

Post Nyasaland

by Alison McLennan

On our return to the South Wales Valleys from Nyasaland Dad didn't want to rejoin the Glamorgan Force this time. After all the excitement and adventure of the Police forces abroad he felt he couldn't go back to pounding the beat again in Wales. So he decided to open a school of motoring. He started off with one vehicle just to test the water, he wasn't sure of the demand for driving lessons in Trehafod at that time. So he bought one vehicle and fitted it with dual controls, he set up an office in the house and so *'The Trehafod School of Motoring'* was formed. It wasn't too long before the business really took off, every man and his dog on the mountain, all of a sudden, wanted to learn to drive. So Dad bought a second vehicle and he employed another instructor to drive it and the business went very well.

In the meantime my Mother decided to reopen the Fish & Chip shop in the front room of our house which was first opened by her mother many years before. So there were busy times



ahead as the front room was once again transformed into a shop. Business was great, the shop was open 7 days a week from lunch time until late at night so they would catch all the passing trade of people on their way home from a night out, desperate for something hot to eat. One Saturday night Herman's Hermits (great band from the 60's) drove past after a gig up the Valleys and stopped in for a feed. I couldn't believe it the next day when Mam told me, I was annoyed that she hadn't woken me up. But she did get Peter Noonan's

autograph for me on a piece of chips paper! So that made up for it!!

Restless Times

So now having spent about 18 months building up successful businesses in Trehafod, Mam and Dad started to get restless. After living abroad for so long they yearned for new adventure once again. It was then Dad saw an advert in the newspaper ***"Hard working migrants wanted to start a new life in Australia"*** this to Dad was a message from heaven and discussed it with us all and decided to apply. The following is an extract from an official document at the time of the ***"Ten Pound Pom Scheme"***:



"Adult migrants were charged £10 for their fare and children travelled for free. They were drawn by promises of employment and housing, a more relaxed lifestyle and a better climate."

"Ten Pound Poms" needed to be in sound health and under the age of 45 years. There were initially no skill restrictions, although under the "White Australia" policy those from mixed race backgrounds found it very difficult to take advantage of the scheme. At one point in 1947, more than 400,000 Brits were registered at Australia House in London for the scheme.

The aim of the scheme was to substantially increase Australia's population in response to fears of a Japanese invasion, and a new awareness of Australia's vulnerability and unrealised economic potential as an under-populated country. The "Populate or Perish" policy was developed by the Curtin Government before the end of World War II."

An official letter came a few weeks later from Australia House in London where we were to go for an interview. We were all so nervous, Dad especially because he would have been so disappointed if they didn't accept us. So new clothes were bought for us all, Dad wore his best suit and off we went to London for the grand interview. Of course there were no problems with the interview, the Official was very nice to us and told us all about Australia and gave us

brochures of lovely beaches and outback scenes. We were all very excited and to think if we were lucky enough to be accepted it would only cost us £20 to go - amazing! So we all went home on a high and awaited the next letter to come from Australia House. A few weeks later the due letter came, we had been accepted and we would be flying out on 23rd May 1965.

So now it was panic stations to get organized. My Brother Greg was now 15 and I was 13 years old and eager to move on to new adventures. Dad sold the Driving School to the other driver, and Mam just closed the shop once again.

As the leaving date drew closer my Mother started having cold feet. She suddenly realized that Australia wasn't around the corner and she wouldn't be able to visit her mother as often as she would like, and as my Nan was getting on in years Mam went into a sort of depression and didn't want to leave. So in the weeks that followed we had to work hard to persuade her to change her mind.

Australia here we come!

Our tactics must have worked because the 23rd of May arrived and off we went to Heathrow for our flight to the other side of the world. We boarded a British Eagle Plane belonging to British Airways and it wasn't very big compared to the planes today. It must have been a chartered flight because all of the passengers were also British Migrants. Because the aircraft was small we had 4 stopovers on this epic journey as I remember. I think it was Bahrain, Bangkok and Darwin before finally arriving in Melbourne where we changed planes to a domestic flight this one had propellers - it was that long ago! So we were squished in this tiny plane for our final leg of the journey to our destination of Adelaide.

We arrived in Adelaide about 9pm on the 26th May 1965 three days after leaving London (a far cry from the current 17 hour nonstop Perth to London service) there was a bus waiting to take us all to the Migrant Hostel. Bear in mind this was the month of May which was pretty much winter in Adelaide and as we drove along in the bus we all sat in silence looking out at the bleak, wet, cold night outside and I think we all wondered what on earth we had done, this didn't look at all like the Australia we had been enticed with back at Australia House.

The bus pulled into the Finsbury Hostel and it was like an Army camp, there were small Nissen huts in neat rows and at the end of each row was a toilet and laundry block then in the center of it all was a huge shed that turned out to be the communal dining room. The bus driver dropped us at the dining room and there were officials inside who crossed us off their list and gave each of us a mug, plate and a knife and fork and then we were shown to our own private Nissen hut.



The Toilet & Laundry Block



The Nissen Hut

So here we were in this little hut that was to be our home for the next 2 years unless we decided to make a go of Australia and find alternative accommodation outside the hostel or sit it out for 2 years and return to the UK. Free of charge. Many migrants on the hostel were very

unhappy with the conditions and complained constantly and decided to stay on at the hostel for the 2 years and then returned to the UK without even experiencing the true Australia. Dad wouldn't have that and decided for us all that we would make a go of it because this, as he put it, was "The Land of Milk and Honey". The next day we familiarized ourselves with our surroundings, we duly made our way to the dining room for breakfast with our crockery and cutlery in hand. It wasn't such a bad deal really. we had three meals a day provided for a very small payment each week. The showers and toilets were clean so that was a bonus - the only down side was having to walk out in the cold to them, but we got used to it.

Two days after arriving my Mother said we should go to a beach like one of those she had seen in the brochures. We had no idea where the beach was in relation to the Hostel so we all walked to the bus stop and asked the driver to take us there, and the nearest beach turned out to be only twenty minutes away - and there was the ocean. We were all thrilled to see it although it didn't look very tempting at the time because it was so cold.

The Hostel, as it turned out, wasn't as bad as we first thought. We got quite used to the communal living and after a while it became like a safe haven for us and I for one felt a bit strange whenever I ventured away from it.

Mam and Dad set about finding work. Mother managed to get a job in the dining room of the Hostel and she did a good job - as she did with everything she turned her hand to and I must admit it was comforting to see her behind the counter whenever I went in there for a meal. Dad looked for work wherever he could and managed to get a job at a plasterboard factory nearby. It was hard manual labour and totally different to what he had been used to in the Police Force but he never complained and quite enjoyed the experience. Months later when he resigned from there, his boss said to him, "I had a feeling you were an ex Copper from the start and never expected you to fit in here, but you surprised me, you did very well."

As time went on we managed to settle into a routine of sorts in the Hostel. Mam made the hut as homely as she could and both she and Dad always looked on the bright side of things. I am sure there were days when my Mother absolutely hated the place but she never showed it or complained. Greg and I made friends easily and in the evenings we would all congregate in the laundry block in the centre of the Hostel. There we would have general chats and Greg would play the guitar and we would have sing-alongs and a good old laugh together.

During those first few months many real estate agents would visit the hostel and try and sell us houses in a suburb of Adelaide called Elizabeth. It was a new satellite city on the north side of the city. Most of our neighbours in the Hostel bought into the deal so that they could get away. We went out there once to have a look but it seemed isolated and cold and obviously full of English people and so we

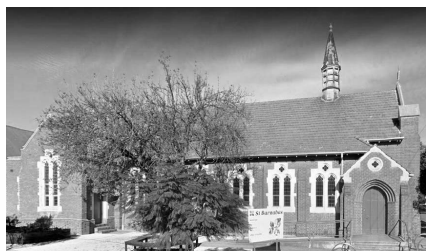


didn't like it at all. Dad said there was no point coming all this way to Australia to live in a community of British people. We may as well have stayed in Wales and of course he was right, so back we would go to our little hut.

As luck would have it (or divine intervention as Mam put it) a priest from the Anglican Parish of St Paul's, the Reverend Johnston, came to visit the Hostel and he invited us all to his Church service on Sunday. He was a lovely man and Mam and Dad took to him straight away. We went to a few Sunday Services at his Parish and everyone was very friendly. One day Reverend Johnston mentioned a house that was for sale in a suburb about 10 minutes from the hostel. We all went to look at it and it was an old house in a quiet older part of Adelaide but Mam and Dad liked it because it felt like it was Australian! But being a very old house it needed a lot of work to make it inhabitable but it had lovely grapevines in the back garden that were just heaving with red grapes waiting to be picked plus two huge palm trees that could be seen for miles around. It was right next door to St. Barnabas Anglican Church which Reverend Johnston also looked after. And so Mam and Dad decided to buy this lovely old house to start our new life proper in Australia.

We moved in there in November 1965, I remember it well because it was so hot. Dad had to build a kitchen in the little annex at the back of the house and brought the toilet indoors. I for one hated going outside to the toilet, it was full of spiders, they were huge and terrified me. Dad certainly did a good job of the renovations and so we settled in.

Our first Christmas in our new house was something to remember. Again it was about 40 deg. And Mam bought a real Christmas tree (it was tradition!) and she hung chocolate things off it which of course duly melted all over the floor along with all the pine needles from the tree but she did her best. My present that year was a big stuffed Koala that played Waltzing Matilda



when wound up. It was very Australian and I treasured it. And so our wonderful adventures once again began only this time in Australia. We all became very involved with St. Barnabas Church next door, Dad became the Church Warden and Mam was involved with the ladies of the Church and Greg and I started a Monthly disco to raise funds for the Church. It all tied in very well and we so enjoyed being involved with the local Community.

After about a year My Dad joined the Commonwealth Police Force and after 2 years in Adelaide we moved to Alice Springs where Dad began work at the Pine Gap Research Facility, they were very exciting and happy times for us, my Mother was in her element working at the local Hospital looking after the Indigenous children who came in from the Settlements for treatment.

Life was good again and the rest is History. We all remained and prospered here in Australia, I married an Australian and have three adult children and six grandchildren, my brother Greg married a girl from Wales would you believe and they still live in Adelaide and I and my family have been in Queensland for the last 30 years. I lost my dear Mother in 2007 and my dear Father three years later but I will always be so very grateful to them for showing us the World and all its adventures.



*Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong
Under the shade of a coolibah tree,
He sang as he watched and waited 'til his billy boiled
You'll come a-Waltzing Matilda, with me
Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
You'll come a-Waltzing Matilda, with me
He sang as he watched and waited 'til his billy boiled,
you'll come a-Waltzing Matilda, with me*

*Down came a jumbuck to drink at the billabong,
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee,
he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag,
you'll come a-Waltzing Matilda, with me*

*Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
you'll come a-Waltzing Matilda, with me
he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag,
You'll come a-Waltzing Matilda, with me*

Alison McLennan (Nee Tomkins)

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