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# Talking about the past around WYEE

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Zita Deaves and Russell Deaves

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*Zita and Russell are cousins. They are both descended from two pioneer families of the Wyee area, the Deaves family and the Freeman family. Here they reminisce about what life was like as they were growing up in Wyee.*

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*Russell:* The original John Deaves in Australia had a sawmill in Sussex Street, in Sydney. He moved from Sydney to Ourimbah, which was then called Bluegum Flat.

*Int:* Was he a sawmiller all his life? When he came to Bluegum Flat was he still working in a sawmill?

*Russell:* Don't know. But the men in the Deaves family were pretty much all working in the timber industry.

*Int:* Not many farmers, then?

*Russell:* I can't think of any of 'em who were farmers for a living. They all had a garden and some chooks – just about everyone did in those days. But mostly it was timber cutting and bullock driving.

*Int:* Were there any Aborigines about the place when you were growing up?

*Russell:* No. No. A few of them used to come here from time to time.

*Zita:* Granny Freeman was the first white woman in Wyee. She came from good stock in England – the Radclyffes. And if she had gone back to England we would have all been rich and famous!

*Russell:* The Deaves' and the Freemans were quite prolific in the early days, but there are other names that spring to mind. There were a fair few Woods...

*Zita:* They helped start off the Bethshan Mission, I think. You know Winns, the department store in Sydney and Newcastle? I think they put up most of the money. And the Woods' were into timber, I think...

*Russell:* Timber, and orchardists and dairying. And the Armitages...they got mixed up with the Deaves' a lot...

*Int:* When they got married, did they tend to stay in the area?

*Russell:* Yes. They didn't start moving away till when I was growing up. I was born in Wyee, and there was no hospital in Wyee. People would say: "You weren't born in a hospital!" and I'd point out that if you were going to be born in a hospital it was a matter of a trip in the back of a horse and cart to bloody Wyong in those days.

*Int:* How did you get on for doctors in those days, like for everyday medical matters?

*Zita:* Our doctor was at Catherine Hill Bay, Dr Kilgour. And you'd be sick and dying and you'd still have to ride your bloody bike from here to Catherine Hill Bay!

*Int:* He wouldn't do home visits?

*Zita:* Sometimes he would. He came out for the last baby Mum had, and Nurse Thomas delivered the baby — Denise. I could never understand why people didn't get on a train and go to Newcastle for a doctor.

*Russell:* Well, you'd've had to pay your fare...

*Zita:*... and you could ride your bike for nothing! We had a Real Estate Agent called Mr Croke, and he was disabled. He had an old Buick car with the side curtains and all that, and one day I needed to go to the doctor. I told Mum I

was too sick to ride my bike, and she said: "Well, we'll get a ride from someone". Anyway, we got out on the road, probably half way to Doyalson, walking, and along came Mr Croke. He lived out along Hue Hue Road. He pulled up and offered us a lift. I think I would have been about 14, and I said to Mum that she should sit in the front, because I didn't want to sit in the front with Mr Croke. I remember that because of his disability he used to have a brake that operated somehow from the back of his seat. He used to lean back on the seat back to stop the car.

And Granny Deaves had a prolapsed womb because she'd had eight children, and they didn't operate in those days. Every six months she'd have to get a ride from Harry Farmer in to see the doctor. The Farmers had the shop in those days and Harry had the taxi. Harry used to take her in, but while she was at the doctor's he'd go to the pub at Catherine Hill Bay and forget all about Gran. When he finally came to get us he'd be drunk and drive us all home! And Gran used to have to find enough money to pay the doctor, and to pay Harry Farmer to drive us there. Most of the roads were gravel then. Us kids used to have to line up to see who could get a lift with Gran, because it was a big deal to get a ride in the car to Catherine Hill Bay.

*Int:* On a different topic, did you ever hear of anybody making their own grog, or growing their own tobacco?

*Zita:* Well there was one lady who didn't make it, but she used to get it from Dalwood Vineyards. There were four blokes who used to share what was quite a big stone container. It was wine.

*Russell:* Well, I never drank table wine. It was always port or muscat. I used to play cards with some of the fellas. I was only a kid, and they used to live out on Hue Hue road – at Flame Tree.

*Zita:* When Farmers had the shop, some people never paid their bill. They'd say "Book it up to Chifley", you know, 'cos Chifley was the Prime Minister then.

*Russell:* Everyone had chooks in those days. There was a farm out on Wyee Farms Road that was a poultry farm. It was a family affair, until the Egg Board and the Citrus Board were formed and they sent all these sort of people broke. It was the same with the dairies. Back then, if you wanted eggs you went and bought them from the poultry farmer, if you wanted oranges you went and bought them from the orchardist. But then the powers that be decided that we couldn't do that, and made it illegal. This meant that a lot of the young fellas in the families had to go and get a job somewhere else. That was one of the reasons that a lot of people moved away from the area. When the power stations started up there were a lot of people worked there, but prior to that it was nearly all timber cutting. When my late brother Cliff was doing the pulpwood...

*Int:* Was that pulpwood that went to make Masonite?

*Russell:* Yes. In Wyong, where that new school is before you go across the bridge, that was a big paddock with pulpwood stacked on it. It was second grade timber. You wouldn't cut building timber out of it. I used to cart it to Raymond Terrace for bloody ages. I was a butcher by trade, but I used to do other things as well. Originally they used to put it on a train. My brother started that. He had a couple of Blitzes and they'd cart it in to the railway. But then they started carting it to the factory in Raymond Terrace.

*Int:* You said you were a butcher by trade. How did you go about becoming a butcher in those days? Did you do an apprenticeship, or...

*Russell:* I started when I was about 8 years old. My brother-in-law owned a butcher shop at the time, and before school, and after school, and on school holidays most of the time I spent in the butcher shop. When I was supposed to be a second year apprentice I went to work in a butcher shop in Hamilton and I was only there a week and they put me on butcher's wages. I was virtually a fully-fledged butcher when I was very young.

When we were still going to school, Zita's brother George came into the butcher shop up here at Wyee. He used to get five bob or something to wash up. Do you remember the old Immersers? They were like a big element with a longish stem on them that you'd put in the boilers to heat the water. You'd hang them on the side of a big bucket and turn it on. I was putting some mince through the mincer, and instead of hanging it on the side of the bucket he just dropped the whole thing in! The mincer came alive and the electric shock threw me into the bloody wall!

*Int:* Did you stay a butcher for most of your working life?

*Russell:* Yeah. I started butchering in the early 'fifties. I remember getting two pounds two a week, but the days were long. You'd start any time after around five in the morning, and you were there till you finished – maybe six o'clock at night or even longer sometimes. It didn't matter how many hours extra you worked, you still only got two pound two. I used to pay a pound for horse feed and a pound for board, and that left me with two bob to spare. So consequently I had to do other things as well. I used to lead horses from here to Mulbring for a pound. I'd be riding my horse, but leading the other horses. One time I led these horses to Mulbring and the owner wasn't home, so I left them in his yard and came back home. The next week there was a gymkhana here at Wyee and the Mulbring bloke came to it. I spotted him, and went up to him and asked him for the quid he owed me. "Oh," he said, "you enjoyed doing it didn't you? I'll give you ten bob". I called out to my older brother Cliff, who was a big bloke, and the Mulbring bloke saw him and immediately said "Here's your pound". I think he probably would have paid me anyway, and was just having me on, but when I called out to my brother he soon paid up.

*Int:* What about your social life? Did you have dances and things like that?

*Russell:* Nearly every Friday and Saturday night there'd be a dance. Joyce Wood would have played the piano, or Mrs Bennett, with old Graf on his drums. Then we'd get a band from Morisset – Dulcie McKinnon, and a bloke who used to play the violin. There was a violin, a sax and the piano. Bloody good band it was.

*Zita:* And Alan Barnett played the trumpet, I think it was. That's Barbara Barnett's father. He was the local undertaker. Barbara King Funerals does it these days.

Russ, you didn't mention that bloke who played the piano, who used to pull out tufts of his hair while he was playing. Later, when they came to tune the piano, the tuner reckoned there was a jam tin full of hair in the innards of the piano!

*Russell:* We'd have these dances, because if we didn't have dances, who was there to fight?

*Int:* Were fights common, then?

*Russell:* Well, blokes'd come over from Swansea, just for the fun of it, you know. There were some funny nights.

On the weekends, in the daytime we'd be always playing tennis or cricket or something. At one stage, in my day, we had seven cricket teams in the various grades. The pitches were alright, mostly concrete – some of 'em had malthoid on 'em. I don't remember that we had any football teams though.

On a different topic, there was a bloke called Dougie Kilday. He crashed a plane just over the road near here, only a couple of hundred yards away. He'd only just got his light plane licence to fly solo. My brother-in-law and myself were out in the backyard – either killing chooks or cleaning fish, one or the other. The brother-in-law was ex-Air Force, and Dougie was up there looping the loop – it was a Tiger Moth sort of thing. My brother-in-law said suddenly: "Hey, he's bugged, he's too low!" and we started running over to where he was. We were halfway there when he crashed, and by the time we got there the plane was burnt to a cinder. His father was in it with him.

*Zita:* And he crashed in his girlfriend's backyard. He was engaged to be married to her.

*Russell:* Then, the next day in the Newcastle Herald, it said that the bodies were taken to Wyee Hospital. This was, I think, the early 1950s, and from then on I never believed what I read in the newspapers because there was no hospital in Wyee, and there still isn't!

*Zita:* The bloke who owned the plane had a garage up at Cooranbong. His first name was Friday, which was a nickname, and I was always told that he got that name because whenever you asked him when your car would be ready he'd always say it would be ready on Friday! His wife was in one of our local papers

recently, and she was 106. She reckoned she'd had such a long life because she ate Weet Bix everyday. She was a Seventh Day Adventist, and got the Weet Bix from the Sanitarium factory in Cooranbong.

*Int:* And when you had the dances, did you have booze at them?

*Russell:* Yes. But outside. And the ladies would bring a plate with some sandwiches or cake or something. The Hall was on wooden piers, and I think my pier was No 3, down this side. If you went outside and found someone at your beer, you just jobbed them, there and then. But most of the time you could trust them. Everyone stuck their bottles by their pier under the Hall. You couldn't take beer into the hall in those days.

A few blokes smoked pipes. One old guy in particular always smoked a pipe and when I was working in the butcher shop, if you looked out the door he'd be coming across the bridge and you could smell his pipe from the bloody butcher shop. It was a big old curly clay thing...

*Zita:* And then he used to spit. He'd end up with a mouthful of tobacco juice and spit it out wherever he was. He used to come up to get his share of the wine, and he'd come down to our house near the tennis court. He was sitting near the window one day, and Mum had a lettuce patch just outside the window, and he would be spitting out the window onto all the lettuces. Mum ended up digging the whole patch in.

We used to get a lot of the patients from the hospital at Morisset, because the Crim Ward was not that far away, and they could walk here through the bush. We'd get patients turning up and they'd want help, or shelter or something. Mum had this woman in the house once and she couldn't get rid of her. One night we were inside and somebody knocked on the door. Mum yelled out 'Who's there?', and we all crept over towards the door and Mum slid the bolt on it, and said "If you don't answer me soon I'll bloody well shoot you!". She didn't have a gun, of course, but she thought she was OK now she had the door bolted. The, next thing, there's a quavering voice: "Any body home?" and it was an old bloke that used to drop in sometimes. He couldn't hear Mum because he was as deaf as a post. He'd been there for about twenty minutes and Mum finally let him in. Someone bought him a hearing aid – the first one I'd ever seen –but he didn't ever use it.

*Russell:* It used to be Dr Rickard at Wyong wasn't it? The only time I had to get the doctor when I was a kid was when I got an appendicitis. He had an old black car, and it seemed to take a long while for him to get up here...

*Zita:* It probably would have cost something like five pounds for him to come up from Wyong...

*Russell:* I don't know. Plenty of times when I came home from school Mum would say: "I want you to go a message for me before you let the horse out". She'd want

me to post a letter, but then she couldn't find a threepence for the stamp. That happened more than once. Things were a bit tough at times.

Anyway, Rickard came up and told us that I had appendicitis. He told me not to ride the horse for something like six weeks and I should get better. I think I kept off the horse for three days, so of course I finished up in hospital.

*Zita:* Then there was the time that David (Russell's brother) got his eye knocked out.

*Russell:* I don't know much about that. All I know is that he got it knocked out with a broom handle.

*Zita:* I was standing right next to him. They used to throw the broom like they do in Scotland with the caber. On sports days they'd throw the broom, and this time the wind caught it, and it came spiraling through the air and the handle went straight into his eye. He ended up with a glass eye, which was always a joke with David, because he'd take it out and put it on his tobacco tin and say: "Watch this for me. Don't let anybody take any."

*Russell:* Yeah. Imagine if you started throwing a broom around at school now! On Empire Night we'd have a ball made out of hessian and soaked in kerosene. You'd light it and then pass it around. It didn't burn you as long as you didn't hang onto it. If you tried that these days they'd lock you up. That's probably why they call them the Fun Police.

So many things have changed. When we were kids, you'd get home from school on Friday afternoon, do the messages, then we'd grab a sugar bag, and some tea and sugar and a couple of tins of baked beans, and we'd be off up into the mountains on our horses. We'd go and camp, and nobody would worry about us. We'd sleep out in the open. We wouldn't leave home if it was pouring with rain, but if we got caught in the rain up there we'd just get a few branches and make a rough shelter. If we came to a gate, we'd go through it and leave it as we found it, but nowadays all the gates are locked against trespassers

*Zita:* You can't even get down to Wyee Creek anymore. There's gates there now. And it's not as though there's anything down there they'd need to have a gate for.

*Int:* Do you know when the Wyee school opened?

*Zita:* There was a school here in Wyee already when I was born, and I went to it when I was old enough. There was another school down Hue Hue, but I don't understand why they had one there as well. People like the Lancasters used to go to school there. In the end they closed that school and the kids used to have to come to Wyee. The school at Wyee is well over a hundred years old.

We didn't wear shoes to school. We didn't have the money.. Mum used to have to

drive from here to Morisset in the horse and sulky to get the dole, even though there was a postal service in operation by then. I think she used to go in every fortnight, and she got six shillings, I think it was. Once a year the children were issued with shoes, but you couldn't wear them because they were like pieces of board, they were so stiff! If we did wear them to school we'd take them off as soon as we'd get there. They also gave each child a length of material, and the mothers would make up skirts and pinafores, so that everyone had the same. I used to get into trouble because I used to only iron the sleeves and the front of my shirt, because you couldn't see the rest.

I used to have to do a lot of the outside jobs, like, we used to have to empty our own toilet, and I'd have to dig the hole, and get the wood. My stepsister Betty had to set the table and do the vegetables. Betty learned to sew but I wasn't interested in sewing at all. I preferred to be out doing my jobs. My stepfather Frank used to grow vegetables, and I used to have to ride around on my bike and sell beans and tomatoes, and take orders. But we never had time to play. If we got all our jobs done we could go down to see our cousins and play for a half an hour if we were lucky. And of course we had to be home before dark. To make sure we got home before dark, Grannie Freeman used to say that there was a man lived down by the creek who had a coffin on his shoulder and his head under his arm!

*Int:* And was Avondale school going when you were kids?

*Zita:* It's been going for as long as I can remember. I don't think anybody from round here went there, but quite a few used to work there.

My mother's house – the house that I was born in -- was next door to my place in Wyee Road. The Council condemned it because it wasn't a full nine inches off the ground! Mum gave that house to a fellow called Curtiss. I was living in Canada at the time, and she used to write to me and say: "Stupid old Curtiss is pulling the guts out of it and it's going to fall on top of him." Then later on I got a phone call and she told me that house actually had fallen on him. The helicopter had to come and get him and he was taken to Newcastle Hospital and not expected to live. But he did.

My grandmother could neither read or write, and Mr Rien, who ran the Bethshan Mission used to come out to her house once a week and have a church service with her every Sunday morning. I used to listen to what was being said and I thought it was mostly garbage. I still do. People would talk about how they were going to glory land and all this, and then one of them would die, and they'd come over and cry. One of these times I went up to them and said: "Why are you crying? She's gone to glory land. It's going to be wonderful for her.

When we were young we'd go to the Seventh Day Adventists on Saturday, because they had a better sandpit. But then on Sunday we'd go to the Mission



*Zita's mother's house, where Zita was born.*

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or to the Church of England, because we were C of E. The little church that we would go to is still up here, but we would only go once a month. There was no Minister in Wyee for the C of E. He lived at Dora Creek. I'd say most of the community was religious in the early days, and people like me would just tend to keep their mouth shut – 'cos it was somewhere to go.

*Russell:* When I was going to school up here, the master had his own method of dealing with bullies. Two boys in particular used to bully two other boys. Their father was a railway worker, and they'd only come to school for a couple of months at a time. Every time they came back they'd pick on these two blokes and give them a hiding. Word would get back to the headmaster that these two boys had been bullying the other two, so at playtime he'd sidle up to the school captain and say: "I'll be a little bit late back from recess today. Take care of that matter for me, will you?" We'd take the two bullies down the back garden and give them a hiding, and that solved the bullying problem. You'd give 'em a smack in the mouth and that was that. It stopped it.

*Int:* I'm told that In the early days there was a sawmill down Hue Hue Road somewhere...

*Zita:* Farrells...

*Russell:* And Angus' were just down this way. And a bloke called Lancaster

had a big mill out at Wyee Point. They used to take logs down to it on bullock waggons, then they'd saw the timber and put it on barges and float it down through Swansea to Newcastle. When I was clearing land out there, twenty years or so ago, I suppose, (I had a tractor and a blade and I used to clear a few blocks), there was a big mound, and when I put the blade into it it turned out to be a bloody big heap of sawdust. Lancaster had quite a few people employed out there, and lots of the Deaves' used to cart logs out there.

*Zita:* Ruttley used to own all that land down there at Wyee Point. We used to go down there and shoot rabbits. I used to, with Joe Lancaster. There was no one there, then.

*Russell:* We used to chase horses down there. Originally it had been all fenced with heavy duty wire rope. We'd be chasing brumbies down there years later and there might happen to be a panel of this heavy wire rope still left... that was a bit dangerous.

*Zita:* And he also owned the block of land behind the shops, here at Wyee. I think it belongs to a Ruttley, but not THE Mr Ruttley.

*Russell:* One of the schoolteachers owned a lot of land around here too. Then there was Arthur Calvert. We'd go down there as kids and he'd say: "Want a lolly, boys?" and he'd chuck us Minties, but they were brown, and we were never game to eat them.

*Int:* That's something else you couldn't do today!

*Zita:* When I used to go down to the point and shoot rabbits, one day I shot one and Joe Lancaster used the gun after me. He said he didn't know I could use it because the sights were out to buggery. I said that was probably how I managed to get it!

*Russell:* No. There was nothing down there forty years ago. You could go down there and camp and do whatever you want.

*Int:* Is the Lake close enough to be used by many people from around here?

*Russell:* Oh, yes there's a lot. And since they stopped fishing it commercially it's good fishing. The commercial fishermen were just dragging the guts out of it. But when we were kids it was common practice to just lob in a stick of gelignite. The older blokes would chuck in the explosive and we kids would help them get the stunned fish out.

Going back about 25 years or so, I suppose, there was a bloke that lived over near the Mission. He was a big, rough, ebullient sort of a bloke, and there was another bloke there who was a sailor. I'd had a couple of run-ins with him – chucked him out of a dance or two – and this time we were in the pub at Morisset. It must have been close to knock-off time, and I'd dropped in there.

I had an Austin A40 ute at the time. Anyway the big bloke came up to me and said: "Mate, any chance of getting a ride home with you?" "Sure" I said, "but as soon as he sings out 'time', we're goin'. I'm not waiting around." "No worries," he said. Then about five minutes later the sailor strolls up to me: "Any chance of a ride home?" "Sure mate, as long as you're ready to go when he says 'time'". Come ten o'clock I said we were going. We're driving along, and the two of them are arguing like hell. I stopped the ute and said: "If you guys want a fight, then get out and get it over with. I'm goin' home". They calmed down, and when I got near the Mission the big bloke said to me "Thanks for the lift. If ever there's anything I can do for you, just let me know." This bloke was a shot firer working on the roads at the time, and I said to him: "Matter of fact, there is. Is there any chance of getting me half a dozen plugs of jelly?" "No worries", he said. When we got to his place he told me to keep driving down to his neighbour's place. By this time it would have been around eleven o'clock at night, but that didn't stop him roaring out to wake up his neighbour. The neighbour came out in his pyjamas and they talked for a bit, then into the neighbour's garage they go. Soon the big bloke comes back out, and he's carrying a carton – 144 sticks -- of gelignite. He drops it in the back of the ute along with 144 electric detonators. When we got back to his house he won't let me go till he'd given me three bottles of beer as well. I told him I didn't want 'em, but he insisted. Then I proceeded down to the other bloke's place to drop him off. When he got out he gave me six bottles of beer, which I also tried to refuse. "No", he said, "take 'em. I'm not going to be outdone by that other miserable bastard!" They were pissed, of course, but I ended up with nine bottles of beer and 144 sticks of jelly and dets – just for giving them a lift home!"

*Zita:* In those days everyone used to hand stuff around. If you had a tomato patch you'd give them around, or beans...

*Russell:* See, if a woman lost her husband, say – they'd put on a gymkhana or something like that to raise a few dollars for 'em. We used to raise a fair bit sometimes.

*Zita:* My mother was often an instigator of those...

*Russell:* Horses, and woodchops, and bullock riding and stuff like that.

*Int:* Were there bullock teams?

*Russell:* Not at the gymkhanas, but there were lots around the district because of the local involvement with the timber industry.

*Zita:* Bill Armitage, in the cemetery up there, has a bullock team engraved on his headstone.

*Russell:* He also carved a wooden bullock team. I think it's in the Memorial at Canberra or somewhere. It was absolutely brilliant – the detail and all that in it.

One day, playing cricket, I broke a bloke we called Meggsy's wrist. It was an accident. They'd got a few early wickets, and I went in, and Meggsy came right in close to field at mid-off. I drove this ball, and I must've just got it spot on. He tried to catch it, and it broke his wrist – but it still went to the boundary! It was travellin'. On that particular day Douglas Duncan opened the batting, and I think I went in seventh. And at stumps he was 81 and I was 79.

*Zita:* Joe Lancaster was my brother-in-law, and he was good at everything. He used to run everywhere, and he used to make boats. He was the healthiest bloke – had five kids in five years – and he really used every minute of his life to be active. He came home from the club one night and said to his wife Betty: "I'm not feeling too good. I'm going out for some air", and he fell flat on his face, dead. I think he was only in his forties.

*Russell:* I'd seen him at the club earlier that night and he looked bloody awful. I think he must've had a heart attack.

*Zita:* People used to say that I should've married Joe, but Betty was at home looking after five kids. Joe would come down and say, "Let's dig some worms and we'll go and have a fish". It was my job to pull out the worms, and I had to be careful not to break them or they'd die. You'd pull out handfuls of mud from the bank. And Joe used to sit up a tree with his gun, and as the mullet swam past he'd shoot two or three at a time.

*Russell:* When we used to go and blow the fish, this Joe Lancaster was terrific. If you had deep water, you'd only use a little bit of plug, because the deeper the water the more pressure it created. It'd stun the fish, they'd go down to the bottom, and you'd go in and get them before they woke up and swam away. If you used too much jelly it'd kill them and they'd float, and the ones that were only stunned used to sink. There were some really big mullet, and if they revived while you were trying to get them they'd try to get away, and for us it was good fun, y'know.

*Int:* And when you went in after the stunned fish, did you just open your eyes underwater...?

*Russell:* Oh yes. It used to get a bit murky just after the plug went off though. I was probably ten, I suppose, and I was down at Spring Creek I think it was, with my older brother. The plug went off, and I was paddling around in the water where I could stand up, and finding the fish with my feet. Suddenly I must've got out of my depth and started bobbing down – I couldn't swim – and I came up and yelled out that I couldn't touch bottom, and my brother calls back, "Well swim, you bastard, or you'll drown!" I've been swimmin' ever since!

*Zita:* And then all Wyee would have fish...

*Russell:* Yeah, we'd get a corn bag full of fish and we'd be handing them out everywhere.

*Zita:* And it was my job to clean them.

*Int:* Why did that job fall to you? Because you were a woman?

*Zita:* I dunno. I think my mother didn't like cleaning them.

*Russell:* It would interfere with your drinking!

Another day, I remember it was an Empire Day, and I finished up at the school for cracker night. I'd been out looking for our cows. A car was a pretty rare thing in those days, and we'd let them out on the street to roam. Anyway, there was our cow, and Mick Baker's cow – they were two that we couldn't find, and it was my job to go and find them. I found them, and I went to bring them home when they went charging through the top end of this creek. So I put the horse in straight after 'em, but I got the horse across a log. It started lunging and plunging when suddenly the girth broke. I got the saddle out and chucked it on the bank, and got the horse turned around, and we're trying to get up the bank, which was quite steep. The bloody horse wouldn't make any effort to get up the bank, and I'm leaning on the reins, when suddenly the horse decided to lunge. As soon as he lunged his four hooves went boom boom boom boom – straight up my back! A bloody big racehorse thing it was! Even though the saddle now had no girth, I put the saddle back on him and walked him home. (I got up on a stump, and climbed up on him without having to put my weight on the stirrup, you know). When I got home, my brother was in the stable out the back. "What happened to you?" he said, and I told him that the horse had walked up my back. "I think my back might be broken..." He pulled me, saddle and all off the horse and I hit the ground. Then I got up again. "Well, if you can stand up," he said, "it can't be broken." Mind you, I've had a bad back ever since.

I used to be the doorman at some of the dances when I was younger. Sometimes a couple of smarties would try to get in without paying, but they'd call me over and then the money came out. As I said earlier, sometimes blokes would come to the dance from Swansea, and we'd rather fight someone from Swansea than one of our local blokes. But you could have a good old punch-up and then go and have a beer together. If you knocked someone down, you'd wait to see if he got up and wanted any more, and if not you'd often go off and have a drink together.

Those gymkhanas I mentioned. They were fair dinkum. You'd get the bookies and everything at 'em. They'd bring horses that had been racing in Newcastle, they'd bring 'em here just to win the Wye Cup. The cup wasn't worth much money, but they might stretch the bookies out a bit.

See, back then, if you went to the dance, say, you didn't even shut your door if it was a warm night. Or if you had a car, you'd just park it outside with the keys in it and the windows down. Even if you'd had a few and decided to walk home and pick up the car the next morning, it was always still there. But nowadays I wouldn't go up the street to get the paper without locking the house.



# CANAL JUMPING

## 1983 Australian Championships

### WYEE — 22nd January, 1983

MONSTER CARNIVAL — GREAT FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT  
ADMISSION FREE — Commences 9 a.m.

REFRESHMENTS (Beer available under licence)  
BARBECUE STEAKS  
GREASY POLE CLIMBING  
BRICK & ROLLING PIN THROWING  
WOODCHOPPING  
CHILDRENS RIDES  
FUN OF THE FAIR ACTIVITIES  
BMX RACING  
THE CANAL JUMP SKYDIVERS

CARNIVAL QUEEN PRESENTATION

HELICOPTER JOYFLIGHTS  
Country & Western Night from 7.30 p.m.



PROCEEDS TO WYEE SPORTS & RECREATION CENTRE

## FUNDRAISING



# Canal jumpers take your mark!



They're jumping Canal Jumping Channel...  
 ...the pole is held vertically in the canal...  
 ...the jumper is suspended in mid-air...  
 ...the pole is held by two people on the bank...  
 ...the jumper is holding onto the pole...  
 ...the pole is held vertically in the canal...  
 ...the jumper is suspended in mid-air...  
 ...the pole is held by two people on the bank...  
 ...the jumper is holding onto the pole...



*Zita:* We should mention the canal jumping days. They were spectacular. They were news all over the southern hemisphere.

*Russell:* Well, they were, yes. They were the Southern Hemisphere Championships. There's a bit of a creek down here behind the hall, and to raise money to build the hall, someone had seen this thing on TV that they do in Holland with the dykes there where you use a pole to try and jump across. We decided that we'd have a crack at that, so we got 20ft long aluminium scaffold tubes and put a bit of a base on them so they wouldn't sink too far into the mud. Then you'd try to climb up them as far as you could, and when they came down you'd see how far you could get down the creek. With the first ones we were going across the creek, but a couple of blokes got almost all the way across the creek and bloody near broke both their ankles, so instead we started going down the creek. On those days we'd also have other things, like eel fishing, and all sorts of entertainment for the kids. One of those days we raised fifteen thousand dollars, which is a fair bit of money to make in one day.

We also had Australia Day turnouts up here. We'd have a bullock team and a hayride behind the bullocks. We also had a couple of sets of stocks that I made. We gave one set of stocks away, but I've still got a set down the yard.

*Int:* And what did you have to do to be put in the stocks?

*Russell:* We could make up any reason! We had a triangle for flogging, too. I've still got the cat o'nine tails out in the shed. If we locked someone onto the triangle, we'd put a flat board across the front, and when you whipped them, the whip had to go around them and onto the flat board. We'd put cochineal onto the lashes so they still left bloody welt marks, and it looked very realistic. But it didn't hurt them so long as the lash part came right round onto the board at the front.

*Zita:* And they also had rolling pin throwing and brick throwing contests...

*Int:* What about woodchopping?

*Russell:* Yes. Our relative Harold Deaves was world champion in two or three events. We had woodchopping at the Australia Day events, and we had ordinary woodchopping and tree felling on other occasions.

When we got the hall finished, the Mayor's name was Ivan Welch. He was down here for something or other one day, and he began to talk about all he had done for Wye. I said: "Hey, Ivan, hang on. Lake Macquarie Council didn't contribute one shilling towards this bloody hall." And then I told him how we got it. We started off with what we now call the old hall, which had been blown to pieces by a storm. Early seventies I think it was. We started to raise funds, 'cos we wanted to build a new hall like they have at Bonnell's Bay. It was gonna cost twelve thousand dollars to rebuild. So we raised money like buggery till we got to twelve thousand dollars, and were ready to start, but the Council said we couldn't

begin because it was gonna cost twenty thousand now. We started raising more funds, and got to about sixteen thousand dollars, and they told us that the cost was now twenty five thousand dollars. We were chasing our tail, you know. Anyway, I was mates with Merv Hunter, who was, I think, Shire President at the time. He went on to become the local member. I was telling him how we were getting nowhere, and he said he'd see what he could do. Not long later he rang me up and he said that he had a hundred thousand dollars that we could have. So away we went...

*Zita:* How much did it cost in the end?

*Russell:* Oh, about a hundred and thirty something thousand dollars. (The extension we put on later cost three hundred thousand). Anyhow, we had it pretty much completed, but things like the turf around the outside wasn't done, and we didn't even have any chairs or tables. And by then we didn't have any funds left much. So I rang the Council and went to see them and told them that we had to get a couple of hundred chairs, and I suggested that the Council could buy them, and we'd pay them back when they sold the land. We had to give the land to the Council so they could sell it on our behalf. They were quite uninterested in this idea, "Oh, don't worry. You'll be able to get them in time". I replied: "Well, I dunno. Where are we going to sit the Premier? He'll be coming to open it." They said: "Oh, why weren't we told?" And I said: "Because you didn't bloody ask!" Suddenly they changed their tune, and said: "All right. Go and get them. Here's an order number". And the next day we had truckloads of turf and all sorts of stuff.



*The community hall in 2016*

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We were having a meeting prior to the opening, and someone asked who we were going to get to open it. Someone said we should get the mayor, and I said:

“Bugger the mayor, we should get Merv Hunter – he got us the money. Or else we should try to get the Premier.” Nobody thought that was going to happen so I asked Merv if he thought we might be able to get the Premier. He said he’d ask him, and I said if they could, to give us the dates that he’d be available and we’d take it from there. So he did, and we did. Neville turned up in his helicopter, and did the job. At the end I asked Nifty if he’d like a drink, and he said he didn’t mind if he did, and he didn’t mind if he did several more times, so Neville left us with his arms around our shoulders as we poured him back into the helicopter!

Years ago when my old man was a young fella they used to have boxing tournaments up at the old hall. There was a bloke who was a professional main event fighter down in Sydney and he lobbed here one night. He said to the blokes here: “I’ve got a fight coming up in Sydney in a couple of weeks. Any of you blokes interested in sparring a few rounds with me?” One of our blokes called Harry Webster said he’d take him on for a few rounds. They start sparring, and the pro boxer hung a couple of good ones on him. Harry said: “If that’s the way you want it, son...” and proceeded to thump Christ out of him!

There was another bloke who got pretty wealthy as he got older. I think he owned some shops in the suburbs of Newcastle. He used to go on the train of a Friday with a little briefcase, and bring it back full of cash. He bought a new Holden ute when they first came out in the fifties, but if it rained he’d leave his new car in the garage and walk, so it wouldn’t get wet!

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*(Compiled by Bill Bottomley, July 2016)*