



Harmina Dijk

nee Pesman

I was born on 8 February 1911 in a small village called Surhuisterveen in the Dutch province of Friesland. I married my husband Wouter in 1936 (he came from another part of Friesland but did not speak the Friesland language) and we inherited his father's flourishing textile business. At the same time I continued my singing career. Our first daughter was born in 1937 and the second daughter in 1938. Two more girls were born post-war, which completed our family with a total of six daughters. Eventually we decided to migrate and move to Sunny Queensland in Australia, mainly for health reasons as both my husband and the youngest child needed sunshine largely lacking in the Netherlands. . . .we travelled by train to Brisbane – an experience in itself! At the station in Brisbane, the Minister of the Reformed Church, Reverend Westera, welcomed us.

We arrived at the Wacol Migrant Centre, where we stayed for six weeks in a cabin with creaking iron beds, newspaper as wallpaper and even wooden floors and broken steps. It was a real disappointment that we had to go to the migrant-camp, despite the fact that employment and a house had been promised. Our daughter cried her heart out with disappointment at our new beginning and I could not blame her. However many people were in similar or worse situations and I thought "if I give up as a mother, the whole family will collapse." We had to be brave as there was no way back. We had chosen to go and nobody had forced us to leave The Netherlands. The food in the camp was reasonable including milk and porridge for breakfast. We made the cabin as cosy as possible and put curtains in front of the windows. As a family we were making the best of a bad situation and with God's help we made it!

We were fortunate that we had church contacts. After church on Sundays we were often asked out for lunch. That was really appreciated, in particular, as there were eight of us. On the first Sunday, the Westera family invited us to lunch but I could not go because I had sprained my ankle on the broken steps. However my family had a great



WACOL REMEMBERED

Country of Birth: **The Netherlands**

Date of Arrival in Australia: **March 1957**

time and other occasions followed. The Westeras have become very good friends and they still are. We were so thankful for the love and friendship shown to us by the people of the Reformed Church.

Without a trade (while experienced in selling textile) it was very difficult for my husband to find a job and the Immigration officer, Mr Moor, tried very hard to help him. We were grateful for that and became good friends with him. We had learnt English before coming to Australia but were reluctant to speak it as we were afraid of making mistakes. My husband found employment in the textile department at the Myer store in the Valley. It was manual work and the job was only for a short time. He then worked as a labourer until we finally bought a cleaning business and that went very well. He had reached his goal to be his own boss and he also helped some of his part-time employees to start their own businesses.

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