OLD TIES, NEW BEGINNINGS DUTCH WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA

Melbourne February 1997

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Old Ties, New Beginnings is published by

DutchCare Ltd.

P.O.Box 2415

Carrum Downs, 3201

First Published February 1997

Reprinted August 1997

ISBN: 0 646 30854 8

This publication is funded by:

and

The Consulate-General of the Netherlands, Melbourne

Printed by Print Mint, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank the following people for their support of this book.

Peter Haffenden of Melbourne's Living Museum of the West for his advice and who made it possible for Natascha Zinken, a Dutch student on placement, to work on the project.

Benoît Grüter for his wise council and belief in the importance of collecting women's stories.

My husband, Hans, and daughters, Lian and Marla, for being there when I needed them and for sharing the word processor with me.

Our sponsors the Australian Foundation for Culture & Humanities and The Consulate General of the Netherlands in Melbourne. Without their financial contribution this book would not have been published.

Most importantly the women who were willing to talk about their migration experiences.

Foreword

Growing up in the centre of Amsterdam in the 1950's I was aware of the enthusiasm of some people about the endless opportunities migration would bring. Not living far from Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, I still recollect the information sessions where optimistic pictures were painted about the boundless opportunities in a sunny, spacious Australia. Many of my father's patients related their great excitement about migration and this was often discussed at our dinner table. I never imagined that one day I would migrate with my own family to Australia.

Once married and after having lived in different countries in Europe, we decided that a move to a less populated continent like Australia would be a good idea. When my husband's work offered a transfer to Melbourne we did not hesitate and the four of us immigrated in early 1983.

One of the surprises was the contradiction between what people were telling me about "easy going, egalitarian" Australia where everybody had "equal opportunities", and what I observed. Education baffled me. I had come from a country where all schools are equally subsidised by central government and where there are no school uniforms. I found it hard to understand how a dual school education system (public/private) could create the same opportunities. Only 25% of children went to private schools, but they would take up 75% of university places.

School uniforms seemed to be seen as proof of this egalitarianism. However it is widely known that school colours and school tie not only identify the school, but also the economic status of the parents and children. It appeared to me that education was being bought and that private school education increased the child's opportunities.

While house hunting it was pointed out to us, that it was advisable to live in the southern or eastern suburbs since the west was a working class and industrial area. Too far out in any direction was not desirable either. Where you lived not only determined your access to public transport and services, but also defined your standing in society. The emphasis on home

ownership, the prestige this brought in comparison with rental and/or public housing seemed contradictory to the egalitarian ethos.

In an endeavour to find out more, I enrolled at Monash University, where I completed a BA majoring in Sociology. As one of my third year subjects I took Sociology of Migration. I was astounded by the way in which statistics about intermarriage and loss of language were used as a example of how Dutch migrants had successfully assimilated into the mainstream, although there did not seem to be a common understanding who or what this "mainstream" was. By that stage I had met only a handful of Dutch people, but felt that what I had noticed so far was very different indeed from assimilating. The importance placed on Dutch customs such as a handshake on meeting or being introduced, the celebration of birthdays where families and friends get together, the cosiness of the homes where great attention is paid to interior decoration, with pictures from Holland, Delft Blue and a old Dutch clock, as well as the food consumed, such as Dutch biscuits, "bitterballen", "croquetten" and "huzarensla" was for me a picture of people who lived their original culture. My interest was raised and I took it upon myself to write about the "invisible" Dutch.

During my research I made contact with a Dutch organisation, the Australian Dutch Community Service (ADCS) which was on the verge of folding. By then I had realised that ethnic specific services were essential. There seemed to be a lack of cultural sensitivity in service delivery by mainstream services which might explain why migrants made far less use of those services. Also when people get older they seem to recall more of their earlier life and often, due to ageing, lose the ability to speak English, returning to their language of origin. I felt that it was therefore essential that ethnic specific services were provided. As a result I offered my support to start a new organisation once the ADCS closed its doors. This is how I became a founding member of the Dutch Australian Community Advisory Bureau (DACAB) which later was renamed Dutch Australian Community Action (DACA) and is now part of a much larger organisation which provides ethno-specific aged care, Dutch Care Ltd.

In November 1993, DACA organised the first Australian Community Conference in Melbourne. One of the workshops dealt with Dutch Women in Australia. A recommendation was made: "That the Dutch Associations and Federations in each State of Australia encourage the recording of the

experiences of Dutch migrant women and establish an archive for these recordings".

As part of the organising committee and the facilitator of the women's workshop I took the initiative - with the assistance of the Dutch language media-to appeal to Dutch women to come forward and share their migration experiences. When I started to collect the stories I soon realised that the project was more time-consuming than I had imagined. I have a full time job as a community support worker, working with people with mental health problems and therefore little spare time. Fortunately Mieke Smid and later Pam Snelleman, both retired teachers, were able to join me as co-editors.

The women who responded came from Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland. Most stories are interviews which have been taped, transcribed and edited, but some are edited versions of letters. All the women involved had the opportunity to read, make changes and choose under which name they wanted their story published. However, to safeguard their privacy, we as editors, decided that all names and recognisable details be changed. The titles are reflections of recurrent themes during the interviews. On the whole, as few changes as possible have been made. We have aimed to let the stories speak for themselves, to keep them as authentic as possible and to maintain their unique Dutch flavour.

Why collect women's migration stories in the first place ?

In the 1950s and 60s thousands of Dutch women migrated to Australia. They came after having lived through the Second World War which had left the Netherlands in economic disarray, with high unemployment, a housing shortage and in the background the threat of another war, this time with the Soviet Union.

The women migrated to Australia at different stages in their lives: some were engaged to be married, some were young brides, while others had established families. They migrated for a variety of reasons. Some were keen to seek adventure, others were escaping a housing shortage, or wanting to improve their economic status. Those who had children wanted to give them a better future. All appeared to be willing to do anything to

make the move to Australia work. None had any idea what to expect or what leaving behind their family and culture of origin would mean. Not one expected to see their relatives and home country ever again.

Dutch women are also part of a migrant group which has often been called the "invisible" Dutch. As both Dutch and Australian Governments actively promoted assimilation, Dutch migrants, more than any other ethnic group, did their utmost to comply. It was not acknowledged until the 1970's, when the Australian government's policy changed to multiculturalism, that first generation migrants (new settlers) did not assimilate, but adapted to the mainstream culture. It seems to me that, in reality, within their homes migrants live their own culture, and only in public do they adapt to the Australian way of life. In general it is the women who play the most important role in maintaining the original language and customs. Women often dedicated their lives to their families, they were the nurturers, reared the children, kept the families together, upheld Dutch traditions and customs and created a "Dutch" home life. Often they would speak Dutch with their children and partners. But once the children started school they learned English and no longer responded to their parents in Dutch. Moreover, teachers often indicated that it would be to the children's disadvantage to continue to speak Dutch at home.

Regardless of the worldwide recognition that first generation migrants (new settlers) cannot and do not assimilate but adapt to their new environment, the resurgence of assimilationist attitudes and the push for the negation of multiculturalism by some in the community, is of great concern. It denies the fact that all migrants have helped to shape and are still contributing to the way this country is developing. Potentially, a push towards mainstreaming means that ethnic specific services are superfluous, denying people - who by an active immigration policy have been invited to come here - the services to which they are entitled.

There is a lack of written material about the experience of female migrants. Few life experiences have been recorded and little acknowledgment has been given to the contribution women have made in the settlement process. Women's stories have remained largely unseen and unspoken. Yet without women few men would have survived. While men went to work, the women looked after the physical and emotional welfare of their families, and often had to supplement the family income as well.

The qualifications of these women were not recognised and they were automatically earmarked for cleaning, housekeeping or factory jobs. The many sacrifices made for husbands and children were largely unrecognised, while they ignored their own needs and wishes.

All the women who participated in this project have a story to tell, and to some extent their stories are tales of life struggles which many women experience, and are not confined to one ethnic group. What gives the stories a profoundly different flavour is that they occurred in the context of an unfamiliar culture, with little or no knowledge of Australian customs, laws, language and without support from relative and friends.

This collection of stories is not only a part of the history of Australia, but also a celebration of courage and a validation of the contribution migrant women have made to this country.

Elly Zierke

By way of introduction

“Old ties, new beginnings” presents the stories of twenty Dutch-Australian women who migrated along with thousands of Dutch and other post-war migrants to Australia during the 1950's and 60's. Very little is known about those Dutch women who settled in Australia. Their "homesickness"is sometimes mentioned and blamed for "unsuccessful" or return migration to the Netherlands (Beijer et al 1961, Blauw and Elich 1984, and Hofstede 1964). Why did they come in the first place, and why did they mostly stay? What was it like for these women to start new lives in an unknown country on the other side of the world? And how has life been for them in Australia? These stories go some way to answering such questions.

The literature on Dutch migration to Australia has generally stressed Dutch

"invisibility" and assimilation (*cf* Gruter and Stracke 1995) and the Dutch migration experience is reduced to a non-event or an impediment to adjustment and integration into the wider Australian society. These women's personal and often moving accounts help fill out the picture of Dutch migration and settlement in Australia. They also broaden our understanding of migration and point to how life-changing and life-long the migration experience can be.

This introduction sets out to place the stories in their wider social and historic context. Describing the crucial but "invisible" role played by women in Dutch family migration to Australia, it also identifies some of the personal consequences and dilemmas associated with migration. The last section presents a brief description of the women and some themes and ideas conveyed by their stories.

Dutch family' migration to Australia

The popular image of the hardworking, "individualistic" Dutchman suggests that Dutch migration was somehow a matter of individual choice and that Dutch migrants were mainly men[1]. The reality is that some 150,000 Dutch left the Netherlands during the 1950's largely as a result of government policies and programs designed to encourage their migration. Similarly, Dutch migrants were predominantly government assisted and arrived in

family groups rather as individuals[2]. Another characteristic of Dutch migration is their relatively high rate of return migration with around one third of Dutch migrants leaving Australia (Harvey 1978, *cf* Neiwenhuysen 1995).

Both the Dutch and Australian governments saw Dutch migration as a solution to their respective domestic population and workforce problems, and they negotiated a series of assisted migration schemes to stimulate and control the flow of Dutch migrants to Australia. While Australia was accustomed to 'paying' for the people it wanted, the Netherlands did not have a tradition of assisted migration. On the contrary, emigration was defined as a personal matter and not very 'commendable' at that (Hofstede 1964, Lucas 1955). However, the Dutch government saw emigration as a permanent solution to its population problems and was prepared to 'pay' certain people identified as 'surplus' to the economy (farmer labourers, unemployed people, unskilled workers) to leave. In this context 'return' imigration represented a failure of government policy (Hofstede 1964). Whatever else happened, Dutch migrants were not to return as "failed" migrants; they were to stay where they went. Similarly, while Australia traditionally relied on assisted migration to attract migrants to its shores, until the 1950's this was meant only for British settlers when Australia turned to post-war Europe for population and skilled workers. As northern Europeans the Dutch were considered a preferred source of population, a hierarchy which was reflected in the preferential terms offered them compared with "darker" migrant groups (Jupp 1966).

Negotiations between the two governments centred on skill categories and Dutchmen as workers, with women mentioned only as 'dependents' or as members of family units (Walker-Birckhead 1988). While family migration may not have been directly discussed, it was certainly a refinement or improvement on existing Dutch and Australian migration policies; and assisted passage and housing, and the promise of a better 'future' for children were strong incentives. In post-war Holland with its severe housing shortages and uncertainty about the immediate future, these would have been very attractive. From Australia's perspective, 'large' Dutch families (and the larger, the better) offered a 'blonde' alternative to the families of 'darker' and less desirable migrant groups. The Dutch government saw family migration as an effective means of shedding excess population. In the 'rationalistic' language of "Emigrate", the official mouthpiece for Dutch

emigration policies during the 1950's, family migration meant that more people left at a time or per unit. Family emigration also offered a more permanent solution to Dutch population problems; men with families being more tied down and less likely to return to the Netherlands than single men. Children leaving with families was also considered desirable because it offered a solution for future as well as present unemployment problems (Hofstede 1964: 65).

Dutch migration to Australia was predominantly Catholic[3]. One reason was that the Church saw Australia with its well established system of Catholic parishes and schools as a good destination where Catholics could continue to practise their faith (Hofstede 1964: 125). The Dutch government denied responsibility for the consequences of its emigration programs, defining emigration as an individual matter. Indeed, their interest effectively ceased "as soon as the emigrant (had) been properly delivered in his new country" (Hofstede 1964 : 94). The widely accepted view in the Netherlands seems to have been that emigrants were "people with little social participation" and therefore relatively unaffected by leaving their families and country behind (Hofstede 1964: 107). The churches on the other hand took a broader view of emigration and their responsibility to emigrants, sending clergy to immigration countries to minister to the spiritual and welfare needs of new migrants and expressing concern that emigration be a voluntary act and not the result of government pressure or propaganda.

Nevertheless, despite these ambiguities, the Catholic Church remained strongly committed to Catholic migration as a solution to Dutch population problems. It was also strongly committed to Catholic family migration in the belief that migrants' (*ie* men's) spiritual welfare would be better protected if they were married rather than single (Kampschoer 1954). Women were seen as more tied to their immediate environment, more 'naturally' opposed to emigration and less 'emigration minded' than men. As the Church saw it, the task then was to redefine migration as a worthwhile, praiseworthy activity for Catholic women as well as men (*cf* Van Campen 1954).

Again, it was Dutch women's presence that was deemed crucial to the success of family emigration policies, be they secular or religious. It was as if emigration heightened rather than detracted from the Dutch housewife's

traditional bourgeois virtues. This situation highlights another "emotional" side of family emigration which is less easily resolved. For however much family migration might benefit the nation or the Church, family migration also meant the breaking up of families, of daughters leaving mothers and grandchildren being taken away from grandparents.

Dutch women were caught up in a dilemma: As traditional homemakers and "moral centre(s) of their families" (Beijer et al 1961: 312) their role as migrants was to accompany Dutch workers and children to Australia, and make "gezellig" homes for their families in the various reception centres, hostels, garages, caravans and houses they were to live in. And as these stories reveal, this was no easy task given the difficult conditions in which many women found themselves. But more than this, by building these Dutch homes, women helped to ensure that their families stayed in Australia and did not return to the Netherlands: which was the ultimate aim of Dutch and Australian emigration policies. The problem then is that by doing their duty as wives and migrants and ensuring the success of family emigration policies, Dutch women became simultaneously homemakers and home breakers.

The women and their stories:

Last year I won first prize with a sampler representing our 50 year long marriage. It shows the different houses I lived in: in Antwerp (Belgium), Leiden (Holland) and Adelaide (Australia). Also the names of our children and nine grandchildren and pictures of the different places where they live.

(Henriette, "*My creativity saved the day.*")

The family has always been the most important thing in my life. It was my world and I loved it. When I look back I can only say that if I had known what it was like to emigrate, I would never have left Holland, regardless of the hardships we were enduring at that time.

(Katrina, "*In the end you belong to neither country*.")

Who are telling the stories? First, they are twenty women who wanted to share their migration stories and put them "on the record". The stories are testimonials to hard work, endurance and survival against the odds. They

are also about good luck, great adventure, and how much the women themselves have learned from all those experiences. To a very large extent they are about family. Yet, while their stories have similarities and points in common, the actual details and viewpoints are very individual. In other words, there is no average or typical story here, nor are these women somehow speaking for Dutch migrants generally. They are speaking instead for themselves.

Like most Dutch who migrated to Australia, they are an older group. Most are in their sixties; however, there is a considerable age range with the youngest in their fifties and the oldest in their mid seventies. The majority migrated in the early 1950's, which were the peak years for Dutch migration to Australia. Martina ("*Pictures in my mind*") was the first to arrive in 1949 with her husband and young child, before the onset of organised migration from the Netherlands, when only small numbers of Dutch were migrating to Australia. They were privately sponsored and unlike later migrants did not stay in a migrant camp. Her memories are of war-time Holland, travelling by ship with a sick baby, the ready availability of work during those years, and sightseeing in Melbourne. The last was Leonie ("*One hardly knows what it's going to be like to be a migrant*"). She arrived with a husband and two young children in 1969 when government assisted passages to Australia were effectively over. They travelled by plane instead of boat, and their first home was a migrant reception centre. Her first memories are of Nissen huts and the strangeness of the Australian bush.

Despite their differences, these women's stories are suggestive of a shared migration experience. Both "followed" or came to Australia for their 'husbands' sakes (for work, because of personal problems). Compared with their husbands, they describe themselves as being very settled in the Netherlands with close families and jobs they liked. That is, if it had been up to them, they would not have migrated in the first place. Like many migrants, their qualifications were not recognised and they initially exchanged professional jobs for more menial positions in Australia as cleaners. Both women describe a piercing homesickness in the early days which they have overcome but which never entirely goes away. Leonie describes:

I had left my whole support network behind, the loss of friends and relatives was truly painful. There were no neighbours who would drop in for a cup of coffee and a chat. These were tremendous losses for me, causing much pain and anguish, but slowly the pain started to ease because I said to myself: If you want to stay here, you have to make something of it'.

There is also a sense of belonging in several places at once or of not really belonging anywhere at all. As Martina says: "*the homesickness remains. One is always torn between one's country of birth and one's new country*". Nevertheless, they managed somehow to be outward looking and "*make something*" of their lives in Australia -making homes, raising their children and improving their lives generally.

All the women here are mothers and grandmothers. On the whole they are a fertile group with an average of five children each. Again, there is considerable diversity with several having only one or two children and others ten or more children. In terms of marital status, about half of the women are still married, almost as many are widows (which is not surprising given the age of this group) and several are divorced.

As well as being homemakers, most women have worked outside the home- as cleaners, nurses, and in shops and small businesses. Such jobs were attractive as they tended to be part-time or involving shiftwork, and could be fitted around their families' needs. On the other hand, they involved hard physical work, were generally poorly paid, and involved long (paid and unpaid) working days. In "*Living in the land of promise and new opportunities* ", Petra describes how she was left alone after her husband's sudden death, with no family support to raise four young children:

I bought a delicatessen shop... That way we could live behind and above the shop, plus the children could come home from school and I would be there, so they did not have to be by themselves... Our youngest was only six weeks old when I started the shop. I hid him from the customers behind a wall of biscuit tins initially in a playpen then in a high chair.

The shop was open six days a week from seven in the morning until seven at night. She could not afford much help and worked "*day and night*" in the

shop, and doing housework and cooking late at night. Now after thirty years of hard work, she is enjoying a well earned retirement with her family and playing golf.

I have just held my day-old grand daughter in my arms. She is the second generation Australian of Dutch descent.

This is how Tieneke opens "*I had dreams of this country...*". These stories cover a great span of time from the present to thirty years ago or more, when they first left the Netherlands. It is a very long time, almost a lifetime ago. Most were young wives and mothers when they came to Australia, now they are grandmothers or even great-grandmothers. Parents have died, marriages survived or finished, businesses flourished or failed, and children grown up, and some have died. One could say these women have simply lived their lives, but somehow it is all linked to that single event and its unforeseen consequences. All agree that their lives have been changed by migration. The question is, how? Leonie sums it up this way:"*If we had stayed in Holland my life would have turned out entirely different - I think*."

Memories of the early days - arriving in Melbourne during a heatwave, a drunken man singing "Waltzing Matilda"; travelling with three children and a baby on your lap; the taste of pumpkin, mashed potatoes and chops - are detailed, vivid and almost palpable. After all, those were significant, life changing times - when the full implications of migration hit people. Migrating to Australia was more an idea, a dream, an "*adventure*". Then the reality started to seep in, what would it all mean, for them and their families?

It was all very exciting, a real adventure, but once the boat sailed the reality of it all dawned on me and I suddenly started to ask myself what I was doing!

*(*Margreet*, "I never lost my optimism, nor regretted that I came)*

"*To be a migrant is to step into a territory unknown.*" Most overwhelming perhaps of all was the sense of aloneness, of being alone and unknown in a very big country.

In "*Australia has a character all its own...*" Ellen describes her feelings this way:

Every Saturday morning I would get up early to make sure that our little cabin was clean and tidy, and then stand at the door waiting for [the priest] to come over and say hello', but he never did. I felt terrible because I realised that in Australia, I was a nobody, while back at home I was a member of a respected family. Once I went shopping in the city and I walked among all those people and I thought if there was only one person who would say, Hello, Ellen, how are you?'But there was no one there and I felt so very lonely.

But these stories also convey how very exciting migration has been. They were young when they arrived in Australia, and there was a certain freedom and optimism in leaving the "*smallness*" and certainties of life in the Netherlands for new friends and futures in Australia. For example, in "*Wappan*..." Janneke describes living in a shearing shed while her husband worked as a rabbit-catcher. In practical terms this must have been difficult for a mother with young children, yet she says it was "*a nice, uncluttered and breezily free life and no hardship*." Not only did Janneke cope, she remembers thoroughly enjoying those months at Wappan.

It all depends how you look at it. Such an experience would have been unimaginable beforehand; or the stuff of migration horror stories back in Holland. These stories are full of surprises and unexpected situations which are a consequence of migration and which changed their lives and them as individuals too. As much as being about life in Australia, these stories are journeys of self discovery where women discover capacities and aspects of themselves they did not know they possessed. In the finish, it is this realisation which makes their stories and the migration experience itself so mysterious and so precious.

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"LIVING IN THE LAND OF PROMISE AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES"

by Petra,

Victoria

My husband and I married young. By the time we had two children, a three year old and a six month old baby, we decided to seek a new life for ourselves in a new land. My husband had a small greengrocery in Holland, but times were tough after the war. We decided on Australia, to raise our living standards. So we packed everything up and sailed to Australia. It was a long trip to the lucky country, taking five weeks. When we arrived we were taken to a reception centre in Bonegilla for the first week, then were encouraged to find a home.

In a southern suburb of Melbourne, on Port Philip Bay, we discovered a magnificent old house. It was built in an era when homes had servants who were summoned by bell pulls which were suspended throughout the house.

My husband worked in a nursery close by. One day we found out that there were free English classes held at a State School in the vicinity. For the first class we arranged for a neighbour to baby sit and we set off to the station to take the train and then walk to the school, taking 45 minutes altogether. In class the teacher asked us where we lived. When she found out our address, we discovered that my husband actually worked next door. We were all amused. If we had simply walked through the garden where my husband worked, we would have reached the school in five minutes. Anyone could have made that mistake!

I used to walk to the shops regularly with the pram and people looked me up and down all the time. So I thought next time I'd better dress up a little in case I was not properly dressed the first time. But the same thing happened again. After about three or four weeks I finally

plucked up enough courage to ask the lady over the road why people were staring at me all the time. Then she explained that they knew that we were Dutch and they expected us to wear Dutch national dress and clogs !

The same lady invited us for a party one night. " Just bring a plate" she said. " Gee, they must be poor," I said to my husband, "that their guests have to bring their own crockery." We did not realise that we were supposed to bring something to eat ! [It is not customary in Holland to bring food or drinks to a party: Ed.] In those days when you went to parties there was only beer to drink, both for men and women. We did not know the customs then, so we didn't bring anything. One arrived at 8 pm and then did not eat a thing until about 11 or 11.30 pm. Then the table was laden with hot and cold food and sweets [To serve supper is unknown in Holland, one serves fingerfood continuously during a party: Ed.]. But in between times people just drank and drank and when we were ready to go home, supper was served. It was all so different from Holland.

I missed my family in Holland. They were against us going to Australia, so you became determined to prove that they were wrong and we were right and that we could make it here. You never told them that it was difficult and often lonely, especially after my husband died. But that happened later.

In the beginning, one didn't know anybody, or the language, and my husband was at work while I was alone and trying to assimilate.

We started to save for a block of land, because my husband wanted to grow flowers for himself, although he never grew flowers in Holland. We bought a block of land, financing it with another couple and a bank loan. There was an old house on the land as well, so we shared it with the other couple; they on one side and we on the other. During this time I had a daughter, our third. But when I was expecting our fourth child a few years later, my husband was hit with severe headaches and collapsed. I took him to the Alfred Hospital where he was operated on and a tumour was discovered. He died during the operation. I couldn't believe it, he'd never been ill, just a headache for three days. His health had suffered a great deal, because years before he had been in a concentration camp, when still in his late teens.

After my husband's death I tried to get some form of pension from Holland, but as an Australian citizen I was not entitled to anything from the Dutch Government. I was forty-one at the time with three young children, expecting a fourth and we'd had the business for six years. I was supposed to continue the business and do half of the fields on my own, but of course that proved to be impossible. In the beginning friends helped me out, but I had to find something else and I sold my part of the business, and that way we could pay off our debts.

Somebody suggested I rent a big house and then take boarders, but you need a lot of rooms for that in order to make a living. Instead I bought a delicatessen shop. That way we could live behind and above the shop, plus the children could come home from school and I would be there, so that they did not have to be by themselves. My son, our youngest, was only six weeks old when I started the shop. I hid him from the customers behind a wall of biscuit tins, initially in a playpen, then in a high chair.

I did not have much experience running a business other than my parents in Holland who ran a shop. But I seldom helped out there. However, you learn fast when you have to. I know I took a big risk, but I did not want a milk bar, because that meant a seven-day work-week. With the delicatessen shop, I was open six days per week, leaving me one day a week to spend with the children. The man from whom I took over the shop told some neighbouring shopkeepers that he had sold his business to a widow with four children. "I give her three to six months," he'd said " and then she will be broke". He had only been in the business two and a half years. Everybody said that it would be too much for me and too difficult. Sometimes it's good that people tell you these things because it makes you more determined.

My family in Holland were constantly saying "Come back" but you don't go back with four children. Over there everyone had his own family to deal with. The only solution was to make my own way. We had already been in Australia for ten years when my husband died. Two of our children were born here, while the other two were so little when we arrived that they couldn't remember anything about Holland. Originally we spoke Dutch at home, but after I started with the shop I spoke English all day. And when I asked the children something in Dutch, they answered me in English. In the

end I was too tired to concentrate on Dutch and it slowly slipped away from me.

I had the shop for twelve years. I cooked my own corned beef and pork for the shop, working in the kitchen at night when the shop was shut and the kids asleep. I had help in the shop after nine in the morning, but I opened at seven o'clock when the bread and milk was delivered. In those days most shops closed at five thirty pm, but I stayed open till half past six or seven o'clock. In the summer evenings I'd be the only one open and I would sell a lot of cold meat. Sometimes I would sell more between seven and nine am and five and seven pm than I would during the day when I had help. The children were very good and the oldest ones would help out as much as they could. I had to wean the baby and bottle feed him because I had no time for breastfeeding.

When the older children came home at lunchtime they all helped out, they did a lot for me. Our eldest was twelve then. I myself worked day and night. The lady from the newsagent used to say that she knew that I was hanging out the washing when she saw our light on in the backyard at ten or eleven at night. I did not have any help in the house, but sometimes I had a lady working part-time in the shop during the lunchtime rush hour. I couldn't afford to pay someone to stay more than a few hours, there were always bills to pay; the phone and electricity bills, the rent and of course we had to pay off our loan as well. After paying for our day-to- day household expenses and food for the children as well as the bank loan, there wasn't any money left. It had not been difficult to borrow money from the ANZ Bank, they were very good to me. I had only taken over the goodwill of the business, the building was rented. After a while I started to stock things from Rubens, the Dutch wholesaler, as well as stocking continental items, something very new at that time.

I had the shop for twelve years, but in the end I was so tired that the doctor told me to sell the business, otherwise I would have been in a coffin in six months. I could not eat or sleep any more. The doctor wanted to give me a prescription for tablets, but I was so angry that I walked out of his surgery. The next morning he rang to say that the children could come over to get the prescription and that I should think things over. At first I thought that it would make a difference if we were not living at the back of the shop any more. I put a deposit on a house just around the corner, but after six

months I realised that that wasn't any good either, so I put the business on the market.

It was just the right time, because not long afterwards a supermarket opened. With the money from the sale of the shop I could put a little toward paying off the house. But we still had to live.

Within six months my shop had been closed by the new owners.

Somebody suggested to try to find a job in the hospital of the Association for the Blind, just five minutes away from where we lived. After applying for a position, the Matron said: "If you can run a shop and raise four children single handedly you are more qualified than any of the girls working at the Home now." So I asked her when I had to start work, stating that I wanted weekends off because of the children. I had to work one day each weekend however, so I worked on Saturday and had Sundays and Mondays off. I had never had two days off before in my life!

Work started at 7 am with half an hour for breakfast at 9 am. At lunch time I could run home and be back again in time. My youngest child began school nearby, so I could be reached easily. We were thoroughly trained at the Home: for example we had to go onto the road blindfolded to make us aware of what it is like to be blind. We were taught always to put the patient's food in the same place, and when taking people to the dining room always to guide them to the same side of the chair. Then they feel where the table is and the back of the chair and are able to sit down themselves.

I worked there for twelve years and then I became too tired and had to retire. I play golf now, something I learned late in life and I enjoy it. I am Treasurer of a big golf club and also do "Meals on Wheels." There is something happening every day, like today's meeting at the golf club. What I missed out on for thirty years of working constantly, I really make up now.

My four children are all in Australia: two are married with four children each. One daughter who is not married lives close by and my youngest son is still at home. He was an electrician at first and travelled a lot, but then he went back to study at RMIT for two years. Now he studies at Monash University. All my children received an above average education. When the

children grew up I found a new social circle. When I made Australian friends they knew me as a widow.

One fine March afternoon, a close Dutch friend invited me over. Together we went to the Holland Festival in Dandenong. To my great surprise I received a prize: a trip to Holland ! I couldn't believe it ! My friend had written a story about my life and the hard times women migrants had when emigrating to a new country. That was in 1985, the second time I went back to Holland. The first time I took the two youngest children. At that time I had already been away from Holland for twenty years. Everything seemed so small and close together, like a doll's house. I missed the wide open spaces. Everyone wanted to know if I would like to settle in Holland again, but I said "No, I like it for a holiday but I would not like to live here any more." One outgrows the Dutch way of life, everything is so small and everyone knows everyone's business. Besides, so much had happened in my life in Australia and it had been so different from that of my relatives in Holland.

Here I have my children, grandchildren and my golf. When I first started playing, one of my sons gave me five lessons as a present.

I thought :" I had better make use of this" and I never looked back. The children sometimes say: "It's the worst present we could have given you; you're never home any more." But I love a game of golf and play eighteen holes now, even though I had a hip and knee-replacement two years ago. You'll never grow old if you keep moving.

"I HAD DREAMS OF THIS COUNTRY, DREAMS ABOUT WORKING IN THE OUTBACK

by Tieneke

Victoria

I have just held my day-old grand daughter in my arms. She is second generation Australian, of Dutch descent.

It was 1961 when it all started. I decided to go to Australia as a 26 year old nurse. I had graduated in general and psychiatric nursing and was working in a hospital. I lived on my own in hospital accommodation. The adventure of migration really appealed to me. I had dreams of this country and I had read everything I could find about it. Dreams about working in the outback on stations and isolated communities. I also dreamed about driving a M.G. sports car! In 1996 I still have not got my sports car and have been in the outback , but as a tourist.

And this is how it all happened.

I had planned to go to Perth, but on the ship I met this wonderful man who was going to Adelaide so I changed plans and decided to make Adelaide my destination.

The "Waterman" (the ship I came with) anchored in the Port of Melbourne. A buzzing place with lots of people welcoming relatives. Most emigrants for Victoria were brought by train to the camp at Bonegilla near Albury. People for South Australia were also brought to the railway station. It was mid-morning and we had to wait for the interstate train till 8 'o clock that night. The train ride was somewhat uncomfortable on hard wooden benches for 12 hours. A drunken man sang "Waltzing Matilda" nearly all the way. We could not enjoy the landscape as it was dark for most of the trip. Sleeping was really difficult so we would lean against each other. There was no food on board and as far as I remember, once, when the train stopped, we were able to buy some food at the station. We got off at a small station where a

bus was waiting to bring us to the camp in Woodside S. Australia. This turned out to be an old army-camp. We lived in barracks, got our linen from a central post and it seemed a bit like a prison. I shared a room with another woman and all facilities were shared too. It was rather strange to have to go outside for your bath. There were mainly Dutch people in the camp and we all had to get used to uncomfortable living. The food from the general kitchen was quite different from what we were used to. There was mashed pumpkin and mashed potatoes and chops, it wasn't very tasty and tasted all the same. For breakfast we ate hard porridge which was not appetising.

We made many lasting friendships in the camp. Anyway the area was beautiful. Hilly country, animals which were new to us. Mosquitoes like helicopters and frightening big spiders.

Then the job hunt started. On a bus to Adelaide which took approximately 1 hour. Riding on the bus was sometimes scary. Winding roads with steep climbs and descents [So different from the flat Dutch landscape: Ed.]. In Adelaide we had help from the Embassy. They provided us with plenty of information and places to get employment.

The city of Adelaide impressed me. Beautiful old buildings, lots of impressive churches. Round the inner city were parks with sports fields and lots of trees and green lawns. The suburbs were strange, especially the car sales-yards with all the decoration of flags. All the houses on separate blocks of land and shops with verandahs [In Holland cities are far more condensed. Most people live either in flats or townhouses and there are few free standing houses in cities: Ed.]. It looked like the Wild West to me.

I found work at the Northfield Psychiatric Hospital. I had a room in the staff building. It was good to leave the camp where I had stayed for about 2 weeks. It was very lonely because not many nurses lived in the nursing quarters and as soon as they were off duty they would go out with their friends. My knowledge of the language and the medical terminology was not adequate to work as a qualified nurse , so I started as a first year student. I had school English but that was really not enough to communicate well.

I learned a bit there, but it was a very isolated place. I was a qualified psychiatric nurse and the way they worked here was different. The way they treated their patients was quite oldfashioned. At that stage they were behind with treatment methods. Public transport was at least an hour's walk and only twice a day there was a bus to Northfield, then on the outskirts of Adelaide, where I could catch public transport into the city.

The man whom I met on the ship and who would become my husband worked on the opposite side of the city. We did not see much of each other, but we stayed in touch. Since we were both lonely, we decided to get married. He was a soccer player in Holland and the Dutch soccer club was always on the look-out for fresh players from Holland. They found out about him pretty quickly and he joined the club. Through the soccer club "Oranje" we met this wonderful couple and made many other friends. They helped us a lot and have done so for years. Now in their eighties, they remain our best friends. They were witnesses at our wedding. We went to the Registry Office in the city and asked when they could fit us in. Well, came the reply, in six weeks time or this afternoon, so we made a quick decision and took the afternoon. Not everything went smoothly at the ceremony. We had trouble with repeating the wedding vows, for at the weddings where we had been in Holland this was not done. We were taken by surprise, but somehow we managed and got through the ceremony all right.

We lived first in a private boarding house where we had one room and did not have much privacy. We shared the house with two drunks and another person.

Later that year we rented a flat near my husband's work, but too far away for mine. I resigned and found work for a few nights a week in a local nursing home.

In the next 15 years I did not work in the nursing profession. We had our family, four children in all. We first only spoke Dutch with our children, but as soon as they went to school we spoke more and more English and so my English improved as well. This was a happy but sometimes difficult time, as over all these years money was in short supply. We had some personal tragedies. Our eldest daughter had a congenital heart disease and died at the age of seven. That was hard, but people were very supportive.

When I came to Australia I knew that I had a cousin somewhere but did not have an address. We were here for about 2 years when she contacted us. She had found out about us via relatives in Holland. She lived in Victoria on a dairy farm and we visited her during the holidays. It looked good, my husband loved it on the farm and I did not mind being a farmer's wife. After a few years in Adelaide we decided to go to Victoria and try our hand at dairy farming. We packed all our stuff in the car and a trailer and then there was no more space for the three children and me. So we took the train to Melbourne. We lived for a short while in Melbourne, my husband doing all sorts of jobs while we were looking for a share-farm. We found a place in the Goulburn Valley. Entering the Valley there were beautiful green paddocks in contrast with the area through which we had travelled. It was irrigation country, it all looked so fresh. In the following eight years we worked on different dairy farms, milking cows, rearing calves, irrigating paddocks etc. Every time we moved, we moved to a better farm.

Our children loved the country and we had a good life. The local schools were very good. First I took them to school by car, later they would take the school bus.

Then after those farming years I decided to do a refresher course in nursing. Many things had changed. My terminology was up to scratch now, but there were so many new developments in the health industry. After three months of working and studying I was able to register as a general nurse in 1979. I worked as a geriatric nurse in the next town. When there was a vacancy in the place where we lived, I applied for the job and got it. No more travelling, that was wonderful. I worked there till 1992 and then called it a day.

Our children have found their own way, they all have done well. Once they left, the money I earned was not a necessity any more, so I was able to stop working.

When I came here I left my two sisters and father behind. We were not a close- knit family and because I already lived on my own I did not miss them much. We always kept in contact, first by letter, later also by telephone. There were so many new things to get used to. Everything was so different. The cities, the way of life, the pubs which closed at six pm and

where the men would go after work and drink as much as possible before closing time [It was not customary for Dutchmen to go to the pub after work and a six pm. closing time for pubs was unheard of : Ed.]. The way the houses were decorated. All the chairs against the walls and a table in the middle and nothing else [The Dutch take great pride in making their home cosy, taking great pains with interior-decorating: Ed.]. So many different customs, for example at a party all the men on one side of the room, the women on the other. You would dance and then return to your own group. There was hardly any mixing between the sexes. All very foreign to us.

When I look back I have no regrets that I took on the adventure to travel to another continent. It has been a good life and now I enjoy being at home and spend my time gardening and do some charity work. I work as a friendly visitor, help with "Meals on Wheels" and enjoy being a grandmother of four beautiful girls whom I can spoil as much as I like.

BRIDE BY PROXY.

by Jenny,

Victoria

My fiance wanted to migrate to Australia and so did I. However my future father-in-law felt that my fiance should go first in order to find out how things were before I joined him. So I stayed behind in Holland and promised to send him the money for his fare back if things did not work out. After he had been in Australia for sixteen months, we were married by proxy in a Registry Office, his brother was the "stand-in" bridegroom. That was on the 9th of June 1952 and I left for Australia in August. All I wanted was to be with my husband !

It was all a great adventure. On the boat I teamed up with five other girls who were on their way to join their husbands. We arrived on the 16th of September 1952 and a church-wedding was arranged for the 18th of September. In those days it was not respectable to live together before one was properly married, and for Catholics only a church-wedding was valid. The service was conducted by a Dutch priest, in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne. One of the girls I travelled with on the boat got married on the 17th and we acted as witnesses for each other on those two days. We stayed in contact. Much later my husband told me that, when he left Holland in 1951, he thought that he would never see me again. But I had given him my word and I stuck to it.

Because I was 24 years old when I left and the youngest at home, it was quite something for Mum and Dad to let me go. We were fortunate, however, because Mum and Dad stayed with us for 18 months in 1963 and so did my father-in-law. But in the beginning I was very homesick and I could have crawled back to Holland. I had absolutely no relatives here while I was used to a family with three sisters and two brothers. I missed them terribly, especially on Sundays; during the week things weren't too bad.

My husband, who was a baker by trade, had found work in a bakery in country Victoria and through his boss we got a house. It was a fully furnished four bedroom house, and little by little we bought all the furniture in it, paying it off with the rent.- Quite a few single fellows and also young married couples were looking for board and/or a roof over their heads. Somebody from the Good Neighbourhood Council, an institution which tried to be helpful to new arrivals, knew us and the house. He used to say to these home-seekers: " Go to Jenny and Karel, they have room and they'll be only too pleased to help you." But after having been separated for 16 months, we liked to be on our own. -However, after six weeks we relented and took in our first boarder. After he left, we had at least four Dutch couples staying with us at various times. Mostly they asked if we could put them up for one week until they had found something for themselves, but usually they would stay from four to six weeks.

Our first baby was born in 1954; by that time two of my brothers had come to live with us as well. Having a baby and some of my own family here made a big difference and I was far less homesick. Twelve months later my sister and her husband joined us too; that made me even happier.

Before our second son was born in 1957, we had moved to the local Agricultural College, where my husband was employed as a chef. We lived there and Karel worked there for 28 years with a short interlude in Adelaide, where we had wanted to try our wings. But we were soon back again and the principal welcomed us with open arms. It was very convenient that our sons could attend the College. Altogether we had 7 sons and 2 daughters. The only drawback was, that my husband had to work every second week-end. I did not have a driver's licence, so it meant that the children and I were tied down too, because we were dependent on my husband for transport.

When our youngest was 3 years old, I also started work part-time at the Agricultural College. At first from 7pm. -9.30 pm., because my husband was home by then. I did chores that could not be done during the day. After doing all kinds of jobs, mainly in the housekeeping area, for 12 months, one of the kitchen-staff left. "Aha, I thought, I'll apply for that vacancy !" But I was advised against it because my husband was the chef. However, we needed more income badly, the children were becoming more expensive as they grew older, so I applied for the job anyway and got it ! I

belonged to the kitchen department, but had to look after the dining-room. I had to keep everything tidy, supervise mealtimes and make sure that everything was ready when the College expected visitors. I worked in that particular area for 13 years. There were 120 students living in, so there was a lot to do.

When we first arrived in Australia I did speak a little English, but not enough to have long conversations. Our first neighbours were an elderly Australian couple, they were absolute darlings. If they had not seen me at a certain time in the morning, they would come over and check if I was alright. Often we talked over the fence and the wife would fill me in and help me along. Then her husband would say: "Now you be quiet and let her talk. You can speak English, but SHE can't, she has to learn." They were tremendous neighbours who really gave me a good start. They were very helpful and I learned most of my English from them. As soon as the children started going to school, I slowly but surely picked up more English every day and after that I never looked back.

What stood out for me was, that life here was very different from Holland. Most houses in Australia are ground-level only (bungalow style) while I was used to living in a double storey house in Holland. For me it was a completely new experience to sleep at street-level, and it took a while to get used to. Our first house was a very old place, but we did much to give it our personal touches. Luckily I had brought from Holland knick-knacks and other things to make a house homely, so everything was displayed to advantage.

It was not easy, holding down a job and raising nine children as well. But the kids were tremendous; they all had their chores and we worked as a team. With the help of the youngsters I could manage. None of them had problems of any kind: if that had happened, it would have been a disaster for me.

I am very happy here now, but when we made the decision to go to Australia we really didn't have the faintest idea what we were letting ourselves in for. When I left Holland I said I would be back for a visit in 5 years' time. However, it became 20 years before I had the opportunity to return. That was in 1970: I went "home" for 6 weeks and my husband looked after the children. Holland had changed of course and after six

weeks I started to miss my husband and children. I was happy to return to my real home !

Our second Holland-trip was in 1985, when Karel retired. And then, when we had been married 40 years in 1992, the family gave us two tickets to go to Holland. Of all our children, only one son has remained where we live; he has two children. Another son lives approximately 65km. south-east of our town. Our two daughters live in Melbourne, four sons live in Queensland and yet another one in northern NSW. The family is widely spread out now, but every winter we make a 6-week trip to visit all the children outside Victoria.

When people ask me if I want to go back to Holland I say: “No way! We are happy here and this is our home”. The children in Queensland have asked us to come and live up there, but that is no good for us. They are all married and have their own lives to live. I get along really well with all my children and their spouses, but I always tell them: “You have to make your own lives and find out for yourselves, the same as I did !”

“I HAVE NEVER BEEN SORRY .”

by Laura,

Queenslan
d

I was born in a small town in Holland in 1920 and my husband came from the same place. When we met he was a representative for an electrical wholesale business and he had to travel a lot. At the start of the war, on the 14th of May 1940, to be precise, the building was destroyed by bombs, hence he was transferred to a different branch. During the occupation he did a lot of work for the underground movement and luckily he was never caught.

We married during that terrible war in 1944. Living conditions were very bad; there were shortages of food and a curfew; to go on a honeymoon was out of the question. After our marriage we lived temporarily at a friend’s place, but since we had 4 children in 5 years this house was soon too small for our growing family. We were fortunate to be able to rent a very nice, newly built brick house. Our fifth child was, as was usual in Holland olland, born in this house. Mind you, three out of the five children were born in hospital.

After the war the Dutch government actively encouraged people to migrate and we were interested to find out more about it. Also my eldest brother had already migrated to Australia in 1948. Through him and others we got a lot of information about this wonderful country. It took us several years before we were ready to take this big step to the other side of the world. We sailed on the “Johan van Oldenbarneveldt” and left on the 23rd of January 1952. The hardest thing for us was to say farewell to our families. But we were young and quite well educated and prepared for this big step. Also I felt that I had to follow my husband wherever he went. When we left we had 5 children between the ages of 7 years and 15 months.

We celebrated our 8th wedding anniversary on the boat. We had wonderful weather, it was like a five week honeymoon. When we landed in Sydney reality hit and we realised that it was now up to us to persevere and succeed. In Sydney we boarded a steam train for Queensland where my brother and some friends awaited us. The train trip took 21 hrs and we had one compartment for the 7 of us. We sat up, I had the baby on my lap, 3 of the children slept on the benches and our eldest son lay in the luggage net.

The only money we had was the fifty pounds landing -money, which we received from the government. We started off living with friends who had 5 children as well. Their house was really too small for all of us, therefore we soon rented 2 old houses. The rent was one pound per week, but there was no drinking water because the water tank had dead frogs in it. Our neighbour from across the road was very nice, she said straight away that we could get water from her tank. The two houses were next to each other. One house consisted of a kitchen and a small room which we used as a dining-room and the other house had 3 bedrooms. It was all very, very old, no carpets on the floor, no pictures on the wall, no lampshades and no curtains on a rod. Yes, that was hard in the beginning, but we nevertheless made a cosy home of it [having a cosy home is important for the Dutch: Ed.]. The children had the time of their lives. We had 7 acres of bushland all around us. We were happy, the Queensland sunshine nearly every day was great.

My husband went job-hunting and it took him a fortnight to find a job, just in time because we were running out of money. He worked for 7 years in a biscuit factory, first as a storeman, but he worked himself up. He earned only nine pounds a week and he had to travel by train to work and walk a fair bit too. Then he changed jobs and worked for 25 years for a wholesale business.

I became pregnant with baby no. 6 which was born in 1953. We still did not have any running water and washing nappies was a disaster. We bought some pipes from a business next door and an Australian friend helped my husband to connect the water from the main road. Was I happy ! We lived here for 3 years. We had a horse, a cow, ducks, a goat and a kid later on. Some really funny things happened. We had some possums under the bedroom roof and the ceiling had holes in it, and one night while I was

saying the rosary with the kids I suddenly swore in Dutch “Gatverdamme!” [Damn it: Ed.], because a possum did a wee-wee exactly on my head. Eventually we had to get rid of the goat and her kid, because one time I heard our baby (just home from hospital) crying, I ran upstairs and saw the kid jumping out of the cot. It could have killed the baby and what with the wee-wee in the cot and the animal droppings on the floor all this got to me and I could not stand it any more. We rented another house, further up the road. The rent was three pounds a week and it had 18 acres around it. The house was so old, the cement walls had cracks all over, there were holes in the floor and the walls were dirty from the smoke of an old woodstove. My husband did a lot of repairs, for which we mostly paid out of our own pocket, because the owner was a bit of a miser. We should have known better, because the landlord suddenly put the rent up and wanted six pounds a week which we could not afford. The landlady came with her solicitor and according to the small print in the contract we had done things to the house which we were not supposed to have done. We had sleepless nights and not a penny in the bank, and then we were evicted. We learned the hard way. During this time 2 more children were born, a boy and a girl; we now had 8 children.

Our Australian friends took our plight to heart, they had seen that we had done our utmost, and one day they came and said: “Your worries are over, we have bought you a little house, which you can afford. You can’t be put on the street any more”. What a surprise !

It was an old style house, on wooden stumps, with a dirty bathroom under the building, a toilet in the backyard, but it was close to the beach. The price was nineteen hundred pounds, with five hundred pounds deposit, which the friends had collected. They said: “No hurry to pay back those five pounds, first pay off your own house and than pay us.” It was marvelous and the lift we needed. Two more boys were born in 1959 -1962, we now had 10 children.

Over the years we improved our house a lot and also made a dream of a garden with a bit of rainforest. We had a very happy time there. Our home was always open for everybody and of course our family life was very strong. The first years were of course a great struggle, but we trusted in the Lord and we got lots of help. Looking back, our hardships were really a bonus. We managed them together as a family and it made us stronger.

Education for our kids has always been our first priority and that with 10 children was not always easy. But our goal has been reached. They have all done very well. Their marriages are sound and with 28 grandchildren we can look back with satisfaction and gratitude on our big step to emigrate. In 1991 we sold our house and are now living in a little house behind our son on 2 1/2 acres with lots of birds around us.

We are retired now and still very busy with our hobbies, such as lawn bowls, swimming, embroidery, gardening etc.

For our 50th wedding anniversary in 1994 our children organised a fantastic party. Over 100 people had a marvellous time under our big pergola here and my eldest sister came over from Holland to celebrate.

And so the last days of our life are approaching and we thank God for all we have experienced. The hardships, the good and the bad. It has been worth it and we are probably the better for it.

"AUSTRALIA HAS A CHARACTER ALL ITS OWN AND I LOVE THAT ! "

By

Ellen, Victoria

After the war my husband was called up for re-training. Then the Army sent him to the Dutch East Indies, where the Indonesians were trying to free themselves from Dutch colonial rule.

He served for three long years in Indonesia. Soon after he came home I was pregnant again (we had 2 children already). This time we had a girl and we named her after our first baby daughter who had died as a baby during the war. We lived in a house of several storeys and with 3 children it became very difficult. We looked everywhere for another house, but to find one was almost impossible. So we started thinking about migrating, not only because of the housing shortage but also because we still suffered from the after effects of the war and the loss of Indonesia. It seemed to us that it would take generations to overcome these setbacks, although our standard of living was improving fairly fast.

There was a general belief, supported by newspaper reports, that Holland was too small to support an expanding population which was at that time about 13 million, and people with large families were regarded as irresponsible. We already had four children and I'd always wanted a large family like my parents.

We saw Holland as a very small country and although we loved it we did not see many opportunities for our children's future. Also my husband seemed to become more and more envious of my love for my family of origin. I always tried to make him part of our clan, but to no avail. So I hoped, rather naively, that by going to the other end of the world and leaving my family behind our marriage would become stronger.

I did worry about living in a far-away country without family and friends. So in the end we decided that my husband would go first and find himself a job and a place for us to live.

We did not know anything about Australia, but we had learned in school that there were a lot of sheep and kangaroos and we knew the names of the five largest cities. There was an emigration office in town and we heard there that Australia wanted only tradesmen. If my husband was prepared to work in a chemical factory, he could pass himself off as an assistant chemist (he had at that time a very good position, he was company secretary in a pharmaceutical factory) . We started completing forms and together with the kids had our chest X rays taken.

My husband left Haarlem by train for Genoa (Italy) where he boarded the "Amstelkerk", a freighter with passenger accommodation. Meanwhile I sold all our furniture. I was pregnant again and knew that once I was over seven months I would not be allowed to travel.

The first news we received was that he had arrived in Melbourne on a Saturday afternoon and discovered that all the shops and offices in the city were closed [In Holland shops are open until 5 or 5.30 pm on Saturdays: Ed.]. Nor could he find a place to sleep and in desperation returned to the pier where his ship was still moored. The captain took pity on him and allowed him to spend the night on the boat. He met a Dutchman who gave him the address of the Dutch migrant chaplain. He told my husband that it was hopeless to get a job because most bosses wanted only skilled labour, but he found a job in a chemical factory and a boarding house in the city.

My brother arrived in Australia soon afterwards. He was contracted for a job with lodging on a chicken farm in Diamond Creek. Later he managed to swap jobs with my husband. He lived there without paying board in return for his services on the weekend. During the week he worked as a builder's labourer in the village. There was a 2 room-building which used to be an incubator room. It was incredibly dirty but if my husband was prepared to clean and paint it we could live there for a rent of two pounds ten shillings a week. He earned seven pounds ten shillings, the five pounds left over he saved for a deposit for a block of land.

Meanwhile I had to make more trips to the emigration office and I was told to have fresh X-rays taken, then present them with the children at the Australian embassy in The Hague. I had to wait for hours,and it was not easy to keep four children quiet and happy. One of the boys had to have a physical examination because he looked so pale, but everything turned out all right.

It took a while before we found passage but finally we could travel on a British ship, the "Maloja", a former troop carrier. We first had to travel by train to Hook of Holland where we took the boat to England. My parents came to say goodbye and I was determined not to cry. I believed that we would do well financially and would be able to travel home in a few years' time. It must have been very sad for my parents to lose not only their eldest daughter but their grandchildren as well.

Finally in early March of 1951 we arrived in Melbourne. All I remember was that my husband came on board to help us disembark and that his employer was waiting with his ute to transport us all; they were good people and helped us a lot.

The next three years we lived in the 2 bedroom cabin on the farm until my husband had built our own house.

Every Saturday morning the parish priest, Father Ashe, would visit the Hickling house to bring Holy Communion to their mother-in-law who was sick and who lived there. Every Saturday morning I would get up early to make sure that our little cabin was clean and tidy and then stand at the door waiting for him to come over and say hello, but he never did. I felt terrible because I realised that in Australia I was a nobody, while back home I was a member of a respected family. Once I went shopping in the city and I walked among all those people and I thought 'if there were only one person who would say, hello, Ellen, how are you ?' But there was no one there and I felt so very lonely.

Our next child was born on April 13, 1951 in the Queen Victoria Hospital, one month after we arrived. When I felt the baby coming I screamed my lungs out and the nurses came running and they were there just in time, but for me they were too late because I was terrified that I would crush the baby.

In Holland at that time nearly all babies were born at home, my own doctor had in the past supervised the births and visited me every day. I had a qualified nurse as well who stayed in the house for 14 days. In case of difficulties hospitalisation was arranged. The birth of a baby was not regarded as an illness but rather as a natural event. I had read a book written by Grantly Dick Read, it was all about natural childbirth and breathing exercises. We were far ahead of the English-speaking world where only now home birthing is possible. Holland was different in many ways, not only in obstetrics. We read widely in English, French or German. When I arrived here I was told that Catholics were not allowed to read Graham Greene's books, and we found that amazing.

Forty years ago there were hardly any good restaurants and all pubs closed at six o'clock in the evening. The worst thing was the segregation of the sexes: at parties the women formed a little clique and the men congregated somewhere else. Where we came from it was the custom to shake hands on being introduced and I was at times embarrassed when coming towards people with an outstretched hand and my hand was just ignored

Yet that first winter had its good moments too. We were full of hope for the future, we had paid off our block of land and we were waiting for a loan from a building society. A letter from old friends arrived. They were ready to migrate to Australia, had nowhere to live and could we help to find accommodation ? They, the couple and their 4 children, ended up staying several months with us. How we managed I don't know. There were 4 adults and nine children under eight living in a cabin of only four squares. The weather was good and the children played mainly outside. We shared the cooking and washing and ate in three sessions. Our friends found a small cabin where they lived for about two years before returning to Holland. The wife was homesick and very unhappy here.

One of my other brothers and his wife had arrived and they too stayed with us for a little while. It was not easy for them either ! Life was hard for all of us in those days.

My husband had already bought the land, a big block, 60 x 165 feet: When the loan came through he started building. Of course he had his job, so the only time he was able to spend on the house was weekends and

some summer nights. Everything was done by hand; there were no electrical tools so it took a long time. Building the house became easier when the roof was on and the weatherboards in place so we had some shelter from the weather.

Immediately after the war materials were hard to get and when placing an order a cheque for the amount had to be handed over to make sure that you would get the goods. That worked well enough until we ordered the hardwood flooring; the timber did not turn up and the money was gone. The supplier was a crook and went to prison but for us it was an enormous sum and it took us at least a whole year to save that money again.

On top of that we had a new baby ! Our daughter was born on the 5th November 1952 in a small private hospital. I was much happier there than in the Queen Vic. 18 months earlier.

Then my husband got a job as accountant in a place next to where we lived, and made more money, thank heavens. On his former salary of seven pounds ten shillings (less the weekly rent of two pounds ten shillings) we could not save anything at all.

The children all went to school with the nuns, it was a long walk for them. Both boys cried the first day at school because they were left in such totally strange surroundings while they could not speak English at all, but they settled in quickly and picked up the language fast. Sometimes I could not understand what they were talking about and when they laughed I thought they must be swearing and I got really angry and let fly, in Dutch of course. I listened to the radio and read the newspapers to pick up the idiom. I had learned English at school but the Australian accent was a different matter for me.

We did not have a car then, our old Whippet that we bought for 60 pounds had given up the ghost and so we had to rely on public transport and that was virtually non-existent. We had to walk half an hour to pick up any mail and buy bread and meat. We got our milk from a neighbour across the road who had four cows, that was lovely for our large family. When we went to the city, which happened rarely, we walked through the paddocks to the railway station.

The roads were very dusty in summer, full of potholes and muddy in winter, but that did not worry us very much and I remember that I had a strong sense of freedom in those years. There was not much bureaucracy compared with Holland and although we had to struggle we still had our hope for a better future. I did not have time to be homesick, but every now and then, at night, and especially when we were at the beach I felt that ache while thinking about friends and family and wondering where they were now and how they all were.

In 1954 we had a little girl. This happened during the time that my parents were here. We always hoped that our parents would stay and settle in Melbourne, but although mother was rather keen, father missed his house and his club in Holland, moreover there were still three children and one grandchild back home and so they decided to go back after having been with us for a year. It was a sad farewell, I was very grateful that they had stayed so long with us because we never saw mother again, she died a few years later.

By then my husband had a job as an accountant in a small country town, he liked the place and tried to find a house to rent but that was impossible. He lived in a hotel and came home on Friday evening and left again on Monday morning at five o'clock. He could do this because we now had a car. We had won 250 Pounds in Tatts and we thought this was the best way to spend the money. It was a British car, a Standard 10, rather small but somehow we managed to fit all the kids in the back, while I held the baby on my lap; that was allowed then and we never had an accident, thank heavens.

Unfortunately my husband decided on the spur of the moment to give up his job, he was always inclined to do this. We had some money in the bank but that would not last us very long. So he decided to accept the offer of a friend to become a partner in an accountancy and tax-consultants business in the city and for a while things were all right.

Then, one day, my husband saw an advertisement in The Age about a holiday centre in Daylesford that was for sale. He talked to my brother and his wife who were willing to become partners in the venture. The plan was for him to continue in the partnership in the consulting business and for

my brother to continue his job in the City and to operate the guest house as a sideline.

We sold our home and bought the holiday centre and that summer we were very busy. There were 16 cabins, a shower block and a cafe and milk bar. My sister-in-law and I helped too, although we had to look after the babies all the time. We loved Daylesford.

My husband took our two eldest boys to a Catholic college in the city each day on his way to work and picked them up at night. They were very long days. During the winter months we had hardly any guests and as a result little money coming in. Also my brother, who was our partner, accepted a position overseas. Before he came to Australia he had been manager of a plantation in Indonesia, but was forced to leave when the Dutch were kicked out.

Financially we could not go on like this so we had to sell the place at a great loss and we returned to Melbourne where we rented a house in the eastern suburbs. And it was there, in 1966, that our tenth child was born in St. Vincent's Maternity Hospital.

The house was large and old by Australian standards. It had been a gentleman's residence and in the hall, next to the kitchen, was a set of bells to summon the servants. There was a big pantry and a scullery and so we used the kitchen as a dining room. We had five bedrooms and a large study and a major advantage was that it was close to all the schools and to the city. We had not been there for very long when my husband became ill and it was found that he had diabetes. From then on until his death he had to inject himself with insulin. He also had to keep a strict diet and I had to weigh all the food, but worst of all his needles had to be sterilised every day.

Money was in short supply. We ran up bills at the grocer's and the milk bar, and were then asked to pay up or else. The kids often helped me out: one of my sons had a paper run and a delivery job for the chemist. He gave nearly all his money to me. Another son was also a delivery boy and the girls helped with baby sitting.

We had not been long at our new address when Greg was born. I went to St Vincent's Maternity Hospital for his birth and remember clearly

that the baby was a long time coming. Well, I did expect that the labour would be easier after so many children, but I was tired during the birth and it was another forceps delivery. However he was a healthy baby and that was all that mattered.

That year we were financially in a much better position because the loan for our first house had finally been paid off. It made me worry that all the money would be spent before we could buy another house.

Then my last baby was born. I had become very anaemic and tired during the pregnancy and the baby was normal but died during the birth, because the cord was too short. I was told that she was baptised before she was buried. I was devastated and felt terribly empty and sad. Then one of my sons and a daughter became very ill with rheumatic fever and they had to spend quite some time in Fairfield Hospital. Without transport is was difficult to visit. Often when I didn't have enough money I walked for miles with my youngest son in the pusher to save the bus fare. Then I would take the train at Fairfield station and I used to hide in the toilets until the collector was gone because I couldn't afford a ticket; there was no other way. So my daughter was often left alone in a strange place, without visitors. My son was older but it affected him deeply too !

Our financial situation was now not at all good, with a family of that size that seems unavoidable, but things should have been better. After my husband had left the partnership he obtained a position with a large firm of chartered accountants, and had become auditor and group manager. The salary was quite good but the children and I never saw any money.

He could not cope at all and started to drink more and more. He drank to a definite pattern. On Monday he was sober but every day he would bring alcohol home and the quantity would increase day by day until he flaked out over the weekend. By Sunday he would recover and on Monday he would start again. This had disastrous consequences for all of us and himself in particular: being a diabetic he was often sick and missed a lot of work and as time went on he became very difficult to live with. When he had been drinking he often became irrational and even violent and that made me very frightened. In the end I had to do something for the sake of the children and I started a long pilgrimage from the Catholic social welfare bureau to social workers and several psychiatrists. Every time I was told to

come back and bring my husband along so they could find out what was wrong etc. But he would not dream of going and seeking help.

As our situation was so bad I decided to seek work. I saw an advertisement in the paper for a child-care officer in a government-run children's home. At the interview I told matron that I had never worked before and needed the money badly and that I needed to be free during the school holidays "Otherwise", I said, "my children will end up in this place". She agreed with me and I got the job.

Our working day started at seven and we had half an hour for breakfast; we had the same food as the children and the food was excellent. After a while I became a senior officer and twice weekly I was in sole charge from 5 pm until the night staff arrived. That meant that I had to dispense drugs and medicine from a cupboard that was always kept locked and I had to make sure that all children had showered and the little ones were tucked in bed by eight. The older children were allowed to watch TV until the night staff took over. I had of course some girls working with me but during those hours we had only a skeleton staff to look after some 40 to 50 children, and when I finally came home I was exhausted.

When I came home from work one day, two of my daughters were waiting for me at the station; apparently they had been there a long time. I understood that they were unhappy at home, with Dad drinking or in one of his moods. And again I sought help but in those days there was nothing, no women's refuges, nothing.....

Because I worked the children had to make their own lunch; at night I cooked a simple dish for next day's evening meal and one of the girls would heat it and feed the kids. One of my daughters did her Matriculation that year and it was amazing that she passed because it was all very hard on her but we needed the money I earned. When I was not home she bore the brunt of everything including her father's abuse. Later I realised that she tried to shield me from her misery and the family problems

Every term I paid some school fees because I was determined that my children would have a good education, but after Matric I could not keep them home any longer because there was no peace for study. It was not all bad: Sundays were usually peaceful and sometimes my husband would

take us all for an outing to the Dandenongs or Kinglake or the Maroondah Dam and once we even went to the Zoo.

In 1966 we moved to an other suburb. I left my first job, the travelling was just too much and fortunately I found another job close to our new home. I had a little office and looked after all the valuables of the old people and sorted things out with their families after they died. That job was only a 10- minute walk from home and so I was back in time to cook dinner at night.

I was often sad that because I worked I could not belong to the mothers' club and often missed out on school fetes and activities. In all honesty I must say that it was not just work that made me feel like an outcast. My husband's drinking meant that we could never go to dinners or parties at his work and did not dare invite people to our home. I never knew what would happen.

As soon as he came home the whole atmosphere changed immediately and became unbearably tense. All of a sudden there would be this wall that I could not penetrate: whatever I said or did, no matter how hard I tried to make things pleasant, it was never enough.

During that time I wanted to forget the fear and misery when my husband was drinking. So, the moment he left I read anything and everything. Sometimes I bought the paper at the milk bar. But there was no money for magazines. In the end things became unmanageable: our electricity and water were both cut off at the same time and the car and TV were repossessed. But then I got some help. I went to see a doctor and he suggested that I go to Al-Anon, a support group for the families of alcoholics, and he sent someone along to take me to a meeting. That was very good since I probably would not have dared to go on my own. When you are told not once but for years on end that you are no good and have no brains it will affect you, and so it was with me although at the time I was not aware of it.

I can honestly say that Al-Anon changed my life. Before that, I truly believed that no one in the whole world had a more wretched life. At Al-Anon I found that there were people who had suffered a lot worse. At the

meetings all were calm and we recited the serenity prayer together, the prayer that I often said myself later on in times of great distress:

LORD grant me the serenity

to accept the things that I cannot change

Courage to change the things I can

and the wisdom to know the difference

And for the first time in many years I learned to look deep into myself and not immediately to put blame on others. I needed courage and although I made some new friends and kept going to the meetings the situation at home did not improve, and I hated my husband when he hurt the children because I felt responsible for them and I loved them so much. I also loved him because I remembered the good times, and I knew that he was a sick man and felt much compassion for him.

When I had been an Al-Anon member for some time, I did change and got the courage to do things. I went to a short course in public speaking at the Alcohol and Drug Foundation. Later I was sent to schools and colleges and different clubs to speak about alcoholism.

We had gone away from home for many weekends to stay at one of my sons' or to my brother's holiday place. So after a lot of prayer and discussion with my friends we left home. My children were a great help, one found a small cottage with two sleep outs so one daughter and a son came back and helped pay for board.

I remember that the priest came to visit us and he had a big case of apples with him. That made me cry, but the kids were a lot happier then and two of them had their friends to stay for a weekend and once we had a dinner party for a few friends.

After we had been there for about a year my husband contacted me for the first time. We talked, and for the first time he admitted that he drank too much, that he had been wrong and had hurt us in many ways and if I decided to come back he would try hard to become a better person. Christmas was not far off and I was in great inner turmoil. In the end I

decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. The children were very angry with me, I could understand that, but I could not act differently. However in time they understood and learned to forgive; and we became friends again

That Christmas was somewhat more peaceful, and although my husband tried hard he could not keep his promise, but there was no more violence. Some time later he came home early from work and he told me that he had resigned because he could not cope any longer. He had been drinking during the day, the first time that had happened in all those years, and he then realised that he was well and truly hooked, or as they say in AA: he had hit rock-bottom. He then asked me to make an appointment at a hospital for drug dependent people, where he stayed for three weeks.

It was a big step forward, but we had no income at all, and so I went to his firm and spoke to the partners. The result was that they paid his superannuation and that covered the mortgage on the house. For the next five years they sent me a cheque, the amount was not enormous but big enough to pay for two of the children's school fees. Then my husband received the invalid pension and I, as his wife, received the same amount every fortnight.

One day I saw in a newspaper an ad from the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau. They needed part-time social workers and training would be provided. So I applied and was accepted. I worked under supervision and had my own clients. My clients lived mainly in inner city high-rise flats and I could arrange my visits in my own hours.

I used to walk from the high rise flats through the old inner suburbs and to my surprise I found that I loved it, looking at the old terrace houses. The old buildings had a charm of their own and then I knew all of a sudden that this Melbourne was my city and although I was on my own, there was no loneliness any more. I really did belong. I stayed at that job until I was 59 and only left because I needed a hip replacement and would be out of action for a long time.

Even though my husband was sober it was not easy for him, he loved sweets but was not allowed to have them, because of his diabetes. He still had his cigarettes but when he developed emphysema that too was forbidden. One New Year's day I went into the lounge and there he was

with an empty sherry flagon. He started to cry and said " I did not want to do it, but I was so lonely". I helped him to bed, and the next day he went back to hospital - this time for a month. After that he never drank again during the last nine years of his life. I admired his tenacity and his willpower to fight every day against his impulses. It was very hard for him but he won, and we had some good years together after the children had gone.

Well, I was a widow for 2 years and 2 months and then to my surprise I got married again. I was looking after the books of our curate who had left for Africa and one fine Sunday morning Gerrard appeared on my doorstep bringing back some books he had borrowed. I invited him in for coffee. My first impression of him was that he was a poor skinny pensioner. We started to go out, enjoyed each other's company and I soon found out that he was anything but poor. All our respective children welcomed our marriage and we are one large family.

Since our wedding in 1984 we have made many trips within Australia and overseas. Our holidays were lovely, but coming home was good too. I could not go through life only enjoying myself. We help others with delivering " Meals on Wheels" and we often visit sick people in our parish.

I remember how sad I was during our first years in Australia, all the family events we missed, but life is very different now; years ago we became naturalised Australians and I can now say that I feel part and parcel of the community.

“MY CREATIVITY SAVED THE DAY.”

By Henriette,

South Australia

It is nearly thirty-three years ago since we left Amsterdam with m.v. “Zuiderkruis” for Australia, which was completely unknown to us. It was a lovely voyage and we were well looked after, but we carried our “separation sorrow” silently with us. Were we ever to see our parents and other relatives again, and most of all, what did the future hold for us ? - We arrived in Australia with four children between the ages of three and sixteen; no house, no land to build on and no money. - The ship berthed in Melbourne at midday in a heatwave of well over 40 degrees. Then we had to take the train to Adelaide.

The first day after our arrival my husband fortunately found work as an organbuilder; so very soon we could move to the hills where the temperature was more bearable. At once we tried to rent a house, but that was not easy for a family with four kids: after all we could wreck it ! After great effort we finally succeeded, it was a fluke really; the landlord could only speak French and I’m fluent in that language. It’s also possible that we made a good impression !

Next we were facing the enormous task of saving for our own house. In his spare time my husband earned extra money by working as a furniture-maker. I wanted to teach, but because I did not possess a “Leaving Certificate” it was out of the question. I wasn’t exactly a spring-chicken any more and I also wanted to be there when my youngest daughter came home from kindergarten. It is hard to take when one can speak four languages and one is a qualified shorthand typist as well, that one must have one’s “Leaving” (completion of 5 years High School in Australia) to be able to teach. Through acquaintances I found work as a cleaner. I had a good reputation, could work independently, but all the same out of sheer desperation I had a good cry every now and then. After a year and a half we had saved enough for a deposit on a house in the mountains, away from the city. We didn’t overcommit ourselves and we bought a cheap house which has undergone quite a few changes since then. At that time I also

swapped my bicycle for a motor-scooter. I kept my cleaner's job for seven years, at the same time exploring other possibilities.

Soon after we had moved into our own house my husband had to go to Perth for a few months, because over there an enormous organ was being built. I stayed behind with the four children; no neighbors, no telephone, not even friends yet. That was a difficult time, especially with all the strange sounds of the Australian bush at night.

After some time, an acquaintance asked me if I would be prepared to teach spinning to a Dutch lady. That was good fun. And it gave me an idea ! I bought several spinning-wheels and my husband made the weaving-looms. Through advertising I soon had as many classes as I could handle. Eight pupils in the morning, and eight again in the afternoons and evenings. I started teaching for schools and for clubs: it surely was tiring. Eventually I accumulated forty looms, and my husband built me a studio. In those days spinning was still something special (and that in a country with millions of sheep ! Ed.) and everyone watched in admiration at different Agricultural Shows I attended. I continued my spinning and spinning-classes for many years, right up to my husband's retirement.

Going back again to the time that we first arrived here from Holland: there was not much available in the shops as far as craft - and needlework materials were concerned, so I had to order my materials from Holland where I had my personal contacts. Whenever I arrived home disappointed or depressed, I immediately started on my needlework and embroidery in order to get into a different frame of mind. My first "handiwork" was a bell-pull with an oak leaf pattern in autumn colors. This reminded me of my family-home and of my youth. After that I started to embroider Dutch scenes which won me many a first prize at the Shows. Last year I won first prize with a sampler representing our 50 year long marriage. It shows the different houses I lived in: in Antwerp (Belgium), Leiden (Holland) and Adelaide (Australia). Also the names of our children and nine grandchildren and pictures of the different places where they live. I still embroider a great deal in my spare time and I've also started with lace-making.

Our four children have done well: my eldest son has his own business, my eldest daughter is a nursing sister and the youngest one is a teacher. Our third child was nine years old when we first arrived here and he found

adjusting to a new country and environment extremely difficult, because he didn't know any English and he didn't play sport. However, after much study he also has a good job now. All the children still speak Dutch, which is a source of great pleasure to me ; Dutch is our "home"- language. - Sometimes I look after my youngest granddaughter. I always speak Dutch with her and I can't wait for her to say her first Dutch words.

We were fortunate that we never had to struggle with illness or other mishaps; through sheer hard work and determination we have achieved our present position in life. Admittedly I had the advantage of being able to adjust more easily, since I was born in Belgium.

As a little mite of hardly five years of age, I used to go daily on an hour's train-journey, so that I could attend the only Dutch school in Antwerp. My holidays I used to spend with my grandmother in Rotterdam. After the war we moved to Holland where the customs are different from those in Belgium.

My house is cosily furnished and whoever drops in for a visit is offered a cup of coffee with apple cake. - For St.Nicholas my grandchildren all receive their gingerbread and traditional "pepernoten" (a type of spiced button-shaped cookies). At Easter time, we paint our eggs and at Christmas we still decorate our Christmas tree with real candles. How glad and excited I was years ago, when we had a cold Christmas day for a change and we could light the candles ! Notwithstanding the fact that we keep up our Dutch traditions and customs, I get on very well with our Australian friends. Although much is organized for the Dutch here, we don't participate a great deal, because the Community Hall is too far away from us. Besides we are not the type of person who is interested in folk-dancing, bingo or bridge. I'm happy and contented, but I cannot deny that there are times when the yearning for "the good old days" prevails.

Fortunately we have been able to visit our relatives in Europe several times. In 1993 we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary and that was a final farewell to all we had left behind so many years ago. Our relatives and friends from Belgium, Holland and England were present to give us a resounding farewell. First there was a service in the church where we were married and after that we had a fabulous get-together in a remote farm house where we could say our final good-byes to everyone present.

Of course our pleasure was mixed with sorrow, but at the same time we were very aware of our second “homeland” at the other end of the world where our children and their families, as well as our friends, were awaiting our return.

"ON THE WHOLE I LOVE THE FREEDOM HERE AND AUSTRALIA HAS NOT BEEN BAD FOR US."

by Saskia,

Victoria.

We used to have a grocery shop in Holland and we were making a comfortable living until supermarkets appeared on the scene: then business started to go down hill. Our only choice was to sell the shop and for my husband to find a job. But he had been running small businesses for twelve years and finding suitable employment was rather difficult, apart from the fact that unemployment was still high in Holland in those days. - So I suggested: "Let's leave this country and try our luck elsewhere".

Initially we chose South Africa, but we heard such horrid stories about "apartheid" and how the blacks and coloureds were treated, that we decided to go to Australia, since I had an uncle living there. I must admit that I was the one who kept pushing for emigration, because I just couldn't see my husband working for somebody else, he was so used to being his own boss. Besides, our children were 16, 14, and 12 years of age at the time, so if we didn't move soon, they would not want to come with us.

We travelled by plane, because one of our friends who worked for KLM pointed out that in the long run that would be cheaper. After all six weeks on a boat with five people is not exactly cheap either ! So we landed in Melbourne in 1958. We were met at Essendon Airport by my uncle and aunt and we stayed with them until we found a place of our own.

Accommodation was hard to find in the country town where we wanted to settle, particularly for families with children. But eventually we moved into a converted garage/workshop, although it was quite primitive. The toilet was in a little shed in the back garden, which was usual in those days, but certainly an eye-opener for us new arrivals [in general houses did not have outside toilets in Holland: Ed.]. Dutch people helped us with beds and other furniture, because our own was still on the high seas. It took at

least six weeks to reach Australia, while the Customs clearance and delivery took another one or two weeks. After a year we received the news that a house had become available. I could hardly believe our luck. But when I saw the house I burst into tears. It was terribly run down and filthy. There was no kitchen sink, just a tap with a bucket and the bathroom was in the backyard in a shed. The house had two bedrooms, one for the girls and one for the boy. My husband and I slept in the lounge room.

For my husband it was not easy to find a job, but he was prepared to accept anything, so initially he worked as a gardener, although he did not know the difference between a weed and a plant, at times with disastrous results. For example, one of his customers asked him once to take out the weeds, but when she came home from shopping the whole garden was bare! The poor woman exclaimed: "Where have all my plants gone ?" She was frantic. Eventually he got work in the bush as a labourer.

In the beginning I stayed home and looked after my husband and children. But one day someone offered me her cleaning job and I accepted gratefully, because that would give me a chance to learn English. I would never go out to do my shopping without pen and paper, in case I got stuck.. Then I would go to my daughter who worked as a shop-assistant in the town's main street and she would write things down for me. But even then people didn't always understand what I was saying. What always puzzled me was, why some people didn't have any problem understanding me, while others just played dumb and said: "Sorry, we can't work out what you're saying" and just left me standing there. Which infuriated me of course, so I would walk out of the shop leaving purchases behind. Even to this day I have to listen carefully in order to understand what people are saying.... When someone called at the door, I would open it, but watch the children for clues what to say. They taught me a lot: they used to give me signals when to say "yes" or "no", it was a scream, really. All the same, people used to say that my English was better than my husband's, because he mixed his English with Dutch and German!

What used to get my husband down was, that his workmates were forever bragging that in Australia everything was bigger and better. When an old model train passed by they would say: "You don't have anything like that where you come from", and my husband would answer:" That's correct, our trains are far more modern than that!"

We finally managed to make a trip “back home” after we had been here fifteen years. Holland was quite a shock for my husband after such a long time and he saw things with different eyes. Once back in Australia, he was never homesick again.

For me this was different. I did miss my family, but I was the one who wanted to come here and I had my husband and children, and my aunt and uncle. We did not make many friends, we were always working and the Australians could not understand us. We did not have so much contact with other Dutch people either which was very different from Holland where we had friends. I have always been a loner, happy with my own company, not like my husband who was a talker. Once in the beginning, I became even quieter and my husband asked what was wrong and I said: “I need to see the sea”.

I grew up in a seaside town and naval base, and was used to seeing the sea every day. So we went to the coast , I sat on the rocks breathing in the sea air and that pepped me up.

I worked as a cleaner for a long time, first with a family, than as a home help for the Council and than in a doctor’s surgery, but I always made sure that I would be home when the children got home from school. It was an advantage that our children were older, it was much harder for women who had small children.

I have been to Holland several times and people have asked me if I would want to come back to live. But your friends have found other friends, you have lost contact. I am just not used any more to the Dutch way of life, so oppressive, so narrow-minded, everything according to rules and regulations and always taking notice of what the neighbours might say. With furniture everything has to be the latest fashion; very different from here.

We were always very thrifty and we worked very hard, day and night, and put all our money in the bank. That is how we could go to Holland. My husband and I went twice and I went a third time on my own. We had few holidays, just little outings to the Grampians and sometimes we visited the seaside. With the money we saved we bought a car and caravan and after my husband retired we would just take off and travel when we felt like it,

which was wonderful. Unfortunately my husband died 10 years ago after 45 years of marriage. That has changed my life completely.

I was 42 years old when we arrived, really too old and that is why I never really adjusted and had such difficulties learning another language. I am 77 years old now and I still think in Dutch and have lived longer in Holland than in Australia. I try to keep busy but when I go to the Uniting Church to do art and craft, which I love, people talk about other people I do not know so I just sit there and listen. It is the same with the Senior Citizens club, I cannot contribute to the conversation because they talk about their past and people and events I do not know about. That makes it really difficult.

Our children have done well and are happy here. They have moved from this town. One lives in the Northern Territory, and two are still in Victoria, not too far from me. I do not go and visit them because it is too far on my own and of course I do not drive. Wherever I go I have to take a taxi which I seldom do. One of my daughters comes once a week to help me with my shopping because I have problems walking, so I cannot go out on my own. The telephone has become my lifeline. It is really difficult when you are on a pension, because it is too expensive to ring my children often.

On the whole I love the freedom here and Australia has not been bad for us, regardless of all the problems we had; those problems we might have had in Holland too.

“WAPPAN” OR OUR FIRST HOME IN OZ :

A SHEEP FARM.

By

Janneke,

Victoria

My husband and his brother arrived in Australia in 1950, 9 months before the children and I. We had to stay behind, because all Migrant Hostels in Australia were full. The men first had to secure work and a house for the whole family: “ proof of accommodation” was required by the authorities. The two men first stayed at Bonegilla, a Migrant Hostel in N.E. Victoria, near the N.S.W. border.

Not long after they arrived, a sheep farmer who was looking for labourers visited the Hostel. Fortunately “my” men were signed up together by that farmer, so they could stay together. The farm or “station” as they say here in Australia, measured approximately 4000 HA. which is about the size of Drente (a province in the N.E. of Holland: Ed.).

Initially my brother-in-law had to work in the vicinity of the homestead, eg. do the gardening, milk a few cows, slaughter two sheep each week and do odd jobs around the house. My husband had to help look after the whole property with a few other farmhands: of course, under supervision of the boss. They did fencing and also helped with shearing, with calf and lamb branding. They did crutching, which means shearing only the back parts of the sheep as blowflies would lay their eggs in the dirty parts of the sheep’s behinds, and worms would enter the inside. He also helped with cutting firewood, and bringing it to the farmhouse and to the labourers on the farm, spreading fertilizer etc. When new fencing was needed, the boss simply used the speedometer in his Landrover to work out how much wire was needed: he just drove along the stretch that had to

be fenced off and then took it from there as far as his calculations for materials were concerned.

After the children and I had arrived, the men were appointed as "rabbit -catchers". During the 1950's there was a real rabbit plague in Australia: they ruined pastures, and ate the grass. Myxomatosis (a virus to exterminate rabbits: Ed.) was introduced. Not withstanding the fact that there were professional rabbit-catchers, who used guns and traps to kill the animals, the farmer wanted my husband and his brother to do that job. They were given ten dogs and it was their task to make the property rabbit-free and keep it that way. The dogs were to sniff out the rabbits, if necessary chase them and where possible to kill them. Although killing the rabbit was really the men's job: they dragged the rabbits out of their holes and broke their necks. Often they caught foxes too. The boss used to pay them five shillings if they showed him the fox's ears and a piece of its skull. Next the men would take their "proof" to the Shire Hall and there they received another 7 shillings and 6 pence. These rewards were extras and they were allowed to keep the money in addition to their normal wages. The rabbit skins, which were cured and then sent to Melbourne, also provided extra income.

But now I must go back to the beginning, to the time that the children and I arrived, nine months after my husband. Although the boss had started building a farm-labourer's house on the property, it was not completely finished yet, so we spent the first three weeks in the shearing-sheds which was an experience in itself. A nice, uncluttered and breezily free life and no hardship. All the same, we were more than happy to move into the new house when it was ready. It stood in the middle of the paddocks, approximately 1 km. from the road and 3 or 4 km. away from the homestead. We lived amongst the hills, in the middle of nowhere and usually we didn't see a soul. When the children spotted a farmhand on horseback they came running inside, all excitement, and called out: " Mum, Mum, a man on horseback!" Whenever the farmer drove through the fields in his Landrover, the same used to happen.

Near the house we had a water-tank with fresh water that was pumped up from a nearby well. Milk and meat -approximately 10 kg per week for our household- we got from the farm, and the farmer's wife collected our bread twice a week for us in the neighbouring village. Our

groceries came from there too and once a month -on pay day- we went with the whole family to do some shopping, That was a real treat and our only regular outing so to speak, because the town was the district "capital", with banks, many shops, a small hospital, a police station and a post office. It was our return to the "inhabited" world ! We thoroughly enjoyed living at "Wappan" these first eighteen months after our arrival.

At that time, John, our eldest, was six years old, but the school was 8 km away; I didn't drive, there was no public transport and it was too far to walk. So we enrolled him in the Education Department's Correspondence School which had been founded in the early 1900's for cases just like ours. Naturally Mum had to function as teacher. Fortunately the lessons were clearly written, well set-out and thoroughly explained. All the same, I found teaching a difficult task, because my English was practically non-existent. To be quite honest, I learned a great deal myself from my son's lessons. Whenever a lesson arrived, there was a personal note included from the Correspondence School teacher for both of us , which was appreciated very much.

Initially John received some pre- school lessons, because of his lack of English. These lessons consisted mainly of labelled pictures of objects and animals and that way he learned his English alphabet. Once we received his 1st Grade Lessons, he had to learn to read and write and do Arithmetic as well. I was instructed to explain things the "play way", so the other children who were 4, 3 and 2 at the time wanted to join in the games as well. Contact between the school teacher and her pupil was first class; she really took a personal interest in our eldest (and me !).

Singing lessons were given over the wireless. My son received the text of the song by mail so that he could study the words. We were informed of the time and date of his radio-lesson, so the whole family would listen in. A male teacher and a few children would first sing the whole song and then very slowly sentence by sentence, each sentence over and over again. So, soon we had our own little family -choir.

By November John had to sit for several tests; but first I had to explain the procedure to him and after that he was out on his own. Instead of "break-up night" in a school-hall, there was a special radio-session, in which several children received an honourable mention, including John. He

deserved it, because he started his lessons well into the school-year and not only caught up with the others, but did very well indeed.

After a year and a half our second child reached school-age and it would have been impossible for me to teach two children: one in 1st Grade and one in 3rd Grade. After all, I was running a household for seven people as well, and that without electricity, which meant no washing-machine, no vacuum cleaner or any other electric appliances. For lighting we used bottled gas-lamps and for heating a slow combustion stove.

Because of this we moved house, so that the children could walk to school. Mind you, it was a tiny building with two class-rooms, one teacher and between twenty and thirty pupils. The teacher's wife helped out sometimes and gave the girls needlework lessons. Our second child was placed in 2nd grade practically right from the start and the same thing happened again to no. 3. All this thanks to their elder brother's Correspondence School lessons !

How I experienced those early years is best expressed by the following:

I am sitting on the verandah looking out over the country side, It is so nice, so majestic; all those high hills around me. On the right is a range with many spurs. Before me, a bit farther on, another range. To see the top of the hill next to me, on the left, I have to lift my head straight up. Our house is at the foot of a spur running out of it. Nature is beautiful, at the same time wild and disorderly. A variety of colours shows the green grass, stretches of grey rock outcrops high up the hills, with the blue sky as a canopy.

`This is the county I have adopted, or... did this country adopt me ?

Victoria with its hills, mountains, valleys, chasms, gorges and streams. It looks like an open Bible. When there is a thunderstorm, and God's voice many times echoes between the hills, then the valleys rise up to meet Him and the mountains bow down to greet Him. Some winter days when rain pours down continually and water streams off the hills, gushing down in a great hurry, flowing from one cataract to another, being in bed I listen to the noise they make. Yes, "Deep calls to deep in the roar of Your waterfalls". The first year as a migrant, my thoughts might have wandered back to the old country, but I lifted my eyes to the hills, expecting help from the Lord. Those hills were around me as His protecting arms. Seeing cattle and sheep grazing on the

hillside, Psalm 50:10 comes to mind: "..... for every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills".

The road to town, a 24 km. trip, goes through the hills, but the last part is flat. Behind the town, hills rise again; small ones, larger ones, with the mountains in the distance. One high top is always covered with snow in wintertime. Did God, when creating this world, wipe away the hills from that flat to build that high mountain ?

My fantasy is running away with me. Everything is so quiet, I can hear the stillness and listen to the silence. Didn't God tell me when I came to Australia:" This will be your country, and I will be with you, all the days of your life, because I am God of the WHOLE earth?"

Our dog barks. I go inside. Some work has to be done. Why was I sitting there, daydreaming? As we will soon be moving to a place close to a big city, this must have been my "official" farewell.

We moved still to another couple of places in the country until our eldest son had to start High School. For that reason we had to move closer to Melbourne, because in the late 1950's High Schools were still few and far between in Victoria. (in 1948 there were only 12 High Schools outside Melbourne: Ed.). We settled in one of Melbourne's outer suburbs and although we have changed addresses a few more times since then, we have remained in the same area until the present day. Without any regrets whatsoever.

"FAREWELL DEAR FATHERLAND."

By Hester,

Tasmania

My fiance and I had already been engaged for three years when we were 27 and 24 years of age respectively. No wonder we wanted to get married, but we had to wait at least another eight years before we were entitled to " woonruimte" ie. living space. In Holland after the war there was such a shortage of housing, that the Government had to step in and regulated "housing permits" to give every one "a fair go". So even if you owned three houses, that didn't mean that you were allowed to live in one of them. You had to wait your turn to make sure that EVERYONE was accommodated.

My husband's brother and his wife had emigrated to Tasmania a few years earlier and they wrote to us that we should come too ! No housing shortage in Australia! My future brother- and sister -in-law were prepared to sponsor us and also to put us up for the first few weeks. So we applied for our Australian landing- and other necessary papers which were processed in due course and we got married.

After a few months we left Holland with the m.v. "Zuiderkruis" (Southern Cross, an apt name for a ship sailing to the Antipodes). In our minds this was going to be our honeymoon. However, reality turned out to be a little different ! Once on board the ship, we were separated: my husband was assigned to a dormitory which he had to share with thirty other men and I was housed in a cabin with two women and two boys, who were allowed to stay with their mothers. There were too many children on board, there was never a quiet or private moment. Unfortunately we don't have pleasant memories of this voyage.

As soon as the ship had berthed in Melbourne, we were immediately taken to the airport by taxi and flown to Tasmania. No one was present to welcome us, because everybody expected us to arrive by ferry the next day.

The telegram that the immigration officials had promised to dispatch had not arrived, and hasn't even to this day.

Once at my brother-in-law's house, he pointed out to us a small building in a neighbouring garden, "Look", he said, "that's what I've rented for you." In our eyes it seemed to be a palace: two bedrooms, spacious kitchen cum living area, a bath in the laundry and basic furnishings. What else did we need ?

Fairly soon after arrival, I landed a job at the woollen mills, but my husband had no such luck. He applied for job after job, but the constant reply was: "Your English isn't good enough." And later on: "Your wife has work, so why worry ?" So he took on the role of "house-husband" and I brought in the bread and bacon.

Then after a few months I became pregnant; soon I would no longer be able to work so we had to find a solution. My husband put on his best suit and hitchhiked all over Tasmania, looking for work. I must say that in 1960 too, it was difficult to find employment. The affluent 1970's and '80's hadn't arrived yet! He visited many a C.E.S. - office, without result, until he arrived in Devonport. There the employment officer told him: " If you can make it clear to us that you want work, your English is good enough for us. You can start at the Ovaltine factory tomorrow." -"That's impossible, " said my husband, " dressed as I am in my Sunday-best.!" " Either you start work tomorrow", they said, " or you are not in need of a job." - "O.K.", he said, " but please tell me where I am to get overalls and where I am to sleep. I don't possess a penny !" That was remedied quickly after an Immigration official was called in.

A few weeks later, I also moved to Devonport. There we were warmly welcomed by the Reformed Church community. One year passed by before we moved to Penguin, a small village on the north-west coast of Tasmania. We lived in a flat next to the church, where we had a beautiful view over the ocean. The only people I mixed with were Dutchies, which certainly didn't help my English. Another set-back was that I'm a native of Rotterdam and I still use guttural r-sounds: that doesn't exactly enhance my English either .

When the children started pre-school - we had a girl and two boys- they didn't understand or speak a word of English either. Fortunately that changed very quickly. At work my husband soon became fluent and eventually so did I.

We never regretted emigrating to Australia. On the other hand, we would never be able to adjust again in Holland; we are too used to the wide open spaces in Australia and room, lots of room !

I have visited Holland three times since we left and my husband has done so once. Unfortunately, he contracted Hepatitis A soon after he arrived in Holland. Of his nine week holiday, he spent seven in bed and he never wants to return.

Personally I would love to go back just once more to celebrate Saint Nicholas, Christmas and the New Year. However, the best part of leaving is still always arriving back home and being reunited with husband, children and grandchildren.

“WE WERE NEVER DISAPPOINTED”

by Johanna,

Victoria

Soon after the war there was a real mood to migrate to South Africa, Canada, New Zealand , Australia and America. It was not so easy to migrate to America. That country was a bit choosier about whom it accepted. South Africa did not appeal, but Australia was a bit exotic. You did not know anything about it. We did not need to emigrate for economic reasons. It was just an adventure. I had a job as a nurse in a well-known Hospital in Arnhem.

My fiance had a friend who had wandered around Victoria and who had written that it was a very good place to come to. Mind you, that man was living in a tent in the quarries. So my fiance migrated. He paid his own fare and went to country Victoria in 1951. I had to wait until my 21st birthday because my parents did not want to give me their permission to go. I was 21 in November 1952 and I left in March 1953. My fiance paid my fare too. It was two hundred and fifty pounds, a great deal of money, almost half a year’s income.

I came out by plane. It took us 10 days with a Constellation a-type aeroplane which would fly on to Korea to pick up troops and take them back home. These planes had trouble all the time, but it did not worry us. We stopped in Rome, Damascus and Karachi where we stayed several days because we had to get a new engine. We slept in the barracks which were very hot. We did not have a visa to go into town. We went to Bangkok, Singapore, Jakarta and Darwin. My fiance had been waiting for me for days. On the plane were mainly young girls who were going to meet up with their fiances: I often wonder what has happened to them.

We met in Melbourne and we went by train to the country to a town which was 330 km away. I stayed for a few weeks with an Australian family who had befriended my fiance. Afterwards I started nursing in the local Hospital. The matron had said that I could have a job, but, in the meantime, she had retired and the acting Matron really resented having

migrants on her Staff. It did not matter if you were Dutch, English, German or a doctor or a nurse. She really made it very difficult for me. There was such a shortage of housing and a room in the Nurse's Home would have solved the problem. Although there was a vacancy she just would not give it to me. She may have regretted it, because she stayed in the town and so did I. Finding a place to live was just one of the difficulties. I stayed with Dutch people who lived near the Hospital. The nursing part was very good. I still had to re-train, but I accepted it all. The nurses accepted me and they were very good to me.

We married in August of that year in the Presbyterian Church. Our friends the Jackson family were very good to me. They helped us and introduced us to many people. They gave us a very good start. The friends we made then are still our friends now. Our children grew up together. I nursed for another 12 months and than I had my first baby. We lived during that period in 2 rooms and a sleep-out, together with another family. That was really difficult. You had to share the bathroom and the cooking facilities. When you are 21, you accept those things. However even our Australian friends lived under the same conditions. House sharing was common. I had not really expected a housing shortage. I thought this was only a Dutch problem. I had expected there would be more flats.

My husband worked as a welder for the Country Road Authority. We started to make play-ground equipment and set up a demolition company as a side line as well, and things started to look up. We really worked all the time. We made swings and I helped him with welding and bending the pipes. It was a way to get some extra money. When we started to do the demolition work, my husband still kept his job which was really difficult. For many years I looked after our timber yard, which I liked. We had two jobs. My husband was wrecking schools, banks and hospitals from 5 o'clock in the morning until late at night and we did that for years. We belonged to many organisations and I was on the City council. It was the busiest time of my life, with four children at various levels of education as well.

At first I became involved with our Church organisation, I was part of the Young Wives group and became President. When the children went to kindergarten, I was President of their committee. Once you do things you always get invited to do other things. You just go from one thing to the other. It is where you make your friends and do things together. I was on

the High School Council for fifteen years and President for seven. I became involved with the school because I always believed that when my children were at High School, the school Council was the place to go if you had something to say, or wanted something to change.

I became the first female President of the High School Council. When I was in line to become President, the Principal tried to get someone else. They wanted to pass me by, in favour of another man. This gentleman asked me if I wanted to be President and I said: " As I have been Vice President for some time I intend and expect to occupy this position". He said: "Go for it. I will not oppose you." That Principal was really anti women. He used to say: " What really gets me is these women getting into positions of authority". Very telling! I always had to be a step ahead of him.

For graduation night the Principal used to write the President's speech and he offered to write mine, but I said: "No thank you, I have always written my own speeches". Afterwards he said to me that I had conducted the ceremony most competently. I think I got nine out of ten. I used to talk to the teachers and changed a few things on the Council. The Principal would be secretive about the money the school had and I thought that we should have an information night, so that the teachers knew where the money came from and how it was distributed. He agreed reluctantly and we went ahead. You can really get a lot of cooperation when you consult people.

When one of the City Councillors retired, another came to see me and asked if I would be interested to stand for Council. I was not sure but then I thought: "If they think I am capable, why not?". It was 1973 and the papers had headlines: " Migrant woman stands for Council". There were about six or seven men in the same election, but I topped the poll in two succesive elections. That shows that people respect you for what you do and what you contribute. People did not know anything about us. They always said that if you belong to a well-known family in the region it would be easy to get elected. The ratepayers didn't know our background, or where we came from, but voted for me because they respected both of us for our contribution. People were always asking me to speak to their organisations and I would do it if I had something to contribute. Working in the timber yard I met a lot of men who would say to me: "We vote for you, not because you are a woman but because you have common sense". The

many contacts I had with people through the timber yard were a big advantage. Most women do not have the opportunity to meet so many people and I dealt with men every day. There is a general perception that women do not support women but to come out in a poll ahead of seven men, means that they too must have voted for me. I never found any discrimination from the male Councillors, I was always encouraged to have a go. For five years I was on the then Executive of the Water Works Trust in Melbourne which was a closed club.

At the first election I was defeated and I said: " That's probably because of my name", but people said: "No, we just do not know you." The next year I nominated again and was elected. They told me that they had "found out" about me and I was on the Committee for five years together with ninteen men. So really when you are willing to get involved you can. If you get that far you can do things for your area, organise conferences among other things. It was an interesting time, I was on various Committees, but after 10 years you feel you do not want to be public property any more. You have to make a choice. My family came first and you cannot do both. When you are away all the time, you cannot keep your family together and that was more important to me. I had ten very exciting years, and was mayor of the town from 1977 -1978. That was a very busy year. If you are a female mayor, you have no mayoress. Your husband is your escort. Whereas the mayoress usually opens the flower shows, craft shows and art exhibitions I had to do both. I opened the flowershow and chaired the firebrigade-zone meeting. You really had to be on the ball and know what you were doing. Although I always had all the support, you just had to be a bit better as a woman and a step ahead all the time.

We really never had problems like many other migrants. I could speak English, and it took me only a few weeks to get used to the Australian accent and way of speaking. Our qualifications were not truly recognised and that was fair enough, we did not really know their Imperial measures and technical terms. I never got my Nursing Certificate because I never finished my training, you just did not go back to work after you had children. But I worked as a Nursing Aide, which was much better paid. But I mainly worked in our own business which was fulfilling and interesting.

We do not have any relatives here. My husband and I are the only ones. Perhaps I was not so close to my family in Holland. It did not really

worry me not having them here. We always had lots of people around us, Dutch and Australians who have become our family. We have had our relatives out here, but they do not want to live in Australia.

The first time I went back to Holland in 1971 it really looked different. When you leave when you are 21 and come back when you are 40 you notice the changes. Since then we have made frequent trips. I sometimes think I should have changed countries every five years. I just find that interesting: I love new challenges !

We have always been proud of being Dutch and like to talk about Holland when people ask and I often talk about their industries and way of life with pride. I don't like people who say, we are Australians, and therefore cannot speak Dutch anymore, that is a form of insecurity. We should always be very proud of our country of birth regardless of whether we are naturalised or not. I think that the Dutch have contributed a lot to this country and that migration has been very good for Australia as a whole.

" ONE HARDLY KNOWS WHAT IT'S GOING TO BE LIKE, TO BE A MIGRANT"

By Leonie,

Victoria

It was my husband who wanted to emigrate to Australia, he was not satisfied with his life in Holland and he also had difficulties with some of his relatives regarding his drinking. We talked for nearly four years about migrating, because I was not keen to leave Holland. I was happy where I was. I came from a close-knit family and had my own career. I was a qualified midwife with my own practice [home births were the rule in Holland and midwives played a major role during deliveries, and pre-and post-natal care: Ed]. Ultimately however I gave in and agreed to go to Australia. That I changed my mind was partly because we could take advantage of the "assisted migrant" scheme, which meant that the Government sponsored us on condition that we stay for two years; otherwise we would have to repay our fares. Hence I agreed to give it a go for a period of two years provided that, if things did not work out, we would go back to Holland.

We arrived in the middle of winter twenty six years ago, in July 1969. We had a two year old daughter and nine months old son with us. It was a coincidence that we settled in Melbourne, because my husband had chosen Tasmania as our destination. Our plane landed at Essendon Airport and waiting for us was Aunty Marie and her new husband Jaap. We were transported to a Migrant Reception Centre in Nunawading. The centre consisted mainly of small huts made of corrugated iron called "Nissan" huts. The huts were very small and divided into two sections: one a living area with a table and some chairs and the other section had some beds in it. The only heating we had was a small electric heater not nearly enough to even give a hint of warmth. For meals we had to go to the communal dining-room;: bathroom and laundry facilities were shared too. It was a totally new experience to share and with such a varied group of people. Of course the food was also very different. Never having had stew before, in the beginning I wondered what all this mixed food was, it was too thick for

a soup: day after day it seemed to be the same menu! Moreover both our children got throat infections straight away. It wasn't a good start. I quite liked Nunawading, but not the Nissan huts. Back in Holland we had applied for a migrant flat and after ten days we were informed that we could move into a flat in a migrant complex in Burwood (it is no longer in existence). Once we had moved in we thought we might as well stay in Melbourne. My husband went house-hunting and found this house on the outskirts of Melbourne where I am still living. Straight away I fell in love with the view of the "hills". Although my husband wanted to be moving continuously and live in other places, I put my foot down, I did not want to move again after this big step to Australia. So I told him if he wanted to change residence again, he had to do so by himself.

In the beginning I did not work, since the children were still very small and I wanted to be home with them until they went to school. When our son went to Kindergarten I started to clean houses. I earned $ 6.00 for six hours work which was just enough to pay the weekly milk bill. Now I was a part-time cleaner and housewife, whereas in Holland I had my own career and my own midwifery practice.

I was overwhelmed by my first impressions of Australia. Nature was so grand, so different. Everything grew so tall and fast, while the colours of trees, shrubs and flowers were exuberant. The unknown birds sounded so foreign and were so colourful. I felt insignificant and small in this vast country. It took me a long time to get to know the names of birds and plants and to come to terms with all this strangeness. I was born in a small town in the north eastern part of Holland. Besides, I was a rather unadventurous person, not keen on travelling at all. In Holland, everything I needed was close by, but not so in Australia. Perhaps this feeling of strangeness and insignificance was partly caused also by the fact that the English I had learned was different to what was spoken in Australia. People didn't have a problem understanding me, but I could not understand them. I felt very uncomfortable, and expressing myself became increasingly difficult. I often wondered if I would ever be able to express myself the way I could back in Holland. Achieving this was a slow process and it took many years. It might also have been slow because I felt so isolated. I had left my whole support network behind, the loss of friends and relatives was truly painful. There were no neighbours who would drop in for a cup of coffee and a chat. These were tremendous losses for me, causing much pain and

anguish, but slowly the pain started to ease because I said to myself:" If you want to stay here, you have to make something of it." But at first I felt like a tiny grain of sand on an ocean beach.

I did possess a driver's license, but driving on the left side of the road seemed rather dangerous and daunting, so I took driving lessons. When I went for the test, the policeman who was the examiner could not understand that I had not taken the opportunity to have my Dutch driver's license translated and converted. But I wanted to make sure that I would be a safe driver in this country. That first year made me often think that people were very friendly here. I didn't understand why they would wave at me, but I waved back at the car driver. Much later I found out the drivers were not waving at me, nor acknowledging my presence, they were putting their right arm through the open window to indicate a right hand turn or the intention to stop. Even today I have to laugh about this coincidence.

In 1969 the suburb we lived in was rather remote and the last part of the highway was a dirt track. There were not many houses yet and the whole set-up was quite primitive with open waste-water drainage and only dirt roads. Electricity and telephone were available, but my husband did not think it necessary for us to be on the phone. Of course the neighbourhood has changed by now, people have come and gone. Mainly people of ethnic origin live here, and I include the Anglo-Saxons in that; after all only the Aborigines are the true inhabitants of this country.

There was a hospital in our suburb and when there was a Nurses' strike in the early '70s I volunteered to work for a few hours each day. One night the Matron came and offered me a permanent job, but I could not accept because both children did not as yet go to school. Besides I would have to do a three months' refresher course in Box Hill. My qualifications as nurse and midwife were not recognised here. I told the Matron that once I had been able to do the course, I would be back. When our son was 4 1/2 years old I enrolled in the course, but it was very stressful. My husband was not the type of person who would pitch in, he wanted his wife to be at home and was not prepared to make many concessions. I could not truly rely on him in any way, because he is an alcoholic. Since our immigration he had changed remarkably in behaviour. He thought that all our problems would be solved by leaving Holland. But of course, wherever you go, you take your problems with you and ours did not diminish, on the contrary

they increased. Partly also because we did not have that support network of family and friends which we had in the Netherlands.

I didn't know anybody in Melbourne, although I had some support from my mother's two sisters who lived in Morwell and Bairnsdale respectively. Especially some of auntie Anne's children who were my age, would at times come and pick us up and we sometimes stayed the night with them. That was marvellous because it was a bit like coming home. But on the whole I felt very lonely, no telephone to call Holland, no close friends or relatives nearby and the change from having a career to just being a housewife was enormous. I was used to being with people: helping, giving advice, working with doctors and district nurses; this whole part of my life was lost. But slowly the isolation became less. I enrolled in an English course to increase my confidence, then I became involved in my children's Kindergarten and in September 1973 I finished the Nurses' Refresher Course. Subsequently in 1974 I started to work as a Nurse at the local hospital. Midwifery I had to give away, since it wasn't recognised as an independent paramedical service and I did not want to work in an organisation.

At the hospital I was assigned to a section which had just been opened. This part of the hospital was reserved for elderly people, for rehabilitation. This opened up a completely new field for me. In due course however, terminally ill people were admitted to the wards as well. Initially I thought this sort of work is not for me, but somehow I lasted. I realised that I knew little of death and dying, so I tried to further my knowledge, but I could not find any useful information. Eventually I discovered the works of Elizabeth K⎫bler Ross and that opened a whole new world for me. I learned and loved the work I did. It was tremendously gratifying to be able to assist people on their last journey. It was a very rewarding field to work in; the family and friends of the dying, many colleagues and doctors were most appreciative of my understanding of these patients.

Of course working thirty hours a week, as well as being a housewife, raising children and coping with an alcoholic husband was not easy. In that respect it was a very stressful time. By now I had to work because my husband never gave me enough money for groceries or to pay the bills: he decided how much we had "earned". Based upon how well "we" behaved. Our relationship deteriorated more and more, he would come and go as he

pleased and when he was present he was very demanding. He wanted his dinner whenever he chose to come home, no matter what time it was. When I was no longer prepared to cook for him at any odd time he said: "Who needs a wife like you, who doesn't even cook for her husband !" I still felt for him, but did not take care of all his needs any more.

That was the end of our marriage and in 1982 we separated, I could not give any more any longer. In spite of the fact that our marriage was not a good one, I grieved deeply. My self-esteem was still tied up with him. He did not think well of me most of the time and when he definitely left the day before Mother's Day, I felt as if I was being discarded like an old piece of dirt. After our separation he felt that he had the right to return whenever he wanted to, because officially we were still married. I went to pieces every time that happened, so after a while I told him that he had to inform me first, if he wanted to come, so that I could prepare myself. He refused to pay maintenance for the children who were 12 and 14 years old by then, so I had to make sure that we survived. The children went to a school close to my work and they could come with me before and after school if necessary. I tried to work week-ends when the children had places to go to, because week-end work paid extra and often I worked five days per week so as to obtain some sort of financial security. The children became teenagers and I lacked many skills to cope which caused me a lot of sorrow and heart-ache.

In 1986 I started to make some positive changes for myself. I learned from a counsellor about alcoholism and about my own behaviour and the way I had interacted with my ex-husband. I discovered that during all those years I had tried to control and to change him and I realised that I was not quite sure if I could change myself as was suggested. But ultimately I did change, because what I had done so far had not borne any positive fruits. I was at breaking point and willing to do anything.

Then I sustained a neck injury at work and the orthopaedic surgeon informed me that I would never be able to go back to nursing. That was in 1986: it was a terrible blow. I felt hollow and empty after giving to others constantly and fulfilling their needs, while never fulfilling my own. I had sustained one loss after another. First the country I grew up in, the people I knew, my first career. Then my marriage break-up and finally I lost the career I had built up in Australia. I was very tired and I slept a lot. In 1986 I started a Course in Rational Emotive Therapy at Melbourne

University under Michael Bernard and Robert Dawson. Once a year the founder of this therapy, Albert Ellis, would come over from the States and assist in the examinations. This is how I started to learn about myself; how to reduce my anger and anxieties, my fear of life. I also did some courses with the Health Department, dealing with addiction, but something was missing and after years of being in recovery privately and also in self-help groups I felt there were still gaps. In 1987 I started to correspond with an Institute in the USA, called Hazelden, which specialised in addictions. I expressed my interest both in what they were teaching and also in studying with them. I received a stack of papers to fill in. They wanted to know everything about my personal life in fine detail and on a practical level they wanted to know how I was going to finance the thirteen months intensive, live-in Course. I had always been completely open with my relatives in Holland about my life in Australia and they knew about my struggles. One of my brothers offered to pay for a plane ticket to Hazelden in the States so that I could go for an interview and another brother offered to sponsor me so that I could do the course. I accepted their generous offers, although alternatively I would have been prepared to sell my house in order to finance myself. I was accepted for the course and it was a great relief not to have any financial worries. Never before in my life had I studied so hard. Learning about alcohol- and drug addiction is learning about emotional issues and the covering-up of pain; the pain caused by sexual, physical and emotional abuse. It was a tremendously intensive, confronting and enriching year of soul-searching. A lot of my emotional issues started to come to the surface, issues I had suppressed for some forty years! I received loving help and support, total strangers became soul-mates; without their love and care I would not have been able to last the distance. At first, I wanted to go home after six weeks, because I felt I could not cope. But after talking to the psychologist and going into therapy myself I decided to stay. I learned a holistic approach to life and wonderful skills of self-care; I worked for nine and a half months with drug- and alcohol dependent people and the remaining ten weeks with their families and/or significant others.

Now I am a counsellor myself and I take a holistic approach to my work. I return to the USA regularly, that is where my support network really is; in Australia my support network is rather small. Every time I come back from America I am bursting with energy, all the goodness and nurturing I receive over there is something special. I have never been happier in my

life. I have been able to study, to grow, to receive love from people around me, from my children and grandchild . The openness within my family of origin has brought most of us closer together. I do understand how I operated in the past and how I operate now. I am so happy with everything I have; I am content and grateful. It is an honour to have the love and support of my children, my family of origin and friends all over the world; I cherish this and am deeply thankful. Life is a process and learning to live with life is a process too; if one can regard this as an adventure, it feels better than anything else.

I see our emigration still as something I would have preferred not to have happened. If we had stayed in Holland my life would have turned out entirely differently - I think. When I came out here I hardly knew what it was like to be a migrant: I didn't know what lay ahead, what to expect, how to adapt to a different culture, how to make connections and friends and how to find fellow countrymen. As migrants we were really not prepared at all for what lay ahead of us. To be a migrant is to step into a territory unknown.

Although migrating has been a traumatic experience in many ways, I am grateful for what has ultimately eventuated. If I had not come here, I would not have met the people I have, I would not have had the experiences I've now had. It seems that this was my destiny.

I have strong ties here in Australia, as well as in America and the Netherlands.

My relatives, that is my brothers and sister, are the ones who make it financially possible for me to go back to Holland and America to strengthen those ties. I have the best of three worlds !

“IN THE END YOU BELONG TO NEITHER COUNTRY.”

By Katrina,

Victoria

I came to Australia in 1955 together with my husband and eight children and I was pregnant with our ninth child. We made the decision to emigrate, because we did not think we had any future in the Netherlands. We were having a really hard time to make ends meet and to feed our children. I often listened to the radio which broadcast messages and stories from Dutch emigrants in Australia. The stories these people told were just fantastic, plenty of work, great weather and lots of space. It sounded like a land full of opportunity where the money was growing on trees, like a dream. It was around Christmas and we did not have any money for food, when I was once again listening to the broadcast from Australia and I said to my husband: “ This sounds like the solution of our problems; we have to go and make a better life for ourselves and the children”. My husband was not convinced that migration would be the solution, but nevertheless he went to an information night about Australia. Afterwards we talked about it for a long time, not being able to make up our minds whether to apply or not. Then one day, when I felt really desperate I decided something had to be done, so I went to get the application forms and convinced my husband to apply.

We were allowed to take many of our belongings and we took as much as we could. We did not really know much about Australia but we had heard that such items as chamois-cloths and carpet-beaters were not for sale, so we stocked up on all sorts of things we thought we could not purchase in Australia.

When we arrived in Melbourne we went straight to a hostel for migrants in Creswick near Ballarat in Victoria, where we stayed for seven weeks. That was not bad at all. There were lots of people around in good spirits. From there we moved to a small town near Ballarat called Sebastopol, where we got a house. The house, which belonged to a farmer, was really old and did not have many comforts. There were neither gas-heating nor hot water, but there was electricity. There was a wood

stove and a boiler in the kitchen to heat up the water for the washing. With nine children you do have a lot of washing, it was a massive task. There was a garden around the house with a fence, next to another block of land where the farmer had thirteen cows grazing. I was terrified of these cows and did not dare leave the garden. I was virtually a prisoner in my own house. The baker would deliver bread and would put it next to the letter box in the front garden, but I did not dare go and get it, so I had to wait until the children came home from school.

It was there that our 10th child was born. My husband and children were my life. What made it so difficult for me to adjust to Australia was that we did not have any relatives here. We were on our own and I did not speak one word of English. I came from a large family in Holland. Relatives would drop in all day and there was plenty of support and help when I needed it. Suddenly we lived in the middle of nowhere and there I was without my relatives and with ten children and no support. In Holland we lived in a city in the centre of the country and I was used to the busy city life with shops within walking distance, so I felt very isolated and lonely here in Australia. The children went to school, my husband started his own business and I was left behind with the two babies. I had nobody to talk to and as a result I lost a lot of weight. I hardly ever left the house and of course with ten children there was plenty to do. I seldom went shopping. My husband would drop off the shopping list in town before he went to work and the shopping would be delivered to our house. I had hardly any opportunity to mix with Australians so there was no chance to pick up the language either. We did have Dutch people living in the neighborhood, but I seldom had contact with them. Part of the problem was that I was very busy with the family and I had also lost interest in meeting people because I was homesick for Holland. I did try to learn English though, especially because of the children, but I never really got the hang of it. After we had been here only a short while the children stopped talking Dutch. They would speak English all the time and I could no longer understand my own kids. I was devastated, so my husband told the children only to speak Dutch at home so that I, their mother, could understand them. It was not that people were not helpful - especially the Dutch priest was wonderful - , but that could not replace the intimacy with my relatives in Holland. Because of my isolation I started to idealize Holland more and more and would tell the children all these wonderful stories about this paradise called Holland.

It became quite an obsession and my only aim became to save enough money to go home.

My husband suffered from asthma and he developed serious health problems. As a result he had to give up his business and we moved to Melbourne where we started a milk bar. I was much happier there because I had people around me. There was traffic and I liked the liveliness of the city. I also enjoyed the contact with people and my limited English was just enough to understand and talk to the customers. We all slaved away to save money to be able to go back to Holland. But the milkbar did not work out either and after two years we had to give it up. We had lots of setbacks and difficulties with our health. It was just one thing after another.

In 1967 we had saved enough money - with the help of the children- for all of us to go back to Holland. Of course we had stayed in contact with my mother, brother and sisters, but when we arrived in Holland, it soon turned out that we did not belong there any more either. Everybody had gone on with their own lives and things had changed after twelve years. The worst thing was that the family connection was broken and they called us foreigners !

For the children the re-emigration was very disappointing. Holland was nothing like the stories I had told them. But I loved being back with my relatives and I loved the life we had in Holland. But my husband had a heart attack, and when the doctor asked him what his problem was, he said that he was homesick for Australia. So the doctor advised us, for my husband's sake, to return to Australia. In the meantime one of our daughters did get married and went to Canada and another daughter had married a Dutchman. After four years in Holland we returned to Australia in 1971. In 1975 one of our other daughters went back to live in Holland.

Our children have always been very supportive and have helped us wherever they could and I am very proud of them. The family has always been the most important thing in my life. It was my world and I loved it. When I look back I can only say that if I had known what it was like to emigrate, I would never have left Holland, regardless of the hardships we were enduring at that time. In 1986 my husband passed away. The children

have their own lives and I am here in a Dutch retirement village, and we have to make the best of it.

“TO HAVE MOST OF YOUR CLOSE RELATIVES HER

REALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE.”

By Hetty,

Victoria

My two brothers left for Australia in October 1950. My elder brother had lived in Indonesia and when he returned to Holland he had trouble finding his feet. He felt that everything was so small and that people were very narrow-minded and he wanted to see more of the world. For my younger brother, emigrating to Australia was a way to avoid being conscripted into the army. After the war people were less than enthusiastic about having their lives disrupted again by conscription.

Our family consisted of two boys and two girls and I was the only one engaged at that time. My father had promised that, if the boys liked Australia, the whole family would follow. My sister and I protested by saying: ”You cannot decide for us”. My sister was a bit older than I, had a very good job, and I had studied until the age of twenty and had just started teaching, so we really did not seriously consider migrating. It was a difficult time for my mother: her two sons were in Australia and her two daughters in Holland were not keen to go. She was really torn. When my fiance, who had been in Indonesia for two and a half years, came back, his job had been kept open for him. We both had a lot of doubts about migrating, but my brothers wrote these really pressing letters urging us to come. They wrote about the enormous space and absence of the threat of war. In Europe you always felt that there was the threat that Russia might start another war but I refused to consider that a reason to leave Holland. I always felt that God would take care of us. My parents talked continually about Australia as if it were paradise. We really got fed up and often left the house so that we wouldn’t hear them idealising Australia. However, eventually my fiance and I began to talk seriously about migrating. It was a really tough decision, but finally we decided that all of us, except my sister, would go. Although my fiance’s mother was a widow and found it difficult to accept that her son wanted to leave again, we left on the 9th of May 1952. She could not understand that my sister was staying behind, while

the rest of the family migrated. When we left, we really thought that we would never see our relatives again. My husband wrote to his mother nearly every week until she died, which she appreciated very much ! In 1969 we were able to stay with her for three months, with our youngest son, who was six years old then. She died 6 months later !

We travelled on the m.v. Johan van Oldenbarneveld to Australia. My fiance and my father slept with twenty-five men in one dormitory and my mother and I in another with twenty-five women. Privacy was out of the question. One of the women in our dorm had to be woken up at 6 am. each day for health reasons. We really hated it, because her husband would come and wake all of us up. The whole trip took four and a half weeks. We arrived in Melbourne on the 12th of July 1952, in pouring rain. Both my brothers were at the pier to meet us. They had rented a large room with a kitchen at 74 Power Street, Fitzroy and lived there till we arrived. Then they gave the room to my parents and me while my brothers and my fiance went to live in a boarding-house with bed and breakfast provided. The house at 74 Power Street was quite large and two young couples from Holland lived there too. They were pleased to have my parents there, because they missed their own. Now they had instant surrogate parents !

We really enjoyed ourselves there. It was really "gezellig"[cosy: Ed.]. Hans would get up every morning at 6 am, buy a newspaper and come and pick me up to go job hunting. We had arrived at a very bad time as it was the end of the financial year and nobody was taking on new staff. It was very discouraging. Everywhere the answer was no ! My eldest brother took me to the Council for Independent Schools to apply for a job as a teacher, but, although I had had eight years of English at school in Holland I did not dare open my mouth! A private girls' school in Toorak offered me a job as an assistant needlework teacher. They would not pay me for three months; during that time I could learn English and after three months they would pay me. In retrospect I should have accepted that offer, but I really needed a full time job. We received two pounds ten shillings per week from Social Services and I felt bad about it. I did not want to live on a handout. After four and a half weeks we both found jobs. I started as a part time home help in a house not far from where we lived. In the meantime we were still going to the employment office to find full time work and eventually I found a job in a sweets factory in Abbotsford. The owner was fond of young girls, so you had to watch him. It was a terrible job making

lollies. The sweet smell just took your breath away. We had to wet pieces of licorice and then place them in a container with little coloured non-pareils like hundreds and thousands and pick them out with a fork. You had to be really careful that they were well coated.

One day after work, my youngest brother told us about a house in Ivanhoe. The house was rented by a company in Williamstown for one of their employees. This employee could suddenly get a house locally. As the house in Ivanhoe still had a 2 year lease, the Company was eager to find other tenants. My brother told them that we were looking for a house and wanted to get married. At the same time an acquaintance came from Bonegilla camp to look for work and a place to live for his family. Straight away we offered him to come and live with us in Ivanhoe, so that we could share the rent. He accepted, found a job and went to Bonegilla to get his wife and son. My fiance boarded with them for three weeks, before we were able to get married. Eight weeks after we set foot in Australia we were married on the 8th of August 1952, Hans' 25th birthday. I was twenty two and a half years old. We had brought everything we needed to set up house apart from furniture, and with the 36 Pounds each which we had been allowed to bring, we wanted to buy some new furniture. But that was easier said than done. Most furniture was very old fashioned and rather heavy. But we finally found some modern furniture. I kept my job in the sweets factory until December of that year when somebody had to be laid off. It was either another Dutch woman or me; since I was pregnant and the other Dutch woman's husband did not have a job, I felt it was logical for me to quit.

I had a wonderful time before the baby was born. I could sleep in and read books. It was a pleasant relief from all the work I had done! I knitted for the baby and made baby clothes and sheets which I embroidered. Our first baby, a boy, was born on the second of August 1953. For the delivery I went to Dandenong where my parents had moved. I stayed with them for a couple of weeks after the birth. After that I returned to Ivanhoe, but I kept seeing the doctor in Dandenong now and then. It was quite a trip. First a twenty minute walk straight up the hill to get to the station, then by train to Richmond where I had to change trains for Dandenong. The whole trip took more than an hour.

We really had to watch our pennies! My husband earned twelve pounds ten shillings per week and we paid four pounds fifteen shillings rent, which was shared by our neighbours. I had nine match-boxes in which I divided our money, so that we could pay all the bills, like gas, church, milk, groceries, electricity etc. We always managed to put some money in the Bank to save, even if it was only one shilling!

After we had lived in Ivanhoe for two years the owner offered us the house to buy. He wanted four thousand pounds and a deposit of one thousand pounds. We really had to laugh about his offer. We did not even have one hundred pounds ! We had only one income and each other and a baby and that was it! I tried to make some extra money by knitting angora jumpers and by making beaded earrings. We had brought plenty of dress material from Holland, all very modern and colourful. There was not much choice in dress material in Melbourne. It was the same with shoes, which were either black, brown or blue! I had brought a pair of light tan shoes which really created a stir. There was not much variety in food either; nor in delicatessen, so we had a lot sent from Holland.

I really missed my old friends, especially after I stopped work. Although we lived with another Dutch couple and I was friendly with the woman, who was 18 years older than I, it was not the same as talking to my girl friends. This was different for my husband. He had his job and me. I meant everything to him, he often said.

We moved to East Kew and shared a large house with my parents, so that we could save money to buy our own house. It was here that our eldest daughter, was born in March 1955. It took us four and a half years to save up enough money to buy our own house. It was extremely difficult and we only bought necessary items, nothing luxurious. At last we were able to buy an old house in Elsternwick. The people before us had lived there for twenty three years and had never repainted the house. We painted the house white on the outside and also the inside. We removed the iron lacework and built a pergola instead. We had blue outside venetian blinds installed and a red pergola and letter box, so we had a red, white and blue house just like the Dutch flag! The house was ideally located, close to public transport. My husband worked in the city and took the train to work each day and I could easily visit my parents. We were about the last ones of all our friends to have a car. We lived in Elsternwick for eight years and during

that time the twins were born. It was quite a surprise ! I only knew three weeks before they were born that I was going to have twins and then they were born five weeks prematurly ! It was a bit of a shock. They were both very small, the girl was in a humidity crib for a day and the boy for a week. They were each on a different floor in the hospital and the first 4 days I did not see my baby daughter, which was distressing. Only when another women pointed out to the Staff that I had not seen my daughter yet, did they put me in a wheelchair to go and see her. The doctor said that she had a black eye and at first I did not understand him, because in Dutch you say " blue eye," and that her brother had probably kicked her in the womb. Five years after the twins, in June 1963, our last child, another boy, was born.

Over the years my husband was promoted and when he became a manager, he also got a car. As he did not have his drivers` licence, he had to take lessons and go for it. It took him ages to pass and after his fourth attempt he finally passed the test. I never learned to drive myself, because all our cars were company cars which I was not allowed to drive because of insurance regulations. I was always at home with the children and because I did not have a car I seldom did our grocery shopping. Before we had a car, my husband would do most of the shopping by bicycle. He had those Dutch bicycle bags on each side of his bike which could hold quite a lot of groceries. There were some shops within walking distance and I would pack up all the kids and walk there. Once I had the twins in a pram and the other two walking at each side. An old lady stopped me and asked how old I was

(I must have been 29 or 30 years old) and if they were all mine. Then she said: " Well you have done your share for the nation!". I thought that was hilarious!

We often went for walks and when possible, bicycle rides. We had both brought our bicycles from Holland. One day when we were cycling each of us with a child on a seat in the front and one at the back of our bicycles, we were stopped by a policeman who said that it was too dangerous and that we were not allowed to ride that way. We told him that it was a Dutch custom and quite safe, but he disagreed. That was the end of our bicycle rides, and we went back to walking again.

We had always said: Once we have a car, we will move to Box Hill, closer to the church. We felt that it was really important for the children to get religious instruction in our own church. We belonged to the Reformed Church in Holland and my father had made inquiries about which church to go to once we arrived here. The Reformed Church already existed. It was founded on 30th December 1951 in response to the demand by Dutch people who did not feel at home in other churches. My brothers for instance, first went to the Free Church in Alma Road, but the congregation consisted mainly of older people, who felt that an organ in the church was too worldly. This sort of problem arose all over Australia, so the ministers came together and decided to establish their own church. The friends we had in the church were mainly Dutch and some were married to Australians. This has changed over the years and we even had a minister who used to belong to the Presbyterian Church (later he became one of our professors at our Theological College in Geelong). The church has been very important in our lives and we have always been very much involved. This made it easier in a way to be away from our country of birth, because you instantly had friends with common interests and also a well developed support network. Having most of my family here made all the difference of course. The severe illness and death of my husband at 59 years old has deeply shocked me. Yet when looking back, I feel greatly blessed by having had a beautiful marriage, five well -adjusted children, all happily married to Christian partners and seventeen precious grandchildren. My involvement with the Church, my children and grandchildren keep me very busy.

“WE REALLY DID NOT HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO LIVE IN AUSTRALIA.”

By

Noortje, Victoria

While we were living in Rotterdam we decided to emigrate to Australia, together with two other couples. We went to the Australian immigration office in the Hague and signed up. We all left in 1950, but we did not leave at the same time. One couple went after the other. I was thirty years old and our daughter was six when we left. We all thought it was a big adventure. You did not really know what going to a country at the other end of the world would be like. After all, it was just after the war, and world travel for everyone, especially the young was unheard of then. We were full of anticipation, but also trepidation. Nevertheless we made lots of plans.

The first couple who went to Australia did not have any difficulties in finding a job, because the husband had trade qualifications as a house painter, and on arrival he found a job in Burwood. We, the second couple to leave, were supposed to go to Bathurst in NSW. While we were sailing to Australia on the m.v. Johan van Oldenbarneveld, (it was its first journey after the war and it was still a troop transport ship), we received a telegram from our friends in Burwood telling us to get off the boat in Melbourne, because they had found a job for my husband. That was easier said than done. It took a fair bit of talking to convince the authorities to let us disembark in Melbourne. Our friends met us at the boat in Port Melbourne. We had taken a bottle of jenever (Dutch gin) with us to celebrate. My husband, whom I had never seen drunk, first had with our friend and the boss a couple of beers and then the gin and they got quite drunk. Later that night we were taken to Olinda in the Dandenong Ranges where our friends had found accommodation for us in a guesthouse. When we arrived there, a man was waiting for us. He turned out to be the schoolteacher and I thought: “How embarrassing. Here I am with my drunken husband. What an impression we are making!”.

Our dwelling was quite small. The three of us had to sleep in one bedroom. The kitchen was tiny. There was a really small sink, and hardly

any space, just enough to fit in a small table and two chairs. The schoolteacher came to see us the next day to ask if he could take our daughter to school with him. This man turned out to be really friendly and helpful. He took us the same week to a barbecue in Olinda. We didn't have a clue what a barbecue was, but we said that we would like to come. We drove up to the hills and finally we arrived in the middle of the forest at an open space, where there was this big fire on which food was cooked. The barbecue was organised by the local football club and everybody was very friendly and really easy-going. I had a great time.

My husband's job was in Burwood. He had to travel by train which was fine, but then a train strike started which lasted for 3 months [strikes were unheard of in Holland at that time: Ed.]. At first he had to travel in a open truck, later he stayed in Burwood. I fell ill during his absence and my daughter contracted a throat infection. It was terrible, I did not know what to do because I did not speak any English and I got by as best I could with sign language. Somebody realised our predicament and took us to the doctor who gave me a penicillin injection.

When the strike was over, we were reunited for a couple of weeks. Then my husband received the news that he could start another job as a painter in a village close to Sale in Gippsland. As we could not go with him, and not knowing how permanent this job would be, my husband became a boarder and our daughter and I stayed in Olinda. I did not really like it, but we did not have any choice. I did have contact with people around me, but because I spoke hardly any English, I often said Yes instead of No and vice versa and this gave rise to some interesting and sometimes funny misunderstandings. In the beginning shopping was a problem. At times I ordered food by phone and as I spoke hardly any English it was often a surprise to see what they delivered. One time I thought: "That is nice, they have put some flowers with the order, but it turned out to be asparagus that was in flower". At that time there was one general store which had only basic items and if we needed something special, we had to go to Belgrave. We really lived very simply and tried to save. I still remember how proud I was when I bought a beautiful cup, and how pleased I was when we had saved up to buy a radio. It was wonderful to be able to listen to music.

In the meantime the third couple had arrived and we all lived in the same block of flats in Olinda. It was quite an international community: Germans, Austrians and Dutch all living together. The headmaster from Olinda used to come to our flat and teach all the women English. There was often lots of laughter about the strange words we learned and the mix up of languages was most amusing.

Once a month there was a dance in the hall. We often went, as there was always a good atmosphere. Although we were foreigners and immigrants, people really made an effort to understand and accept us and I have always been very grateful for that.

In those days "New Australians" were not always welcome, certainly not at social gatherings.

We played cards with our other Dutch friends, mostly in our little kitchen and when somebody wanted to go to the toilet, everybody had to leave the kitchen to let that person pass. We had many good nights. It was really "gezellig".

When my husband came back from his job near Sale, I said: "I need to go out and find a job myself". I used to be a furrier in Holland and it was not difficult to find a job here. I travelled by train to Melbourne. It was great to be in the city and I really enjoyed being among other people and being able to use my skills. I did this work for a number of years. Than something happened at home and I had to resign from my job.

We had mostly Dutch friends. We had good times together, because we shared the same cultural background. We would visit each other regularly, especially on birthdays. We really pulled together in those early years, partly because it was easier to talk Dutch and also because there were no Dutch clubs or anything like that to be among peers. That did not exclude us however from having Australian friends. We mixed with them as well.

I went back to Holland in 1970 and it was really nice to be among family and friends, but it was also good to be back. Australia is where my home is now. Unfortunately my husband has died, but I enjoy living in a Dutch retirement village. It is good to have people around you who share the same cultural background and therefore understand you. When you get

older, it becomes more important to be among “kindred souls”. So I am fortunate to be able to live here. It is really “gezellig”.

“I NEVER LOST MY OPTIMISM, NOR REGRETTED THAT

I CAME.”

by Margreet,

Victoria

I was 21 years old when my engagement broke off. I was a bit in limbo and eager to see more of the world. One of my friends had migrated to Australia with her husband and she was willing to help me get into the country. At that stage you could not migrate as a single young woman, so she found me a young man, who originally came from Overijsel [A province in the Netherlands: Ed.] , who would pose as my fiancé, and she had also arranged a job for me. My parents were terribly upset when I told them that I was leaving, but they could not stop me. It was all very exciting, a real adventure, but once the boat sailed the reality of it all dawned on me and I suddenly started to ask myself what I was doing!

We arrived at Port Melbourne in May 1957. My friend and my fictitious fiancé were there to pick me up. It turned out that the lodgings they had found for me were in the same house as my fiance’s. I did not like this young man at all; and having had a Catholic upbringing, staying under the same roof with him was not proper, so after three days I decided I must take action. Times and values were different then. On the boat someone had given me the address of a German couple in Malvern, a Melbourne suburb, who were looking for an au pair girl [somebody who looks after the children and does some light houswork in return for board and lodging and a little pocket-money: Ed.]. My landlady called a taxi and I just arrived on their doorstep with my hand luggage. In retrospect it was really quite dangerous, because I did not know a thing about these people; nor had I called beforehand to ensure if the job was still available. In a combination of broken English and German I introduced myself and told them why I was there. Fortunately the position had not been filled and I stayed with this family for seven months, looking after three children and doing cooking and washing. During this time I was introduced to the Dutch drama group “Het Voetlicht” in Box Hill.

It was great to have a social life and to meet people who understood you and enjoyed acting as well. I met my future husband at the acting group and we fell in love. After having known each other for five months we decided to get married and we started off as a young married couple in a boarding house in St Kilda, because neither of us had much money, nor any furniture.

Soon I became pregnant and because I was really ill from the start I had to stop working. We rented a small apartment which was quite primitive; the toilet was outside! Our first baby was born in hospital [this was very unusual for a Dutch woman as in Holland home deliveries were the norm: Ed.]. My husband worked very hard and I stayed home with the baby. We lived very frugally in order to save up for a deposit on a house, which was everybody's dream. We never went out, because we could not afford it, but we loved each other and that was enough.

I hardly spoke any English and it took me two years before I had the courage to open my mouth. When I went shopping I would write things down beforehand and show my list in the shops. On public transport I would show the conductor a note with the address so that he could tell me where to get off. The first two years I would let John do all the talking, but with the help of newspapers and television I started to learn basic English.

When our baby girl was 10 months old we had saved enough money for a deposit on a house in one of the outer suburbs. I had no idea where that place was and I really would have liked to buy a house in Box Hill, but we simply could not afford that kind of deposit. The house was part of a new housing estate which consisted of twenty houses. There were no roads, pot holes everywhere and when it rained it got terribly muddy. To catch transport you had to walk for miles [in Holland public transport is mostly close by and runs frequently: Ed.]. There were no shops, not even a milk bar. I was very isolated and did not have contact with anybody. All day long I would look forward to my husband's homecoming. Services were non-existent, there was no doctor, no health center, nothing.

Those early years in Australia were emotionally, but also physically, very hard for me. For instance, the first eight years I did the washing for four people by hand (we'd had another baby) and shopping with two toddlers was a difficult task. We did not have any money for baby sitters,

but until the children were five and six years old, we managed to go to the acting group in Box Hill. It then became too difficult for the children to stay in the dressing room while we were on stage. So my husband said that it was not good for the children, and that was the end of acting. I really missed that contact, but a year later another Dutch couple moved into the neighborhood and with them we formed a friendship which has lasted to this day. We never questioned our lives, you took everything in your stride and never really looked at what your own needs were. Even when we had very little money, we would not consider a bank loan. We had been brought up to pay cash for whatever we bought, it was always "boter bij de vis".

My husband was twelve years older than I, and he was always looking for security and thinking of the time he would retire. He had joined a real estate firm and had bought some cheap blocks of land for investment. But in 1964 my mother became very ill and we sold all the land to enable us to travel to Holland to see her. We stayed several months and when we came back to Melbourne we decided to move. Where we lived was so barren, there were no trees, and it was so isolated. John wanted to start his own real estate business and I was interested in starting an art and craft shop. We renovated a building in Waverley and ran our business from home. The first year and a half the business went quite well, but in 1966 there was a credit squeeze and the real -estate business went down considerably. I was struggling with my art and craft shop. I tried to introduce all sorts of different crafts but people were mostly interested in knitting and crocheting. Then I fell ill and we had to close down both businesses, which meant we lost everything and were left with lots of debts. It turned out that I was pregnant again.

We rented a very old house in Ringwood for fifteen pounds a week and the two years we lived there were the happiest for me. When you do not have any other relatives you are totally dependent on each other and this either makes or breaks your relationship. Ours only improved with the years. We were both convinced that more material goods would not make us any happier, although it would have been easier if we had not had to struggle financially at times. It was my Australian neighbor who made these two years so special. She was just fantastic, she was always there for me and with her assistance my English improved greatly. Through her I got a much better understanding of the Australian way of life. She was really the first

Australian I got to know. We both had three children and we would help each other out. Even now after thirty years we have maintained our friendship.

To pay off our debts I started a cleaning job, cleaning schools. Although the work was terrible, I had lots of fun with the other women who were all Dutch and we used to sing and joke while we worked. In 1968 my husband accepted a job in a real estate agency in Mentone. I was really distressed to leave Ringwood but it was too far for my husband to travel to Mentone every day. My husband used to work seven days a week and was only paid when he made a sale, so we never knew if we would have enough money for food. Insurance took a large part of the pay, as he was self-employed. After two years we had saved enough to put a deposit on a house and over the years we renovated that house and added a second story to it and we lived in this house until my husband died.

In 1971 I found a part-time job as delicatessen assistant with a groceries chain. The manager soon realized that I knew a lot about foreign foods and asked me to set up an international gourmet department in their three stores. In 1979 I was put in charge of the gourmet departments of all the nine stores. From that time on, things started to improve for us. I bought my own car and we were able to go out more. Sadly, my husband started to have health problems and suffered two heart attacks. We were very concerned about how long he still had to live, so the five of us went to Holland so that my husband could see his mother and sisters. At night in bed I used to think "dear God, please let him stay with me". As wife and mother you keep up appearances, you stay cheerful and positive, and I did not give myself a chance to deal with my own emotions. In situations like these, you miss your close relatives in Holland most. You don't have anybody who really knows and understands you, and whom you can totally trust.

When I turned fifty I stopped working and finally had time to do all the things I had always wanted to do in art and craft. During this period my husband had five by-pass operations. It was touch and go but he made a fantastic recovery, only to be diagnosed with cancer eighteen months later. He died in 1989 after great suffering. We really were very compatible and enjoyed a marvelous marriage for thirty-one years.

When I look back on my life, it was a very rich one. We struggled at times and always came out on top, but I would not like my children to have to struggle the way we did. When we arrived in Australia we had no idea what lay ahead of us, but we were willing to do almost anything to make it work. All the setbacks made us grow closer and we never lost our optimism. I have no regrets about coming here, because I love the life style, the freedom and even the unpredictable Melbourne weather !

I have a busy, fulfilling life with my craft, volunteer work, family and friends and I love every minute of it. But as a migrant you really are in a sort of limbo. You still hold on to some of the Dutch customs and traditions, but you also adopt the Australian way of life. You never totally belong here, but you definitely do not belong in the Netherlands either. I often talk about this with my Dutch friends. We would never want to go back and live in Holland but we all agree you do not belong in either country, and sometimes that is hard. Our children have grown up here, they are Australians and I often see that this second generation does not always understand their parents and their culture. I am lucky because I have a very good relationship with my three children, and that means a lot to me.

“AS SOON AS I LAND ON AMSTERDAM, I AM AT HOME, YET I CHOOSE TO LIVE IN AUSTRALIA.”

By Els,

Victoria

I was born in London, my mother was American, my father Dutch, and we moved back to Holland in 1937. We were a bit of a mixture, in England we were the Dutch children and in Holland we were regarded as English, but as I spent my formative years in Holland I regard myself as more Dutch than English.

My fiance had been in the army in Indonesia and when he came back to Holland he found it hard to settle, so he started talking about migrating. Holland was still suffering from the after effects of the war, there was a shortage of housing etc.. He wanted to migrate, I was sort of half-hearted, but if we were to migrate at all, I was in favour of Canada, closer by, much easier to get home to Holland. The adventure certainly attracted me. But my fiance’s uncle, who had spent time in Queensland to recuperate after his release from Japanese internment in Indonesia, had painted such rosy pictures, that he really wanted to go to Australia. After Indonesia, the Dutch climate no longer appealed to him and to live in a sunny country like Australia seemed ideal.

We were married at the Registry Office in Amsterdam and we planned to marry in church in Melbourne. My fiance left first and I followed in 1951. Although we did not know anybody in Melbourne we still chose to go there, because we heard through the Church that a Dutch Priest had set up a hostel for single Dutch males: a good starting point, we thought. When I arrived I was booked into St Ann’s Hall, a boarding house for women only. We were married in Sacred Heart Church, Kew, together with another couple who did not have any relatives here either, so at least we had the support of each other. There we were, two couples in front of the altar and an empty church behind us! It was hard, I remember that at the end of the day I had a pain in my jaw from stopping myself crying, thinking of everybody back home and not even knowing where we were going to spend the night! The accommodation my husband had arranged fell

through at the last moment, so he was frantically making phone calls and so was the priest who had married us. We found a place to stay in Mulgrave. I had not expected that it would be hard to find accommodation. We married on the Saturday, our honeymoon was a trip to Frankston on Sunday and on Monday my husband went back to work.

We shared a house with a man and his two daughters, who were lovely people. We were able to use the kitchen, and a part of it was curtained off and served as our living room. Behind the kitchen was a small room which was our bedroom. The rooms were furnished, but we needed cups, saucers, knives, forks, etc.. On Monday I took the bus to Dandenong to buy things. I asked the bus driver to drop me off in the Main Street, he stopped the bus and said: "This is it lady". There were only a few shops, I just had quite different expectations.

The next day I started to look for a job. Jobs were fairly easy to come by, I wasn't choosy and accepted a job to do the bookkeeping in a furniture shop and at times I also helped out in the shop. The next job I had was in Springvale as a telephonist, using a switchboard with old fashioned cords. I had the big advantage that I spoke English and had some intimate knowledge of the Anglo Saxon culture because of my American mother. Later I took a job with Tomasetti in Melbourne.

We knew absolutely no one when we arrived and the family we lived with was our only social contact. They were fantastic, really taking an interest in what I would knit or sew, admiring what I made, and giving me hints for cooking, because my mother had never taught me to cook. They included us in everything, even Christmas dinner. They were a tremendous support. But through circumstances we needed to move. We were offered some other accommodation more in Mulgrave proper, with a Dutch family to whom we were introduced after Sunday mass. They were also very nice people and became lifelong friends. We had one room there and use of the bathroom. We met a lot of Dutch people through the church .

Our next move was when I was pregnant with our first child in 1953. We took up accommodation with a Dutch farmer who had several bungalows on his farm, which he rented to Dutch people. One of the bungalows was a fixed up chicken -coop. Some people really did live in substandard housing, but they would clean the windows and spruce it up,

make it cosy and put flowers inside. They made the best of what they had. I think the Dutch really had that quality of making the best of things. Other sub-standard housing along the road was filthy and messy, but not those where Dutch people lived ! We shared half the house with the farmer.

After our son was born we had a six or seven month spell in Tasmania where my husband had taken a job, but it was not the sort of environment to make progess and get ahead. It was lovely though, to live in Devonport, an ideal place to bring up a child. When we heard that we could get accommodation back in Mulgrave we returned to the mainland. Our first son slept for a while in a converted orange box. Thick straw first and a blanket folded double over the straw and up the sides to protect him from the rough wood.

On sunny days I put a suitcase outside with a folded blanket as mattress, the lid tied to a door knob. He even slept in a drawer for a while with a pillow as mattress. We had bought a secondhand pram but it was in storage after we returned from Tasmania. A Dutch friend eventually gave us a bassinet. We still have it and each of our 5 grandchildren has slept in it.

Mulgrave was a little rural village, some of the roads were made, others not. We lived on the highway. I can remember walking with the pram and two children by my side; the middle of the road was made, the sides not, and in the rain the cars would splash mud all over us. We lived on a hill and I had to turn the pram around and drag it up-hill. I could not push it through the gravel. We were often in a real mess when we came home and I would cry and then clean everything.

I missed my family, but in a way it was easier not to have anybody here who could see the circumstances we were living in. How upset my mother would have been if she could have seen it. No hot water, we shared an outside bathroom with a chip heater, a sort of boiler which made the bathroom nice and warm. You rolled up bits of newspaper and put it with some sticks in the boiler to light it. It was very different from what I was used to, but I could remember not having hot water during the war and we had lived in fairly difficult circumstances during that time in Amsterdam. Nevertheless it was not easy without hot water or washing machine when one had three small children. There was a copper in the cow shed, all very

time consuming to use, but I was young and willing to do anything. It was even fun if all went well.

The bungalow we lived in was very small. There was one bedroom and when our third son was born there was no room for his bassinet so at night it would stand on the kitchen table, and during the day on our bed. I taught myself to sew and made clothes for the children because I could not afford to buy what I wanted to dress them in. I sewed by hand. I did not have a sewing machine. I can remember sewing a really nice pair of trousers for one of my sons out of the sleeves and back of an old Harris tweed jacket and a shirt out of some one's old shirt. It was so satisfying to see them looking nice.

We never went out, shopping and Sunday mass were my outings. We saved every penny for a house and never even dreamed of owning a car. Eventually we bought a house in Ringwood. We saw it advertised. They were selling it, lock stock and barrel, furniture and all. The man my husband did the gardening for on a Saturday morning was willing to come along and give us some advice. After the inspection he said: "You cannot afford not to buy it." It was a very humble ten square fibro cement house with a big back yard with a high fence and a gate I could lock, so that the children would be safe. No fire place, just a pipe for a little stove. The furniture was all very ordinary, but when we moved in it seemed luxury to me. The house had only two bedrooms but there was a little sunroom we used as a bedroom as well. That was in 1956. We bought it on a very small deposit and the house cost only a few thousand pounds. We might not have liked the furniture, but it was a start and it would have taken years before we would have been able to buy what we really wanted. We scrubbed and painted and gardened. We were very happy there, they were good years. Our fourth child, a daughter, was born there. Through the church I met some Australian women I am still friends with. By this time my husband could speak English well enough to get a much better job. He was working in the City and we were still saving to try and do a bit better. We decided to buy a car, a Fiat 1100, secondhand from a Dutchman. We had made it: a house and a car ! My husband was earning good money, working long hours doing freelance work which paid well so we were able to save. One year we bought our youngest son a toy sail boat. While looking for a lake to sail it on we spotted a house for sale and fell in love with the look of it. We were able to buy it with very little deposit

but it took 3 months before we sold our house in Ringwood and could move to Burwood. Here we spent seven very happy years and our other children were born there, so we had three sons and two little daughters. Jan is a frustrated gardener, he always wanted more land. When the opportunity came we bought this house in Kalista and we have been living here now for 25 years. Our lives changed a lot, leaving Burwood was a big mistake. We needed a second car. The children had to travel longer to school and it was difficult for them to socialise. As soon as they had driving licences they bought cars and in no time we had five cars and four motorbikes, a crazy situation really. In 1974 our eldest son was killed on the road on a motorbike coming home from work on a Friday night. All the children started to move to the city, after their brother's death.

It is very quiet here, the houses are far apart. Most people I knew have moved away and I don't know many now. In a way it is isolated because you cannot go anywhere without a car.

Speaking for myself, my greatest difficulty was homesickness, not so much for Holland as for my family. I missed them very much. Had I been financially able to return to Holland, I am pretty sure I would have. Even more so after the children were born, because I felt so much that they were missing out.

They had little idea of the joys of having grandparents, aunts and uncles. I remember hearing a neighbour's child talking about her "Nanna" to our youngest son. He asked " what is a Nanna?" She, very surprised that he did not know, said "Haven't you got a Nanna?" "No, but I have a new dressing gown" he answered. He probably didn't want to appear too hardly done by !

When our first grandchild was expected, one of our now grown up daughters remarked "This will be the first one of us in Australia with a normal life" and when I enquired what she meant, she replied "This child will have grandparents and aunts and uncles."

I was homesick in the early days, but when the children grew up and I got more involved with schools, things became better. What was really hard was that both my parents died before I had the opportunity to visit them.

Because of the war I had not finished my education, so I went to night school and did VCE and from there I did various courses with the CAE, book-groups and writing-groups. When I left Holland my sister said: " I do understand that you will not always tell mother the truth for mother's sake, but if we are to write to each other it has to be the truth, otherwise it has little value." We stuck to that and we have really long conversations by letter.

I have been back to Holland three times and it always amazes me that as soon as I land I feel at home. I have certainly not been unhappy here. I know I would not have had as big a house or as big a garden but I would have had a different quality of life, had we stayed in Holland.

I think all first generation migrants have the same difficulty. They really do not truly belong anywhere, their hearts and loyalties are divided.

“MIGRATING IS AN ADVENTURE WHEN YOU ARE

21 YEARS OLD”

by Ineke,

Victoria

When we told our friends that we wanted to emigrate, they wouldn’t believe it ! They could not understand that we wanted to emigrate to a country where there was no opera, hardly any theatres and no large museums. They kept asking: Why on earth do you want to go ? I was 21 years old and my fiance and I wanted to get married and live in our own home. But we had little prospect of getting a place of our own, although we had been on the waiting list for public housing, as was the custom after the war. We could not move in with my parents. Their house was too small. My fiance’s mother had one of her newly married children staying with her for quite a while, she had not enjoyed that experience so she did not want to repeat it. My fiance had really itchy feet. He always wanted to travel and I did not mind emigrating either. It all seemed like a big adventure.

Our first choice was New Zealand where my sister had moved to some years previously. We were not accepted, because my fiance was a labourer. They only wanted people with specific qualifications, that I was a trained childcare worker did not count. They were not interested in the women’s qualifications, because most female emigrants were channelled into housekeeping and cleaning jobs. We received a letter from the New Zealand Embassy telling us that we were unsuccessful and that we were not to question this decision. Our second preference was Australia: we applied for that country and were accepted.

We left Holland as an engaged couple and arrived in Australia in February 1956. The trip was quite an adventure. We travelled by sea with the m.v. Zuiderkruis. The accommodation was primitive. Males and females were separated and we slept forty to a dormitory, there was no privacy whatsoever. We came as ten pound migrants so we had to work for a number of years for the Australian Government.

On arrival the immigration officials wanted to send me to a home for unmarried girls and my fiance to Bonegilla on the Murray river near the NSW boarder, regardless of the fact that we had friends in Geelong where we could stay. I thought if we are separated now, I will never see him again. We had had contact with this young couple and had let them know that we were coming and they were at Station Pier, Melbourne. When I spotted them, I went back to the immigration officers and told them our friends were here to meet us. Thank goodness, they let us go.

This young couple had rented a house from a Latvian whom they could not understand. The house was overcrowded. Our friends had one room which served as both living and bedroom and they had the use of the kitchen and bathroom. Another Dutch couple and their three teenage children occupied the rest of the house. It was so crowded that we cooked at times on a camp stove in the garden. We could not live together, because we were not married. So it was important for me to find alternative accommodation as soon as possible. I almost immediately found a job at a College via an employment office. It was not difficult to find a job, because my English was relatively good. This was a different story for my fiance who did not speak any English. Because I lived in the College and had full board, I could save most of my seven pounds a week pay. Seven pounds was a lot of money in those days and much more than I had ever earned in Holland. I was very frugal and walked everywhere to save money. It was nice to have showers and I remember how amazed I was by the huge fridges in the kitchens; I had never seen such big fridges before. On the first day at the College I was warned by the cook not to copy the language of the other girls. It was " bloody this "and " bloody that"; and he explained other swear-words that were not acceptable either. A Dutch friend had warned me not to use certain Dutch words, because they sounded like swear words. Even when your English was reasonable there were always certain expressions you did not know. I think most migrants have been taken by surprise by the expression "bring a plate", thinking that people did not have enough crockery when they invited guests. I made numerous mistakes of course and I could see the reaction on people's faces when I used a word in the wrong context.

I liked my job at the College, but when the school holidays started, they just closed the school. They did not take any notice that I did not have anywhere to go. That was totally unimportant to them, they did

not care. I was just turned into the street. As living together was out of the question, we married as soon as possible and the wedding took place on the 12th of May 1956. It was really moving. On our wedding day we received lots of presents from people who lived in the street where our friends lived. Some of the people we had never met. There was a card from an Italian family and the wife wrote that although she had been in Australia for many years, she was still treated as a foreigner. On the whole in the beginning we did not have much contact with Australians.

The five of us (the two of us, another couple and a single man) rented a house from some Yugoslav people. The rent was five pounds a week, quite expensive as I earned seven pounds. Shortly after, both of us found a job on a farm. I did the housekeeping and my husband was a farmhand. We had free housing and we earned twenty three pounds per month. For our meat we only had to pay threepence a pound, incredibly cheap. It al sounded great, but after six weeks the farmer fired us, not explaining why. Later it turned out that he had never planned to employ us longer than six weeks, but used us as a bridge before the person he had hired permanently could start.

An Australian acquaintance took us to an employment office in the Western District of Victoria. Once they realised that I spoke English, we had a job straight away. We arrived at the farm in the area on Guy Fawkes day and our Australian neighbours had organised a barbecue. We did not know what that was. These neighbours took us under their wing and explained everything. They were great, and our friendship has remained until this day. We were friendly with all the neighbours; they all had different backgrounds. There were Germans, Italians and Scots and they really understood what it meant to be a migrant. But nothing really bothered us. We were young and it was all a big adventure. If I remember correctly we moved about twenty times and lived in different parts of Victoria. All this moving did not trouble me at all. The fact that we lived in houses, farms and once even in a tin shed was all part of the adventure. I could pack up and move in a week. Even after the children were born, moving was no problem. The kids just helped with the packing.

I mostly worked as a housekeeper and cleaner. When I was pregnant I worked until the day I was due and went almost straight back to work. Admittedly, I was lucky, because I always found jobs where I could

take the children. When they were little, they would be in the pram while I worked, and later during school holidays I would bring the children and they would play with the children of the people I worked for. My husband did all sorts of jobs. He worked on farms and in the Ford factory. He learned English from a man who had learned his English in Hahndorf in South Australia, so he ended up with a German accent. People often thought I was English and made guesses from which part of England I came. This was helpful when I was looking for jobs. My husband had opportunities here he would never have had in Holland. He studied for about ten years and became an accountant. Only one of us could study so I did not have the opportunity to improve my qualifications.

We always kept in close contact with our relatives in Holland and my sister in New Zealand. I really never felt homesick, but that probably had a lot to do with my age when I came here. I was only 21 and life was an adventure. The only thing that was quite difficult for me was that shortly after we arrived my father died, and by the time I was notified he had been buried. There was nothing I could do about it. I cried a lot about his death. We were very close. I have been back to Holland twice and my mother and sister have been here twice too, so we have not lost contact. I have frequent contact with my sister in New Zealand and she has been here on numerous occasions. My husband's family always promised to come and visit us, but it never eventuated . As so often happens, they found it easier if we came to Holland.

It really has been a great and interesting life and I have never regretted that we came to Australia.

My husband has died in the meantime and I have moved to a Dutch retirement village where I have made some good friends. We get along really well. It is "gezellig".

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"**THIS IS HOME !"**

By Nel,

Victoria

Our whole family - Mum, Dad and six children- arrived in Australia in 1950, more than forty years ago. In Holland we used to live in a small village in the south of the country near the German border, where everyone knew everyone. My parents made the decision to emigrate by themselves, because at the time taxes were high and Mum and Dad also feared another war, this time with Russia. They never discussed this enormous move with us children, notwithstanding the fact that I was seventeen and my two older sisters were older still and even had boy-friends. My father also decided to go by plane, because with three teenage daughters he didn't want to take any risks: he had heard too many stories of what went on during those six-weeks sea-voyages.

Although I found it difficult to say farewell to my girl-friends, I was still very excited and found it all a great adventure. My two older sisters did not want to leave at all: they had boy-friends, but Dad didn't give them any choice. For the younger children it was easy, for them the family-group was the most important thing.

The flight to Australia was like a fabulous holiday. In those days it still took six days, because we only flew till 4 p.m. each day and on landing were taken to a nice hotel. We had our showers, then a tasty meal and after that we hopped onto a bus to see the sights. The next day the plane took off again at 8 am. with seventy people on board. In our eyes it was a BIG plane!

We arrived in Darwin for afternoon tea, then flew to Sydney and finally by train to Melbourne. My father's youngest sister lived in a village in the Warburton Ranges, not far from Melbourne. She and her husband intended to pick us up, but my Father rang them and said: "Don't bother, we're taking a taxi, it's not so far !" So he hired two taxis, we had quite some luggage as well, travelling with a family of eight. When we left Holland, twenty five pounds per person was all each migrant could take out of Holland at that time, a total of two hundred pounds was all the

cash we had. Those taxi fares really made a hole in his pocket, they cost him sixty pounds ! He took it all in his stride however, and did not worry.

The first month in Australia we stayed with my uncle and aunt and their two children in a big farmhouse, until our relatives found my father a job on another farm, where there was a house available for us too. But our furniture and beds hadn't arrived from Holland yet, so the neighbors supplied us with essentials for the time being. We three girls slept on an improvised mattress: a huge "doona-cover" filled with hay. One morning when we woke up and opened the windows, a horse stuck its big head inside, trying to feed itself on our mattress !

Life was primitive and spartan in the beginning and I don't know if I would have been able to manage under the circumstances as the mother of a big family. But my parents did and I admire them for that.

We received free milk, butter, meat and wood to keep us warm. We girls had to milk the cows each morning, because my uncle had told the farmer that we were good at it. The truth of the matter was, that we didn't have the faintest idea, but we soon learned. The farmer's wife wanted me as home-help as soon as she noticed me. I was paid ten shillings per week and given a block of chocolate each week as well. At heart she wasn't houseproud at all: half the time she would sit there, talking and drinking tea and often when her friends arrived, she would say to me: "Sit down Nel, we'll leave the cleaning till later." She certainly wasn't a hard task-master !

After nine months, we moved to the north-west of Melbourne, where all the big canneries were. My father had set his heart on becoming a fruit-grower, because in Holland he had been a fruit importer and -exporter, trading with Belgium and Germany. In Shepparton he first became a fruit-picker, so that he could orientate himself and become acquainted with the "lay of the land" so to speak. He soon realized that he could not possibly run an orchard by himself; my two brothers were still too young to help him start a business. So after six months, we left Shepparton to settle on a dairy-farm in Gippsland.

While in north-west Victoria, the three eldest girls found work straight away: I was offered a job as "nanny" with a family with six children. My sister, the dressmaker, did not have any trouble finding work either and my

other sister, who was half-way through her midwifery training when we left Holland, was taken on by a woman who was pregnant. My youngest sister, only eight years old, attended school, of course.

Although we had had a year's private tuition in English while still in Holland, we could not have a proper conversation with anybody at all. All we could say were simple expresions such as: "How are you? / Good morning/ That's nice." We communicated somehow in the beginning, but a real conversation was out of the question. We mainly smiled and laughed a great deal and got on with it.

The farm in Gippsland was literally at the end of the world: the boundary was the ocean shore! The house was small and dilapidated and had to be painted both inside and out before we even could move in. But my father was in his element; he could manage the property together with my two brothers, and he didn't have any financial worries. Later he started a share-farm, which was even better.

Once the family was installed properly I told my parents that I would like to become a nurse. I had already talked to our parish priest who arranged an interview for me at St. Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne. I was accepted for the next training course, but my problem was that I could not write proper English. So every night I was occupied for three or four hours, writing out the lecture notes correctly, while the other girls were enjoying themselves, relaxing or going out. I kept this up for two months, slaving away trying to keep up. The matron encouraged me to keep going, but it was all too much. I felt I was going to have a nervous breakdown, so I called it a day and transferred to St. Vincent's private hospital, where I became a nursing aide. At night, I attended English classes at a private Secondary College. After approximately one year I took up my nurse's training again and this time I succeeded. I lived in the nurses' home for two years, visiting my parents in Gippsland regularly and not saving a cent. I had so little money that , when going into the city, I would walk all the way to save the sixpence tram fare. I befriended many of the other nurses and we had lots of fun together. Eventually, I got a job at a psychiatric hoospital in a north-eastern suburb not far from Heidelberg. That's where I used to go to church on Sundays and where I met a Dutch family who lived not far from the hospital. They invited me for coffee sometimes and that's how I was introduced to their nephew, my future husband. Of course I didn't

know that at the time. It took twelve months before we became engaged and after two years we were married. That was in 1956. For our honeymoon we went to Holland by boat, so that I could meet my in-laws. Of course I was excited to be back in Holland after six years and it was marvelous to meet my husband's mother, brother and sisters. We stayed two months in Holland and then it was time to say farewell and head back to our adopted homeland. By that time I was pregnant and at first we stayed with my parents for a while. My husband went job and house hunting (he was a pastry cook). He soon found us a flat in a bayside suburb and to find employment in his trade was not difficult either.

Before our first child was born I worked part-time for the Red Cross, looking after a young polio-patient, which earned me 15 pounds per week. But after the baby arrived, I stayed home, because in no time - or so it seemed - we had seven children, four sons and three daughters.

After the first four children were born, we moved away from Melbourne to a town in country Victoria, where my husband started his own business. Our family kept growing: three more children were born and I had my hands full. Not only with housekeeping and child-rearing, I also helped out in the pastry-shop. Even now I'm a grandmother, I still help out in the shop. I love the life here, this is home to us and I don't think we'll ever move away.

PICTURES IN MY MIND

by Martina,

Victoria

It was at school in 1940 during a geography lesson that my attention was first focussed on Australia and the city of Melbourne. But in my wildest dreams I could not ever have imagined that I would live there one day, far away and isolated from the familiar countries and people of Europe, the variety of nations and languages, without the culture as we used to know it. Not until 1946 did I think of Australia again, when I met a Dutch family from Indonesia who had returned to Holland via Australia, where they had been recuperating from their terrible sufferings in the Japanese camps. To them, Australia seemed like a land overflowing with milk and honey. The thing that struck them most was the pleasure the Australian people seemed to derive from giving and sharing. To the father of this family - who had become my father -in -law because I had married one of his sons in the meantime - Australia was the land of the future. Unfortunately he passed away (due to a neglected illness he had contracted in the Jap. Camp) before he could return to Australia as an immigrant. But he had instilled in his wife and sons a feeling of necessity as well as an urgency to return to this paradise "Down Under".

After a while it dawned on me that I was to be part of this picture, because my husband was eager to join the work-force, notwithstanding the fact that he had missed years of schooling and did not possess many certificates or diplomas. Work opportunities in Holland straight after the War were few and far between, certainly without much schooling. For people born in the tropics Holland was cold, small and depressing and the thought of returning to studies was even more depressing for my husband. So when the opportunity to migrate presented itself, he was very enthusiastic and dying to go. By this time we also had a son to think of. The language would not be a great problem for either of us, but leaving home and my parents was the big obstacle, since I was an only child. Shouldn't I stay close to them and remain in Holland ? Moreover I was enjoying my work as secretary to the principal of a Latin Grammar School [upper secondary school: Ed.]. Would I be able to get a similar job in Australia ?

On the other hand my parents felt that I would be safe if I went to Australia, although the thought of my leaving made them desperately unhappy. But like many others in Holland at the time, they also feared an invasion from Russia. So they gave their consent, albeit with a heavy heart.

Apart from the usual health-requirements the conditions of entry in 1948 were - amongst others - that a job and housing had to be guaranteed. In other words, we had to be sponsored. And we had to pay for our own journey, although we did not have to live in a camp like so many who came later. -Fortunately my husband had worked in Australia during his previous stay and had made friends in Melbourne. They found him a job and rooms for the three of us to live in.

When the day of departure finally arrived and I looked out of the rear window of the taxi and saw my parents standing at the gate together I thought the world had come to an end. To this day I still have an enormous guilt-feeling for having caused so much unhappiness.

The ship that awaited us in Rotterdam was the "Volendam", one of the vessels of the Holland-America Line. I was allotted a lower berth; the baby hung at its side in a rope bassinette. The men slept down below C deck in hammocks, and also on tables and stretchers. They were not very comfortable there, but they had a lot of fun all the same. - In our cabin there was only one washbasin, so most women went to the common washrooms or to the bathroom.

Once we had passed through the Gulf of Biscay in awful weather and next through the Straits of Gibraltar, the weather improved considerably and it was a joy to sit on deck and relax, while watching the baby in his playpen. I befriended an Australian girl who had married a Dutchman and who was on her way back to Melbourne. Her babygirl often played with our son in his playpen. The food on board was good and in the calmer weather the plates did not skid all over the tables any more.

Unfortunately the baby became quite ill with gastro-enteritis and we were very worried. The Czech specialist who was a passenger on board was not allowed to treat him, the ship's doctor had to suffice. The baby food that was issued through a hatch in the wall was quite awful and the

medicine dispensed for the baby had not much effect either. All the feelings of homesickness, apprehension and doubt came flooding back.

On entering Port Phillip Bay, I could see Queenscliff, the place where my husband and his family had stayed just after the war and I remembered all the things my father-in -law had told me and why it would be best for us to make our life here. We could see Melbourne in the distance and once the ship had anchored there, I felt that he was right and I was at peace. We were ready for our new life in "Terra Australis", the great Southland underneath the Southern Cross "where the silver stars are in the sky".

It was a sunny morning in January 1949 when the ship docked at Port Melbourne. Driving along the Esplanade to our new home we saw the beach which was full of bathers. We noticed palm trees, Norfolk Island pines and the odd Moreton Bay fig where some people were sheltering from the fierce sun. I also noticed the little steam-tram further down and I made up my mind to make use of it often. And what a lovely feeling it was to walk into a free-standing house with a garden all around it [in the Netherlands few houses are free-standing, most are townhouses or apartments: Ed.]. It was situated south of the Yarra in one of the better suburbs.

On arrival there we were made very welcome and were treated to a lovely roast of lamb with all the trimmings. New things for me like lamb, pumpkin and marrow, mint-and tomato-sauce; the vinegar bottle and the bread and butter plates. Not forgetting the pickles and the chutney. It all tasted very nice.

Although I had learnt French, German and English in school, sitting there at that dining table I had difficulty understanding what the conversation was all about and I hardly dared to open my mouth. There were so many words and expressions: Over the years, I would learn lots of them like: the dunny, loo or lav that was still outside, give the bloke a fair go, the poor bugger; he's true blue I reckon.- Too right he is, mate and so is his sheila and so forth.

After we were sufficiently rested we were invited to afternoon tea, to have a cuppa. There were lamingtons, a sponge-cake and fruit cake. I could

never bring myself to say: “Ta, love”, certainly not with the addition of “ever so much”; and I asked myself if the lady came from the bush ?

The kitchen we shared in that house was big and square with darkish, horrible linoleum on the floor and an oil cloth on the table. One couldn’t really say that the stove was clean and the sink was too small. The kitchen dresser with the coloured glass lead-light door somewhere up at the top was just about the only available cupboard. There was an ice-chest in the corner with an ice-pick, and the meat-safe was hanging in a tree outside. - Understandably I thanked God on my bare knees when the crate with our belongings arrived !

Work was good where my husband first started and he earned six pounds per week, while we paid approximately 15 shillings rent per week. If we wanted to buy a car, I would have to find work too. I didn’t feel confident enough yet to apply for an office-job, so I started cleaning and ironing for other people, as well as doing kindergarten work. This work I’d never done before. Forcing myself to save money, not eating proper meals and worrying as well, took its toll. I became ill with a stomach ulcer and a nervous breakdown. The homesickness returned as well. If we hadn’t migrated, I could still have been working as a secretary.

Eventually however we bought an old English sports car: an Alvis 1928. The trips we made in that little car enabled us to see many lovely things: all the city sights, and the parks and gardens: We visited the circus, the Melbourne Show, the Botanical Gardens with the Temple of the Winds, and the fountain near the Shrine. During interval at the State Theatre we ate Coolmints, cashews, Old Gold or Black Magic chocolates, while music was played on the theatre organ and we stood to attention during the playing of “God Save the King/Queen” at every performance or film -session [to play the national anthem in picture-and other theaters was not the custom in Holland: Ed.]. - It was great to see the red flowering gums along the avenues, wattles in the gardens and jacarandas as well. We went dancing in the St Kilda Town Hall, the Palais de Dance or the Trocadero, all dolled up with a spray of gardenia, boronia, daphne or frangipani and if one was fortunate one wore marcasite jewellery. We learned the Pride of Erin, the barn dance, the square dance and the Lambeth Walk.

On our sightseeing trips we often took my shipboard friend and her small family along. I owe a lot to my Australian friends. Through them I learned to appreciate the easy Australian way of life and started to feel at home in this new country. Over the years we have befriended more Australians than people from my own country. But coming back to our sightseeing trips: Melbourne was a beautiful city in those days. The architecture of the buildings in and around the city was of mixed colonial and Victorian style, with beautiful facades. There were no skyscrapers at all -the T&G Building at the corner of Collins & Russell Streets was the highest building- and the Prince Henry Hospital hadn't even been built yet. Some beautiful mansions were still standing in St. Kilda Road.

But in our household, money was always short. Where other people saved up for a brick veneer, a bush block or a beach-house (with mortgages attached of course) all we wanted was a bigger car without a loan from the bank. By then my husband's mother and brother had arrived from Holland. Eventually we rented a house where we could all live together and Ma (my mother-in-law) and I found jobs as typists in one of the Government Departments. - Besides, Ma looked after our son when my husband and I found part-time jobs at Luna Park, enabling us to save even more. Admittedly it was not "highbrow" work, but soon we were able to buy our bigger car, a Lagonda Rapier 1934. This one had two doors, but it needed repairs and a new hood.

Before long, my brother-in-law started building a house on his block of land and his mother moved in with him and his wife. We sold our block of land, borrowed money from my mother who had arrived in Australia also, and bought an old weatherboard house in Elwood for three thousand eight hundred pounds. That was in 1953. My mother came to live with us in her own self-contained little flat. Not long afterwards we all became naturalised Australians. We have never regretted this.

My mother was sixtyfive when she arrived in Australia. She had been a trained nursing sister and started doing some part-time work in a nursing-home. She went there on her bicycle, her "Gazelle" [a well known Dutch bicycle brand: Ed.] which we had brought from Holland. She was unhappy and missed Holland terribly. She kept saying: "Everything is so ugly in Australia" and by this she meant the helter-skelter way of building so aptly described by Robin Boyd in "The Australian Ugliness". She

complained about the long streets with “roofless” shops as she called them. Nowhere a market square, graced with an old church or townhall, to be found. When you drive into a country town it’s even worse, with its ribbon development along the highway. It’s all the same, even the gumtrees. These are often the first impressions of newly arrived migrants. But she liked Geoff Raymond reading the news on the A.B.C. and once a year she went to Hepburn Springs to take the mineral waters and chat to some other migrants, mainly refugees from Nazi Germany, who used to flock to this place. It reminded her a little of Europe, she used to say. She lived with us for twenty five years until she had to be admitted to a nursing home herself.

I too missed the old buildings of Europe with their architectural beauty, and the charm of its little villages, a great deal. So I became interested in the heritage of Australia and the preservation efforts of the National Trust, a body of people who are forever trying to save worthwhile old buildings from the demolishers. I joined the National Trust and enjoyed tremendously my two voluntary working days each month at one of Melbourne’s big mansions. I think that the interest we show as new migrants in the everyday events of people around us and also in the important issues our new homeland is faced with, greatly determines the attitude of the “older” settlers toward us.

By now my husband was doing well in the car-trade, but he was not happy. He always wanted to be his own boss. One day he came home and announced that he had thrown in his job after a row with his boss: he had just walked out. My heart stood still: what now ? But he wasn’t concerned at all, because he’d heard that the Mobil Oil service station down the road needed a new manager. He applied for the job and got it. But managing a service station is a very tiring job, so soon he decided to continue his car repair business from home. That was rudely interrupted by the local Council which advised us to find premises elsewhere. So a deposit was paid on a suitable workshop and a partner was found. And that is how he earned his living till the day he retired.

There is no longer a White Australia Policy as it existed when we first arrived here. People of every colour and creed can settle in Australia now. The aborigines were the first ones to arrive in Australia across the landmass that once linked Asia with this island-continent thousands of years ago.

Since then many migrants have brought new customs and cultures and have stimulated economic development in the land of the Golden Fleece, where people live together in peace. But for all these newcomers the homesickness remains. One is always torn between one's country of birth and one's new country.

“ALL I WANTED WAS SOMEBODY TO TALK TO.”

By Monique,

Victoria

I am not quite sure why we emigrated, but it became clear after we had arrived in Australia. My husband was quarrelling with everyone in Holland, he did not get along with anyone, and that was the same here. We did not have to leave Holland because of unemployment. He had plenty of work as a bricklayer and work was not a problem here either. It turned out that my husband had a mental illness, and he was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic.

We, my husband, son and I, arrived in 1958 a day after the Melbourne Cup. The m.v. “Johan van Oldenbarneveld” could not moor because of the Cup and had to wait one day in the bay. It was a memorable trip. We had the hundred-thousandth migrant on board, and about 100 Indonesian stowaways who were deported to Indonesia. Our son turned eight on the boat and I had my birthday as well.

My brother had emigrated before us and he lived in the western suburbs. We lived with him and his family for a while. We knew from him that it was not easy to find accommodation. For instance in that particular area, which was not developed as yet, there was a man living in a hole in the ground and others lived in iron sheds. In the morning he would go off to work, neatly dressed with his briefcase. We had not realised how difficult it really was to find accommodation.

Everything was so different from Holland. It was so hot that the cows were dropping dead in the paddock, and the flies were absolutely terrible. We had never seen so many before. The houses were very different, all free standing and the curtains were always drawn, or if they had blinds, the blinds were closed. That gave the impression that nobody was living there [in Holland people seldom close their curtains even at night: Ed.]. Some migrants thought that all those houses were empty.

A lot of eastern Europeans lived in the area and we found rooms with a Polish man who was separated from his wife and he looked after their son. There was a bungalow in the back which was rented out to an English couple, we rented rooms inside the house and we all shared the kitchen and bathroom. There was very little hot water, not enough for everybody and when you wanted to take a bath he would come and say "no, no," and would try to prevent you. He would talk German to me but sometimes slipped into Polish and then I could not follow him. He was very lonely and at Easter when I came into the kitchen in the morning he offered me a glass of vodka according to Polish custom. I was too polite to say no and he gave me another glass of vodka, and that on an empty stomach ! The situation with the water became critical and we found another place. This time with a Latvian man whose wife was away overseas.

One day our landlord presented us with a piece of paper with some figures on it. He said that this was the electricity bill and we had to pay extra, because we used too much electricity. I said: " That is not a bill, that is just a piece of paper, I will not pay you". When I came back from shopping some of my husband's tools had disappeared and it turned out he had taken them and locked them in the shed. I told the lady in the shop what had happened and she called the police. The police came, our landlord was known to the police, and he gave everything back, but after that we could not stay. In the meantime his wife had come back unexpectedly as well.

We found accommodation close by, and we transported our belongings in a wheelbarrow. This time we rented a bungalow in the back of a house which was owned by Australians. It was self-contained and had its own bath and washhouse. We stayed there for five years.

We had enough money for a deposit for a house, but my husband did not want to buy a house. It was all very strange and he quarrelled with everybody, he did not get along with my brother and sister-in-law either. He started to behave rather oddly, became quite paranoid and this was the start of years of threats, verbal and physical abuse, worries, fear, anxiety and multiple hospitalisations in psychiatric hospitals.

One night he got up and started howling like a dog and all the neighbouring dogs started to bark. It was late at night and I did not know what to do! My husband had a doctor's appointment for a physical

complaint and he was referred to a specialist, but he did not keep the appointment. I went to see the doctor and explained what had happened and he was very understanding and said " that explains why he did not keep his appointment". He also said: " If anything happens do not hesitate to ring, regardless of the hour".

My husband would work on and off as a bricklayer. He made good money. One day he was home again and he agreed to go and see the doctor, but he did not want to come inside. He was pacing the street because spaceships had landed and he had to save the world. The waiting room was full of people and they all stared at me. I saw the doctor and he gave me some pills for my husband. He had to take one, but took two and passed out, so my son and I put him to bed.

Another time he thought that there was somebody who wanted to attack us and he wanted to protect us. But there was nobody there and in his confusion he bashed me. Often when he behaved oddly or threatened us we would flee in the middle of the night to my brother. On one occasion a doctor came and gave him an injection to calm him down so that he could sleep. We were so scared that we took our mattresses and slept in the house of our landlord.

Once the ambulance came to admit him to Royal Park Hospital, my husband, who was in his pyjamas, bolted. The ambulance officers went after him and calmed him down with an injection, and they were able to get him into the ambulance and to the hospital.

At Royal Park all psychiatric nurses were migrants, which was rather odd. They worked shifts two days on, two days off. With one group he never had troubles but with the others there were always hassles. One day one of the nurses said: "Have a look at your husband, he went berserk and nearly killed somebody ". He had taken a standing ashtray and thrown it at somebody. The nurses had overpowered him and both a nurse and my husband had bruised faces. They had put him into solitary confinement.

I received a letter from Royal Park that I had to give permission for shock treatment for my husband. The letter was addressed to Mrs Kees Groen. I felt awful, I thought this must be a joke but it was real. It was as though I did not have a name any more [in the Netherlands married

women are addressed as Mrs., their initial and married name followed by their maiden name: Ed.].

On one of my visits to Royal Park, as soon as I came in the nurses approached me and said; "You are strong, you can do it, you can look after him, you have to sign that your husband is coming home with you, because if you don't we do not know what he is going to do ". I was also informed that he had to take his tablet and was not allowed to drive a car and all sorts of other things. After two days at home he just took the car. There was nothing I could do. He stayed home for a couple of weeks, than went to work again. He was an excellent bricklayer and made lots of money.

The hardest part was that you could not talk to anybody, nobody believed you, my husband would say terrible things about me and blame me for everything. It was in a way a relief that my husband's English was poor, because when he went mad he would carry on and curse in Dutch, which was less embarrassing.

Our GP was called Doctor East and my son and I had developed a code between us. When we needed to call the doctor and did not want my husband to know, I would say the wind is coming from the east and than my son would know that he had to go to the phone-booth to make the call. One time our doctor was not in and a locum came. My husband told tales about me and said that all the medication was mine and that I was mad. The locum said: "If there is a problem with your marriage you need a priest, not a doctor" I responded: " I don't need a priest, please do something". He said: "Your husband is calm" and left. My son and I then went to my brother, because I didn't feel safe.

I was often so afraid, I never knew what would happen next. The fear was always with you, even when he was in hospital, you never knew when they would discharge him. It was such a strain, I could not sleep at night and I was exhausted. It took me hours to clean up after breakfast. Once I went to the doctor, I had not slept for a week and he said "go home and sleep" which I did. Unexpectedly my husband came home and he was furious that I was in bed and started cursing.

Then one day he took one of his turns and he threatened us with a knife and threw a plate of food against the wall. The bungalow was very

small and at first we could not get past him. My son said, “Let’s go”. It was terrible and we fled to my brother. I called the doctor, who wasn’t there. I finally reached him the next day, explained what had happened and he then drove around with the police to find my husband and to admit him to hospital. After this incident I decided that I could no longer cope and that I would leave. I was at the end of my tether.

There were families who were going to be deported because one member of the family was mentally ill. I did not want that to happen to us. I went to the Commonwealth Bank which had translators who advised me to see the social worker at the emigration office. The social worker understood that I needed a solicitor and rang the Good Neighbourhood Council, they would recommend a good solicitor. When I came there the lady told me I was very un-Australian. We never deport sick people and you should look after your husband. I told her that I was not interested in her opinion and only came for a solicitor.

I informed our landlord that I was leaving and asked if my husband could stay, but they did not want to have him there on his own. I packed most of our belongings, some were stored. I had it all planned. We would first stay with my brother, I would then find work somewhere in Melbourne and a place for my son and me to live.

Before I left I went to talk to my doctor and said that the situation had become unbearable and that I had to leave for the sake of my son and myself. He said: “Yes, your son won’t have a father, but perhaps he is better off without one”. He suggested that I go to the hospital to let the psychiatrist know what my intentions were and that my husband could not return to our former accommodation. Which I did. The psychiatrist said that I had to tell my husband myself. So I explained to him that he was sick and things were not working out between us, that our son was becoming increasingly nervous, and my husband was quite civilised. Then the psychiatrist and the nurse left the room and my husband started to curse and went for my throat, tried to strangle me. I defended myself, and screamed and the psychiatrist and two nurses came in, jumped on him, gave him an injection to calm him down and took him away. They said to me, you can go now; no counselling, no support, just as though nothing had happened!

The next night my husband came to my brother's door and it was very scary. I called the hospital and asked the discharge nurse why they had discharged him so early with nowhere to go, despite what I had told them. The nurse replied that it was only proper that I should look after him and that I was not entitled to move out and leave him and that I was to blame if anything happened to him. He kept coming back and it was just unbearable, we were so scared! My brother suggested that I should leave Melbourne and go and stay with his wife's relatives in the La Trobe Valley. So we fled Melbourne because of my husband. We lived with them for some weeks. I found work as a cleaner in a hospital. I had to get up at 5 am. and work started at 7 am. The continuous strain had exhausted me totally and I could not keep up with the work. And there was always the threat that my husband would find out where we were .

We could not stay there forever so I advertised as a housekeeper in the local paper. We got some response and one man came and said that he would think about it. Shortly after, we received a phone call from my sister-in-law informing us that my husband knew that we were in the La Trobe Valley. We left in a rush the same night and they drove us to the man who had shown interest to have me as his housekeeper. We didn't really know if he wanted to hire me. We stopped somewhere along the road and called him to let him know that we were on our way. It was in the middle of August and the Christmas decorations were still hanging in his houseand the floors were covered with dead blowflies. The house had only two bedrooms and it seemed that he did not only want somebody to clean his house but also to share his bed. I quickly made the beds in the other room and shared that room with my son. My son went by bus to school in the near-by town. The job did not work out at all, the man did not like my Dutch cooking and the way I did things. One day, to my shock, a visitor was announced, and I thought that my husband had found us, but it was the Dutch minister who had a son in the same grade as mine. He also happened to come from the same town where we came from in Holland. Australians seem to think that if you come from the same town you automatically know each other, but I had never seen this minister before in my life. I explained that I had been given an ultimatum to leave by next Saturday and he indicated that he was willing to help. That Saturday the man went to his sister and we had to be gone by the time he came back. We were packed and ready. By 8 pm. the minister called that he hadn't found anything but not to worry, he would come and pick us up. We then

stayed with an old lady for a while. Once again I placed an advertisement in the paper and received one response. I went over by train to have a look. The house was like a holiday house and had only two bedrooms. I accepted the job anyway. It wasn't bad money, six pounds a week and food and lodging. After a week I noticed that not everything was what it seemed to be. The man was a pensioner and would not be able to pay me for long.

In the meantime one of the teachers in the La Trobe Valley had called the school where my son was enrolled. My husband had been at the school and the teacher wanted to know if I had custody over my son. I explained the situation and said: " You don't give kids to mental patients". They understood our predicament and did not tell my husband where we were. While we stayed there I had been several times to see my solicitor in Melbourne and there were some Court appearances as well. My husband would tell all sorts of stories about me, just to make me look bad. Our son had to testify and he was so nervous. Anyway no decision was made although my husband's solicitor openly said that I was entitled to do what I did, that I was not wrong. There was no decision made and it went to the Judge. It took two days in the Magistrate's Court and then I had to appeal. A psychiatrist testified and he felt embarrassed. He said that the separation had contributed to my husband's mental instability, but that I did not have a choice. The Court was at a loss because they had not dealt with mental patients before. The judge said, they are all decent people, and that man belongs in hospital, and then gave me custody. Just before Christmas, after I had paid the Court and the solicitor, I had 10 shillings left. At that time I made children's clothes and sold them. My husband had to pay two pounds for me and five for my son, that just covered the rent. By that time we moved back to Melbourne because the teachers in Gippsland felt that my son should go to either Melbourne High School or University High School.

We found accommodation in the eastern suburbs. This was shared housing again. The house was so terribly damp that when we woke in the morning our blankets were so wet that you had to dry them with a towel. There was no water pressure and it took hours to fill the bath. One could not water the garden and use the tap inside the house at the same time.

I was a dressmaker by trade and found work as a dressmaker in the Block Arcade. The people who worked there came from all parts of the

world, it was like the United Nations. But I did not earn much money so I started to look in the newspaper for a better job. There was an advertisement in the paper for a job with a then well known fashion house. I applied and after a day's trial they chose me out of all the applicants. We all worked together in this large attic, there was a nice atmosphere and I really liked the job. We all worked very hard to be ready for a fashion parade. After the parade they no longer needed all the staff and I was sacked. I did not know where to go, because I did not have any money. Soon I found a job at a large hotel, mending linen, and I stayed there for about one year.

In the meantime my son had received a scholarship. Where we lived was in the school district of University High so he was offered a place there. The man from the Education Department who was handling the scholarship said to me that he would send the money to the local high school, because that would be much better for my son, closer to home and not so much travel. I really had to put my foot down to make him send the money to University High.

One day in 1965, my son called to say that there was a telegram from Mont Park. My husband had died in hospital of cardiac failure. He was 54 years old.

Before I left my husband we had bought a block of land in the western suburbs and we had started building. The frame was up, but when I left him, I had put a stop to the building. My husband was under the Public Trustees because when he was unwell he did the craziest things, like giving everything away. However shortly before he died for some unexplainable reason he had not been under the trustees for a period of two weeks. During this time he had made a new will. My son and I were to inherit the block of land, but all the cash went to his niece who had returned to Holland. I did not have any cash and had to arrange the funeral. So I decided to contest the will, went to a solicitor who advised me that if I were naturalised I would have more rights and a better chance to win the case. Of course that turned out not to be so. After a long time, five years, we settled, one quarter would go to the niece and the rest to us.

I changed jobs, this time to St Vincent's Hospital where I worked in the laundry repairing linen and I stayed there for five years until I retired.

We also moved to a small house in one of the inner suburbs In this house there was no gas pressure and it took four hours to heat the copper to do the washing.

In the meantime my father had died in Holland and my mother was very lonely, so she came to stay with us. My mother gave me that part of the inheritance which was legally mine and I started to build the house in the western suburbs, with a granny flat in the back. I did a second job as a cleaner at night for a while to be able to pay for carpets and curtains in the new house.

My mother was 76 years old when she came and did not speak any English, this was very hard for her. She then had a stroke and I had to stop work to be able to look after her, for which I received a pension. She lived for another year and a half before she died. That was a terrible shock for my son and that year he failed school, but managed later to get into Melbourne University.

Things did not work out between us, we did not get on during those years, my son became depressed and took an overdose and nearly died. I was very anxious, terribly worried about him. I did not want to go through the same anxiety as I had had with his father so I went to see a doctor who prescribed tablets for me, but nothing changed. What I needed was somebody to talk to, but nobody helped, or believed me or wanted to listen to what I was saying. I just could not cope any longer and I took an overdose, then I realised that this was crazy. I had worked so hard for a house and wondered what was going to happen with it, because my son was not yet twentyone years old. So I went to a neighbour to call a taxi to go to hospital. In the hospital they gave me medication to throw up. The doctor wanted to admit me to Royal Park because, as he said: "I had been upset for a long time". So I went into a psychiatric hospital. I talked to the psychiatrist about my past life with my husband. I got really scared and wondered how I ever would get out of this hospital. There was also a Dutch psychiatrist who said, no more medication, but in the evening the nurse came and she insisted that I take the medication. I said: "No, the doctor has said, no more". She did not believe me because a lot of patients said that all the time, so she forced me to take the medication by holding my nose so that I had to open my mouth to breathe.

My son and I talked to the Dutch psychiatrist and after we had told our story he said: “There is nothing wrong with either of you, it is just better if the two of you do not live together”. I was discharged soon after and the separation has worked well.

In 1973 I remarried an Australian; we first lived in an outlying western suburb, but decided that we wanted to live closer to public transport and the city. We bought a unit where we are still living.

In 1990, my son, who is a social worker and a film maker, made a film about our past called: “Conversations With My Mother”. We went to all the places where we have lived and told what had happened there. Making the film has really changed my life, it was like coming to terms with the past. After we finished filming I was totally exhausted and stayed in bed and cried for days. The film was shown at the Melbourne, New York and Vancouver Film Festivals and also at the Melbourne Cinemateque. I had to introduce the film in Melbourne and afterwards lots of people came to me to speak about their experience with mental illness and emigration. For the first time I had the feeling that people understood the experiences that I have been through. And for the first time I had peace of mind.

I have tried to join Australian groups in our neighbourhood, but somehow I do not fit in. My experience is that it is easier to mix with other migrants. I decided to go to a Dutch over 50’s Club. I leave the house at 8.30 to be there at 10.00 am and come home at 4 pm. It is quite a trip with public transport but I really enjoy it, it is “gezellig” to talk with Dutch people, you have something in common.

I have never been back to Holland, I don’t have any close ties there.

Although I have had a lot of pressure in my life, it has never been boring and it was not all bad, funny things happened too.

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[1] They are also known for their “Dutch character” which is described as hard working, materialistic and blunt. *Cf* Walker-Birckhead 1988, 1995 on the construction of Dutch character in Australia

[2] Almost half of all Dutch Migrants were dependent children which is almost double the average for post-war migrants arriving in Australia (ABS figures in Emigratie 1957:30). Similarly, 61.5% of Dutch migrants arriving between 1947-71 received financial assistance from the Australian government compared with 86% of British and 19% of Italian migrants (Cox 1975). This actually understates total assistance received by Dutch migrants, for example, the Netherlands Government Agency Scheme sponsored the emigration of 5,699 unskilled Dutch workers to Australia (Emigratie 1954,1955) which would not have been included in Australian figures.

[3]Almost half or 44.7% of Dutch migrating to Australia were Roman Catholic, which is well above the proportion of Catholics in the general population during the 1950's (38.5%, Hofstede *op cit:97*