

The Whittle Story

A Live Book

Moving to Australia

By Ruth Whittle, February 2019

Jeff and I have vivid childhood memories of World War 2 in England. Jeff's father served in both World Wars. My brother's RAF plane was shot down, in 1942, over the North Sea and he was never found. We each witnessed the bombings of nearby Manchester and Coventry respectively, and I was an evacuee. Nothing extra-ordinary, but we never wanted to go through such a thing again.

Since having our own children, we had some sleepless nights over the years and speculated on how different a nuclear war would be in a country as small as England.

One morning in 1961, at the height of the Cold War, Jeff looked up from his newspaper and said "You, my dear, are going to Australia" (or words to that effect).

This had not been on my agenda! We had four small sons and another baby soon to be born. We had just bought bunk beds for the boys and a new car, and I was settling down for the last few months of my pregnancy. But, when he explained why, I did not argue!

We sent a lengthy telegram to Jeff's relatives in Melbourne, arranged passports, and bought plane tickets. My luggage consisted of a few clothes, my feather-weight Singer sewing machine and a double sized push chair as the littlest child was not yet walking.

Very soon, I set off with the boys - and my other precious bundle. For them, it was just a big adventure because they knew that Jeff would be joining us in a few weeks' time. We travelled on a Qantas Boeing 707, its cabin decorated with murals of the Australian outback, complete with kangaroos. At that time, the fastest trip from England to Australia took more than 34 hours, with eight stops. They called it the Kangaroo Route.

Our plane was delayed in Karachi for a few hours in the middle of the night. When we stepped on to the tarmac at Essendon Airport on 13th October 1961, Jeff's relatives were there to welcome us. The bunch of flowers they had brought had wilted in the warm weather.

They took us to the Prince of Wales Hotel in St Kilda where they had booked rooms for us to stay. The receptionist there said: "You can stay until Cup Day and then we are booked out." I said: "What is Cup Day?"

In those days, "jet lag" was not known about, so I was surprised when, around 2 am each night, the children woke with one accord, expecting to play. Our eldest son, about to turn six years old, soon worked it out. "We wake up because it is daylight in England."

By Cup Day, I was renting the top floor of a house near the beach in Elwood. During these nocturnal playtimes, I would write letters to Jeff back in England. I had read about how Princess Margaret, who was pregnant at the same time, could not find a comfortable place to sit in Buckingham Palace. "She should try emigrating," I wrote.

Jeff joined us there on 13th November 1961 and soon we moved to yet another house in Elwood. It was very grubby, so Jeff sent me off on a walk with the children. Whilst we were out, he scrubbed all the floors himself.

Finally, we saw that a rental house was available in Newport, near the Williamstown Hospital where I had been booked in by Jeff's cousin. In those days, children were not welcome in rental properties, so we were fully expecting a refusal. Instead, we were greeted with open arms, and those dear people remained our good friends for many years, until they died. We were also given three Christmas cakes, two from complete strangers. We are still touched by the memory of those kind acts at a time when we needed them.

In Newport, we celebrated Christmas with a festive tree, two plastic chairs - and not much else. The possessions that Jeff had packed up from our home in England were still on the high seas.

Our fifth child (our only daughter) was born in early February 1962, and six months later we bought a house and moved to the eastern suburbs.

Jeff had found a job at the Defence Standards Laboratories at Maribyrnong, on the other side of town. He was prepared to drive a long way to work each day so that we could live in a nice area.

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He joined a car-sharing group with colleagues so that I could use our Volkswagen Beetle for shopping twice a week.

A few years later, we had a sixth child, another boy. Then, in 1971, because we needed more space, we moved to a house in the next suburb, where we still live to this day. We had no inkling of how this house would go through several incarnations, serving first as a family home, then providing a space where Jeff's mining software was developed in the early years. Now we have reclaimed some of the bedrooms, but Jeff's office remains up there. He uses it every day.

Once, I heard a lady describe how she had escaped from Poland during the war and I realised for the first time that, technically, we were also refugees. We were just lucky to simply land in this country with a British passport and be able to stay on.



Life in Australia was a big adventure for the boys! Melbourne, Oct 1961



Leaving Williamstown Hospital with our new baby girl, Judy. Feb 1962

Our family all now live safely in Australia – mission accomplished!

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Ruth Whittle BA

Ruth has an honours degree in French from the University of London.

Her first job was as Executive Officer in the Ministry of Supply in London, then in administration at AERE, Harwell (Atomic Energy Research Establishment).

After marrying Jeff in 1954, she devoted herself full-time to raising their six children, five sons and a daughter.

The family moved from England to Melbourne, Australia, in 1961.

When Jeff and Ruth established Whittle Programming in 1984, she successfully undertook the marketing of the software.

Since her retirement in 2000, Ruth has maintained a keen interest in the continuing development of the Whittle software.

She is currently working on compiling a history of the Whittle software by means of a Live Book.

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