

ODIN'S BEACH

NISSEN NAVIGATES 80 YEARS OF HISTORY



As told by
DAVID & NOELA NISSEN



Published by

Mission Beach Historical Society

Document H018 Version 1.0.

Web page: mbhs.com.au



Told by David and Noela Nissen, South Mission Beach.

Interviews by Dr Kathleen Broderick (2007) & Ken Gray (2021).

This history is copyright © Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022.

First published 2022

Compiled by Ken Gray, *Edited by* Margaret Remilton.

Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this work may be stored, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission. Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

A record of this title is held at the National Library of Australia (Ebook) and the State Library of Queensland (Print and Ebook).

The text and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and of people interviewed by the author, and do not reflect the views of the Mission Beach Historical Society or its members.

Mission Beach Historical Society's logo is designed by Leonard Andy, copyright © Leonard Andy. The design depicts a Djiru shield with a cassowary which is the endangered, iconic flightless bird living in the north Queensland rainforests.

The histories published by Mission Beach Historical Society are as accurate as we are able to make them. Few accounts of history are 100% correct and there are always going to be more errors when we recall events of many years ago. We welcome suggested edits and additions or deletions and where possible we will edit where we find we are in error. However, the oral histories we record are the words of the people we interview and we can only alter those with the authorisation of the people we interview. At times we record the full story of a family and have it on record for research purposes yet publish an abbreviated version on the web page to make it more readable and relevant to our regular audience.

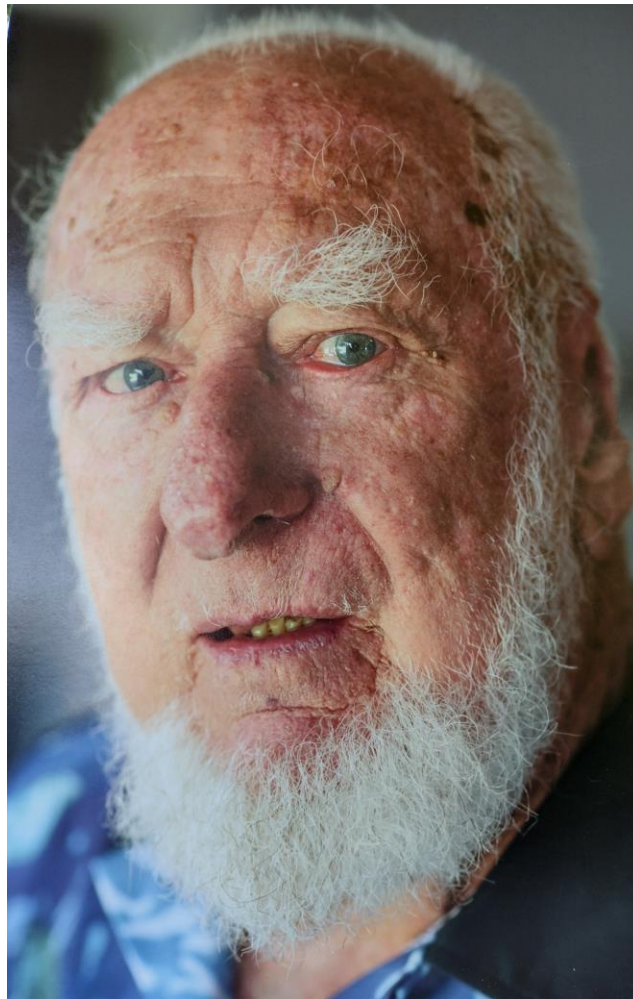
There is an abridged version of this story on the Society web page with the same name, *Odin's Beach* AB18.

Cover Image: Mission Beach, looking across to Dunk Island. There was just one coconut tree on the full 11 kilometre stretch of Mission Beach when Dave and Noela first built on the beachfront.

FOREWORD

David Nissen, or Dave as most know him, was born in Tully 4 September 1939 and has lived all of his life in the district apart from spending a few months in 1942 in Brisbane when he and his mother evacuated to a safe place while the war was threatening. He also spent a couple of years at high school in Brisbane, two years in the Northern Territory as a crocodile shooter and a while in Tasmania and Victoria on large power projects. His younger brothers, Jim and Bob, were born after the war.

After qualifying as a high voltage electrician early in life, then being a crocodile hunter, Dave helped set up large power stations in Tasmania and Victoria for a time before returning to Cardstone, North Queensland to run the Kareeya power station and train others to operate it.



David Nissen 2022.

Dave has spent much of his life diving on the Great Barrier Reef and has been on almost every reef on it. He has also explored almost every inch of Cape York and visited all of its rivers and islands. He is an honorary member of the Lockhart River Aboriginal Community.

By any definition of the word, Dave is a legend; in Mission Beach and right up to the tip of Cape York. There is a street named after him in Wongaling and that is an unusual occurrence for a living person; Council's seldom use names of living people as place names anywhere. Nissen Street is

where he built a 65 foot fibreglass motorboat (*Odin*) at the mouth of Wheatley Creek, where he was watched closely by the resident croc. He has a long history of close encounters with crocodiles.

Dave has endless tales to tell and not all of them can be told here as we are focusing principally on his recollections of what has happened in the Mission Beach district during his life. Some of his wildest stories are such that they cannot be told anywhere in writing. He is an entertaining man and is widely known and respected for his knowledge of the Reef and the district.

His WWII stories, mainly gleaned from conversations with his father who served in the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC, Q116018) at Mission Beach, are told in the eBook, *War and Beach*.¹ We will not retell those memories here. Dave also saw many things after the war in his explorations in the hinterland, on islands and when diving that added to our knowledge of WWII events here.

No other living person has stayed at Mission Beach and nearby for almost all their life of over 80 years, apart from his wife Noela Nissen of course. The aim was to capture his recollections of what happened here over those years and to understand what changes have occurred. We also focused on who he met from our past and what he knew of their lives. When possible we sought input from Noela as well.

Dave can do anything hands-on: electrical, diesel motors, stainless steel welding, reef diving. You name it; Dave can do it. When he built the boat at Wongaling he nearly killed himself on the epoxy fumes. Undeterred, he then explored every pocket across Cape York's waterways and islands until he lost his boat in a fire.

He is an experienced electrician who for many years ran the hydro-electric power station up the Tully River at Kareeya. Dave was Senior Operator, Training and at one stage was running all four of North Queensland's power stations for the Northern Electric Authority of Queensland.

Dave was diving extensively on reefs and in rivers, even before 1950 while at primary school, and was out on the ocean every spare minute with mates, island hopping and spearing fish and he learned much about our past on such adventures.

Noela Nissen was also born in Tully (09 February 1942) and qualified as a schoolteacher in Brisbane before going on to become a highly respected Principal at St Clare's Catholic Primary School in Tully. Here we have an amazingly brave and accomplished woman with an Irish twinkle in her eye, much needed by the wife of 'David'.

¹ Ken Gray, *War and Beach*, Draft2Digital, eBook, 2020.



Noela Nissen, right, with her sister Marcia Courtice.

In his early days, Noela said that David was a man of few words and not the cheeky fellow of today. This is a highly successful union with three generations of Nissen's, all born in Tully, now making their unique and positive mark on the district.

Dave Nissen has strong views on today's world of political correctness and of people rorting systems or misinforming debates such as reef conservation and the politics of power generation. He has continually contributed to the wider debates on such issues and has always done all he can to ensure the sustainability of the Great Barrier Reef.

He is an astute observer of nature and of events in the community. He and his family have contributed greatly to the district during their years here.

After 30 years of service to education as Principal of St Clare's School in Tully and another five years at El Arish school, Noela was awarded a Centenary of Australian Federation Medal; recognition fitting her long-term dedication to the children of our region (see image next page).



Ken Gray (Scribe),
March 2022

FAMILY

Scribe: You may wonder why we have called Dave Nissen's story, 'Odin's Beach.' Odin was the King of the Norse Gods of course and knowing Dave, it is no stretch of the imagination to understand that he would have been just as comfortable cavorting about the world in a Viking longship raiding France and England in the 9th century as he has been adventuring far and wide on his many boats in north Queensland.

Dave has Danish ancestry and his persona displays many similarities to that of the Vikings. Dave's grandfather, Harry Nissen (Hans Joseph Trules Nissen, 1872 – 1941) was Danish born:

When Hans Johannes Trules Nissen was born on 31 March 1872 in Fredericia, Vejle, Denmark, his father, Hans, was 41 and his mother, Kristine, was 27. He married Josephine Rollinson and they had seven children together. He then married Florence Harriet Swarzes and they had eight children together. He died on 17 March 1941 in Gosford, New South Wales, at the age of 68, and was buried in Point Clare, New South Wales.²



Harry (Hans) Nissen, Dave's Danish grandfather.

Furthermore, after emigrating to Australia he was described in a Police Gazette in February 1907 as being 38 years age, 6 foot 6 inches height, 'A Dane; toymaker and carpenter.' Dave's grandfather was not only Danish, but he was also tall for the time. Quite the Viking. Dave relates well to that image and is quite proud of his ancestry.

Ancestry records a little about Dave's father, Rolf Boysen Nissen (known as Ralph) as well.

When Rolf Boysen Nissen was born on 2 August 1902 in Balmain, New South Wales, his father, Hans, was 30 and his mother, Josephine, was 35. He married Rubina Emma Whitson on 27 January 1938 in Brisbane, Queensland. They had three children during their marriage. He died on 26 August 1976 in Tully, Queensland, at the age of 74, and was buried there.

So Dave came from a large Danish-descended family on his father's side. His grandfather, Harry had emigrated to Adelaide, married there in 1895 then moved on to Sydney. Dave's father was one of 17 children because his grandfather married twice having 15 children in all and his mother was married previously and had two children

² Ancestry.com.au Hans Joseph Trules Nissen, accessed March 2022 at: https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/?name=Hans+Joseph+Trules_Nissen&birth=1872&location=5027&name_x=s_1&priority=australian

before she married Harry. Dave's mother, Ruby (Rubina Emma Whitson), was born in Gloucester, England in 1904 and came to Australia when she was just 16 years old. (Dave's earlier recollection).

Dave: We tried to trace our family history well back in Denmark but found it difficult as most of the old Church records were burned by Napoleon's army during the invasions.

Mum was young when she emigrated from England to Australia but I am not sure of her age. Someone in the family once said that they had traced her ancestry back to the 800s in Denmark. *Scribe: In Ancestry.com.au the Whitson family via Rubina Emma Whitson (Ruby Nissen) traces back for six generations to 1657 and the families on both sides were for most of that time living in Cornwall; mainly in Devon or thereabouts so it appears that Dave has a rich ancestry of old Britons (Celtic people living in Cornwall before the Romans) as well as Danes. There may be one of the Whitson spouses in earlier times who could be traced back to Denmark but it would take much search time to determine that.*



Radio and electrical repair workshop of Ralph Nissen, El Arish.

Dave: My father, Rolph Nissen became a rabbit shooter in NSW and changed his name to an Aussie version, 'Ralph', to fit in with the locals. He came to North Queensland in 1936 with his brother to Lower Tully where they were on a cane farm for a short time before moving to El Arish. Mum could not settle in Lower Tully. Ralph worked later on in El Arish fixing radios, bikes and gadgets of all sorts for people and a photo of his workshop reveals what he was up to.

Noela: I have little knowledge of my family ancestry but know that Andrew was an important family name: that was the name given to my great grandfather, grandfather, father and brother. I am not sure when the family emigrated from Ireland but the Irish traditions continued on strongly with our family in Tully. Dad died young at only 42 years age. The Ronan family met frequently and there was always a big sing-along and much drinking and fun and there's little doubt that the drinking helped end my father's life prematurely yet as a child, I was not adversely affected by his

lifestyle. My grandparents on Dad's side of the family had a cane farm just on the outskirts of Tully on the north side, towards Bulgun.

Scribe: Noela's grandfather, Andrew Ronan, emigrated from a tiny Irish village named Kilmihil in County Clare. That is on the eastern side of Ireland, north of Tralee and just east of the city of Limerick.³ He married Elizabeth Agnes Onthank who came from Tipperary which is not far away just west of Limerick.³ The 'Unthank' (sometimes spelled 'Onthank' name stems from several old English towns named 'Unthank' located in Northumberland and Cumbria.

Dave often speaks proudly of Noela's long-term battle with severe health problems and tells of how she has fought on so bravely to defy the odds.

He goes on to shock his audience and says nothing could kill her as she is 'bog Irish.' Of course that is a name given to slur people of lower class in Ireland yet Noela Ronan is as far from 'bog Irish' as anyone could imagine; she is all class to those who know her well.

³ Elizabeth Agnes Onthank, *Ancestry.com.au*, accessed March 2022 at: https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/83627326/person/182329505703/facts?_phsrc=Fqa528&_phstart=successSource

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

We lived at 29 Wilson Street in El Arish when I was growing up. We rode our push bikes to the El Arish State School. I was the school captain at one stage. There was a big forestry plot of pine trees there. Where the golf course is now, there was a racecourse at that time and a rodeo ground and the main road was not where it is now either; it was out the back of the school that original road. It went up to Silkwood, the old Tully Road, and down to where the ice-works was; not where that is now.

Inez Campbell was a schoolteacher at El Arish and taught my two younger brothers but not me. She was a Lloyd before she married Doug Campbell.

El Arish was a big place in those days compared to now. There were three timber mills and a plywood mill and my father was the number one benchman at Myer's sawmill. Sixty three people worked there. I remember the last bullock teamster who was towing logs into the mills but cannot recall his name. That was a sight to see.

Mrs Borsato had her shop in the town when I was young and the old pub was there too. Martins owned the butcher shop in El Arish then and there was a chemist as well. The Martins had a large block down where the North and South Maria Creeks join and that was where their slaughter yard was. One of my mates, cannot remember his full name, Peterson was his family name, was taken by a croc there when he was wagging school. We had camped there at the fork of the creeks beside a big mango tree in the weekend, Sid Adams, Petersen and me and Sid and I went home and back to school but Peterson stayed on because he disliked school. That was beside the original road to Mission Beach and there was an old bridge crossing the creeks and we camped there on a sand bank. That bank is all overgrown today. I took the coppers down to show them where we camped after Peterson went missing but they never found him and assumed he was eaten by the croc.

We used to go up into the hills and creeks behind El Arish, swimming and fishing. Starting at an age of nine or ten, we rode our pushies to the beach on the weekends to Bingil Bay or Garners Beach most times and camped there and went spearin' and fishin' and raping and pillaging as kids did in those days. There was a huge calophyllum tree near the middle of Bingil Bay just south of where the toilet block is today and we camped there. We had water readily available from the creek. The other kids that I remember who often came camping were the Asko and Larry Keto, Sid Adams, Noel Hopper, and Ariesti Sedrini. Ariesti was later killed in a gun accident.

Mum came and camped with us sometimes for two weeks in the school holidays. Sometimes we rode our bikes right down to what is now called Wheatley Creek at Wongaling and at that time there was a big log over the creek with a handrail on it. We walked across that at times. There was an old tin shed on the beach where Wheatley Park is now and that was built by George Webb. The Wheatleys, after they purchased the farm from George Webb, relocated it onto the farm and made a chook pen or something like that out of it. There was no road there at the time of course, just a walking track to the beach from the Wheatley's home.

We mainly went fishing or spearing when we came to Mission Beach and Bingil Bay and had a small plywood dinghy with a 6 horsepower outboard on it later on. We didn't have to go far to get a feed

because the sea grass was right near the shore at Bingil Bay; right into the low water mark. At night we would go down at low tide and spear Moreton Bay bugs. Can't do that now though, none there.

We made our spear guns from timber and used the rubber tyre tubes to create the tension needed. I remember when I was still at primary school and I rode home on my pushie with a 76 pound barra on the handlebars. It was a monster. We went over to the islands in the pram dinghy. The islands were powering in those days. Plenty was going on there and I remember the movie they made, *The Age of Consent*. That was on Timana Island and we used to go over to see them filming the nude stuff.

One thing just came to mind. We were in for a swim one day larking around and the old man comes down with his 303 rifle and we hear a gun shot. He killed a croc that was close to us and swimming our way. It was three and a half metres long so we were lucky that day.

Actually, Bingil Bay has worn back into the land about 20 metres from the 1950s. There was almost nothing at Bingil Bay then, only the remains of the Cutten's house; that was on the hill where the graves are and it had a grand piano in it. I remember playing the grand piano a bit; we were only kids just mucking around.

There was another old house at Bingil Bay that was unoccupied and near the beach just north of Cutten Street. That was the old Alexander home and was made out of that yellow timber that white ants don't eat; Leichhardt. That burned down later. Harry Plumb also had a home further inland near the site where the gin or rum distillery is today in Butler Street. Old Harry had a long tin shed and it was full of Army K rations; he had hundreds of them in there. We liked to visit Harry as he sometimes gave us chocolates from the ration tins. At times Dad would pull in to see Harry in our Ford Prefect ute. He rode an old army Harley Davidson motorbike before he got the Prefect ute.

That all happened up until I was 14 years old I think. I only did primary school in El Arish and was sent to Brisbane for two years to do my high school study there when I was 14. I stayed with Auntie Lena in Newfarm. As soon as I finished high school I was interviewed in El Arish by the boss of the power company in Cairns, CREB. He offered me an apprenticeship and I joined them immediately. Four pound and 18 shillings a week I was paid and accommodation in Cairns cost me five quid a week. But I was lucky as they were building substations everywhere at the time so I was never in Cairns and I stayed with an old war widow, Mrs Matthews. She was a nice old lady and had a son, Tuppy (Frank) Matthews who died recently after being electrocuted at the Tully Substation on 22Kv.

The creek at the south end of Bingil Bay had a track running up the hill beside it; it started at the bridge near the beach and went well up the hill. There was a water wheel halfway up the track and they had a dam on the creek well up with a race running alongside the creek to the wheel. That drove the coffee mill. The walking track is still there and remnants of the Cuttens works remain there. There is a photo of the coffee mill in the Council Chambers. That was where the wooden rail line went. I can also show you where the railway line was at the Hull River.

The old traction engine they used in the Hull for timber hauling is still lying rusting away out the back of Holland Street in the swamp. Apparently, there were five acres of logs near Jackey Jackey Street and they floated them down the creek to the ships. In the Hull River there is still evidence of

the ships loading there as they offloaded the ballast rocks into the rivers. Near the mouth of the Hull River, you can still see where the rock pile is. Then they came up the creek with the tide and used bamboo poles to keep the ship off the mangroves. They would park at the Jackey Jackey Street ramp and load logs there. There was another loading place up the South Hull as well. The ramp for that one is still there; I think it's on Joe Collins' land, where Carmoo Creek comes in. There is still a heap of logs in the river and we used to spear big barra among the logs and crocs.

The Daintree River has large heaps of ballast rocks on the sides in parts as well – they are also from sailing ships offloading their ballast rocks. I almost got eaten by a monster crocodile in the Daintree River near those rocks when I dived in to retrieve an anchor once.

The Cuttens had a railway line going down Cutten Street and around the corner along the Esplanade to their big rock and timber jetty. My father told me that and said they grew 200 pounds of coffee there in 1917 (*Scribe: 250,000 pounds at their peak in the 1890s.*⁴) They used to take the goods by lighter around to Clump Point where there was a 'Dolphin', which was a pontoon for loading freight onto ships. It had piles in the water and a roof on top. The ships tied up alongside the pontoon and loaded the coffee and fruit on. There was nothing at Clump Point in those days of course; not even the toilet block. There wasn't a jetty at Clump Point or Narragon Beach.

Noela: We lived in Tully when I was young. I was born in Tully in 1942 and when I was around five years old, say 1947, and there were only two or three homes at South Mission Beach; down towards the south end of the beach, nearer to the rocks. It was just a dirt road and the two or three houses were behind the road as the houses are today. We shared a holiday home there with the Stuarts. You went up one set of stairs to the Stuart's place and another set of stairs to our place. It was a long rectangular building with a partition in the centre.

In December 1949, a child, Briony McNamara, was killed by a box jelly near our house.

The Clifford's always came down to stay when we were there but they used a tent. I think the Murphy's also had a house a bit further north but I am not sure of that. No one lived there permanently; they were just holiday homes, very basic.

Dave: Don Day also came down to South Mission Beach from Walkamin and he owned a Tully sawmill. Later on I used to do his electrical work. You know that big tree at the East end of Jackey Jackey Street? Well there was a similar tree, just as big about 20 metres out towards the sea. That's where Don Day used to camp, beside that tree. There was a bloke lived near there later; Jack Ballini. He had a story about a huge crocodile that ate a man at the Pioneer River when they were building a bridge across the river. That would have been a record croc. They took a photo of it but never got two coppers to witness it otherwise it would have been a world record but they did not record it properly. He had a photo.

Later in life, Noela and I bought four lots on the beachfront at Wongaling and that cost us £4,000 at the time; £1,000 each. Imagine that. That is where we built the Coral Trout Units; holiday accommodation. We used three blocks for the units and sold the fourth one. That recently sold for \$860,000. We built a beach house there first and used it for holidays and weekends.

⁴ Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H005, 2022, P. 34.

MEETING OUR PIONEERS

I was born in Tully when the family were briefly living at Lower Tully and they had to get across the river when it was in flood to get to the hospital. Some of my recollections of the pioneers come from interesting chats I had with Bert Porter. I knew many of the old timers who arrived in the district early on but cannot recall a lot about most of them as I was too young to have significant conversations with them.

I clearly remember Bert saying that Reid, who was living just north of the Wheatleys on the hill (it was called Bolton's Saddle), went missing; he didn't turn up for his mail at North Mission. Bert and the copper, who did not know where Reid lived, went to his house and found him dead and rotting in his sack bed. They dug a hole under the bed, cut the bed down and buried him there. His bed was just two poles with chaff bags slung over them according to Bert. (*Scribe: News reports indicate he died accidentally while shooting in the bush.*⁵) A gravestone was sent by the Sydney Gas Light Company, the place he worked for, but it was very heavy and they could not carry it up the hill so left it near the beach. Bert was a good mate of mine and was the District Super for the power company in Atherton (Cairns Region Electricity Board) and I met him first there at a substation when I was an electrical apprentice.

Old Reid did not leave a will Bert told me and about five years after he died the Council allowed Max Jones, the Shire Engineer, to buy his large farm. Peter Wheatley and Max Jones were neighbours then and were often in dispute over cattle roaming and Peter offered to buy the land from Jones who refused and he sold it to Sam Hattam instead. Either Sam or Roy Morgan subdivided that farm and created the Reid Road lots known as Elfreston Estate I think. The Reid block finished where the skate park is today and went down to the Wheatley's farm border. North of the skate park was state land.

Peter Wheatley subdivided his land on the beachfront as well at the south end of Reid Road and Hattam had to pay for access across Peter's land to make his subdivision workable.

Bert Porter told me that his family once owned all the land at Carmoo; it was a large land holding, maybe 1,600 acres. The Porters were one of the first families to select land here. They tried to live there and farm the land at Carmoo but found it far too difficult with the pigs, crocs, sand flies, mosquitoes and so forth so they selected several lots of land at Wongaling from the old Shire boundary right up to where the main road turns towards Mission Beach. The land stretched right down to the beach and the Porters lived in the original home down near Castaways. The shire boundary was halfway down the straight on the road from Mission Beach to Wongaling; it was at the cutting.

I can remember the Bussts at Bingil Bay a little as my father visited them and took me along occasionally. John and Alison Busst built a home around 1960 just above where the camping ground is at North Bingil Bay and you know that he cleared that entire bank of vegetation. He cleared it all Johnny Busst; he made an amazing mess of the forest by the beach with an excavator. You would not get away with that today.

⁵ *Tragedy in the Bush, Accident While Shooting, The Brisbane Courier*, 15 June 1914, accessed on Trove, March 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/19967638?searchTerm=Tragedy%20in%20the%20Bush>

I met Edmund Frizelle many times. He was a nice old bloke and we called in occasionally to see him when we rode our bikes down to the beach. It was said that he was French and came from the penal colony in Noumea. Bert Porter visited him on the way back from horseback travels to the Tablelands in those days. He returned on the Palmerston and Frizelle's place was a handy rest point on the way home. Frizelle lived near the Jorisson Bridge on Garners Beach Road and was one of the first to settle in that area. Bert lived near Castaways and said the house survived the 1918 cyclone because the coconut trees around it saved it.

We knew old Fenby quite well too. My father used to bring his tucker down from El Arish for him on an old army Harley Davidson motorbike and I'd be with him. He was an old bushie and seldom wore clothes. He had thousands of chooks and scrub hens. I do not remember any goats there at the time though. He sent all his eggs to Mrs Borsato's store in El Arish. She would sell the eggs then reimburse him with supplies and someone would take them down to his place when they were going that way. He never had any wheels, no bike, no nothing so he relied on other people looking after him for supplies.

My mother was secretary of the CWA and Peter Wheatley's mother was the chairman and she wrote several wills for old Fenby. The CWA did a lot to look after him and they managed his money. When he died he left his money to the CWA ladies of El Arish and they owned the land for about five or six years but they couldn't pay the rates so they gave the land to the Indigenous People of Australia.

The only Garner I remember was Ted but I can't recall much. We often camped at the north end of Garners Beach so saw the Garners around. There were two old dongas there and Spriggs Healey and two other blokes owned them and we often used them as they were not often occupied. There was an old wooden boat they left there with a Blaxland Twin engine in it but it had dried out in the sun and shrunk the timber so it leaked badly. We camped there and went over to the Barnard Islands when we were kids. Sometimes we tried to take that old boat out but it would take so much water in that the engine flywheel would be partly immersed and squirting water in the air. It would wet the spark plugs and you had to stop and clean it up. Jesus, those were the good old days. Christ, there were some fish around then.

There were two slipways at the mouth of Muff Creek. There was an old guy who worked for the Council and they let 'em build a hut there at the mouth of Muff Creek. We camped with him all the time. Maybe his name was Arthur Shenson. Arthur was the first Daintree Ferry Operator. We used to go croc shooting and would have a few rums because it could be a wild old night. I stopped drinking though when I was still a teenager. One night at Muff Creek I was nearly eaten by a croc.

Jimmy Merrill was on the other side of the creek and had a grass farm there later in life. He came from New Guinea and built a couple of caravan parks at Wongaling Beach after Bruce Morgan built the one at South Mission. Jimmy built a van park for his cousin, Frank Armstrong, who ran it for a while. Jimmy was among the first army blokes into Hiroshima after the atomic bomb and was unable to stand the pain caused by the radiation poisoning just before he died.

On the hill south of Garners Beach were the Brookes; old Dorothy Brooke lived there alone later. They had a small dairy farm at the north end of the beach named after them. The house on the corner of Garners Road and Holt Road was built by Wanda and Sean Lowe.

I knew Bert Wildsoet and his brother, was it Ken? The Wildsoets were some of the original settlers and owned land where the supermarket is. They also owned some of the land that was selected by the surveyor, Hyne right on Clump Point. Jimmy Nason from Victoria who lived in Reid Road for a while owned land there later, where the Eco Village is. His girlfriend was Gail Gregory and she is still alive in Portsea, Victoria and has the journals of Jimmy Cook. Nason's grandfather purchased those precious journals at Sotheby's in England. I have seen it in its leather bound cover and it's hard to read as its written in the old English language. I have read some of it and it tells much of what the Cook voyage discovered here. They speak of coconuts at the Frankland Islands and that is the only place that Cook observed coconuts on Australian coastline. There was only one coconut at Mission Beach when I was young – right near to the land we purchased on the beachfront at Wongaling Beach and it is still there today.

I knew the Alexanders a little as well. One of them married a Cutten, Les Alexander I think. [*Scribe: Florence Alexander⁶ was one of the original Cutten family and Les was one of her six children and did not marry*]. He only had one arm. Their first house was on the road from Bingil Bay to Garners Beach opposite the chook farm there.

Things were very different when I was young. For example, there was a service station near the Wongaling Creek bridge on the south side of the main road and that is where the Porters had their rubber plantation. There are a few of those rubber trees remaining in the scrub today.

The Royal Palms estate used to be Wheatley's banana farm. It was about 30 acres of irrigated bananas and Nevil Wheatley subdivided that land.

I knew the Buntings a little when I was young but cannot remember much about them. You know where the golden orchid is on the Wheatley property near Wheatleys bridge? That's history. It's where Peter's grandmother is buried and they have not erected a monument. That's a shame. I'm always going crook about that.

An old hermit called Fides Skardon lived up on the hill where the closed motel is (*Elandra*, previously named *Tam O'Shanter* and *The Point*). The Wheatley's used to take his tucker to him on a horse.

We knew the Davids too from North Mission but did not see the people from North Mission often as they were too far away. Bluey David recently died in Tully, at 92 years age. He subdivided part of their farm on the beachfront at Donkin Lane.

There have been many funny moments in Mission Beach; it's been a great place to live in because most people enjoys a laugh and at times we can be too serious so I've always found that a good laugh helps. I was working in a pub for a while and in walked a bloke named George. He was utterly outraged. 'Hey! Look at this!' he yells above the din. He's holding up a ticket he has just been issued by the local police. 'The bloody coppers can't even spell my name,' he protests. 'Look. It says Dorge!' The whole place was in an uproar with laughter; George had difficulty pronouncing his name and the letter 'G' always suffered so it was no surprise to anyone but 'Dorge' that the police had made this error.

⁶ Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H005, 2022.

A DRIVE WITH DAVE

Dave felt that he could remember more about the district's history if we took a drive around the streets. Dave was driving and chose the route as I recorded his chat. We started from his home in South Mission Beach and drove past Frog's Hollow soon after we started.

Scribe: We're going Dave.

Dave: Alright. Well, that land, [Frog's Hollow] was all the 'mission' land so was owned by the state government and later on the Wheatley's leased it. The father actually leased it; Alfred Wheatley. There's a dam over there in the scrub and when he built it we went and had a look and there was a crocodile you know already in there and it was only a week old. In there [just after we turned from South Mission Beach Road into Wheatley Road] is where the old bridge was. That was where they had the railway line with timber rails to transport timber logs from near where the school is now and down through Wongaling to the Jackie Jackie Street ramp.

It followed the main road to Tully after Webb Street and off to the left following where the power lines are today to the development at the back of Wongaling (Mission Hills). The line went roughly where Pacific View Drive is then along the line of Dunkalli Crescent for a bit and down through the Wheatley property; through the swamp land there.

There were two railway lines in the district in the early days, this one and the one at Bingil Bay and there were only remnants of them left when I was here as a boy. There were also many roads that do not exist anymore and the alignment of some roads was changed considerably. The road from the main road to Tully and down to South Mission Beach was an example and you can still see where the original road was – to the south of the current road. There was also a rough track out the back of Wongaling going over Bolton's Saddle at the north end of the Wheatley property; that was where old Reid died.

The block here, beside the tip and down to the beach was owned by Bert Ikblack, not sure exactly how you spell it, he is German. Bert worked for Peter and Don Wheatley in the sawmill and Peter was unable to pay his wages at the time so he gave him a five acre block on the beachfront here. Bert is still living and is married to Deanna Conti so someone will know the correct spelling.

That's where I built me boat down there [Nissen Street]. [On Reid Road now.] This was just a sand track down through the scrub in them days. At No 12 was one of the first houses in Reid Road but nobody lived in it then; the bloke who owned it worked in the Tablelands at the tin dredge.. There were no houses when I was first here of course. I wired most of the original houses built around here. Mick Sabadina did the road for the subdivision at Reid Road.

This is where our beach house was [No 32 and 40 Reid Road]. I took a few weeks holiday when I was at Cardstone and built a basic beach house and we had this lane beside it. This is our favourite coconut tree here, beside this lane. Yeah, that was the only coconut tree in the district at the time and I built a ramp here with four feet of rock under it to allow us to launch the boats. I used Peter Wheatley's dozer to do that. The Navy bloke who was killed by a box jelly sting during the war died right near that tree. Later, when we left Cardstone, we built three flats (Coral Trout Units) on three of the four lots we bought here. Those palms were planted by Noela [golden canes].

Here, where the bitumen ends [No 42 Reid Road] is where the road ended after Peter Wheatley's beachfront subdivision. There was just scrub from here north at the time and Reid owned this land, next to Wheatleys. There's a drainage easement at the boundary of Wheatley's and Reid's land. Hattam lived on the beachfront at around 60 Reid Road and he did the Reid land subdivision. Reid's land came up here and north of it where the forest is still on the beachfront the state owned that and it was not subdivided in front of Reid Road further up this end. The rules changed over time so at the start they could place the front boundary only 30 metres from the highest annual tide mark but today it's about 150 metres.

That caravan park [Banfield Parade] was built by Jimmy Merrill, I wired it. Banfield Parade was not here when I was a young fella. There was a tree in the middle of the road at around where the Ulysses Units are. Here [north end of Banfield Parade] is where the Dunlop's had their private school. It was only a tiny building with a dunny outside and flyscreens. It was just a sand road. There was a big timber corduroy crossing on the corner here where Banfield Parade ends. All the land at Koda and Kwilla Street was a Bulgaroo swamp and Porters Creek was right down here at the junction of Kwila and Koda Streets when I was a kid. There was a road went right down to the mouth of Porter's Creek.

I remember when they were building the pub [Resort] and when I was wiring it; 385 kilometres of wire in that job. I was putting a fan up and the water was about a foot deep through the bar area. This area floods hey. I wired all that and this shopping centre. Tropical Hibiscus Van Park was another one built by Jimmy Merrill.

[Further down Cassowary Drive.] This was Porter's land here of course.

[Kent Close.] This was owned by the Johnstone Shire Council later and there was a pineapple farm on MARCs Park. Alf Daveson had a pig farm at Dewar Street and he let them all go when he left so there are black and white pigs everywhere now.

[Just after the Wongaling Creek bridge on the right]. There was a service station here and it burned down. They had a bit of steel wire in the fuse so I presume it shorted.

[Almost into Mission Beach Village at the turnoff to Castaways.] That is the house where Bert Porter lived. That house and land is now owned by Noela's brother Andrew Ronan. The Barnes family have been here a long time too. I did a lot of the wiring at Castaways too when it was called other names. Jack Romano had it first as the Moon Glow in 1961.

Bruce Shepherd owns that land there [backtracked now, behind the Tinnie Shed]. That's why it's called Shepherd Close; he owned all this land here. He was an operator in the control room with me at Kareeya for a while.

[Mission Beach village.] This was a road through here and it was closed off and called the Village Green.

You know where that Johnstone Camp used to be of course. That was going on for decades and stopped around 15 or 20 years ago. They all died out. Les Campbell and his family lived here right opposite the jetty. Old Pop Campbell took the kids to have their bath in the creek.

Narragon Beach – we used to camp here as well at times when I was at primary school. Wee Beach – look how clean the sand is there with no run-off. Beautiful beach that.

[Cutten Street, well up.] That house there was owned by the Mayor of Darwin once. Howard and Iris Watson built the motel, Blue Pacific. Lost in a cyclone some time ago. The Bicton house was on the beachfront on the plateau, near where the graves are. It was burned down.

[Top of Cutten] No 56. That was owned by John Bunt the first Director of the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS). The house was built by Geoff Grainger. Bunt was married to one of the Holt girls (related to Harold Holt). Johnny Bunt; he was a nice bloke and good at the job too.

Koombaloomba Creek, [north Bingil Bay towards the camping ground.] That used to be a beautiful freshwater, free flowing creek. That's where all the black fellas got their water; a heap of black fellas. When John Busst built his home here he cleared the entire forest on the beachfront to get a view, we used to shoot quails on the cleared land near the beach. There was also a walkway up onto Ninney Point to the coast watchers hut used in WWII. There was a walkway from here at the camping ground, all the way round to Kurrimine Beach and there were goats all over the place here where the campground is.

I did a bit of wiring for Kate Tode later when she owned the house that Busst had built. [Bingil Bay Road, north side, near beach nearing Bingil Bay Café.] That lot was owned by some people who imported chemicals and made a lot of money; came from Tassy I think.

[South side of the road.] In there, that was one of the Alexander houses; I think it's still there in the bush. Les Alexander, the bloke with one arm owned it. [Near Bingil Bay Café.] Here's where Dick Verhey's chook farm was, I did all the wirin' there. The chook farm was a hundred metres long. Jeez, he had a lot of chooks. He was a bit of a dude old Dick; his favourite saying was, 'Do you get my ID Dave; do you get it?' Yeah.

[Butler Road, at the distillery.] That's where Harry Plumb's shed was there. Ritchie Hodson used to own this land a while back.

[Plantation Drive.] This is where the tea plantation was. [Cedar Creek.] This was a beautiful bloody creek too when we were kids eh, and there was a sawmill on the west side of the bridge that's there now; about 100 metres away from the road. This was all grass paddocks and we burnt the grass and it burnt the sawmill down and we got into shit about that.

[Opposite side of road past Cedar Creek.] I am not sure who owned that one, maybe the Alexander's but I remember being in the ceiling cavity wiring it once and this bloody 10 foot carpet snake bailed me up. I wired the backpacker joint on the hill here too and it was owned by a guy from Melbourne but I cannot recall his name. [Roger Scales.] Opposite that big shed was once Dick Verhey's grain shed where he made all the tucker for his chooks.

[Garners Beach Road.] This is Jorrisen bridge. That was Dick Verhey's wife's sister. See that creek there, Cedar Creek, there's a house just there beside the creek and that creek used to be a beautiful fresh running creek that bloody thing. Look at it now. Just downstream Donny McConnell lived in a house and he had a 30 foot boat tied up in his front yard. You imagine that now? Inconceivable in that mud pond. Bloody croc just missed me in there once. I think the house there now is different

but where the boat was the creek had a huge deep drop-off. That's what all the silt has done to the creeks. Used to fish for Bara in many of them.

In the scrub there [just past the bridge, south side of the road] that was where old Frizelle was and Bert Porter told me about him. He was supposedly the first person ever to live near here [near the beach at Garners]. Whether that's true or not it's what Bert Porter told me. That land was later owned by the Kenny's and earlier, Harry Holt had his holiday home up that road there. The chemist in Tully, Kattahanis, owned the land on the south side of that and then it was the Brooke's dairy farm on the north headland of Brookes Beach south of that.

[South end Garners Beach.] When I was a kid there was all bloody little camping dongas all along here and we sometimes camped in them. This was all bloody hippies in the early days; dozens of the bastards. When the Council chased them out they all went to Cedar Bay.

[North end of Garners.] There was another road near the north end of Garners that went around the back of the headland to Muff Creek. There was a Council guy living in a home there. Sprigg Healy and the boys from El Arish had several dongas here too. We camped in them often. There was a walkway around that point [north end Garners] and it went right over to Kurrimine.

[Holt Road near Brookes Beach.] That walking track to the beach used to be a built road; bit steep but it was a good road. We sometimes camped at Brookes Beach too.

Scribe: So, Dave, you lived here all your life; if you had your time over would you do it all again?

Dave: Aw shit, yeah. You couldn't get better. We came to live here full time when our oldest son was near school age and the old girl wouldn't send 'em to Cardstone school, she wanted him to go to school in Tully. I was still in Cardstone in '67 when we had the big flood so it was shortly after that we came to live on the beachfront at Wongaling. We had a great life at Cardstone too though. They built us a new house, had a brand new wife; on clover. We only paid £90 a year for rent and had a great salary. Great start to life, hey. And soon we had the beach house as well so we had the best of all worlds.

[On the way back, Clump Point, Ecovillage.] That was a mango plantation in the old days and many of the old trees remain in there. Let's go for a gander in here to the boat ramp. This is the best piece of bush in the area if the Council would clean the bastard up; they treat it like shit and just push any broken trees carelessly up against the beautiful mature trees. Any Council that understood tourism would know better and keep it pristine. You'd think they'd take the debris away. It was originally owned by a surveyor, Hyne, way back and it was cleared.. At the end of Clump Point there was not a tree to be seen – it was a big grass paddock and the black fellas burned it regularly to keep it that way so they could round up the wallabies for tucker.

That bloody reef at the end of Clump Point was full of fish when I was a kid There was a big octopus with six foot long legs. We went out in our seven foot six pram dinghy and we used to catch so many fish we had to swim home pushing the boat! Jesus there used to be some fish around here in those days. It's too dirty to go spearin' there these days but. There was a perfect circle hole about 20 foot deep just offshore; it was a blow-hole from a volcano and out off the point about 300 yards there was another blowhole about 30 foot deep. We speared Big Scales fish in it. And the bloody thing's all silted up now. There's a lot of crap spoken about this Clump Point area. Yeah.

[Castaways]. There was a death here from a box jelly when it was owned by Jack Romano and was called the Moon Glow. A girl dived in and got water all over her boobs and it killed her nearly instantly. There were nurses there on site but they could not save her. That really changed things for Jack and he sold up and went to the Tablelands shortly after and had a motel at Tolga.

[Woolworths.] The land here, west of the supermarket is the Guifre's, Sam Guifre brought me down once to look at it and said he had approached Council to build a retirement village on the land. He showed me how they demanded that he raise the land level by one and a half metres right across the entire area for flood mitigation before he could build. He cracked it and said he had enough and would not build here. Imagine that, all the resort and supermarket buildings are at ground level and this had to be raised 1500mm! Eh, how bloody stupid is that?

[Carrington Drive.] That is where the road went to go over Bolton's Saddle in the old days. Started on the other side of the hill at South Mission beach Road. [24 Dunkalli.] This is close to the place where Reid had his house when he died.

So, there you go!

Charlie Pasina was quite a character from our past. He was put in a prison camp in the war. You know those bloody submarine pens they built with strong tech-concrete tops, and the Tallboy bombs? They built a long skinny bomb that goes through the concrete and blows up the submarines in the pens and he said the reason that worked was because they bodgied the concrete.

Charlie bloody escaped from the prison camp though. The most valuable thing they had in the prison camp was a cat. Because when you when wanted to run away, you took a cat and when they sent the bloody dogs after you as soon as the dogs were about to catch you let the cat go and they chased the cat instead of you. The first time he tried to escape he ran across the paddock and it was wintertime, and the Germans bloody machine gunned them all and he never got killed, but he lay there pretending he was dead. And when it got dark he kept goin'. He got away and came right across the world to bloody Australia where he worked in the Snowy. Shit, he had some stories to tell old Charlie about the war, hey. Right. The Germans used to grab them when they played up and drive a stake in the middle of the Quadrangle and put a sprinkler on top of the stake and when they got up in the morning the prisoner bloke was frozen in a block of ice. Charlie was only around 18 years old when he escaped. And he ended up here. What a legend he was.

REEF ADVENTURES



Dr Kathleen Broderick: interviewer.

Dr Kathleen Broderick is an Affiliated Researcher with the Australian National University at their Fenner School of Environment and Society. In 2007/8, while Manager Social and Economic Information and Research at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Kath led an exciting social science team and Madeleine Fernbach and Kate Nairn published a paper named, '*Reef Collections: An Oral History of the Great Barrier Reef.*' This was part of an overall project to create '*Outlook Reporting.*' Kath assisted her team by conducting some oral histories herself and one of her interviews was with Mission Beach's Dave Nissen. They also interviewed Tony Lee and Bruce Shepherd in this series.

Kath authorised Mission Beach Historical Society to use Dave's oral history if he agreed and he did so. Hence we have included it in this collection. To me, it seemed pointless re-interviewing Dave on his Reef and associated adventures when Kath has already done so and is a more skilful oral history interviewer than I will ever be. There is some repetition of life experiences with the interviews I did yet I retained most of that as there was additional insights worth retaining. We excluded small parts of the conversation when it totally overlapped with what has already been said in this document.

What I most liked about Kath's 74 minute interview was that she was able to remain largely on topic and transcribe the interview verbatim so retaining the essence of Dave's voice, whereas I have edited his input more severely so have lost much of his unique language.

The full 'Reef Collections' paper is available at

<https://elibrary.gbrmpa.gov.au/jspui/handle/11017/433> and a PDF of the report can be found at:

<https://elibrary.gbrmpa.gov.au/jspui/bitstream/11017/433/1/Reef-recollections-an-oral-history-of-the-Great-Barrier-Reef.pdf>

[Unclear] words are denoted in square brackets and time stamps may be used to indicate their location within the audio. Distribution of this transcript requires client authority and is subject to the provisions of the National Privacy Principles.

Kath: It's Kathleen Broderick and I'm interviewing Dave Nissen and we're in the River Lodge Hotel or Motel in Innisfail and Dave's from Mission Beach and we're talking about reef recollections. So can you tell me a bit about where you were born and ...

Dave: Born in Tully. Lived in El Arish. Well what else. Electrician probably by trade. Been all over Australia building power stations. Tasmania. Two year's crocodile shooting. Used to have 24 fishing licences. I don't know how many boats I've owned but I think our current count at the moment is 13 minus one. My big boat's lost out at the Hunter.

Kath: So tell me a bit before we get onto the reef stories and recollections let's talk about you a bit more because you've been pretty forthcoming with some information about the reef which I'm going to get onto in a second but I'd like to know when you were born in Tully. Do you come from a big family or'?

Dave: No I only had two brothers, that's all but my old man had 14 brothers and sisters.

Kath: And he was a Tully man as well?

Dave: No, he was a Dane.

Kath: A Dane, as in Denmark?

Dave: Yeah, and my mother's a Dane as well. My mother's got a history back to 820 when the Dane's invaded England and put [unclear] on the throne of England. Yeah my mum's got a pretty top history actually. But the old man's history is lost because Napoleon went into where he used to live and burnt all the churches and all the records. We've only got the records back to the grandfather. From when the grandfather come out to Australia till the present day there's 890 direct descendants.

Kath: Oh wow, he's prolific.

Dave: Jesus, what a crew hey.

Kath: What was his name, the grandfather?

Dave: Rolf, R-o-l-f, Rolf Boyson Nissen.

Kath: Okay. So, what brought him out as an immigrant? When would that have been 19...?

Dave: No, that was in I think 1902. That's my grandfather. Me old man I don't know; I was born in 1939 so I think my old man was probably 28. I think mum was 32 because she was bit older than the old man.

Kath: Sorry your grandfather didn't migrate?

Dave: He did.

Kath: He did but your father did?

Dave: No sorry yeah, the father was born in Sydney.

Kath: Okay.

Dave: He was a rabbit catcher, whatever you like to call it. Rabbit trapper.

Kath: And your mum was?

Dave: Mum immigrated from England. Her father got killed in a mining accident in Wales. They haven't shifted more than 20 miles since 1820 or whatever it was.

Kath: The family in Wales?

Dave: Mum's family yeah. Never moved. Actually my daughter was over there about five years ago, more now, she's got kids. I think Keely's six. Our daughter went for a trip around the world and she went over to a little place called [Blakeney] which is on the Severn River and that's where the Danes landed when they were digging up the old village there. Very interesting. That's an original Danish village in England.

Kath: Mmm. Wow, very interesting. And have you been over there?

Dave: No I don't want to go anywhere. I have enough trouble here without going over there.

Kath: You make enough trouble here you reckon?

Dave: No there's only one place I want to go, the [Friviloff Islands.]

Kath: The where?

The [Frivilotf] islands down near, where did the pommies have that war, South Argentineans?

Kath: Yeah, oh like Falklands?

Dave: Falklands yeah, the [Frivolffs] near the Falklands and that's where all the killer whales are.

Kath: That would be great.

Dave: We've got killer whales here too you know.

Kath: Really?

Dave: Yeah we've seen them out here diving. Scary bastards.

Kath: Are you making this up? Like this is Orcas?

Dave: Yeah. Bloody oath. You swim there diving and you see one of them buggers coming I tell you what, they don't want to seem to want to eat you but, they just dive up for a look you know.

Kath: Do you see them regularly?

Dave: No probably three in 20 years. There's great white sharks up at Princess Charlotte Bay too. We caught one up there one year.

Kath: That would be generally accepted that that would be outside their range?

Dave: Very rare, yeah. Very rare.

Kath: Interesting Dave, we're just kind of getting through your early childhood and you were saying you had two brothers, born in Tully?

Dave: Yeah, lived in El Arish but when we were primary school kids, well like I told you last night, we used to drive around bloody throwing dynamite off guard and bloody spearing and fishing and bloody bows and arrows you know. We used to ride our push bikes from El Arish down to the beach and go spearing. When I was 10 years old we'd be driving back to El Arish with a 50 pound Barramundi on the handlebars of the push bike you know. We caught some awful big Barras in our time hey. Young son caught one at Bathurst Head when he was about seven, it was 1.86 metres long. We let it go but. Big female it would have been.

Kath: Where did you do your apprenticeship?

Dave: Well it was at Cairns Regional Electricity Board in those days in Cairns. Yeah studied electrical fitting mechanic linesman cable joiner. There you go. I didn't wire houses I built power stations. Yeah; bugger that wiring houses.

Kath: Over the years I guess you've had a long association with the reef, when did you come...

Dave: Been going there forever.

Kath: ...when did you come back to it after you went away?

Dave: Well I did me apprenticeship but all that time there we used to go to the reef. We used to go out from Cairns. A Chinese mate of mine that was our best man had a little tiny boat. I think the biggest outboard you could buy in those days was a 15 horsepower [unclear] water cooled. We used to go out the Reef or Cairns fishing there and it was so small you could stick your hand over the side and touch the water when you were sitting in the boat, little boat. We used to catch a lot of fish in Cairns. Then in the apprenticeship days I can't say I didn't do a real good apprenticeship because we were everywhere. We were here, there and everywhere. Up the Atherton tableland and here in Innisfail we stayed at the pub up the top of the hill in Innisfail for probably a year while we were building that big substation out on the Palmerston. Used to go down the pool there every morning and swim for half an hour before breakfast. Nice and fit in those days. But anyhow yeah we spent half our life swimming around the coast spearing and fishing and catching crabs, whatever was going on. Then I went to Cairns and did me apprenticeship and then soon as I finished that, the day it finished I bolted because I met an old bloke up at the Archer River who was a professional crocodile shooter, bloke called Mick Newman. I said I've had enough of this crap I'm going crocodile shooting. So Mick and I went crocodile shooting for two seasons. You only go shooting crocodiles in wintertime, you can't shoot crocodiles in summertime because they're too lively, the crocodiles are cold blooded and they've got to come out of the water and get in the sun. That's why you see crocodiles sitting on the bank. They're getting their temperature up so they catch their dinner. if they're cold they don't move, like carpet snakes, they just lay around and do nothing, so they're easy to shoot. We shot bloody I don't how many thousands of crocodiles.

Kath: So tell me about it? What did you do, what was the life of a crocodile shooter like?

Dave: Bloody ripper.

Kath: What was a typical day perhaps?

Dave: Well I had an old army Willy Jeep and Mick had a series 1 Land Rover and we used to tow the trailer behind the Land Rover with all the salt in it because you had to salt the skins and we just headed off up the cape and talked to blokes in cattle stations and whatever and went on their properties and shot crocodiles. You could only shoot about five a night. Any more than that and you couldn't skin them out. What you'd do is depending on the tide, it's better to have a rising tide than a falling tide because a rising tide comes up through the mangroves and whatever and the trees and that but a falling tide you get all little bits of bubble sit on the leaves and it looks like a crocodile's eye and you get all these spots in the river but on rising tide you don't get that.

Kath: So, to be able to see them you have to have a rising tide?

Dave: I reckon it's better for a rising tide. What we do is go upstream and come back with a falling tide. You wouldn't have to row then. We only had a seven foot six pram dinghy to shoot out of. Little boat. You'd be sitting on the back rowing and it's only that much freeboard to your back, but anyhow we had a few narrow escapes, but that doesn't matter. Crocodiles jumping off the bank and sinking the boat and Mick going out and getting bitten.

Kath: My goodness.

Dave: You don't want to hear all that. I can talk all day about crocodile shooting. But anyhow as far as you're concerned the rivers were full of fish. We never had any trouble catching a feed. When we were just about ready to go home you'd just have the spotlight and stick it under a tree and there'd be a Barramundi like 10 or 12 pounder you'd just fire a shot in him with the 303 and take him home for breakfast. It was no trouble. We used to shoot the wallabies and chop them, put them through the mincer because we got sick of eating fish. Put the wallabies through a mincer.

Kath: This was around the late 50s, early 60s.

Dave: Sixties yeah.

Kath: For a couple of years?

Dave: Two seasons and in between I worked doing electrical work for the board and that. Well I don't know if I should tell you this but the two worst things I ever did was shoot bloody donkeys up at Elsie Homestead in the Territory. Really bad, that's one thing I'm really ashamed of, shooting donkeys.

Kath: Why is that?

Dave: Terrible. There were millions of donkeys in the Territory in those days and you had a 303, you'd just fold the windscreen down, one bloke driving and one bloke shooting and the donkeys used to run in the line you know, up the cattle pads, there'd be 20 donkey running along. You'd just get behind them from here to that bar there away and shoot them fair up the bum with a 303 and the bullet would go in and come out the side of their neck somewhere, solid army round and they'd scream for 20 minutes before they died of loss or blood or something. That was bad.

Kath: Mmm okay.

Dave: That's one of the things I shouldn't have done and the other one was shooting Lorne Hill water rats but you don't want to know about that one. There is a water rat at Lorne Hill that's not there now it's extinct and it looks like a platypus and there's only two places in the world they live. One was Lorne Hill and one's in a river up the mountains of New Guinea and we shot 50 of them. The bloke was giving us 50 pounds each for the skin and I said to Mick I said there's something going on here. We made some enquiries and found out that they were bloody rare. They're easy to shoot but. They used to swim round like beavers but you don't know that. You shouldn't put that in there I'll get put in jail.

Kath: I'll rub that off the tape.

Dave: Yeah you'll get put in jail there.

Kath: So going back to your time in Cairns when you were a young strapping electrical apprentice and you've got this friend with the little boat...

Dave: I had lots of friends in Cairns. We used to go here there and everywhere, yeah.

Kath: Can you tell me about some of your reef trips out from there and what it was like?

Dave: Like Johnny said, we used to catch any amount of fish, you know. Didn't have to go far. We had a little favourite spot around behind Sudbury. We used to go round behind Sudbury and catch all the fish you want and go home. We'd just fill the ice box up. My brother-in-law, I've been married for what, 42 years now the old girl tells me and like 30 years ago my brother-in-law and I had a 21 footer with two big outboards on it, 120 horsepower I think they were, that's the biggest you could buy in those days. Him and I could go to the reef in the morning and we'd be home by night and we'd have 400 pound of coral trout in the box.

Kath: Wow.

Dave: Two blokes. We are expert coral trout fishermen. I've caught so many coral trout. I had a licence to sell them. I used to sell them from the beach house. I built a block of flats at the beach; Coral Trout flats they were called.

Kath: What; you really called them the Coral Trout flats?

Dave: Yeah.

Kath: They were funded by Coral Trout?

Dave: Yeah they were.

Kath: Did your fishing technique... So you'd spent some time skin diving earlier on'?

Dave: We used to hand line fish but it was easy catching trout, you'd just go and park on a bommie up there and throw, see Coral Trout hang out on the front of the rock when the tide's running. They don't hang around behind the rock. They're all out there looking for a feed. So you go and park upstream and throw your line back. Johnny talks about people going to the reef and catching no fish. The only reason they catch no fish is because a lot of them can't catch fish anyhow. Like I said to me mates with a \$1.2 million Bertram and 700 litres of fuel and they come home with five fish. Shit you've got to be joking. We go out there in a boat that travels 60 miles an hour and we're home with 200 pound of fish in half a day because we go spearing too. I don't do that much no more. I can't keep up with my boys. Well one boy, the little brother; one's over in Perth but our crew are all able to dive at least 30 metres. They've got Riffe spear guns. You've never heard of a Riffe gun but a bloke Jay Riffe in America makes spear guns and we make our own now. We've got big spear guns with float lines and floats on them for deep water and another ski rope on the end with a handle to grab hold of it and the spear comes off the gun and they spear like 200 kilo Dog Tooth Tunas and all that sort of stuff. Mark's (my son) had an ambition to spear a 1000 pound Marlin but I go crook at them when they talk about stuff like that. We could have done it many times. Up at Waterwitch Pass a few years ago, shall I show you on that map, we were swimming in Waterwitch Pass and this Marlin at least 1,200 pound come right up to us. Right up to us. You could have touched the bloody thing and I'd see him swinging the gun around and I went over and pushed him out of the road. You couldn't kill something like that. I might have done 20 years ago but not now. Well I used to be a Marlin fisherman too. I caught plenty of Marlin. I used to go to Tangalooma and drive a boat called the Casada for my mate Richard Estep. It was a Cheoy Lee and it did 48 knots this big boat. Forty two footer. I used to go and drive it for him and do those Tangalooma tournaments. Ripper adventure. Got a 150 tonne mothership and I won't go on.

You've got a tape recorder going but the thing that used to happen there was like used to happen down there.

Kath: What? Not quite kosher, not quite above board?

Dave: There was always plenty of ladies with no clothes on.

Kath: Oh okay.

Dave: I got on the TV once. I'm on the back of the game boat and there's two girls one each side of me with just, are you going to wipe that off?

Kath: Yep.

Dave: Just g~strings on and we're catching bait and I'm over the back of the boat with a net and a stick and we'd throw fish in there, jump it all up and chuck it in and we're catching these yakkas they call them, for live bait and I'm over there catching these yakkas and both of the girls are hanging over beside me and I look up and here's the news boat with the Tony Barnett on the bloody thing and I said, Tony what are you doing? and he said I got you now Dave. He said I'm going to put her on this afternoon's news and I said, don't do it to me.

Kath: So, these trips were quite the entertainment for the well to do...

Dave: Well, we used to clean them up every time in those tournaments. They used to get the shits hey. You ever heard of a bloke called Peter Bristow? He's pretty famous. Brazakka? You heard of Brazakka?

Kath: No.

Dave: Dennis Wallace? Cape York Barramundi helicopter fishing? They're all good mates of mine. You should meet Brazakka one day. He's a wild man Brazakka. But anyhow.

Kath: So they were supplying a tourist market those guys?

Dave: Oh Brazakka does, yeah. It will cost you a lot of money. Jeez I don't know what he charges. Eight hundred bucks an hour for the helicopter and whatever. But he does Cape York heli-fishing. He's got four helicopters. His Mrs is a good pilot too. I'd rather fly with her than him. Brazakka's a bit scary. But anyhow he dives in and out of trees and lost one in the river one day and crashed it and the feds were chasing him.

Kath: So, how long have you known them, some of these guys that you were just describing?

Dave: Pretty well all me life.

Kath: So they were local boys as well?

Dave: Bristow come from Moreton island. That's where we used to clean the tournaments up down there. I think Bristow's in Guam now. He left his Mrs and picked up with a fancy girl and he went to Guam with his game boat. But Brazakka's still in Cairns. Cape York. Heli-fishing. He'd be a bloke to talk to you if you want to. He was the second best Marlin fisherman in the world Brazakka was.

Kath: So what was your involvement in Marlin fishing? Were you competing or ...?

Dave: Yeah the blokes that were fishing were competing. I was just driving the boat. I don't want to catch Marlin for them. Once you've caught one you've caught enough you know. Sailfish, Marlin, you name it hey. Bloody Dog Tooth Tunas, big Mackerel. I think the biggest Mackerel we ever caught was 122 pound. That's a bloody big Mackerel. But anyhow, yeah, no, she's been all a good adventure.

Kath: So can you tell me a bit about these changing businesses because I sort of haven't followed that story very well.

Dave: Marlin fishing I think should be banned actually. They don't bring too many fish ashore these days. They tag them and release them but there's some people that do. Like there's a bloody joker in Cairns that's a Tuna fisherman and they take the Marlin and they sell them. But Marlin are like, actually small Marlin up to about 500 pounds, they're just like Mackerel to eat but Sailfish are red meat like Tuna meat. They're only good for Sushi or something. They're not good eating. Sailfish they're just red meat you know, but the Japs would eat them. I've got another mate, Bobby Kwon. He's got an 80 metre expedition boat. They shouldn't be allowed in the Barrier Reef them blokes. They've got bloody nitrox diamond and they got skids, sleds you drive around with and they've got spear guns and they go anywhere. They don't care.

Kath: I guess I'm not really following that story. So you're an electrician, you've been travelling around, you've done all sorts of amazing jobs. So you settled back down here at Mission Beach ... when?

Dave: Yeah I saw a bloody sheila sticking her finger in the spaghetti and I thought that'll do me.

Kath: Is she an Italian girl?

Dave: No, she's bog Irish mate.

Kath: Bog Irish?

Dave: She's got cousins or uncles that are bloody IRA lieutenants.

Kath: You've been married about 40 years?

Dave: Forty two years.

Kath: It seems like yesterday?

Dave: We go alright. We've got some beautiful kids and some beautiful grandkids. My old sheila's very sick. She's only 42 kilo. She's had cancer for 20 years.

Kath: Wow.

Dave: Very sick. But anyhow. She's a good bird.

Kath: So when you came back, did you settle in Mission Beach when you got married?

Dave: No, yeah, no we lived at Cardstone up in the power station, up behind Tully. I was, let me think about this. I was up in the Territory shooting donkeys and then we went up to Oenpelli and then we come back to Elsie Homestead and I said to Mick, I said I've had enough of this. I'm going to get a job. So I rang up my old man in El Arish and I said find me a job and about a week later I rang back and I said have you got me a job? He said yeah down in Tasmania building a power station. I said beauty, just what I want. So I go straight back to El Arish. I had a Willy's Jeep, an

American Army Willy's Jeep. No doors, no nothing. Big crocodile skin on the front and a rifle up here and a rifle down there and whatever you know. I unloaded all my shooting gear and left the rifles in there but. My mother said if I'm going to Tasmania, she said I'll come to Brisbane with you. So we went, to Brisbane and I dropped her off and went to Tasmania. I got to the terminal and I cruise up there about nine o'clock in the morning and I said here I am, I want to go to Tasmania. Give me a ticket. Yeah there's your card. Yeah. The boat doesn't leave till nine o'clock tonight mate. Well before that I pulled up in the middle of - see I went to school in Brisbane so I was sort of used to a big city but I had a big beard in those days, a real wild looking bastard and I pulled up in the middle of Swanston Street in Melbourne with the Jeep and got out and I'm standing there looking around and the bloody coppers are coming; what are you doing mate? Where do you come from? I said the Northern Territory. You can't bloody have a gun in your car like that. I said yeah. I just hammed it up. I was a bushy you know. You got any bullets in it? I said no, the magazine's not in it. Oh that's alright then. Had these people in hey. They bloody never had a clue. Anyhow they never seen nothing like me I can tell ya. We got to the terminal and over on the edge of the terminal over there's a big tree. I said I'm going to go and camp under that tree there till it's ready. Oh that'll be right mate. I go under the tree and I find some sticks and light a fire and I'm boiling my billy and there's this big bloody office there and this bloke comes wandering over and says, what are you doing? I said I'm making a cup of tea. He said wait a while it's smoko soon, we'll come over and have a cup with you. So, about six people from the office come over and we're boiling the billy and having a cup of tea and they're eating their biscuits and the bloke says shit, it's 20 past. We'd better get back to work and I said oh yeah, come over at lunch time. We talked about crocodile shooting. You see, all these bloody people down south they'd never been nowhere and done nothing. They couldn't believe it. I'd start talking about fishing and shooting and crocodiles and bloody whatever, whatever, you know. Anyhow at lunch time the whole bloody lot come over and I've got the billy boiling. They brought their chairs and they're eating their lunch and we're talking about crocodile shooting and they're all going, I'd love to do that you know. Then when it comes time to get on the boat they said here you've got a first class ticket. We'll put your car on for you, get up there and I had a first class ticket up near the bridge with the captain. So, I spent half the trip sitting up there with the captain crapping on too. Then we get over to Tasmania and I cruise up to Poatina which was a big camp. We were building a power station there. I booked in. Actually my offsider at Poatina was Nobby Clarke. The Nobby Clarke. Yeah he was just a TA in those days. He was working from uni. I used to give him hell. Anyhow I still had some gelignite in the car and all that stuff you take bush you know. I go down the creek one day and we're going to catch a trout see and we're down there stuffing around. You could see the trout under the bank and I said, I'll fix them bastards up. I go get half a plug and shoong; got about five trout and we went home. He said you can't do that and I said bullshit, that's how we do it up north.

Kath: Now last night you did talk about trout fishing in that way on the reef. Can you tell me a bit about that? Was that before then that you were...

Dave: What do you mean, blowing them up?

Kath: Yeah.

Dave: No, we never did it on the reef. We did it in the creeks.

Kath: But you said people did do it out there?

Dave: They did yeah. Some of them did. A long time ago. Like Johnny was talking about; the clam boats. We were out there when those clam boats were there years ago and we went up and bloody fired shots at them and everything hey. Those bastards were going around with these big, curved hooks you know and they just ripped the clam out and opened it up and they'd just take the muscle, the muscle in the clam. That's all they were taking. Yeah we fired a couple of shots at them once.

Kath: So, these were like illegal Taiwanese fishers?

Dave: Yeah.

Kath: When was that just about?

Dave: That'd have to be in the 60s too. Something like that.

Kath: What were you doing out there at that time, were you just...

Dave: We were spearing.

Kath: Just recreationally or were you running charters?

Dave: No. Never did any charter work for money or anything like that. I just went spearing, raping and pillaging. Like in Tasmania too. I was just thinking there we got some trout and then this bloke says oh we're going to go bloody ~ you're not going to put this on this thing are you ~ he said oh we'll go and get some rabbits. So we go out there to where all these rabbits were and this bloke's got a 22 and he's fired a shot and all the rabbits run away you know. I said, I'll sort that out. I go along and get my 22 out of the car with the silencer on it hey and I go wh, wh, wh and about four rabbits fall over and he said, how do you do that?

Kath: So you moved back to Queensland after that?

Dave: Well I went over to work at Yallourn at the briquette factory there at Yallourn and they were building the big power station there called Hazelwood and they wanted some tradesmen to do the annual maintenance. I was the only one that had a ticket for 1,100 volt motors. So I pulled these big 1,100 volt motors to bits and put the bearings in. Christmas day it was red hot and I thought stuff this bloody joint and I was having trouble with the union too, because when you go there you've got to join the union and I said I'm not joining no fricking union. They give me buggery hey but they had to keep me there because I was the only one that had the ticket to do these big alternators, big motors. Anyhow, Christmas day it was red hot hey and I had a mate there that was a TA to and he was fully traumatised this bloke. His job during the war was knocking the teeth out of the bodies and getting the gold out. Poor bastard. He used to sit there for 20 minutes washing his hands when he had lunch and he wasn't going to touch his sandwiches. He'd get a sandwich and he'd put it to his mouth and he'd put it back down and go and wash his hands again because it's the smell of the, you know. But anyhow, I rang the old man up and said I'm sick of this, too hot. it was about 44 degrees or something and down in the mine. I said I'm going home. So I just walked out. Left a week's pay and everything and drove back up here and I was straight into the power station. So I worked there for about three years until I saw this sheila with her fingers in the spaghetti, and ... We made all our babies up at Cardstone at the power station in the bush, which was ripper, bloody beautiful place to live. We had a house right up on the hill because I was one of the bosses. It was looking out over the river. I was actually the training bloke. I trained blokes from Cairns to Townsville to drive power stations. There was a big waterfall straight out our bedroom window sort of, you know and it was a beautiful place to live. We made our three babies there.

Kath: Did you go to the reef when you were living there?

Dave: Yeah, all the time. Soon after, I just went down the beach and bought this block of land. Took nine weeks holiday and we built a beach house. That was when our first boy, Mark was in the oven; Noela was pregnant with Mark and we had just built the beach house. I built a boat under the house actually at Cardstone. A 21 footer. We just went to the reef forever.

Kath: The beach house, where was it?

Dave: Reid Road, Mission Beach, just metres from the sand.

Kath: Right. So that's where you've been...

Dave: Yeah. Where the Trout flats were built later.

Kath: And that's where you've been pretty much ever since?

Dave: We lived there for a long time. I worked at the power station but then when the kids had to go to school the old girl being a bloody schoolteacher decided that Cardstone school was too small so we come to the beach. We sent them to the Catholic School in Tully. Then she ended up being the principal there after a little while. She was the principal for a lot of years hey. Our kids would come home from school on the bus, when they were primary school kids and they'd be flying off the bus at 100 mile an hour. Off would come the clothes. We had a boat down the beach. They'd be gone. They'd be out around the islands spearing and fishing and carrying on. They couldn't do it now because they never had a licence. Then I used to take them up the Cape shooting and fishing. Our daughter, Donna always said they were brought up in the back of a Land Rover going up Cape York.

Kath: You must have had a lot of happy memories with them hanging out fishing.

Dave: Yeah. In the end, when I built this 21 footer I ended up putting an inboard outboard in it because it was more economical and the boys and Donna they could start the tractor up, fuel the boat; we had a fuel tank there and everything, put it in the water, come on dad we're going to the reef, yeah. They'd drive the boat, take it off the trailer. I'd just get on in case something happened. They were only bloody 12 years old these bloody kids. Out to the reef spearing and fishing and jumping around and carrying on. Then back 'home again. Then when the boys went to high school, they'd go out spearing and fishing and they'd have to get back on the bus to go to high school and the old girl would be down on the beach jumping up and down because they weren't home. You'd see them coming across the water in the dinghy and they'd be yahooing and yelling and sometimes they had to chase the bus as far as Cardwell to catch it to get them on the bloody bus you know. They always say my kids they had the best upbringing you know. They had the best life my kids. *(Ken Gray: a reader may think the children missed out on an education. Peter ('Bungy') Nissen later in life chose to go to university and now has a PhD in petrochemical engineering so they probably got by!)*

Kath: So do you think that they saw a different reef when they were kids than what you had seen?

Dave: I don't think it's changed actually.

Kath: You don't think so?

Dave: Outside there it hasn't, no. Like we've been diving on those reefs out there for 50 years and I don't reckon the reef's changed. Like I was trying to say last night, a lot of people have got a

distorted view of the reef because a lot of it isn't like you think it is. Like a lot of it's crap. A lot of it's not worth looking at. I don't think it's changed in 50 years.

Kath: When you say 'crap' you were talking last night about rocky surfaces not coral...

Dave: Well what I call crap you know. Yeah, bits of coral and bits of seaweed and the bommies are like this and this with holes in them but they're not what everybody thinks is a beautiful reef. There's not too much of the whole Reef like that hey. I don't reckon there's 20% like that.

Kath: You think that that's always been the case, that there's never been?

Dave: I haven't seen any change at all. What went through me brain then, something? Oh like I was saying last night, a lot of stuff is that cemented stuff you know. It's like, I don't know what they call it, but about 80% of the Reef is made up of that stuff. It's like solid, like rock. When you see it in a fish tank they call it living rock, that stuff you know. That's what most of the reef's made up of. It's not made up of coral at all. Like you see beautiful staghorn coral gardens and plate corals and all that you know, but it's not everywhere. Like people think it's everywhere. Like all these bloody tourists they take out of Cairns, they've never seen any good reef. A couple of them are. There's a couple of places they go. I don't know what one of the rocks is called, that's a good rock. But you know, I'm talking the real serious stuff. Like South Flinders. South Flinders Reef is not much coral, it's all just rock with big holes through it. But like I said, we've got a photo of my boat sitting up there, 60 footer sitting up there. I said 100 foot down last night but it wasn't 100 foot it'd be about 70 feet and we've got all these underwater videos. I tell you what, if you want to see a video someday, Christ we've got some good videos. Then he's got a photo of the boat up there and you can't even see the water. You'd think it was flying. That's really seriously good stuff. But most people never see that.

Kath: So, you're talking about you don't think the reef has actually changed?

Dave: No. In-shore it has, not outside. In-shore reefs are all stuffed.

Kath: Right. When you're saying in-shore, how far out do you think the problem's...

Dave: Out as far as Brook Island. I'd say 10 nautical mile out. Most of it's stuffed.

Kath: When you say 'stuffed' can you just explain what you mean and when might you have seen that sort of change?

Dave: Well there is a bit of coral here and there but it's not like it was 50 years ago. I can think of a place there what we call Lugger Bay Reef which is just down the corner from where we used to go. Lugger Bay is the little bay down from where we live now and there used to be a big gutter along the beach there of about 10 feet deep at low tide. We actually landed a sea plane in it once at low tide because it was too rough to land anywhere else. My mate had a sea plane and we landed in there. Actually me and my brother are building one now, a sea plane. Beauty hey. Only way to go. When you haven't got a boat you get an aeroplane. He's an aeroplane engineer my brother. But anyhow there's a reef here and there's a creek here and that used to have a big gutter along there, well that there's totally silted up now and around the corner here, just around the corner, there's a big cave there that we could guarantee to spear a Barramundi in, every time. That cave used to be that high, now it's that high and that's how much the silt's come up, at least that much. Around the next bay down a bit further

Kath: Kurrimine?

Dave: Kurrimine Reef, well whenever it's good weather I'll take her out and show her all these things but there's a bommie there near the end of Kurrimine Reef that was at least as high as this ceiling, a bunch of rocks as big as this building and that's totally gone now.

Kath: The actual rock has gone?

Dave: Yeah, it's a bommie.

Kath: Or is it covered up?

Dave: Covered up, yeah.

Kath: So, as high as this ceiling, we're talking about...

Dave: That's in 40 years. 12 foot ceilings here maybe ten foot.

Kath: Ten foot. Wow.

Dave: Totally covered up and at the mouth of Maria Creek, when we used to spear when we were kids, I can take you and show you the exact spot, the water was at least 12 feet deep and we used to go down through all the trees and hang our spear guns down there and the water was only about that high under and all the Barras used to swim round under there. You'd put your spear gun down there and you'd get a breath and go down and wait for a fish to come past and you'd spear it, like monster Barras like that size you know. But that's gone, it's just totally silted up now.

Kath: So, you said that since you can remember it wasn't like that 40 years ago...

Dave: No it wasn't.

Kath: Was there a period of time where there was a rapid change in that in-shore reef condition that you can remember, or did it happen gradually?

Dave: I reckon it just happened gradually. I reckon it was to do with all the cane and mainly banana expansion. I reckon bananas, I won't say bananas out loud because my mob are banana growers, but what would you call it, unsafe banana practice. Like I said, I'll show you the son's farm, his Mrs owns it, all the headlands have all got sand on them; they've got gutters made right and that sort of jazz you know. You've only got to drive down the road here and have a look when you across to North Johnstone, have a look to your right, that banana farm there. There's mud this thick everywhere, well that all runs straight down the river. Actually the Johnstone River is the second most polluted river in Queensland. The Fitzroy's the first. I used to own a slipway down there on the Johnstone, and the amount of mud and shit that used to get in the slipway was unbelievable. I had to put in a big pump to wash it all out.

Kath: When did you have the slipway?

Dave: I sold that about eight years ago.

Kath: How long did you have it for?

Dave: Ten years.

Kath: Did you notice a change in that time?

Dave: Yeah, the first years it wasn't too bad but after that I had to wash it out every time you wanted to get a boat up. It was a 100 tonne slipway; it wasn't a little one.

Kath: You said that the reef hasn't changed as much as you can see because it's not all beautiful anyway, so there's always about 20% that's beautiful coral and the rest is kind of rocky stuff?

Dave: Yeah, I don't reckon it's changed much.

Kath: Johnny talked a lot about the number of fish changing, did you...

Dave: Oh yeah the fish has diminished a lot. Yeah. Well certain fish like Coral Trout. Well the fish that haven't diminished is Black Spot Tusk Fish. See we spear a lot of Black Spot Tusk Fish. You don't know what they look like but they're like a big ball chin groper you get over in the west.

Kath: Oh yeah.

Dave: Same as a Ball Chin Groper but they haven't got the white under their chin. They grow like this big, pretty heavy-duty fish. But we've been spearing at [Ida] for like 40 years and I reckon that the Black Spot Tusk Fish haven't diminished because you've got to be a pretty good spearer to catch them. The water's got to be say, 20 metres deep and not too many spearers will go 20 metres. Like all these amateur blokes you see around here are not that proficient and they haven't got the gear. Like there was one bloke in Cardwell crapping on about Tricky Snappers. Well you can't shoot Tricky Snapper with an ordinary spear gun you've got to have what's called a Rob Allen rail gun that's a very skinny spear and goes very fast. Like a Tricky, if you had a Tricky over near that door and you fired a normal gun at it, he'd just dodge out of the road like that because they're so fast. But if you had a Rob Allen rail gun the spear goes like greased lightning and they can't dodge it. That's the only way you can catch Tricky's.

Kath: But these Black Spot Tusk Fish are similarly difficult to catch?

Dave: Yeah, you can't catch them on a fishing line. No. That's why they're still there. Oh you can if you use soldier crabs but that's a trade secret.

Kath: I'm going to tell Madeline that one.

Dave: No. Well talking about soldier crabs hey, there's a place here down there called Double Island Point which is south of the Mourilyan Harbour which used to have acres of soldier crabs when we were young fellas; acres of them. You know what soldier crab is, them blokes that run around sideways and bury into the mud. Same at Lugger Bay where I was talking about where that gutter was that used to have 100 metres square of soldier crabs. Not one to be seen there now. I think there are some down here. I haven't been there for a while but this place down here where those soldier crabs used to live was a real good Barramundi spearing place.

Kath: Did you notice at any particular time that there were none there? Like when did you notice?

Dave: I think it was when the silt started to come. Like the heavy duty silt. There's one thing I'd like to do if you ever get permission to do is take an excavator down on Mission Beach and dig a bloody great big trench across the beach down as deep as you can go in the wet season like now so the sand is hard when it's low tide and just have a look at the silt layers down like that, down the beach. Because I dug a hole in the beach there with the kids the other day, my grandkids about that deep...

Kath: About a metre deep.

Dave I just shaved one side and you can see the layers of all the stuff there you know, like the dirt and the flood patterns. You can see the whole thing. When at Mission Beach and Bingil Bay, anywhere around there, when you walked on the sand it used to squeak under your feet like 30 years ago...

Kath: That really fine ..

Dave: ... really fine stuff like you get up the Cape, but there's none of that now. Actually, the sand has turned very grey. But people don't look at that because they've never seen it like it was. But that would be a good exercise to cut a big shaft across the beach and take some photos and then analyse it. That'd be a good exercise I reckon.

Kath: That's a really interesting observation. I don't think I've heard anyone else mention that the beach sand has changed.

Dave: It's gone grey. You've only got to look at it. You go to Whitehaven Beach; you haven't been to Cape Granville but Cape Granville is a lot better than Whitehaven Beach. Cape Granville's got thousands of acres of sand dunes. There's a place up there...

Kath: This is up on the Cape?

Dave: Yeah, right up the Cape. There's a place at the McIver River where there's a big sand blow right beside the McIver River it's got to be 200 feet high. It's slowly marching across the scrub and killing it. We get up there and skid down this thing hey but you've got to be careful because the trees are dead under it and you're flying down there next thing you've got a bloody tree sticking into you. Bur up at Cape Granville there's really seriously big sand dunes up there and see they wanted to sand mine that as they do at Cape Flattery. Cape Flattery's a big sand mine. The Japs have got a sand mine there. Years ago they used to have a barge take the sand out to the big ships and that Cape Flattery beach behind where the ships used to anchor; I've never seen so much crap on a beach anywhere in my life because the Japs used to ...

Kath: Like rubbish it?

Dave: Yeah, the Japs used to just chuck everything overboard you know. There was all sorts of stuff there. The quarantine boys talk about it; you do not know what's going on there. Luckily there's no habitat for 100 miles so it does not matter. Well there's a place called Dead Dog Creek that Johnny was talking about just up from there. But the amount of rubbish that used to come off those ships was unbelievable.

Kath: Tell me a bit more about spear fishing Dave. I'm really interested in how you were talking about a bit of change in the technology of spear guns but I guess you've also been a spear fisherman over a long period. So you've got a really good perspective and been able to observe the species diversity and fish numbers. Can you tell me a bit more about your experiences spear fishing?

Dave: Where do you start?

Kath: Yeah, I don't know. What about a place you've been to?

Dave: Well, when we first started spear fishing we had spear guns made out of car or bike tube rubbers. We used to make them ourselves. I actually had a double barrelled spear gun once and they weren't very efficient, but you didn't need to be. I got a mate, Charlie Winklemuller at the beach. He's a little bit older than me but Charlie and I were the gun divers in those days and he used to

spear in the creek. He had a pair of goggles made out of cows' horns. He had a bit of cow's horn that long with a piece of glass stuck in the front of it and with a bit of rubber in between and that's how he used to spear in the creek with these bloody goggles. I saw him the other day and wanted to know if he still had them. They'd be a really seriously good bit of stuff to have.

Kath: So, what sort of fish did you catch then?

Dave: What, in the rivers?

Kath: Yeah.

White eyed, like what do you call them, Mountain Trout. We called them White Eyes. They're some sort of Perch. Nice fish. We used to spear in the rivers amongst the crocodiles and all the rest of it.

Kath: When was this?

Dave: Kids hey. Yeah. We still spear them in with the crocodiles. They don't hurt you. They're alright. I'd be down in a snag trying to spear something and the light goes out and you'd look up and there's a big lizard paddling from here to the ceiling above you going down that way or that way and you'd say, Oh shit. Hold your breath a bit longer and dive up out of the water. When you dive under a log and you see a big head looking at you, you're thinking oh shit and you get out of there real quick. I remember once a bloke called Syd Adams and me were diving in that place, I was staying at Maria Creek and there's a big log there with a big butt on it and the log was about that far off the ground. There was always Barramundis hanging around there and we used to always fight each other over who was going to be first and I got in front of Syd this day and go down the log and I'm looking around and there's a gator there about 10 foot long sitting under the log. I could just see his feet sticking out. So I went around him and up the bank and hid behind a tree, see, and I'm sitting there waiting for Syd to come along and he comes along and down he goes and next thing he's out of the water and running up the bank and the bloody croc came out from under the log because I must have disturbed him. Then I started to laugh at him and he brought the spear gun around; I'll shoot you, you bastard he yells. I thought, well hang on, hang on.

Kath: God yeah, so he walked on water.

Dave: He did. But I was spearing another time with a bloke in the Hull River with a mate of mine called Pauly Sabo (*Paul Sabadina*). We used to spear some awful big barras in the place. Actually we've got some videos of some really nice ones. We've got videos underwater with crocodiles and all sorts of stuff up in the Jardine River last year. My bloody bloke he's in with the video camera chasing bloody crocodiles around. I said, you'll get eaten you know. But Pauly and I were spearing in there one day and I speared this big Queen Fish about that long and hang it up in the tree. We used to just go down with the current and spear a fish and break off a mangrove and hang it in the mangroves and you'd go down further. Then you'd get the dinghy and go back and pick them up. Pauly and I were in there and it was a little bit dirty and the fish were a bit flighty and he got the shits and got out. He said I'm going to have a cast with the fishing rod and he's about from here to that door away casting the thing in the boat.

Kath: Is this is the Hull River?

Dave: In the Hull, yeah. The fish was about from here to that door upstream from me and I went down and all the fish went, gone. So, I get back into the mangroves and I've got the water level

about here looking around. Next thing this gator about 10 foot long flies out of the water up there and grabs my Queen Fish and swims away with it.

Kath: Oh no.

Dave: Pauly says, what the bloody hell was that? I said, oh the crocodile pinched my fish. He'd just had his son then and he said, no, we're not getting in there anymore. I've got responsibilities now. He won't get back in either.

Kath: Won't he?

Dave: No way in the world. It frightened the Christ out of him it did. There's all that stuff that happens up the Cape. Like we'd go spearing up there and someone's in the boat with a rifle and you're in the creek spearing and you'll see a gator from here to that far wall over there swimming around but they don't come near you. All you've got to do in crocodile country is never splash around, anywhere when you're skin diving. Never splash around the top because straight away everything's after you. I've done it. There's a crocodile swimming there. You get in the water and swim quietly up towards him and he'll turn away and run away. But you get in and go da, da, da; straight at you like that because they think you're wounded see. I've done it in the mud banks up on Smithburn. We used to go up there and catch a lot of fish but see a big gator laying on the bank and you'd just jump out of the boat and flop into the mud and swim along the mud towards him and they're lying there having a sleep. Crocodiles have got a thing under their jaw here, a little thing they stick out and they stick it on the mud and they can feel you walking 100 metres away hey, and they're asleep but because this thing here is a sensor and you're swimming along. Next thing their eyes open, they look at you and they pick their head up and you keep swimming towards them, even a five metre crocodile and they're gone, back in it because they don't know what you are. As long as you take them gently they won't touch you. Same with the sharks. They won't touch you. I've seen my eldest son, bloody 10 foot tiger shark trying to pinch a Red Emperor off him and he just let the shark come in and put his elbow against his head and just worked it around him like that and pushed the fish over here and when it comes back again come up to the top and chuck it in the boat. Yeah they don't bite you hey. Everybody's shit scared of sharks. There's only one shark you've got to be scared of and that's an Oceanic Whitetip. Jeez, they're serious sharks them bastards.

Kath: Have you seen some of these out here?

Dave: Yeah, but only in the deep water. They don't live in shallow water. They're oceanic sharks. They chase tuna and that for a living so they've got to be quick. They've got very long pectoral fins that hang down and they fly like F115s. They go so fast and come straight at you at 100 mile an hour hey and they go straight past like that and you think oh shit and then they're back again and they're in your face. They swim very quick. Serious sharks, Oceanics. Their pectoral fins have got all motley colours on them and his fins are mottled and the tail. What they do is they get out in the current and they shake themselves like that and a tuna comes flying along and thinks it's bait because they can see these white things flashing, they go flying over there, woop, too late. Oceanic he sort of kicks himself when the fish comes you can't even see him move hey. They've just got this sort of whiplash thing you know. But you've got to get out of the water when they turn up.

Kath: Have you seen any Reef Sharks try to attack you?

Dave: They have a go all the time but they're not after you. Any silly bugger that goes spearing and drags dead fish around with him is asking to get bit you know. My own son got bit with a shark

once. I wasn't out on the reef this time but I got a phone call at four in the morning, they're bringing him home. His hand's still stuffed. But what that was they caught a shark and they were in the rum and they give it a punch and the only trouble was he missed didn't he and stuck his hand in its mouth and it bit him and he had to get plastic surgery. But I seen a bloke got bit across both thumbs once. A little shark, only that long. We were out there and this bloke speared the thing and I said what did you spear that thing for you stupid bastard. He went down to grab it on the spear and he put his thumbs like that to grab the spear and he put both thumbs straight into his mouth and the shark chewed nearly his thumbs off here, all his carpal tunnel was eaten out and everything. We had to bring him straight home he was bleeding to death.

Kath: Have you seen a decline in the number of sharks?'

Dave: I don't think so, no. I think there's still plenty. Well, like that bloke the other day that got drowned.

Kath: Where was that, up here?'

Dave: Yeah, out off Mission Beach. One of our boys got drowned.

Kath: Oh really I didn't know that. Was it a skin diver?'

Dave: Yeah. He was spearing out at Otter with his father-in-law. it was all in the papers, about three weeks ago, a month ago. We only had the funeral last week.

Kath: What happened?'

Dave: Well he had a shallow water blackout. He made some major mistakes. First of all he was diving in 21 metres on his own which he shouldn't have been doing and the dive before he come up with convulsions and his father in law grabbed him, I don't know his proposed father in law, grabbed him by the back of his wetsuit and held him up till he got his breath and then he decided he's going back to get his spear. So he took off back down to get his spear and the father in law saw him come up within about six toot of the top and a big cloud of bubbles come out of his mouth and he went straight to the bottom..

Kath: Dear oh dear.

Dave: We didn't find him for two days. But he never moved from where he was but all we found was — the coppers come up from Brisbane. I won't go on about, the biggest stuff up I've ever seen in my life. Bloody coppers declared it a crime scene and wouldn't give us the GPS. Anyhow we sorted them out in the end. I spat the dummy after two days and said we're going; with the aqualungs you know. We were free diving but they wouldn't let us go near the thing because they reckon it was a crime scene for God's sake.

Kath: So, let's go back to, is there anything else you want to tell me about the reef and your experiences of it?'

Dave: You'd be here all day.

Kath: Yeah well that's okay. I think it's interesting that you say it hasn't changed.

Dave: I don't think it's changed at all especially around here. All the in-shore reefs around this wet tropics area have. I mentioned Friendly Point last night, well Friendly Point is just south of Cape Granville, I can show you where it is on the map there. The reefs are just north of Friendly Point

and the island I was thinking of was called Knight Island. I've been going there for quite a while and I've never seen any change there and that's a coastal reef. The black fellas have been diving there for 30, 40 years and they never say there's any change there. But these reefs down here like King Reef, Brook Island Reef, anywhere where there's major rivers with flood plumes coming out and it's not the dirty water either that's stuffing it up. Like always after a cyclone there's really seriously flood plume, dirt out there and I rang Hugh up the other day and told him to get some photos of those log jams out there but he did nothing about it. They should have got some photos of that. I've never seen that before, ever. There was three five acre rafts of logs out in the shipping channel. Well that never happens, and that's because of cyclone Larry probably. I'm going to put a proposal to the Marine Park Authority that anybody that clears land other than domestic land like I mean a householder, has got to chip the whole thing. Got to chip the lot and then you won't have any trouble with logs in the ocean and all that sort of stuff. It will also make it a lot more expensive for them. Like a chipper costs \$800 an hour. We've got them down the beach all the time chippers, those big tub grinders. We've got two there at the moment, still cleaning up from Larry. But if they did that it would sort a lot of them out.

Kath: So, you said it's not just the sediment after events though that's the problem?

Dave: I was telling that Hillary there last night, I reckon and there's a few blokes that talk about it too is that the Diuron, Diuron is a wetting agent in the herbicide. See a lot of the farmers now are slashing their grass instead of poisoning it but up till now, up till these last couple of years they've been using herbicide and they put a wetting agent in there, whether it's Diuron or whatever it is but there's two or three different types. What a wetting agent does it causes the poison to become sticky and when it gets into the flood plume it makes that dirt there sticky. So, when it gets on the polyps, like the polyps are used to bloody dirty water. They fluff it off, little polyps. You know those tube worms are a good example, they've got their tiny things up there catching their dinner and they fluff it off. They can fluff it off but when it's got Diuron or a wetting agent on it, it sticks and they can't get it off and that's what kills the polyps hey. That's what I reckon. Just from what I've been talking to other blokes and whatever. Diuron's banned in America anyhow and we're using it here. So I don't know what's wrong with these bloody people, but anyhow.

Kath: Just to finish off, I wanted to ask you about bleaching. Have you seen any bleached reefs up here?

Dave: No I don't believe in coral bleaching. I reckon it's all crap.

Kath: You haven't seen any white reefs then?

Dave: Yeah. But you know what coral bleaching is about? Remember I said that 138 metres lower. Okay, in the Barrier Reef I think as we know it today is probably only 800 years old because the water's been rising and rising from what I can find out, you didn't know old Johnny Bunt? John Bunt was the first director of AIMS (*Australian Institute of Marine Science*) in Australia. He was an American and I knew him and his Mrs real well. Him and I used to have serious discussions about all this you know. Johnny reckons the sea's been rising say 3mm a year or 4mm a year, about that. but the coral grows about 6 or 8 or 10mm a year. So now the sea rises, contrary to what all these people are saying, the sea rise has slowed down because there's no more ice to melt. You know, it's the rising of the sea. You look back over the last million years there's been about 20 ice ages. The last one was 10,000 years ago in the Northern Hemisphere. Like the ice over the great lakes in America was 1.5 miles thick 10 years ago and it was 3 miles thick over Scandinavia. I've got a ripper

book up in the [island] that explains it all which is called People to the Past. It's cost me about \$80 but anyhow. Like I said that before, when you get ice that melts on the land you get a serious rise in the ocean because ice on land melts it's got to displace water but if you get ice that melts in the sea it doesn't do nothing because it's floating and it's the same buoyancy and it's what's up above the water is when it melts, you put an ice cube in a glass of water the water doesn't overflow.

Kath: So you're saying that the coral is growing up above the...

Dave: The coral is growing faster because you can see that by the amount of, at really low tides a lot of that gunky looking stuff comes ashore or on the beaches and when it dries out too many times that becomes buoyant and it floats away. Well if you dry coral twice like this low tide event that happens every year about this time, the big tides were about three weeks ago, 3.8 metres and down to zero sort of, if you get that drying event happens twice well the coral can handle it. You can see all this slimy looking stuff coming off it. Like that's their natural sunscreen. It protects them from the sunlight. But if you do that four times they'll bleach. It happens all the time. When you look at a photo of coral bleaching it's always in reasonably shallow water and it's always nearly staghorn coral.

Kath: Have you noticed an increase in the amount of bleaching though?

Dave: No, its less this year.

Kath: But you're saying this year, but I mean over 50 years or 40 years?

Dave: No, I don't remember. We didn't look at that, we just ran around spearing fish, but I did see coral bleaching sometimes but I just read an article in some book that said that there's no bleaching this year, it's very minimal this year. I reckon all this climate change hoo ha is okay, it might be 20% of the rhetoric is right, the rest of it is crap. Like Al Gore's thing for instance, the Pommies have taken Al Gore to the supreme court and they won't even show that thing in England.

Kath: I didn't know that. I'm just going to have a look at my list of questions and make sure that I've covered everything because ...

Dave: We can talk here all day.

Kath: We can and I thought I would just make sure that I've covered them. I think we've talked a lot about how the reef's changed over time and you were saying that you don't think it's changed much.

Dave: I don't think it's changed significantly. inshore yeah, but outside no. That's including the whole reef. Once you get north of I'd say, well Princess Charlotte Bay I'd say, once you get north of that there's very little change in the reef. Well just right now I was talking to my mate yesterday at Restoration Island and the water at Resto now is as dirty as the water here. The Claudia River's in flood. You don't know where the Claudia River is but it's really seriously in flood. It comes out of the Iron Range National Park and it's dirty red. It flows down past Resto and out to sea and all the logs and all that stuff comes along. That coral doesn't affect it because it's got no wetting agent in it. That's what I tried to tell some lady at one of the meetings who was supposed to be a turtle expert and she was crapping on about floaters disease and I said have you talked to the black fellas about floaters disease and she said no. If you talk to the black fellas what happens with floaters disease is the mud gets on the seagrass and the turtles eat the seagrass and it ferments in their tummies. I've seen turtles up on the island, like I go, I shouldn't tell you this, but I go turtle and Dugong hunting with the best of them. My mate fat Albert up there, you don't know Albert [?] but Albert's one of

the big gurus at Lockhart and Albert and I go out with them just to see what these buggers are up to you know, and we bloody knock off turtles and Dugongs like they're going out of fashion. But the turtles that have got floaters disease, their tummies are like this round, their intestines from the fermenting off the seagrass and the mud on the seagrass. That's why they float up until they get rid of it and then they can swim away.

Kath: Okay.

Dave: That just come through my mind then, they won't eat that part of the intestine. They cut that out. They chuck it away. Oh don't go like that, it's beautiful. You know what they did with the guts of turtle, they get the intestine, they wash all the green shit out of it and they chop it up into, like spaghetti and they deep fry it. Oh bloody beautiful hey. Or they put it in a stew and that's about that they were talking about Red Emperors there before. Those Red Emperors, the reason they don't blow up is because they've got a different swim bladder altogether to any other fish and when you get a Red Emperor you can see their backbone inside them and the air bladder in the Red Emperor is this very thick, pure white, like chewing gum. It's stuck actually to their rib cage. When you clean a Red Emperor you can't get it out. All the other fish are just one flick of the knife and the air bladder and all that's gone but the Red Emperor it's in there, and if anybody ever catches a nice big Red Emperor like that, you just get the air bladder out, cut it in half and deep fry it.

Kath: Delicious?

Dave: Oh beautiful tucker. Yeah it is.

Kath: On that note. I think we might end the official part of our interview Dave.

Dave: Is there anything else you want to know? We've been everywhere and anywhere.

Kath: We've got some secret stories about fishing.