and I asked him how much he wanted for it. He said he was sorry but he couldn't sell it for less than four pound ten. I said I'd give him four pound ten for it, but he said he thought I wouldn't be able to afford it.

I told him that I was trapping rabbits and getting ninepence a pair for 'em, and that I'd be able to get the money. So I went trapping rabbits day and night, setting damn traps by hurricane lamp, till I got the four pound ten. You can do anything if you've got determination.

Yeah. Where there's a will, and all that. I wonder what they did with all those guns? I mean, they wouldn't have sent .22s off to the troops would they?

Jack: No. I think they were just frightened of civil war or something - or the Japs coming in...

But you'd think then they'd want the people...

Jack: To defend themselves. Yeah. *(Pause)*.

And in those days, what form did weddings take? What was your marriage like? Did you go to the city for it?

Jack: Beryl came from Mascot, so we got married down there. But all the local girls round Wyong Creek got married in the local churches around there.

Beryl: They used to go to Sunday School once a fortnight, and they used to go twelve miles.

Jack: We used to go there early, to have Sunday School before church. Aunt Nellie, who lived up on the grandfather's place on the Run - that was Dad's brother's wife - she died last year. Poor old lady, she was 80-odd, and we went out to Wollombi to her funeral. She was buried there because that's where all the McKays are. We took our lunch in the Esky and a thermos of coffee, and coming back we stopped at that old church at Laguna for lunch. It was a nice place - flat, and very quiet. When we were kids, that was the church we used to go to once a fortnight, and in those days Les' dad - Uncle Chris - was always the one to ring the bell. I used to be always the last into church because I wanted to stay and see Uncle Chris ring the bell.

So, after lunch the day of Aunt Nellie's funeral I was looking at the bell, and wondering just how it worked, and at that stage I didn't know that it was counterbalanced, and I was slowly pulling the rope down and watching what was happening when all of a sudden she went: Boinngg! Boinngg!

Beryl: I'll bet it went out all over the valley! They probably thought it was townies, you know, playing about.

Jack: A lot of the kids used to walk from Yango valley across to that Sunday School.

That'd be a bit of a walk, wouldn't it?

Jack: I suppose. I've never been up in there. *!Digression*).

Do you have any memories of fires, from when you were up in the Run?

Jack: We used to burn off.

But you were never threatened by wildfires? None of the burn-off fires ever got out of hand?

Jack: They'd just burn themselves out. See Bill, when you depend on grass like we did, you can't let too much rubbish get around. At the end of the winter, before the spring, when everything's a bit dry - and a little bit damp, too, of course - it'll burn. But most of the fire'll just find it's way about. Not like now where they save it all up and when it gets away, well - you're in real trouble. Even in the Forestry here they should burn every winter. It shouldn't be as disastrous as it is now.

And what about floods?

Jack: Oh, I've seen some bad floods. I've seen all those bridges washed away - it changed the creek. There's not many big waterholes down there at all now, you know. There's two arms up from the grandfather's place, and bad floods would tear a little bit of the bank out. You'll see a lot of it all through Murray's Run. And then after a big-flood you'd get sand washed up that deep! Halfway up the fences.

Was that useless to try to grow things on?

Jack: Oh it was sand, and loamy stuff. I remember as a kid I helped Uncle Bill put a fence up around one part where we were going to put a peach orchard. That was always the calf paddock in there - that was where the bull was kept, and all the calves. And on all the new ground that the flood left there we grew huge watermelons the first year.

It was quite fertile, then?

Jack: Oh yes. Peach trees - holy mackerel peach trees went crazy on it. They like a little bit of sand anyway.

For some reason I thought that when the sand came three or four feet deep, that it degraded the pasture there, but actually it was a really fertile alluvial deposit?

Jack: Yes, you got all sorts of rubbish and undergrowth - like compost - mixed with the silt. But these days, the problem that Us has got is that all those fellers out there don't burn anything - they've got no stock on there to eat the grass, and there's so much rubbish that builds up that when a flood comes it picks all this stuff up and takes it and it gets caught in poor old Les' fences and washes them all away!

Did you lose fences in floods up there?

Jack: Oh we used to lose fences all right.

It must have been heartbreaking to have to keep re-doing stuff like that.

Jack: Oh well, you had to do it, you know. You couldn't let your stock run all over the place.

There's remains of old fence lines up where I live that Braithwaites must have put in, and that's pretty rugged country. And it must have cost a lot of money.

Jack: Well, they would have done that themselves.

Yeah. But they'd have had to buy the wire and stuff.

Jack: But they would have split all the posts themselves. We always used to split all our own posts.

What did you use? White mahogany?

Jack: Yeah, white mahogany. Or bloodwood wasn't too bad. *(Pause)*.

Now have I got it right? Your dad and mum bought from the Goldsmiths, did they?

Jack: My grandfather did. When he got married he bought Goldsmith's old property - the house and all.

Did Goldsmiths buy it from Murray ?

Jack: I don't know much about how it got the name Murray's Run, but when grandfather got married he went to work at Bulga - he had a horse and dray on the council - and dad was almost in his teens when they moved up on to the Run.

Beryl: Your dad was born in 1891.

Jack: So it would have been around about the nineteen hundreds I suppose when grandfather went there.

And then he built another house apart from Goldsmith's house?

Jack: No, that was the original one - most of it was. But it's burnt down now. I think it got burnt down after the people bought it when uncle sold out.

Beryl: You can still see where the very first Goldsmith house was.

Can you? What's left of it? Just a few stumps?

Jack: A bit of old stonework where the chimney was, and there's two orange trees. They don't look any bigger than when I was a kid, seeing them the other week.

Flo was talking about country remedies, what with there being not much in the way of doctors in the district. Did your mum have bush remedies for things when you got sick Jack?

Beryl: We used to have that block licorice.

Jack: If we got a cold all we'd have was a hot lemon drink going to bed with an Aspro or something.

Beryl: Then there was Paregoric and Syrup of Figs.

Jack: Cod liver oil for your bronchitis. If you scratched yourself you dabbed kerosene on it.

Cessnock was the nearest place to go to for medical help?

Jack: Or Wyong... *(Pause)*. My grandfather always used to have a crook knee, and he always had goanna oil. Stinking goanna oil! Have you ever smelt it? Aaargh! I was a still a kid, but it was around when I had just started shooting, and he said to me that if I saw a goanna to shoot it for him. He'd open him up and it'd have two of these big pieces of fat, like pork fillets up his back, like yellow fat. And he used to render it down. Holy mackerel it used to stink! He used to rub it on his knee - he used to swear by it.

I've got plenty of goannas up at my place. I've noticed that after a while they get a bit cocky and don't frighten easily.

Jack: Yeah, they get used to you. Out there before I left the Run, when I was working for my uncle - six bob a day I was getting cutting scrub around the hills and that. The wallabies'd get used to you. You'd be there chopping the scrub and you'd look around and there'd be an old wallaby, feeding away there and taking not a bit of notice of you.

Didn't you have trouble with the animals and birds raiding your fruit trees and things like that?

Jack: Oh the flying foxes...

And didn't the possums eat everything, and satin birds?

Jack: Oh, we used to get satin birds. There was a lot of satin birds on Uncle Chris' apple orchard.

What'd you do? Shoot them?

Jack: We used to get down there with a shanghai. We'd give the satin birds something! They're good to eat, satin birds. They've got beautiful white meat. They're lovely.

So they wouldn't ruin your fruit crop then? You'd still get something from it?

Jack: Mostly the high stuff. The flying foxes did a lot of damage. Satin birds used to love apples. But with peaches and plums and that you'd get those little silvereyes - they're the ones that'll ruin fruit. They only just bite them a couple of times. Or rosellas - they do a lot of damage.

So all you could do was frighten them off?

Jack: Mmm. I remember there was only once in my life at Murray's Run there that they had to get an open season on the wallabies. They used to grow feed for the cattle in winter, like oats and saccolene and that, and the wallabies would come in and clean it up in no time. So there was an open season and you'd just shoot as many as you could.

Did you get money for the skins?

Jack: I think they just used to skin them for rugs, the blokes that used to come in there and shoot them.

Did you eat them much?

Jack: No. But

I've had wallaby tail soup. Shooters used to come in there sometimes and they'd camp in the shed up at grandfather's there and they'd make wallaby tail soup. They used to come from Newcastle this mob - four or five of them, and they'd sit there chopping this stuff up and they'd make a great big bucket of it, you know, with a couple of wallaby tails chopped up in it. Beautiful soup.

But nobody ate steaks off them?

Jack: We never did, no. But you take a wallaby or a kangaroo - they're a clean animal. You can make pigs very dirty if you want to - pen them up and they'll stink. Piggeries can be terrible places, can't they?

I did have the hindquarters of a kangaroo once, though. I used to trap rabbits, and there was Harry Brown - he married Les' sister. In the wintertime he had lots of traps around Laguna - I think it was a big part of his living in those days. I was only a boy then and he wanted a hand from somebody to help him set all these traps - he had hundreds. He offered us fifteen bob a week and our keep - me and another feller. This was when I had my .22 - I hadn't lost it yet, and wherever we went on people's property we camped in the sheds. We thought it was great.

One day we were in that arm up from Lem Nichols' place. There was a big shed up there that we were camped in. I could've come home to my place, but we liked to camp in this shed - get up early in the morning and go round the traps, you know. Every afternoon there were a couple of roos would be in this same place - you'd see them come down just on sundown, and I decided to have a go at one. Harry said that if I got one I should bring it back to camp because he wanted the skin. I got this roo, and lugged it back. He didn't want the skin - he took the hindquarters off and put it in a camp oven and baked it the next day. He offered me some and I wouldn't have any. We never ate them up on the Run, you know - never see Dad kill a roo or eat it, it was always wild ducks or we'd kill pigs or chooks or anything like that.

The next day we had to go out to Bucketty, and he sent me and the other bloke - also Jack, from Laguna - to get the traps ready while he cut a lunch for the three of us. Anyway, we get out there and it comes lunchtime and we're pretty hungry because we'd been working pretty hard and we all sit down in the shade and boil the billy, and we're into these sandwiches. I was too hungry to even think much about what was on them, and when we'd finished Harry said: "A bit of roo's alright, eh boys?" I couldn't knock it. It was lovely. Just tasted like a bit of pork.

But the wombats up that Run now! D'you know all the time I lived there I think I only saw two wombats - probably because we had so much cattle moving around and that and getting up in the hills. If you wanted to find a wombat burrow you had to go up all around the top. Now they're all along the creek banks everywhere!

Beryl: Jack's mother had a magpie whose leg had got caught in a rabbit trap. She make a wooden leg for it and that magpie walked on that wooden leg for a long long time.

Jack: It could bark like a dog, that magpie. It'd call everybody by name.

What? It said words like parrots do?

Jack: Oh yeah. Magpies'll talk like anything...

I didn't know that.

Jack: ...and Reggie Bradley's father, Uncle Tom, he nearly always had a magpie - Reggie'll tell you this - and he had a chap living there with him, and he was sweet on this girl Connie Bailey. Uncle Tom used to say: "Hello Lou. How's Con?" you know, and it wasn't long before the magpie was saying it.

We had the bottom paddock like down the bottom line, and that was one day paddock for the cows, then up this big flat I was telling you about there's other two day paddocks, which meant that every paddock got a two day break. The grass needed that to recover, when you've got 60 to 80 cows on it. We had a front verandah that might have been, say, about four foot six off the ground with pallisading around it, and this magpie used to sit on there. The cows'd come past there, and the magpie'd bark at them just like the old blue dog. The cows used to take off because they thought the dog was after 'em!

Beryl: I still say they were the good old days. Do you know what? You'd be out there and you'd have the draper man come around and he'd have supper cloths with fancywork on them, and women's underwear. He'd come to the verandah to knock on the door and he'd have all his wares in suitcases. He came one day when I was up there visiting, and he was in the house talking to Jack's mother and me and his sister Sybil, showing us all his wares. He was holding them up, pants and things like that, but round where the draper couldn't see him, Jack was there pretending to be sitting on his mother's chamber pot to make us laugh! We got the giggles and didn't know where to look! ...That seems as if it was only the other day.

Jack: I wouldn't mind if I owned that property and still lived there.

Well it's a nice part of the world, isn't it?

Beryl: For dances, we all used to have these big ball gowns. We'd spend all the afternoon ironing these ball gowns then Reggie'd come with the truck, and we'd all climb up on the back of the truck to go to the dances. There'd be heaps of us on the back of the truck. We'd go out to Toukley and all to a dance. Uncle Tom - Reg's father - bought a car. A '28 Chrysler sedan. It was a big thing to have a car then - you know. Well Reggie was going off to the dance and Uncle Tom was out the front saying ta ta. Reggie was going to take the new car, and Uncle Tom was saying don't do this and don't do that to him. He was real dry and a slow talker, and I can still hear him: "Now, Reggie, don't go overloadin' the Chrysler. I think seventeen's plenty."

Jack: I don't think I was with them this night, but what happened once was they were coming home along Wyong Creek, and there wasn't enough room inside the car for Patty Love, one of the local girls, so she had to ride home standing on the running board, and Reggie was holding onto her with one arm while he was driving.

But that Reg Bradley - he'd be one of the district's best citizens, you know. You've got no idea what that man used to do, even when he was still only a kid. Reg was always mechanically minded. He'd cut the chassis down of a car or truck or something and get a pair of tractor wheels to fit on the thing to make a tractor, and all this type of thing. He'd tackle all sorts of stuff. He could do anything in a sawmill, too. I was in Sydney for 27 years there so I got away from everything a bit, and our kids grew up without knowing his kids.

Beryl: Well families do that, don't they? You may know one another but the kids go their own way.

Jack: Oh yes, he's a top bloke, Reg. There were a lot of lovely people up that valley when I was young. We knew everybody...

Beryl: I was saying to Bill earlier what a nice person Keith Fernance is.

Jack: All those Fernance boys were nice.

Beryl: They all had nicknames, and some of them we mightn't ever know their real names - only the nicknames.

Jack: Well my name's not Jack.

Beryl: He's got three names - James John Saul, but he's Jack to everybody. They mostly wouldn't know his other names.

Saul ?

Jack: After mum's father.

Were they religious? To pick biblical names like that?

Jack: My grandma was. All my grandfather's brothers had names from the Bible. Saul and Joseph and Rueben, and Nathan.

Was church a regular part of your life when you were young ?

Jack: Well Mum always made sure we went to Sunday School and church every fortnight. Grandma used to hold church in her home at Wyong Creek. Nobody had cars in those days, and it'd be too far to walk and the sulky wouldn't be big enough to take the whole family, so grandma decided that the minister could come and use this room at Wyong Creek. There was Reg's family, and Aunt Ida's family - that's mum's twin sister - and we'd be there... and all the kids around the place used to come there.

Jack: You know what it was like when you were a kid in church, and you'd try to be quiet, then you'd get the giggles, and you'd be trying to hide yourself because you didn't want the minister to see you laughing. And Tommy Bradley - that's Reggie's cousin...

Beryl: That's Jack's mother's twin son.

Jack: ...Grandma had the room set up in her house just like a church, with seats on each side and an aisle up the middle. The minister's up the front carrying on and reading out of this book, and in trots a little pup. I don't know who owned it - grandma maybe - and Tommy Bradley, who was only a little feller then, realised the pup shouldn't be in church and pounced on him to take him out. As soon as he grabbed it, the pup started yelping and that started all us kids going, and we were getting dirty looks from the grown-ups! *(Laughs). (Digression).*

... When my uncle got sick and decided to sell his place at Murray's Run, I always thought his two boys would have it. He had two sons and Dad had two sons. His two sons lived in Cessnock, and I always thought that Cyril and Allan would finish up with the Run. I used to think it would be great to own it, you know. Of course when he sold it he never got much for it - that was before the boom. At the time we'd been struggling to pay off a place we had in Mascot, which by then we owned. Actually I think we might have scraped up just enough to buy it, but nobody talked about things in those days, and I didn't know that the two boys didn't want it. I regret it all a bit now because I've only got the one boy, and he's so interested in it all - where I used to live and all that - you know.

Beryl: He'd like to go back over there.

Mmmm. It could have carried on the whole historic family connection with the Run, couldn't it?

Jack: What's going to happen, Bill, with all those people up there now, it's going to go back to a wilderness as far as I can see...

When you'd come along that flat part before you go down The Gap, you could see our place. All the hills were cleared - it was a beautiful little settlement up in there. But now you can't see anything for scrub! It's going to finish up they're all going to live in the bush... And the little parcels that they're buying are too small to be any good to them. It's a liability to them. It's happening right through Yarramalong and that too. There's no dairies there now, but it was all dairies once...

Beryl: We used to go back up there nearly every Christmas.

It must be a funny feeling to go back now, is it?

Jack: Yeah. I feel like when I go back there I'd just like to put something up and stay there, you know. Kick all those other fellers out and have it to yourself, you know.

You must feel like it's been taken over by strangers, which it has really, I suppose.

Jack: Yes... We had a pretty good life there. It was primitive - no power, no tractors, single mould-board ploughs, work from daylight to dark...

Beryl: And husking the corn for the winter feed...

Jack: No posthole diggers. It was always done by spade... We used to grow a lot of corn - for the pigs and that, and the chooks. After dinner of a night time everybody'd be down the sheds husking corn. We got through some, too.

What'd you do with the husks? Burn them or what?

Jack: No. They used to just scatter them and plough them in, I think.

Beryl: They used to have a diamond snake in the shed, and when there'd be a rat or something, they'd pass it up to the snake on a pitchfork.

Jack: There was always a big stack of hay in there. We used to grow oats and make hay.

Did you make silage?

Jack: No. We used to chaff it up and give it to them straight.

And was that powered by anything - the chaffcutter?

Jack: Yes. The milking machine.

So the milking machine was a bit of a generalpurpose energy source then was it?

Jack: The chaffcutter room was back to back with the engine room of the milking part. It was all driven off a four inch belt. (*Long digression*).

You know, how my father didn't ever get drowned out there on the Run I'll never know. He could never swim, and he used to ride across those creeks there when they were flooded. Once I saw him walking between our place and grandfather's in a flood, and he had to cross a creek which had a bit of a pole across it and a sloppy sort of sapling thing for a rough handrail. As he was walking across it of course the bloody thing broke, and he was hanging on to the sagging handrail with the water tearing through underneath him. He had to get himself across hand over hand sort of thing. How he never drowned is beyond me.

Beryl: I don't know how you didn't get rolled in the tractor once, when you were driving it in the Ourimbah State Forest. A log rolled and nearly got you Jack, didn't it?

Jack: Oh, it snapped back and got me on the leg. There were no canopies on tractors in those days. I only got hit one other time - it hit my shoulder and tore the top out of my boiler suit.

... We had nothing in those days. We'd just had Julie - she was only a little baby, and I used to lay in bed of a night time and worry what'd happen if I got sick.

If only I had fifty pound in the hank - you could battle on for three months on fifty quid in those days.

Beryl: So he went chopping firewood for people.

Jack: I used to work Saturday mornings chopping wood - I'd do anything. Once you got that little bit extra you felt secure, you know.

Beryl: We both had parents that could have helped us, but you don't do that. You do it yourself.

Jack: It's nice to be independent if you can.

.....
Some weeks later I taped a second interview with Jack and Beryl. This time they had asked Jack Is sister Sybil, who had also grown up on Murray's Run, to join us.

.....
Sybil, you left Murray's Run when the family moved to Wyong Creek How old were you then?

Sybil: I was about fifteen, I think. Our older sister Elvie had the Wyong Creek Post Office, and she had three kids and I used to spend a lot of time over there.

Jack: When Elvie left Wyong Creek to go to Sydney, that's when Dad and Mum moved from Murray's Run to take over her place. This was when the war was on.

Sybil: I was twelve when she got married and I used to go over there a fair bit, and then when I was fifteen we moved there for good, and we had the Post Office then. Then later I left to get married and they didn't have it for very long after I let

Was it good having the post office? Did it make your place a bit of a social centre for the area?

Sybil: Well we used to have a lot of people come over from Kenyon's Guest House to get their mail.

Running a post office must take quite a bit of time for the people involved. Was there much in the way of payment for doing all that?

Jack: I don't know what it was.

Sybil: I don't either, but at the time I suppose it would have been alright. (Digression)...When I was quite little - I think I was only about two - and living at Murray's Run, I fell off the verandah and cut my leg badly on a broken bottle. It left a great wide scar that I've still got, but there was no thought of going anywhere to have it treated.

Beryl: Didn't you have a splinter in your leg that travelled for years?

Sybil: Yes. That happened out at Murray's Run too. I was writing a letter - I would have been about thirteen - and Jack comes to stickybeak to see what I was writing. I was sitting on a sofa made of that western red cedar, and a splinter went into my leg as I slid along it away from him. It was in there for about fifteen years - you could feel it, pinch it through the skin - then it disappeared. One day when I was about twenty eight or something I was having a shower and noticed a whitehead here on my hip. I scratched at it and out popped this splinter! (*Laughs*). I've still got it stuck on a bit of paper at home somewhere.

Jack: We were talking earlier about that little school at Murray's Run that we went to. There were a couple of the Woodbury kids went, there was our family, Aunt Nell's family from up on the old place, and

Sternbecks had two or three kids there - but all up there were only about fifteen or sixteen kids went to that school.

Sybil: I was wondering what would have happened to the library there. There were some lovely books in it.

Jack: Did you ever read “Dot and the Kangaroo”?

I've heard of it, but never read it.

Jack: Well, I read that when I was a kid, and I used to shoot kangaroos, shoot rabbits - I'd shoot anything because we all had .22s. I read that book, and I felt so sorry for that poor little kangaroo...

Didn't stop you though, did it?

Jack: Well after a while I forgot about it, and I was back into it again. As kids we had to join that Gould League of Birdlovers. That was it! Hang up the rifle on the wall - no more shooting birds! That lasted about six weeks, too, I think. Then there was “Uncle Tom's Cabin”. You remember that? That's a pretty sad book. Once a week the teacher - that was Mardi, my Dad's first cousin - she'd read this book to us for a half hour or so. We thought she was old, but she was only a young lady then. She'd get weepy, and all the kids'd have tears streaming down their cheeks!

And how many years difference between you two? Were you at school when Jack was, Sybil ?

Jack: Sybil's five years younger. I think I went to school till I was fifteen out there - just to keep the numbers up so the school would stay open.

You'd probably rather have been doing something else, would you?

Jack: Oh, I wasn't interested in school.

Were you Sybil ?

Sybil: I suppose I was. I didn't have many days off.

But you didn't say you didn't want to go because that was the thing you did - go to school.

Jack: I didn't mind the subjects I liked, like maths. I didn't mind autobiographies, I didn't mind geography - but that old English history used to drive me nuts! King John and Magna Carta and all that. I used to get so bored!

Sybil: I used to like writing compositions. My imagination would run away and I'd write pages and pages! (*Digression*).

There were a lot of aborigines in this area once, but they don't seem to be part of anyone's recollections...

Jack: You didn't worry about the aborigines in our time.

Sybil: We had caves on our place with aboriginal paintings in them, but other than that I didn't know about aborigines. We used to walk up to one where there were lots of hand paintings and animals too. I'd like to go back up now and see them again.

Did you realise at the time that they must have been done a long time ago?

Sybil: Well, they would've been, but you never saw anybody... (*Digression*).

Sybil: It used to be my job to get the chooks in of a night, and they're as silly as anything, chooks. I used to bring them in with a stick, and I'm waving the darned stick around and I hit this rooster accidentally on the beak, and knocked it out! It's sprawled out on the ground - and I'm only a kid, and I was frightened - I

thought I'd killed it. But after a while he recovered and jumped up and went on his way.

Did you ever hypnotise the chooks when you were kids?

Sybil: Yes. We'd sit them down and rub their heads, and put it under their wing, and they'd sit there for ages. We had a great time when we were kids. Even though it was right out there where we didn't see anybody much and only went to Cessnock once a month and all that - oh, it was a wonderful childhood.

Did you look forward to going into Cessnock?

Sybil: Oh yes - it was a big outing. It took about two and a half hours to get there, too. It was only 36 miles, but the road was so rough - going there was an all day job.

Jack: You know that section of road from the Old North Road from the bottom of the Run to Laguna - that hard stone road? It was like that nearly all the way to Cessnock... I've seen gutters a foot deep on the road from Flat Rock down to our place. It'd wash out because the leaves would block up the gutters and the water would come straight down the middle of the road, and you'd have to straddle it with your wheels. It was so slow to get anywhere.

And I suppose the Council wouldn't maintain it all that often, would they?

Jack: They had nothing to maintain it with. All they had was a pair of horses and a tip dray and one of those hand scoops. Feller called Dan Langan used to do it. Then there was a bloke that lived at Wollombi got a job on the Council and he bought a truck - the first one on the Council up our way. It was a tipper with a little hand winch on the side - it replaced the horse and dray.

You said Dan Langan. Did he come from up Watagan Creek?

Jack: Yes. Aunt Nellie that married my Dad's brother - well he's her brother. I don't think any of those Langans are left now - a couple of their wives might be. (*Digression*).

It seems that nobody much got into those country crafts that go with horses, like making saddles, plaiting stockwhips, or doing leatherwork.

Jack: They didn't do much leatherwork round our way. There was a saddler used to come round - he'd do the horse collars up, or repairs on saddles, any leatherwork or harnesses... He used to do the whole district. I think he came from Cessnock way, or it might have been Singleton. He had a good run, but he only travelled around in a horse and cart then. He had all his gear with him. (*Digression*).

Did you ever get out round Yango way much, Jack?

Jack: I've never been up the Yango valley in my life. I've been right across from Bucketty down into Mangrove Mountain and the Mangrove valley, but not up Yango.

Did you girls get around much?

Beryl: We used to go to the dances...

Sybil: When I was living there I was too young to go anywhere much unless I was taken, so it was only to the dances. The kids all used to go to the Wollombi dances. Other than that it was Sunday School and church. (*Digression*).

Jack: What is it that they call you newcomers? Move-ins...?

Beryl: Blow-ins.

Jack: Blow-ins. That's right.

There's a bloke down the Yarramalong valley who's been there over seventeen years, but as he says: "I'm

still a blow-in “ . If you weren't born there and didn't grow up there, then I you're a blow-in... (general laughter). (Digression).

Sybil: Talking about riding horses - the only horse ride I ever did was when Enid Bradley was out at our place - Reg's sister. She got on the saddle and I got on the horse at the back and Uncle Mick McKay gave it a flick on the rump and it bolted. It went round a corner post near the house really fast and we nearly scraped our legs, then Uncle Bill came running out of the barn and caught it and stopped us. I've never been on a horse since.

How old would you have been then?

Sybil: Oh, about ten or eleven I suppose.

Jack: Enid Bradley is Reg's sister, Bill. She's a very talented woman. She's an artist - she does a lot of those bark paintings, she knits - you've got no idea what she gets up to. *(Digression)*. ...You know that bloke Freddie Carson that used to own the mill at Yarralong and the flying foxes and all that? He was a very clever feller. A good businessman. He used to have that big old petrol-driven Caterpillar thing - we used to be able to hear it from our place down the Run. It'd be blasting away out there all day, and old Freddie used to say that every time it fired it cost sixpence! Because there was no diesel or anything around in those days, you know.

What was it like in those days, growing up in what was then pretty remote country? Did you get a talk about the birds and the bees from you parents?

Sybil: You probably learned about it naturally, growing up on a farm...

Beryl: You work it out from the cattle, I suppose.

Jack: My Mum and Dad never told us anything - I don't know whether they ever told you anything Syb, but Dad never told me anything. You were with pigs and cows and horses all the time...

But they were pretty different times then compared to now weren't they? They didn't talk about that sort of thing at all...

Sybil: I think the kids can tell us a few things now.

Jack: I think kids are taught too much too soon today.

D'you think? Isn't knowledge always better than ignorance?

Jack: Oh yes...

Beryl: Oh, these days you'd have to know.

Jack: I wasn't ignorant about anything on the land because I saw it all the time. And Bill, you didn't take a bit of notice.

So nobody told you, and you made the connection yourselves as kids. Did you see the animals actually laying the keel, as it were?

Jack: Yes, you'd see cows having calves and that.

Sybil: Yes, you just didn't think about it. Auntie Nellie would have had a couple of kids when I was old enough to have known better, and I didn't notice she was wearing smocks until she got thin again and had had a baby. I never connected the two. We must have been real naive, mustn't we?

And when you were going to these dances all the time in your teens, was there any sort of romantic interest in the fellers or was it all just good clean fian?

Beryl: You didn't leave the dance hall once you were in there.

Sybil: Oh no, that was a no-no.

Beryl: And you knew who were the ones who would leave the dance hall.

Sybil: Yes. If you saw someone go out, then my god she was rough!

But it used to happen a bit, did it?

Sybil: Oh a little bit, yes.

Beryl: Of course we never ever left the hall! But when we were young we were so innocent.

Jack: When I was young I knew how chickens arrived and all this business, because I remember Grandfather one time had a lot of ducks up there and I had a broody hen down home. I went and got some duck eggs from him and put them under the chook and she brought out twelve ducks. She looked after 'em just like chickens. She used to go crazy because the creek wasn't far from our place...

Sybil: The poor thing. She was on the bank and the ducklings were in the water...

Jack: And she used to go off her brain. You could see the little fluffy things diving around in the water ...It used to frighten the poor old chook. It was a bit like the kids at Wyong Creek that had a blue cattle dog, and it used to go crazy when the kids would go for a swim in the creek. He didn't like it.

But still, Jack, it must have been a big step from knowing about chooks and ducks and all that... to courting Beryl. (General ribaldry - indecipherable. --probably fortunately!).

Sybil: In those days you didn't knit on Sundays, you didn't tell lies, and you didn't take anything that didn't belong to you. And that was drummed into you. And by gee, I was married and had a couple of kids before I could knit on Sunday! I felt that guilty - you know.

So the influence of religion was quite strong then?

Beryl: Oh yes. It still carries on. What you were taught then still carries over now.

Jack: All we did on Sundays was milk the cows. And Good Fridays. And no meat.

Beryl: They reckoned that if you ploughed on Sunday the crop wouldn't grow.

Jack: Yes - you've got six days to do that - you should have Sunday off. And nobody ate meat on Good Friday. Some families wouldn't eat butter, milk, tea or anything on Good Friday. On Good Friday Mum used to put salmon on the table. All that came from Grandma's side.

Beryl: I wouldn't even give our dog meat on Good Friday. Not that we are in any way over-religious.

What did you do for toilets in those days? Did you have long drop dunnies?

Jack: We had the pan.

Beryl: When we were at Wyong Creek we had a hole in the ground toilet with a wide board with a hole in it for a seat.

Jack: One day I killed a snake near the toilet, and the same day, just on dusk, I had to go to the toilet. I used to wear a belt around my pants, you know; and I took the belt off and coiled it up and put it on the seat alongside me. When I got up I got a hell of a shock because I thought it was another snake - I'd forgotten about my belt!

Beryl: I know a feller that was a nightman, and he used to get back in the truck after carrying all these

pans and roll his own cigarettes!

Sybil: Well I heard that the sanitary cart tipped over once on a bridge, and the driver was searching around for his coat in the mess and his mate says: "You won't be able to wear that coat anymore anyway." And he says: "I'm not worried about the coat - but my lunch is in the pocket."!

Jack: Ten door sedans, they used to call those trucks.

So you had a pan that you buried, Jack. Did you have to draw lots to see whose job that was?

Jack: There used to be a few arguments about it.

Beryl: You used to use Phenol. And even these days, if you smell Phenol you think of the toilet.

Jack: They used to put kerosene in the pan. It'd float on top and keep the flies away.

Sybil: Jack, did you tell Bill about when you used to wrk with Alan Thompson? When he told you not to bring lunch?

Jack: Oh yes. He bought one of those mobile saws - a Hagen saw. You brought a pulley down onto a belt - that was your clutch - and the more you tightened the belt the more drive you got. Anyway, they had some big trees up there. Some of them would have been three and four foot through - big old dried trees, you know. They put a sawbench in and used to sell the block wood for firewood round Wyong - about a pound a cartload or something I think it was in those days. We only cut it up into six foot lengths, but having that old motorised saw to cut through these old dry logs...

Anyway, we're away from the house this day and they used to make their own butter - it was wartime and there was butter rationing on, and we often got a bit of butter and a few eggs off the Thompsons. People did that sort of thing those days - if you had too much of something then you gave it away. This time we were away Alan says to me: "You bring your lunch tomorrow." (We often used to go home for lunch). "Tell you what," he said, "Tomorrow we'll boil a billy. You bring some bread, I'll bring the butter and the eggs. We'll boil a billy for the eggs and another one for the tea."

He brought a dozen eggs...each! I thought he'd brought a dozen of them for me to take home, but no! So I thought I'd try and stick with him - I wasn't all that old at the time. I got through half a dozen and he's still going, and when I got to ten I had to stop. He kept going, and ate the ones that I couldn't as well! But Ted Thompson reckons half a loaf of bread and a Muscovy duck was only a snack! ...And he's sitting there with no boots on - he never wore boots in the bush. The Thompsons never wore boots - they'd plough in no boots, they'd do anything in no boots.

Beryl: And now they tell you not to eat more than two or three eggs a week.

Jack: Syd Thompson was the bachelor of the family. He came from St Albans and he used to come over to work on his brother's place. He couldn't ride in a car because he got carsick. If he wanted to go back to St Albans, he used to ride all the way standing on the running board!

Beryl: Another thing about Wyong was the buckjumping tent at the Wyong Show. You'd win something if you could stay on the horse for a certain time.

Did you ever have a go at that, Jack?

Jack: No. I had enough bits of me busted out at Murray's Run. I came off 'em a few times out there. Poddy calves - you'd get ten or twelve calves around the trough all feeding because they used to love the milk - and you'd get up on a fence and jump in the middle of 'em, you know, and then there'd be a scatter and you'd be down on the ground and they'd be over the top of you, and...

What? You did this just for fun ?

Jack: Yes. You'd get up on top of them and ride them. Soon as you got on them they'd back off, and out they'd go! Scattering. We really had some fun - especially if they went downhill, and you'd fall off and go slithering down on your backside.

Sybil: I think the best part was when we used to grease the slabs with fat to slide down on. We'd carry them right up the hill and get on them and we used to slide down.

Jack: We'd use a piece of six by one board sanded right down nice and smooth and you'd rub a lot of fat into it to make it shiny and smooth. And in summertime when the grass was very dry you'd go like on ice on them.

Sybil: Then you'd walk all the way back up. Sometimes we had no seat in our pants.

Do you think this only happened up there? Nobody else has mentioned kids playing like that. Mostly they seem to be going to school and doing farm chores.

Jack: Well, there's been some tin canoes sunk up there in those waterholes. We were always building tin canoes. We used to sneak the iron out of the shed - poor old Uncle Bill used to hate that. You'd get a bit of six by one and shape it for the back, then get a bit of leather strap and tack it round in between the wood and the tin so it would swell up and make it watertight. Then you'd do the front. We had some great times.

Beryl: And when the cows would have to come home across the creek we'd ride along on their tails. It was like water skiing. We'd hang onto their tails and they'd go like anything!

Jack: But they used to be a wake-up to us after a while and we'd have to hide in the bush and then jump out and grab them by the tail... We had some good times out there, by crikey we did.

Sybil: We made our own fun, that's why it was good. We didn't have much bought for us.

Jack: And poor old Dad. We were going to a dance and he didn't want to go. He had a '35 Dodge, and I could drive. I learnt to drive in a Model A Ford going over to Braithwaite's. I was only a kid.

It'd be pretty safe, though, wouldn't it?

Jack: Oh yes. You'd never see another car. Anyway, he let me take the Dodge so we could all go to this dance. So away we go to the dance. We came back home alright. The next morning we're up, and Dad was up milking, and I used to have to ride my bike down to Sternbeck's to get the bread and the mail. But this time I took the car. I drove down and got the mail, and went on up to help with the milking. When Dad came down for lunch he passed the car and it was still warm from going for the mail, and he says to Mum: "That bloody Jack must've given that car a caning last night. The bloody thing's still hot!"

Beryl: We said before about the cattlemen that used to stop over at home when they were going to the saleyards. Well, Marie McKay and I used to get little tiny weeny stitches and sew their pyjama legs up, or short sheet their beds. The poor devils! If they were just tied in a knot, fair enough, but these were little stitches!

Jack: Gladly Sternbeck - that's Les' sister - Mum's brother was only young and he used to go with Gladly. He used to live at Wyong Creek and ride a horse over to Murray's Run to see her.

That's a fair way. He must have been keen.

Sybil: Well something was happening. It was worthwhile I suppose.

Jack: Anyway, on Sunday afternoons Gladly and Alf used to come up home to see Mum. He'd tie the

horse up on a post down from the house and come up and see us, and when he'd go home Gladys and him would walk down to the front gate together and he'd ride home. So this day he goes down and gets the horse and leads it up to the house, and as he's coming up this bit of a rise the bloody horse is farting with every step it took.

Sybil: That would have been really embarrassing in those days.

Jack: Yes, today everybody would laugh, but not in those days. So Gladys is standing there like a lady and Alf's got a long forlorn look on his face. The fowlhouse wasn't far away, and all the chooks used to feed about the paddocks, you know, and to try to break up the embarrassment Mum says: "What's that white thing down there? That's not a chook is it? Is it a bit of paper...?" and Dad says: "Why? If it is, do you think the bloody horse might need it?"!

Les Sternbeck and I were riding over to Wyong Creek one day and we stayed at Aunt Ethel's - that's Dad's sister who married Mum's brother. That was my second home when I was a kid. He had a little black stallion down there, and I had an old grey mare. I was talking to Marie's father one day and he said to me: "That's a nice little stallion. What you want to do with that old grey mare," he said, "you want to get a foal out of her by this feller. He's not a bad pony."

So this day I was riding this old grey mare, and Les had this stallion - a beautiful looking stallion, and he met his cousin who lived at Wyong Creek and was going with a girl up in Ravensdale there somewhere. They come trotting up the road in a horse and sulky. So we're sitting on the horses talking to this George Bowman and his lady, and this bloody stallion starts prancing around - all around this horse that was in the sulky, and Les is having a job to control it. The next thing the stallion has dropped its doodle out and starts piddling on that hard stone road, and it's splashing everywhere, and the lady in the sulky is sitting up, and George - well you could see the whites of his eyes!

Anyway, we said we'd better be going, so away we go, and George trots on, and as soon as we get down the road a bit Us yells: "What do you think of that? You bloody bastard!" and he's cursing and swearing at his horse. Every time I see Les I forget to remind him about that. I'll bet he'd remember it.

Sybil: That goes back fifty or sixty years.

Jack: Of course, if it had've been blokes on their own they would have laughed at that. It's just that there was a lady in the sulky and the three men were all trying to be gentlemen, sort of thing.

Beryl: Those days you got embarrassed though, didn't you?

Jack: I can remember Mum telling me as I was growing up that you've got to be a gentleman around ladies and all that...

Beryl: You always were, too, weren't you?

Jack: ...you had to have your shoes shiny and a clean hanky in your pocket.

(To Beryl and Sybil) *And you wouldn't swear. Did you hear the fellers swear much?*

Sybil: No. Not much.

Beryl: But it was sin to swear, wasn't it? (*Digression*).

You must have been pretty close to the Sternbecks...

Sybil: Oh yes. Everybody helped each other...

Jack: You wouldn't go to Cessnock unless everybody knew. You'd bring back fancy cottons and things like that for the girls - you wouldn't go without seeing if anybody wanted anything.

Sybil: I remember once going to Cessnock as a kid. I used to get two shillings when I went, and in Coles nothing was over two and sixpence so two shillings would buy a lot of bangles and bits and pieces. I was walking up the street this time and there was all this broken chocolate in the window of one of the cafes. Big hunks they were, and it had “ninepence a pound” on it. I’m only about nine I suppose, at the time, and I didn’t know I could’ve bought threepence worth, you know, and because I wanted to buy all sorts of other things in Coles I decided I couldn’t spend a whole nine pence out of my two shillings. And to this day I still think of those slabs of chocolate I could have had if I’d known.

Jack: I’ve still got 26 teeth, but the few teeth that I’ve had pulled out... I’d go to Cessnock with a toothache, and the dentist was upstairs. I’d walk past, and look up the stairs, and decide not to go just then. Then I’d come back again, and do the same thing. Then I’d go round the block for a while, thinking: “Geez I’d better go or Mum and Dad’ll soon be ready to go back.” I was terrified! Because they used to hurt like hell then, but you go to the dentist today, they don’t hurt much the speed those drills go now.

Sybil: Yes, and this dentist, Gersh Baker, used to have his sleeves rolled up and he had great big arms, and he used to lean in and all you could see was a big arm. Then he’d start to sing.

What? While he was working on you?

Sybil: Yes. While he pulled the tooth out.

Jack: I used to shoe my own pony when I was a kid. Put four shoes on him. He was the foal of Les’ stallion from that old grey mare. Gee he was a good pony.

So you got one out of that in the end, eh? Was it common for people to do their own horse shoeing?

Jack: Everybody shod their own horses those days. You’d just buy the shoes and fit them on. Nail them on. The horse soon let you know if you didn’t put them on right. (*Digression*):

Sybil: What about that duck you brought home one day...

Jack: Oh yes, the bloody black shag...

Sybil: There’s Mum cutting it up, and she said: “Gee, it’s got a funny wing on it.” Because you see shags have got a different wing, with another joint or something in it.

And you’d brought it home plucked had you Jack?

Jack: Yes. Only for a joke.

Sybil: Anyway, we ate it!... and it was good.

And who used to do all the preparation - the plucking and the de-gutting and all that? Was that women’s work or men’s work?

Sybil: Not me!

Jack: If we wanted a chook I was generally the one who had to do it. I used to chop their heads off and scald them.

Sybil: Mum used to do it too sometimes. She’d chop their heads off.

Beryl: We used to go fishing with Yvonne McKay. She was a crack shot, Yvonne. We were fishing for perch, and when you’d get a turtle on your line we wouldn’t touch them and she’d just shoot them off the line!

Poor bloody turtles! Were there a lot of turtles in the creek then?

Beryl: Oh yes.

Those little terrapin things?

Beryl: Yes. They're stinking things, though. *(Pause)*.

Sybil: I remember Marie and I trying to cut Grandfather McKay's toenails with a pair of scissors while he was asleep. Anyway, he soon woke up. His nails were so thick and hard I think they would have needed more than a pair of scissors and two little girls! *(Digression)*.

Did the local minister come around and visit the houses much?

Jack: The old minister used to come up and spend the night at Grandfather's. He had a Model T Ford roadster.

Sybil: Old Stephenson, you mean? Remember how he used to test the bridge? Sternbecks used to tell him always to mind that bridge out there and he'd drive up and stop the car and get out and jump up and down on the bridge to see if it was safe to drive over. Everybody else from up there had been driving over it all the time, of course.

Beryl: When you'd go into Cessnock you'd often be late coming home and it would be cold, and how many gates did you have to get out for?

Sybil: Oh, too many. And that going to the dances at Wollombi. It'd be two o'clock in the morning and we'd be coming home and our feet'd be like ice, we'd be so cold.

Beryl: And you'd get into white sheets when you got into bed. No flanelette sheets then.

Sybil: And there was no electricity to turn a heater on or anything, and you wouldn't make a fire at that hour of the morning. You'd get into the sheets and shiver!

Beryl: We'd go to a dance when the kids were little, and we'd put them up on the stage behind the piano wrapped in an eiderdown and they'd sleep the night. When we came home we'd walk through fog with the baby in our arms. Still and all it was good fun. People probably wouldn't do that today. I suppose in those days if you complained they'd think you were soft or something like that.

Sybil: Nobody complained! That was your outing, and it was good that you were out, and that's where you went.

Beryl: And we danced all night to a piano and a violin.

Sybil: What about the time at Wollombi when they used to do those square dances, quadrilles or whatever they call them? There'd be four couples and the men would get hold of the girls and swing them right out and around. There was a music stand at the front of the stage, and as they swung the girls right out flat somebody's heel caught in the music stand. Well! Pages of music went flying! They had to stop the dance and get organised again. *(Digression)*.

Jack: They were good builders in those days. They never had electric tools. I can remember Uncle Rube would take off with a canvas bag for his tools - to keep the weight down. A bag long enough to take spirit levels and... some of the wood planes were over three feet long. You'd spend all the weekend sharpening tools, ready again for Monday morning. That was their life. I might have been a builder if it hadn't been for that - I used to like building. But I got turned off by seeing Uncle Rube go out... he'd go out to Lithgow or somewhere and he'd stay there for six weeks or two months or something and finish the job before he came home again - because you couldn't afford to be travelling in those days. They never had cars then of course. They'd get on the train to go and build somewhere with a bag and their saws.

Beryl: Most of the Greentree blokes were builders, weren't they Jack?

Sybil: Mum was a builder!

Jack: Yes, Dad couldn't drive a nail. He'd rather tie it up with a piece of wire.

Beryl: I'd go up there to visit, and there'd be a doorway in a wall that wasn't there before. She'd fill in the other doorway and cut another one if she wanted to.

Sybil: Yes - we'd go to school and when we came home the wall'd be missing. You'd go into your bedroom and where your bed used to be your dressing table'd be there and your wardrobe would be somewhere else. You'd get lost in your own bedroom.

Jack: She used to move the heavy furniture about by putting a corn bag under two of the legs and dragging it about.

Sybil: She'd put up shelves and do the wallpapering herself...

But that'd be unusual wouldn't it, for a woman to be so handy?

Sybil: Oh yes.

Jack: Dad never said anything to her about changing things around. He just let her go.

Sybil: I don't suppose she'd ask him if she could do it. Once he'd left the house she'd just start knocking things down! That's who Enid takes after. Mum could do lots of handicraft things...

Beryl: Beautiful crochet.

Sybil: Yes, she could just look at the picture and crochet things. She'd see a doily on the table somewhere and go home and do it.

Jack: Enid's got a pot that they used to use to make brawn in the early days. It's got a screw-down lid and looks homemade as though a blacksmith's made it or something.

Did they make it so as to get rid of all the scraggy bits of meat or did they use good meat?

Jack: Grandfather McKay used to make it when they had a kill. He used to always make a brawn, but I can't remember how he pressed it. And he always used to make it too salty.

Beryl: We had a reunion out at the Run one day about fourteen or fifteen years ago now. We had it in the cowbails, and it poured! It was real flood rain - gosh it rained! It wasn't a bad day, but the rain made it a bit uncomfortable.

Sybil: We had a Greentree reunion at Wyong Creek and there were 320 descendents and 280-something turned up. But it takes a bit of organising.

You've never been tempted to have another reunion?

Jack: Oh they might one day.
