

Len Hall Memories over the past few years and up until now

Well, the year is now 2010 and it is April the 1st today and now having reached our allotted life span of 3 score and 10 years, plus two years, my wife Pam and I decided that there was still a few more good years in us both and so we began to look around for another house to live in because we were getting rather bored with our 'retired' lifestyle in suburban Perth.

There is an old saying about 'rolling stones not gathering moss' but that is not strictly true when it comes to nomads like us and we found that since moving our possessions to what was going to be our final resting place we had almost doubled our moss for want of a better description.

And so we had the usual 'garage sale' of unwanted household items and after a days work we had made some cash and sold off the junk that we didn't want to take to the new house.

All the unsold stuff we carted off to the Salvation army shop rather than take it with us again.

In 2002 we had designed our 'last' house (the one we have just departed from) and then had it constructed on a block of land that was located about 5km from Perth central business district (CBD) almost on the banks of the Swan river, it was a delightful location and it was so easy to get on our tandem and ride into Perth or Old Guildford along the river bike paths.

However after 7 years we got a little bit bored with the location, which although pristine, had too many people living too close together and we yearned for a view from the rear windows other than the back of our neighbour's garage across our rear courtyard.

There was a report in today's newspaper that stated that in 40 years time Perth will have doubled in size and population, my grandchildren may have to worry about that but we wont. By that time the expected population of Australia will be around 35 million people. Maybe that doesn't sound too many when one thinks about how big Australia is compared with Great Britain and the United Kingdom population, but we are mostly clustered around the outer edges of the country at present.

One day in years to come they will find a way to irrigate central Australia and then the invasions may well begin when the Asian hordes realize what we have down here. Which is enough land to feed and house billions of people, if only they could get enough water to it to make things grow.

Since we arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 1970 we lived there for a while and then in moved to Sydney where we lived for 5 years and then we had a year back in the United Kingdom and then we moved to Perth in 1976. During that time we have lived in about 10 different houses and to be quite honest we have never looked back and missed anything about the ones we have left behind.

When our 4 children were younger we had to change their schools now and again but they have all done well for themselves and they all have become successful in what they set out to do, so they don't seem to have been worried by the moving around.

Sadly for us our 2nd son Jeremy aged 44, did return to the United Kingdom to reside with his wife and 3 boys in Hassocks in West Sussex but we do manage to see them every few years and we communicate via the telephone and emails on a weekly basis. I sincerely hope that my United Kingdom grandchildren will realize just what they are missing and come to live in Australia when they are old enough to leave the nest.

Actually we had a telephone call today to say that they are coming here at the end of this year to spend Christmas with us. I imagine that the last United Kingdom Christmas was rather cold for them, whereas in Perth have only had 4 hours rain in the past 5 months now and we could do with some right rain now.

Our daughter who will be 50 next year and the other two lads aged 47 and 38 all live in Perth and between them we have 6 grand children also living in Perth (9 altogether).

Anyway we decided to move away from Perth which is the fastest growing city in Australia so they say, and when we saw a house we liked in Henley Brook which is a suburb located in the Swan Valley we decided to buy it and move as soon as possible, the house we sold was obviously a bargain at the price we asked and it sold within 3 weeks.

It has now taken about 9 months to redecorate the new house and make a few changes so that we are more than happy with it and the garden is slowly being modified to our design. This has been a lot of hard work but as I tell myself and Pam this is free exercise and it is keeping us fit so we just get on with it.

The suburb of Henley Brook is located about 30km north east from Perth and it is about 3km from Ellenbrook which is a new town where our son Richard lives with his wife and two children, Ellenbrook will eventually become home to 30,000 people when it is completed.

This is a well planned township that is split into so called villages and the central hub has everything that we want, or to be honest that will be by 2012 when the new shopping precinct is completed.

Meanwhile the area is inundated with cycle paths and parks and of course lots of fresh air, I have now joined the local cycling group and I train with them on Saturday mornings, the only problem being that they are all half my age at present and they do give me a hard ride.

We ride our tandem a couple of times a week and I compete in bike races with the West Coast Masters cycling club.

All of our children thought we were crazy to move from a nice little retirement house on a compact 450 square metre easy maintenance block to a larger house on a more than quarter acre block. We think they all thought that we had one foot in the grave already so why upset things by moving.

Isn't it strange the way ones children think that their parents are so old but actually in our case we are fitter than our kids with many years of life left in us we hope. I suppose I must have thought the same about my own parents but neither of them lasted as long as I have so far.

And then, when we went and spent more of their inheritance (skiing they call it) by buying new furniture they were certain we had lost our marbles. But we look upon gardening as a form of exercise and we now have a lovely garden to tend and admire when we have a break for a cuppa. And remember that you only live once and that there are no dress rehearsals in this life.

In this lovely rural district we have many country roads where we can ride our tandem and very few cars to worry about, unlike the so called quiet lanes in the Sussex part of the United Kingdom which I dared not cycle on when we visit Jeremy, I value my life too much to risk it on a bike ride over there.

The nearest supermarket is about 3km away and it is a bit further at present to a hardware shop or a cinema, but as we both still drive it is not a big problem and we do use the bikes of course.

The area where we live is in a vast estate but fortunately no two houses are of the same design and the house blocks are bigger than in Perth and ours is a small one at a ¼ acre, and just 300 metres from us there are sheep and cows in the paddocks, where most blocks are 5 and 10 acres, you would call these small farms I think. It is nice to occasionally hear horses neighing and cockerels crowing in the distance.

Within a 200 metres walk from our home there is a beautiful landscaped park with several lakes and playgrounds for the children, and at one time years ago the area was a quarry but has now been landscaped and it is a pleasant area in which to walk our two aged poodles several times every day.

Two possible hazards in this area are snakes and Kangaroos, I have not seen any snakes (actually we saw several in Perth) but the roos are all around and driving at night is a hazard as they can and do wreck cars if one is unfortunate enough to hit one.

So many people worry about Australian snakes but there have not been any fatal bites in Perth now for many years, however there are more venomous creatures in other parts of Australia that do take a life now and then. But when one considers the death toll from car accidents etc. the snake population is not a problem.

In the far north of Western Australia where it is a more tropical climate there are animals such as crocodiles that can be a problem if you ignore the warning signs. And of course there are always the sharks living in the sea all around us that will take a swimmer or a piece of one occasionally.

Last week there was a fox cull and of the estimated 7 million foxes in Australia they only managed to kill about 3000, these introduced pests kill sheep just for fun and together with feral cats they do a lot of damage.

We also have millions of feral camels and goats plus buffalo and millions of wild pigs. The rabbit population appears to be under control but they used to be a huge problem.

At present the greatest pest problem is the Cane Toad and since its introduction in the 1930 period they have spread across the top of Australia and they are now entering Western Australia. The Cane toad has poisonous glands on its back that kill any creature that attacks it and it is taking its toll of the native species that try and eat one.

Some native animals and birds are learning how to deal with them, and crows for instance will turn one on its back and only devour the stomach etc.

I do recall that when we decided to come to Australia all those years ago in 1969 we asked about snakes when we were interviewed at Australia House in London and the young girl who interviewed us said she had never ever seen one.

I have email friends in the United Kingdom who are worried about the way I walk around our garden without shoes on, this is because people over there think that Australia is like some kind of Jungle where snakes and spiders abound and are out to get you at every opportunity.

Nothing could be further from the truth and I informed one friend in Norfolk that the most dangerous hazard in my garden was the possibility of walking in some poodle doggy poos.

Perth is a very civilized city and although there are a few reptiles in the wetter areas they do a good job of keeping the rat population down. There are no crocodiles in this neck of the woods and one has to go far north or to the Eastern states before you see one in the wild.

The past year did present me with a few health problems, and one was that I was diagnosed as having Prostate Cancer, but now after surgery, the Prostate and the Cancer has all gone and I have had the 'all clear' and now I can say it is a thing of the past.

The next major obstacle was that I had cataracts in my eyes and they have now been removed and at 72 years of age I can now see clearly without spectacles for the first time since I was 7 years old.

So this year 2010 (40 years we have been over here now and married to Pam for 50 years) promised to be the year I became re-invented and so after a two month enforced lay off (on doctor's orders), out came the bike and the tandem and I am pleased to say that once again I am getting quite fit, and so to is Pam of course.

I think two old sayings apply here, one is that 'I am not as good as I was once, but I am as good once as I ever was' and the other is that 'the older I get the better I was'.

I am well aware that many people in the United Kingdom are of the opinion that we do not have any real history in Australia but that is not quite true because Australian history of the European type is just a little bit shorter than yours.

For instance the area where I live now, which is called Henley Brook is in the Swan Valley wine region and it takes its name from one of the earliest named areas in Western Australia. In March 1827 Captain Stirling was exploring the Swan River and when he reached the extremity of navigable water in the river for their long boat, he made a close inspection of the country around.

There is a plaque at All Saints Church in Upper Swan to commemorate this site (2 km from our house), it states that it marks the spot where Captain James Stirling of H.M.S. Success camped during March 1827.

Captain Stirling took the name 'Henley' from the property that his father Andrew leased in Surrey, England, between 1818 and 1822.

A brook flowing through the area was recorded as Henley Brook in 1842 and in 1972 that name was approved as the suburb name.

The neighbouring district was named Ellenbrook after Stirling's wife Ellen who married Captain Stirling in Guildford in 1823 when she was 16 years of age. She gave birth to 6 daughters and 5 sons and 3 of them were born aboard ship, 2 whilst at sea. Imagine the horror of giving birth at sea 180 years ago.

There are many more stories about the hard life that early settlers had to endure in Western Australia but I will not bore you with those but it is all available on line if you are interested.

As for ourselves we feel lucky to live in an area which is full of history with the spirit of pioneers who have passed on their legacy of hard work and dedication to the land. Many roads and streets in the area are named after early settlers and pioneers.

And so here we are at April 2010 and who knows what the next few years will bring for us, I don't think this will be the last house we live in and already we are making plans for a later date. Maybe when the poodles have gone to doggy heaven we shall hitch up a caravan to the car and go and see some more of this vast land before we die.

After that maybe a retirement home will be our final home, who knows because at present we can't think that far ahead.

Remember tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life so make the most of it whilst you can.

To be continued at a later date.

From Len Hall

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