

Rolf Bierman

Forty-three years on, his feelings as an eight-year-old of surprise, trepidation, shock, and excitement about the complete unknown, were still fresh in the memory of Rolf Bierman. There was much to be done as he and his family completed their immigration medicals, packed, and said their farewells. All too soon, it seemed, the day of departure dawned.

“Someone took us to the airport. Goodbye. Tears. Hugs. KLM awaited us. So did Australia. Three days later on 30 September 1958, Sydney Harbour Bridge appeared on the horizon. The Brisbane Limited Express train was our overnight accommodation for the trip to Brisbane. South Brisbane Station platform was crowded with welcomers, among them Mum’s brother Jacques Kreuning, his wife, Els and only daughter Yvonne. Yvonne gave each of us a long thin packet of columbine toffees. Uncle Jacques had served in the Navy during World War II and visited Brisbane with fellow troops at the end of the war. He had marched through the city streets. He was so impressed with what he saw that he and his family migrated in 1952.

They took us to their home, an old Queenslander in Eagle Junction where chooks in the back yard scattered as we clambered out of the car with our goods and chattels. The stumps stumped us, the high ceilings dwarfed us, the stained coloured windows cast a hew of shadows on our sweating bodies, the timber creaking floors replied to our footsteps and the wide verandahs beckoned us in search for that cool breeze.

After a few days, we moved into the Wacol Migration Centre. Isolation, homesickness and unemployment set in. Dad’s English was school English. His chance of an office job was now a far cry from what he had in Holland. But he was a fighter, a quality that, as a child and as an adult, I always deeply cherished in Dad – his sense of

WACOL REMEMBERED

Country of Birth: **The Netherlands**

Date of Arrival in Australia: **30 September 1958**

responsibility, determination, willpower, braveness and sheer guts. Not once did he give up. He was always on the go. As a child, I could not possibly have come anywhere near understanding what he must have gone through. Yes, both Mum and Dad suffered from homesickness big time. Nina pined and moaned for Barold, her boyfriend in Holland.

A tiny temporary building on stilts at Wacol served as our school. I was unsettled within myself. On one occasion the teacher tore strips off me over something but, whatever she said, English was still foreign to me. Dad wanted me to play soccer at the Camp but I disliked it so much, that in a match between the Dutch and Italian under nines, I ran after the ball, then off the field and kept running. I remember those terrible bushfires all around us (Blunder Road was on fire), the awful food, the pounding heat, flies, and the beat up Austin-55, our first car, which never really worked.

Dad tried everything. In desperation, his career during the first two years in Australia spun far and wide. He sold flour for Simpson’s Flour Mill, did time as a brickie’s labourer at the Kratzmann’s Flats at Hill End, worked as a wardsman at Princess Alexandra Hospital, he did shifts as a night watchman. He never stopped! One year later we moved into a small rented house in Guthrie Street, Paddington.”

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