

3BBR Bilby community Radio Chops (Frank) Lambert audio transcript

Voice of Interviewer Shelley Varcos: Welcome to *Back to Bilby* – a journey through our history and the people who shaped our town....
Our focus today is on Frank 'Chops' Lambert, the owner of Lambert's Butchery, which is a family institution in Bilby – I think there's been three generations of Bilby folk buying their meat at Lamberts...
Chops, welcome to the show.

Chops: Uhhh... thanks Shelley. Don't quite know why you want me on the show...don't know what I've got to say that's interesting...but I'm always willing to give it a go!

Shelley: Well, Chops, for a start, how about telling us how you got your nickname?

Chops: You know, I've always had it, ever since I was at Primary School. Comes from having a dad, and his dad before him, in the butcher's shop. I think Dad used to call me a bit of a pork chop – that's 'coz I was a bit on the porky side when I was a little kid – then my brother said it at school, and it stuck...

Shelley: How many in your family?

Chops: ...I've got a brother Chris... he lives here in Bilby, Beefy he's called...we work together. Then there's my sister Marjorie, she married a farmer over beyond Bendalong... we don't see her all that much... just Christmas and big family parties.

Shelley: Why's that Chops?

Chops: No particular reason. She's just busy with the farm and the kids...and she really gets involved with the Bendalong community... You know how it is...she's just grown away from Bilby a bit.

Shelley: You certainly haven't...how often have you had a trip away from Bilby, Chops?

Chops: A trip? Why would I want to leave Bilby? This is where the Lamberts belong. ...I don't want to go on trips and stuff...We've got lots of things happening in Bilby, have to keep an eye on it.

Shelley: Yes, tell us a bit about the new Bilby Mall...

Chops: Yeah, that's a real good one...Beefy (that's Chris) thought it'd be great to get lots of little shops all together, make it easier for the tourists when it was raining, so they could just walk around a bit, check out coffees and crafts and stuff like that...
It's been doing real well...all the shops got rented out fast...

Shelley: You've shifted your butcher's shop into the mall too. That'll be a slice of history being pulled down now that shop has gone from the corner of Lambert Drive and Main Street, it's been there as long as I

can remember. I think the accountant's there now, looks so different. Do you think your customers will come and buy your meat in the mall, when there's now a big supermarket opposite in Boundary Road?

- Chops: Cripes, you sound like Myfanwy...she's always going on about history. Look, I'm in business to feed the kids, make a living, make sure there'll be something to pass on...people have always bought from Lambert's, and that won't stop no matter where the shop is. We give personal service, not like a supermarket. We have a reputation – that's our history, it's part of the future of Bilby. If we don't change things now, Bilby'll go back to being a ghost town...and kids won't find jobs here.
- Shelley: Speaking of kids, how's Snags?
- Chops: Yeah, you used to go to high school in Bendalong with him, didn't you...He's doing real well with the apprenticeship, enjoys it just like I did – only I got to work with my dad. And like the rest of us, Snags loves his footy. In fact, this year I've got all three boys in the Bilby Bullants – he's in the centre, the others are on the backline...
- Shelley: What does your wife think about all the time you've spent with those barbecues you've been organising to raise money for the new football stand?
- Chops: Jenny remembers what it was like in Bilby when we were growing up, we both do...you know, we started going out together in high school, been together ever since. I talked about a ghost town, but it was worse in those days – kids were rushing to get out of Bilby, or if they stayed they had nothing to do...silly gangs hooning around in cars, drinking too much, getting into trouble. Jenny lost her brother in an accident – he's buried in the Bilby graveyard, too many kids have been buried there... We both want to build up Bilby while we've got the chance, while there's a bit of money around. A new football stand, the mall, new shops – jobs the kids will be able to get. Something to keep them out of trouble, give them something to work for... So Shelley, make sure you get along to the next barbecue – it's at the Sporting Spot...lots of really good raffle prizes!!
- Shelley: Thanks Chops, I will – you're certainly really involved in the community...you go back three generations don't you...
- Chops: Yep, we've always lived in Bilby. Ran the butcher's like you said, but we've always had a bit of land as well. Still got it. Up on the plateau...great views, makes you really appreciate life when you look at the town and how things are going...I've got the old homestead up there, pretty much as it used to be...
- Shelley: How was it like in the early days? Did your father or grandfather tell you much about it?
- Chops: Nah, they weren't big talkers...my granddad used to do a bit of shearing in the district, help out other farmers...he was a big man, hard worker. I remember one time, my dad told me how the Bullants got their name – the football ground used to be further up above the river, not near the Bilby swamp like it is now. It'd been really dry, and

there were bullant heaps all over the ground, just starting to pop up everywhere. The boys were doing training, it was a bit hot still, and all the boys were loafing around, not putting much into it. He was a bit cunning the coach, so he told them he needed to talk to them, got them to stand near a few bullant heaps and distracted them by ranting and raving, gave them quite a bit speech about what he was going to do to them at training that night. They were so worried they didn't look down at their feet – they were covered in bullants – and soon they started biting, and the boys took off – and the coach yelled out, that's how you've gotta move, like bullants are up your pants!! (Laughs) Best training session they had, my dad said!!

Shelley: Your dad was sure a bit of a character. I'll never forget the funeral – he'd left enough money for drinks for every person in Bilby, at the Grandview Hotel – insisted he didn't want speeches, just a celebration.

Chops: Yeah that was a good funeral alright...I miss him...tough to work with, but fair.
But he was all about getting things done...he said hard work never killed anyone...you can't make omelettes without smashing eggs was one of his favourite sayings – he was always a bit fiery...
So I suppose I want to make sure there's a town here like he dreamed about when he went on council... and did all that work to get the football ground shifted to the river flats, and started raising money for the clubhouse.

Shelley: Do you think he'd be proud of what you've achieved? Not just building the Sporting Spot down at the footy ground, all the work you put into getting it licensed, setting up the restaurant and everything. But there's also all the work you've done with Bilby Business Association... And you're on the council too, aren't you?

Chops: Dad always told me not to go on about being the centre of attention, just get the job done. Someone had to get the business association going again, it was when the town was really coming to life again, when we had that whole lot of alternative-type farmers coming...

Shelley: Not your favourite group, are they...you called them gypsies and dropout hippies I heard...

Chops: I was pretty crook about them setting up their organic farms on a bit of land I had my eye on at the time...
But that was about 15 or so years ago ...their Saturday markets are really popular with the tourists, all that organic stuff ... they've settled in, their kids go to our school, some of them are getting involved in the town...

Shelley: Yes, I heard one of them challenged you recently as head of Bilby Business Association...Do you think it's time to give someone else a go? You've been in charge for upwards of 20 years....

Chops: Young puppy!! He doesn't know what Bilby needs, he just hasn't been here long enough. And his wife...she doesn't even come to meetings, she has her own job in Bendalong. My Jenny's been doing the suppers ever since I got it started again.

Shelley: Jenny mustn't see much of you at the moment – your council commitments, the latest fight over the graveyard for the business

association, all your business interests, your family farm on the plateau...and I hear you're thinking of buying the funeral parlour...

Chops: Now, Shelley, just stop there...what are you trying to say? That I'm not a good husband and father?

Shelley: No Chops, I just wondered how you fit it all in?

Chops: Well it pays to be organised – and Jenny is a great support. And the boys help out after school. Snags is already doing a lot of the work on the farm, and Beefy's boy is doing a bit. We're all hard workers...that's what our family's always done, given back to Bilby. And now's the time to be doing things, when the opportunity's there. That's why these silly greenies and historical (I call them hysterical) groupies have got to get real – what use is a graveyard when we need a hospital? This town has grown faster than any of us thought, but I want us to be prepared, to grab this opportunity with both hands. That's what I'm doing...

Shelley: Yes, some people have said you're grabbing a bit much – the council seems to be pushing your permits through pretty quickly

Chops: Shelley, you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head...who's these people you've been talking to? (Pause) Eh? (Pause) Yeah, just what I thought, you can't say. You should check your facts first - There's a lot of backbiting going on at the moment, and successful people like me seem to cop it. My position on the council is all about doing what's best for Bilby, and that's growth. Look at the figures! No one can deny the whole place is booming...and who's done that? It's not the greenies, the organic hippies, the hysterics...it's businesses like me, who know what Bilby really needs. Do we need the new hospital? Of course we do. We don't want our oldies leaving town to die on the way to the Bendalong Hospital, or little kids having asthma attacks that the bush nursing hospital can't cope with! What about the low unemployment we've got now? The kids who can get jobs in the local shops...all the doctors and nurses who'll move to Bilby when we get the hospital built... And the tourists!! Every weekend, they're all over the place like ants, buying everything they can... Bilby's never had it so good, and a lot of that is due to me, ... and my supporters.

Shelley: What about the TV program, do you think that's been a good thing for Bilby?

Chops: Of course it has – it's put Bilby on the map. They're a bit of a nuisance when they're here filming, but that's still business ...they stay in the hotels, eat out at the restaurants, have lots of coffee – my gosh they can sure drink coffee – give me a good cup of tea any day!!

Shelley: Isn't Bilby changing too much? Has it grown too big?

Chops: That's what I'm trying to tell you, Shelley... It can't grow too big, this is what my dad worked for, my granddad – so there's something to pass on to our kids, a place they can stay and work and live, be happy...

Shelley: John Russell says there'll be nothing of the real Bilby left soon – with all the new houses going up near the wetlands, endangering the growling grass frog...

Chops: Look, John Russell is scared of change. He was scared on the football field, he's scared of hard work, he's probably scared of Myfanwy and her hysterical historicists too!! He just wants us all to go back to a ghost town full of growling bloody grass frogs! He was just like that when he was a kid too – always worrying about the way we farmed, kept talking about erosion and planting trees instead of clearing – he didn't know anything, he was a town kid, never worked a farm in his life.

Shelley: Actually, you both went to school together, you were in the same football team weren't you.

Chops: Yeah, he wasn't too bad, quite fast...but he couldn't go through packs, just tried to run around them. Of course he was a bit of a runt then – hasn't changed much has he...(laughs)

Shelley: I believe there was one very memorable day, when you and he had a fight over Myfanwy...

Chops: No, no, don't remember that at all. Sorry, got to get back to work now...we can't all just sit around having coffees you know. I've got businesses to run.

Shelley: Yes of course Chops. Thank you very much for your time today. It has certainly given us an idea of the way Bilby used to be, and how you think it will grow into the future...

Chops: Yes, Bilby has a great future – it's going to be bigger than Bendalong!

Shelley: You've been listening to Frank 'Chops' Lambert, the head of Bilby Business Association. You can find out more of Chops' plans for that future by checking out the Bilby Business association website. And listen in next week, as I talk to John Russell the Bilby Landcare President, about 'that fight' and other issues near to his heart in the developing Bilby story.