

Frances M. Cochran  
465 Dolores Street, #6  
San Francisco, CA 94110

AUSSIE TRAIL TO LONDON

A Journal by an American

1 Australia--An Adventure Begins

On the Tasman Sea between New Zealand and Australia  
Summer Christmas Break, 1974-1975

The swaying of the ship on the rough sea caused me to wake from a deep sleep that afternoon. For nearly a week I had been stricken with a germ I had picked up on one of the islands and had spent most of my time in bed. Before I became ill, this South Pacific cruise had been just the change I needed from my nerve-racking teaching assignment at North Melbourne Primary School.

Yet my holiday would soon be over and once again I would be back in the classroom. I wondered how the other Americans and Canadians with whom I had shared the 1974 spring flight from San Francisco to Australia had found teaching.

Three and a half years as an elementary substitute teacher in Marin County, California, had failed to establish me in a classroom of my own due to the continual decline in public school enrollment. A friend, realizing my quandry, told me about the need for teachers in Australia. The Australian airlifts of the early 1970s furnished an intriguing solution for job-seeking American, Canadian

and English teachers. However, not until I met two lively Australian fellows who were on the last leg of a world tour, did I decide to go there.

Of Australia's 11 million, 2.5 million lived in Melbourne. Located at the head of Port Phillip Bay on the banks of the lovely Yara River, it was truly a beautiful city.

Like most large Australian cities, Melbourne had an abundance of immigrants. Many of these new Australians, hoping to better their economic futures, came from Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy and British Commonwealth countries. They settled in the industrialized disadvantaged suburbs where the need for teachers was greatest. It was to these suburbs that many of us were sent.

Although I had found teaching at North Melbourne to be a most difficult experience, I also found that thus far it had proved to be the most stimulating and enriching time of my life. I was given a first hand view of the lives of many of these new Australians through their children, my students. I was a guest at many of their celebrations. A Greek birthday party, an Hungarian wedding, a Turkish Islamic circumcision party and a Yugoslavian Islamic funeral were cultural happenings I would long remember. Never did I dream that one day I would visit each of these countries with Australians.

But as for the present, my chief concern was where my next teaching assignment in Melbourne would be. One more year of teaching and I would be on my way home. Life in Australia and

the cruise would be but fond memories.

My thoughts were soon interrupted by a knock on my door. It was Jennifer Rawlinson whose stateroom was across the hall from mine. Twenty-eight, of average height, an Afro haircut framing well scrubbed features, she had come in to cheer me. Although we had shared the same dining table with a dozen other passengers, this was the first time we had really had an opportunity to talk.

Jen was a nurse in Melbourne and enjoyed writing in her spare time. Since the beginning of the cruise, she had been composing all sorts of poems and character sketches of the more lively and eccentric passengers and crew members.

As this unaffected young woman read to me, I noted that she wrote interestingly and well. Later she told me that the Rawlinsons were country folk living near the gold mining town of Ballarat, Victoria. They had been unable to afford electricity until the late 1960s. Consequently, without television, Jen had been a voracious reader of good literature.

After her father's tragic death, her mother was forced to work. Jen, at an early age, assumed the responsibility for her three brothers and sister. It was apparent by her manner that she was a survivor and capable of most any task. She was the strong, silent, independent type.

Like me, she had taken the cruise alone. We soon learned that we were practically neighbors in Melbourne and that we had the same flight from Sydney to Melbourne the following day.

Little did either of us know that this meeting was the beginning of a friendship which would lead us to share one of the most exciting trips of a lifetime, the overland through Asia and Europe to London.

Melbourne  
1974-1975

Travel was always a popular topic of conversation with the Aussies, especially with those youth who had taken an overland or were planning one. In teachers' lounges, at dinner parties, after church, in pubs and at football and soccer games travel stories were invariably exchanged.

I continued to hear stories of adventuresome Aussies who, between jobs or highschool and university, would take off a year or two to travel. They either flew to London or took the overland trail there from Katmandu, Nepal. From London many would visit relatives for the first time and then would tour the world.

In the winter months, many would find subsistent jobs in London. To save money for future travel, to buy return tickets home, or to keep from spending their funds for the time being, some worked as clerks for the British Broadcasting Company, or as nannies for aristocrats, or even as maids in Buckingham Palace. Casual work in nursing and tutoring was attainable as well.

Prior to my Australian teaching opportunity, I had been planning a trip to Europe, but the thought of going to Asia

had never crossed my mind. I had grown up, as many modern middle class Americans, thinking that one day I might travel to Europe. But now in the Southern Hemisphere with the tip of Asia a mere seven hours away, it was natural to look at traveling differently.

Osmosis for considering the overland for myself began to set in. The investigation of this unusual way to return home culminated one morning while on a coffee break in the teachers' lounge. I was thumbing through the Teachers' Gazette where I found in the classified section that Christian Youth Travel Association (CYTA) in Sydney was sponsoring a 12,000 mile bus trip from Katmandu, Nepal, to London, England.

The cost was \$1100 plus an additional \$300 for the flight from Sydney to Katmandu with stopovers in Singapore and Bangkok. For a little extra cash I could return home by this extraordinary route.

Upon response to my written query, CYTA disclosed that they hired Sundowners Limited to take their groups to England. Sundowners was a reputable firm which had been transporting groups between England and Nepal for ten years. Included in the \$1400 tour price would be all sleeping accommodations, either hotel or camping facilities, and usually two full meals daily. The trip would take us through fifteen countries over a period of eighty-four days.

Enclosed in the letter was a Sundowners' brochure entitled, "a personal guide to your overland journey." Paragraph two of

the foreword stated the following:

You have shown a spirit of adventure in that you want something out of the ordinary, to get off the beaten tourist track and into the lesser known parts of Asia and Europe. Be warned--you will encounter habits and customs completely foreign to the society to which you belong. At times you will experience moments of discomfort and be appalled by local conditions and lack of facilities. However, be prepared to accept the people and conditions as they are and make the best of the facilities available. By doing this, and showing tolerance and understanding, you will have what we hope will prove to be the most rewarding journey of your lifetime.

Realizing the value of such an opportunity, I made my decision: I would go! In February 1975, I sent CYTA my \$100 down payment.

Those of us who had signed up for this trip and lived outside of Sydney were assigned pen pals from the nucleus group living in Sydney. This would ensure that each of us would know at least one member of the group before the trip began. Immediately, I began receiving letters from Kathy who was also a teacher.

In addition, CYTA sent me memos of meetings and parties designed to orient the group regarding the journey. These get-togethers not only briefed the group on important aspects of the trip, they also established rapport among the members long before the departure date of February 23, 1976.

Soon Jen learned of my plan to return home. For some time she had been considering taking a break from nursing. Like some of her friends, she wanted to travel and visit relatives in England.

On the winter evening of July 28, 1975, in my cosy bed-sitting-room, she and I sat huddled around my portable heater. There, over large mugs of steaming coffee, we discussed at length the possibility of her joining me on the overland. I was thrilled when she decided to send CYTA her down payment.

Jen and I saw little of each other until the week before Christmas. Then we met briefly at my place to discuss our progress on preparing for the trip. She too was receiving letters from her pen pal in Sydney and had made contact with her relatives on the English island of Jersey. They would be eagerly awaiting her arrival.

We both agreed packing for this trip would be a real feat. The brochure was very clear as to what we should pack. The one suitcase we were allowed was not to exceed 24 x 16 x 8 inches. I bought a Samsonite case from a secondhand store and trial packed it once. In it I packed two pairs of jeans, several tops, a wine wool turtleneck with matching muffler, cap, and gloves, a blue cardigan, tennis shoes, a floor length cotton skirt, a sundress, a powder blue parka, a bikini, a pair of highheels, and a goodly supply of underwear. Also, instructions were to pack at least four rolls of toilet paper, thongs, a small sewing kit, a standard drain plug, detergent, sleeping sheet and practical food items.

Additionally, we were allowed a shoulder bag which should contain, at all times, a change of underwear, sleeping apparel, shaving or cosmetic bag, towel, spare film, tissues, thermos, camera and the prescribed medicines. Besides three large jars of salve for a hair condition I had contracted while living in Melbourne, lomital pills to fight diarrhea, chloroquin tablets to prevent malaria, sterilizing tablets for water and salt tablets to combat dehydration would be packed in the bag. Should we not unload the suitcases daily from the bus, the shoulder bag would provide our necessities. Finally, it was strongly advised that we leave room in our cases for souvenirs.

CYTA also encouraged us to bring a travel journal as well as cassettes and paperbacks to contribute to the bus library.

Jen had made a dandy moneybelt, but I had not found a suitable one yet. The ones in the stores were too small, and I had no sewing machine to make one. The moneybelt was the most essential item of all for it would contain our passports, international certificates of vaccination, travelers checks and money of various currencies. As a safeguard, we were told to carry separately duplicate copies of all important documents.

This was the last time I was to see Jen in Melbourne. She too had much to attend to as she planned to be away from home for at least eighteen months. Our next meeting would be at Sydney's international airport on departure day.

I gave up my bed-sitting-room January 5, 1976, and moved in with Kathleen, a colleague who had become a good friend since

my first day in the Australian school system. Of English heritage, she, her Italian girlfriend, Sophia, and I had shared many memorable social times together in Melbourne.

They had introduced me to the horse racing highlight of the year, the \$100,000 Melbourne Cup. With its women dressed in couture and its men in equally formal attire, and its famous chicken and champagne served under striped marquees, a good time was had by all. We had also joined the National Trust where we enjoyed a ridotto and dinner at the lovely thirteen acre estate of Rippon Lea. The Illawarra mansion in the wealthy suburb of Toorak was the scene of the National Trust's successful winter ball which had been great fun.

I would not only miss these formal occasions, but I would indeed miss the fast moving game of Australian Rules Football and the sight of Aussies guzzling liters of beer and eating the popular meat pies as they cheered their team on.

For a week Kathleen and I were a bit cramped with my sleeping bag and seven suitcases of various sizes. But then she drove me and my excess luggage, bulging from the windows of her mini, to Appleton Dock where a freighter would transport my belongings home to San Francisco.

The next stop that day was the Department of Health where I received my first series of a typhoid-cholera inoculation. The last series would be given a week later. I also made an appointment with my physician for a tetanus shot on January 21. Time was becoming short and the urgency to cover all bases became

more immediate.

Fortunately, I had no reaction from the shot, so Kathleen and I continued with our evening plan for my farewell party. Several close teacher friends of mine met us at "Silvers," a posh disco in Melbourne. These young ladies looked exceptionally lovely that evening. For a multitude of reasons they had become very dear to me while I lived in their country. I knew I would miss them and wondered if we would ever meet again.

Two days after our night on the town, Kathleen flew off to Tasmania on holiday. I went to the hair salon to have my shoulder length hair cropped to one centimeter. This change in my appearance caused friends to gasp at first sight of me. However, I had decided to simplify life on the road as much as possible, so I hoped my usual concern for vanity would claim a lower priority in the weeks ahead.

The last weeks in Melbourne were spent visiting close friends and the public library to learn about Alexander the Great. The overland Jen and I would be taking derived its name from this great general. Although in reverse, our trip would trace some of the areas he conquered in the Middle and Far East.

Living from 356-323 B.C., Alexander III became king of Macedonia in 336 B.C. when Greece was subject to Macedonia. Greece's wish to destroy Persia, her traditional enemy, was realized under the leadership of Alexander. In 334 B.C., Macedonian forces joining united Greek forces, crossed the Dardanelles where they fought and defeated Persian forces near Troy in northwestern Turkey.

After taking most of Turkey, Alexander conquered much of the Middle East and went on to Egypt where he founded the great city of Alexandria. Following his conquest of Mesopotamia and the three Persian capitals of Babylon, Susa and Persepolis, Alexander became known as the sole ruler of the Persian Empire. His strategy for conquest then turned northward to today's Balkh, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union's Usbek Republic. He finally headed southeast to Northern India where we would first encounter his territory.

At the early age of thirty-three, he died of a fever, but is credited with spreading the Hellenistic or Greek culture to the world he conquered. Now more than 2000 years later, at age twenty-nine, I would be traveling through some of these pages of antiquity. My excitement grew with each passing day.

Sydney  
February 13, 1976

A week after returning from Tasmania, Kathleen drove me to the bus station leaving me with my heavy suitcase, shoulder bag, sleeping bag, and purse. The Ansett Pioneer Express coach left Melbourne on time that evening and arrived in Sydney early the next morning. I took a taxi to the night club area of King's Cross where the youth hostel was located.

I was met by the hostel's Welsh warden and paid her \$27 to cover bed and breakfast charges for my remaining <sup>9</sup> days in Australia. She showed me to my clean quarters on the second floor of the old four story home trimmed in white iron lace work from an earlier

period. I was given an upper bunk in a large room containing six bunk beds, a round table and a kitchenette. The faded pink wallpaper blended forlornly with the raveling green carpet. The bath and toilet were down the hall.

After settling in at the hostel, I left for the general post office at Martin Place, the city square, to make a call to CYTA. Maree, the CYTA agent who had been in contact with me since receiving my down payment, said plans for the trip were going according to schedule. I should be at Kingsford Smith International Airport Monday, February 23rd at 11:30 A.M. I told her I had yet to find a suitable moneybelt. To my relief, kind Maree said her mother would make one for me. I gave her my waist measurement, and she assured me that she would bring the moneybelt with her to the airport.

That evening the hostel was filled with young Australians, New Zealanders, Britons, Canadians and Americans. Several were in my room swapping travel tales. I had officially entered the intriguing world of the international traveler.

Making friends with English Evelyn, I learned that she and a girlfriend, both in their mid-twenties, had traveled to Australia with two Scotchmen through Europe and Asia by public transportation. Their trip had taken four months. Evelyn was now trying to earn money to return home by way of Japan and the Soviet Union where she hoped to catch the Trans-Siberian Railroad. A buxom beautiful girl, soft-spoken and positive, Evelyn would no doubt realize her travel dreams.

Mandy, an eighteen-year-old beauty from Western Australia, was another friend of the moment. A voluptuous flower child, this blonde was out for fun and adventure.

Evelyn, Mandy and I would enjoy Sydney at its best. Ferry rides around the lovely harbor, warm swims at Bondi and Manly beaches, delicious counter teas at nearby pubs and a tour of the magnificent Sydney Opera House with these girls filled the hours as I waited to leave Australia.

In a spare moment, I phoned Yvonne of Sydney, a young woman I had met at the Formula 5000 auto races in Adelaide. Educated in English private schools, her permanent home was Hong Kong where her father owned a shipping business. Fast cars, hot air ballooning and any sport involving risk seemed to fascinate this friendly tanned blonde.

She was presently working on a promotional job for a successful Australian restaurant chain. Before ending our conversation, she invited me to an informal dinner party she was giving for some racing friends on my last Saturday in Sydney. I gladly accepted her invitation.

The day of the party dawned overcast and rain was in the offing. Around 7 P.M., I walked to Circular Quay and took the Taronga Zoo Park Ferry across the choppy harbor to Sydney's northern suburbs. At the isolated dock, I took refuge from the storm in a phone booth and called Yvonne for a ride to her home. Within minutes the Hamiltons whom I had also met at the Adelaide races came for me in Yvonne's \$35,000 Fiat, one of three such

cars in Australia.

Tom and Michelle Hamilton of Sussex, England, were house guests of Yvonne. From a conservative background, Tom, a large, sandy haired man, was an oil broker, but his hobby was racing his Lotus in Grand Prix competition. The Hamiltons had just completed the Australian circuit and would soon be on their way with their Lotus to the Grand Prix in South Africa.

Yvonne's Tudor home in Clifton Gardens was on a steep hill, and in clear weather it afforded a spectacular view of the distant Heads where Sydney Harbor opened into the Pacific. Two walls of the living room had been replaced by glass to capture this view. Tropical plants surrounded the house and filled the terraced rock garden. Priceless paintings, chandeliers and thick carpets graced the interior of this elegant home. The dining room had a magnificent wall size, gold leaf, framed mirror. Beyond the living room and up a couple steps were the kitchen and game room crowded with jet-setters sporting expensive casual wear. Some played pool and others a coin slot machine. Four bedrooms and a maid's quarters were on the second floor.

The guests, predominantly Australian and English, resided in Australia, England, Hong Kong and the United States. In my overland threads of jeans and T-shirt with glass in hand, I mingled with race drivers, models, business men and women, teachers, secretaries, wives, girlfriends and even a Swiss banker. In the various conversations I encountered, curiosity peaked when

they learned of the trip I was undertaking. Many of these "world travelers" had never heard of the overland.

Yvonne served a buffet of delicious shrimp casserole, salad and homemade bread. A variety of select wines were available. A dessert of the Australian treat pavlova with coffee and tea followed. The party was more than a success with guests lingering until 3 A.M. Due to the hour, Yvonne invited me to spend the night.

Early the next morning we awakened to a crystal clear day. The Heads with the crashing surf below were in sparkling view as were many sailboats. After a hardy English breakfast, prepared by Yvonne, I left with Tom and Michelle who drove me back to the hostel. Before parting, they invited me to visit them when I arrived in London. It was hard to believe that in less than twenty-four hours I would be on my way there.