

## Memories of Christmas

I always think I have been lucky in life. Born into a happy, secure and loving family in Edinburgh I wanted more of, I was not sure what, so I moved to London, but I still wanted more so I emigrated to Australia in January 1969 and there I found the adventures that I had been seeking.

I worked my way around Australia and December 1970 found me in Perth, Western Australia sharing a clap board house with Andrea, Pete and Jane. The wood covering the house had been weathered to a soft silvery grey that creaked and sighed depending on the weather. There was a large magnolia tree in full bloom in the front garden that dropped its petals onto the veranda providing a soft pink carpet. Our neighbours were all friendly but as we were four young singles our life styles were very different from the families around us. We had been told of a family living across the road who were from Aberfan and were trying to build a new life in the sunshine of Australia after the darkness and despair of their valley but our paths rarely crossed. Of all the places I stayed during my time in Australia 45 Riverside Road was my favourite, except of course for the outside toilet or dunny. The fear of spiders, in particular the red backed spider nearly reduced me to a constant state of constipation.

I met Andrea and Pete when I had first arrived in Melbourne and we had kept in touch during my travels. Jane had been at school with Andrea and was a ghost of a girl who flitted in and out of our lives. Her father had died of skin cancer which at that time was quite rare and she declined to join us on the beach where we spent most of our free time.

Anyway that Christmas there were only the three of us. We all felt it was important to have a really good Christmas as it would be Pete's first in Perth as he had just emigrated from Sheffield to be with Andrea and my last in Australia as I was leaving in January to start on my return journey to the UK. Our preparations had begun in November when we started to collect extra bottles of wine and pay into a kitty. As the big day approached we made many sorties to the supermarket and the small house seemed to bulge with food and drink.

I was working in a children's hospital and had volunteered to help decorate the wards. Subsequently I was responsible for the disposal of all excess and unwanted decorations which ended up, of course at No 45. We bought a real Christmas tree which we displayed in the lounge in the centre of the house. The house, inside and out was a riot of colour and resembled a ginger bread house on speed surrounded by pink snow.

On Christmas Eve we met up with friends in the local pub and all returned to our house to await and toast-in Christmas Day. As we turned into the road we were greeted with the rich sound of a Welsh male choir in full flow. Quietly we arranged ourselves on the veranda and drank in the music which rolled on and on. When it finally stopped the night air was heavy with longing and homesickness for a land we didn't know and a sadness we would never understand. Gradually lights went on up and down the road and the mood lightened as people appeared bearing trays of food and drink. Soon we were handing round our contribution to the spontaneous party, catching up on street gossip and meeting and exchanging names with new neighbours. I have long forgotten the name of the Welsh family but still remember their friendliness and how much they appreciated the cheery positivity of their Aussie neighbours. At midnight Barry got out his guitar and everyone started singing Christmas carols.

No-one was quite sure when people started to drift off but it was well into the morning of Christmas Day. We cleared up as quickly as possible and took ourselves off to bed; after all we still had a full day ahead of us with a traditional Christmas barbie on the beach to look forward to.