

A I was born on 27th October 1950 and I was born in the Catskill mountains of New York state, not far from Woodstock.

P So what made you come to Australia

A This is where I belong. You've got to follow your heart. If you don't you're missing out on some important things

P How old were you when you came

A 19. One way ticket.

P Why did you come

A This is where I belong. Suzi can probably tell you a bit more. This is where I belong. Some people know, some people don't, some people never know and I feel sorry for them. For me I belong in Far North Queensland.

S He knew as a young boy where he was headed, growing up in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York, people would ask 'what do you want to be when you grow up?'

1.33

Not a president or an astronaut, he wanted to be Australian, that's what he said as a little boy. I blame National Geographic magazine because there in those photographs, he fell in love with the Great Barrier Reef. His dream as a boy was to build an underwater house out on the Great Barrier Reef. Not far from it. We get a hell of a lot of rain here. That's not quite what he had in mind. He wanted to be out there on the reef, when he was 19 he had a one way ticket, to Australia and then you can carry on, he lived in a tent studying marine biology. He can tell you the story

A Sure, how far do you want me to go

P Were you the only one in your family who wanted to come

A I asked my parents when I was young but they wouldn't so I came by myself

I went to university in Townsville at James Cook and studying marine biology but at that time we had a premier of Queensland Bjelke Petersen and he wanted to drill for oil on the GBR and chop down the rainforest for woodchips and I was a prominent member of Townsville Conservation Council and all the regional conservation groups joined together to form the Cape York Conservation Council and I became the director for their environment centre for 3 years I think. I worked for next to nothing, \$50 a week to try to fight those campaigns and so a few other things. We got involved with the Aboriginal rock art at Laura the conservation council was instrumental in having that protected. We actually took on the Queensland government on that one and won. They took us to court and we beat them. But it was the people of Australia that saved the barrier reef and the rainforest. We just did our bit. Two national icons that have to be protected. There's no finer place in the world to witness those but the Douglas Shire because we're surrounded by two world heritage areas.

As far as I know it's the only place in the world that's like that.

P Goodness, then you came to Mossman

A Well I lived in Kuranda, I lived in Cairns, Gordonvale and Kuranda when I worked for the Conservation Council. I'd been writing letters to Susan over the years and she came to visit and ultimately we wanted to find a place to raise a family and live a life in as much harmony with the environment as we could. We started in Kuranda but in order to plant a tree we had to chop a tree down and that wasn't going to work for us so we ended up buying part of a cattle property in Whyanbeel. That's this property.

Took years to find it because we had very specific requirements we were seeking. And those requirements were, because we wanted to raise a family I guess and parents try to look after their children what was important for us was that we had pure water to drink that wasn't contaminated with chemicals. We had clean air to breathe, so no pollution and we wanted to grow our own food and I don't think you can find a better place in Australia to do that than the Wet Tropics. We grow food 12 months of the year, the wettest place in the driest inhabited continent on earth. And there's no air pollution. It's a clean place.

P So that was your aim at first, just to be self sufficient

A We actually put an ad in the Cairns Post saying, like those old Wanted posters, \$1000 reward for anybody who could find the perfect block of land for us with these requirements. Lots of people tried but they couldn't, none of them actually fitted what we wanted. We wanted to be backed up to National Park or State Forest so then you've got a big backyard which really, doesn't cost you a lot to buy the land. It's your security in a way. I grew up in the mountains so I like to have a mountain at my back.

P You started doing that, tell us what you do now

A It's evolved. Basically we started as starting to feed our family and grow crops commercially and most of the tropical fruit and nut crops which exist in Australia today did not exist in those days, so in conjunction with some other people we went out around the world looking for different tropical fruits and nuts to introduce into Australia and that began a life journey of

S travelling to countries around the equator

A and falling in love with rainforest

S Same climate as this

A rainforest climate. You have to grow crops suited to your local environment. And so it began a journey not only of just food for ourselves but it began an industry, it was part of a beginning of an industry in north Queensland. And it sort of consumed us, but I believe if you're on the yellow brick road, you stay on the yellow brick road. You don't say I'm leaving. While many others have lost interest in fruits or just grown enough for themselves or gone the commercial avenue, we just kept going and going and going and meeting some of the most incredible people but also witnessing some things around the world which aren't all that nice. Like the destruction of the rainforest in a phenomenal way.

All around the world. It's in New Guinea, Africa, Asia, the Amazon, wherever there's rainforest, people are trying to chop it down. There are a few exceptions. Costa Rica is one of those. It's an amazing place. Their government really cares about rainforest. Here in Australia we've protected what's left but in the early stages we destroyed most of what was here in our rainforest.

P So you've grown a new rainforest here have you

A Sure, well and truly rooted (laughs) there's in the history of tropical fruits and so on, we weren't with the first ones back in the country because back in the 1800s there were two organisations, there was the Queensland government and an organization called the Queensland Acclimatisation Society and they introduced plants into Australia as crops to see what would be economic for farmers in, not only tropical Queensland but southern and western Queensland and most of those things went by the wayside. The Douglas Shire had a unique collection of some of these plants out at J D Johnston's farm and another farm in the Mowbray but most of those trees have since disappeared. Because sugar, when you try to send fresh fruit to the market which in those days was Brisbane, it went by ship and most of the fruit was either rotten by the time it got there or was eaten and they needed

commodities which had a length of time, a good shelf life and sugar won out for the coastal regions, sugar and cattle.

P Now it's better because there's air travel and you can get it to the markets faster

A Much quicker. A lot of produce gets sent from Queensland down south and even overseas. It's a two way street and being in the southern hemisphere we actually have unique opportunities to export to the northern hemisphere in their off season. On the whole planet, the most important part of our lives revolves around water and we just happen to be in the most perfect place for fresh water. Because you can't grow food without water

S You can improve the soil but water was the most critical thing for us

A Our property didn't have the best soil. Decomposed granite. It was pretty poor In nutrients. Like Susie said you can always improve your soil but you can't create rainfall.

P When did you come here

A We moved to this property in 1982 but we had actually looked at it in 1979. Rossi Cavallaro and Joe Noli brought us out in 1979 to see the property. It was a bigger block in those days and they had just had 95 inches of rain in 5 days. Which was a record. It washed away houses and cars and bridges and telegraph poles and we said this is the place for us. It cleaned up all the creeks. There was nice clean quite stones and beautiful flowing water. There's a great diversity in this valley in the land forms so you can have low lying country and steep hillsides and small flat paddocks and while it was originally cleared for sugar cane in 1928, when mechanical harvesting came in, it then shifted to cattle because mechanical harvesters couldn't manage these small paddocks. We bought it from the graziers, between cane farmers and the cattle farmers they basically cleared everything from this valley and so when we bought the property it was devoid of trees

S eroded. Even the creek banks. Totally cleared

A And granite sandy soils erode very easily and we had erosion gulleys that you could put oh probably 3 or 4 semi trailers in. and we had to fix up those erosion gulleys. Still picking up rocks, that's part of a farmer's life

S There was not one tree on the property

A We bought it from the Osbornes in Daintree. They still own a number of properties in the Daintree but the two brothers owned four blocks of land in this valley and they wouldn't sell just one to us they wanted to sell all four so we had to find other people to join in to help buy the other three blocks

Ian and Keith Osborne.

I Janice

Keith's wife is Janice. They're the ones that owned this property. They're up in Stewarts Creek, with cattle. They actually made the Weekend Australian magazine about a year ago. It was an amazing picture. I went woooo

P Who bought the other three blocks

A An architect from Adelaide, called Ian Hannaford.

P You had a Hannaford next door, Nick and Amelia. That's his father. He bought three blocks.

A And we couldn't buy this one block ourselves and we bought it with two other people from the Permaculture institute in Tasmania. And we were going to set the property up as a permaculture institute but we soon realized there were only two workers out of five of us. So when Hannafords decided to subdivide their three blocks into 20 acre blocks, we did the same here and Suzi and I ended up

S We ended up with our own block instead

P What was the total that she bought

A 72 acres

S And initially aback in 1979 Alan and I were going to buy the whole 72 ourselves and the prices must've gone up,

A Diane. We were sitting in the solicitors office waiting for them to arrive, waiting to do the biggest thing in our lives, buy this 72 acres, they didn't show up, we found out cattle prices went up but Diane Cilento and her friends put in an offer to buy the block for more and we had agreed to.

It took 3 years to actually get it. She had already owned the block at Karnak, I think her friend wanted to buy it.

S So then we had things changed and the Osborne wanted to sell all the blocks together not just 72 acres

A We were involved in permaculture and the head, founder of Permaculture, Bill Mollison, as part of the Rare Fruit Council, we got him to come to Mossman and give a lecture and we packed the building. People from Cooktown, Tablelands, Ingham come up here to hear Bill talk. He went back to Tasmania and told some of his people there that this was an incredible part of the world. We showed him this property. In Gordonvale he stayed with us. We said one day we're going to get here.

S We didn't want him to tell anybody because we were afraid someone wealthy would come and buy the valley up and we would never get our land we wanted. Because we used to come up and look at these mountains and say This is home. We're going to be here. But long story short we didn't want him to tell anybody and he did. He went back to Tasmania and started telling people at the permaculture Togary. The next minute these other guys came up to see us, and wanted to see the valley. We took them up here for a ride, they ended up buying with 2 other guys the land with us, sharing the 72 acres.

A We couldn't afford it on our own

We were initially going to buy it for 29,000 72 acres, we ended up paying 54 I think so in two years it almost doubled.

S We couldn't afford it any more so we had to share it with the two guys from Tasmania from the permaculture farm

A So the three of us bought it together and we still didn't have any money so we had to work for Hannafords to pay off our land. So I built the neighbour's house, I planted a few orchards.

P Which neighbour's house

A The people who owned the land were the Saxons. And now it's owned by John and Alex. His surname is Kara (*spells it*) and her surname is Bernhardi, she's a doctor in town.

S She's at the Mountainview Medical Centre

A Planted part of their orchard, the Saxons. Some of those original trees are there, Hannafords sold their block of land, it's now owned by one of the Kershner boys and his wife

S Changed ownership over the years but we've stayed.

A We've seen a lot of people come and go. They see Whyanbeel on a beautiful sunny day in winter and they say this is paradise. They live here for a wet season or two and they've gone because they just can't handle the rain. But you don't have a rainforest without rain. So we think we're pretty fortunate. We still don't have any money

S We went overseas collecting these seeds and trees to grow on our dream property we didn't have yet. We had this dream. So we went collecting many years before we actually purchased the land

A 3,4,5 years

S so we were growing them in pots so that's why we put an ad in the paper. Find the perfect block for us. We already had trees growing that we had collected on trips to south America and different places so we were kind of getting desperate for land. Finally when we got the land it was home for our trees.

A we had another block of land lined up in Redlynch valley it was smaller, it didn't work out

S This was a better block anyway with the water situation

A this is paradise for water. Two boundaries are creek

S Gravity water. we're on Boulder creek

A the small creek doesn't have a name

S It flows into Whyanbeel creek. There's a lot of creeks in the mountains here with waterfalls, beautiful waterfalls

A Often you can be in Mossman and look up at the hills and it's sunny and it's raining in the gorge and up here. That's the nature of the topography and the way the rain patterns go.

P Not many people want that

A A lot of people take water for granted but when they don't have it or are put on restrictions they complain. Water is the key to life

S and our plants come from wet areas.

A We're very fortunate. 80% of the rivers in the world are polluted by humans and here we have drinkable water coming straight off the mountain. It's unfortunate that government regulations make you put chemicals in it when Douglas Shire had the worlds best filtration plant to get these things out. I think it's a travesty of justice that it's but some people always take the easy road. We never looked at taking the easy road. And it's probably cost us a bit ultimately but the answer to a lot of problems on the planet are not just to throw chemicals at it but to look at what are sustainable and beneficial solutions to us.

We have a philosophy about land which I started to develop when I actually lived in Townsville and we don't really own land. We buy it for money but we only can live on it while were alive and when we die we can't take it with us. Perhaps we can get buried on it or get ashes spread on it but you can't take it with you. The planet is in real strife as far as eco system health is and we believe we should give the land to the next generation whoever that may be in better condition than when we received it. And if everybody did that we could heal the planet. Whether it happens or not is another story. There are a lot of greedy people on the planet

P when you came here it was totally denuded. How much have you planted

A The first year was basically trying to get access into it. Filling into erosion gulleys. We engaged soil erosion. In those days the Dept of Primary Industries had a soil conservation officer who came for free would tell us how to stop erosion.

S Where to put the drains

A historically in north Queensland so much soil and silt goes out into the barrier reef through the mouth of our rivers. That's our children's inheritance. You can't get rid of your top soil and expect to maintain a society indefinitely. It won't work. You've got to protect your top soil. So soil conservation for us was a very important issue.

P So you put drains in with bulldozers

A We had machines come in and put in conservation drains to slow the water down. It's fast water that causes erosion, it's slow water that prevents it. And

S that was a free service in those days it was great, it helped farmers work out how to drain their land. Helped us in the very beginning then we started putting irrigation in

A In the first year we didn't get many trees in. Probably just a few. Some of those are here today. I remember the first tree we planted. It was a Giant Lau Lau (*spells it*) from New Guinea. My father was here visiting and we planted it.

P Does that fruit

A Produces a fruit and has giant leaves

P Can you eat the fruit

A Yes

P How did you get all these seeds in past quarantine

A Through quarantine, we didn't go past quarantine. We went to quarantine and asked them how to do it. And that began a very long and important relationship that we today have with quarantine. We actually have a quarantine station on this property and it's a real privilege to be able to have it but through that we have managed to bring in many species of plants safely into Australia. Basically we had to learn to understand that Australia is an island. Island environments and eco systems are pretty fragile more so than large continental eco systems where there's big migrations and so on. And so being separated from the rest of Gondwana for the best part of 95 million years, Australia's evolved from some highly endemic plants and animals which occur nowhere else. At the same time the ocean's been a barrier to keep out pest diseases and weeds. So we worked with quarantine to prevent that from happening. There are certain things you certainly can't bring in in an easy fashion like citrus and bananas. You just put that out of your head because the risk of importing a pest or disease is just too great and not worth the stress. There are so many other species which are incredible which deserve to be in horticulture and agriculture and people deserve to eat.

S But some people might criticise bringing in exotics, bringing in plants from other countries. You have to think where your food is coming from. Would you rather buy it, that's coming from other parts of the world and you don't know their practices maybe. What they've dipped it in before it comes to Australia. Wouldn't you rather have farmers growing here and eating organic fruits rather than importing everything. I think people forget where their food is coming from when they criticise some of the exotics. A lot of food that people take for granted that people buy in supermarkets are not from here, they're not Australian fruits

A Or even Australian grown. But having said that I've worked with some of the people from the United Nation, the FAO and the two big countries most dependent on food resources from outside their own country of origin are Australia and New Zealand. Apart from fish and macadamias and a few kangaroos almost everything we eat has originated somewhere else. That's becoming more and more true for every country in the world But it's historically true for Australia since white man's arrival. The aborigines it was all native food.

We have a huge issue in this Shire and in this state with regards to coconuts. It's absolutely absurd. Fossil coconuts come from new Guinea and New Zealand. Where's Australia situated in relation to that. They're the earliest records that are known to exist. Aborigines were opportunists and they ate coconuts. They knew heart of palm was a good pam to eat, to say that they weren't native is probably a bit short sighted to be kind to those people.

S even if they were exotic, what's wrong with them. They're such good food. They're so useful

A One of the most useful plants in the tropics for sure

S We've travelled between islands and we see them floating in the ocean. they're just floating around and finding a home

A But anyway, going back to our story. A lot of the plants that we brought in through quarantine are now grown commercially in Australia. In fact I work fairly well with the government. Even some of the major commercial mangos and custard apples grown in Australia, I introduced to Australia with the Queensland government

P What else did you introduce

A Lots of things. (laughs) Too many to count. Hundreds of species of tropical fruits and nuts and probably a few hundred different species and varieties of heliconias and gingers and their relatives. While we were waiting for our fruit trees to bear we got involved in the tropical flower business because they produce so quickly and we needed an income. In the early days we became the largest tropical flower growers in the whole country

S It happened by accident. While we waited for the fruit to bare. And while we were collecting the fruits we'd see these beautiful flowers and decided to bring them back and they grew so fast and in no time at all we had a lot of flowers. And we just tried to sell them to see what happened. It just took off. We just got side tracked into commercial flower growing for many years

P Where did they come from

A Heliconias predominantly come from central and south America and the Caribbean but there are a couple of species in the western Pacific which are bat pollinated. All the rest are pollinated by hummingbirds and a few other animals. Gingers come from all around the tropics of the world and even sub tropics so Australia has about 18 species which are native. But they originated from the Asian, our gingers are related to the Asian gingers. So there have been migrations and when the land bridge was there between Australia and New Guinea for some time, some of them must've migrated across. There are gingers in Africa, there are gingers in Asia, through the South Pacific. Gingers pretty much everywhere in the tropics. But not heliconias. Heliconias are only native to Central South America, Caribbean, the Americas what they call the neo tropics and a few species in the western Pacific which got to New Guinea but not to Australia and they're bat pollinated. So their flowers are not colourful because bats, no colours at night time really.

35.55

P where were you exporting your flowers

A We sold to all the major cities in Australia but we also exported overseas we had markets in NZ Singapore HK, Japan and the UK. Not huge markets but limited markets and everything expanded really fast. Friends of ours started growing them. Other people saw there was an opportunity. The industry grew quite rapidly. Suzi and I became foundation members of the Heliconia Society International overseas. I eventually became a board member, a vice president and then a president for 4 years. We held one of the international society's conferences in Cairns in 1992 and it was really successful and that was despite the fact that people couldn't bring plants into Australia because of quarantine. And yet we had all these visitors from around the world come. And it was a real impetus.

S We don't have wild heliconias and the gingers to collect. These people are collectors and then came from all over the world but they came to Cairns knowing they couldn't collect. It was a great conference

A That conference was preceded to the pilots' strike in 1989. It led to Suzi and I making the decision to leave the flower industry. Because It went on for 6 months. We were the biggest employer in Whyanbeel by far (laughs)

S Relying on all our neighbours and friends to help us cut the flowers

A We had a dozen employees. We'd pick flowers at 3 o'clock in the morning with headlamps on. Some people still do that today. I think Joe Noli still does that today. No he uses the headlamps on his vehicle. But we had headlamps on our heads

S We'd pick all through the night sometimes. Out there with the pigs and the pythons and everything else. And the rain. And floods.

A And bats

S And the creeks flooding. We had to get the flowers out and the creek's flooding. We'd been picking all night and packing and can't get out because the creek's up. We had to carry boxes, we called them coffins, the boxes were really big, we had to carry them through the flooded creeks, borrow cars on the other side to get to the airport. It was amazing.

A I have to stop

P We'll stop

38.47

ALAN #2

P You were talking about the quarantine station here

A Lets go back a little bit. Quarantine itself is trying to prevent eliminate or minimize a risk of anything bad coming into the country. Before you can bring anything into the country you have to have permission to bring it in. There is a Permitted Species list and there's a group of scientists working through quarantine which assess every plant so to how any problems it has, risks and so on. And if it's a new species which has never been brought in before, we have to do an extensive weed risk assessment, which discusses pests and diseases as well but it's an elaborate document which you have to do a significant amount of research for to provide the government with enough information to make a decision on whether it can come into the country. If it's seeds, they have to be sterilized, have a scientific name, be free of soil and flesh and those types of things and everything that comes into the country has to be inspected. So it goes to quarantine, they put it under magnifying glasses or microscopes, sometimes they cut into things to see if there's anything inside the seeds and if they're permitted and if they look healthy then they're often released then people can grow seeds. As far as plants go they have to be absolutely free of soil which is a major issue when you're trying to transport live plants from the other side of the world. Again they have to be sterilized as much as possible. They have to have their scientific names. They have to be on that permitted species list. There's an import permit that goes with that. The government charges for that. When they arrive in the country they're inspected and they're fumigated with ethyl bromide. It's a gas which is outlawed in almost every industry and country in the world but is still used by quarantine in Australia to try and prevent pests and diseases from coming in. then under licence they get transported to our quarantine facility and then they're looked after by registered quarantine approved persons. And every 4 weeks or so the government inspector comes up to inspect the plants to make sure they're healthy and any issues are identified and samples sent away for identification and notification. And if at the end of all of that process which can go from anywhere from 4 months to, I think our record here was 9 years and 11 months, then they're released. But quarantine doesn't stop there, we still have to monitor, for us as private people and citizens, you have to monitor it afterwards to make sure nothing was missed in the quarantine process. And the quarantine building itself is specially approved by the government where no insects can get in or out. It

has double doors with airlocks. It has special drains and treatment facilities. It's quite a special building in the process of quarantine.

Having said that we know enough now that even when we're overseas collecting plants, if we see something that might be rampant overseas, it's not a good idea to bring it back because it could become rampant here. Many issues. There are certain families of plants you just discount because they're bird dispersed and the seeds could end up anywhere. It restricts what can be brought in but there's so many species out there, we have plenty to work with.

We've collected more than 500 species of fruits and nuts and a few thousand species of plants altogether. And we were recognised internationally by the Slow Food International for our work protecting traditional foods and that took us to Italy to receive an award. It got us to meet some incredible people in different parts of the world who really appreciate food and it taught us that conservation can be fought or won on many levels. It doesn't always have to be the intellect and the heart it can also be the stomach. We try to use food as a tool to teach people about conservation because I'm writing a new book at the moment and I reckon there's more than 10,000 species of jungle fruits and nuts and leaves which are edible to humans which virtually nobody knows about. Virtually nobody

And we're losing rainforest at a phenomenal rate, a football field every couple of seconds. This is too great a resource and opportunity to pass up.

So while we initially started to feed our family and live a nice healthy life, being kind to the environment, were really passionate about saving rainforests. The rainforests that remain in Australia are fairly safe but around the world they're in a perilous state.

P Do you think climate change has got a lot to do with that

A No, I think it affects climate change, clearing the land actually affects climate change, I don't think climate change affects it so much. They go hand in hand but you can't keep putting billions of people on the planet expecting them to survive on nothing. They have to use resources. Ultimately the question comes down to what kind of a planet do we want to live on and what's important to us. For me and Suzi biodiversity represents the health and the wealth of our planet. And this planet looks after us. It actually allows us to survive here. Without rainforests we don't have enough oxygen to breathe. Isn't that enough of a reason to save rainforests and yet they're being continuously destroyed. A some of it is overpopulation, population pressures I should say but a lot of it is because of greed. Because of our demand for more and more of everything. And you can't take it with you. We arrive on this planet with nothing, we leave with nothing. Life's

S We should be considerate of the next generations but we're not. How crazy is that. We destroy our own nest and were not caring for future generations.

A The fact that 80% of the rivers of the world are polluted are an indictment on humans. And they we pay money to clean the water up so it's safe to drink. Wouldn't it be better to keep it clean in the first place. I think historically people saw a river running by if they threw something in it, that got rid of it. It was a way to clean things. They didn't realise that ultimately it accumulates somewhere else. There's not a cubic metre of the ocean that doesn't have micro plastics in it. That's kind of sad. The oceans cover 72% of our planet, or the water does anyway.

P You've got a big job, Alan, Suzi

A I'm just a foot soldier. We've I guess we've received the admiration of some pretty important people around the world for the work that we do and I think the way we try to present our message that you can live in harmony with the environment, you have to be

aware of human impacts and what you can do. Um. Ultimately if we don't look after it, we suffer. And well never find another planet like this. I'm convinced, people can dream, people can go to Mars, Mars doesn't have trees on it. Mars can't grow rice and citrus and things people expect to have in their lives. We're kidding ourselves. We should look after the planet we have.

P Getting back to you on this property, do you still sell fruit commercially

A No. that was our original intention but as we saw all of these different species and varieties of fruits growing around the world we had to make a choice. Do we try to keep a sample of these fruits for future generations, be it in Australia or whatever. Or do we just focus on growing the fruit for ourselves and making an income. Sadly the income part's been pretty hard. But it wasn't really hard decision to say we're not going to grow fruits commercially. We only have so much land and we have so many species to put in it and there's only two of us, and we're getting older.

S Commercially you need great quantities and were so diverse we don't have the land

A And along the way we learned by observing from nature and from our indigenous friends in communities all around the world including Australia, we've learnt that monoculture is not the answer. It's certainly not. It doesn't occur in nature in a rainforest situation and what we know about our planet is so small compared to what there is to learn. It's a tiny fraction. We know a lot about big animals and big plants. We know most of them on the planet. When it comes to the small things and the things that are underground and in the water, we know very very little. We could still discover some big animals and big plants but the micro-organisms, the things that the fungi, an integral part of the web that keeps everything going, holding us all on this planet we know very little about. It's an exciting field for scientists and I don't know how we encourage more kids to go into it. Sadly maths and sciences are diminishing in their appeal to people.

(noise) what on earth is that

P We'll stop for a minute

14.09

ALAN #3

P` So you've collected all these species how do you tell people about them

A People come here but we also give lectures at conferences and societies. I write articles and people hear about us and certain people search us out and many of the things we bring in, because we don't grow commercially, they end up going to a nursery or DPI or permaculture people and from there they might get spread around. And that's the sort of insurance policy that things will keep going. I guess the sad part of that is some of the really minor species that people aren't interested in, because they might not taste that nice or they're not commercial or for various reasons and yet they may be critical in the breeding programs in the survival of the species or the survival of industry. You might need them for root stock, breeding programs who know when and how and if you might need them. But if you don't have the resource then you're in trouble. If you have the resource you're fine. Once something's gone, it's gone.

P Most of the things you've imported have gone somewhere else

A a lot of them have but there's still quite a few that haven't

P What will happen to the those in the future

A The ones that are here? Who knows, you can never be in control of destiny once you're gone. We'll try and leave this place in the hands of someone can appreciate the plants but who knows, no one knows. We constantly talk about it.

P It's amazing that you've introduced so many species that are commercial

A We did it all legally, there are people that import things illegally and cause problems. Everything we've done, it's all recorded, it's all gone through government channels and so on. That's very important for us because there's so many things here that we need to show people that you can do things in the right way. Quarantine over the years has got significantly more difficult. It used to be a Prohibited plant list, now it's a Permitted species list now which basically threw every plant that wasn't in the country into a prohibited plant until you could prove it wasn't and the onus is now on importers to prove that it's going to be safe for Australia. Which I think is not a bad idea.

P Do other people in this valley grow your species

A Some do. Sure. In fact it'd be difficult to go to most coastal towns in tropical Australia and not see a plant that we've brought into the country.

S We see them in nurseries and Bunnings and all over the place

A We sold a lot of plants to the Mirage Resort when it was being built. People move plants around. If people like things they move them around. You can't stop that and from a quarantine point of view it's quite risky because every time a new ethnic group of migrants comes to Australia, their plants come and they're not necessarily on a permitted species list but ultimately these people have these plants and you wonder how they get them into the country. I think it's great for our food but I prefer to see things go through the quarantine system to make sure they're safe, that they don't have pests and diseases. It's interesting times we live in. and while Australia has built this incredible barrier for quarantine, or this border for quarantine the World Trade Organisation has punched huge holes in it and so many things come in either legally or inadvertently which cause a risk for Australia. And while you have a dedicated team of people trying to prevent these things happening, you have a bigger and more powerful group, industry and trades people, allowing things to come in and out all the time which while they may give token reference to quarantine, it's not working all that well

P Talking about plants still

A Even fruits and vegetables that come into the country, and ships that come in with their ballast waters. I'm very concerned about it. There's so much trade going on, planes and so on that things do come in. having said that, climate change will change even our natural eco systems and some of them quite dramatically and a pest or a weed which occurs in one part of Australia today but not another part may shift to the other part and disappear. This is what happens in nature and there's no way you're going to prevent something like that.

P Speaking about pests, when you first came to this property, were there mosquitoes

A Sure there were snakes. We have an interesting thought about snakes. We had taipans and death adders and brown snakes and I believe that a given area of land, a hectare of land can support X number of snakes, maybe one snake. And if you encourage the non poisonous snakes to fill those niches, maybe the poisonous snakes won't stay around and we've worked with that system since we first bought the property. We may have seen a couple of red bellied black snakes in the last 20 years but we haven't seen any death adders or taipans or

But we did in the early days when we first came here. It was full of taipans. And we had two young girls and their friends all running around. So it was a concern for us

P What did you encourage to stay

A Tree snakes and pythons and water snakes. Create the right environment

S Occasionally we might see one now out of place but most of the ones we see are non poisonous.

P Considering the amount of foliage and undergrowth you have it's amazing

A I think a lot of those more toxic snakes, this is not a general rule, in general not necessarily all the time, they like it a bit more open. And we've pretty much re-afforested the whole property so there's not a lot of open space here. I could be wrong but it's also a very wet place and a lot of those snakes don't like really wet places.

P Although they did at first

A It was more open and dried out quicker

S It was cleared so there was a lot of open and a lot of rocks

A We have mosquitoes for six months of the year and we don't have them for six months of the year. It's like day and night. You can't say when they're going to come because that can often vary up to six months but basically we have them through the wet season and as soon as the cold weather comes they disappear and they don't reappear until the warm weather comes again. I'd say from June to November we don't have mosquitoes. If of course you have a much wetter or much hotter year that can change a little bit but there are always through the cooler months of the year no mosquitoes which is great

S where we find them is in the wet forest and in the trees so around the houses we try and keep a little bit clear so air can flow

P Was it difficult bringing up two little girls in this environment

A It presented challenges. The first year we home schooled because there were no buses. In fact the buses came when our kids reached high school.

S We had an issue with Miallo school

A before you get to that, there were cattle gates on the road coming in and out of here and for Suzi to take the kids to school in Miallo she had to open and close the gates 16 times a day

S In the pouring rain

A And often it's pouring rain, the road's covered in water and that was really a trial and tribulation. We were so glad the day the gates disappeared, it was a miracle. They were a couple of them along the road

S The cattle farmers down the road had two gates. Anyway. So the girls went to Miallo school and somewhere along the line the area was growing and they said we have to build a new classroom. Used to be just one classroom for grades 1` to 7. So what did they do, they built it out of unsealed and chipped asbestos that's banned down south so they sent it up to us. Unsealed and chipped asbestos.

A And the workers were working on it and cutting it up and nailing it up while the kids were at school

S So we called a meeting and said this is not a good thing what you're doing using asbestos. Banned down south send it up to us

A It was a second hand one

S No one wanted to hear about it. The farmers said their houses were built out of it, that's fine. They're old houses. There's a lot of houses built of asbestos in Mossman but people aren't sawing it and chipping it. If you leave it alone it's maybe OK. But they were working it while the kids were at school

A So three families decided to take their kids out of school

S and we had to do something with the girls so we took them to Rocky Point school on the hill, beautiful school, I had to drive them up there every day, even further than Miallo. That's when the school buses came to Miallo school and I'm watching all the other families, kids getting on the school bus and I had to drive them to Rocky Point. Then years go by and Rocky Point grows, we have to build a new classroom. But now they built it out of concrete and steel and they built a proper classroom. Then Miallo school

A Got rid of that one

S But then my girls are going to high school. So I had to do a lot of driving to school but it was important for them to socialize with other

A Also a lot of driving for dance lessons and music lessons

S I became a taxi driver for a few years but they had to get out and mingle with the other kids.

P When was the asbestos incident, do you know the year

S I'll have to think about that. My daughter's nearly 40, Heather

A I'd say it was around '86 or '87.

P What a terrible thing

A They had removed it all from parliament house in Brisbane.

P Do your girls want to take on this property when you're done

A They're interested but they have their own lives

S They help us from time to time when we need it

A Whether they could do what we do, we don't know

S We have two grandsons that are showing interest

A And the grandsons are great. The 5 year old wants to be an entomologist

P They live close by

A Yes. When the daughters turned 18 they both took off and disappeared.

S Heather went to Japan for a year and Carli went to Melbourne. They came back

A it's a good part of the world. The best part of the world

S the grandsons are at Cooya beach and Heather's at Spring Creek

A We looked at land at Bloomfield, across the river, south of Cairns but a lot of what we looked at, our decision was made on instinct. We didn't want to be across the river because of school, hospital those type of things. And south of Cairns just didn't feel right for us. There's no, we love places down there

S It's beautiful but it didn't feel like home. This felt like it from the beginning. We used to come up and look at the mountains and dream about it. We often pinch ourselves now don't we

P Tell us what a typical day

A We don't have typical days. Every day's different. Early this morning I was working on irrigation, yesterday afternoon I was doing concrete forming and steel setting and tractor repairs and picking up rocks. Every day's different. Some days we lecture. Some days we have tourists who come

S When tourists come, it takes days and days to prepare for that

A I do garden design, I do research, she experiments with cooking

S Pulping fruit to freeze

A Maintaining two houses and a big property is a pretty full time job. There's lots of different jobs here. Flower arranging

S Weeding

A Picking fruit. There's just so much to do. You couldn't name it all

S There's never a dull moment

A But we really appreciate it when the phone doesn't ring so much, when the emails don't come in so much, when we can have a little bit of quiet time for ourselves but there's not enough of that

S There's a hammock there on the veranda, tourists often ask how often we use it. I don't think we've ever been in it

A I might go in it a few minutes here and there but

S We rent out the house too occasionally for holiday accommodation and small weddings and things like that, so we have been busy over the last couple of years

A Pam knows about AirBnB

P We don't do AirBnB but we do BnB

A How do you do it

P We have an arrangement with a German company

A They keep you busy

P Very busy. Too busy like you. You want some quiet times sometimes

We'll just stop for a tick

18.53

ALAN #4

P Alan can you tell us about the name Botanical Ark, how that started

A it would've started just after 1989, the name. and I don't know, it just came to me one night while I'm sleeping. I wake up in the middle of the night with some what I think are good ideas sometimes. I said that's it. It represents where we're heading and what we're trying to do. Not that we're trying to have two of everything but that we're trying to represent some of the important species that might keep humans alive. We were inspired by a number of books and people who were pretty much saying that the world's in trouble, we're losing a lot of species and so on. And I guess that, one of my real childhood or teenage books that I really cherished was called the Limits to Growth by the Club of Rome and it was a book that said we live on a planet of finite resources and how we manage them and how we look after them will determine how the planet's going to be. So that was really important to me.

And then in the 1980s America's top scientist at that time, I think the presidents decide who their top scientist is and he was top scientist under Democrat and Republican presidents, and he came to Australia and gave lectures down south and the newspapers reported what he said and he said in the next 25 years we could lose 20% of all life on earth as we know it. And Suzi and I said not if we can help it. Not if we can say something and do something about it. And you can preach you can lecture, do all sorts of things but really you have to provide working examples to show people that there are alternatives, better ways of doing things. For people who talk all the time and don't do anything, there's lot of people like that in the world, they're probably failing their cause by not providing real examples. That's the hard part, actually doing the work. You can digest a lot of information from books (pam coughs) and media and other sources to come up with really plausible arguments but to have a living example, to have proof that you can do things is very important to some people. Not everybody thinks intellectually. In teaching there are some people who are visual, some are auditory some are hands on, you have to teach in different ways to reach everybody. I'd like to think of the Botanical Ark as an example of how it reaches people in all those different ways. Maybe emotionally and some people might say spiritually but we owe

our existence to this incredible planet, you can call it Mother Earth if you want, all sorts of different names, but it's a fantastic planet and we should treat it with respect, simple as that.

P So you designed all these gardens here

A Designed the gardens, designed the houses, built the houses Suzi and I, we had some friends help us. I've designed other gardens. I've designed the Ginger Garden for the Singapore Botanic Gardens. I designed a garden for a five-star resort in Vietnam. I designed another garden in Zanzibar. I don't want to design just any old garden. I've been instrumental in helping design the Mossman Botanic Garden. I need challenges. I don't want to do the mundane. If someone gives me a 400 square metre block and they're going to put a big house on it and he says design the garden, that's probably not for me. There's lot of other people who can do that work and do that well. I want something more challenging.

P What fun that is, does it take a long time

A Sometimes. But long probably not as long as some people. I studied Japanese gardening because I wondered how you can have a garden that was created 1100 or 1300 years ago and it still remains the same today basically. I heard the story of a temple who hired a master gardener who was in the garden for 2 years and all they did was move one tree to get the right thing. I'm not in that category at all. That's a different level of gardening from me.

But the tropics has such an incredible opportunity in the array of plants they can use. I'm not talking just exotic plants. We have so many native species that can be used in landscaping that have incredible potential and many of them have not been used. I guess there's reasons for that. Some of them have been too inaccessible. Sometimes the government makes it difficult for people to get some plants. The case in point would be the foxtail palms on Cape York. They said you can't have any seeds. People smuggled the seeds. People chopped down a palm or two to get the seeds which is criminal but because they didn't manage it properly. If there's a demand for it, release the resource, make sure it's done safely in the best way for the environment and people can enjoy both

P They prohibited the seeds

A they said you can't take these seeds. It was a new species of palm that was discovered by a chap from Atherton and it was a protected area so it was illegal to collect the seeds but that doesn't stop people who can make money from it. A single seed was selling for 3 or 4 US dollars a seed. People were getting thousands and thousands of them at a time and even chopping down the palms and it was decimating the seed population up there and the government didn't think about this. And in many cases still doesn't think about it properly. You should have a ranger or two who are harvesting the seeds in a sustainable manner. Making sure enough are left for their reproduction. And selling them and the government could be making the money. And satisfying a demand and looking after the conservation of the area. But that's a whole side story. That's a little bit different from Whyanbeel

We've had a nursery, we've sold plants to farmers and to other nurseries mainly. And we have nurseries here but mainly for ourselves. Tremendous amount of work, too much work.

S We are rebuilding the nursery. We took the plants out and put them in the trees so we can finish building

A Occasionally we get some help but we don't have any employees. I'd rather bring in a contractor with a bobcat to do something than

S Sometimes we have woofers

A Rarely. The woofers thing it's worked and it hasn't. You get both ends of the spectrum with woofers and we don't have the time or the patience for someone. We've had great ones but we've also had terrible ones

S They have to live with us

A if we had a separate house for them it would be different

P What do you cook with

S Mainly I just pulp fruit and freeze it so I can have it throughout the year to use like breadfruit. Breadfruit is one of our favourite ones because when it's green it's a bit like potato. We harvest the fruit when it's on. Blanch it, cook it up a little bit, freeze it and use it throughout the year like a potato. So we do that with a lot of different fruits. We don't have great quantities of each fruit so when we have surplus of something we dry it, freeze it, make things with it.

A She loves making cakes and pastries. She makes a lot of those things. And she experiments with lots of different types of fruits.

S There's not a lot written about some of the tropical fruits. Do substitutions. I'm not a chef or anything I just say what does it remind me of. Like mamey sapote, with the orange creamy flesh from central America. It's a bit like sweet potato or pumpkin. So I'll turn it into a pumpkin pie. Instead of pumpkin I'll put mamey sapote in. so that's what I do, a lot of substitutions

P When you were first here were you self sufficient, did you eat your fruit

A We've never been 100% self sufficient. I don't think that was ever the goal. However if the world economic system collapses I think we could get there pretty quickly because we have a good foundation for it.

Going back to the snakes, we used to have ducks, chickens and geese and lots of snakes, mainly pythons but in one 8 night period I caught 5 of them all over 3 metres long. And then removed them. Moved them to different places where they wouldn't come back in a hurry so I knew they weren't my snakes that were coming back every night. You lose a lot of sleep getting up in the middle of the night to bag a python and take it away. We decided it's time to get rid of the poultry. We're not ready for that yet. We thought we had pretty good poultry pens to keep them safe at night. We'd learned a lot since then. We wouldn't do it again, and we wouldn't have them near the house because animals become pets. It's hard to eat them.

12.57

and they like being near people. We have fish that like being near us

S Jungle perch

A it's amazing. If you show no aggression towards an animal and they've never grown up with any aggression and there's many places in the world where people can enter that environment like the Galapagos and be surrounded by animals that show no fear whatsoever towards humans. And you can reach a stage like that in your environment so the greatest vote of confidence that we're doing the right thing here is when all the wildlife comes back.

S That's happened by planting these plants and creating the habitat for, platypus have moved in

A We have pretty much all the wildlife that occurs in the rainforest near us, even the Boyds forest dragons have come back on our place where there was certainly none here when we arrived. There were white tailed rats, water rats, snakes and a few other things. Today there's a real healthy population of wildlife and diversity.

S but wild pigs and cockatoos have been our biggest pests

A even more than so the fruit bats

S Fruit bats move in from time to time and they can be a pest too

A usually when there's a big cyclone that decimates rainforest around like Innisfail, a population will come, a smaller sub group of maybe three or 400 individuals will come and camp on our place. We don't mind that for a while but we don't want them to stay permanently. Usually they leave after a year or so. But to have a huge population here would not help us at all. Cockatoos are probably worse because they eat the seeds and they destroy your fruit to get to the seeds. I guess one benefit is that they're out in the daytime where you can see them if you're constantly moving around.

P What do you do to get rid of them

A we've tried many many different things, we've tried netting the trees but the trees are too big. We heard a thing on a gardening program that if you hang a CD up in the air and you paint one side red and a one side orange and it goes in the wind it looks like a flame. The cockatoos were back in the next day (laughs) both sides were painted. It didn't frighten the cockatoos for one day even, not even 24 hours.

But we did have an incredible experience with cockatoo control which was just from observations. We had a big tree that we grew from seed. It was the biggest tree on the property. It grew to 36 metres before it blew over in a cyclone. For a number of years about 200 cockatoos would rest in that tree for many months. In the middle of the night they go squarking, wakes you up. We tried every legal method we could to get rid of the cockatoos. We banged saucepan lids, we played bad music, we lit fire under the tree we tried lots of different things. The cockatoos kept coming back but cockatoos don't stay in the same place the whole year and one year in their absence some starlings moved into the tree. They make big long hanging nests. The starlings were actually great, they went out into the forest and they were foraging fruits and seeds and dropping them at the bottom of the tree. So we were collecting some fairly difficult to obtain rainforest seeds just because the starlings were dropping them at the bottom of our tree. When it came time for the cockatoos to come back, the starlings were still in the tree. And the cockatoos wouldn't go in that tree. There was no battle between cockatoos and starlings. The cockatoos stayed away. The starlings were there for one season. The cockatoos never went back to that tree. So they must've associated it with something like mites or some pest that they couldn't get rid of. Whatever it was the starlings prevented the cockatoos going into that tree. It was the biggest tree. They didn't actually stay on this property, they stayed nearby in the rainforest. They still ate our fruit. it was a form of pest control for cockatoos which we had never observed, we had never been told of and here it was in front of our eyes. Just by observing what goes on in nature you can learn so many things.

For example we're surrounded by rainforest. The Shire's predominantly rainforest. It's verdant and growing and green and nobody's fertilizing it. How does it look after itself. If you study ecology, if you study nature, you see it's the leaves, and the branches falling down and the micro-organisms with the right temperature and moisture and it feeds itself. So if you adopt those principals in your gardening or farming situation you can either reduce your fertilizer usage immensely or you can eliminate it. And in most of our places we've eliminated using fertilizer. The same goes for pest control in the rainforest. No-one's killing the pests. Nature takes care of it. You have enough diversity and it looks after itself. It's taken the local pollinators a couple of years to discover how to pollinate some of the introductions

and it took about the same amount of time for the pests like bats and birds to figure out how to attack them and eat them. So we didn't really gain anything in that regards.

P What about Cyclones

A We've had a number of cyclones through the place. We've lost a lot of trees. It hurts when they come down. It's an awful lot of work. I think we're more philosophical about it now than when it first happened in that every tree that comes down is a chance to plant a new one or a few new ones

S So far so good and we haven't had a direct hit where you wake up in the morning and it's all matchsticks. it does happen down around Mission Beach and stuff.

A We've seen that happen to friends of ours. We've lost, in one cyclone we lost hundreds and hundreds of trees and when cyclone Yasi came, we lost a lot of trees and actually the rainforest behind us was hit harder and the Wet Tropics people said there was a band throughout the Wet Tropics at about 200 metres elevation that got really decimated. So we got hit with Yasi, it was pretty bad, we lost another 100 or more trees. Then the following year we had cyclone Jasmine which only hit this valley and it wasn't even recorded as a cyclone on the news but it was when it came in from the Gulf. I was overseas at the time

S Our shade houses the roofs came off, our plants were out in the full sun

A It was a disaster, worse than Yasi for us and not many people heard of it. She was taking me home from the airport through Mossman, only a few branches down. It was only when we got into this end of the valley I could see the damage. The cattle property, all the trees on the RHS were stripped of leaves. The cyclones that come from the west have done more damage to this valley than the ones that have come from the coast. That's from very limited history. But when you climb the ridges of this mountain, you can see on the western slopes there are vast areas of disturbed forest or regrowth or sections that have been cleared, up to 20 acres in some areas where it's just fern and maybe a few other plants because it hasn't recolonized to the extent. A big landslide from the cyclone that came in from the west, I think that was in 1956 I'm not sure. There was a bad one that came through from the west from the Gulf and it hit this valley badly. And we're now 60 years later and there's still vast areas on the western slopes of this mountain, of ridges that are damaged

P What's that mountain called

A it's part of the Mount Spurgeon tableland but the rocks behind the house are called the Devils Thumb so we have to behave ourselves because we're under the devils thumb. (laughs) That was never an aboriginal name. the name Whyanbeel, Janet, what's her last name, used to be the florist

P Goodall

A She told us when we first came here it had two meanings. One of them was wooden canoe. For the life of me I forget the other one. She had studied aboriginal names.

P I've got a thing here that it was named in 1873 by Dalrymple when he came past. And it says he thought it was the aboriginal name for the area but it's since been reported that it's their name for a dugout canoe. Another theory is that it meant Middle Tribe, they were flanked by the Mossman tribe and the Daintree tribe. I found that out since I asked you. It's difficult to know. You haven't had any aboriginal people around here

A No. I've worked with aboriginal students at the Gorge and at TAFE, I used to be a lecturer at TAFE and I think I've learned as much as I taught. TAFE in Mossman, we had a great head of TAFE at that time Warren Dickie. Miss that guy. We'd still have good one if he was here. That was his whole life

P How old was he when he passed away. Not very old

A in his 40s.

P in the cyclone did you ever lose anything that you couldn't replace

A Yep. And that's sad but we all lose things in our lives. People lose their parents or their children or whatever. It's tragic and to lose a plant obviously isn't going to affect humans as much as losing a member of your family but our trees are our extended family so it does hurt. You have to be philosophical about it

S Sometimes you can't repeat a trip, if we've collected something and brought it back and you think you can go back because you lost it, go back to that place in south America wherever, often that forest is gone or those trees are gone and you can't collect it again. So I don't know, we have a few things here that you might not find in the wild any more

A I think there's a couple of plants. In the future there might be more that are here that don't exist. That's never been the intention of our project. We like to think this is an experiment, it's a teaching tool of how things can be done and some of the things, it has contained some of the resources that we might need for the future. Because with climate change, I know there's a lot of people who say they don't believe in it, every farmer knows it'd happening they're just denying it. Those that don't speak out. We all know it's happening. Big business, people don't want to change their lifestyles, that's what it amounts to. People aren't prepared to say I'm ready to change. There is a cost but the cost today is far less than it will be in the future. There was that great report that was done out of the UK a decade or so ago, I forget the name of it, it clearly outlined that. It might cost us something now, but in the future it'll be magnified 100 times to try to sort out what we can. As the climate changes, we're losing species at a phenomenal rate. The top scientists of the world reckon we're losing between 50 and 150 species a day. I think that's too great a loss to sustain. We become poorer for it. I tell the permaculture people who come here, it's usually backyarders and farmers who want to live a healthy life and grow as much as they can to feed themselves. I often tell them and the Rare Fruits people we're a toolbox for the future. We've got the tools to be able to improve our food supply and so on. And of course it's an example, we're trying to regrow rainforest full of useful plants. There are few experiments I know of like that where there's a bit of a recorded history of starting from scratch from pretty much a blank canvas which was what our property looked like and ending up with a highly diverse productive thing which can support people. And the wildlife that it should too.

P Sometimes did you just have one tree that's grown, do you try and propagate it

A Yes we try to propagate it. First of all I try to get more than one.

30.02

in case that tree falls down and smashes another one that's growing. The problem comes that many trees have male flowers on one plant and female flowers on another so you've got to have both of those in order to get the fruit so if you lose one you've still lost the fruit. So we've tried and I think developed some firsts in the world on how to propagate some plants asexually so they can be moved around and their numbers built up so we've done cuttings and marcotts and grafting and a lot of experimental techniques here to try to not have just one plant. And you learn a lot about plants doing those types of things. Some plants won't do it at all, you can't propagate them. Other ones you can. You learn from nature. Interestingly juvenile plants propagate a lot easier than older plants.

But humans are fairly determined. If they think they can make some money out of it, or if it's very important to them often they'll find ways to do it which otherwise seems impossible. We're just a big experiment here. (laughs) Life'd be so much easier not to do what we do. But it'd be less rewarding. (pause)

P Do you want to talk about Mossman

A We love Mossman. We think it's a great town

P Has it changed much

A Not a whole lot. We've got a great big supermarket now and a traffic light

S From the early days people were extremely friendly towards us. We were outsiders looking for land to buy. We weren't locals. Never will be I guess because we weren't born here. They always accepted us. Really super friendly. Sugar cane farmers especially. When our daughters were growing up they were like family some of the farmers around here to us because we didn't have any family here. We were really welcomed with open arms weren't we especially bringing in these new plants and some of the sugar farmers were quite interested in them.

A Our first friends were Billie and Joe Noli because their youngest daughter and our oldest daughter are the same age

S They're like family. We were pregnant at the same time for Imelda and Heather who are going to be 40 next year both of them. I guess I met them 40 years ago. And they were always very welcoming and we even found this land through Joe Noli bringing us up for a drive to show us this valley and we said Wow that's it because he knew we were looking for land. But we had already collected plants

A We met him through Rare Fruits

S We brought the seeds back with us, so he was interested. We started the Rare Fruits Council in Australia in Cairns, might have been '79 maybe.

A Could've been late '78

S We formed the Rare Fruits Council in Cairns, the start of it. Since that time, many branches formed around Australia and we had one in Mossman in the early days.

A There's still a Mossman branch

S In the early days it was packed full, the hall. Do you remember that

A We had 400 people at a meeting in Cairns.

S We used to do Rare Fruits dinners up at the Nautilus in Port Douglas it was thriving n those days then everybody got busy with farms and didn't come to meetings as much. It's still going. How many branches around Australia

A They divided, there's probably about 5 now, there were 12 at one time and I think there was about 1100 members. It was really big

S In Florida the international one

A And that's how we met Joe Noli through them

S We started the one in Cairns.

P Did you swap ideas and plants

A And talk. But you really learned when you go overseas and see how they're growing and where they come from and the indigenous people and how they use them, that's when you really get to appreciate the significance of something

S We went to markets overseas in the tropics to see what they were growing and selling and meet farmers and go out in the forest and find less popular fruits and nuts. So we brought things back even though they might not be commercial but we collected anyway because they still have a use. We transformed from a fruit farm and a flower farm in the beginning to ethno-botanical plants that have a use for people in some way. For fibres, dyes

A Medicines

S I guess it turned into more like a botanical gardens collection rather than an orchard, it wasn't really an orchard of anything because we don't have great quantities

A We're members of Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the Australia NZ Botanic gardens. and I occasionally give lectures to some of those groups. But the Mossman Botanic Gardens is going to be great. It's going to predominantly represent the Wet Tropics rainforest and the evolution of the Wet Tropics from the very first plants that occur on the planet, primitive plant families and of course the wet tropics has the greatest number of primitive flowering plant families here. And we'll represent all those very important groups to the arrival of the aboriginals and how they then utilised some of these plants. Continuing on to European settlement and which plants are important to us and which ones are suitable to here and hopefully leaving it with a big question mark of what does the future look like. Here's what we have, do we value it or do we not. But a lot of it will be done through aboriginal context. This is their country. They know different things about the forest and plants and animals than we know and that we'll probably ever know.

P do you think they've still got that knowledge? They're losing it aren't they

A well I think that a lot of it was lost, a significant amount was lost during the stolen generation when the children were taken away from their parents and grandparents and that information wasn't passed on. There are a lot of aboriginals who are trying to decipher what they lost might be a way to describe that. Discover what they lost and so they're clinging, grasping at every little bit of information they can to try to rebuild their history. It was an indictment on whites that they lost so much and there was that disconnect. It's sad but a number of things were recorded. I mentioned I worked for the Cape York Conservation Council and we helped set up the Laura Rock Art protection zone and there were a number of researchers who were doing oral history on it from some of the elders during that time. I think most of those recordings would probably be in Canberra at the Australian National Library. I know some of the people who were actually involved in that. Some of those stories were told, not all of them for sure and if you look at some of the old ethnographic photographs and writings you go Wow, and what's amazing for me because I've dealt with the pygmies in the Congo and central Africa is that we had aboriginal pygmies around here on the Tableland. If you go to Ravenshoe there's a tourist information centre there and in the back of it there's a special building to celebrate, have you been there

P Yes

A It's incredible. I just, I love that spot. When I first arrived in Australia which was 47 years ago there were still a number of pure blooded pygmy aborigines. I doubt if you'd find any today, they're all interbred with other aboriginals or other people and their culture of living in the rainforest to the best of our knowledge has gone. As a living example. There's still historical notes and evidence but it's sketchy. I think their language is gone and language is definition. You should know that better than most people. They say around the world we lose two language groups a week or one every fortnight I forget which one it is. And the two countries with the greatest numbers of languages are Australia and New Guinea. New Guinea by far but Australia behind that. And that's a resource that's incredible. And interestingly the people who did the most to preserve and protect those languages were the missionaries who destroyed their cultures. Because they wanted to translate the bible into their language. So they recorded the language but at the same time they wouldn't let them keep their totems and things like that.

And so I have a great deal of respect for indigenous cultures. They can teach us so much. They have taught us so much. But most of modern society today has very little respect for them which is tragic.

43.17

but one thing I learned from the local Yalanji aborigines, or observed is that, and it's true in a number of other indigenous cultures too, that they value today far more than we do. They have a Dreamtime, the Dreamtime's important and their ancestors are important but almost everything is for today and their concept for the future in our mind doesn't even exist. It's a very abstract thing. It's nothing like we know. And it's easy to say that they didn't have a concept of the future. Some of them will say we do now, but when you speak with them and interact with them, everything was about today. Maybe tomorrow a little bit, but 20 years in the future, no, wasn't relevant. Hasn't come yet so why should I worry about it. Whereas our western society's obsessed with the future. That's why we have an insurance industry, that's why we have this financial system that lends us money, it's crazy. How simple would life be if we didn't have a concept of the future. (laughs) isn't that interesting.

P It's true

S We wouldn't be growing our trees

P For future generations

A Well I think one of the sad aspects of politics today is that they don't think long term future. All they're thinking about is the next election. Yet we owe it to our children and grandchildren and their children to leave them with some of the great things on this planet. Sadly it's disappearing. We lived on a cane farm in Gordonvale when I was on the Cape York Conservation Council, I'd been to university, textbooks done all the university stuff and this man walked around his farm and everywhere in bare feet and he taught me so much in such a short amount of time I was absolutely stunned. You wouldn't learn it in university. He could tell you the condition of his soil by feeling it with his feet. He'd walk to a stream and he'd say, and it was, he had 40 acres of forest on his cane farm and all the other forest around his place was decimated. He said when I was young 10 feet deep you could see every grain of sand in this creek. Today you can't see any. It's all silt from the cane farms. And if you've ever been up Cape York you can go to places in the wet desert, Jardine National Park. And see the same grains of sand in 10 feet deep of water, it's that crystal clear. Why shouldn't all water be like that. Why should it all be full of silt and chemicals. I think we owe it to future generations to keep the planet healthy. And I'm fortunate I've got a partner that believes the same thing I do. Ouch! (pause)

P Fantastic. What else. Want to stop for a minute?

A Sure.

47.56

ALAN #5

P You were saying it's been very hard work here

A We've never been frightened of hard work, we actually enjoy working, but it's taken a toll on our bodies over time. the joints don't work. For me I think a fair bit of that has to do with a reckless youth, motorbike accidents, skiing accidents, tractor accidents

P All here or in America

A Both. The motorbike and tractor were here. The skiing accidents were over there. But you have to live life to its fullest. You can't hide behind a door and say I'm not going out because there's scary things out there. You have to go and do it, grasp it. This is the only life you have you're missing out on opportunities if you don't get out there and do something. I feel for the children today whose parents are frightened to let them out to play after school in the yard or in the village. I like to think Mossman's still a pretty friendly town and you can do that. But in some of the bigger population areas, parents are frightened to let their kids

out because of what they hear on the television and radio and so on. So they're becoming addicted to devices. This an incredible world, to think that technology's going to save us is a big mistake.

P How long did it take you to get communications here. Did you have a phone

A We got the phone fairly quickly. It took us a while to get electricity and electricity was very expensive. It just about killed us.

P Did you have to pay for it to run from the road

A Yeah and the more neighbours you could get involved, the cheaper it would be. Then you had to guarantee a payment per annum for I think it was 15 years. It was a killer. And we had 2 blocks of land at the time so we were paying this guarantee on both blocks of land even though we only used electricity on one of them. I think it was \$25,000 initially to get on which was a killer for us. It was really bad. Probably mid 80s. and I mean I wish solar cells were cheap then. We would never had gotten onto mains power. We have some solar some hydro and some mains at the moment.

P You had to pay \$25,000 for 15 years every year

A No that was the initial fee, then they reduced that fee by you signing up to these guarantees. You still had to come up with, might've been 13 or 16 thousand dollars cash upfront thing, then you had to pay a minimum of so much a year for 15 years even though you weren't using it. And I think that the energy company, and in those days it was State government, it still is, Ergon I think. I think all the energy companies have fallen asleep behind the wheel. didn't see what was coming, anticipate it. Left us with archaic infrastructure and missed out on a lot of opportunities. I think the future is going to be more and more independent systems as these batteries become more economical and more reliable, the energy industry's going to find itself in a real difficult place. And they deserve it because they haven't been awake and aware of what's happening. Too expensive. The last decade has seen electricity price hikes, people can't believe it. Nothings gone up like that. Nothing. It's not rational. It's not fair.

P What about the phone

A The phone came in pretty quickly. Telstra was called Telecom in those days. They didn't charge anything for all the wires and stuff that came in, brought a bulldozer and a pipe layer on the back of it and just ripped through the land and laid cables, I said eventually there's going to be more people living up here, so they put in bigger cables. And Telstra were pretty good in those days. They knew there was lightning in the area so they put a special lightning cable on top of the other one. All the telephones were underground. It's not the most reliable service, in fact getting the internet through the telephone line is real iffy here. When the internet first came, you could run an email faster than you could send it through the internet. They promised you 64 bits per second, or minute, you could see the numbers, it got down to 4, stopped for 5 minutes, it was pitiful. It's got a lot better since then but they haven't really changed the wires that come to this end of the valley

P You're not NBN

A We have some satellite now but that's, I don't know. My daughter who lives in Spring Creek gets unlimited internet through the mobile service for \$79 a month. We pay \$59 for 30 GB which used to be a lot, but if someone watches a movie or two in a month she's gone. Then you have no internet pretty much. Most everybody in remote Australia is experiencing the same thing. What's promised us initially by the Labor government NBN may have been alright. What people are receiving today is not the same and it's more and more, people use up more and more GBs, it has to slow down.

P We rely on it so much, you must do that with your bookings.

A Yep.

P You think of when you first came, you probably didn't have the internet.

A We had a fax machine, we didn't have that in the beginning. Then we got a fax machine when we had the flower business. In the flower business we started with a telex machine, then went to a fax machine, so even on our old letterhead, it's got the telex on it. (laughs) at least it wasn't morse code ay. (laughs)

P were you the first people to live at this end of the valley

A No. There were cane farmers in the beginning

S they didn't live here. The Osborne never lived here, no one lived on this land.

A the cattle farmers didn't live here none of them did until we got here.

S And then there were squatters

A they were dope growers

S staying in the old barracks which we moved into across the creek

Å They were dope growers and they didn't want to leave because they had crops

S yeah there were a lot of crops

P probably hasn't changed much

A I think it's changed

S It has. Because we moved here they thought that's what we were growing. It was a cane barracks that we moved into

P What did that look like

A You could see the stars through the holes in the roof

S Just a concrete shell with a tin roof full of holes

A We had to put a new roof on it

S we had buckets collecting water and we had an outhouse outside, pretty primitive, no electricity just a concrete shack but we moved in with two little babies. Lived there for 5 years, no electricity. So when the power went out down the road at a friend's place, she came running to us Oh really, powers out, you can stay with us. We had a gas stove we bought from LifeLine for like \$30 or something. Before that in Kuranda we had a wood stove, that was really primitive.

A We might go back to a wood stove

S That was so primitive, that place was so tiny, the size of the kitchen here, in the forest, plagued with scorpions. so far up here we haven't seen scorpions. At Kuranda it was full of scorpions.

P I've never seen a scorpion in Shannonvale

S At Mowbray they're at Spring Creek

A She's been stung a number of times.

S When I first came from New York City in the snow to Kuranda in the wet season in this little hut plagued with scorpions I got stung. One was behind my ear, it's a long story. Stung so many times.

A We've got lots of stories but they don't relate to Mossman

S That was before Mossman.

A We like Mossman. I don't it to get too big

S I'd like it the say it is

A It's got the essential services that we need pretty much. I think it was great getting our local government back because you can actually talk and from the time we first came here, we could talk to anyone in council, any of the councilors, the mayor, we were on

speaking terms with every one of them even though we might not have agreed with some of their views. We always had reasonable and sensible discussions and I think it's the best form of local government. You can relate to people on their needs rather than somebody's big aspirational needs. I just like our community a lot, love it

S Have to say our mayor is one of our first friends in Australia back in the 70s.

A I met her husband Andre in 1972

S So we were friends since the 70s with Andre and Julia, Andre Leu, and I have to say that Andre was also instrumental in bringing in exotic plants, fruits and things in the early days

A And bamboo and, he's a real good waterlily expert too

S He collected things from Asia. It's amazing. They weren't living up here, we met them in Kuranda.

A They moved to Bondi

S they moved down to Sydney for quite a few years and came up to visit us when we'd just built this house. Then they decided to move up here which was great, and the rest is history.

13.37

A She would've have been high up in the Commonwealth Public Service if she'd stayed down south. If she stayed in the public service and didn't go into politics she would be really high up. She knows how things work. I'm happy she's our mayor.

S Andre is doing great things around the world with organics. But he had an interest, we all had an interest in the early days in bringing fruits into the country. Andre was part of that too from the early days

A You obviously know a lot about the history of this area. I think that some of the future can be taken from the history in the sense that I reckon the Daintree valley itself should be a dairy again. It's got some of the most, some of the wettest area with some of the best grass for cows. There was a butter factory in Daintree but I reckon we could get boutique butter and cheeses and dairy products like you find in some of the southern places that really promote their regional foods and I think Daintree could fill that niche.

S like Mungali creek they were really nice and boutique but they ... still you could do a lot in Daintree with dairy.

P I think their problem in the early days was transport but now it's easier.

S We're close to the international airport now. Living here too, close to the airport although it wasn't international then

A When I first came to Cairns there was no Australian airlines. It was TAA and it was on the service side of the airport and it was a shed that was open on one end. I don't think they could even lock it. That was the terminal, that was it. I've been in a lot worse airports than that (laughs)

S What about Madagascar (both laugh)

A Cairns airport has come a long way and it's offered us a lot of opportunities. But a lot of the decisions regarding Cairns airport are made in palaces of power from big business and governments. I think Brisbane has taken away a number of the flights and opportunities that Cairns could have had to put into their airport. But we complain how the south gets everything and the north gets very little until the cows come home and we won't get anywhere. (laughs)

P You were talking about Julia and Andre coming to visit you in this house. How difficult was it to build. Were you an architect or a builder

A Actually I did a carpenter's apprenticeship. Where I grew up, I started before I was legally allowed to start, and where I grew up it was snow for a lot of the year. (Suzi laughs) My criminal past, that's hardly criminal. Where I grew up there was a lot of snow and ice and so work slowed down in winter time. And the unions did the apprenticeship and my father was in the carpenters' union. And I got an apprenticeship in the carpenters' union because he knew people. The agreement was when school finished I would go to work as an apprentice and when school started, I would sign off and let the men who had families work and they would give me full credit for the year of an apprenticeship. And so I did that (laughs) and I got my trade certificate by just working summers. In the good weather. And one of the projects we worked on was exactly what they're trying to do at the Snowy Hydro. In the night time when there's no power demand, you pump water up to the big reservoir, and when there's demand you let it down so you can generate more electricity. Because water's flowing all the time and if you can use some of that water again you've got incredible energy conservation. It's a smart move. I think I was 17 working on that project and it taught me something about, if you think a little bit outside the square you can become far more productive.

P So you were pretty well qualified to build a house

A When I lived in Kuranda I would build some houses for a builder. Help him. So I had some fairly good skills but I was never a cabinet maker.

S Tell her about our first house we built in Kuranda. Cost us about \$80. And we had no money so we went to the, they had a timber mill in Kuranda and we pulled out the timber they were building, rubbish

A today they'd use a lot of that timber but in those days, there was reasonably good timber they were throwing timber but it wasn't prime timber

S We'd take it to this little rainforest area where we were building our house in the forest, build a frame out of it then we've got hessian, burlap. We made a slurry of cement and water quite thick and dip it in. First we stapled the hessian to the frame we built. Roof and everything we had three frames on each side, six big frames for the gable and stapled this hessian onto it then we'd paint a slurry of cement mixture onto it

A did it a few times

S Then we dipped it into this cement mixture, put layers and layers on it. Built this little house, it was a hessian and cement house. It cost us about \$80 and we lived in that in the forest so when branches came down, they made a hole in the roof. It was a bit hard in the wet season.

And we had another little hut next to it with a wood stove and had to gather wood to make a fire to cook. And how's that in a wet rainforest. And that was the place that was plagued with scorpions. That was our first house we built. I guess we built this one when we came up here after that, again a concrete house

A I built the neighbour's house over there, I've built a few houses

S This one was supposed to be a solid pour concrete house. It's the cheapest and strongest for cyclones

A And there's a number of houses in Mossman built that way because when the Italians first came here they built houses that way

P So the wall is total concrete

A No that's how we were going to do it

S We started it like that with the footings. We were digging the footings and a friend came around, this was Ron Rasmussen in Syndicate Road and he said I've got a little backhoe, I'll bring it up and help you, because we were digging by hand

A He dug some of the footings

S We had help along the way just from friendly people, so he dug the footings

A We met some of the most wonderful people here. We made the formwork

S and we're mixing concrete by hand in a little mixer and pouring it in and then take the formwork away and you've got a wall.

A Slide it up

S Fortunately happened down under in the footings. Another friend came around, couldn't believe were doing it by hand. he said Do you want to live in this house. You're going to be 99 years old. you're doing to be here forever. You've got to get a cement truck to pour it in.. So we did that. Got a vibrator to pack it down. So the pressure of all the concrete coming out of the truck fast, the wacker packer thing burst the walls because slowly the way we were doing it, it was working but fast, pressure, it burst the walls and concrete went everywhere, fortunately the footings were, so it happened and we had to sit down and rethink our plans.

P I can't hear you, you have to hold it or

A I'm going for a little walk

S We thought about it and somebody told us about this father and son team who can do concrete blocks. They said You'll be in your house in no time. Because it'll take us forever the way we're doing it. It wasn't working. So we hired this father and son team who came and camped here in a tent and in about one week all the concrete blocks were up. Couldn't believe it. So we had a shell of a house and little by little got the roof up and moved in. no doors and windows in those days. Made it easier to do things. We were living in the hut, the cane barracks across the creek for five years. Pretty primitive. Moving up here with no doors and windows, it was still luxurious being in a big house. With a proper flush toilet and we put electricity on and the girls, it was like Xmas. They grew up without power, they were turning lights on, flushing the toilet. It was all exciting. Soon we got used to it. It's quite amazing when we look around today, built a real house.

Yeah it's a great house, it's so open. Perfect for the tropics.

P OK I'll stop for a minute

26.00

ALAN #6

P Tell me how you and Suzi met

A As I said I lived in the Catskill Mountains in New York not far from Woodstock. Every summer down the hill from where I lived along the river was this building, this great building and every summer a big silver bus full of Scandinavian kids would come up to this building to spend their summer there. It was a Norwegian children's home summer camp. There were four boys living in the mountains, this was great because all these beautiful blonde haired blue eyed girls would come up. Obviously new people to the town in the summer, all the locals would interact with them, because it was a friendly place. So we got to know most of the kids there Suzi was maybe 10 years old when I first met her. She was too young for me, she's 5 years younger than I am. She didn't have blonde hair or blue eyes. But I guess there must've been something about her that intrigued me. When I came to Australia we wrote letters

S He was 19 and I was 14 when he left. He said See you over there. I had to grow up and finish school first and all that.

A Anyway she came over and

S I came for 6 months, I had a 6 month visa. I went to uni and take a break for 6 months. Came over and he was living in Kuranda in this little hut plagued with scorpions and snakes and everything else. somehow I stayed and kept renewing my visa every 6 months and after a year and a half became a permanent resident. Everything was easier in those days. Everything was carefree and easy. They hauled us down to Cairns to ask us why I wanted to stay. He was already a permanent resident, One day were going to have a farm, one day were going getting married. Ticked the boxes and I could stay and I became a citizen two years after that and never went back.

A So she's a dual citizen but I'm not. I had to give up my US citizenship to become an Australian which I was happy to do. I belong here.

S He did that from a young age, when he came he became a citizen straight away

A Took three years

S lived in a tent, had a bicycle for transport, and he's studying marine biology so now we're n the rainforest instead, close enough but we just don't get the time to get out there

A today's battle for the Barrier Reef is probably even harder to fight than the one that we fought back all those years go because today it's more about climate change than anything else. And I'm not convinced we're going to be able to win that one in the short term. So what's the world going to look like in the future, we don't know. But if we all do our best, we can maybe keep a lot of what's really important for us. Hard to know.

So we've been together for 42 years now. Two children, two grand children

S Heather and Cali and two grandsons. Heather was born on one of our first big plant collecting trips, we headed to the amazon. I thought she'd be born in a little village on the amazon. We were young, we had backpacks. Long story short, we were running out of money, we don't know how we did most of the things we did. In those days, Bankcard, worry about it later (?). Somehow it worked out. She was actually born in Florida. We were running low on funds as we were going down through central America, Guatemala so I went to Florida where his mother was and she was born there. And then he came back up from south America and we had a little basket to put her in. We kept travelling and we came back to Australia with 80 new species and a little baby. One of the first big trips. It was probably '78 we came back. We did a big long trip for about a year collecting plants, and she was born half way into it. Maybe that's why she likes travelling so much. That's Heather. The oldest.

The other one's Cali and she's got two little boys, two little grandsons Jackson and Harrison

P You've had a fantastic time, it's been a good life, still doing important work

S Friends all over the world who are interested in plants, it's so nice

A And if you don't live life to the fullest you're cheating yourself. You can't save everything for when you retire because who knows when you're plucked off the planet

S This Botanic Gardens in Mossman, we're really excited about because we've always had a dream there could be some public garden open for everybody to use and keep the plants alive, keep them going long after we're gone. It's just a great community garden, going to be fantastic isn't it.

A It's going to be great

S That was such a dream for us. Because we thought what happens when we're gone and some of these rare plants are gone. A new person comes in and destroys the plants. It's all wasted but at least now with project in Mossman

A it's more than just a garden. By distributing plants to growers and to permaculture people and we actively engage in sharing plants and seeds with other botanic gardens and researchers around the world so we do a lot of that

P And that will happen at this Mossman garden as well

A I think so. The Mossman garden will be governed by a slightly stricter set of rules, in the sense that there's a lot of new government conventions and formats you have to follow which have restricted things, so I think we were lucky to do it when we did it. Yeah. We sleep well at night, pretty much.

S having this quarantine house might be beneficial for the Gardens in the future

A Yeah but that's not part of this

P Well it's been wonderful chatting with you both, thank you very much

A Our pleasure

P So many stories. Thank you

7.31

THE END