



Frances Blacker

If you haven't seen Frances and daughter Karlene walking down the main street or in the town library, you can't have been in Braidwood long.

I WAS NEVER MUCH FOR GOING TO school — I was much too independent. I think I've been to school about eighteen times in my life. I was mustering with my grandfather when I was five. I remember once my grandfather had a couple of old wethers, that's a sheep that's been cut, and we were out mustering and we couldn't

find them anywhere. But one day, while mustering out along the Half Moon Road, my grandfather looks across and there's a couple of sheep skins on old Les the neighbour's fence. He was a bit of a rogue. So my grandfather says to him one day, "Oh by the way Les, you owe us for that couple of wethers you killed."

"Whadda ya mean?" says Les. "Well, they've got my bloody brand on them," says me grandfather.

I remember Ernie Seidel who used to live on Feagans Creek. He was a lovely old man who lived by finding a little bit of gold and trapping a lot of rabbits. I always hoped we'd bump into Ernie on the way into town, he'd get a lift with us, and I knew that he'd go over to Chewings and he'd buy me all these mixed lollies.

The last time I saw Ernie, in the early sixties, he was on the Mongarlowe bridge and I was coming across on a horse and he said, "Oh you're still me little Frances, still me little tomboy". It was not long after that I heard that he'd passed away. I cried for ages — he was close to ninety, but he was just one of those characters that have all gone.

My mother was one of two sisters, she was the oldest, Zena and her sister was Jean.

Mum married Ronald Davey who'd come out from England, in the navy on the HMS Implacable which was a destroyer. He met mum who was a very attractive woman; he reckoned she had the best legs on Bondi beach (laughs).

I was a sickly child; I was born with rickets. Mum was sick the whole nine months of her pregnancy. For the rickets I needed plenty of fresh vegetables and that's why I spent a lot of time with my grandparents, Violet and Harry Neilson, at Charleys Forest. I used to tell people I had two mummies and daddies.

Out on the farm we had cattle and sheep and because of the rickets they put me on a horse at a very young age to strengthen my legs. They never put me in a stroller, I had to walk or ride everywhere. Now I can walk for miles! When Karlene used to work at the Braidwood Landfill, I would walk out there — and back if I didn't get a lift.

I'm not a bad horsewoman. I've had a life-long love of horses.

When my father first joined the police force he was in the mounted squad. He had an old police horse named Old Bob, a real old rogue, who was clever enough to pull the bolt from the stable door and go off in search of lollies. He liked a treat.

In the mid nineteen-forties dad was in the NSW Vice Squad with Frank 'Bumper' Farrell and Bumper taught his new rookie quite a few tricks — maybe dad taught him a few too. After Sydney, dad ended up as the policeman in Cooma assisting the sergeant there, an ex-footballer name of Fred



ON THE HORSE WITH DAD.

Chapman. Fred was a big man, twenty-two stone — when he went to the picture theatre they had to remove the armrest between two seats.

Next he was transferred to Bombala and on to Eucumbene, then called Eagle Hawk. It was a tough life for a copper on his own out there in the bush. There were never ending fights and many fatal accidents to attend. Many of those poor people [who came out to work on the Snowy-Hydro] never got back to their homeland.

Back in those days he had to pick up the body and attend the autopsy and I remember a time when there were four fatals in one day — it was horrendous. And then there were the prostitutes. When they were brought in mum had to do the strip search and I remember one lady came in and it was like, "hasn't she got a beautiful bust", all nice and pointed and sticking up. But after she was searched and came out it was like two fried eggs — and bantams at that! [laughs]

Of course with dad's last name being Davey, they'd sit there intoxicated singing, "Davey, Davey Crockett, king of the wild frontier" as well as other relevant songs like, "Don't fence me in".

Then we moved down to a little place called Sioux City, not named after the Indians, but a little town down in the valley below Kiandra. Some pretty funny things used to happen there too. One time we had four drunk and disorderlies in the cells and dad had gone to bed. Mum came in said, "Dave, I don't like the look of those blokes in the cells". So dad flies out in his underpants to sort 'em out, he never bloody-well wore pajamas but he was very handy with his fists. One time mum had to get into them with the mop as well.

Another time, while dad was out on another case, there's a call from the pub. A big Czechoslovakian bloke, only seventeen, but six-foot, and he's trying to kill this young fella. So mum marches up there, and being an attractive woman, says to him, "Why don't you come home with me; I've got a lovely comfortable bed". So he thinks he's in for bit of a good time but mum takes him back to the station, leads him into the cell saying, "there's a nice bed in here". Then she swings the bloody door on him! So she got written down as a deputy for that one!

After all the bitterly cold weather we were moved to a little place called Maclean near Grafton. We went from snowmen to fishermen. I remember one there was a bloke who was a bit mentally unstable and he drowned. He thought he was Jesus Christ. Tried to walk across the Clarence [River] didn't he. Dad asked the local fishermen what actually happened. One of the fishermen turned round and said, "He was doing really bloody well, walking along the water real well, but then," he said, "this bloody great mullet jumped up and he fell clear in the hole".

When I was a little kid it was a great



WITH MY MUM.

adventure coming in to Braidwood. We had to watch for rain because if it rained heavily we couldn't get home; the creeks would flood. If we were lucky we'd get to go to the pictures, which were run by Gladdy and Cecile Burns. I remember Gladdy Burns was very much the lady — always wore lovely pastel suits — and beautiful hats with flowers or artificial fruit.

It was good fun going to the pictures at the National Theatre. We could go to the Royal Café for sixpence or a shilling's worth of hot chips wrapped in newspaper. You'd rip a hole in one end and eat them during the movie.

This would have been the late fifties or early sixties and I remember the first movie I saw was Peter Pan. There were a lot of westerns and I got into trouble with one of them. I remember the Indians had staked this poor bopper out on the ground and the vultures were there waiting. Of course then he's saved by the cowboy hero and I yell out at the top of me voice,



LEFT: RONALD DAVEY AT THE POLICE STATION IN THE SNOW. BELOW: A POEM FROM THE SNOWY SCHEME ERA.

From Jindabyne tunnel and round Island Bend
We boys go to Cooma, our money to spend
And we'll buy youse some beer there if you happen to see
Four Italians, three Germans, two Yugoslavs and me
We'll pull up in Sharpe Street by the Alpine Hotel
If you've been to Cooma you'll know this place well
And before we're inside our order rings out
Four vinos, three schnapps, two slivovitz, one stout.

From the song 'Cooma Cavaliers'
by Ulick O'Boyle and The Settlers.