

PLOD ESSAY:

Welcome to Wonthaggi, Part 2

Clifford Osborne, from Nottingham, made a good decision when he chose to emigrate from England to Australia in late 1948; and Jean, also from Nottingham, was smart to marry him. But, the luckiest thing they did was come to Wonthaggi.

Jean wasn't so sure at first because when she walked down the street the morning after she and Clifford arrived she thought it was like a wild-west town she'd seen in the American movies.

"There were these great gutters," she remembers, "and all along the road were horse troughs for the farmers' horses with rails to hitch them up to, and none of the roads were sealed."

But very quickly, she found that there were so many English and Scottish people here and that wherever she went people would always chat with her, that she immediately felt comfortable. Besides, she and Clifford had Mr and Mrs Hand, their sponsors, to watch over them.

Soon she and Clifford, with their new friends, the Mollisons, were running a successful furniture shop and Jean gave birth to their first child, Tony. The Hands had a son, Eddie, who was one year older than little Tony and if they made something for Eddie, they also made one for Tony.

Both little boys got wooden barrows at the same time and Mrs Hand knitted Fair Isle Jumpers for both of them out of wool remnants. They considered the new immigrants part and parcel of their family.

Much to Clifford's delight, they found the generosity of Wonthaggi people was unbounded – at least nothing like they had ever experienced from neighbours in England.

"People accepted us right from the beginning," says Jean. "We didn't have to do anything to be accepted. People seemed to

think, 'Well, they're here; we can't send them back; they're part of us.'"

Jean remembers that when they first arrived in Wonthaggi, there was no refrigeration. People had Coolgardie safes or Ice Boxes to keep things cool. And that wasn't so effective. So, people grew fresh produce in their gardens and shared everything.

"I had a gentleman knock on the door one day,"

remembers Jean, "and he said, 'Hello, Missus, your boss (he meant Clifford) said you liked rabbits.' I said, 'Yes, we do.' And he said, 'Oh, I got a couple here.' With that he handed me two rabbits and started to apologize for not having them skinned. I told him it was all right, 'I know how to skin a rabbit!'"

There were a couple of boys in the neighbourhood who liked to fish and go deer shooting. They regularly brought over part of their catch and if it was deer meat they would have it properly butchered and then divvy it out amongst the neighbours with a kind of raffle.

One day a neighbour yelled over the fence, "Jean, do you like mutton birds?"

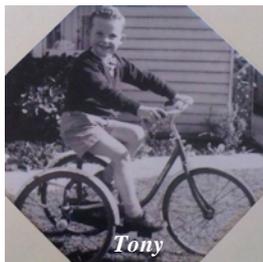
"Well," says Jean, "I didn't hear the *Mutton* part of his question having never heard of such birds before, but I thought anything that flies I can cook, so I said, 'Yes.' Well, I put this bird on to roast and put fat with it, as you do. While it was cooking, I thought the smell was very strong, but I was used to eating game birds in England.

"Eventually, I opened up the window it was so strong and then I opened the oven to have a look at the bird. To my shock the fat was almost coming over the top of the pan. I took it out of the oven and, stepping over a child, I rushed it outside so I could pour the fat off. I didn't know you have to cook a mutton bird in a skittle with water on the bottom to steam it off.

"In the end it was delicious. Although, what a mess it made of the kitchen!"

Jean admits that, yes, she still likes mutton bird, but no one brings them to her anymore.

She says she was amazed the first time their good friend, Frank Mollison, came to take



Clifford out mushrooming. She didn't understand why he had four buckets with him.

"I didn't believe they could ever find enough mushrooms to fill all those buckets."

But they did. Clifford brought a brimming bucket of 'mushies' home for Jean to cook, Frank kept a bucket, and the two fellows went around offering the rest to whomever wanted them. They were soon gone. In this way Clifford began to participate in the generosity that existed in his new home. Jean was so impressed.

"Sharing like that was something I never knew in England," she says.

Jean and Clifford prospered in their new home. They moved the furniture business from Ludbrook's corner to shops further up on Graham Street owned by Mr Hartley, who had run a tailoring business there for years, but was now retired. Mr Hartley had not had good luck renting his shops after he closed his business and was reluctant to get burned by yet another tenant, when Clifford came along. Coincidentally, Jean and her little boy, Tony, met Mrs Hartley at a church gathering and Mrs Hartley was so smitten with little Tony, who was a bright and smiling child, that she told her husband to give this young English couple a chance to expand their business. So that he wouldn't jeopardise his pension, Mr Hartley offered to rent the shop to Clifford for £5 a week – excellent terms in Clifford's mind. A deal was done.

Eventually, Clifford and Jean bought the property from Mr Hartley, who never regretted renting to them. In fact he was so taken by them that he offered to sell the couple the shops for an amount minus the accumulation of the £5 rent he had been charging them all these years. It was a deal made in heaven by a generous man.

Jean worked in the business with her husband while her mother looked after Tony and then, later, Lorraine when she came along.

Jean says, "When I wrote to Mum in 1952 to tell her how happy we were in Australia, especially Wonthaggi, she decided to come out to join us. I reckon she really came out because she didn't believe what I was telling her. Anyway, after she arrived – and never left – that's when I went to work with Clifford in the shop."

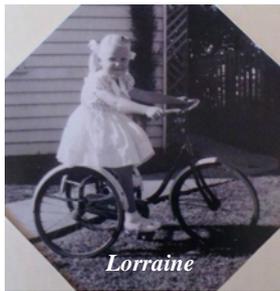
Jean was a trained dressmaker and furrier. She had done a four-year apprenticeship in England. In fact, before Clifford got work, Jean had kept them going by making clothes to order for people in the town. She says, "I knew how to make beautiful ball gowns and mink furs. I knew how to cut skins, extend them and shape them. There was demand for the gowns, but no one could afford the mink. In the shop with Clifford, I made curtains, and they sold well."

Before the Osbornes embarked for Australia way back in 1948, their sponsors, Mr and Mrs Hand, wrote to them about what to bring with them:

"My Dear Friends," they wrote, "if you've got a bicycle and a sewing machine bring them because they are very expensive here. A bicycle will cost you £20! Also bring linen & blankets, as they are also very dear. Nothing is rationed here except tea, butter and petrol."

Of course, Jean already had the sewing machine packed, with a separate motor to go with it. Lucky thing she brought it.

Eventually, Clifford began sponsoring members of his own family to come out from England. He started a fish-and-chip shop for his brother to come out and run, but he couldn't get his wife to leave England so Clifford's sister came out with her husband, Bert Palmer, to take it over. Bert is well remembered in Wonthaggi. That shop was next to the Workmen's Club and at closing time the fellows would roll out of there and into Bert's to get big parcels of hake or flake and plenty of chips.



Jean's daughter, Lorraine Dowson, says, "Mum's and Dad's prosperity was infectious. The fact that they came here and people showed them kindness and shared their lives with them made Mum and Dad decide to share in turn. I think that's why Dad wanted to be on the Council and then he became Mayor because he felt Wonthaggi gave everything to them. Everyone looks after each other here. This did not happen in England. Over there, people did not go out of their way to help others. Here people rally round and look after each other and help each other.

"At the very end, Dad said, 'I had a good life and Wonthaggi has been wonderful to us.'"