

CHAPTER FIVE

Arrival in America

'Neath the Golden Gate to California State
We arrived on a morning fair.
Near the end of the trip, we stayed aboard ship,
We were still in the Navy's care
I was the young wife, embarked on a new life
Happiness mixed with confusion.
I'd not seen for a year the one I held dear
Would our love still bloom in profusion?

(Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', November 2001.)¹

The liner SS *Monterey* arrived in San Francisco on March 5, 1946, with 562 Australian and New Zealand war brides and their 253 children on board. A journalist from *The Sydney Morning Herald* was there to report that 'scores' of husbands were waiting on the dock, and that 'true to the reputation they established in Australia as great flower givers, nearly all the husbands clutched huge boxes of blooms' for their brides and fiancées.² 'Once the ship was cleared by the health authorities', it was reported, 'the husbands were allowed aboard and there were scenes in the best Hollywood manner.'³ It was a 'journalists' day out', according to the newspaper, and 'a boatload' of press and movie photographers and special writers from all the major news services and Californian newspapers went in an army tugboat to meet the *Monterey*.⁴

¹ Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', in *Albany Writers' Circle No. 19. A Collection of Short Stories and Poetry by the Writers of Albany*, November Issue, Denmark Printers, Albany, WA, 2001, pp. 36 and 37.

² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 6, 1946, p. 3.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

Described as 'the brightest event in the lives of waterfront writers and photographers since the war',⁵ this romantic and joyful account ostensibly described the atmosphere surrounding the war brides' arrival in San Francisco. It was written from the perspective of a journalist who was undoubtedly pleased to report a happy, 'feel-good' story after the end of the war. Its contents, however, were quite removed from the actual experiences of these young women as they caught the first glimpse of their new home. Although the war brides' first impressions differed, and their reception by their husbands and in-laws varied, for most there were periods of anxiety, apprehension and doubt, at least until they had reached their final destinations in their adopted country. Even then, for some, it was not a 'Hollywood dream' come true and there were plenty of challenges to overcome.

A poignant entry in the diary of young Betty de St Germain as *David C. Shanks* anchored in the bay of San Francisco a month later, on 28 April, 1946, indicates the depth of emotions some women experienced:

These last 19 days have not been the best, but...I would do it all again just to be with Ray. I didn't think I could love him anymore than I did in Sydney but I find myself loving him more with each obstacle that comes my way...I know we will be happy and I have no regrets...I know I'm going to be so terribly lonely but then I also know that Ray can give me the love to make up for those I've left behind. I'm starting a new life and I'm

⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 6, 1946, p. 3.

taking advantage of this opportunity God is giving me, but I'll never forget all my wonderful family and my true friends. I love you all and I'll never forget you, never.⁶

As well as sharing her innermost thoughts with loved ones at home who might read her diary, her fervent words also seem to be directed to herself, for reassurance that all will be well despite the loneliness which she suspects looms ahead.

This chapter highlights the mixed emotions which accompanied the reunions of this cohort with their husbands and fiancées, and the varying receptions they received from their husbands' families. It also explores the women's different accounts of their first impressions on arrival in America, and examines the way individual women adjusted to the earliest challenges they encountered in the new cultural environment in which they planned to make their permanent home.

REUNION

The war was still in progress when Western Australian war bride Irene Franck arrived in San Francisco in 1944. The sea voyage on a Swedish freighter had been anything but pleasant for her, as she was pregnant and suffering with morning-sickness as well as seasickness. On arrival in San Francisco she was feeling wretched, unable to eat or drink, and was extremely thin. Her husband was still in service, so was not there to meet her. She somehow summoned the stamina to travel by train to Chicago to stay with her in-laws, who fortunately were 'the most delightful

⁶ Betty King, (unpublished diary) written as Betty St Germain (nee Mott) on board SS *David C. Shanks*, April, 1946. (Copy of extract in possession of author.)

people' and took good care of her, although she recalls: 'They looked at me as if I was a kangaroo or something!'⁷

Individual experiences on arrival in America were, of course, very different. War bride Dorothy Pence Berry sailed during wartime on a troopship from Brisbane to arrive at the naval base San Pedro, in California in January 1945. It was an extremely long journey of 90 days as they had picked up returning troops from New Guinea and were forced to make manoeuvres to avoid mines in the water. Dorothy remembers that on arrival in America everything was packed up in the morning, so there were no meals on board that day; although she comments that 'the Red Cross was there to greet us with donuts!' This was her first encounter with a 'donut' as they had not yet made an appearance in Australian cuisine. There was 'nothing' for the baby. She recalls that the returning US servicemen disembarked first and that the war brides were the last to leave the ship. Dorothy says: 'I understand now' that 'the servicemen were coming home after being at sea all those months and years', although at the time she did not understand this order of priority and was very anxious to disembark.⁸ On arrival at San Pedro, the war brides were assigned to different taxi cabs and taken to a hotel where the duties of the Red Cross came to an end, and the young Australian women had to find their own way to their final destinations.

Very few of the war brides interviewed for this thesis recall their arrival in America in terms similar to the bright event so described by *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Few reunions went as was expected. Australian war brides were usually first-

⁷ Interview with Irene Franck, San Diego, CA, 25 September, 2001.

⁸ Interview with Dorothy Pence Berry, Denver, CO, 6 September, 2001.

time travellers, and thus the arrival in America for these women was fraught with anxiety, as they searched among the crowds on the wharf for someone they recognised who might be there to meet them. Emotions ranged from jubilation and excitement to disappointment and distress, depending on whether or not there was someone there to receive them. There were inevitably feelings of disappointment and humiliation. Beset by problems such as sick babies, lost luggage, sometimes not being met and not being aware of their husbands' whereabouts, these young Australian women had to deal with many challenges on their arrival in an unfamiliar environment. Some women found it difficult to recognise their husbands and fiancés on first sighting, after the long separation. Already suffering some anxiety about arriving in America, the first glimpse of their husbands did little to reassure them, as the men were sometimes almost impossible to recognise in civilian clothes. Arrival also brought with it new challenges as the war brides had to deal with a new currency, a new vernacular, new cuisines, and new customs.

Colleen Halter, pregnant and sick for most of the journey, remembers arriving in San Francisco on June 14, 1946, to find nobody there to meet her. When her name was called over the loudspeaker, she remembers:

I walked down the gangplank and I didn't know what to do. I could just see everybody looking at me and thinking 'That poor little thing, she's pregnant and no-one to meet her!'⁹

⁹ Interview with Colleen Halter, San Jose, CA, 27 September 2001.

Colleen was ushered over to the Red Cross hut where there were several other girls waiting. She felt sure that something had happened to Jerry and she used a public phone to call his Aunt Addie in San Jose, close to San Francisco. She remembers the difficulty of doing seemingly simple things in a new country:

I didn't know how to use the phone. The money looked so different and I was used to big pennies! So I asked a gentleman there to get that number for me, which he did. I talked to Aunt Addie and...she said 'You're not supposed to be here until tomorrow!'¹⁰

Colleen's husband Jerry and his cousin 'Speed' eventually arrived to collect Colleen. Self-conscious because she was pregnant and seemingly abandoned, Colleen vividly remembers the events of that day and how 'everyone around me had those looks of "Phew, thank God we don't have to send her back!"'

San Francisco was usually only the first stop on a long journey to a new home, and many women interviewed reported that travelling alone within the United States was not easy for the war brides, especially for those with babies and small children. They suffered discomfort due to the mode of transport, the length of the journey and at times the severe weather conditions, as well as the sometimes fragile health of the mother or her offspring. Hazel Walker's story provides a typical example of the stresses such a journey posed. Hazel arrived in San Francisco on her 24th birthday. Ladies from the Red Cross came on board and took the 300 war brides in groups by car to their headquarters to arrange hotel accommodation. After a week in San

¹⁰ Halter, *op. cit.*

Francisco, Hazel travelled by train to Chicago, and there she and other war brides experienced their first taste of resentment from American women. She recalls:

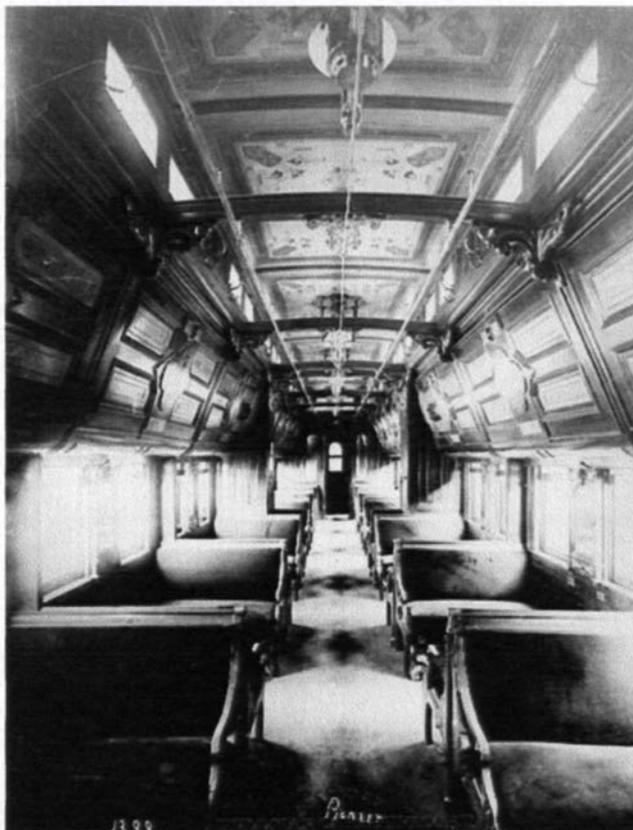
Every day on our way to the dining car, we had to go through a car that wasn't a Pullman, and some of the women in that car used to get down and wipe the floor after we'd walked on it and say rude things about us for having married US servicemen. We never acknowledged that we heard them, because we were brought up not to lower ourselves to the level of people like that; not that it didn't hurt our feelings. We were nervous enough as it was.¹¹

There was an 'Army man' on the train who checked on the war brides every day to make sure they had no problems. When Hazel's seven-week-old baby became ill, this man stopped the train somewhere in Kansas and had a doctor come on board. The doctor said the baby was travel sick, and asked Hazel how far she had come. He was shocked when she answered 'Australia', and said 'Good Lord, woman', and told her to give the baby nothing but boiled water until she got off the train. When the personnel in the kitchen would not give Hazel the water, the Army man arranged for the porter to get it for her. She says:

That man had been, and continued to be wonderful to us for the whole three days we were on that train. I

¹¹ Email correspondence with Hazel Walker, in Phoenix, AZ, 31 August, 2007. Note: The Pullman car was a train carriage with sleeping facilities. During the day the upper berth was folded up like a modern airliner's luggage rack. At night the upper berth folded down and the two facing seats below it folded over to provide a relatively comfortable bunk for the night. Curtains provided privacy, and there were washrooms at each end of the car for men and women. Porters were usually African Americans. Source: *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pullman_Company [Accessed 9 November, 2009].

No. 23 – Travel by train in America



Once disembarked from the ship, Australian war brides travelled to distant parts of America to join their husbands and in-laws. This Pullman sleeping car, arranged for daytime use, is typical of the mode of transport which carried them across the country. [Copy of original owned by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin visual Archives, Album 36.166]



Pullman sleeping car with beds made up for night-time travel. [PB Works, <http://arielnpaulaustensarah.pbworks.com/f/pullman2.jpg> Accessed August, 2009].

was so grateful, that I wrote to him after I arrived in Chicago, and thanked him for his care.¹²

Women travelling with their babies had to summon all their courage on leaving the ship, in order to make the additional journey by train to meet up with their husbands or their in-laws. Rosemary Smith sailed on *SS Lurline* in April 1946 to San Francisco where her husband was unable to meet her, but with assistance from the Red Cross, she travelled to Long Beach by train. She recalls:

It all seems like a blur at times, but I remember on that train, coming down through the red desert to Long Beach, that it took almost all night...It was a regular troop train and they treated us like regular army. Every time we stopped somewhere they'd shout out, "arm and line up", you know, just like we were part of the forces.¹³

Although no longer on board naval vessels, the quasi-military experience continued for some of these women, even after their arrival in America.

After such arduous journeys, it was sometimes weeks or even months before these war brides were reunited with their husbands. For most this was due to the exigencies of the war. Lowell Rudy was not at the dock to meet his wife Allie and their new son when they arrived on the *SS Lurline* in June 1945 because he had been shipped off to Guadalcanal in the Marshall Islands. Allie had never travelled outside

¹² Walker, 31 August, 2007, *op.cit.*

¹³ Interview with Rosemary Smith, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

Australia before. She journeyed by train to Ohio where she was to be met by her in-laws. Still suffering from the nausea of seasickness on the ship, Allie recalls:

My son had dysentery and in those days you couldn't buy disposable diapers...I couldn't stand to wash them, and I kept throwing them out the train window! Nobody saw what we were doing, but you dare not put them down the toilet. I kept throwing them out and I had to buy more and more. You could buy them on the train. It was just an impossible task for me to wash them, as I wasn't feeling very good at all. But we made it across country and his parents met me in Dayton, Ohio, and took me to their farm home.¹⁴

Seemingly abandoned by the husbands they had not seen for so long, the disappointment and despair of some war brides was almost tangible when they recalled that their husbands were not there to meet them. Betty Blondon and her six-month-old baby arrived in San Francisco on board *SS Lurline* on November 14, 1946, to be informed by the Red Cross that her husband was not there to meet her. She remembers thinking, 'What am I going to do?' His whereabouts were unknown to her and she was unable to contact him. There was a three or four hours wait for customs to clear the luggage, so she went with a few other passengers to have lunch. When she returned to check for her luggage, Betty says: 'someone came up behind me and grabbed me and it was my husband!' He had arrived after all...so it was a lovely

¹⁴ Interview with Allie Rudy, Denver, CO, 7 September, 2001.

surprise!' The couple drove down to Palm Springs where they stayed with her in-laws and spent Thanksgiving with them, thus being immediately introduced to a great American cultural tradition.

Although many husbands were not able, for one reason or another, to be present to greet their wives on arrival, great efforts were made by some to meet their Australian wives. One discharged United States soldier, Amor John Mason, was so keen to be re-united with his 19-year-old Australian war bride Joyce, and his 18-months-old son Glenn, that he 'thumbed' his way across America when he learned that his family was arriving at San Francisco on March 6, 1946. It took him seven days and 22 hours to reach the West Coast from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He met his young wife and their son and put them on a train for Philadelphia, the family's fare being paid for by the US government. Mason did not have enough money for his own train ticket, so he hitch-hiked back again. The return trip took him eight days and 14 hours, and he arrived home with little change from the 71 dollars he had at the start of his journey.¹⁵

Even after arrival in America, a few women still had to be persuaded to join their husbands and not return home to Australia. In April, 1946, headlines in the Australian press announced 'Two divorces among US Brides averted' and it was reported that Army, Navy and Red Cross officials convinced two war brides who arrived on SS *Lurline* that they 'should re-examine the situation before doing anything drastic'.¹⁶ The paper told how 'one girl's happiness was shattered on arrival by a

¹⁵ 'Hitch-Hiked to Meet Bride', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 18, 1946, p. 1.

¹⁶ 'Two divorces among U.S. brides averted', *The Northern Star*, April 15, 1946, p. 1.

telegram from her husband stating the marriage was a mistake and she should return to Australia'.¹⁷ However, the bride's mother-in-law was contacted and she invited the girl to go to her home in Missouri until the matter was resolved. Shortly after the *Lurline* docked, another war bride shocked officials by asking where she could file a suit for divorce. She was finally convinced that she should visit her husband before carrying out her plan.¹⁸

For other war brides, the very long and lonely wait continued, but now in unfamiliar surroundings. For example, when May Webb sailed on SS *Monterey* in 1946, it had already been four years since she had seen her husband. She was met by her husband's sister in San Francisco, as he had been shipped to the Bikini Islands and had arranged for her to go to Wichita, Kansas, to live with her sister-in-law and her family for two years, making it virtually six years before the couple was re-united.¹⁹ Nancy Lankard's husband was still in the navy and his ship was also involved in the atomic testing at Bikini Atoll. On arrival in San Francisco in April 1946 she was met by the Red Cross who 'were really wonderful' and took the war brides to Oakland to the train. Nancy recalls:

I was met at Denver, Colorado by my mother-in-law and her sister. They had to be identified, and then they claimed me - like a parcel! We drove down to their home in Colorado Springs.²⁰

¹⁷ 'Two divorces among U.S. brides averted', *The Northern Star*, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Interview with May Webb, San Diego, CA, 25 September, 2001.

²⁰ Telephone interview with Nancy Lankard, 14 November, 2004.

Circumstances were different for Rita Hopkins who, unlike most war brides, was able to accompany her husband on SS *Lurline* under wartime conditions in 1944, although as he was being invalided home as a sick person he was in a medical cabin. On arrival in San Francisco, they were met by the Red Cross and Rita's husband was transported to Latimer Army Hospital nearby and he went from there to the medical facility in Santa Fe. Rita tells how she went to Monrovia, outside Los Angeles, near Pasadena, to stay with her husband's aunt and uncle before going to Santa Fe, New Mexico for six weeks, eventually moving to Wisconsin. Rita says she had no trouble settling in: 'I was fine...everybody was really good.'²¹ Rita, a very positive person despite difficulties, had demonstrated a confident resourcefulness in preparation for her wedding in Australia. When she was interviewed in September 2001 in Salem, Oregon, she was similarly positive. She was bright, spontaneous and generous with her time, even offering me accommodation, while she cared for her wheelchair-bound husband who was very ill. It would appear that her statement that 'I was fine...everybody was really good' could be interpreted utilising the concept of 'composure' as, in all reality, it must have been a very stressful time for her given her husband's very poor health. Here again is an example of the strength of character displayed by many of this cohort in the face of adversity.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions of America were different for each individual. Knowledge of America among this cohort was fairly limited, and their expectations of American lifestyles were largely coloured by what they had observed from Hollywood

²¹ Interview with Rita Hopkins, Salem, OR, 11 September, 2009.

films screened in Australia. Patricia Law remembers her first impressions of the United States and says: 'I loved San Francisco...we went over the Golden Gate Bridge and I'd never seen that many cars!' She also remembered thinking: 'I'd seen too many movies and I didn't realise that people were just home bodies like we are', and that America was 'not all parties' and that it did not reflect the Hollywood images in movies.²² Influenced by Hollywood films, Shirley Norton was fearful after her arrival in San Francisco aboard SS *Monterey* on 22 April, 1946. She and her small son, who was ill, travelled east by train to Chicago to meet her husband. She remembers: 'I thought Al Capone was still alive. I wasn't too happy going to Chicago, I can tell you that!²³

The first glimpse of their new homeland was sometimes disappointing. Gladys Borger who sailed to San Francisco on SS *Lurline* in 1944, did not expect to be met by her husband, as he was on SS *Apache* which had gone back into battle in the Philippines. She remembers her very first impression of America as a disappointment when she first viewed the Golden Gate Bridge as the ship steamed into San Francisco. Expecting the bridge to be 'golden' as the name implies, she was disenchanted to find that 'it was painted orange!' But she did find it impressive, and remembers: 'it was September...the countryside from San Francisco to Sacramento was beautiful'.²⁴

The beauty of the countryside was remarked upon by several war brides. It was the landscape and environment that first caught the attention of Margaret

²² Interview with Patricia Law, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

²³ Interview with Shirley Norton, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

²⁴ Interview with Gladys Borger, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

Fosmo. She recalls that her very first impression of America was the beauty of the Oregon coast as they drove north to Seattle.²⁵ Ivy Diers from Rockhampton in tropical Queensland, travelled by train to Seattle, where she was to meet her husband. She clearly remembers seeing snow for the first time from the train in northern California.²⁶

Valda Hertzberg's first impressions of Philadelphia were better than she had anticipated. She recalls:

having been told by my husband that Philadelphia was flat, dirty and unattractive, I found...where we lived was actually outside the city limits...It was very pretty and hilly, with the river Schuylkill, and the biggest park there is!²⁷

The different climate and terrain was not always a comfort to these young women. Dorothy Thompson, for instance, came to America from the sunshine and warmth of Queensland and first settled in the small town of Clark in South Dakota, in the midst of a bitter winter season. Dorothy found the move to be 'a big change' and she remembers how she was very unhappy for the first five years, and describes how much she 'hated the winters':

²⁵ Interview with Margaret Fosmo, Seattle, WA, 13 September, 2001.

²⁶ Interview with Ivy Diers, Seattle, WA, 13 September, 2001.

²⁷ Interview with Valda Hertzberg, Darling Point, Sydney, 30 May, 2007.

I came here in March and the snow was melting –
dirty slushy snow – no leaves on the trees, and I just
thought I'd come to the end of the world...²⁸

Acclimatising to new surroundings was a challenge for many war brides. Patricia Law, originally from temperate Sydney, initially found it difficult to settle in her new surroundings. It was very different living in the dry desert of Arizona where it was so cold that the pipes froze in winter. She describes the region as a place of 'extreme heat' and 'extreme cold', to which she had to adjust.²⁹

The alien landscape did not make sense to Sydney war bride, Joy Shaddle, on her arrival in Forrest, Illinois in 1947. She reflects on her first impression of the countryside:

I remember it was March, and that is not a good time
in Illinois, because it is neither blanketed with the
beautiful snow, nor is it green. It is bare! I remember
I thought 'They've had a bushfire here!' All the trees
were bare. I looked around and thought 'Oh, what a
pity – it's all black!'³⁰

For Betty King from Sydney, it was the night lights in New Orleans she first noticed when driving with her fiancé to meet his family:

²⁸ Interview with Dorothy Thompson, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Interview with Joy Shaddle, Forestville, Sydney, 4 October, 2002.

It was just on dark and he had borrowed his brother's car to come in and pick me up. As we drove down Canal Street, the main street, it was like fairyland! There were so many neon lights that we didn't have [in Sydney] then.³¹

In contrast, for Pat Law it was the lack of night lights and entertainment which made an impression on her when she reached her destination of Casa Grande in Arizona. She explains how in Sydney during wartime 'there was a lot of night life...clubs where you go dancing, and of course there was nothing like that in the little town where I went – just picnics and 'pot lucks'.³² The small town lacked the sophistication of the city of Sydney, where entertainment specifically for the troops in wartime had seen nightclubs and dance halls flourish during the 1940s.

Other war brides were impressed by the grand scale of the roads and infrastructure, compared with Australian cities. Sydney girl, June Carver, now in her eighties and legally blind, still has strong visual impressions of her arrival in San Francisco on SS *Lurline* in 1945. Her husband had driven all the way from Utah to meet her, and the couple returned there by car. She recalls: 'there were no freeways at that time, and I was overwhelmed at the size of the buses and trucks whizzing by. I had never seen such big trucks in my life!' After leaving San Francisco her main impression of the US was that 'it was wide', and she describes her memories of its vastness on the road trip to Utah:

³¹ Betty King, Interview, Castle Hill, NSW, 16 June, 2005.

³² Law, *op. cit.*; Note: 'Pot Luck' is the term given to a luncheon where each person brings a plate of food to contribute to the cuisine. Patricia found this was 'something new' compared to Australia where the food was supplied by the host.

we drove through northern California and across the whole of Nevada, and it was just a wide open desert State. Las Vegas was just a little dot on the way in those days – it wasn't what it is today.³³

Similarly, Joanne Patterson was impressed by the vastness of the United States as she and her husband drove from San Francisco to Milford, Ohio. Coming from Melbourne which was a big city, she found 'the little towns' where they stopped along the way were quite intriguing. She found the people very friendly and declares, 'I was a celebrity!' She remembers visiting one small town in Kansas where 'they wanted to take me to the Chamber of Commerce the next day to make a speech about Australia!'³⁴ Similarly impressed by the size of the country, Betty Blondon recalls: 'it was big! And the cars scared the life out of me because they were on the wrong side of the road!'³⁵ For Mary Bourne, her very first impression of the US was how the very wide roads reminded her of the 'monstrous boulevards' in Germany that were repeatedly shown at the newsreel cinemas in Australia.³⁶ Her husband had not been there to meet her, she had been seasick all the way across the Pacific, and her luggage had been lost. Given these unhappy circumstances it is perhaps no wonder that such wartime images came to mind.

The number of cars on the roads signalled an apparent affluence compared to Australia where petrol was rationed during the war and motor vehicles were often

³³ Interview with June Carver, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001

³⁴ Interview with Joann Patterson, Reno, NV, 1 October, 1999 and at Portland, OR, 14 June, 2004.

³⁵ Interview with Betty Blondon, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

³⁶ Interview with Dorothy (Mary) Bourne, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

motionless, 'up on blocks' in garages. Edna (Teddy) Pickerel sailed on SS *Mariposa* with her small child, arriving in San Francisco on the memorable date of Anzac Day, 25 April, 1946. Her husband, whom she had not seen for six months, was waiting on the wharf with his uncle. After a few days in San Francisco with his aunt and uncle, the couple drove on to Salem, Oregon, where they spent the next six months living with Teddy's father-in-law and his wife, until finally the couple was able to buy their own home nearby. Teddy Pickerel's first impressions of the US noted that 'everything was different' and 'everyone had a car'. She noticed on the drive from San Francisco that there were 'all these places that said 'motel'. A motel was something she didn't know from Australia in those days and she says: 'I didn't know whether it was a place of ill repute or what! I hoped it wasn't because we stayed in one on our first night on the road!' ³⁷ Iris Craig also found the journey by car very different when she first arrived. She remarked on how strange it felt to be travelling on 'the wrong side of the road', and she noticed odd spelling on the advertising broad-boards, such as 'nite' and wondered 'is that the way they spell here' as she thought it was definitely 'not good English'.³⁸

To some of this cohort, American cities seemed more affluent and advanced than those in Australia, while others thought America was lagging behind. Irene Perucci's first impression of the United States was amazement at 'all the automobiles!' She had never seen so many, and she observed that everyone seemed to go about their own business 'as if they didn't know there was a war going on'. She also noted that it seemed more affluent: 'things weren't rationed over here, whereas

³⁷ Interview with Edna (Teddy) Pickerel, Salem, OR, 11 September, 2001.

³⁸ Interview with Iris Craig, Sydney, 15 November, 2003.

back home you had to have eight coupons for a pair of shoes.' She observed: 'It was a very fast pace...compared to back home.'³⁹ Rita Hopkins, originally from the Northern Queensland town of Rockhampton, also found the US to be quite advanced, and thought that Australia was probably 'fifty years behind'.⁴⁰ By contrast, Nancy Lankard, originally from Sydney, considered herself 'a real city girl' and being used to the bustle of the city, found Colorado Springs 'a little behind the times'. She remembers that:

people were friendly but a little 'country-bumpkin-ish'.

I was very, very lonely – coming from a big family – and it was very expensive to get through on the phone to speak to family back in Australia.

Sometimes the phones were on a party-line and there would be other people on the line. It was very hard.⁴¹

Similarly, Kathleen Heeren's first impression of the United States was that 'it was strange, and years and years behind' Australia. In her opinion, 'America didn't come alive until probably into the mid-50s'.⁴²

The war brides' impressions as to whether America was 'behind' or 'advanced' were usually influenced by the locations in Australia from where they originally came. Compared to small towns such as Rockhampton, (particularly before the influx of American troops), the US would no doubt have seemed more advanced. For those

³⁹ Interview with Irene Perucci, Lemon Grove, San Diego, CA, 23 September, 2001.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Interview with Kathleen Heeren, Reno, Nevada, 30 September, 1999.

women who came from cities such as Sydney or Melbourne, on their arrival in a small mid-west town, for example, the US would appear to be less advanced.

The different American cuisine made an impression on some war brides and fiancées. In Seattle, Margaret Fosmo's sister-in-law drove her sight-seeing to Pike Place Markets, famous for their displays of fresh fish and produce, where Margaret sampled 'a chilli dog' which she thought was 'terrible'. Generally, though, her impressions were that it all seemed 'pretty much the same as at home'.⁴³ Norma Rehrer remembers being impressed by the home-canned fruit that some American people had stored in their basement, and also by the 'chocolate covered almonds' in the shops in San Francisco. She says: 'We hadn't had those in Australia for years!'⁴⁴ When Betty King arrived at her husband Ray's brother's house in Louisiana, she remembers how she was accepted immediately by the family and was treated to a meal of 'red beans and rice with chilli in it'. Betty comments: 'I don't have to tell you what happened! If you've eaten chilli, you know about it! I didn't know what had happened to me!'⁴⁵ New 'ethnic' cuisine was another cultural change to which some of the Australian women had to quickly adjust.

'FOREIGNERS' IN A NEW LAND

The general attitude of Americans to the newly arrived Australian war brides, even before the war had ended, was highlighted in an article in *The Washington Post* on July 29, 1945. Under the heading, 'Thousands of American Girls Face War-Caused Spinsterhood', the article states that 'many thousands of American girls never

⁴³ Fosmo, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Interview with Norma Rehrer, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

⁴⁵ King, Interview, *op. cit.*

find husbands as a direct consequence of war'.⁴⁶ The paper reported that American 'official sources hesitate about giving out estimates' but they nevertheless 'concede that more and more girls face certain spinsterhood'.⁴⁷ Among the reasons given were the surplus number of women in America when it entered the war; as well as the deaths and casualties of war, many of which were believed to be young unmarried men; and the numbers of American soldiers who 'are marrying overseas'.⁴⁸ Although the Australian Embassy was reported to have 'no figures', the Australian newspaper polls indicated in July 1945, that more than 10,000 American soldiers had married Australian girls.⁴⁹ The newspaper also reported that 'hundreds of Yank brides' are expected also to arrive from countries such as 'Iceland, Trinidad, New Zealand, Italy, Egypt, France, Newfoundland and other foreign nations'.⁵⁰ With this influx of women from other countries, married to American GIs, it is no wonder that in many instances the war brides became aware of hostility and prejudice towards them.

In the case of war brides from ex-enemy countries such as Germany and Japan such hostility was made plain through legislative restrictions on inter-marriage. The ban which prevented GIs marrying German nationals was not officially lifted until December 11, 1946, although further obstacles to intermarriage were installed. A three-month waiting period was required before marriages between German women and GIs could take place, allowing for careful screening of all prospective war brides. Then the marriage could only take place one month before the American was scheduled to depart from Europe.⁵¹ The Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 specifically

⁴⁶ 'Thousands of American Girls Face War-Caused Spinsterhood', *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1945, p. 83.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Schukert and Scibetta, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

excluded Japanese from immigrating to the US.⁵² Japanese-American marriages to US servicemen were actively discouraged, and many GIs decided to marry their fiancées in traditional Japanese ceremonies without military permission. Many soldiers contemplated giving up their American citizenship so they could remain with their Japanese fiancées and brides. It was not until 1947 that President Truman signed the *Alien Wife Bill*, which resulted in the *Soldier Brides Act* (Public Law 213), which stated that: 'the alien spouse of an American citizen by marriage occurring before 30 days after the enactment of this Act [July 22, 1947], shall not be considered as inadmissible because of race, if otherwise admissible under this Act.'⁵³ The 30-day limit, however, did not allow time for couples to attend to all the red tape involved in 'screening' the Japanese girl and obtaining the commanding officer's consent to the marriage. This landmark legislation eliminated race as a discriminating factor, but was of a temporary nature. It was not until June 27, 1952, that the *Immigration and Nationality (McCarran-Walter) Act* repealed the *Oriental Exclusion Act* of 1924 and gave all Asian nationals a token immigration quota, eliminating race as a barrier to naturalisation.⁵⁴

War brides from ex-enemy countries were variously received in their new adopted country. Japanese war brides like Rita, found it hard to assimilate in the new American culture. She settled with her husband in a small town in North Dakota where she became 'an oddity'. It was 'a strictly all white town' where the people had never seen a Japanese person. During her crying spells and her husband's drinking bouts, she thought 'if he can't help himself, how can he help me to learn new ways?'⁵⁵

⁵² Schukert and Scibetta, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 209.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 144.

⁵⁵ Helene R. Lee, *Bittersweet Decision. The War Brides 40 years later*, Roselee Publications, Lockport, N.Y., 1985, p. 284.

Japanese war bride Tanya, who had a good command of the English language, had a different experience. Adapting well to the American way of life, she went to University, became a prolific writer and talented artist, and had a fulfilling and happy marriage.⁵⁶ A war bride from Germany, happily married for more than 30 years, remembers: 'My husband's family opened their hearts and doors to me', and 'the neighbours couldn't have been nicer' although life in an old house on a small tobacco farm in North Carolina presented challenges.⁵⁷ Another German war bride tells how she was initially scrutinised by her husband's family in a hostile manner, and how she travelled through miles of barren prairie land in Wyoming to reach the 'house' on her husband's 'ranch' which was just a small unpainted wooden shack, on a hill 'bare of any vegetation', which was to be her future home. Overwhelmed by isolation and loneliness, unable to read or write English properly, this 'foreigner in a strange country' soon felt trapped in an impossible situation. The marriage eventually became abusive and, many years later, ended in tragedy.⁵⁸

Although the Australian war brides were English-speaking and had more customs in common with American traditions than most newly arrived war brides, they did not escape the resentment directed at foreign brides who were seen to 'steal' the young American men away from eligible American women. Overwhelmingly, the war brides interviewed for this thesis expressed bemusement at being treated as 'foreigners'. As Australians wives of American servicemen, they were in fact 'foreigners' in America under US law, until they became naturalised citizens.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁵⁸ Mathilde Morris, *Dreams and Nightmares of a German War Bride*, Cambridge Writers Press, Auroro, CO, 1998, pp. 57, 58, 218.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 8, US Citizenship for Australian War Brides

However, it had never occurred to them that their husbands' relatives and friends might suspect that they would be Aboriginal, have black skin, nor that they might not speak English and therefore be difficult to understand. The parochial attitude of Americans, who generally seemed to know little about countries outside their own, was surprising to the war brides. They had come from a country which was predominantly Anglo-Saxon, where Aboriginal people were not part of the mainstream population, and where the White Australia Policy excluded the immigration of Asians in an attempt to keep Australia 'white'.⁶⁰ These young Australian women, who came from a nation so closely allied to America during WWII, were shocked to find that they were treated as 'foreigners' in that country. That they should be the subject of queries about race and whiteness was something they had not expected, and subsequent feelings of alienation tested some of the war brides as they settled into their new homes.

The testimony of the war brides in this study reveals many instances of ignorance about Australia on the part of Americans in the immediate post-war years, which included confusing Australians with Austrians; the belief that Australians were 'black' and did not speak English; and in one instance believing that Australia was attached somewhere to the Southern tip of South America. War bride Joy Shaddle, who settled in the small town of Forrest, Illinois, describes the 'open house' when her mother-in-law 'invited everyone' to meet her and 'they all came'. Joy says:

⁶⁰ The White Australia Policy, framed by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1902, prohibited the immigration of Asians to Australia. It began to unravel after WWII, but was not completely dismantled until the mid-1970s. (See Andrew Jakubowicz, 'White Noise: Australia's Struggle with Multiculturalism', in *Working Through Whiteness. International perspective*, Edited by Cynthia Levine-Rasky, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002, p. 107; also Frank G. Clarke, *Australia in a Nutshell – a Narrative History*, Rosenberg Publishing Pty. Ltd., 2003, p. 274.

At that time, they didn't know what an Aussie looked like. They didn't know whether Lloyd Shaddle's wife was black or white! I think they came out of curiosity, and many of them would say to me 'You speak quite good English!' I'd laugh and say 'I can't speak anything else!'⁶¹

Allie Rudy was living with her in-laws, and before her husband returned home, all his friends from high school and various cousins, who rarely visited, came to see 'this Aussie' that Bud had married. According to Allie, the people in town knew very little about Australia, and she tells how one person in particular expected her to be a black person: 'Yes', she says, 'an Australian Aborigine!' She remembers: 'he was delighted that I was white and that I could speak English!'⁶² Allie's husband was a well-known sportsperson in town - 'a wonderful pitcher in baseball' and he 'played football so very well' -and she explains how his friends were curious to see 'what kind of a woman he had married'.⁶³ She recalls:

My mother-in-law's friend had wanted to know what she thought about her son marrying a black girl! Others asked 'How will she understand what we say?' It made me feel a little uncomfortable and it was rather hurtful, but I realised it was just ignorance on their part.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Interview with Joy Shaddle, Forestville, Sydney, 4 October. 2002.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Lankard, *op. cit.*

As well as having to confront these unexpected issues of 'race' and 'whiteness' in a country where they expected to blend in and feel at home, there were other issues of ethnicity which tested the war brides. Soon after arriving in the US, Shirley Norton, her husband and their small baby moved to Milwaukee where they rented an apartment, in part of a big house. The woman who rented the house had sub-let this small apartment without telling the landlord. He found out and came banging on the door one day. Shirley remembers:

this was a German man that I could hardly understand! He had a very guttural voice. Milwaukee had a lot of German population. He told me I was a foreigner and should go back where I came from!⁶⁵

This outburst coming from a German, no doubt a resident of some years, seemed unfair to Shirley who thought, as an English-speaking wife of a US serviceman, she was less foreign than he was, particularly given the recent association of wartime alliances where Germany was the enemy and Australia an ally of the US. This experience temporarily undermined Shirley's sense of security regarding her new home.

Prejudice was often directed towards the war bride for marrying an American serviceman, rather than blame being apportioned to the American groom. Dorothy Thompson initially lived with her in-laws in a small town where she says 'there was a lot of prejudice against us girls when we came over here'. She says: 'We married

⁶⁵ Norton, *op. cit.*

Americans and took their boys away'. She felt this local prejudice personally, as 'in a small town everyone knows you'. Dorothy says: 'nobody really bothered to come to see me', although she suspected that her mother-in-law had a lot to do with this, as she didn't want people to come to the house. Reflecting that life in America 'hasn't been a bed of roses', Dorothy adds 'but I can't really complain about it', a comment which suggests a certain amount of compromise which was necessary for some marriages to succeed. Dorothy's attitude is typical of the strength, determination and stoicism of the Australian war brides when dealing with feelings of alienation and in pursuing their goal to make a success of their marriage.⁶⁶

MEETING THE IN-LAWS

Meeting the in-laws quite often proved to be challenging. Not all war brides were given a welcoming reception from their husband's families. Because of housing shortages just after the war, it was difficult for the newly married couples to find accommodation. In many cases the war brides initially were expected to live with their in-laws in an unfriendly and hostile environment. There were various factors that prevented instantaneous bonding between the new bride and her in-laws.

Dorothy Pence Berry was not accepted by her husband's parents who had earlier written to their son saying 'Why don't you marry a nice American girl instead of a foreigner?' As there was no housing available, the Red Cross provided the couple with accommodation until they could get Navy housing in Berkeley.⁶⁷ When Dorothy

⁶⁶ Thompson, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ 'Housing Shortage Grows More Critical in U.S.', *The Northern Star*, April 3, 1946, p. 5. 'The housing shortage in major US cities continues to grow more critical as troops return from overseas'.

became pregnant, her husband suggested that she and their 18-month-old daughter should go to stay with his mother in Ohio, to be cared for during her pregnancy. It was not a happy experience for Dorothy who found that 'they didn't care' for her and they saw her as 'a foreigner' and criticised her Australian accent which she found very hurtful.⁶⁸ After returning to California, however, she realised that it was not all Americans, but just her in-laws who lived 'in their little sphere in the world'. So she adapted her attitude and relations improved. She says 'We ended up good friends years and years later, but I was always a "foreigner" to them.'⁶⁹

Sometimes religious differences were the root of the problem. Joanne Patterson found her in-laws to be generally 'cordial', although her mother-in-law said the marriage would never last, 'mainly because they were a Catholic family and Joseph had married out of the church and married a foreigner'. Her father-in-law was friendly, and Joseph had two sisters with whom she made good friends.⁷⁰ Allie Rudy felt fortunate to be 'welcomed with opened arms' into the home of her husband's family, but she felt that her mother-in-law seemed to be bothered that Allie was Catholic and had married into their Protestant family. However, she says:

I won them over because I think they realised that it didn't matter, and that I was a decent person. I was a good wife, I was a good mother and I was a great help to her. So I won myself into their little hearts I think.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Berry, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Bourne, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Patterson, *op. cit.*, Reno, NV, 1 October, 1999 and at Portland, OR, 14 June, 2004

⁷¹ Rudy, *op. cit.*

Allie was expected, as were most of the Australian war brides, to settle into a domestic role as housewife and mother. However, she was enthusiastic about the new experience of farm life. Coming from the city, she loved the idea that 'all they had for heating was a pot-bellied stove with coal'. Her mother-in-law cooked fresh eggs on a coal-oil stove. Nothing bothered her, and Allie describes her as 'a real farm person' who seemed not to be aware of any hardships. She would always cook the meals, which was wonderful for Allie as it allowed her time to take care of her son and take him for walks. She enjoyed life on the farm because she knew it was 'wholesome and healthy'.⁷²

Betty MacIntire's mother-in-law ran a 'ramshaded' rooming house in Green River, Wyoming, for young men working on the railroad. Betty and her husband stayed with her mother-in-law for about six months until they moved into 'a little place of our own'.⁷³ Betty recalls she was 'homesick right from the beginning' and 'things did not work out the way I thought they would'.⁷⁴ Despite Betty's efforts to maintain this marriage, her husband proved to be an alcoholic and the relationship ultimately failed, although not until her children were teenagers.⁷⁵ At the time of Betty's taped interview, she made reference to 'her story' which she was writing, and which she promised to give me at a later date. Keeping her promise, she presented a manuscript to me in Denver, Colorado, in 2001. This gave a detailed and poignant account of the difficult marriage to the US serviceman she had met 'in a brown-out' in

⁷² Rudy, *op. cit.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Interview with Betty McIntire, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

Sydney, and fallen in love with during the war, details which she had not been ready to share at our first meeting. This explained some pauses and some sense of incomplete answers to questions asked by the interviewer during the earlier recording process.

Some war brides were fortunate to be genuinely welcomed by their in-laws. After 'an awful trip' on SS *David C Shanks*, war bride Cynthia Peter found it hard to settle, but she was thrilled at her reception by her husband's family when she arrival in San Francisco on 23 June, 1946. She says:

I met his parents and his sister and his brother...I think the whole family was there! I was delighted because they were such nice people. I was so thankful for that.⁷⁶

Despite this warm welcome from the family, who 'were always wonderful' to her, Cynthia admits that she was 'terribly homesick for a long time'. She was not alone in suffering homesickness. This was something that affected most war brides to some extent, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

After two weeks in America, Kathleen Heeren's husband was ordered to Japan, and she then made the arduous journey by train to stay in Minnesota with his family, who 'were very kind' to her. But, Kathleen remembers that because of wartime restrictions, it had been previously difficult to contact the family, and 'it was like

⁷⁶ Interview with Cynthia Peter, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

meeting strangers'. She recalls they had little in common:

Being a city girl I knew nothing about farming, I knew nothing about breeding animals...I didn't know anything about raising corn or soy beans. So we had nothing in common. There was really nothing to do there. I was so bored I thought 'This is not for me!' ⁷⁷

As well as the change from city life to rural living, adjustment to life in the multicultural 'melting-pot' of America was an unexpected challenge that confronted a number of these Australian wives soon after their journey across the Pacific. Irene Perucci married into an Italian family, and sailed on SS *Lurline* in 1944, on the same day that her husband was shipped out to Guam. It was a year and a half before she was to see him again. There was no-one to meet her at the ship when she arrived in America, and Irene and her good friend Lola, from the same small country town in Western Australia, were separated as the American Red Cross allocated them different hotels.⁷⁸ From San Francisco, Irene took the train across the country to Boston, Massachusetts, and then another train from Boston to Salem. She remembers the warm welcome she received:

My mother-in-law and my sister-in-law were at the depot waiting for me in Salem...I told her I would be wearing a red hat and a red coat...so...when I got off

⁷⁷ Peter, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ Perucci, *op. cit.*

the train she just threw her arms around me and said

‘Welcome to my home as my son’s wife!’⁷⁹

Irene stayed with her husband’s Italian family and initially did not feel homesick, because she and her mother-in-law had become acquainted through letter-writing. Because of their Italian background Irene’s in-laws spoke broken English, and they would converse in Italian. Irene recalls: ‘Papa would come up to me and put his hand on my shoulder and say “Mama and I no talk about you when we talking like this!”’ Not wanting to appear rude, he wanted to reassure her and make her feel comfortable. Despite the warmth of her hosts, however, Irene felt isolated and recalls: ‘There’s many a time I sat at the table with my mother-in-law...and she’d look up at me and say, “Rene, ah-why are you crying?”’⁸⁰ All the kindness in the world could not make up for the absence of her husband, as she ‘missed him very much’; nor could it soothe the pain and longing she felt both for her husband and for the family she had left behind.⁸¹

The war brides who married second- or third-generation American immigrants often experienced different receptions by their in-laws. Some received warm welcomes and experienced the richness and diversity of the American ‘melting-pot’. Others found they were not welcomed by their in-laws. These women felt excluded and as though they were ‘outsiders’ intruding in an ethnic enclave. Marrying into a German family, Joan Byer sailed from Western Australia on board SS *Fred C Ainsworth* in April 1946. She travelled by train to Omaha, Nebraska, where she was

⁷⁹ Perucci, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

met by her husband Ray and the couple spent two days there before driving on to New Ulm. Ray's mother had died in 1925 and so it was 'a bachelor house' which they shared with his father. The couple stayed for a year and a half, but Joan was very lonely at first, as New Ulm was a German town where most people could speak English, but chose to converse with each other in German. Joan felt rather excluded because of the language barrier, and rather isolated as she felt that she was considered an 'outsider' who had 'married one of their own' and, she recalls, 'there was a lot of that to overcome'.⁸²

Similarly, it was 'a culture shock' for Joyce Balogh who did not feel at all welcomed by her husband's parents who spoke Hungarian in the house most of the time. She remembers, 'I felt isolated. It wasn't a good situation at all'.⁸³ The image of the 'Hollywood dream' was far from the reality of the Hungarian 'ghetto' in Pennsylvania where Joyce began her new life.⁸⁴

Margaret Fosmo married into a Norwegian family. She sailed on SS *Mariposa*, from Brisbane arriving in San Francisco on Anzac Day, 25 April, 1946 to be met by her in-laws. Her husband, Olaf, was still away in the military service, so Margaret travelled north to Seattle where she lived with his family for about two months before her husband got leave. The couple then went to San Francisco and stayed there in Navy housing. Margaret describes her in-laws as 'very nice' people, although at first her mother-in-law wasn't too pleased, as she had not chosen her to marry her son. Margaret's mother-in-law had 'a lot of Norwegian friends'. When they came to visit,

⁸² Interview with Joan Byer, Vista, CA, 24 September, 2001.

⁸³ Interview with Joyce Balogh, Tigard, OR, 10 September, 2001

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

they all spoke Norwegian and Margaret suspected they were talking about her. Her mother-in-law was not very nice to her 'in a lot of ways', but eventually, she felt she was accepted⁸⁵

Marge Andreatta married into an Italian family. She was looking for her husband as the ship docked and when she 'spotted him' she lifted their small daughter up for him to see her. After staying for a few days with her husband's sister in a flat above a grocery store, the couple moved in with his mother in San Mateo about 20 miles south of San Francisco. Marge found this a difficult time. Both her husband's parents were Italian, but while her father-in-law spoke broken English, her mother-in-law couldn't speak a word of English. Despite the language barrier, Marge had no problem with the family who 'were very sweet'. Initially, though, she did feel some prejudice and thought that her husband's sisters regarded her as 'some little gold digger that wanted to come to America and snatch their brother'. But eventually, she says, they 'accepted me as a sister'.⁸⁶

For many of the war brides, the experience of childhood in the Depression years meant that they had remained, almost in a state of extended childhood, in their parents' home. As well as dealing with the process of emigration and all that this entailed, these young women were also dealing with growing up and being responsible adults. Rosemary Smith's husband, who was waiting for her at the train station, took her to live with his mother and his two brothers in their house in Long

⁸⁵ Fosmo, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ Interview with Marge Andreatta, Denver, CO, 7 September, 2001.

Beach. His father wasn't alive. It was very different for Rosemary at first. She remembers:

His mother was a little stand-offish. I think she favoured the boys so much and she was very difficult to get close to...She expected my husband to be close to her, and he being just out of the service wanted to go and do things with a friend who had been with him in the service in New Guinea and had lived in Long Beach...when you're young you don't think about things, you just think of your own enjoyment. I can understand it in a way.⁸⁷

Rosemary was used to living at home with three brothers and a younger sister and a half sister with 'everything going on'. Now she found herself living with just adults and she comments: 'all of a sudden, you are one of the adults'. Eventually they moved out with a friend of her husband's and rented a house together, and this was 'a lot of fun'.⁸⁸

The welcome received by some war brides from their husband's family, was so warm-hearted that it was almost overwhelming, and while not always preventing uneasy feelings of homesickness, this affectionate reception quickly dispelled any fears of not being accepted as part of the family. Joan Hamilton remembers being met at the end of her train journey: 'the whole family was there, and such a fabulous

⁸⁷ Rosemary Smith, *op.cit.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

welcome' even though 'they didn't know who I was!' It was the most astonishing greeting she had ever had in her life!⁸⁹ However, Joan and her mother-in-law had written to each other numerous times even before the couple were married in Australia, which paved the way for good communication when they were to meet much later in person.⁹⁰

Possessiveness and jealousy on the part of the mother-in-law were also factors which affected the reception of the new bride into the family. Valda Hertzberg acknowledges that her mother-in-law 'disliked her intensely'. She explains that her husband's father had died when he was just fifteen and he had one sister who was a year old. Letters to Valda and her small daughter Carolyn from her mother-in-law seemed very welcoming, but in retrospect, Valda said her mother-in-law did not 'want someone interfering – she wanted him – and I came first [with him], very much first.'⁹¹ Similarly, Iris Craig received a very cool reception from her in-laws who did not welcome her at all. She felt fortunate that she didn't have to stay with them. She explains, 'my mother-in-law had an aversion to English people and as far as she was concerned, I was English. So I cannot say I was welcomed'. Also, her mother-in-law considered that 'boys were the only children you should have', and Iris says, 'I had a girl!'⁹²

Norma Rehrer had a good relationship with her in-laws. Her husband, Gene, arrived by train from Missouri to meet her, and then they travelled on a Santa Fe train

⁸⁹ Interview with Joan Hamilton, Anaheim, CA, 19 September, 2001.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

to Sedaya, Missouri, where he was stationed. His parents welcomed her 'with open arms' and when Gene received orders for the Philippines, Norma lived with them in Pennsylvania for eight months. She was included in the family and spent time helping his father with his stamp collection. She recalls, 'he had bags and bags of stamps and said he would never have gotten it done if it hadn't been for me!'⁹³

Some war brides happily escaped the necessity to live in close contact with their in-laws and were able to start an independent life with their husbands all to themselves. Jean Fargo sailed on SS *David C Shanks*, arriving in San Francisco on 28 June, 1946. She made her way by train, with carriages especially for war brides, to Washington DC where her husband came to meet her. Jean thought this city was 'just fantastic' and thought America seemed more advanced than Australia. She was well received by her mother-in-law, although she recalls:

she was old...in her eighties...and she seemed like a hundred to me! Then he had three older brothers living fairly close-by...all the wives were very nice, but they were all older than I was...I think that I was glad that I didn't have to live too close.⁹⁴

Many war brides were prepared to make the best of the circumstances in which they found themselves, some much happier than others. Their sometimes stoic acceptance of their situations and their determination to retain a positive attitude often seemed to be influenced by memories of their parents' feelings of sadness and their

⁹³ Rehrer, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ Interview with Jean Fargo, Reno, NV, 1 October, 1999.

lingering doubts that their daughters were doing the right thing by going to America to live. The war brides' determination that all would be well and that their lives in America would be successful, was a positive characteristic common to these women. For example, Peggy Dunbar Blackman's first impressions of the United States were 'very favourable'. She says:

The people I met, the buildings, San Francisco Harbor – I didn't think it was as beautiful as Sydney Harbour – but I was not in a criticising mood and I was prepared to find things to like. I had a positive attitude and I was bound to make a success of this marriage. I have a lingering memory of my mother's face as she waved me goodbye, with tears streaming down her face. I'm sure my father felt the same.⁹⁵

Peggy had sailed on SS *Mirrabooka* early in August, 1945. Her husband, Don, was not able to be in San Francisco to meet her, but his parents came from their home in Paolo Alto, California. She lived with her in-laws for six weeks until Don came back from Manilla, and she 'got to know them very nicely', as she recalls, 'I think they were pleased that Don had married someone who looked like their kind of girl...I looked pretty wholesome, I think, fifty years ago...I was their kind of prospective family member and they were thrilled and they welcomed me.' Before long, Peggy 'fell in love with Paolo Alto'.⁹⁶ This is testimony to her positive attitude and determination to make a success of her new life in America. However, her recollections also reveal a

⁹⁵ Blackman, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

recurring theme of the strong bond between mother and daughter, and the way that Peggy was haunted by her mother's grief at her leaving, which fuelled her determination to succeed in her new venture. Her positive attitude in the telling of this story perhaps masks the on-going feelings of grief which she remembers so vividly. In the analysis of this oral testimony, the concept of 'composure' is useful to interpret Peggy's feelings. The strength of her positive attitude belies the deep emotions she felt when remembering her mother's tears.

Australian war brides reacted in different ways to the challenges they faced: the sometimes alien landscape; the relationship with their mothers-in-law from whom some learned culinary and household skills; as well as their initial homesickness and subsequent cultural adjustment to their surroundings. On arrival in America, they had to leave the 'security' of belonging to a group on board ship and move on to an independent life as an individual. As new wives, they were expected to fill the domestic role of housewife and mother, often living in the shadow of their mothers-in-law, while making every day adjustments to a new culture. This scenario was far from the media's picture of the promised 'Hollywood dream'. Despite very different experiences, varying degrees of welcome and acceptance, or non-acceptance, as well as a diverse range of comfort and quality of available accommodation, many of these young Australian women felt 'torn apart' at being so far away from their parents and the support of their extended families and friends.⁹⁷ Homesickness was something which many war brides suffered in the early days and weeks, sometimes even for years, after arriving in America.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Interview with Sunny Sansing, Reno, NV, 28 September, 1999.

⁹⁸ Note: See more detail regarding homesickness in Chapter 6, 'Living in America'.

CHAPTER SIX

Living in America – immigrants in a new land

Our room up the stairs, for we were to share
That floor with a sister of his.
A wide window seat, I gazed down at the street,
My own folk I surely did miss.

So I began a new life, became a housewife,
Tried to stifle that backward look.
Learned to do things their way, as I had to stay,
And honour those vows that I took.

(Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', November 2001.)¹

This chapter examines the experiences of Australian war brides once they arrived in America and explores their adjustments to cultural and familial change. It also highlights the way in which the experiences of these Australian wives differed from the experiences of war brides from other countries, as well as from other post-war migrants to America.

The special legislative provisions of the *War Brides Act* of December, 1945, followed by the *G.I. Fiancées Act* of June 29, 1946, facilitated the reunion of US servicemen, their foreign wives, fiancées and children. A study of female migration to the United States by Marion Houstoun *et al*, points out that this legislation was 'a paradigm of its kind' which generated rare statistical data on the impact and sex distribution of immigrant spouses of US military personnel admitted to the US.² This allowed for the compilation of statistics regarding the numbers of war brides

¹ Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', in *Albany Writers' Circle No. 19. A Collection of Short Stories and Poetry by the Writers of Albany*, November Issue, Denmark Printers, Albany, WA, 2001, p. 37.

² Marion F. Houstoun, et al, 'Female Predominance in Immigration to the United States Since 1930: A First Look' in *International Migration Review*. Vol. 18, No. 4, Special Issue: Women in Migration (Winter, 1984) p. 920.

immigrating to the US, but not specifically for numbers of Australian wives. Between January 1946 and December 1948, there were 112,882 wives of US servicemen admitted to the US, almost 25 percent of all US immigration during that period. These statistics show that the dominance of female immigrants to the US peaked (at 61.2%) during the 1940s, a decade of exceptionally large US military presence abroad.³ The Australian contingent of women who migrated to America as wives and fiancées of American servicemen, based on a maximum figure of 15,000, made up a significant part (13.3%) of the total number of war brides admitted to the US during the same period.

Historian Cheryl Lange observes that 'the experience of severance, which is integral to migration' is common to all migrants and unites them.⁴ However, the immigration experience for Australian war brides differed in many respects from the experience of war brides coming from Britain, Europe and Japan who were desperate to escape the appalling conditions of destruction and loss in their own war-torn countries. For the 40,000 British wives of American servicemen, this was made worse by their processing through bleak Tidworth Barracks before sailing to America.⁵ European war brides often found it difficult to assimilate and to be accepted into the American way of life. French war brides found that the reality of adapting to a new culture without the support of family and friends was fraught with difficulties, and the cross-cultural adjustments for these women were complex and challenging and caused friction and lack of understanding in their exogamous

³ Houstoun, *op. cit.*, p. 920.

⁴ Cheryl Lange, 'Introduction', 'Immigration and Citizenship', in *Studies in Western Australian History*. Vol. 21, 2000, p. 2.

⁵ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, p. 419. Note: The figure of 40,000 is a conservative estimate by Reynolds, based on unpublished US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) figures for those entering America as alien wives of US citizens. (p. 420).

marriages, many of which ended in divorce.⁶ A study of German war brides in America in 2005 highlights the 'cultural baggage' they brought with them from their Old World background.⁷ It reveals their struggle to free themselves from negative stereotypes and popular assumptions of collective guilt for Nazi atrocities and taboo topics such as post-war rape and survival prostitution. Even after fifty years, many of these women were wary of being interviewed, fearful of continuing stereotyping.⁸ Similarly, Italian brides of US servicemen found it difficult to acculturate to the American way of life and missed their traditional customs.⁹ The European war brides did not have English as their first language, and this restricted their ability to communicate, making it more difficult for them to adjust to their new country of residence.

Despite several Japanese attacks on Australian soil, the Australian homefront had not suffered the physical destruction and bombardment that Britain, Europe and Japan had experienced during the war. Australian war brides left a country which was affluent, compared to Europe at that time. Australians were well-fed, despite wartime rationing, and women were enjoying a new social freedom as they took up men's vacancies in the workforce. Even for those Australian war brides who came from large families, poor families, and from families temporarily facing lean times as a result of the Great Depression, the 'push' factor which propelled war brides from Europe and Japan did not exist in the same way. The war brides' departure from Australia separated them from family and friends and a homeland where most had lived relatively happy lives, to

⁶ Hilary Kaiser, *French war brides in America: an oral history*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2008, pp. 150, 151.

⁷ Astid Hastak, "'I Was Never One of Those *Frauleins*': The Impact of Cultural Image on German War Brides in America", PhD Thesis, Purdue University, Indiana, May 2005.

⁸ *ibid*; also see Mathilde Morris, *Dreams and Nightmares of a German War Bride*, Morris Publishing Company, Aurora, Colorado, 1998.

⁹ Elena Russo LeMaster, *Memoirs of a War Bride*, Authorhouse, Bloomington, Illinois, 2006.

proceed often with a sense of trepidation to an unknown future. For the Australian brides and fiancées, it was more a case of 'for love alone'.

In some respects, the experiences of Australian war brides as immigrants to a new country were similar to those of other war brides and post-war migrants, but the Australian women were a unique group of 'aliens' in that special factors differentiated them from other female migrants. They came from a country not pillaged by war; they spoke the English language; subsequently they were not so visible as 'foreigners' as were European or Asian migrants; and cultural differences were not as major as for migrants from non-English speaking countries. Nevertheless, as Reynolds points out, there was generally 'an undercurrent of antagonism in America towards war brides'.¹⁰

The expectations of most Australian war brides as they journeyed to the United States were uncertain, none being quite sure exactly what lay ahead for them in the new country. In contrast to the experience of war brides from Europe, that of Australian war brides was dominated by a strong 'pull' factor, manifest in their longing for what they hoped would be a happy reunion with their husbands, who were in many cases already fathers of their children. Australian war brides were also keen to make a success of their marriages which, in some cases, were only half-heartedly sanctioned by their parents who foresaw some of the difficulties they might face so far away from home, with no Australian family support. Added to these factors, there was also the enticement of a sense of adventure for young women who had never travelled beyond Australia's shores.

¹⁰ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

AMERICAN SOCIETY AT THE END OF THE WAR

In many ways, adjustment to life in a new country was challenging for all war brides. American society had been transformed during the decade of the 1940s, which began with one third of the nation being 'ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed' with one out of four American workers unemployed.¹¹ By the end of the decade American society and economy had benefited enormously from the war industry and the economy began to prosper. By 1947 with post-war recovery in full swing the United States had become the world's leader in aviation, chemical engineering and electronics. It produced 57 per cent of the world's steel, 43 per cent of its electricity, 62 per cent of its oil and it manufactured more than 80 per cent of the world's automobiles.¹²

Despite the new prosperity which was spreading across America at this time, the Australian war brides found challenges in settling into their new lives, some finding it more difficult than others. This was dependent on a variety of factors. Initially, these reflected the ease with which these young women adjusted to changes in the physical landscape; the climate and the locations of their destinations; relationships with their in-laws; the severe shortage of housing; their financial situation; instances of prejudice they encountered; cultural differences and problems which presented themselves in seemingly simple matters such as handling the new currency and shopping. Dealing with cultural and environmental change was an additional pressure placed on these women who were also dealing with the intricacies of setting up a new life with their husbands, and in many cases learning to live with their in-laws.

¹¹ Godfrey Hodgson, *America In Our Time: From World War II to Nixon*, Random House, New York, 1976, p. 48.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 19.

At the end of the war, in America, there was concern about the noticeable increase in the number of middle-aged women seeking advice on how to prevent the break-up of their marriages of many years standing. The city of Los Angeles, it was reported in the press, had 'one of the highest divorce rates in the world, with almost one-half of all marriages ending either in divorce or separation'.¹³ An organisation called the 'American Institute of Family Relations' was promoted as 'a school for brides' where 'girls learn to be good wives'.¹⁴ This Institute also offered pre-marital courses for men on how to be 'happy though married' and also covered problems that a young wife might encounter in the early years of her marriage, even 'the perennial problem of mothers-in-law'.¹⁵ The pre-marital course was open to both men and women, and returned soldiers who were married and finding it difficult to readjust to domestic life were encouraged to attend a course for counselling. The institute also offered its services as a mediator in attempting to reconcile estranged couples.¹⁶ Such concentration on saving American marriages indicates that social readjustment was difficult in the post-war years, even for American couples. Given this state of affairs, it was not surprising that there was an undercurrent of antagonism towards the war brides from other countries, including Australian wives, who were seen to be taking men away from American women.

CULTURAL CHANGE

Many of the war brides found themselves living in US locations quite different to their home towns in Australia. This was not necessarily a negative experience. Billie Ringen, for example, found the cultural differences to be of great

¹³ Lon Jones, 'A School for Brides in Los Angeles', *The Argus*, 25 September 1945, p. 9.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

interest to her. Her father was a forestry foreman and, until she was 13, the family lived in the New South Wales timber-town of Tenterfield, forty-one miles from the nearest town. Billie received her education via correspondence classes until she went to high school in Armidale. She recalls:

When I graduated from high school...I just wanted to go to the city so badly, you know, the bright lights...we had grown up in a small town and had never been exposed to all the things city people were exposed to.¹⁷

In America, however, Billie settled with her husband in the small town of Billings in the wide open spaces of Montana. Despite this not providing the 'bright lights' of the city, she found this an interesting place, although quite different from her Australian home-town. Her in-laws lived in the city of Montana which she describes as:

an old country and western cowboy town – it was big hats, boots, the whole bit – that's exactly how they dressed and that was very interesting to me. There were rodeos, and it was real country.¹⁸

Similarly, Patricia Law from suburban Sydney was also interested in the cultural differences she was presented with in Casa Grande, Arizona, a small town of 6,000 people. There were extremes of climate in the desert, from the intense heat of summer to extreme cold in winter, and she found that social life in the little town was very different to the social entertainments of Sydney. Describing the

¹⁷ Interview with Billie Ringen at Garden Grove, CA, September, 2001.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

countryside as 'cowboy country' where 'the men like to dress western', Patricia recalls: 'we went to rodeos and the American football games.' Although she had been used to frequenting beaches, theatre and musicals in Australia, and missed these forms of entertainment, in America her husband used to take her driving to some historical or scenic area every weekend.¹⁹ She remembers:

I was interested in the Indians. I had never seen or heard anything about them in my own life, and we were near a big Indian reservation. People in town thought I was kind of silly, but when they [the Indians] had their get-togethers, I said 'I want to go and watch'.²⁰

Patricia tells how she and her husband 'watched them do that little shuffle dance and have their own food and they didn't mind us watching'. She says: 'I didn't photograph or anything, I just watched with interest.'²¹

Other war brides, however, found the sudden change of cultural environments quite alienating, and it took some time to adjust to these new conditions. Adelaide war bride, Doris Harburt found it very hard to settle in a strange country. She spent the first 14 months in America living with her in-laws on a ranch 70 miles northeast of Denver in Colorado, then spent the next 5 months in Denver before moving to Harden in southeast Montana. She describes Harden as:

a new town made up of all sorts of people. The Cheyenne Indians were on one side and the Crow Indians on the other. The town was originally

¹⁹ Interview with Patricia Law, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

begun by Indians. People came from all over the States and a lot were from American families of Dutch and European descent...After about three months the homesickness seemed to hit, so I fought the homesickness and got involved in things.²²

Doris found it very hard to feel at home in these surroundings and in 1950, after four years in America, she returned to live in Australia where her husband had always wanted to live. At almost 90 years of age, Doris and her husband were still happily living in Adelaide at the time of this interview.²³

Barbara Edwards, originally from the sleepy fishing village of Ballina in New South Wales, has migrated three times in her life and has found each experience different to what she had expected. As a three-year-old she did not notice the first time, when her family came from England to live Australia. In 1946, when Barbara migrated to join her American husband in his home state of Maine, it was the 'happiest of migrations despite leaving my parents, my sister and my two young brothers'.²⁴ She stayed in America for almost 40 years, spending the last 20 years in Hawaii. Her third migration, however, was when her husband retired and they left America to return to Australia, in part to be closer to help her mother. Barbara found that coming back home is not as easy as moving to a new country. 'The whole life-style in Ballina had changed' and she no longer knew everyone she met on the street. She had to learn the new medical and hospital system and it was

²² Telephone conversation with Doris Harburt, Torrens Park, SA, 12 April, 2004.

²³ *ibid*; see Appendix 2 (10), General Profile of War Brides – How many returned to Australia to live?

²⁴ Barbara Edwards, 'Three Times a Migrant' in *Richmond River Historical Society Bulletin*, Richmond River Historical Society Inc., Lismore, pp. 3-7.

hard to learn the cuts of meat. While she had 'expected America to be different and it was', she had 'expected Australia to be the same and it was not'. Barbara learned that 'adaptation to a new country is easier when one is young, no matter how well you know your new home.'²⁵

LEARNING NEW WAYS

The majority of Australian marriages to American servicemen were happy and successful, but every Australian WWII war bride who relocated her life across the Pacific had to adjust to differences, both large and small. Among the challenges they faced were some seemingly routine matters: shopping; food preparation and cooking; using the US currency and understanding the idiosyncrasies of language as spoken in America, as well as its ambiguities.

Shopping posed some challenges for these newcomers to the post-war American cities and suburbs, which saw the emergence of large urban and suburban shopping centres and malls with large car parks and an abundance of goods. Following the shortages during WWII, Americans were enthusiastic shoppers, and modern supermarkets sprang up across the United States to accommodate increased consumerism, their numbers doubling between 1948 and 1958. New multi-lane highways carried huge numbers of vehicles to the car parks at these retail centres, and from 1945 to 1955 the number of cars on the road also doubled.²⁶

Immediately post-war, however, not all people were fortunate enough to own cars. Australian war bride, Barbara Gleason, settled with her husband and

²⁵ Edwards, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-7.

²⁶ William H. Young with Nancy K. Young, *American Popular Culture Through History. The 1950s*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 2004, p. 11.

small daughter in Monterey, California, at the end of 1945. She had no car to take her shopping, and she found travel by public transport, as well as the shopping itself, presented difficulties. At first, Barbara was unfamiliar with the American coinage and had trouble paying for her ticket on the bus. She recalls: 'I had nickels in my hand, and I said "How much?"'. Seeing her confusion, the bus driver pointed and said 'One of those!' Barbara was embarrassed because she 'didn't know a dime from a nickel or a quarter', so her husband sat with her that night and helped her to understand the currency. At the shop Barbara had difficulties being understood She remembers wanting to buy some face-cloths:

I went all over that town, and with my accent I was calling them "fayce" cloths, and they didn't know what I was talking about. So I just gave up!²⁷

Barbara also had trouble with American terminology for common grocery items. She tells how she 'never had cornflour in the house', because no-one knew what she was talking about. Then she met an Australian woman who told her 'If you want to buy cornflour, you will have to ask for corn starch!'²⁸ Barbara found American food was very rich and difficult to get used to. Even on board the ship she had found the bread seemed to be very rich, and there were too many 'sweets with the salads'. Despite being 'bothered' by the richness of the American food, she did learn to cook 'American' style. While she refrains from joining him, her husband still enjoys eating eggs and bacon with maple syrup.²⁹

When shopping, Jean Vallero remembers having to pay additional tax on purchases. She recalls:

²⁷ Interview with Barbara Gleason, Anaheim, CA, 20 September, 2001

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

I got tripped up with that several times, because the price on the thing is not what you pay. You know, you pay it plus tax! That really threw me for a loop and we had so little money.³⁰

Similarly, Irene Perucci remembers some of the adjustments she had to make when she first arrived in America. She went shopping to buy a swede, and the shop assistant had never heard of such a thing and asked 'what does it look like?' Irene tells how she walked all the way down the vegetable aisle and said 'Oh, here it is right here!' Irene found that the humble 'swede' was called a 'Rudibaker' in America.³¹

Such difficulties encountered by war brides, though seemingly trivial, had an impact on these new arrivals, all of whom were keen to prove themselves competent in their new roles as wives and mothers. Their inability to handle these 'everyday' tasks with ease undermined their self-confidence and added to any sense of insecurity they had in starting a new way of life in a new country.

Betty Blondon initially lived with her husband in a cottage adjoining her in-laws house in Palm Springs, California. She too had difficulties when shopping, and recalls a trip to the butcher's section of the supermarket. She asked for 'a pound of mince' and was directed to a counter where there was sweet 'mince-meat' in a jar. She discovered that in Australia meat is 'minced', whereas in the United States it is 'ground'. To confuse matters more, Betty says, in the US, 'ground beef' is referred to as 'hamburger'. She comments: 'there were lots of little things like

³⁰ Interview with Jean Vallero, Reno, NV, 1 October, 1999.

³¹ Interview with Irene Perucci, Lemon Grove, San Diego, CA, 23 September, 2001.

that', such as her 'favourite rock melon' being called 'cantaloupe', to which she had to adjust. She remembers a trip to 'the Five and Dime' to buy some cotton to mend something. She discovered that 'cotton' is called 'thread' in American, whereas 'cotton-wool' is referred to as 'cotton'. Betty found these small differences very frustrating at a time when she was feeling a little isolated, and was endeavouring to settle into her new married life.³² She recalls:

[I was] trying to live with my husband again – we didn't get along off and on you know – I was ready to go home about three times. It wasn't easy at first. It took me a while to get to understand his ways. He was quiet and always kept everything inside, and I was an outward person and had so many relatives and friends, that being by myself and not knowing anybody was hard.³³

Ambiguities in the language were also a source of frustration. Often an Australian expression had a very different meaning when used in America. Betty Blondon remembers:

I'm afraid I would hear something and my Aussie blood would boil – then I'd think, 'No that's not how they're thinking!' Sometimes I would say something and the Americans would look at me with great big startled eyes as much as to say 'What is this?'³⁴

³² Interview with Betty Blondon, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

For example, Betty tells how a lot of people used to compliment her small daughter, who was 'very beautiful when she was little with her big blue eyes and golden curls'. She recalls:

they would come up – especially the men – and they would pat her on the head and say 'What a cute little "booger"! Well, that was too close to...an awful cuss word to me, and I'd shy back.'³⁵

It was 'just little things like that' which were difficult at first, but Betty gradually became accustomed to the differences.

As well as the ambiguities of language, the variation in accents also caused problems with communication. Irene Franck remembers how people were not used to the Australian accent, (which she had acquired after coming to Perth from Shanghai as a young girl), and they would look at her strangely. She explains: 'I had just started to acquire an Australian accent' and she found many words were pronounced differently in America, such as aluminium pronounced 'al-OOM-inum' instead of 'al-yoo-MINIum'; 'zee' instead of 'zed'; and 'tom-ATE-oes instead of 'tom-ART-oes'. Irene was pregnant at the time and living with her in-laws, so she didn't have much social contact with people to practise these differences in language. She was not feeling very happy as her husband was still away on service and, as she explains, she was 'getting bigger by the minute'. When her husband finally arrived back home, his initial reaction to her did not help to make her feel more secure. She recalls:

³⁵ Blondon, *op. cit.*

my husband got off the plane – he said he almost got back on again. He couldn't believe I could have swelled up that much in nine months!³⁶

American accents were also a challenge. Valda Hertzberg settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1946, at a time when many black Americans were migrating north from the southern states. Valda employed a woman as housemaid and subsequently had terrible difficulty in understanding the woman's southern accent. On the other hand, the housemaid could not make sense of Valda's Australian accent and communication between the two was fraught with difficulty.³⁷

Some war brides had problems with other aspects of life in America. Marge Andreatta, for instance, had no trouble dealing with the new currency which she 'learned very quickly'. Neither did she have any difficulty with language and communication. The only problem she encountered was walking on the other side of the street which really troubled her. She says she still has problems with this even now, and she comments:

I can be walking down Market Street in San Francisco...on the left side, and people are bumping into me and I'm thinking "What's the matter with these stupid people?" Then I realise that it's me and not them.³⁸

³⁶ Interview with Irene Franck, San Diego, CA, 25 September, 2001.

³⁷ Interview with Valda Hertzberg, Darling Point, Sydney, 30 May, 2007; also see Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 54-62.

³⁸ Interview with Marge Andreatta, Denver, CO, 7 September, 2001.

Similarly she used to climb the stairs at work on the left hand side and 'invariably would bump into somebody'. As Marge observes, it was fortunate that she did not drive in those days. Betty Blondon also initially had problems with the traffic driving 'on the wrong side of the road' which she found frightening.³⁹ These numerous, and seemingly small, differences in their new way of life in a new country initially added to a sense of dislocation for many of the war brides as they settled into their new environment.

STEPPING INTO A DOMESTIC ROLE

The role into which the war brides were expected to fit on their arrival in America was also something to which they had to adjust in the immediate post war years when there was an exaggerated emphasis on family life, a legacy of the war experience.⁴⁰ This gave the impression of peace and conformity, and the media image of American women in the 1950s saw them in the home and raising a family, impressions which were reinforced by popular TV sitcoms and hit records of the day. In reality, however, as is argued by historians William and Nancy Young, the fifties in America foreshadowed great social and cultural changes, with increasing numbers of women joining the workforce.⁴¹ The participation rate for married women in America jumped from 16.7 per cent in 1940 to 24.8 per cent in 1950 and 31.7 per cent in 1960.⁴²

Australian war brides, however, on arrival in America were initially expected by their husbands and in-laws to step into a domestic role of wife and mother, and as new brides of American servicemen, it should be noted, these young Australian

³⁹ Andreatta, *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ Anderson, Karen, *Wartime Women: Sex roles, family relations, and the status of women during World War II*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1981, p. 178.

⁴¹ Young and Young, *op. cit.*, pp. xii, 10, 11.

⁴² Anderson, *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

No.24 – Living in America – early years



Dorothy THOMPSON with daughter Beverley Jean (6 months old) in Clark, South Dakota.



Joy SHADDLE with her three children, Bill, Jimmy and Cathleen in Forrest, Illinois.



Iris CRAIG and daughter Erin, adjusting to life on Alcatraz Island, San Francisco, CA, c.1947.

women had little choice. Their official status was that of *alien* residents until they became naturalised US citizens, this not being possible for a minimum of twelve months after arrival. This factor along with the responsibilities of motherhood necessitated a domestic role with traditional female duties at home, caring for small children. In the early years for most of these women, joining the workforce was not an option, although some had already been part of the workforce in both voluntary and paid capacities in Australia. Many of these young women were not long school leavers, and often had very little experience of household tasks in the kitchen and laundry. Consequently they often accepted the help of their mothers-in-law to teach them how to keep house and cook for their new husbands.

War bride Norma Rehrer first settled with her husband in the small town of Sedaya, Missouri. She admits that she 'couldn't cook' and was 'in trouble' with her lack of culinary skills soon after she arrived in America. She used to go to a small grocery store in town where they would help plan her meals. She laughs as she recalls, in her small rural home-town of Winton in Queensland, how she had been used to her mother or father killing a hen or a rooster. She remembers how 'they'd pluck it and clean it and take the insides out'. In her new home in America she recalls: 'I had company one night and I started to cook, and Gene said 'where's the gizzard and the heart?' Fortunately, her husband came to the rescue and removed the innards from the chicken before it went into the oven.⁴³

Dorothy Thompson's husband was from a Norwegian immigrant family and her mother-in-law, who was possessive and did not allow her much freedom, was keen for Dorothy to cook in the same way that she cooked for the family. Dorothy

⁴³ Interview with Norma Rehrer, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

was shown how to make Scandinavian breads and all sorts of dishes which were quite new to her. So Dorothy learnt her culinary skills from her mother-in-law, and fifty years later, she still enjoys making these recipes.

EDUCATION

Education burgeoned in the United States in the immediate post-war years. Under the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act*, known as the 'GI Bill', veterans returning to civilian life could attend college, with the cost of tuition covered by the government. They were also entitled to supplements if they were married and had families, and subsequently this saw a decrease in women's college attendance. At the same time, public school enrolments grew, increasing from about 29 million in 1950 to over 40 million at the end of the decade.⁴⁴

Keen to obtain a good education for their children, many Australian war brides took an active part in their school communities, which helped them to make friends and fit more easily into their new home towns. Betty Blondon and her husband had four children and she comments that in time she became a volunteer at the school her children attended, where she enjoyed the interaction with other parents and found it 'very nice making friends'.⁴⁵

When her children were in high school, Peggy Dunmore Blackman was involved in a program at the school which helped students to apply to study abroad, and she instructed the students who came from abroad. She was then 'lucky enough to land a job' at California University in Sacramento in the International Centre where Peggy says, 'I was paid to do what I had been doing as

⁴⁴ Young and Young, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Blondon, *op. cit.*

a volunteer'. She was there for fifteen years and comments: 'It was the perfect "job-fit"...in that I was right for it and it was right for me'. She says, 'I consider myself a very fortunate woman'.⁴⁶

Once their children were grown up and at school, many war brides stepped out of the home and went to work or looked to further their own education. Betty Blondon took the opportunity to go to college herself for two years, to study early childhood education and library science with the aim of working in a library. However, due to the introduction of a tax initiative in California, known as 'Proposition 13',⁴⁷ she says:

Instead of hiring they were firing, so I never got on. So I stayed with the school as an instructional aid doing the lower fifty percent – the lower achievers – helping the teacher out after she had already given the main class-work. I was there for eighteen years and I enjoyed it.⁴⁸

AMBASSADORS FOR AUSTRALIA

In their enthusiasm to share their knowledge of their homeland with Americans who knew little about Australia, many war brides were happy to give talks at schools and group meetings. Before leaving for America to marry her American fiancé, Joy Parker was 'a popular member' of staff at David Jones' department store in Sydney for over six years. She worked in the Active Sportswear Department, and was promoted to head of the Cole of California swimsuit section in 1946,⁴⁹ when California Productions Pty Ltd. promoted

⁴⁶ Interview with Peggy Dunbar Blackman, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

⁴⁷ Note: Proposition 13, officially titled the "People's Initiative to Limit Property Taxation," was a ballot initiative to amend the constitution of the state of California, enacted by the voters of California on June 6, 1978. Source: Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Proposition_13_\(1978\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Proposition_13_(1978)) [Accessed 7 August 2007]

⁴⁸ Blondon, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ *David Jones' News*, Wednesday, 23 July, 1947.

'American "Chic" for Australia'.⁵⁰ Joy's work, selling Australian women the stylish beach clothes and playsuits 'worn by their Californian sisters', saw the early beginnings of her future relationship with America.⁵¹ The store newsletter was proud to announce in July 1947 that Joy, who had married Dr Lloyd Shaddle three months earlier, 'is the only Australian girl to make her home in Forrest', Illinois.⁵² The paper reported that Mrs Shaddle 'has become quite a personality in Forrest', already having contributed an article to *The Forrest News* about her sea voyage from Australia, and had photographs of her New York wedding published in *The Fairbury Blade*.⁵³ Already involved as an enthusiastic ambassador for Australia, Joy was reported to have 'addressed the Forrest Chapter of the Future Homemakers of America'.⁵⁴ She was asked to give talks on Australia at various clubs, and also in local schools, and she says that 'within two years I'd give a hundred talks on Australia'. Surprised that Americans seemed to know little about Australia, Joy states that after her efforts she feels that 'they know about Australia now!' And fifty-eight years later, the schools still invite her to talk about Australia. Always enthusiastic to showcase the country of her birth, Joy still loves to tell the younger children about the pet kangaroo she used to have in Sydney, and of the meaning of words like 'koala'.⁵⁵

War bride Valda Hertzberg was one of two daughters of Jewish parents, her mother having been born in England and her father in Palestine. Valda's mother had been an opera singer and pianist in Melbourne, and her father was in the wool business. After finishing high school, Valda was amongst the few war brides in this

⁵⁰ 'American "Chic" for Australia', *The Northern Star*, April 2, 1946, p. 2; also, see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 5, 1946.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *David Jones' News, op. cit.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Interview with Joy Shaddle, Forestville, Sydney on 4 October, 2002

study who went to university in Australia where she attended Medical School. Although she did not complete the course, after her marriage to Harold, a radiologist, and coming to America Valda says: 'I did very many more courses in the United States – from anthropology to nineteenth century music'.⁵⁶ Valda settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and from the early days she contributed her knowledge and skills in a voluntary capacity, speaking in different forums and fostering good relations between Australians and Americans.

CLUBS, CHURCH AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Valda was involved with was the founding of an Australian Women's Club in Philadelphia. She saw the need for such an organisation and recalls, 'the purpose really, for people like myself, was to show that war brides weren't just "silly little bits"'.⁵⁷ She was very impressed by some of the young Australian women who were gathered into this club and she took delight at observing the 'development of some of these kids from quarter-horse towns up in Queensland'...which was 'superb'.⁵⁸ She also became part of an international organisation, the American Jewish Congress, as well as the League of Women Voters in Philadelphia, and is proud to have been part of a Reform group of Jewish people. Valda was very active in these organisations and says, 'right away I started doing things', always supported by her husband who she says 'encouraged me to be the person I am'.⁵⁹

Valda was very much welcomed as an Australian in the community and 'given special treatment'. She was invited to speak to different groups informing them about Australia, which in those days 'was quite novel'. One of these groups

⁵⁶ Hertzberg, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

No. 25 – Facilitating learning and community involvement



War bride Valda HERTZBERG from Sydney, settled in Pennsylvania, and was actively involved in founding and supporting women's groups to facilitate learning.



Edna (Teddy) PICKEREL was an active volunteer for many years in church and community activities. Pictured here at her home in Salem, OR, in September, 2001.



Norma REHRER served for 27 years in a voluntary capacity at a local charity-run restaurant in Sacramento, CA. She was still working there when she celebrated her 80th birthday in September, 2001.

was the Knights of Columbus, a very big Catholic organisation, and she also spoke to university women's groups and school groups, her audiences initially knowing very little about Australia.⁶⁰

In such diverse ways, formally and informally, many Australian WWII war brides were great ambassadors for Australia. By informing Americans about the country of their birth, they encouraged interest in and understanding of Australia and its people, its flora and fauna. Such activities helped to foster goodwill between the people of the two countries.

Edna Pickerel, known as Teddy, says 'all my life has been spent here [in America] – it's just that the foundation was laid there [in Australia]'.⁶¹ Teddy settled in Salem, Oregon, which like her original home town, also happened to be a timber town. Early after her arrival, she saw the need for an organisation to cater for war brides like herself from Australia, New Zealand and other countries who had moved to the area, to prevent them feeling isolated and to help them adjust to life in America. Teddy was one of the founders of the Accent Club which welcomed war brides 'from all over' including members who came from England and Scotland. Teddy recalls, 'as time went on, while I still liked the girls, I felt I had outgrown it', and although she didn't remain an active member of the Club, she still meets with 'the old-timers' about once a year.⁶² The Club still exists, but in more recent years Teddy says it has been 'taken over by younger foreign women who married Americans abroad and they are now mostly Europeans'.⁶³

⁶⁰ Hertzberg, *op. cit*

⁶¹ Pickerel, *op. cit*.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

Teddy took advantage of living near Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon, and enrolled in computer courses, as well as typewriting and history classes. She was also involved in a number of academic and political communities. However, more recently her involvement with the local Anglican Church has taken up most of her time. She relates:

the biggest part of my life is involved with my church...my daughter is now fifty-five and she was twelve when she was confirmed, so it's been close to forty-five years at this one church, St Timothy's. My close knit group of friends are people I have known for twenty, thirty or forty years at the church and especially now, as all of us are single, either divorced or widows, we have been family to each other...just like an extension of the family, and it has been a very, very important part of my life.⁶⁴

Like many Australian war brides, Teddy was a regular Sunday school pupil during her childhood, religion was important in her upbringing, and she is an active member of the church community in Salem, Oregon. Teddy has been involved with the Episcopal Church Women (ECW) and has run bazaars, worked on the Altar Guild, and was also an active lector, an acolyte and chalice bearer as well as an usher. She says, 'I even high-flipped pancakes on Pancake Tuesday and I turned chicken at the barbecue...the kind of things you do when you belong to a church'. Teddy admits she likes to keep busy, but she also values her private time and is very happy to be by herself some of the time.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Pickerel, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

Still active at over 80 years of age, Norma Rehrer also volunteers with the Episcopal Church Women's group at the local church in Sacramento, California. At the time of this interview she was looking forward to the rummage sale the next week. She says: 'we work every day and then on Friday we set up, and on Saturday we sell. We have a rummage sale every six months.'⁶⁶ Norma also enjoys working in a voluntary capacity as 'server' (a 'more polite word for "waitress"' she explains) at a local community restaurant where she has been working for the last 27 years. She says modestly:

I work at the Casa Garden Restaurant and all our money goes to the Sacramento Children's Home...officially I work twice a month – but I fill in and then I work special events. We have weddings and anniversaries and retirement parties and I work when I'm needed.⁶⁷

The restaurant, which is open to the public five days a week, is staffed by volunteer gardeners, cooks, servers, kitchen help and cashiers. It serves 'a lot of different chicken dishes and pork and kebabs...and scrumptious desserts'. Wearing a smart green dress and a plaid apron for work in the restaurant, Norma says that more recently, since her knee operation, she works in the pantry which she enjoys.⁶⁸

Involvement in community work, through church and educational activities was and still is a common activity of many war brides. It is clear that they have

⁶⁶ Rehrer, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

embraced their new land of adoption and consider themselves an integral part of their local communities where, after 60 years, they continue to participate in activities with energy and enthusiasm. In this way, the war brides are able to 'give back' some of the goodwill and kindness they themselves acknowledge they have received from their local communities over the years.

Not all Australian war brides chose to join the workforce after they settled in America. Some remained at home, reflecting the trend in both Australia and America for women to return to the home after the war, where they were fully occupied looking after the home and raising children. Joanne Patterson, for instance, says that she and her husband did not feel the need for her to go out to work. She says: 'We weren't too much into the second car, boat, or big house. We mainly liked to travel which we did with all five of the children'.⁶⁹

In America, Cynthia Peter, while being competent at office work, chose not to go out to work. She had left school in Australia at fourteen years of age, completed a business college course, and had her first job at sixteen. She worked in an insurance company and a lawyer's office and then worked for the Red Cross in the Sydney office. However, after settling in America, Cynthia had four children and although she chose not do paid work outside the house, she says: 'I worked hard at home...I sewed for the children, I made shirts for the boys, gave them haircuts, made little dresses for my daughter.'⁷⁰

JOINING THE PAID WORKFORCE

While the general expectation seemed to be for the young Australian wives

⁶⁹ Interview with Joanne Patterson, Reno, NV, 1 October, 1999.

⁷⁰ Interview with Cynthia Peter, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

to fulfil a domestic role, after their children were a little older almost half those interviewed did take up paid work. Those who joined the workforce were represented in many fields of business over the years. In Australia Shirley Norton had worked for the US Army at General MacArthur's headquarters. Tragically her husband was killed in the Korean War in 1951, when she had only been in America for five years, so as a mother of four young children she worked part-time to support the family. When her mother-in-law came to live with them in 1956, Shirley was then able to work full time. Her first job was with the government at the Naval Air Station in Maine in 1957 where she had a responsible position in control of the budget for the whole station.⁷¹

Sunny Sansing, who had been a Signaller in the Australian Air Force, was also widowed. As a ranking officer's wife she had travelled all over the world and says: 'I was very fortunate in that my husband was an officer, so I had privileges that I would normally not have had...I've lived a good life'. She tells how 'the only bad thing that has happened to me is that my husband died in 1970 and unfortunately, he died on my birthday'. Sunny's husband had been flying in and out of Vietnam on a C-47, in an unarmed aircraft, when he was totally disabled. It was two years after he came back from South East Asia that he died. Sunny says: 'I've never married again, I've just gone on.' She adds: 'I'm a firm believer in "life is what you make of it", and I think that most Australians are that way. We make what we can of it - the very best of it. I think we are a very independent type.'⁷²

Because of a severe back problem, Sunny was advised to take up 'belly dancing' for remedial purposes, and soon began creating costumes for herself and

⁷¹ Interview with Shirley Norton, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

⁷² Interview with Sunny Sansing, Reno, NV, 28 September, 1999.

for other dancers to wear. She proved to be an impressive and creative seamstress and designer, and before long was fashioning her own line of lingerie which was modelled at some of the best hotels. In this way, Sunny was able to make an income for herself while she reared her small son, showing both independence and initiative.⁷³

Some war brides found suitable work in the growing retail sector in post-war America. Betty Paukovitz of San Diego joined the workforce, and her main occupation in America was as retail manager for a large chain of department stores, now taken over by Macy's.⁷⁴ Soon after arrival in America, Rosemary Smith worked at a department store selling toys and found 'it was fun'. She says, 'I saved my money and then I went home for Christmas of 1948...to make sure I was doing the right thing' by moving to America. Since her return she says: 'I've had fantastic jobs'. Rosemary then became a buyer of lingerie for a department store, and later went into telephone communications, which she loved. After she was widowed prematurely, she recalls: 'I went to school and became an engineer. It takes a lot of work, but you know when something happens like that, it's funny how you dig in because you need something.'⁷⁵

Jean Wilk, now a proud mother of seven, a grandmother of 21 and great-grandmother of 16, originally grew up in Western Australia. During her childhood, the family moved around the state quite a bit as her father was a mounted policeman. Jean left school at about 15 years of age and worked as a waitress and then in a Kodak camera store, before joining the Women's Australian Auxiliary Navy as a signaller. Now a resident of Mt Pleasant, near Chicago, at 83 years of

⁷³ Conversation with Sunny Sansing in Washington DC, May, 2007.

⁷⁴ Interview with Betty Paukovitz, San Diego, CA, 23 September, 2001.

⁷⁵ Interview with Rosemary Smith, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

No. 26 – Settled and acclimatised in America



Joan (Bette) STERN at Long Island in blizzard of 1996.



Irene and Al PERUCCI at home in Lemon Grove, San Diego, CA, September, 2001.



Barbara and Jim GLEASON, at home in Anaheim, CA, 20 September, 2001.



Betty McINTIRE lives in Anchorage, AK, September, 2001.



Australian WWII war bride sisters in 2004: Shirley NORTON (left) settled in Maine; Joanne PATTERSON settled in Oregon. They both make regular visits to each other and to their sister, Thalia, in Queensland, Australia.



Lola and Tom ATKINS in San Diego, CA, September, 2001, outside their home of more than 60 years.

age Jean is still in the workforce. A merchandiser at a discount store, 'Jean works 10 hours a week, putting out stock and doing display work. She says with pride:

I've worked part-time for the last 25 years. I had so many grand-children that I worked so that I could buy presents – and I still do! I was going to quit at 75, then 80, and this Christmas for sure. But then I thought, if I quit work I will miss it, and they are such a nice bunch of people, mostly women.⁷⁶

Other war brides studied to improve their work opportunities. Once in America, Joyce Olquin, an early school leaver in Australia, went to night school twice a week to get a high school diploma before going to real estate school. She worked in real estate for many years, before becoming a notary in public works, work which she still does.⁷⁷

Billie Ringen trained as a Secretary in Brisbane and joined the Australian Air Force where her job was general office work which she really enjoyed, and In America this training stood her in good stead for obtaining work in a variety of offices doing secretarial work.⁷⁸

Despite most war brides now being in their eighties, their enthusiastic and conscientious attitude to work, both paid and voluntary, continues to survive. It points to the fact that these women, of a particular generation who grew up in Australian during the difficult years of the Depression and WWII, see the importance of contributing positively to their communities in various ways, and

⁷⁶ Telephone interview with Jean Wilk, Mt. Pleasant, IL, 1 July, 2007

⁷⁷ Interview with Joyce Olquin, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

⁷⁸ Ringen, *op. cit.*

many did join the workforce after some years, thus fully embracing the new country in which they have chosen to live.

UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

Living in America, adjustment to marriage was difficult for some Australian war brides who found themselves in quite alien circumstances, living in conditions inferior to standards they were used to in Australia. Also, in some cases the man they had fallen in love with, and married in wartime, turned out to be quite different when back in his home-town. In this cohort of 60, there were 6 divorces (10%), but usually the couples stayed together until the children were older. Although the majority of those interviewed professed to have had happy marriages, it is difficult to know how many made compromises over the years.

When Betty MacIntire arrived in America in 1946, she already had misgivings about her uncertain future, as her husband's letters to her had become infrequent. Lester was known as 'Mac' in Australia, and 'Bud' by his friends back in his home town of Green River, Wyoming, which proved to be indicative of his seemingly dual personality. Betty loved her husband, but struggled for many years with his addiction to alcohol which dramatically affected their marriage and made it very difficult to maintain. Finally, after her husband threatened her with a gun following a drinking binge, she made the decision to divorce him and moved in 1966, with her teenage children, to Anchorage, Alaska. Here Betty showed great resilience in the face of adversity. She successfully sought employment and worked with the same company for many years. She enjoyed social activities, especially 'clog-dancing', and in 1997 when she was in her late 70s, she proudly won the title of

'Miss Senior Alaska'.⁷⁹ Helene R. Lee observes in her book, *Bittersweet Decision* (1985) how 'one of the most destructive forces in the GI marriages was alcohol' and how American servicemen, who became addicted during the war, often continued the habit in subsequent civilian life.⁸⁰ In her study of trauma and grief in post-war Australia, Joy Damousi observes:

in dealing with painful memories of anguish, 'the war' served to legitimise some men's erratic and unstable behaviour and provide a coherent narrative through which to explain why women remained in marriages that were themselves traumatic.⁸¹

This explanation can partially provide an answer in the case of Australian war brides in America who stayed in unhappy marriages for some time. However, the absence of extended family support restricted their options in this regard, especially in times of marriage breakdown. Lack of any welfare provision for abandoned wives and children also made it impossible for unhappy war brides to leave their husbands.

Archival records show that there were some cases of rapid marriage breakdown when young brides arrived in America to find that they were no longer wanted by their husbands who had already formed new relationships. The Australian Department of Immigration received frequent applications from unhappy wives of

⁷⁹ Interview with Betty McIntire, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999; also see Betty McIntire's unpublished journal, given to me at a reunion of war brides in Denver, Colorado, in September, 2001. (Copy in author's possession.)

⁸⁰ Helen R. Lee, *Bittersweet Decision. The War Brides – 40 years later*, Roselee Publications, Lockport, New York, 1985, pp. 345, 346.

⁸¹ Joy Damousi, *Living With The Aftermath. Trauma Nostalgia and Grief in Post-war Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Vic., 2001, p. 113.

both British and Allied ex-Servicemen, and sometimes from their mothers, for government assistance for repatriation to Australia. In America, finding themselves friendless and without financial support, these women sought help because of 'ill-treatment, habitual drunkenness, infidelity, or failure to support'.⁸²

The large majority of the war brides in this study, however, had lasting and successful marriages, and this research shows that this was influenced by a number of different factors. The war brides were stateless and treated as aliens in America, until they became naturalised US citizens, at which time they had to automatically forfeit their Australian citizenship. This legislation made it difficult for any Australian wife, when feelings of homesickness were most acute in the initial years of residence, to suddenly leave her marriage and go back home. The additional complication of raising small children in the first years of marriage, combined with the cost of travel back to Australia, also made this option impossible for many couples. Not all women had the blessing of their parents when they married and sailed for America; others were cautioned by their parents that life may not be easy for them, creating an expectation of possible marriage failure. The war brides' strong desire, in the face of any opposition, to make a success of their marriage gave them strength in the early years to fight homesickness and feelings of alienation, and to show that they had made the right choice of a marriage partner. Because of difficulties in settling due to homesickness, acculturation, and financial worries, the war brides no doubt had to make some compromises along the way. A small proportion of war brides,

⁸² NAA, Canberra, Series No.A6074, Item PO11147, Ref. Nos. 46/1/3378 – Memorandum from The Secretary, Department of Immigration, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, dated 9 October, 1946; Ref. No. 46/5/2507 – Letter from Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor, Canberra, dated 8 March, 1948; Ref. No. 48/474 – Letter re repatriation of Australian War brides from Crown Solicitor to Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra, dated 1 June, 1948.

however, did return to Australia after a short time in America. The press reported as early as 1945 that more than 50 Australian brides of American servicemen had returned to Brisbane on SS *Matsonia*, including divorcees, widows, and those who were 'fed up', who claimed that American women resented them for taking their men, that the pace of life was too fast and the cost of living too high.⁸³ In 1948 it was reported that 100 Australian war brides returned to Australia, mostly with husbands and children, on SS *Marine Phoenix*.⁸⁴ They claimed that the cost of living in America made it impossible for families on a small wage, and that 'it was just one long scramble to make ends meet'.⁸⁵ The oral testimony of the war brides in this study, however, demonstrates that this cohort made the best of the situations in which they found themselves. During the difficult early years, they made efforts to meet the various challenges which confronted them, and many became involved in their children's schools and various community activities.

HOMESICKNESS

Homesickness was a major factor which impacted upon the lives of many if not all war brides. On holidays and other special occasions, homesickness was most acute. Betty Stites remembered one Christmas when her husband had been on duty for three or four days, and she and her two sons were at home alone:

It was Christmas and the boys were looking out the window and everyone else's grandpas were coming to visit them for Christmas...the three of us were sitting, crying, [and] homesick. I'll always remember that Christmas. Lee was on duty until

⁸³ 'Australian wives back from USA', *The Argus*, 23 October, 1945, p.20.

⁸⁴ 'Australian War Brides Back', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July, 1948, p.1.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

late at night.⁸⁶

The loneliness and absence of family members was made worse for Betty who had been the target of nasty comments from the lady who lived downstairs who reproached her for 'coming over from Australia and taking our beautiful young men, when we've got lovely girls here!' Betty felt alone in her new surroundings and recalls: 'She was always saying things like that to me, and not having a soul to talk to – an older person you know – it was very difficult.'⁸⁷

For many war brides, the separation from their Australian families was very distressing. In the early years, it was only the fact that the war brides now had children from their marriage to an American husband that kept some women from attempting to return permanently to their homeland. Originally a Melbourne girl, Allie Rudy, suffered terrible homesickness. She reveals that: 'If I hadn't had children, I would have packed up and gone home. That's where my family is, you know, my roots are there.'⁸⁸ After living in America for more than 60 years, she can still experience real pangs of homesickness. Allie tells how she attended a reunion of WWII war brides in Denver, Colorado in 2001, and on meeting another Australian woman from Melbourne she says: 'we started to talk and she began to cry - it's a feeling of belonging – she felt very homesick – and of course I started to get the feeling too.'⁸⁹ Allie was amazed that she could still feel that way so many years after her initial sad farewell to her mother. She tells how the memories of her mother and the family atmosphere still tug at her heart, and cause her to revisit feelings of homesickness even after all these years. The strong bond

⁸⁶ Interview with Betty Stites. Denver, CO. 8 September, 2001.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Interview with Allie Rudy at Denver, CO, on 7 September, 2001

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

between mother and daughter is again highlighted here, and for many of these women this was a significant factor affecting the intensity of the homesickness they suffered.

Historically and prior to the twentieth-century, homesickness was regarded as a physical ailment – a yearning for home – that could be felt as a variety of bodily symptoms. The approach to homesickness, however, changed over time and after WWII the malady became increasingly described as ‘a condition of childhood and adolescence’.⁹⁰ Although it is common for people to still suffer feelings of homesickness, historian Susan J Matt observes ‘modern society requires...a stoic outlook in the face of change and dislocation’. Subsequently people suffering the pain of homesickness have become ‘increasingly less likely to articulate the way they feel and tend to suffer in silence’.⁹¹

The oral testimony of the Australian war brides reveals that homesickness was a most powerful emotion. The stress of trying to overcome this condition, and their stoic efforts to hide it, sometimes manifested in physical symptoms causing them great distress. Homesickness, not always visible to the naked eye, affected most war brides to some degree. Manifesting itself in various forms of physical illness such as panic attacks, sleeplessness and bouts of depression accompanied by many tears, it was very isolating for the sufferers in a new country where everything was unfamiliar, and in some cases, unfriendly and unwelcoming.

Even for women who had happy marriages, it was difficult for husbands and in-laws to fully understand the deep sense of grief and longing for family and old

⁹⁰ Susan J Matt, ‘A Hunger for Home: Homesickness and Food in a Global Consumer Society’, in *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol.30, Number 1, March 2007, pp. 7, 8.

⁹¹ Matt, ‘A Hunger for Home’, *op. cit.*

friends, which dogged some women for years, one war bride relating that she was chronically homesick for 20 years.⁹² The inability of their husbands to understand the intensity of their homesickness put strain on some marriages, and often the wife was the one to make a compromise, despite being well justified in her suffering. After all, as author Helene R. Lee observes in her study of war brides, 'it was the women who gave up parents, sisters, brothers, life-long friends and other relatives, not the husbands'.⁹³

Despite sometimes chronic homesickness, however, due to reasons discussed above, very few of this cohort attempted to return to Australia to live permanently and in retrospect, most claim to have had a 'happy' or at least a 'successful' married life in America.

⁹² Peter. *op. cit.*

⁹³ Lee. *op. cit.*, p. 349.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Links with Australia

The intangible pull of our own homeland
Is something we scarcely understand
But invisible threads can bind.
We're stirred in a deep and restless way
To know that we must return some day
Those intangibles to find.

(Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', November 2001.)¹

This chapter looks at the ways in which the war brides, quite early after arrival in America, purposefully set about maintaining their links with Australia. It examines the importance and necessity of maintaining these links with the country of their birth, and the enthusiasm of these women to share their 'Australian-ness' with others in America who showed an interest in a country about which Americans seemed to know very little. As described in the previous chapter, one of the hardest things the war brides had to overcome in their new lives in America was homesickness. Even after years of living in America, a chance news item about Australia, a photograph, a phone call or something less tangible, could bring about a nostalgic memory and a flood of emotions connected with family, friends and what they had left behind. Anxious to maintain their links with Australia and to keep up to date with news from their homeland, the war brides made early efforts to satisfy their sometimes intangible longings for what they had given up to join their husbands across the Pacific.

¹ Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', in *Albany Writers' Circle No. 19. A Collection of Short Stories and Poetry by the Writers of Albany*, Denmark Printers, November, 2001, p. 38.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Strong ties with their Australian families have remained intact for most war brides over the last six decades. The separation from family and the vast distance from their homeland fuelled their desire to maintain links through various forms of communication. In the early days, after settling in their adopted country, the war brides communicated with family and friends in Australia by letter and telephone, and were kept well informed (although, in the case of communication by mail, with a time delay) about personal and family matters. In return, their letters informed their Australian families and friends about life in America.

Nancy Lankard and her husband first settled in Colorado Springs, and being from the busy city of Sydney, she found this small town 'a little behind the times'. She found the people 'friendly but a little country-bumpkinish'. Nancy missed her big family, and remembers that she was 'very, very lonely'. As mentioned in chapter 5, she made an effort to maintain links with family by telephone, but these calls were less than satisfactory, due to the expense and lack of privacy on shared party-lines.² War bride Iris Craig remembers that soon after her arrival in America, calls to Australia had to be routed through Canada. She says: 'My mother and I mostly cried on the phone for about 15 minutes, and that cost \$100'.³

Letter-writing was also the main form of communication for Dorothy Bourne, originally from Western Australia. She recalls: 'My brother and I wrote to each other every week for at least twenty years. We never missed a week.'⁴ Similarly,

² Interview with Nancy Lankard by telephone, 14 November, 2004.

³ Iris Craig. Presentation of an Australian War Bride at the World War II War Brides Association, 9 March, 2006.

⁴ Interview with Dorothy (Mary) Bourne, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

Joan Hamilton, an only child, kept in touch with her mother to whom she was very close, by letter writing. She says: 'I'd write to her every week and let her know what was going on.'⁵ Joan's mother has kept all Joan's letters and has offered to give them back to Joan, who thinks they 'would be a lovely history' for her five daughters to read. Joan's words highlight the usefulness of recording important events in letters, diaries and journals when she says how she 'would love...to go back and read of the girls' developments and funny things they said, because you forget!'⁶

Some war brides regularly received copies of popular Australian magazines in the post, such as *The Australian Women's Weekly* and *Woman's Day*, which helped to maintain links with Australia. These magazines kept them up to date on fashion trends, social events, cosmetics and the latest recipes which were popular with Australian women back home. Newspaper articles about topics thought to be of interest were often clipped and posted by family members and friends, and the war brides were always interested in following Australian books, films and sports, despite the fact that sometimes this information was difficult to access in America. These links with their home country helped to ease the pain of separation from their families, but they could not completely compensate for the sense of loss these women experienced, which in many cases still manifested in involuntary and unexpected feelings of homesickness and longing for those they had left behind.

CLUBS IN AMERICA FOR AUSTRALIAN WAR BRIDES

In the late 1940s, all over the United States, groups of women who were new to the American lifestyle, began to come together regularly at social

⁵ Interview with Joan Hamilton, Anaheim, CA, 19 September, 2001

⁶ *ibid.*

gatherings. Many of these women were WWII war brides from Britain, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, who had married American servicemen during and just after the war years. Some groups were exclusively Australian.

Australian war bride Jean Fargo, who settled in Virginia, belonged to the Southern Cross Club, (originally called the Billy Tea Club) in Washington DC.⁷ This Club was founded in 1946 by Mrs Jane Johnson who had spent four years in Canberra when her husband headed the United States Diplomatic Mission to Australia. On her return to Washington DC, she wished to provide a venue for Australian and New Zealand women, as well as American women with ties to either country to meet. Prior to the founding of the Billy Tea Club, Mrs Norman Makin, wife of the then Australian Ambassador to the United States, held monthly teas at the Washington Embassy residence for the many recently arrived war brides from 'Down Under.' It was at one of these teas that Mrs Johnson conceived the idea of forming a club for these young women. Although the newly formed Billy Tea Club was a social organisation, it was the responsibility of all members to promote goodwill and understanding with Americans.⁸ The original name 'Billy Tea Club' was chosen as appropriate because:

this nostalgic title conjured up memories of picnics
with the aroma of gum trees and burning wood
permeating the air while participants sipped tea
around an open fire over which the Billy boiled.⁹

⁷ Interview with Jean Fargo, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

⁸ *Southern Cross Club, Washington DC's History*, <http://www.southerncossclubdc.com/History/History.htm>
[Accessed 11 September, 2008]

⁹ *ibid.*

Jean Fargo remembers how the Australian Ambassador in Washington DC, as Patron of the Club, used to invite members to come to the Embassy to celebrate Australia Day each January, and also to attend various cocktail parties hosted by the Ambassador.¹⁰ These occasions served as a link with Australia on a formal level, and helped to ease the feelings of displacement and homesickness which haunted some war brides, especially in the early years of living in America. The Southern Cross Club still exists today as a social meeting place for expatriate Australians and New Zealanders as well as Americans with an interest in Australia and New Zealand.

In its early years, when it was still known as the Billy Tea Club, it generated much interest among members of the growing Australian/New Zealand community in the Washington DC area. It was also publicised in the American press which saw a growing number of Americans making up a membership of two hundred. In 1950 men were invited to become club members. Members were now drawn from a wider background including Australian and New Zealand Embassies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In the early to mid-fifties members were instrumental in raising funds for deserving causes, among which were the Australian Flood Relief Fund and the Welfare Fund of HMAS Sydney when the ship visited Washington DC. It also donated to universities in Australia and New Zealand, and to some high schools in both countries, sets of books highlighting key historical events and persons in the United States. These activities of the Club were supported by members who were Australian war brides, thus not only helping to strengthen bonds between America and Australia, but also helping the war brides to take part in actively maintaining links with their homeland.¹¹

¹⁰ Fargo, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Southern Cross Club, op. cit.*

The Club changed its name to The Southern Cross Club of Washington, DC in 1952, naming it after the constellation featured on both the Australian and New Zealand flags. The connection with Australian war brides is still strong, and the current President of the Club in 2008 is Colleen Greer, the daughter of Australian WWII war bride, Betty Greer. She is also editor of the Club's newsletter.¹² This Club has the distinction of being one of the oldest, Australian/New Zealand social organisation in the United States. In 1954, the Southern Cross Club's first newsletter was issued, and the publication was hailed as an indispensable bridge in communication between the resident and transient membership of the day.¹³

A number of Australian war brides joined their State's chapter of the 'Daughters of the British Empire in the USA', a non-profit, non-political American organisation originally founded in 1909. Membership is extended by invitation to women residing in the USA who are of British or British Commonwealth heritage either by birth, naturalisation or proven ancestry. This organisation, known as the 'DBE', has been a common bond for women of British heritage living in America who contribute to the good of their local communities and in particular raise funds for the support of the 'British Homes', which are retirement homes established by the DBE for men and women. Meetings are held monthly, usually followed by an informal get-together over a cup of tea or coffee, and 'in this way friendships are formed and the mutual heritage becomes a comforting and familiar bond'¹⁴. Australian war bride, Hazel Walker, has belonged to the Arizona Chapter of the DBE on and off for about 50 years. Hazel says:

¹² *Southern Cross Club, op. cit.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Daughters of the British Empire Idaho Chapter, http://www.dbeidaho.org/what_is_dbe.htm [Accessed 18 September, 2008]*

The chapter to which I belong was originally the Overseas Chapter and was comprised almost entirely of Australian war brides. Many have died or moved on elsewhere, and now there are only two Australians, one South African and the rest are English. The name of the Chapter was changed three years ago to the Union Jack Chapter, because everyone in that chapter had died and as it was the first one to be formed in Arizona, the National office didn't want to name to disappear.¹⁵

The changes of name from 'The Billy Tea Club' to 'The Southern Cross Club' and from the 'Overseas Chapter' to the 'Union Jack Chapter' highlight the changing demographics which have occurred over the years. The changes also demonstrate the way in which such an organisation can adapt to maintain its vital role in an evolving community.

In Seattle, Washington, a group of Australian war brides, Joy Gustafson, Ivy Diers, Margaret Fosmo, who had arrived from Australia on the same 'bride ship' in 1946, joined the Daughters of the British Empire, Gibraltar Chapter, in Seattle, and they also founded the 'Aussie War Brides Club' which had its first meeting in 1947. Joy is still in possession of a scrapbook filled with minutes of meetings, names of members and notes and illustrations relating to the club's history and its activities.¹⁶

¹⁵ Email from Hazel Walker, Phoenix, AZ, received 18 September, 2008.

¹⁶ Interview with Margaret Fosmo, Seattle, WA, 13 September, 2001; also interview with Ivy Diers, Seattle,

Kathleen Heeren remembers when she first settled in San Diego in Southern California in 1946, about 50 women from Australia and New Zealand soon got together and formed The Anzac Club. However, as the young women started having children they were not always able to attend, and people drifted away, especially those with husbands still in service who were often transferred to other locations, and the Club eventually disbanded.¹⁷ Similarly Bernice Geist, who settled in Sacramento, California, belonged to a 'bride's club' which was not only for Australian war brides, but for 'girls from everywhere'. They met regularly at the YWCA for several years. Bernice recalls: 'the girls families grew, and they began to get more and more children and [had] less time to be able to do these things' and the club gradually dispersed.¹⁸ However, these organisations served their purpose well in the early days when it was important to the war brides to have support and contact with others from their homeland. Another lively organisation with its headquarters in Philadelphia was the Australasian Women's Club, its members being the wives of former GIs who had served in Australia. The Philadelphia chapter met regularly in the early years after the war and was particularly active, with its 40-odd members maintaining close ties with Australia and things Australian.¹⁹ War bride Valda Hertzberg from Sydney, one of the foundation members, is still proud of the Club, and has observed the way in which the activities of the Club and the friendships formed there enabled these young women to settle into their new lives.²⁰

Smaller less formal groups of war brides were important in facilitating a suitable way for war brides to meet and maintain links with other Australians.

WA, 13 September, 2001.

¹⁷ Interview with Kathleen Heeren, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

¹⁸ Interview with Bernice Geist, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

¹⁹ *The Australian Women's Weekly*, February 24, 1951, p. 12.

²⁰ *ibid.*

Dorothy Thompson of Golden Grove, California and a number of other Australian war brides who lived in the area set up a regular but informal group. One of the regular participants, Billie Ringen, gives a summary of the club's changing membership:

Most of us have been here thirty-five or forty years, and started this little club in about 1961. And so we've had new members, and old members have passed on and so forth, but we keep about 12 to 15 members most of the time. It's very enjoyable. We have a good time. So many of us are widowed now, so life has changed somewhat for many of us. I think most of the ladies that I know have had rather happy marriages, most of them have had children, they've travelled and they've done a lot of nice things with their families. Their homes are pleasant and we have more than we need to have.²¹

This group still meets regularly, although their numbers are now dwindling due to the ageing of members of the group, and sadly also due to some deaths in recent years. Dorothy recalls:

We generally meet once a month on a birthday – whoever's birthday it is – and we have a 'pot-luck'

²¹ Interview with Billie Ringen, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

lunch...with a birthday cake, and we sing 'I Like
Aeroplane Jelly'.²²

In this statement, the popular term 'pot-luck' (commonly used in America to describe a picnic or luncheon where all guests take a plate of food) is very much part of American culture. In the same sentence, Dorothy speaks of singing 'I Like Aeroplane Jelly' (a popular advertising jingle in Australia in the forties and fifties which promoted fruit-flavoured dessert jellies), a product which became an icon representing part of Australian popular culture. This juxtaposition of aspects of both cultures highlights the acceptance of American culture, as well as demonstrating the importance to the war brides of maintaining links to Australian culture and cuisine over the years.

Dorothy tells how the war brides take it in turn to host the meetings in their own homes. On these occasions the table is decked with traditional Australian fare from the forties and fifties, prepared and brought along by the war brides. At such a gathering in September 2001 these women sought to replicate Australian cuisine as it was at the time they left Australia. Platters contained items such as Devon sausage slices rolled around a filling of potato mashed with diced onion and secured with a toothpick; vegemite on crust-free buttered white bread; devilled eggs; fairy bread decorated with 'hundreds-and-thousands'; a trifle of jelly, custard, sliced peaches and slices of sherry-soaked jam roll; and a birthday cake with an Australian theme, decorated with green icing and two ornamental frilled lizards. This display of typical Australian fare demonstrates how the war brides have continued to present food as they remember it during their young lives 'at

²² Interview with Dorothy Thompson, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

home' and as part of their childhood. This ossification of aspects of Australian culture and cuisine clearly stems from the migration experience of these women who still have a yearning, indeed a 'hunger' for home.

Topping the war brides' lists of what they missed most after coming to America, was always 'family and friends', coming a close second was always food. This corresponds with similar research undertaken on other migrant groups in America. American cultural historian, Susan J. Matt, from her study of diaries and letters of earlier immigrants to America, found that 'next to their families and their family homes, they longed most for the foods of their homelands'.²³ She points out that 'from a neurological perspective' their acute yearnings for familiar foods can be explained, as 'olfaction is the sense with the most direct route to the cortex, the area of the brain that controls consciousness and memory'.²⁴ She also highlights the fact that 'the olfactory arrangement influences parts of the forebrain that have roles in emotion, motivation, and certain kinds of memory', and that food smells and tastes 'can excite emotion and memory in a more powerful way than other reminders of home'.²⁵ Homesickness among the war brides in this study often translated as a yearning for the food cooked by their mothers and eaten in the family home. 'Food' seemed to be a metaphor for 'home' and 'family'. War bride Allie Rudy remembers the culinary delights of Australia when she was growing up and how she savoured them on her return visits, the last one being in 2006:

I miss meat pies! I haven't had a really decent piece of corned beef. My mother used to fix silver-side, and whenever I go home that's what they fix me. I can

²³ Susan J. Matt, 'A Hunger for Home: Homesickness and Food in a Global Consumer Society', in *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 30, No. 1, March 2007, p. 10.

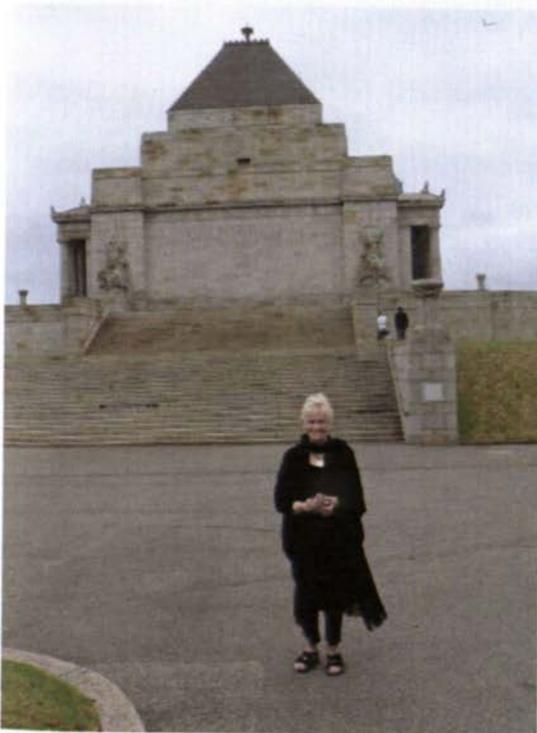
²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

No. 27 – Revisiting Australia in later years



Jean WILK revisiting Rottnest Island, WA, in 2006, where she was stationed during WWII when serving as a Navy Signaler in the WRANS.



Allie RUDY visiting the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, Vic, 8 January, 2007.



Ivy DIERS, visiting the author in Mittagong, NSW, 13 November, 2006.

remember last time when I went home, my sister-in-law who's going to be 91...asked what I would like and I said I would even fix it, or I'll buy it, whatever. I'd like to have a nice big piece of silver-side, and for sandwiches and everything else, and put all those vegies around it.²⁶

In this narrative, Allie's focus on home-cooked meals in Australia indicates a definite connection between the nostalgic memories of home and the food her mother used to cook. Allie swears that she 'now loves America'; at the same time she comments 'but it's not home'.²⁷ It is clear from this narrative that it is not the food, but rather the memories of her mother and the family atmosphere that still tug at her heart, causing her to revisit feelings of homesickness even after all these years. Similarly war bride Jess Berghofer from a dairy farm in Toowoomba, Queensland, remained close to her mother who inspired her, despite the thousands of miles that separated them. Jess, who settled in Texas, recalls how they corresponded: 'She and I wrote and communicated: she could write me her problems and I her mine'.²⁸ The strong bond between mother and daughter is highlighted in the telling of these stories, and indicates this is a significant factor in the homesickness suffered by many of these women.

Val Smith also tells of her links with Australia. After family and friends, next on her list of things most missed was food and drink. Unlike many war brides, she travelled often to visit Australia, sometimes two or three times a year, due to the discounts her husband received as a senior member of staff at Pan-

²⁶ Interview with Allie Rudy, Denver, Colorado, 7 September, 2001.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Greg Berghofer, 'War bride back home', *The Chronicle*, Toowoomba, 27 April, 2004.

Am. Val thinks back with nostalgia to when she lived in Australia and how different it is in America:

I remember how we used to make ginger beer at Christmas time and we'd have that with fruit cake when friends came over. Well, that is foreign to people here – serving fruit cake with ginger beer...nobody likes fruit cake in the US. It is funny, but they have a real standing joke ...companies will give people a fruit cake and it might circulate around that “You might end up with a fruit cake again if you don't watch out!” They are not fruit cake people!²⁹

When visiting Val at her Palo Alto home in California to conduct an interview for this project, she related to me as a fellow Australian, and proudly produced hot cups of ‘proper’ tea made in a teapot, rather than the teabags usually offered in America to dip in a cup of hot water. This was accompanied by a passionfruit-iced sponge which she had specially made for the occasion, a favourite of hers and a legacy of her mother's treasured recipe book – a fitting culinary treat for an Australian visitor.

Lola Atkins arranged a luncheon with several Australian war brides as guests at her home in San Diego, to facilitate interviews with them for this project. The cold sliced meat and salad was followed by an authentic ‘Australian trifle’ that Lola had painstakingly made the night before. It was the first time she had

²⁹ Interview with Val Smith, Paolo Alto, CA, 28 September, 2001.

entertained this group of Australian women, and the first time she had made a trifle in many years. She was upset because she could not buy the necessary ingredient of the Australian brand of 'Foster Clark's Custard Powder', but made do with a 'Vanilla Pudding Mix' as a substitute. It was a great success and delighted the guests who exclaimed that they hadn't had trifle since leaving Australia. It proved to be an appropriate and bonding repast for these women who were there to share their memories of their early lives.

The camaraderie shared by a group of sixteen Australian war brides, at the home of Dorothy Thompson in California, almost sixty years after coming to America, is clearly displayed as they consumed favourite foods familiar to them from their homeland. They enjoyed singing songs which they had once sung to the accompaniment of pianos and pianolas in their family living rooms, when community singing around the piano was a popular form of entertainment in the 1940s. Songs such as 'Daisy Bell' and 'The Bells are Ringing For Me and My Girl', for example, were enjoyed in 1940s Australia. Such romantic songs were also sung at later gatherings and reunions in America, nostalgic reminders of the war brides' courtships and weddings in wartime conditions in Australia. The lyrics from the well-known refrain of 'Daisy Bell' are:

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do! I'm half
crazy all for the love of you! It won't be a stylish
marriage, I can't afford a carriage. But you'll look
sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two!³⁰

³⁰ Harry Dacre, *Daisy Bell*, J. Albert & Son, c1892. Note: This song was first sung in English music halls and was still popular in the 1940s when it was included in albums of 'Community Songs'.

These tangible and nostalgic links to Australia, both culinary and musical, are still important to these women who continue to celebrate their Australian heritage, while at the same time they fully embrace their lives in America.

Australian sport, along with cuisine and music, helped to strengthen and maintain important links to the country of their birth. For example, in 1950 when world-champion sculler, Mervyn Wood of Sydney, raced in the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, a large delegation of Australasian Women's Club members barracked him to victory. In the same year many of the Philadelphia club members journeyed to Forrest Hills, New York, to watch the Australian Davis Cup team triumph over America in the Challenge round.³¹

THE AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN JOURNAL

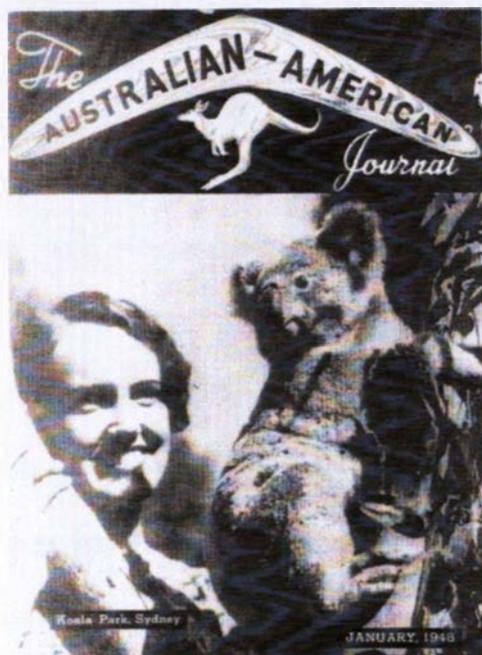
The strong need for the war brides' continuing links with Australia, and the pro-active way in which this connection was maintained, can also be seen in the appearance of a magazine which was set up for this purpose. The first issue of *The Australian-American Journal*, published in January 1948, was promoted as: 'a monthly magazine devoted primarily to your personal interests in Australia and America'.³² The launch of this magazine saw the dream of Australian war bride, Pat McLean, become a reality. Pat tells of two 'soldier buddies' who were among the 'Yanks' who were guests at her family's home in Brisbane, and who were taken 'completely into our home and hearts'. Pat fell in love with one of these American servicemen and relates: 'the day came when I promised to "settle for life" with him in his home in far-off America!'³³ When the war ended, Pat made her

³¹ *The Australian Women's Weekly*, *op. cit.*

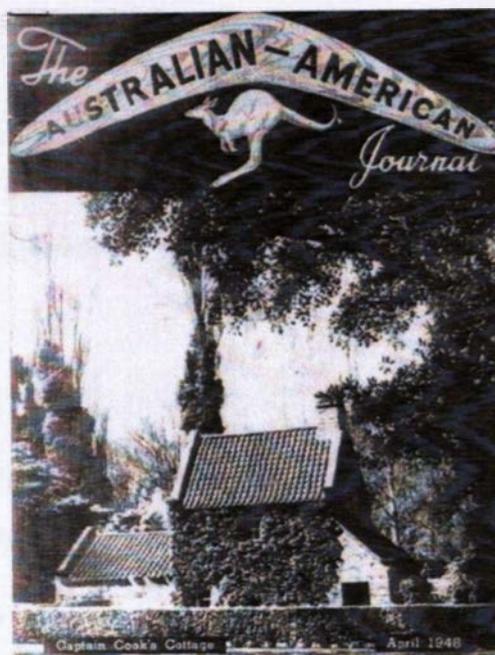
³² *The Australian-American Journal*, January, 1948, The Empire Publishing Company, Louisville, Kentucky, USA. (Copies in my possession were sent to me by Erin Crain, daughter of war bride Iris Craig, in 2005.)

³³ *ibid.*

No. 28 – Magazines and journals



First issue of *The Australian-American Journal* published in Louisville, Kentucky in January, 1948. Cover features photo taken at Koala Park, Sydney, NSW.



Cover of *The Australian-American Journal*, April, 1948, featuring Captain Cook's Cottage, in Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne, Vic.



'Smart Styles' - latest dressmaking patterns from Australia, in *The Australian-American Journal*, April, 1948.



***The Australian Women's Weekly*, 29 March, 1947. Cover: Painting of 'Royal Easter Show' by W E Pidgeon. Source The Pidgeon Coop <http://www.wepidgeon.com/aww.htm> [Accessed 7 January, 2010.]**

new home in Kentucky where, despite her happiness, in the beginning she 'found life in America strange and sometimes difficult'.³⁴ One day she was reading a letter from home when an idea struck her:

What a wonderful thing it would be if we Australian brides could have a publication of our own through which we could keep in touch with one another and with goings-on in our homeland!³⁵

As Executive Secretary of the *Journal*, and with definite signs of good ambassadorial skills, Pat wrote in the first issue to the readers: 'May it prove to be a real bond of friendship between Australia and America – and may it bring about even a better understanding and a closer kinship between our two countries.'³⁶ So, *The Australian-American Journal* was born, displaying a boomerang and a kangaroo incorporated into the masthead design, and the cover of the first issue shows a young woman admiring a koala at Koala Park in Sydney. This tangible link with their home country became available to Australian war brides all over America for a subscription rate of \$US 3.00 in the USA and \$US 3.25 outside the USA.

Endorsed by the Honorable J.B. Chifley, Prime Minister of Australia in September, 1947, his words were published in the first issue of the magazine:

The Australian Ambassador to the United States (Mr. Norman Makin) has spoken of the value of a publication such as "The Australian-American Journal" and I wish it every success in the

³⁴ *The Australian-American Journal*, January, 1948, *op. cit.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

commendable endeavour it will make to bring the people of our two countries closer together.³⁷

A message from the Honourable Norman Makin, Australian Ambassador to the United States of America was also published in the first issue where he spoke of the important mission of *The Australian-American Journal*. He saw the advent of such a magazine as 'an interesting experiment', one 'born of war and the aftermath of war' and one 'destined to achieve success, devoted as it will be to the furtherance of Australian-American ties'.³⁸ He spoke of the 'bonds between Australia and America which were born on the battlefield' and which have been 'progressively strengthened since the cessation of hostilities' a contributing factor being 'the marriages of so many thousands of American servicemen and Australian girls'.³⁹ As well as facilitating a way for Australian war brides in America to keep in touch with each other, the Ambassador commented:

it will take news of their activities to their friends and loved ones at home in Australia, who in this way will be able to follow the fortunes of their daughters in this great democracy of America.⁴⁰

He also hoped and believed that the magazine would be "a useful contribution to Americans' knowledge of Australia".⁴¹

In this first issue of *The Australian-American Journal* the first page is devoted to 'Letters From Our Readers' which contain enthusiastic congratulations,

³⁷ *The Australian-American Journal*, January, 1948, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

comments and suggestions from the first readers, all Australian war brides. The magazine presents core information about Australia, ranging from geographical, historical, agricultural, industrial, educational and sporting perspectives. The 'News From Australia' page contains a variety of information, including: the tabling in Parliament of the 'Geneva Trade Agreement', the price of a top thoroughbred racehorse, the expansion of the Kingsford-Smith airport, and the Miss Australia Contest.⁴² The 'More News From "Down Under"' page includes news as varied as the 'Nightingale Medal for Australian Nurses', the pearling industry, the continued rationing of clothing and food, and a comical story about Herbert, a port-drinking pet rabbit at the Crown Hotel in Parramatta.⁴³ On other pages, a headline announces a "Marine Stowaway Weds Melbourne Girl" and there are stories about the Flying Doctor Service of Australia. Pages follow filled with news of 'Aussie Activities' in America, notices of babies' births, war brides' reunions, club activities and holidays; and more pages display recipes, dress patterns and needlecraft ideas.⁴⁴ The back cover of this magazine is a beautiful scenic photograph of two young women sitting among long grasses at the edge of a lake in Yosemite National Park, California, with a huge mountain and gushing water falls providing a magnificent backdrop. This purposefully designed *Journal*, between its 'Australian' and 'American' covers, encompasses information covering news, food and fashion to which Australian war brides in America longed to have regular access. Its format provided these women with a place to communicate, to share their experiences, and especially for those in far-flung corners of America, to feel that they were not alone. The contents of the *Journal* helped to heal feelings of homesickness and isolation for Australian war brides. As well, it provided a wealth of information about Australia and its culture for Americans to read.

⁴² *The Australian-American Journal*, January, 1948, p. 7.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 8

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 9-15

Subsequent issues of *The Australian-American Journal* continued to brighten the lives of the war brides. In the March, 1948 issue, with two Australian Kookaburras on the cover, a letter from Mrs Dulcie J. Mason from Stevenson, in the State of Washington, tells how much she enjoyed receiving her first copy of the magazine:

I must congratulate you and your co-workers on such a splendid edition. I have read it from cover to cover, and shall look forward to my copy each month. I sincerely hope that lots of the girls will write in as I really enjoy reading their letters and suggestions.⁴⁵

The cover of the April, 1948, issue of the magazine displayed a photograph of Captain Cook's Cottage in Melbourne; and in May, 1948 the cover is a photograph of a large Alsatian dog with a baby Koala riding on its back.⁴⁶ These covers were obviously designed to appeal strongly to the Australian war brides, many of whom were homesick and seeking news from home and contact with other Australians in America. Following the design policy of this publication which also highlighted the beauty of the American landscape, the back cover of the May issue is an American scenic view of a family standing beside their car, gazing at the magnificent view of the majestic snow-capped Mount Hood in the State of Oregon.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *The Australian-American Journal*, March, 1948, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, back cover.

Letters to the magazine were from Australian war brides in Hollywood and Los Angeles in California, from Superior in Nebraska, Stafford Springs in Connecticut, Columbus in Indiana, Clairton in Pennsylvania, Hardin in Montana, Libertyville in Illinois, Okeechobee in Florida, and many other locations across the United States. This diversity demonstrates the spread of locations in which the war brides settled, as well as the magazine's long reach across the vast country, and while it is not known how long this publication remained in production, it clearly served a very good purpose during the period of its publication by reaching many women for whom it was a necessary link both to their homeland and to other women in the same situation as themselves.

HOLIDAYS AND TRAVEL TO AUSTRALIA

Holidays to Australia became popular with the war brides in America, but usually not within the first ten years after settling in America. During these years, while keen to visit their Australian families, many were busy bringing up small children and finances did not allow for travel. Mothers of Australian war brides also wanted to see their daughters, and concerted efforts were made to fund visits to America. Victorian war bride, Joanne Patterson, tells how her mother belonged to the Victorian division of a club formed for the mothers of US war brides. Her mother was 'basically a home body, not involved in going outside the home'.⁴⁸ However, after the war and after she was widowed, and having two of her three daughters married to US servicemen, Joanne's mother became very involved in this organisation and held office as Secretary. The Club held bag sales and raffles, raising money towards the cost of passage to the US for a mother to visit her war bride daughter. This resulted in two mothers going to the US each year.

⁴⁸ Additional interview with Joann Patterson, Queens Park, Sydney, 5 April, 2005.

Joanne recalls: 'That was how my mother came to visit me the first time.'⁴⁹ She remembers: 'It wasn't a big organisation - maybe eight to ten people.' The Club members were issued with a badge with a kookaburra on a boomerang encircled with the words 'U.S. Wives Mothers' Social Club'.⁵⁰

Originally from Sydney, Joane Dambly was a war bride and an officer of the Australasian Women's Club in America. She realised that there were 'just as many if not more mothers anxious to visit daughters here [in America] as there are Australian girls wanting to return home again'.⁵¹ International air regulations allowed bona fide clubs to charter planes for travel between countries, and Joane had the ingenious idea of organising travel which was a two-way exchange of Australian war brides with a group of mothers of other Australian brides who were unable to make the flight. A Pan-American World Airways Constellation was chartered in the name of the Australasian Women's Club for this two-way exchange, which cut the fares from \$1,200 by half to \$600 making it financially possible for twenty-five women to take a trip home to Australia. After only five years of living in America these fortunate members of the Club flew to Sydney where, together with their children, they were transported to their destinations in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and elsewhere. The plane made an immediate turnabout flight with a group of mothers, all members of the "Mothers' Goodwill Club of Australia", to San Francisco where they travelled on to visit their daughters in various parts of America. The stay in both Australia and America was

⁴⁹ Patterson, 5 April, 2005, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ George McGann, 'G.I. war brides returning to visit mothers' in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, February 24, 1951, p. 12.

for four months, in which time Mrs Dambly hoped that she could have her little boy 'talking like a native-born Aussie.'⁵²

For many war brides, despite their strong desire to make a return visit to Australia, the journey had to wait until their children were older and until they could afford the expense of travel. When the opportunity did arrive, the war brides were able to strengthen their bonds with Australia by visiting their families. Barbara Gleason, for instance, regularly communicated over the years with her large family of four brothers and two sisters. Although now there is only one remaining sister, Barbara is still in contact with her extended family. She says:

There are oodles of cousins our age and older and we have all those nieces and nephews and grand-nieces and grand-nephews. There are literally hundreds.⁵³

Despite the long 31-hour flight from California to Perth, Barbara and her husband considered it important to return to Australia to celebrate her 50th, 60th and 70th birthdays with family and friends.⁵⁴

Great efforts were made by the war brides to visit Australia in an effort to maintain links with their home country. Val Smith's daughter was born twelve months after she arrived in America. She says: 'I wanted to take my first-born back to show everyone'.⁵⁵ Val's husband had flown B-47 bombers during the war, and post-war he was a pilot with Pan-Am which entitled him to a 50% discount on

⁵² McGann, *op.cit.*

⁵³ Interview with Barbara Gleason, Anaheim, CA, 20 September, 2001.

⁵⁴ Gleason, *op.cit.*

⁵⁵ Interview with Val Smith, Paolo Alto, CA, 28 September, 2001.

No. 29 – Visits to Australia

The Advertiser **THEY CAN'T BEAT OUR DINKUM PIE**

Thursday, March 19, 1970

After an absence of 27 years, an American war-bride returned to Australia recently with a yearning for a "fair dinkum Australian pie".

America is a great place, wonderful people, and magnificent homes and scenic attractions and lovely attractions . . . but no meat pie, she said.

The war-bride is Mrs. Dorothy Pence, formerly Manning, of San Jose, California.

Mrs. Pence formerly lived in Harris Park, and went to school and work in Parramatta.

She and her husband Everett now have six children aged between 25 and 15.

They are Beverly, Robert, Irene Bill and Shirley, Richard and Pamela.

Mrs. Pence is the sister of Parramatta Rugby League selector, Mr. Reg Manning.

Soon after arriving from the U.S., Mr. Manning, his wife Dorcas and Mrs. Pence visited a well-known Parramatta hotel for the "fair dinkum Australian pie".

"After tasting a pie, she said it was 'well worth waiting for'.

"America is ahead of Australia in many ways, but they just don't make meat pies," she said.

Mrs. Pence said this during the week just prior to her departure for home after a six weeks visit.

● **PICTURE:** Mrs. Pence (centre) tucks into a pie under the watchful eyes of her brother, Mr. Reg Manning, and his wife.



Gardening can be dangerous these days — especially when you dig up a live hand grenade or a mortar bomb.

It sounds unbelievable, but a discovery like this was made in a Granville home last month.

A mortar bomb and a 57mm. cartridge were found in the garden of a home in Elizabeth Street, Granville.

The Army now again points out the danger of people keeping or dumping munitions which could have other uses for the public.

People finding explosives should leave them alone and immediately notify police or the nearest Army depot.

The picture is taken inside . . .

Caption: 'Mrs PENCE (center) tucks into a pie under the watchful eyes of her brother Mr Reg MANNING, and his wife.' (The Advertiser, March 19, 1970.) This return trip to Australia in 1970 helped Dorothy PENCE (now Dorothy Pence BERRY) to maintain links with her homeland.



Joan (Bette) STERN (centre) from Amityville, NY, visiting Sydney, Australia in 1976, with friend Billie (left) and mother Alice (right).



Twenty years later: Joan (Bette) STERN with friend Billie in Sydney in 1996.

fares. However, Val remembers that the air fare to Australia and back was about a thousand US dollars, which 'was hard to come by'.⁵⁶ She loved to sew, and decided to 'do a little bit of extra sewing' to help with saving, and her husband promised to sell what she made. Together they worked to make extra money, and Val put together what she called 'little zoot-suits', made from an Australian pattern for small children's 'pilchers' which were not available in America.⁵⁷ She says: 'I made these little suits up and I'd embroider a little flamingo on the pocket', this being the national bird symbol for Florida where they lived at the time.⁵⁸ Val tells how her husband Ben 'used to cut them out – he was marvellous – and he would sew the buttons on'.⁵⁹ The couple sold the 'zoot-suits' to 'a fancy store' and from this venture, Val proudly recalls, 'we made enough money to put a rug on the floor and to send me to Australia...so that's how I got there the first time'.⁶⁰

RETAINING AN AUSTRALIAN ACCENT

In the early 1950s, about five years after their arrival in America, a spokesperson for a group of Australian war brides who were members of the Australasian Women's Club in Philadelphia declared: 'Most of us are happy about living in America, but we are all dinky-di Aussies at heart'.⁶¹ In an article in *The Australian Women's Weekly* it was reported that although the girls 'looked completely American in their new frocks, nylons and anklestrap shoes', when they spoke 'it was with the accents of Australia'.⁶² A founding member of the Club declared: 'Most of us are proud of our Australian speech and are trying to cling to it'. She comments:

⁵⁶ Val Smith, *op.cit.*

⁵⁷ 'pilchers' – flannel or plastic pants worn by an infant over a nappy.(Source: *Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary*, Macquarie University, NSW, 2006, p. 913.).

⁵⁸ Val Smith, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ McGann, *op. cit.*

⁶² *ibid.*

It is a bit of a shock at first, though, to hear your kiddies talking with an American accent. The children pick up the speech around them and there is not much you can do about that.⁶³

Many of the Australian war brides proudly declare that they have not lost their Australian accent despite having lived in America for six decades. Certainly, there are some who still sound quite Australian with hardly a trace of an American accent. However, while it is sometimes possible to detect a hint of their Australian accent, those who profess to 'still sound like an Aussie' often have a recognisable American 'twang' to the Australian ear. While proud of their Australian accents, the war brides find it is rarely recognised as such by others in America. For example, Betty McIntire says that a lot of people when they hear her speak ask: 'Are you from Boston?'⁶⁴

Sydney war bride, Iris Craig, made an effort to change her Australian accent especially to please her husband, but without success. She recalls:

one day my husband said to me "Why don't you try and speak more like an American?" And so I thought, well if that pleases him, I'll try. But when I discovered myself putting R's where they weren't supposed to be, I decided enough's enough, just take me as I am, I'm not going to change!⁶⁵

⁶³ McGann, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Interview with Betty McIntire, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

⁶⁵ Interview with Iris Craig, Sydney, 15 November, 2003.

War bride Joy Shaddle has a slight American accent, but her Australian accent is still most discernible. She says: 'I have tried very hard to maintain my accent...because that's all I've got left of Australia!' She comments nostalgically: 'I've left everything else behind'.⁶⁶ Proud of their Australian accents, this distinction from other women in America still serves, after many years, as a link to the country of their birth.

MEMORABILIA COLLECTIONS

During visits to the homes of war brides to conduct interviews for this study, items of Australiana were visible in all sorts of different forms. For example, at Betty Bridges' home in Seattle, Washington, she had a special 'Australiana corner' where items such as Aboriginal masks, paintings of Australian landscapes, drawings of koalas and other artefacts were proudly displayed. Australian memorabilia also abounded at the home of Dorothy Thompson in Golden Grove, California, when she hosted a luncheon for a gathering of war brides. The teapot was kept warm in a hand-knitted woollen 'koala' tea-cosy. She also had various Aboriginal artefacts on her living room wall, as well as growing passionfruit and frangipannis in her garden. Barbara Gleason in Anaheim, California, delights in displaying a framed picture on her living room wall of a special 'black-butt' tree from Western Australia. On a visit to Australia her husband had spied this tree and said 'I think that looks like an elephant!' Since that time the tree has become a tourist attraction, and Barbara's grandson gave her the picture of the 'elephant tree' for remembrance sake.⁶⁷ Similarly, Dorothy Hammon is proud of her items of Australiana and relates:

⁶⁶ Interview with Joy Shaddle, Forresterville, NSW, 4 October, 2002.

⁶⁷ Gleason, *op. cit.*

In my house I have a hallway – I must have about 15 or 20 items. There are Aboriginal bark pictures, a picture of Captain Cook, a poem about the Flag, a beautiful tapestry done by an Australian friend, and a beautiful flower arrangement set in a frame that my sister gave me many, many years ago and it has kept beautifully. Oh, and a picture of Sydney Harbour.⁶⁸

As well as these above-mentioned artefacts, some war brides kept other types of mementos from Australia. Joy Gustafson, for instance, kept a lively sulphur-crested white cockatoo – a bird native to Australia – which spent some months in quarantine after it had been brought from Australia by her daughter. This large bird named ‘Sonti’ took ‘centre stage’ in her home, and at 30 years of age had ‘ruled the roost’ for many years, being a living link with Australia and providing Joy and her visitors with much entertainment.⁶⁹

Interviewed during a visit to Australia, war bride Joy Shaddle was visiting one of her three brothers in Sydney. Of all the things Joy misses most, apart from family, is the ‘flora and fauna’. She comments: ‘It never changes, and it seems to me when you leave your country, you don’t want things to change.’ Nevertheless, Joy notices that changes have taken place, and comments:

I come back and I feel I don’t belong here. It’s different - the people are not the same...This is a real melting-pot now and it’s bubbling very

⁶⁸ Interview with Dorothy Hammon, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

⁶⁹ Notes taken while visiting with Joy Gustaffson, Seattle, WA, 13 September, 2001.

furiously, more so than America. So, actually the people where I live there in little old Forrest [in Illinois] are like what I left behind!⁷⁰

What Joy loves about Australia is 'the timeless stuff', the 'flora and fauna'. She comments:

I saw two Kookaburras yesterday and I was thrilled, and some magpies, and then the flowers – the bottlebrush, the wattle. I'm so glad that the wattle is blooming.⁷¹

Joy also speaks fondly of a pot containing a Lantana plant which she bought from a nursery because it reminds her of Australia. It is not her original Lantana plant, as being used to a much warmer temperature it doesn't always survive the Illinois winter and she regularly replaces it with a new hardy plant. But she loves the smell of the Lantana leaves which reminds her so much of 'home'.

AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE, MAGAZINES AND POPULAR CULTURE

For some war brides, books by Australian authors have provided another tangible link to their homeland over the years. Betty McIntire, for instance, a keen reader, had enjoyed Colleen McCullough's book, *The Thorn Birds*, which she thought was a wonderful story.⁷² Peggy Dunbar Blackman, herself a published author in America, is always interested in Australian authors, particularly Jill Kerr Conway whose books she has read and has purchased copies to give to friends.⁷³

⁷⁰ Shaddle, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² McIntire, *op. cit.*

⁷³ Interview with Peggy Dunbar Blackman, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

Similarly, Betty Paukovitz has Australian books in her collection. She says: 'I have all the books about Weary Dunlop', (an Australian military hero) and 'Sarah Henderson' (an Australian pastoralist and author), and 'a history of Sydney Harbour'.⁷⁴ Interested in Australian movies, Betty McIntire enjoyed *Crocodile Dundee*, starring actor Paul Hogan, and as for Australian actor Mel Gibson, she says 'I love him!'⁷⁵ Of course not all war brides shared the same taste in films. Peggy Blackman was not impressed by Australian film star Paul Hogan. She disliked his 'swagger' and found the 'excesses of the Australian accent offensive to the ear'. Peggy, a well-read and elegant woman, was forthright about not wanting to be represented as an Australian by 'that kind of man'. She declared: 'if you get to be too much of a *dilettante*, then you're never going to cut the mustard in forging ahead in a foreign country'.⁷⁶

Jean Vallero was keen to receive the first issue of an Australian magazine to which she had recently subscribed. She also had a subscription to *The Australian Catalogue* from which it was possible to buy Australian food products, books, videos, T-shirts. She also was interested in Australian film actors such as Mel Gibson, Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward.⁷⁷ Collecting Australiana of all descriptions was almost an obsession for Patricia Law, who says: 'My daughter and I buy [Australian] books everywhere we go.' She also has 'a whole collection' of Australian videos and she tells how 'every time there's a new one out I buy it'. She also has a collection of 'every stuffed Australian animal' and says she has 'a

⁷⁴ Interview with Betty Paukovitz, San Diego, CA, 23 September, 2001; see Sir (Ernest) Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, in *Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia online*, <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/dunlop/bio.asp> [Accessed 6 September, 2008]; also 'Author Sara Henderson dead', obituary in *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 30, 2005.

⁷⁵ McIntire, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ Blackman, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Interview with Jean Vallero, Reno, NV, 1 October, 1999.

No. 30 – Australian mementos



Toy pig won by Erin CRAIG as a small child on SS Lurline in 1946, and donated in 2008 to the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, ACT. [Photo taken by author at opening of exhibition on 1 January, 2009.]



Betty BRIDGES and her husband in the 'Australiana Corner' of their Seattle home in September, 2001.



Joy GUSTAFSSON, Ivy DIERS and Margaret FOSMO from Brisbane, travelled on SS Mariposa in April, 1946. All live in Seattle, WA. 'Sonti', a sulphur-crested cockatoo, imported over 30 years ago is a 'living link' with Australia.



Lola ATKINS (left) and Irene PERUCCI, both from Northam, WA, sailed on SS Lurline, 5 April, 1944, and both settled in San Diego, CA. In 2001, Lola admires Irene's collection of soft Australian toys displayed for the benefit of her grandchildren.



This handmade banner hung outside Dorothy THOMPSON's home in Garden Grove, CA, in September, 2001.



Pat LAW and her daughter Meegan wearing Australian colonial dress at a reunion of the WWII War Brides' Association in San Francisco, CA, in October, 2009.

whole collection of koalas, all sizes, and every time they bring one out I have to get one.⁷⁸

CHILDREN'S AND GRANDCHILDREN'S INTEREST IN AUSTRALIA

As mothers and grandmothers, the Australian WWII war brides living in America who participated in this study consider it important that their children and grandchildren are given every opportunity to learn about their Australian heritage. This shared Australian-American bond, a legacy of the war bride's wartime romance and marriage to an American, is a significant link to their homeland. The maintenance of this link through an interest in Australia by future generations is seen by the war brides as an important investment in Australian-American relations for years to come.

Dorothy Thompson, always reluctant to leave Australia, took her children back to visit Australia in 1950 when her eldest daughter was five. She says: 'I really intended living there. I was going home and I was going to stay there. But it didn't work out that way.' Dorothy had left everything in America packed and intended giving her husband the following choice:

'Send my stuff over or come over to me', which I knew he would have. I was so sure that he would, because he did love me and he loved his family. He was a good family man.⁷⁹

However, Dorothy says, the outbreak of the Korean War changed her plans. Because she was not a US citizen at the time, she was afraid that if the war

⁷⁸ Interview with Patricia Law, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

⁷⁹ Thompson, Interview, *op. cit.*

escalated, her children who were US citizens might be taken back to America.

Dorothy admits:

I didn't mind getting stranded in Australia – that would have been wonderful – but, like mother said, 'Think about it, you don't want your children to be without a father'.⁸⁰

So her husband arranged for Dorothy and their children to fly Pan-Am back to the US. She remembers that it was difficult flying with small children on a trip which took 36 hours at that time. When Dorothy's mother died in 1962 she travelled to Australia again, taking her second daughter who was three years old. On this second visit Dorothy still would have liked to stay in Australia, but they couldn't really afford the move and her husband was not keen to emigrate. Many years later, in 1995, Dorothy made another trip to Australia with her eldest daughter. She remembers taking her to the Sydney suburbs where she used to live: 'it was really nice to show her all around Harbord and Manly'. She recalls: 'when we went to Brisbane I would take her to the mall...and I said, "This is where your Dad used to buy me chocolates" and I'd start to cry'.⁸¹

In Australia during the war, when Dorothy was a sales assistant in Woolworths, her husband-to-be had sent her a dozen long-stemmed red roses each week. Dorothy recalls: 'The florist used to come with this big bunch...I was the envy of the whole store.' Dorothy pointed out to her daughter the shop where her Dad had bought the flowers, and they ate in a restaurant in Albert Street where the courting couple had once frequented. Mother and daughter also visited

⁸⁰ Thompson, Interview. *op. cit.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

the Beach House at Coolangatta where Dorothy used to 'hang out' when she was younger. Dorothy was delighted to have been able to acquaint her daughter with the places which meant so much to her. She comments:

So, she got to see all the things that I'd talked about, and it meant a lot to her because she'd heard about it before, and being the eldest and being born there, it really meant a lot to Beverley.⁸²

Some Australian war brides had opportunities for their children to have an Australian education. When war bride Hazel Walker's husband retired from the military in 1962, the family sojourned in Australia and her son Rusty spent the next four years going to art college in Queensland. He painted watercolours and oil landscapes of the indigenous ghost gums on location in Australia. He happily reports:

I sketched the laughing kookaburras outside my window. I painted in the Botanical Gardens across from the college and endured the alarming charge of black swans and swooping magpies, with their sour dispositions, one encounters along the Brisbane River.⁸³

During his four year undergraduate work in Australia he also played in music bands on the Gold Coast with his guitar and blues harmonica. He subsequently graduated from Queensland Institute of Technology (now Queensland University

⁸² Thompson, Interview, *op. cit.*

⁸³ *About Rusty Walker*, <http://www.walker-creative.com/index.html> [Accessed 26 September, 2008.]

of Technology) in Brisbane, Australia, and later completed graduate studies in the United States. From his time in Australia his combined passion for the visual arts and music has continued and he is now a well-known and successful artist.⁸⁴ Rusty's mother, war bride Hazel Walker, is justifiably proud of her son, not least of all because of his involvement with life in Australia, and so continuing the links established between the two countries.

Evidence abounds of the war brides' desire for their grandchildren to maintain links with Australia. War bride Coral Ayraud, for example, was keen to introduce her grandson to Australia. She tells how:

as recently as six years ago I travelled to Australia with my grandson who is blind. He enrolled at Newcastle University and now has a Masters in Chemical Engineering. He has a problem with breaking limbs because of his condition, although that has improved. He has a job with the government and is engaged to be married. I am very proud of him.⁸⁵

THE WWII WAR BRIDES ASSOCIATION

It was not until 1996 that the WWII War Brides Association was officially registered in America. This organisation was the inspiration of two daughters of WWII war brides, Barbara Scibetta, the daughter of a German war bride and Elfrieda Shukert, the daughter of an Austrian war bride. Together they wrote *War Brides of World War II* which was published by Presidio Press in 1988. During five

⁸⁴ *About Rusty Walker, op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Telephone conversation with Coral Ayraud, St Lucia, Qld., 18 June, 2008.

No. 31 – Reunions



Lunch during WWII War Brides' Association Reunion, Reno, NV, September, 1999. Left to right: Joanne PATTERSON, Joanne's American friend Marge, Jean FARGO, Betty McINTIRE and Shirley NORTON.



Viola (Billie) RINGEN at an informal monthly luncheon of Australian war brides at Garden Grove, CA, September, 2001. Billie proudly wears her WWII military medals for her service in the WAAFS, just received from Australia.



Australian war brides sing Australian songs at WWII War Brides' Association Reunion, in San Antonio, TX, 2006.

Left to right: Erin CRAIG (War Baby), Sunny SANSING, Muriel LOCKLEA, Joanne PATTERSON, and (far right) Kathleen HEEREN.

years of research for the book they made many contacts with war brides from many countries who had settled in America. In 1985, the authors organised a reunion of WWII war brides on board the Queen Mary, a ship which had transported many British war brides to America, and which was docked in the harbour of Long Beach, California. The reunion was attended by 500 war brides and their husbands and the gathering attracted a lot of media publicity all over the US. Ten years later, another national reunion was organised on 8 May, 1995, in San Diego - exactly 50 years after the end of World War II in Europe – and was attended by 200 war brides and husbands in San Diego. British War Bride, Eileen Orton, volunteered to write a monthly bulletin for all war brides, which was later called '*The Courier*'. Eileen herself organised the next year's reunion in Laughlin, Nevada, at which time a Board of Directors was voted in. Eileen established bylaws and registered the organisation with the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) as a non-profit organisation.⁸⁶

The Association's bulletin, now titled 'War Brides Courier' is the Official newsletter of the WWII War Brides Association. According to German war bride Connie McGrath, one of the Association's founding members, since its early days this newsletter has 'helped to bind us together, to attract new members, and to plan a national reunion in different parts of the US every year'.⁸⁷

At a time when the war brides are reaching their mid- to late-eighties and some turning 90, many can no longer travel to attend the reunions. However, there are still a number of staunch regulars who still make the journey, and the Association is still receiving applications for new membership from Australian war

⁸⁶ *The American War Bride Experience*, http://www.geocities.com/us_warbrides/AmWarBrides/history.html [Accessed 7 September, 2007.]

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

brides who have only recently learned of its existence and are keen to join. The Association met in Orlando, Florida in October 2008, and, and the most recent reunion was held in San Francisco in October 2009, the port where most Australian WWII war brides arrived in America in the mid- to late-1940s.

The membership of the WWII War Brides Association is made up of war brides who came from many countries including Britain, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia. The existence of such organisations today demonstrates their important role in maintaining links with the war brides' countries of origin and strong bonds with their homelands, which have remained intact. Australian war bride Sunny Sansing says: 'This [America] is where my son is and my two grandchildren and my great-grandchildren are, so this is where I'll be.' She adds: 'America has been good to me' but she admits, 'I don't think you can take the "Australia" out of Australians!' Sunny still misses her homeland and says: 'I still call Australia "home."' However, she quickly adds 'I also call San Diego "home"', and describes this city as 'about the closest thing to Sydney' where she is happy to live. Sunny tells an amusing story which demonstrates her feelings of loyalty to both countries:

When the America's Cup was held in San Diego, I wore a T-shirt that had 'San Diego' on the front and 'Australia' on the back! And for whoever was winning, I turned it around!⁸⁸

Strong attachment to one's homeland is an inevitable part of the process of immigration and applies to others as well as Australians. War bride Hazel Walker

⁸⁸ Interview with Sunny Sansing, Reno NV, 28 September, 1999.

tells how she once took a class called 'Chicano History and Culture' at a local Community College. Hazel says: 'Near the end of the course, the professor went around the class and asked, "How long do you think a person lives in the US before he feels American?"' Most of the young people in the class said varying years from 18 months up. When it came to Hazel's turn she said: 'Never! I'll always feel Australian'. Hazel tells how Doris, another woman in the class, agreed with her and said: 'My husband is American, my kids are American, but I'm Mexican, and I'll always feel Mexican'.⁸⁹

The foregoing examples, drawn from oral testimony of Australian WWII war brides in America, clearly demonstrate the importance to these women of maintaining links to their homeland. The bonds originally forged during their lives as young Australian women during wartime, when there was a heightened sense of national pride, have been nurtured and maintained. The preservation of these links has been vital to the welfare of these women as they settled in to their new homes in America, often originally isolated from other Australian women; where they had to adjust to geographical and cultural change and deal with the challenges of homesickness and longing for a lost time and place.

In establishing various means of communication and meeting places, the war brides clearly recognised the need for such action in the early years of their lives in America. It is a sign of the strong spirit of the Australian war brides that they sought practical solutions to their particular problems and dilemmas, and made positive decisions to improve their experiences as newcomers to America by taking action.

⁸⁹ Email correspondence from Hazel Walker, 21 September, 2008.

No. 32 – Australian WWII war brides meet in different locations



Australian War Brides at the WWII War Brides' Association Reunion, Denver, CO, September, 2001.



A group of Australian WWII war brides invited to lunch in Sacramento, CA, on 29 September, 2001. From left to right: Bernice GEIST, Hope McELWEE, Gladys BORGER, Cynthia PETER, Peggy Dunbar BLACKMAN, Dorothy (Mary) BOURNE (seated) and host Norma REHRER.

The establishment of these strong links with Australia has provided the war brides with a solid foundation on which to build their new lives in America. These bonds have been vital to their psychological wellbeing, especially in the early post war years when they were officially viewed as 'aliens' in a new land, at least until they became US citizens, a topic to be discussed in the next chapter.

More recently, with the development of modern technology, a website, called 'MatesUp-Over' www.matesupover.com has become an online support community for Australian and New Zealand expatriates living in America, and has been advertised on the website Australian New Zealand Association of Minnesota.⁹⁰ Such modern communications now help expatriates to keep in touch with their homeland, but were not available to the war brides in years gone by.

Links to Australia have also been vital to the development of good relations between the two nations, fostering goodwill and furthering knowledge of the people of each country. Over the years, the Australian WWII war brides have proved themselves, sometimes consciously and sometimes unwittingly, to be good ambassadors for both Australia and America.

⁹⁰ *Australian New Zealand Association of Minnesota, www.anzaa.com, [Accessed 5 October, 2007].*