

Clem McKinnon

I was born in 1944 to Thelma and Victor McKinnon. I think at the time Dad was working in the Bathurst munitions factory making end caps to fit the bayonets on 303 rifles. Then we moved to Oberon and Dad got a job in the Timber Industries sawmill which cut the hardwood mining timber to send to Broken Hill.

Then we moved from Oberon out to the Long Arm, which was Dad's parents' place. Dad and Mum built a house, nothing too flash in them days, not much money. Dad got work pea picking and he worked on a property adjoining us. Twins Don and Doug were born before we went to the farm.

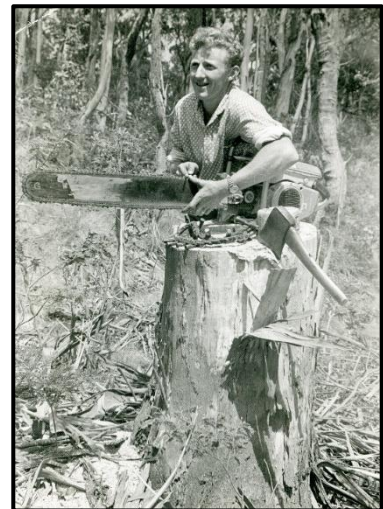


The closest school was the Mozart school. So, when I started, I had to walk down to Shirley Blackman's place, which was a couple of kilometres, and she used to double me on her bike to school. Then I got a bike and we used to ride together. Time went by and Doug and Don got bikes too and we'd go to Mozart together.

It was fairly wet in them years too. We had a little bridge across the Fish River which I'd ride across. And anyway a lot of times the water would be over the bridge and we couldn't get to school, and there was an odd time that it probably wasn't over the bridge and we didn't go to school. It was a bit naughty that. We used to trap a few rabbits too for their skins. We'd sell them to Ray Cunynghame. And if you're lucky, you'd get a fox and he'd take that too. We were 7 or 8, and we'd go ferreting and put the rabbits on the bikes, paired up, and sell them to old Arthur MacArthur. He had the freezing works. We used to get 5 shillings a pair, or something like that. So between that and doing a bit of pea picking we got a bit of money to buy a few things.

Time went on, and when I turned 15, I left school right on the day, and I went trapping rabbits for Arthur MacArthur. I spent the winter trapping rabbits for him on what they call Charlie's Hill, now Paul Kurtz's. I'd put the rabbits on a pole with a hessian bag pulled over them so the flies wouldn't get into them. And Arthur would come out and pick them up for us. When it started to get a bit too hot for rabbits, I started work for Horace Gunning. I worked for him for five years.

And then we started timber cutting. Don and Doug were actually cutting logs out on the Kanangra Walls Rd, so I started with them and we cut for six or seven years or something. The roads weren't good so we camped out in the bush. We used chainsaws to do the cutting, and Bruce Boyd was doing the carting of the logs and Ron and Len Casey too. Jimmy Cole was doing the snigging. He had an old Caterpillar D6, I think, with a winch on it. We cut all over the place. We started at the Walls and we cut Banshea State Forest. Then we went to Mount Werong State Forest, which had really good stands of timber, it was a kind of a stringy bark tree. In places we nearly clear felled it. It consisted of large trees 4 to 5 foot across and you'd get 40 feet of log or more out of them.





All the stringy bark logs had to be barked because the fibres of the bark would get caught in the bearings of the break down saw and it would run hot. Barking wasn't too bad of a job in the spring and through the summer, but when the winter come, the bark could seize up because they weren't growing. So that made it a hard job.

The leeches out in that country were bad, too. They'd even burrow through your socks. You'd feel them

sting and pull them out. Most of the time they'd come up over the top of your socks.

We lost Don's twin brother Doug in 1964. He was only 18. We had cut up the side of a gully and he had 'hung a tree up'. The next day we came back down the other side of the gully and, without warning, the hung up tree just fell. He was cutting a log off and it fell straight onto him. We didn't wear helmets in them days. He was killed instantly. That was a bit of a bad chapter in our life.

I met Coral when one of my mates came out and he said a young lady in town wants you to be her deb partner. And I said, "All right, OK, I'll do it then." And that's where it all started. Yeah, we went on our first date out to the Edith Hall. We used to go to other dances all around the country, Porters Retreat, Mount David, Black Springs. I remember one night at the old hall at Black Springs, somebody went through one of the floorboards. So someone went outside and broke off a big bush, stuck it in the hole, and we just kept on dancing around it all night.

We got married in 1966, so I bought an old house up in Balfour St, for \$6000. We done a bit of work to it, put an extension on it too, and then sold it. And then we bought another. We had about 5 moves, I think, buy a house and do it up. And then we moved to the Meadows. I bought 20 acres and a house from Bill Maher and we were there for quite a few years.

Coral spent a lot of time on her own when we were camped out. I didn't know the kids. You wouldn't do it nowadays.

After the hardwood ran out we started cutting the pine, and it was sort of different. We had to delimb everything and cut it into log lengths. You'd fall the tree, hook your tape on, then work your way up delimbing. And then you'd cut him into logs on your way back. The forestry and the industry's representative used to measure and tally the logs. Then Bob Gibbs, in a forwarder, would come and pick up the logs, and take them out and load them onto the trucks.



Then Gibbs bought in a harvesting machine. It cut the tree down, delimbed it and cut it into logs just about as quickly as it took me to say that little bit. It was a good thing actually, because there was a lot of lot of chainsaw accidents and cuts falling manually.

I had three bad accidents cutting pine. My first accident happened when I cut the top fork of a forky tree; it rolled towards me and it caught the saw and pushed it onto my leg. It cut right into the big muscle. Bob Boyd was there and he wrapped it up and the nurses said he'd done a very good job on it. Dr Robey was here at the time. He said, "We've got to get this thing cleaned before we close it up." He spent a lot of time on it, cleaning it out. And then he said, "I don't think I can deaden that big muscle there. You'll have to get a hold of something." I said, "I'll be right." You could just feel bit of a sting as the needle went in. And then he closed the skin up which was a bit hard because about 1/4 inch of flesh was missing. He said, "We'll have to put a mattress stitch in this to close it." Robey was a good old doctor. I had no trouble with that first cut on my leg. He'd done a good job. Yeah, a great man the for the community too.

I had another accident when a hung up tree fell on me. I was hit on the head and I was wearing a helmet. One of the other cutters seen me and drove me in. So I spent the night in the hospital with concussion.

Then we were testing spiky boots, as a few blokes were slipping and falling over and that. So they got these boots, from Canada I think, with little spikes in them. When I cut I a log off, it sort of rolled towards me and I stepped back but the other boot wouldn't come out of the damn log. And I landed with all me weight on the one leg and it tore the muscle off down the side of my knee. So the doctor had to staple it back on. I think that was the end of the spiky boots.

After working for Timber Industries we cut props for the mines in Lithgow. Darryl Hayden was one of the contractors there and he had just got a contract to cut timber for the Baal Bone mine. He said they've got to be 6 inches square and five foot long. We were up out of Mudgee, in Corricudgee SF, there was a lot of props there, a lot of round timber. We went up there and cut props and we camped there week days for a few years. We had the CB radios at the time and it was the same height as Oberon so you could talk to home every night.

We were offered a small sawmill that had a Volkswagen engine in it. And it had two saws, one upright and one horizontal. The saw would run along the log on a frame. So we used it for a year cutting these props. We had to load them, too. And we bought a skidder to get the logs out. This was on private property because there was none left in the forestry. We used it for a while and then we bought another second hand mill from down near Blaxland. It was pretty near new, but it was the same set up and it was driven by a bigger engine. So we spent a quite a number of years on that all over the district. Darryl Hayden used to come up every week or so and get a load in his truck. It wasn't enough to keep us going. Eventually another contractor out bid him so we finished cutting mine props.



Well after that, we went cleaning, Coral had started up a cleaning business. We had 3-4 girls working with us. Yeah around the town, we had 35 customers. I worked damn pretty hard on that mill, but I couldn't get over how hard house cleaning was!

Sandy Colquhuon asked me would I be interested in a bit of farm work. I was doing two days a week with him, then Hugh Webb, Sandy's son-in-law, rented a place down at Braidwood and

we went down a lot with him. I think there was about 4000 acres in the property, but only about 2000 of it that had any grass of it. There was an old cottage on the place that he rented. We done up the cottage a bit. We built a big machinery shed out of round timber too.

I finally retired last year. I'm 79 and a half.

The roads in the area are a thing that have changed the most, they have really been upgraded good. It used to be a terrible trip into Bathurst when we were kids. You'd do it in a day, easy enough.

All through my time I used to do shooting and hunting and so forth. We'd done a bit of semi professional roo shooting for their skins out at Nimagee. We used to work flat out cutting the logs. Then we'd pack up and head for Nimagee and shoot the roos there and skin them, and that'd pay for all our fuel and make a bit of money too. We used to sell the skins down at a tannery in Botany. They had a little store that made koala bears and all those kangaroo skin products. You can't get the koala bears now made out of kangaroo skin. And we made money, bought rifles and scopes and everything out of all top of the line stuff because it wasn't costing us anything out of our money we made from the other work. We went out there for years, every school holidays.

In 1979 Neville Lang come to see us. He lived down Bindock way. He said roos were eating everything there was. It was during that drought in 1982-83. There was that many roos there you could close your eyes and pick up kangaroo poo. And we had no trouble to shoot 100 roos in just one night. This finished when National Parks took it over, and Neville had to move out of there.

And then I did a few shooting trips - New Caledonia in 1995, and New Zealand a couple of times with Peter Byrom.

We ended up having three children: John, Michelle and Bradley. They've produced 8 grandchildren and now we got 2 1/2 great grandchildren. I try and say to my grandkids live a good clean life and only do to others what you would have them do to you. If you live by that, you can't go too far wrong.

I don't give a lot of thought to getting old. I just go along with the flow. I suppose there's a few good things about it. You don't have to pay when you go to the doctor and you can get a pensioner discount of three cents a litre on petrol. Yeah. It doesn't worry me getting old. Sometimes it worries me when I've got to have 3 to 4 rests to get up a hill. It's just part of life, isn't it?

(October, 2024)