

**CLAIRE LYNCH ORAL INTERVIEW
WITH KEN SIMMONDS
(& MARGARET MELLISH & FAMILY FRIEND FLO)
ON
13 MARCH 2024 AT INGLEBURN**

CL So I'm having a chat to Ken, who is Margaret Mellish's younger brother by 10 years, is that correct Ken?

KS That's true, yes.

CL And Ken you lived at Simmo's obviously from when you were a baby, until when?

KS 1965,

CL Which would have made you....

KS 14 and 10 months when I left home.

CL And what are your memories of living at Simmos?

KS There's some good and some bad!

CL Fair enough, what were the good ones?

KS The swimming in the river in the summertime, camping in the caves. The down side of it was having to go home every day from school and chop firewood and cart water from the river.

CL Yep, that seems to have been a constant thing that all of you had to do.

KS And also, having to walk, in the later years, having to walk back up to the shops to buy half gallon flagons of wine,

CL Ah, for your Dad?

KS Yeah, and me mother. My mother used to drink too, only because she had nothing else to do, I think.

CL Yeah, well she was in a pretty difficult situation.

MM She never had a choice.

CL Lots of kids and not much else to do.

KS Well as soon as the older girls, I was the second youngest, as soon as the older girls got the opportunity they were out of there, you know. I was there till, ah Bimbo, my younger brother, he was the last there, '66 they moved out of there.

CL And what was the reason that they moved out?

KS I think Mum was a bit crook, Bimbo had left home so the old man didn't want to, he couldn't cart water from the river so,

CL Not like his kids!

KS No, and cart firewood. 'cause he had a crook back at the time and Mum wasn't in the best of health so they moved out to my elder sister's place at Hoxton Park

CL Ok okay.

KS So Mum wasn't out there for very long at all before she passed.

CL Because she was only 53 I believe.

KS Yeah she was, yeah, yeah.

MM She couldn't cope with that different lifestyle. Electricity and running water and that. She couldn't cope.

KS No. She passed in her sleep, though, didn't she.

CL Oh, that's something.

KS Yeah, she passed in her sleep.

MM Yes, she went in her sleep.

CL And what's your memories of your Dad?

KS Ah (chuckles), yeah well,

CL You can say whatever you like. Or not say whatever you like.

KS Well there was times I suppose he was ok, but most of the time, especially in the later years, once he had done his back in he was just virtually drunk from ...

MM What about the strap?

KS He had the razor strap behind the door. If you done anything you copped that.

CL A belting.

KS Well I actually left when he was shooting at me with a 22.

CL Holy crap!

KS Only because I wouldn't go up and get another flagon of wine.

CL Ah, ok. And so you thought, that's it, I'm out.

KS I said, no I'm not going, and so the 22 came out and I bolted down the river, and along the scrub.

CL Oh my gosh, it was a bit wild west wasn't it!

KS Yeah. And I never went back. Then later on he actually moved to the back of Falconer's shed and – remember the old truck that Harold Shaw, he was living in when Pat met him. This old truck, but it didn't have a motor in it and it had a back on it,

MM I don't recall that, brother.

KS I've probably got a photo of it somewhere at home. It was just an old truck, well you know where the Muddles and the Regents and all them, well down there, Harold Shaw had that parked in the scrub, he had a tow truck tow it down there and parked it in the scrub and he used to travel back and forth on his push bike. And that's when he was working down at the river with the old man, on the bin with the dredging and that. And he used to drive the tractor and load some of the trucks and that. That's when he come on the scene. And then they got the truck towed from there down to home. And the old man turned it into a bird aviary, then he turned it into where he was making those cane baskets, remember he used to make those cane baskets,

MM Yes. I remember all that.

KS He made the cane baskets, then that was still there when we moved, and then the old man had it towed from down there up to behind Falconer's shed, then he lived behind Falconer's shed in Harold Street. Harold Street and Third Avenue, on the corner.

MM I never knew that either.

KS Well Falconers owned from Harold Street down to Canterbury Road.

CL Ok.

5 mins

KS All the way down there, he owned the whole lot, Terry Falconer, and then the Housing Commission come through and wanted to take it, and give him nothing for it.

CL Right. Yeah, that'd be right.

FLO Didn't he have a bit of an argument with them?

KS I was just going to say that too Flo! We actually, 'cause we all grew up with Terry, Barry and all the rest, and Jimmy refused to take their settlement or their offer, and they were bringing a bulldozer up to flatten it all out. Well they tell me, they had weapons of all sorts (chuckles) and it all came to an abrupt halt, the old tractor dozer stopped at the gate. Where we all were, we was all there, Bimbo and the lot of us, we was all there, and then they went back to the negotiating table and must have come up with a reasonable offer.

CL Yep.

KS Also, in my phone I had that picture of that truck, the old house next door, I've got a picture of the house, that's the one that Terry Falconer's father was born in.

So he said it was sentimental to him, and that's why he wasn't agreeing to them just taking it. And they come to an agreement. Then he bought the old TV man's place out there on Wills Road. And that's where Terry Falconer was living when they killed him.

CL Right. Oh wow.

CL So you would have gone to school in Ingleburn?

KS Yeah. Ingleburn High,

CL And what about Primary School.

KS 1956 I went to Ingleburn for one year, because Macquarie Fields didn't open up 'til 57. And then I went to Macquarie Fields for the rest of the time.

CL And after you left Simmo's, and school I guess, what did you do then?

KS I took off when the old man was shooting at me, I never went back,

CL Never went back.

KS And then I got a job as a brickie's labourer. Then I lived at my mates parent's place in Edgar Street Macquarie Fields, for a couple of years, and then, yeah, just learnt the trade of bricklaying. Been around Macquarie Fields most of the time, and up at Woodbine. Built a new house up at Woodbine. And I lived at Minto on Lincoln Street when it was residential and they turned it into light industry, and then over on this side in Francis Street. Then I sold from there and I went up the Hunter Valley.

CL And now I believe you're practically living off the grid!

KS I am off grid!

CL You are off grid! Good for you, that's amazing. You've kind of gone from being off grid at one end of your life, and now...

KS Well I've got 600 metres of river on my property, and I've got a water pump down there that I use, and I'm thinking, why didn't we have one of these down at Simmo's!

MM That's exactly right.

CL That would have made your life a bit simpler wouldn't it!

KS If we'd had one of those down at Simmo's in the early days it would have been a lot easier for us, you know what I'm saying, and I'm sure there was water pumps around in them days. You know they might have been a bit obsolete to what's around now.

CL Yeah, but none the less, might've made life a bit simpler.

MM After us girls carted all the water, to save using it, 'cause we would have had to cart more, we'd jump in the river with a cake of soap and that was our bath.

- CL** So you had a bath like that in the summertime.
- KS** Didn't you take off, I can remember you taking off from home, I think you went to Melbourne or Victoria or somewhere did you? And then come back?
- MM** Yeah.
- KS** Is that right or not?
- MM** With some friends, they said we'll go for a couple of days and I went with them, and it finished up longer than that. It was a couple of weeks.
- CL** Did you get in trouble?
- MM** No, not off Mum, not off Mum I didn't. But I was scared to come home and face Mum because I was only supposed to be gone a couple of days. But the friends let me down up there. And I had to find my own way. I think I was only about fifteen or sixteen at the time.
- KS** Yeah, I've got vague memories of that.
- MM** It was before I left home for good.
- KS** I remember on the inside of her door she had a poster of her favourite singer. What was his name? (chuckling)
- MM** Johnny Ray.
- KS** Johnny Ray. That's who it was. Johnny Ray (laughing).
- MM** Cry, you know the song Cry?
- CL** Yes.
- KS** Yep, that's who it was, Johnny Ray.
- MM** He was my idol then.
- CL** Oh that's so funny.
- MM** I won't sing it now though! (Laughing)
- CL** And do you want to just tell me that little bit of story again about, that there were people at Simmo's before you guys. Can you just explain that again.

10 mins

- KS** Well there was a family that lived on Fifth Avenue while we lived there, and their name was Dornings. (Dornan?)
- The old man Dorning (Dornan?), he got killed on Ingleburn railway crossing. Crossing the line, train hit him, went over him. Yeah, that was the old man, and I don't know whether it was only them, or their parents that owned it before that even. I think they went back a fair way, a long way down there. So we wasn't the first to live there, we was the last to live there.
- CL** You were the last. Yeah.

KS My mother and father and that moved out in '66 and never went back. The shack was there for a while but I think somebody's torched it, burnt it to the ground.

CL Well I think the carpark is there now.

MM There's a carpark there.

KS I was down there this morning, I was talking to an Islander bloke down there, a Samoan guy, I was telling him, I was showing him where the house was. .

CL Ah, that's amazing. What were your feelings, you wouldn't want them to change the name though, would you, from Simmo's Beach?

KS Well it's out of my hands, my ashes are going to be scattered there,

CL I'm aware of that!

MM I told Claire.

KS It's in my will. I said just cremate me and scatter my ashes at Simmo's. And I've got a mate that I lived with, Bo Reichel, that's who I lived with when I first left home, with his parents, I dropped him off at half past eleven last night! He...

FLO Change the name?

MM Don't change it, no.

CL I wouldn't have thought that you would want to change it.

MM We weren't the ones that chose the name now.

CL No, it just kind of got called that.

KS We was told, I'll quote Barry Falconer,

MM If they're happy to leave it leave it.

KS Barry said the person who suggested the name was Mrs Quelch who used to live in Cypress Street, Macquarie Fields. Now I grew up with the Quelches and went to school with the Quelch family too. Freddy Quelch was the father.

CL Well it's been Simmo's for a long time, when you think about it, back from the fifties.

MM Absolutely!

CL That's like, 70 years!

KS And they say, like, the likeable villain. Who was illegally dredging and mining sand, and it sort of makes me laugh, there where I am, I've got that 600 metres of river, and we needed to patch up some of the road, because part of the road was one of those unmaintained council roads, so down there with the tractor and load the truck with the stuff down the river (chuckles)

CL Bring back a few memories did it!

KS We're not selling it, we're not selling it, we're repairing the road with it.

FLO Don't change it, leave it as Simmos.

KS I'm happy for it to be Simmo's

CL I think that's reasonable, Simmo's is not just your Dad, it's the Simmonds family.

KS It's the family, I mean, you know, they get it from the rogue, the rogue that was illegally... (chuckles) but if you're talking to Barry Falconer it was happening before the old man went down there. He says it went back to his side of the family. But he told me it was the Dorning's that owned that down there originally. Because I think he's actually got deeds and that of his old man's land and knowing that Dorning's had lived there. Terry Falconer's father, he's dead now but I think Barry said the other day he'd be 109 I think, today. Sammy Falconer. (Jimmy Falconer's nickname).

MM Well Mum would have been 107 on the second of this month.

KS Okay,

KS so, he was born in that house on Harold Street and Third Avenue, Jimmy Falconer and it was all happening with his side of the thing, way before that.

CL Yeah, very interesting.

KS That's what I say, we weren't the first, but we was the last to live there. '66 we moved out of there, I moved out in '65.

MM That's when Mum died in '66.

KS Yeah, they moved her out of there, over there and she didn't last very long did she.

MM The 16th November 1966 Mum died.

KS But I could take you down there and show you exactly where everything, the layout of the place, where it all was.

MM Well I might take you up on that next time you're coming down.

MM If Ken's not down here to show you, David can take you and show you.

KS Yeah, where all the tracks were, where the letter box was, where the carvings in the rocks where the house was,

MM Where we tried to carve the steps,

CL The steps, yep, I've got photos of that.

15 mins

KS And I can show you where the road went round into Falconer's property and before Falconer owned it Alan Morcomb's old man owned it. Old Harry Morcomb. He had some sort of an accident and killed somebody in a car accident and he done gaol time for that. And that land that he owned down there

where old Steve's place was, he got behind in the land rates and Jimmy Falconer knew Harry owned it, and Harry said to him, if you pay the back rates, he says you can have it. So that's how Falconer's ended up with the land down there. And in Harold Street down to Canterbury Road on Third Avenue there was one block down there that Falconer's didn't own, and it was the one on the corner of Canterbury Road, so he done a deal with the council, give them that land down the river and he took that block there, and that's how he come to own the whole block from Canterbury to Harold.

CL Oh. Fascinating.

MM These are things I didn't know. I told you Ken could tell you a lot more.

KS We knew everybody in Macquarie Fields in the day.

CL So Flo, you used to go to school with Marg?

KS Same class.

FLO I wouldn't say that. She was a lot brighter than me.

MM I wouldn't say that darlin'.

KS There's another family out there, they were called the Walkers, and they lived out The Point there, and how many daughters did they have, how many girls?

MM Oh, a lot.

KS Anyhow, they're all cousins now, see. And if you look at the Carters, Audrey Manns, the Browns, they're all related,

FLO Remember Fay? I said to her, it would have been at Aud's funeral. I said to her, Fay, I've got to ask you something. Did you ever know that out there as The Long Point or The Point. She said it was always The Point.

KS Always The Point.

FLO Now they call it Long Point.

KS It was Fraser Street at the end.

FLO She said, I can tell you Flo, there's many of my footprints along that road because they had to walk in there, up on top of the hill to get the bus. And I said to the kids it's The Point. It's the Long Point. Don't bloody tell me, it's The POINT! So where'd they get Long Point from?

CL I don't know.

KS So we was talking about old Louie Testa that used to live out there, and the different people he had living out there at the time and one of the Hocking girls got drowned in a dam out at Tickner's, remember when Tickner's lived out there? And Alan Morcomb had one of the kids drowned out there in the dam too. Back in the day.

CL So did you guys all learn to swim down there at Simmo's?

KS Oh did we ever! Because the old man dredged the river it was always deep, and if there was a tree in the right place for a swing to go on it, we done that all the time. And there's caves on this side of the river and also on the other side of the river, and it was nothing for us in the summertime to be camped in the caves and ...

MM And it was wider then too Ken, wasn't it.

KS Yeah, it was wider.

MM And our sister Beverly, she was a fish in the water, she'd give us half way across the river in front before her,

KS She was a tomboy.

CL You said she was a tomboy.

CL She'd dive in and be across the other side waiting for us to finish.

KS She even had, she was the first girl I ever seen with tattoos. She was, wasn't she!

CL You said you wouldn't mess with Beverly.

KS Oh no. (chuckling).

MM What was Elaine like?

KS Elaine was Mum's little girl wasn't she! She used to make me cry so she could mind me and get out of the work!

MM Elaine would pinch Ken and Bimbo when they were little to make them cry

KS The other girls had to do the work! She had to mind the kids! That's right! (Laughing)

CL You described her in your interview as the devil!

KS That's the eldest one, that's Elaine.

MM That's her. And she used to give Beverly hell. And Beverly said, one of these days. And Beverly would wear Dad's pants with a belt with knives on it in a pouch, and one day Elaine went too far and Beverly pulled the knife out and threw it at Elaine, and I tell you what, only that she jumped.

20 mins

KS Well Barbara wasn't too far behind her. No because she, I was talking to Ringo one day there and I said, the old man used to allow the scouts to come down there and camp down there, and they used to have activities down on the river and that, you know, and Wally Mellish comes down and Wally raids all their tents while they're down there swimming,

MM That's something I didn't know about Wal!

- KS** And I'm talking to Ringo up my place about it, and he says, "and me", and he goes, yeah, your sister Barbara got me and Wally there up a tree on a branch of a tree, and they've got all these knives and pouches and everything that they've knocked off from the scouts, and so they're up there, Ringo'll verify it, they're up there – "youse two get down here" Barbara said "put all them things back!" So Ringo goes, me and Wally had to take them back and put them back in the tents where they got them. (laughing) Oh Ringo, he was a character. He was a handful. Yeah, "and me" he says.
- KS** Yeah, well there was good times down there, I mean we had great times in the summertime, when we could get out. It was good because me mates would come down there in the summertime, they'd help me get the firewood, the quicker I could get the firewood and we ended up a, what we call a flying fox, fence wire, from a tree up near the house down to one down near the river. And we put this little wheel on there with a hook on it, and a rope on that,
- MM** You done that did youse?
- KS** Yeah, me and Batto And we put a bucket on it because we jigged sports there at Ingleburn High School one afternoon and we went down the old high dive down on Parliament Road, and Masher Manns, he's got one rigged up going down into the river with a bit of water pipe on it. We had to climb up a tree and hang onto this bit of water pipe, and you'd fly down this wire into the river.
- MM** Really!
- KS** And that's when we got the idea of rigging something up, so Beau'd go down there at the river and fill the buckets up, hook it on, and I was up the top pulling them up and send them back down again. But that was our invention years later. Come too late, I would have preferred a water pump.
- MM** Look our arms all scarred from when we were kids.
- KS** When you look back it really never hurt us. I think it made us better people.
- CL** It certainly made you guys strong
- KS** You know what, I live out there like that now, and like you say, I'm totally off grid, and I've got water pumps down on the river, I've got generators as back ups if I need them, you know. When Barbara was up in Queensland she was chopping firewood
- MM** She was chopping firewood, that's what killed her.
- KS** That's what killed her.
- CL** Oh that's right you told me, 'cause a bit went into her leg,
- MM** Went into the back of her leg.
- KS** And she had bore water set up there, and she had tanks, but you weren't allowed to use the tank water because it used power, it turned the water pump

on too, you know. We tried making a cup of tea with that bore water, you couldn't drink it, could you!

MM Couldn't drink it. You had to use the tank water.

CL Now I'm going to ask Ken something, and I'm going to do it at the end so I can cut it off if I need to. Does Ken know about your sisters and your Dad?

MM Oh yes.

KS Yeah,

MM I've kept no secrets love.

KS We've only found that out since Barbara died. And it's a total shock to the system to be honest with you.

CL Yeah, I'll bet it is.

KS And really, it's disgusting. But I didn't know that.

CL Well you were probably too young really disgusting.

KS Oh I don't know about that, I was still there when Barbara was there, and Pat was there. But Pat wasn't too long after leaving school and she was out of there, wasn't she. Barbara was out, she was with Johnny for a while.

MM When Pat left she was 14 and pregnant.

KS That guy that I said with the truck and no motor she got with him and got pregnant to him.

CL You all left when you were young like 14.

KS As soon as we had the chance we could. That's why I don't drink or smoke.

MM He made us kids do it but he wouldn't do it.

KS He was too old to do it, not only old but not capable of doing it.

MM He used us as slaves.

25 mins

KS He wasn't capable of doing it. He didn't have a car either in 66. If he wanted wine unless someone was coming down to bring it could you see him walking from down there up to the shops to get wine. Could you see him with buckets carting buckets of water from the river. No, it was never going to happen. Once he had that bad back he was at home all the time. If he wasn't drinking wine in the morning he'd got the fire going all day which we had to get the firewood for. Two lots one for the inside for cooking and one for the outside to boil the copper up. We would put the cold water in the bath, we'd boil the water up in the copper. We would have to bucket that out and put it in the bath and then we had to cart water from the river to fill it up again for mum to do the washing the next day. Then when we did have the bath it was one after the other in the same water.

CL Were there any bush fires down there?

KS There was, when the old man done his back in Mrs Alchin was the local postie. When Mrs Alchin gave it away a bloke came over from Cabramatta and took the post up. But he wasn't familiar with the area. He got on to the old man somehow or someone suggested it and the old man was his offsider in the car to show him where all the streets were and who lived there. When they finished delivering the mail he used to get off at Macquarie Fields shops walk through Dales Lane and Peter Miles lived there. When Leo Reynolds moved from up the shop he moved to the corner of Parkhill Avenue and Parliament Road directly across from Peter Miles. So all the local drunks were all in, this is true this is gospel.

CL I believe you.

KS There's a bush fire down at Simmos. I was trying to get the old man out of there where he was drinking with all of them. You know Mum and Bimbo are down there and there's fire all around. Oh they're all right they will get in the river. The old man took off I can't say how long, about six months or more. She was down there she only had me and Bimbo, we were the only two living there at the time. She was down there all the time and I think she had a change in life, that's when she went a bit delusional. We had another sister lived in Ingleburn. So we decided to take mum up there of a day. Me and Bimbo would have to go there after school. That didn't last long for Bimbo because Bimbo didn't get along with her kids. He wasn't allowed to play with their things so Bimbo said I'm not going down there no more. One night Mum goes I wonder where Bimbo is. I said oh he's at home in bed mum. When I got back to Simmos it was isolated down there and there was Bimbo in bed. He wasn't going there.

MM When we all lived down there Barbara was at one end of the bed and I was at the top of the bed, we had to sleep two in a bed.

KS There ended up being four bedrooms in that place. There was no lounge room, there was a kitchen. You came in the front door, there was a big table that had bench stools and a chair at either end of it. Then there was a fireplace on the right. Then there was a door into a bedroom, then there was a middle bedroom and one on the other end. After that was partitioned off and Mum and Dad's bedroom was behind that. You had to walk through the middle bedroom to get to their bedroom. So there were 1, 2, 3, 4 bedrooms and just a kitchen that was it. The bathroom was over behind the old shed and the laundry was part of the bathroom. There was the bath and on the other side was twin tubs and a washing machine with a hand wringer. That's how it was.

CL Thanks Ken.