

Corry de Haas

Dutch-born Pierre and Corry de Haas and their five children arrived at Wacol Migrant Hostel on 17 January 1960. They left Nymegen, Holland on 11 December 1959. They sailed to Australia on the *SS Waterman* via the West Indies and Panama Canal. They lived in Wacol for close to two years and their youngest child was born there. While at Wacol, Corry wrote articles for the Dutch emigrant paper *Wereld Post* (World Post) which welcomed the article as little was known of the experiences in such centres.

Corry has written two books of her experiences, *A Place in the Sun*, deals with the trauma of emigration and *Room to Dance* tells of her experiences in Wacol Hostel.

A day to remember

Wacol, early December 1960.

I received an early message on the Hostel's intercom with a request to come to the office. I dropped what I was doing and quickly went over. On arrival I saw Mr Home, one of the hostel managers, waiting for me. After the usual "good morning" he came straight to the point.

"We have received a request from the Immigration Department for some of our children here to represent their country at the upcoming naturalisation ceremony at Brisbane City Hall; this on Australia Day, next year. It seems five hundred people have applied for citizenship so it will be a grand occasion. The Department decided to make this a memorable one and we have been asked to select five young girls from different European countries to present a bouquet of flowers to official guests on that day. We wonder if your little girl would like to take part?"

"I'm sure she would. It sounds wonderful." My heart was doing somersaults; this was such a surprise. "Thank you for thinking of her. She will be delighted."

"The children will wear the national costumes of their home-countries and Mrs Barbieri has offered to make them, so you don't have to worry about this, Mrs de Haas." Mrs Barbieri was the wife of our block supervisor. "All we ask you to do is teach Mona how to curtsy."

WACOL REMEMBERED

Country of Birth: **The Netherlands**

Date of Arrival in Australia: **16 January 1960**

WACOL CENTRE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION

271

ACCOMMODATION CHARGES CONTRACT WITH

WHEREAS I, **Petrus de HAAS** have requested the Commonwealth of Australia (hereinafter called "the Commonwealth") to provide accommodation by way of board, lodging and other services (including the use of certain articles the property of the Commonwealth) at the Immigrant Centre, Wacol, in the State of Queensland, for myself and for my dependants whose names are set out in Clause 5 of this Contract, which the Commonwealth has agreed to do upon and subject to the execution by me of this Contract:

NOW I in consideration of the premises HEREBY AGREE as follows:

- To pay to the Commonwealth the sum of **£9. 0. 6** for each week for which accommodation is provided, the first of such payments to be made at the expiration of seven days from the date hereof, or upon such later date as may be notified to me by the Director of the Wacol Centre.
- To pay, within such time as the Commonwealth by notice in writing to me shall direct the amount of all loss and damage of or to property of the Commonwealth by any of the persons accommodated as determined and assessed by the Commonwealth.
- Except where otherwise directed by the Commonwealth to make all payments under this Contract to a Receiver or Collector of Public Moneys in the Department of Immigration.
- In the event of any payment due under this Contract at any time remaining unpaid for a period longer than two weeks I HEREBY AUTHORISE DIRECT AND REQUEST My employer on each occasion on which such arrears shall occur to pay to the Department of Immigration upon the certificate and request of that Department such sum or sums (not exceeding on any occasion the total of arrears so certified as then existing) and at such rate or rates as the Commonwealth shall determine.

5. For the purposes of this contract, the persons accommodated are:—

Myself **Petrus de HAAS**
 And **Cornelia de HAAS (Wife)**
Petrus de HAAS (Son)
Monica de HAAS (Daughter)
BRIGITTA de HAAS (Daughter)
Simone de HAAS (Daughter)
Veronica de HAAS (Daughter)
 (Full names and relationship to be inserted)

Dated this **Seventeenth** day of **January** 19 **60**

SIGNED by the said

Petrus de HAAS
 in the presence of

Witness: *Mr. Barbieri*

I certify that the above document was signed by the above-named

Petrus de HAAS after the same had been read over to him in the **English** language by **Mr. Barbieri** and he had stated to the said **Mr. Barbieri** that he thoroughly understood the same.

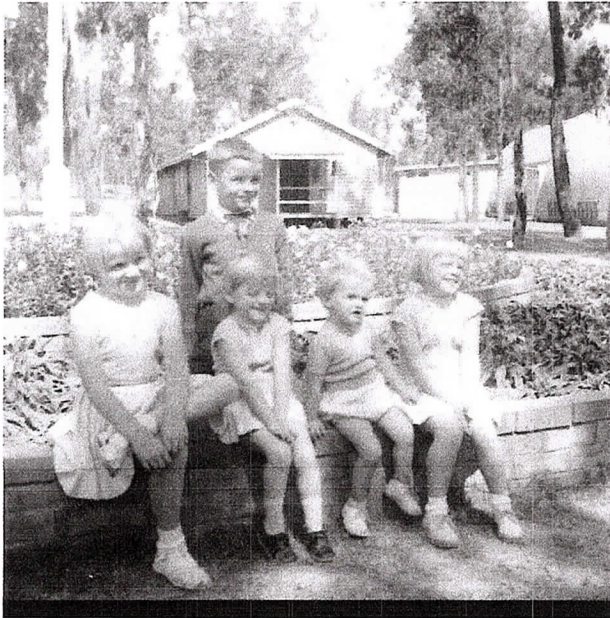
Wacol contract

For a minute there I was lost for words; what a wonderful experience this would be for my little girl. "Oh, that won't be a problem; thank you again. She'll jump at the chance, I'm sure." Meanwhile I thought, I may have to have some lessons in curtsying myself. We don't do a lot of this in Holland.

"Would you have a photograph of a Dutch national costume, so Mrs Barbieri can use that as an example?"

"We'll give you details about transport etc. closer to the date."

"Thank you, that'll be fine." After saying goodbye, I left, drifting home on cottonwool clouds. Couldn't wait to tell my husband and the children. There was a lot of excitement at the dinner table that night.



The de Haas children – September 1960

The following morning I went to see Mrs Barbieri. I'd found a black and white postcard from Volendam, a small harbour town in Holland where at the time people still dressed in national dress. After introductions – we had not met socially before – I handed her the card and asked, "Which other countries will be represented, do you know, Mrs Barbieri?"

"I think Germany, Finland, Hungary and Yugoslavia; I'll be busy during the holidays so you see, Mrs de Haas, the sooner I get the materials, the sooner I can start. " I explained the colours of the outfit and when all was arranged, she thanked me, saying, "Will you send Mona over after school so I can take her measurements?"

"Of course, and thank you for everything. If there is anything more, please let me know and I'll help where I can."

The weeks leading up to Australia Day bubbled with excitement, with costume fittings and practising curtsies, finding out about times and transport and trying to design a white lace cap, which gave us plenty of headaches. In the end we drew one on paper and it almost looked like

the real thing. Once the white silk and lace replaced this, it would be perfect. The only part missing were the beautiful gold broaches worn with the cap. Finally it was all done. One big surprise came next – we mothers were invited as well.

The big day arrived. When we walked to the Hostel office, we saw two comfortable Commonwealth cars waiting for us and we certainly travelled to Brisbane in style. Because of the many people to be naturalised, the ceremony would be held in the big concert hall of City Hall and when we arrived the hall was packed. We were led to our reserved places along the side and waited.

When the official guests arrived, we all stood and sang the national anthem, *God Save the Queen*. There were many invited guests, including the Queensland Governor, Sir Henry Abel Smith with his wife, Lady May, the Lord Mayor, Mr Groom and the Mayoress, several aldermen with their ladies and representatives of the Immigration Department. After everyone was seated, the children presented the flowers, Mona curtsied nicely and presented a beautiful bouquet to Lady May. I was so proud of her.

The other children followed with flowers for Mrs Groom and three other guests. It was a beautiful sight to see these small future Australians already taking part in a wonderful ceremony like this. All that practice had paid off. I was so proud of them and saw that pride reflected in the faces of the other mothers beside me.

With so many people present, the handing out of citizen papers took ages, but finally it was completed and a great roaring applause went up. A German-Australian gave thanks on behalf of the five hundred and forty-two new Australians. I was very teary and shivering with emotion.

A final word from the Lord Mayor ended the official ceremony. We were then escorted to a room where afternoon tea was waiting. When the official party arrived, we were introduced first to Sir Henry and Lady May, then to the Lord Mayor, Mrs Groom and other guests. Everyone was very friendly and easy to talk to. I was a bit nervous and stayed in the background, but they would have none



Brigitte and Simone at the kindergarten in Wacol

of this. We were invited to help ourselves to afternoon tea and were spoiled with lovely sandwiches and cakes. We had a wonderful time, with the children tucking in as well. There were very few extras in the hostel and they had not seen a feast like this for ages.

Later Sir Henry approached me and we talked at length about Holland. When I told him I had lived in Nymegen, he replied he had visited the town shortly after the liberation. He had seen the terrible damage to the city's centre. (An English pilot, on his way to Germany on a bombing raid, mistakenly dropped his load on our town instead of the Ruhr – Germany). Sir Henry asked me about its restoration and I assured him the centre was a city square called "Plein '44." (The year the accident occurred).

It was an afternoon we would never forget. Before we went home, the Lord Mayor took the children to another room where five lovely photo books of Brisbane lay waiting for them plus a beautiful badge as an extra memento.

Then it was time to go home and back to reality. I thanked our "hosts" and knew the children would never forget this. It had been a day to remember. We were driven home in the same comfortable cars and on our return to Wacol,

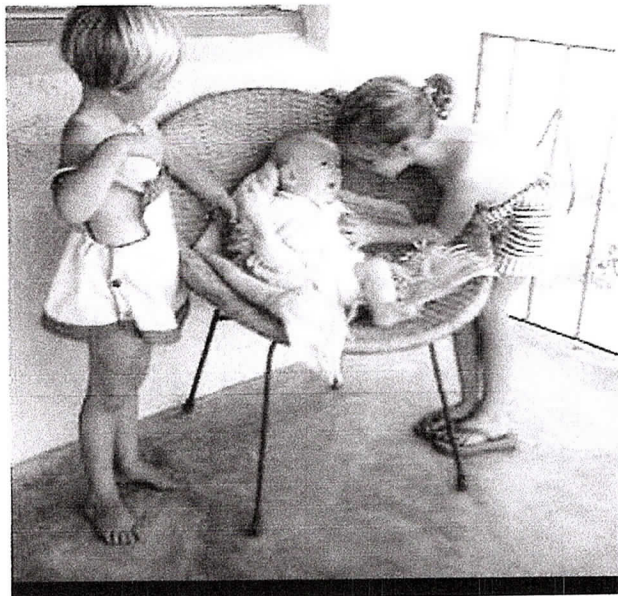
another surprise awaited the children. Both Mr Home and Mr McNamara stood waiting for us at the office and asked the children whether they had a good time, then told them "Well, girls you've done such a good job, we decided you can keep your costumes". And five little girls danced all the way home.

Sunnyboy

No history of Wacol Migrant Hostel is complete without a mention of "Sunnyboy". He was quite a character. No one knew where he came from but he was employed at the centre as a groundsman. And he was the answer to everyone's prayer.

When there was no wood for the coppers, you asked Sunnyboy. When there was no light in the showers, he made sure they were replaced.

When you couldn't get the copper going, he came to your rescue, "No worry, Missus." He went and got some kerosene and whoosh – we had take-off. No one knew what nationality he had. He knew very little English and when we met, his greeting was always the same, "How you like this beautiful sunny Australia, Missus?" Whenever



Welcome to the new baby born at Wacol



my children were with me, he used to pat them on the head and say, "How are my little clean-shaven ballerinas today?" or "All little ballerinas, eh Missus?"

He was always dressed the same, long rubber boots, navy vest and shorts. Always clean-shaven and with a tan half the female population in Holland would envy.

I don't know where he lived, but he must have been working in the centre for a long time.

Years later I took the train to Brisbane to do some shopping and who would enter the same carriage but Sunnyboy. I didn't know his real name so I addressed him as such. His face lit up, we shook hands and then talked and talked and a trip to Brisbane never went so quickly as on that day. I hope Sunnyboy, wherever he is will experience many sunny days, for he was a living advertisement for Queensland.



Morning tea at the hostel