

Country of Birth: **The Netherlands**Date of Arrival in Australia: **December 1957**

Theo Sloots Jnr

In 1957 travel to Australia by ship took four to six weeks, depending on which route was taken. We arrived in December in Sydney. Twenty-four hours later, after a tiring train journey, we arrived at the migrant reception centre in Wacol. "Het kamp" (the camp) as it became known, was the first of many culture shocks we were to experience.

We were assigned to two rooms in a metal hut, which resembled a water tank cut in half, and shared the building with two other families. Imagine our horror, as we first entered the bedroom to make the beds and were confronted with hundreds of cockroaches scurrying away from under the mattress. In fact, cockroaches and other insects of large proportions became a prominent feature in those early days. Certainly, those were the difficult times.

The food was foreign to our tastes (baked beans, vegemite), cramped living conditions in a strange environment and temperatures that regularly soared to the high thirties. We were homesick, and Christmas that year was very strange compared to previous years, most of us desperate for a cool place in the shade. However adjustments were made, my father found a job as a mechanic, and we boys were off to Wacol camp school.

Our teacher was from the Netherlands and this we felt gave us a distinct advantage. How wrong we were! The speaking of Dutch was at all times strictly forbidden and punished with "the cane". For us migrant children who could not speak a word, this was a very frightening and cruel experience. Be that as it may, the result was that most of us could speak reasonable English within three months or so, even though our first words were, "you b-----y b-----d".

We spent eight months in "het kamp" after which Theo senior in an attempt to provide better circumstances for the family, managed to secure a civilian job with the Australian army in Wallangarra. Accommodation was found five kilometres in a place called Lyra. That was not shown on any maps. So off we set again."

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