Never Stop Playing:

[Uncle Bill Lawton] If I'm feeling down, I just pick me guitar up and go and play somewhere and it does me the world of good.

I was born in Augathella in 1931, on the side of the road under a big gum tree. When I was five days old, we travelled from there over to Emerald. I was that small, I was only 3.5 pounds. They put me in a boot box, shoved me under the seat, and they called me Boot Box Billy.

I was only seven years old when I first started playing on an old guitar, a Kalamazoo. It had no keys on it and I just drilled the holes out, burnt the holes through, with a hot wire from the stove and untwined me dad's snare wire and that's me guitar. One string - I liked to play it on tour. Picked it all up meself. Can't read music. No. Never could.

I used to play with Tex Morton when I was 10 years old, me and my one-string guitar. We used to fundraise every fortnight for the boys overseas. Red Cross. And I got up on stage with this one-string guitar. He looked at me, he said, "Do you always play that goddamn one-string guitar?" I said, "Yeah." When I finished he said, "You know what?" He said, "You'd make a good guitarist one day." I said, "Yeah, whatever." And I ended up winning awards everywhere.

I jammed with Barry Thornton and all them, you know. That great guitarist, Slim Dusty. I used to work with him when he was only 14. All night he'd be bashing the guitar and we used to hide the guitar and nobody would give it to him weekends. He was the greatest country and western artist.

They don't play that music today. There's nobody around that I know that plays old-time on string music, like guitars, like I do. They wouldn't know a Gypsy Tap from a barn dance to a Pride of Erin, a waltz. Chicken Dance.

And we pressed on as the Thunderbolts. Me and Billy and Reg got together. We'd do blues or jazz. We could rock it up too if we wanted but we were just strictly country. And we used to do the Black and White football carnival at Barcaldine every year. Occasionally we could do a New Year's Eve or a Sunday dance. One night, about 8.5 inches of rain fell and we couldn't get out of Barcaldine. So when we got back to Rockie, we changed our name to Country Cousins because everywhere we'd go it'd just rain... ..thunderbolts!

[Man] We've been all over the place. We've been all over Queensland. Probably we've been playing for about 40 years, I suppose. If we're not together, we're at home singing with the guitar on our own. Yeah, music's in our blood.

[Uncle Bill] Every Friday night the police reckon we're doing a good job of keeping the Murris off the street. But tonight we come together just to get this done. Hope it all turns out right. I've got to put this in the car so it's ready to rock and roll.

[Man] I'd like to introduce Mr Billy Lawton, the elder of the mob. When we first started off, would it be 40 years ago, Billy Willy?

[Uncle Bill] Oh, yeah. We've been all over. The Lucky Star. So it's good to see youse all back again.

[Man] (SINGS) Though the city lights are driving me crazy...

[Sheridan Lawton] Pa is just in general just a great person so he does things for people just because he wants people to be happy and healthy and have a great life. His music has always brought people together, including our family.

[Uncle Bill] A lot of my grandkids, they learnt the drums, you know. They play a bit of music and some of them play guitars and they all look up to me anywhere I go.

[Sheridan] I love coming out and playing with Pa. I play with him every other month when he gives me a call. Um, I also love playing with Dad as well.

[Uncle Bill] This is The Lawton Band.

[Sheridan] I know!

[Uncle Bill] You missed out! You missed out!

[Sheridan] I know! I was like, they don't want to keep going.

Listening to these songs tonight, like, it takes me back to when I was young and running around playing while Pa would be in the Country Cousins and playing in the background.

[Uncle Bill] I'd be fundraising. I've played down at Cawarral festival they have down there. Wherever there's a community gig fundraiser, I do it. Every Tom, Dick and Harry and his brown dog knows me. Yeah, they all love me.

[Woman] Billy's playing in Mount Morgan, we're in Mount Morgan. Billy's playing at Yeppoon, we're at Yeppoon.

[Sheridan] What inspires me about my Pa is he's very active. It's surprising how social he is, he's always got something going on and he really does live his life to the fullest.

[Uncle Bill] I end up being about 10 years younger. I feel that way, yeah. No, it's good, really good, yeah. In my life, that's always been my ambition, to keep going as long as I can because it keeps me younger. It keeps me mind working and I reckon if I ever give it away, that'll be the end of me so I've got to just keep going. I'll never, never, ever stop playing.