

From

Clogs

to

Gumboots

By Corrie Hennekam

am an old grandmother and as I watch my **I**grandchildren and great-grandchildren growing up I want to tell them a story. I could start this story with: "Once upon a time..."

But, this is no fairy tale; there are no heroic deeds, no princes or princesses. Just an ordinary tale about ordinary people.

So...Once there was a family, our familiy, a Father, a Mother and five children, who lived in a country far away on the other side of the

It was a small country called Holland. A tiny flat country that was nothing at all like



Australia. Much of the land was below sea level, there were no mountains, or deserts or wide-open

plains, but there was a lot of water! We loved our country! But our country had been through a very bad time; five years of war had destroyed many things and the future didn't look good.

Like millions of other people throughout Europe we wanted a good future for our children and so, even though we loved our country, we started looking around to see if there were other places that might offer a more hopeful future.

After a lot of research and soul searching we decided on a young country on the other side of the world that was asking people to come and share its future. That country was Australia.

It was a difficult day when I went tell my

parents our plans. I remembered how, just a few years earlier, my mother had cried when my brother had left to become a missionary priest in Brazil.

She sat there very quietly and finally said: "I suppose they bake bread in Australia too."

Those few words said so much, in her own way she was trying to make it easier for us. Then we got busy. There was so much to do. We had to get passports and fill in lots of

paperwork. We also had to sell our house, decide what to take with us and what to leave and then pack it all into a very large crate. And, hardest of all, we had to say goodbye to all of our family and friends.

On 19th June 1952, along with hundreds of others, we went on board a large ship named the

Fairsea. Our families were there to wave goodbye as we set sail. It was a very sad day leaving behind everything and everyone we had ever known. But it was also very exciting because we didn't really know what to expect of our new home.

We spent nearly six weeks on board ship. In that time we travelled nearly 20,000 kilometres, sailed through a big storm and crossed the equator. Then, at last, came the big day that we finally landed in Australia.

We came off the ship in Melbourne. It was a bit strange arriving somewhere where you did not know anyone at all, except for the people we have travelled with.

It was so busy when we arrived, there was so

much noise with all of us trying work out where we had to go and what we had to do and all the time we had to try and make sure we all stayed together.

It was while trying to get through customs that we had our first brush with Australian officialdom. Opa had "forgotten" to

> declare that he had several cartons of cigarettes and of course the customs man found them in our luggage! Well, he wasn't taking any excuses and Opa was fined seven pounds and the cigarettes were taken from him as well. For us it was such a large fine that Opa

stopped smoking then and there!

We spent our first night in our new country in Melbourne and the very next day we took the train to Adelaide.





From Adelaide we travelled, again by train, to Peterborough and then on to out first "home" Ucolta. What a shock! Ucolta was a little church, a little station and five houses and

one more great surprise - another Dutch family living there. A most interesting thing for the children was the fact that we had a two-seater toilet.



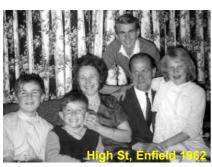
As you could imagine, in such a small town there were no "services" as we take for granted today. So the toilet was the old smelly style that needed to be emptied on a regular basis. Our toilet had a large "hole" for the adults and a small one for the children!

We were in Ucolta for only two weeks, then we moved to Georgetown in the mid-north, where Opa was to start a job with the railways. The great thing about that job was that it came with a house.

The people of Georgetown were fantastic; they welcomed us and made us feel at home. People visited us at our house to welcome us

with cakes and flowers and much more to help us settle in. One of the farmers even gave us the use of a cow! One night we answered a knock at the door and there stood the farmer holding a bucket of milk. He said we could have use of one of his cows but it had just had a calf so until it was ready he would bring us a bucket of milk each day!

Sure enough in a few weeks he brought the cow and Opa had to learn milking and I learnt how to make butter, which I did very well, if I say so myself! It's hard to describe just how much the warm



welcome we received meant to us. Here we were in a small town in Australia so far from home and here were people who were prepared to share

and make us feel that we belonged here. It really did make it so much easier for us all.

But of course nothing goes smoothly all the time.

In the early days we could only afford the necessary things. For example we had no kitchen cabinet or cupboard so I kept groceries in a trunk. One day Marie and Steve started playing shop with the groceries. That was fine except they managed to get the tea and easy oats mixed up. I spent ages trying to separate them out because I was not going to ask the shopkeeper to give me replacements on credit,

so for a while we had tea with easy oats and porridge in our tea.

Everything was going all right and then something terrible happened. Steve got very sick. At that time there was a world wide



epidemic of a disease called polio. It was a terrible thing that left many children crippled. Naturally we were very worried. We had to take Steve to hospital in Adelaide. Luckily there was someone in Georgetown who

> offered to drive us to the City otherwise it would have been a difficult trip by train. But we can thank goodness that after a long time of treatment he finished up quite well.

After a few weeks in hospital we were able to bring him home to Georgetown again, but he still needed a lot of therapy. Once again the people of Georgetown gave us a lot of support. For example

when the doctors said that swimming would be good for him, the policeman offered to help and every day he took Steve to the swimming pool, while the other children were at school.

We were so happy that our little boy was home again and could walk.

We have many special memories of Georgetown and an important one was the birth of Peter in January 1954. Our family's first real Aussie!

We also have wonderful memories of people like old Mr. MacDonald, who wrote about us in the local paper and one night, when there was a bad thunderstorm and the electricity went off, he came over with a couple of kero lamps to help us out.

Keeping in touch with our families in Holland



wasn't so easy in those days. There weren't many telephones and it was very expensive to ring overseas, so we used to write lots of letters. We also liked to send photos of our new home. Opa had a camera and used to develop the film and make his

own photos so our families could share our adventure.

One thing we used to look forward to was the parcels from our families. They were full of traditional Dutch goodies like chocolate letters, cocoa and the ever-popular salted liquorice.

Opa's job with the railways was very hard work, but after two years he was given a chance for promotion.

He had to go to Adelaide for three months for training and in the meantime, we were given a house in Mannahill, not one of the best places to live.

Then Opa was appointed Station Master in Radium Hill.

What a culture shock that was! For our first two years in

Australia we lived in a small country town in the centre of an agricultural area with quite a high rainfall so for a lot of the year everything was green.

In the 1950s Radium Hill was a Uranium Mine in the northeast of South Australia (near Broken Hill) in the middle of the desert. Like Ucolta, the services in Radium Hill were very basic. Being in the middle of the bush there was no local water so all the water came by a pipeline. In the summer the water coming out of the pipeline was so hot that we had to let it

sit in the bathtub overnight to cool down.

As a mining town Radium Hill had attracted a lot of migrants and there were people there from all over the world. The school in Radium Hill had just 200 children but they came from 34 different nationalities!

It was all very strange but interesting and also lots of fun.

In the meantime Opa's brother and family

had arrived and settled in Melbourne. So when it was holiday time we went with our whole family on the train to

Melbourne and had our very first family reunion!

On the way back we had to travel for the last part of the trip by bus. There had been



heavy rain and the road was flooded, so we had to get off the bus, walk through the mud to another bus. Poor Marie got quite hysterical because she was wearing her new pretty slippers and there was no way she was going to ruin them in the mud. So Opa had to carry her.

While in Radium Hill we bought a big green

Ford V8 from the policeman.
Both Opa and I got our
driver's licences; you
didn't even have to sit a
test in those days!

That car was like a tank. But it was big enough to take all eight of us around. There were very few roads and we drove all over the countryside looking for kangaroos and getting to know our new country. One day we had been out driving for hours and had no idea where. Just before we started to panic we saw a railway line and knew we would be okay. Sure enough we discovered that we were nearly home, the only problem was we were on the wrong side of the tracks and there was no crossing nearby. But we managed to get the old tank over the line and

make it home safely.

Being new to the bush, we had to learn to deal with some things that you never expected. One day I was walking toward the house with Peter, who was only about two at the time. I went toward the front door and found a snake curled up on our doorstep. It was such a shock. I ran over to a neighbouring house



and woke up one of the mine shift workers. Thankfully he came over and killed it. One sad memory I have of Radium Hill is of a little baby that got ill. She was very sick and so the Flying Doctor was called. As luck would have it there was a terrible dust

storm and while we could hear the plane over head it could not land. sadly the baby died. Some of the men at the mine made a little coffin and I made it nice inside with silk and a little pillow. It was very sad and reminded us all of just how hard life could be in the bush.

Opa got another promotion and once again we packed all our possessions and loaded the kids in the green tank and went down to the southeast of South Australia to a small town called Lucindale.

It was nice to be out of the desert and back in

a "real" country town. We settled in quite quickly and even got a cow again. Mieke let it be known that she wanted to learn to milk. She did and she loved it! We used to go to Naracoorte to do our main shopping. One day I went with the car (the tank) with a couple of other people. On the way home I was driving along I came over a hill and there were a lot of sheep all over the road. It was too late to stop and so I finished up in

the middle of them. There were sheep under the car and we had to jack it up to get them out. In all there were five sheep under the car, and not one of them was hurt. They just jumped away.

We liked Lucindale but Opa was offered another promotion and so we packed up again and headed north again to Booleroo Centre.



But packing was quite a different job now; compared to when we arrived in Australia. When we moved to Georgetown,

all our goods were packed in a medium size container. When we left Georgetown it was a large container, then two containers and this time we needed an entire freight car. It was going to take several days for our things to arrive in Booleroo Centre, so we had a couple of days stopover in Adelaide. This was the first chance we'd really had to look

around Adelaide and we liked what we saw. We had a lovely time but we never thought then that one day we would live there. Booleroo became our home

for three very pleasant years.

It was always a bit difficult starting over again in a new town, but it was also exciting, especially for the kids.

When we had just been there a couple of days the kids came home from school very excited and told me there is a witch in this town and they took me to show me where she lived.



Well I must say she looked more or less the part, but she turned out to be a lovely lady. The parish priest was Father O'Farrell, a little (very Irish) man. He told the most amazing stories about animals and the fantastic things they could do. Opa and I joined the bridge club and had a lot of fun playing there. One year they had a big

competition, which took about half a year, because you had to play one couple each week at home. The general store put up a big board for the weekly score.

Every shop in town donated a prize, which would go to the winners and believe it or not, but Opa and Oma were the winners. It was like Christmas when we brought the prize home; there was something for everyone in it. At the weekly games there was always a prize for the highest male and female scorers plus an extra prize for a competition of six weeks. One farmer had promised a side of lamb for each winner! As it turned out the winners were Oma and Jack Pearce. The farmer went to his car to get the meat and came back with a big live ram! And there were Jack and I holding on to a horn each and not knowing

what to do with it! What a joke. Lucky for us he had the meat as well.

We had been in Australia for about five years



and we felt really at home, though we will always have strong feelings for Holland. It was about then that we came to

utomatically

another big decision. Since we liked Australia so much, we wanted to become Australians. So we applied for citizenship. It would seem that in 1957 this was something very special for the people of Booleroo Centre because when the big day came, nearly everyone in the district turned out and helped us make it a very special day. The Institute Hall was too small and people spilled outside. What a

great day and what a way to be officially welcomed to our

new home!

There was only one small problem. When Steve found out that he would not be Dutch anymore he did not want to go to the ceremony, because as he said: "I want to be a Dutch boy!" I promised that if he still felt

the same when he grew up, I would write to the Dutch

Queen and explain that he had no choice and would like to be a Dutch boy again. He must have changed his mind for he enjoyed

himself that day and I've never had to write that letter!

It was while we were in Booleroo Centre that Mieke told us that she wanted to become a Nun and so she went off to continue her schooling with the nuns at Aldgate (which was near Adelaide) and then she would have to go to Sydney for further study.

Because it was such a small town, the Catholic children from Booleroo used to go to summer school in Peterborough and they would make their First Communion there.

This particular year there were five children, including Marie, due to make their First Communion and the mothers felt it would be

nice to have it in Booleroo. There was only one thing stopping that, Father O'Farrell said he was not very good talking to young children, but he said that if someone could prepare them, he would be very happy to make it a beautiful ceremony.

So for several weeks I spent time with the children going over their preparations. Then the big day came. So many people came along to celebrate, the mothers all worked together to put on a fantastic breakfast and everybody had a beautiful day.

We were becoming more and more a part of the community. We had made many very

good friends,
Peter started
school in
Booleroo and
Opa got another
cow, this one
was named Pet,
we had a yard
full of chooks



and we had a cat. That cat would always sit on the bed when I was sewing. One morning she was behaving a bit funny, I didn't take too much notice at first but then I noticed that she wasn't alone any more. She was having kittens!

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When the kids came home from school there was a lot of excitement and then one of them asked how did that happen? The answer came quickly from one of the others..."She was always fighting with the cat next door!"

In our third year there, something happened that made it certain we would never forget Booleroo Centre: our second real Aussie, Paul, was born!

Just a few weeks later Opa and Alf set off on a long train journey to Sydney. Mieke was being received as a Novice into the Josephites



Order and Opa and Alf were going to attend the service. It was no small trip either. First they caught the railcar to

Gladstone, then the Bluebird to Adelaide.

From there it was an overnight trip on the Overland to Melbourne and then another full

day on the train to Sydney. Then they had to do it all again to get home!

Soon after that another promotion came up for Opa and again we had to pack and move, this time to Peterborough. While Peterborough was not that far away it was a major effort and since Peterborough

was a "big" town we would not be able to take Pet, the cow, with us. It was a bit sad leaving Booleroo as it was the last real "country town" in which we lived.

Peterborough was a large busy railway town and was no comparison with Booleroo, but we took it as it came and made the best of it. The kids settled into their new school and soon made new friends. One in particular made a friendship which, though nobody realised it at the time, was to last the rest of her

life...Vera met her future husband Gerard. And then there were more big plans to make. My



brother Stephen who was living in Brazil was going home to Holland for a holiday and Opa wanted me to go too so we could have a family reunion.

So it was decided that I would go and take Marie and Paul with me. So after eight years in Australia it was back on board a ship for another long trip halfway around the world. But it was worth it to see everybody and everything again. It was lovely and we got spoiled a lot, but when the time came it was very nice to go home again.

We loved living in the country, but for the children's future, we felt the time had come for us to move to the city. So we sold the green tank, packed once more and moved to Adelaide. Our first home in the City was a railway house in High Street, Enfield. Again the kids had to start at new schools, or in some cases jobs. It was while we lived in High Street that we got our first television, that was in 1961.

Opa's new job was as a relieving Station Master at different towns and he needed

> some sort of transport to get him around. The problem was we could not afford another car so he bought a scooter. It was a Honda 50 and it served him well for several years. It wasn't the best for family trips but over

the years we all had our turns sitting behind Opa as we puttered around town! There was one time it did let him down. Coming back from a week at Gulnare, he got in trouble, because halfway home the engine gave up. Soon a car pulled up with two young chaps who tried to help with no success. So they offered to take him to Adelaide, motorbike and all. On the way they said that one of them had been released from Gladstone jail that morning. Well the jail must have been good to them, because they were very nice.

After a few years in the railway house we started looking for our own home. After a lot of looking around we finally settled on a place and we moved one more time. And we have been here ever since!

From here we have watched our children grow up, leave school, start training and working and before long there were girlfriends and boyfriends. And so the years passed, good times and some not so good times, but our family took things as it came, coped with it and tried to make the best of everything together. Then the girlfriends and boyfriends became wives and husbands and the grand-children started to come. Every one very

welcome and very much loved. In the meantime Opa retired and we just got older



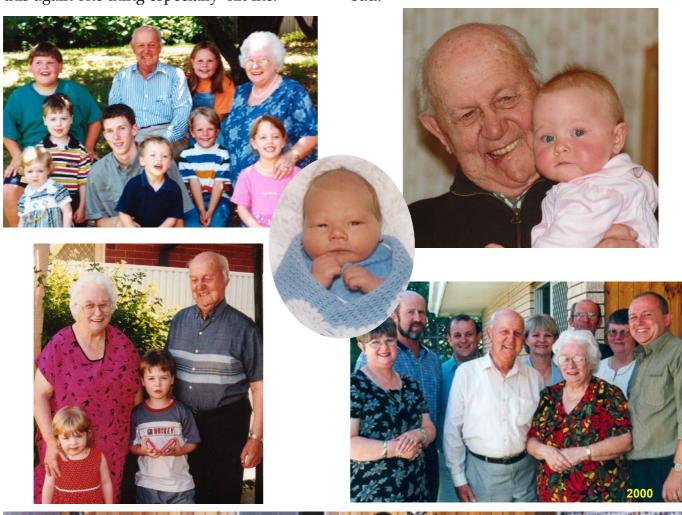
and older and the time seems to go faster and faster. Before we knew it we became great-grandparents. Even more little ones to love. We always enjoy the time spent with our family, especially seeing the little ones grow up and

develop. We hope the future may be as good for them in this country, which has been for us a home we came to love.

Over the years we have made several trips back to Holland. Each time it was a lot of fun, but every time we came back to Australia, we felt we were coming home.

I realise that I could have written a lot more about a lot of things. But as I was reading this again one thing especially hit me. If we had not done what we did, none of those beautiful people, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, would have been born! We probably would have had others, but I cannot imagine anything better than those we have!

50 years ago we started on a long journey to a far away country and an unknown future! Looking back we can say, "it ain't been half bad!"





A MESSAGE FROM HOLLAND

50 years, half a century!

I remember quite clearly the day you left.

We followed the ship through the canal from Amsterdam to IJmuiden at the coast where we waved a last goodbye and saw the ship disappear, thinking it would be farewell forever.

Lucky enough since then the world has become a lot smaller and we have been able to see each other both in Holland and Australia. Even though it still is a long trip, we hope to visit you again some time.

You say there are now 186 Hennekams related in Australia! Yes they always said Dutch people are very industrious!

We have great admiration for you. The great spirit you showed, which made

your migration a success. Your children and grandchildren should be grateful that you did it, for I believe that Australia is still a better place to live than Europe, with all the old and new problems, which never seems to be solved.

We hope you will have a great family party to celebrate.

From Uncle Kees (Oma's brother) and Aunty Agnes.



PASSAGIERSLIJST

Van het door de Nederlandse Regering gehuurde

"M.S. FAIRSEA"

19 JUNI 1952 VAN AMSTERDAM NAAR AUSTRALIE

Gezagovoeder: ANDREA STAGNARO

Veregenwoordiger va de Alvion Steamship Company:

NICOLAS CHEREMETEFF

Staf-kapitein: A. VENTIMIGLIA

Hoofdmachinist: ANTONIO NOVIELLO

Le Officier: B. LUIGI

Administrateur: ANIELLO MURLI Scheepsarts: BORIS SOUBOTIAN

Nederlandse Liaison Staf:

Administrateur: G. PLEMPER

Maître d'Hôtel: C. J. M. J. TIMMERMAN

Scheepsartsen: W. L. PEL W. J. BREYER

H

P. Hendrikse

Mevr. Hendrikse en kind

H. I. Hennekam

Mevr. Hennekam en 5 kdn.

H. J. M. Hensing

Mevr. Hensing en 3 kinderen

A. J. van den Herik

Mevr. van den Herik en 2 kdn.