



Dilys decided to join me because, as we neared the equator, the rooms were very hot. The next day, she said every bone in her body ached from sleeping on the hard deck and decided she would sweat it out in the cabin. The first stop in Australia was Fremantle: in England doctors doing home visits took a Gladstone bag, but when we looked over the side of the ship, we saw dock workers arriving with the same bags. I said, "Not very well-dressed are they, the Australian doctors." In England, "racing" bikes had the handlebars down, but in Australia, they were up, like a pair of antlers. That, and the fact they had licence plates on, really amused us. It is the antipodes.

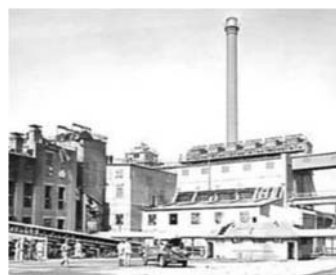
We went ashore and were taken to Perth in a bus. It was very hot, so I went to a pub for a beer and asked for a glass, which would have been a half-pint in England, but what he gave me wouldn't have filled a hollow tooth. I thought maybe he didn't hear me correctly, so I asked for the same again, with unfortunately the same result. I sidled up to a man who had a larger glass and explained the situation. He said you asked for a middy for a middle-sized one and a pot for large one. A glass is for the ladies. We had a lot to learn yet.

We went to the bank and asked to withdraw five pounds to make sure the forwarded money had arrived and it had, so we were relieved. We enjoyed the five days in Perth: the gardens, the Swan River, the sight of the butcher's shop with the meat laid out so nicely and the shop so clean, unlike the English butchers. The fruit and vegetable shops had the produce laid out so nicely. The buses went past with children's prams hanging on hooks at the back of the bus. After five days we embarked for Melbourne, arriving 10/05/50.

There were 8 families on the boat bound for Yallourn and after talk by an S.E.C. official we boarded an S.E.C. bus bound for Yallourn. Some way out of Melbourne, we passed large sign saying, "Officer" and I looked out of the window expecting to see a border or checkpoint. It was months later that I found out it was the name of a small town. We were taken to a dining hall at East Camp and given a meal and informed we could get an advance of two pounds on our wages if required and we would be paid in two weeks' time, which was good news. The bad news was that the houses in Yallourn we had been promised and shown photos of back in England, did not exist, so we would live in Newborough, except for the fact that the houses there were not built yet. They were to be prefabricated houses built, believe it or not, in England, for the Victorian Railways, but the S.E.C. had bought some. In the mean time we were to live in Yallourn North, two families to a house, until the Newborough houses were built. At the interview at Australia House in England, we tried to assess the size of the town to which we were going and asked if there was a theatre there and were told there certainly was. On the tour of the town by bus in the dark, we were shown the theatre - it was actually a picture theatre.



*Yallourn Picture Theatre*



*Yallourn Briquette Factory*

But we did see a well-lit, impressive building which we thought must have been a hotel.....it was actually the briquette factory. Then we were taken to Yallourn North and told to disembark the bus to have look at our interim houses. Most of the women were dressed-up with high heels, and there were five inches of mud outside the bus and there

were a few screams as they stepped out and in to it. We were supplied with sheets, blankets and a box of food for the weekend. On Monday we went to the bank and presented the deposit slip from England and they said they would attend to it, send the form to Sale, and we could get our money in three weeks. Lucky for us the small shop just up the road was run by the wife of dragline driver at the S.E.C. and she allowed us credit. The milkman delivered milk for six weeks and we never saw him, nor did he leave a bill. We had to leave a note requesting him to come to the house so we could pay him. Sometimes we would wake up and find two more houses in the street: they were Housing Commission houses prefabricated in Melbourne and brought up on trucks in two halves, the bolted together.

For single men there were West Camp and North Camp, where the men were supplied with an iron bed, straw mattress and two grey blankets. They paid 10 shillings a week and were able to get a 21-meal ticket for 21 shillings. There were some rough lads in the camps and we read in the paper that a magistrate telling some of the men they could go to jail, or go to work for the S.E.C. in Yallourn! There was also the Eastern Hostel with rooms cleaned, a decent dining room - a lot more civilised. When we were at Yallourn North, Mick Booth and I used to put our overalls on and go to the North Camp to catch the bus to the S.E.C. bus to work for free, otherwise we had to pay for the fares on a private bus. We also went to the camp sometimes to have shower. We lived with the Booths for six weeks.

The small wooden cottages were unpainted, had no sewerage, no fences, no footpaths or made roads. All the top-soil had been stripped off and only red clay was left: rock hard in summer and mud in winter. Again, new houses would appear overnight. When it rained, the "street" would be a bog, so planks were laid down and if two people met on the plank, one would have to get off. The house had three bedrooms, lounge, kitchen, bathroom and laundry. There was a cupboard for odds and ends in the laundry and a linen cupboard outside the bathroom. There was a cupboard in the hall for suit-cases and coats. The houses were well-laid out except for the fact that the only heating was a wood fire.



*Syd trying to break up the clay. Alan & Keith in the front garden*

Next door to us at that time was Steve Guest, a carpenter and we went out into the bush with our axes to get some firewood. If any termites were watching the time they would have been splitting their sides with laughter at our attempts to cut Australian hardwood ....we had no idea. After a while we found a tree that had been felled by a proper axeman. The chips from his felling are big enough to be good fuel, so we took our axes home and brought back hessian sacks and filled them with the chips and store them in our wood sheds.

On Saturday morning, Dilys and I went to the bus stop to catch a bus to the Yallourn shopping centre. Sometime later, a man driving a tractor, towing a trailer with a wooden tow bar, stopped and said, "Are you waiting for a bus?"

"Yes, we are."

"It's already gone today; next one is Monday morning."

He offered us a lift, and we, all dressed up in our best clothes, accepted, and sat on the 4"x4" tow bar over the Coach Road to Yallourn. We got a lift back on a workers' shift bus.

The first job I had was working n a gang, doing maintenance on draglines, dredges, conveyors, signals etc. in the open-cut mines. It was dirty job and we went home covered in coal dust. There were showers at the S.E.C. but if we had one, we missed the bus home. Quite often during the first weeks, the water at home was turned off to connect new houses. When I went to bed, I lay on newspapers after I had turned the shower on and waited till I heard the water running, then I had a shower and went back to bed.



*A dredge in the open-cut*

When women were doing the washing, if the water went off during the rinse stage, when it came back on again, the clothes were covered in a dirty, brown mud and had to be rinsed and washed all over again. Our kitchen window faced the front door of a neighbour's house and one day we saw water pouring out from under the door and down the steps. They left a tap on and went to Melbourne for the weekend.

Most of the people in Newborough came from towns and cities in the U.K. and were used to having shops and conveniences close by and they were soon very discontented. Most of the men had been away at the war and the women had company at work in factories and so on, so they felt quite isolated out here. It was a mistake to put all the struggling migrants all together in one estate, instead of housing them next to Australians. The C.W.A. ladies tried ti help by organising ladies meeting and they asked them to "bring a plate." All did as requested and literally brought a plate!



After a while, I went off the maintenance gang and onto construction jobs, installing transformers on the poles, installing water pumps and so on. the second summer at Yallourn I was working at the bottom of the open-cut putting in a new signal system for the locomotives, screwing 2 1/2" galv. pipe by hand when it was over 100 degrees F. in a row.

After eighteen months there was a vacancy on shift work attending to machine breakdowns. The job was worth three pounds more per week, (I started at the S.E.C. at nine pounds and sixteen shillings per week), and though you worked more days consecutively at the end of night shift we were off work from 8 am Thursday until 4pm Tuesday. I continued to work shifts for the next 25 years. Working outside at night in was very cold and I could have done with long-johns and leather jacket.

A friend on the shift got a contract to dig drains for the new houses (by hand, of course) and I asked to go in with him. We were paid to dig trenches 18 inches deep and nine inches wide and received two pounds ten shillings for each 22 yards. When the pipes herein, we had to backfill. The ground was like cement and the days very hot - not too smart of us to do that after working night shift. On the first trench one of us must have disturbed the line, as when we finished and put the line down, it was way out. We had to widen the trench to about 20 inches in the middle so the pipes could be laid straight. When the boss came back, we held the boning rods whilst he went end-to-end checking. He said, "I'll give you this lads, it's the biggest bastard of a trench I saw in my bloody life!" We carried on for a while and a big German was doing two houses on his own when the two of us were doing one. I saw his wife holding sandwiches to his mouth so he could eat while he stood in the trench. He ended up with a new Holden car.

Another mate got the electrical contract to wire up a large Nissen hut which was to be converted to a picture theatre so I went in with him. After we had finished, the trustees told us that they would like to pay by instalments at ten pounds per month. There were 3 of us so it meant we were paid ten pounds every 3 months. At least I got warm clothes from the digging job. Firewood was two ponds 10 shillings per ton, but we could get a permit to get cut 10 ton of wood from along the coach road. Three of us used to go out after night shift and cut thirty ton and split it into 6-foot lengths. A man we knew at the S.E.C. owned a truck, so he would come after shift and cart the ten ton to each house for thirty shillings each, so we ended up with 10 ton for two pounds.

Dilys took Alan & Keith to the cinema for the kids' matinee and left them with the supervision of the usherette, and came to collect them when the film finished. Unfortunately, Alan had a phobia about big cats. Whenever a Metro-Goldwyn Mayer film was shown, he saw the lion and took off home, so Keith would also leave. Next time, Dilys went down to the cinema and asked if the film was MGM and she was told it wasn't, so the boys stayed to watch. Unfortunately, the film began with a black panther leaping out of



the screen and seemingly over the audiences' heads. Off went Alan again, running home. One time he saw me leave for work with my packed sandwiches to get the bus. He asked Dilys to make him a sandwich so he could go to work too. She thought he was just pretending but found out later that he tried to board the worker's bus. Dilys thought he was playing with the boy next door, but he went missing and could not be found. Eventually Dilys went to a phone box to contact the police. Later that day a policeman came around to tell her that Alan had been found wandering around Moe and someone took him to the police station. He showed the police how he got to Moe: he sat on the broad running board of a car and held on to the door handle. The car left Newborough for Moe with the driver unaware that there was a five-year-old travelling on the outside of the car.

Working in the open-cut was not pleasant, especially at night. The dredges moved on big pads, like tractor tracks, but in the early days, the dredges ran on lines similar to locos. After heavy rain it was difficult working out where the sleepers were and one could end up standing in 8 inches of mud. Later, when the new dredges and conveyors replaced the locomotives, it was possible to drive the trucks up to the dredges. The new equipment also meant the loss of jobs. When I started shift work, there were 12 men employed on each shift operating signals, in cabins or changing points: now one man operated the lot from his seat at the control panel, as well as the pumps which had been operated by four men. The conveyors also meant very few loco drivers were needed. The old conveyors were nearly flat and required men to clean up the spill, but the newer conveyors were laid on rollers to them a more half-round shape and so-by doing away with the men cleaning up. The newer equipment made our job more complicated.

After 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  years on shift work, there was a vacancy for a foreman position and I applied and was given the job. One foreman became sick with Meniere's syndrome and kept having time off night shift. His time on night shift kept coinciding with my time off I was called in to cover for him. This became quite tiring, doing back-to-back night shifts, so I applied for a house in Yallourn so at least I could cut down the travelling time and we moved there at the end of 1956 (21 Narracan Ave). My mother, Florence, who lived with us in Newborough, went back to England. My sister Brenda and her husband Tony, came out and lived with us for some short time until they got their own house. Dilys was really homesick and so we sold the Austin car and bought passages to England aboard the Fairsea for Dilys, Alan and Keith for a holiday. I stayed home to work and pay for the passage. They were away for eight months, arriving home at the end of 1958.



*The Fairsea, Sitmar Line*

After a night shift on the 23rd of August 1959, I arrived home and Dilys had been up during the night making a night dress to take to hospital and suddenly she said the baby was arriving ! I had sold the car to pay for the trip to England so I asked "Tiny" Chancellor over the back fence to take us in. On the way he was told to "go quickly", "Oh, slow down now", which had him in a sweat in case the baby was born in his car. After eight minutes in the hospital, the doctor said, "There's baby daughter for you!"

I said, "It was nearly twins!"

"Why's that?"

I said, "Because I nearly bloody had one myself on the way here!"



*21 Narracan Ave: Alan & Keith in the front garden. Dilys & the boys with baby Jean*

The Victorian Housing Commission were building houses in Morwell and selling them to qualified, private buyers at 5% interest. Yallourn had been given the death-knell, to be dug up for coal, so we thought we may as well move. The S.E.C. offered to double the deposit for up to 300 pounds, but it had to be paid back if left the S.E.C. We raised the 300 and the S.E.C. matched it, so we had a 600-pound deposit. We chose the site and the type of house plan that was offered and waited for it to be built, moving in on Jean's birthday in August 1962. The house cost 4,400 pounds.

I travelled between Morwell and Yallourn to work and sometimes it was hazardous on night and afternoon shift because of the fog which came up where the road had been built over marshland. In 1964 there was an opportunity for a foreman's job at Morwell, so I applied and got the appointment. In 1971 a vacancy occurred for a supervisor's job on day shift only, so after more than 20 years on shift work, I applied and was successful. There were two gangs, with a foreman over each and a total complement of 33 men. My shift job had been concerned with breakdowns and repairs, but the new one was maintenance and construction. With no kids at home during the day, Dilys went to work at Ericsson's telephonic equipment factory, but the repetitive work gave her painful tendinitis in the wrists and arms due to the repetitive work.

The S.E.C. issued a monthly news magazine and in one section were listed the names of people who had worked for the organisation and had died the previous month. Most of the people on staff jobs died before reaching retirement age (65). Of the people I started with, I seemed to be the only one left. So, with Dilys' tendinitis pains and the fact that I may never draw any superannuation, we decided to leave the Latrobe Valley and buy a milk bar in Dandenong. It was a bit run-down so we knew we could improve the business. The first day was hectic as we had to take over the shop, move our furniture in and paint the living quarters all in the same day.

*Written by Syd Boyle*

*Sent in by Keith Boyle*