

Memories Part 3 from 1970 to this day by Len Hall

"The Cancer has all gone"

My name is Len Hall and I was formerly a Walthamstow resident

Foreword

It has now been 5 years since I wrote my earlier childhood memoirs of Walthamstow and Wickford, and, recently, I was prompted by Daniel Quinn who is the "Walthamstow Memories" Site Moderator to write a bit more, so here I am.

As previously stated somewhere, I do tend to ramble a bit so please bear with me and I promise I won't go on and on, but I will try and hold your attention (..If you get bored then I shall never know if you switch me off and I won't worry about it either...) I am a 'hunt and peck' two finger typist so it does take rather a long while to write one of these memory articles.

The heading of this article may intrigue some of you, but those five words **"the Cancer has all gone"** were said to me last week by my Urology specialist/surgeon when he gave me the wonderful news on the telephone. Only the week before I had been the subject of a Radical Prostatectomy, which simply means the total removal of ones Prostate Gland. This was the end result of about ten years of PSA blood tests and other problems that elderly men endure, and up until a few years ago we never ever discussed the matter in public and just suffered in silence. But the knowledge that the Cancer has gone now gives me a new lease on life and at 72 years of age I am sure I can get another 20 years of life (Unlike my poor old father who died of Prostate Cancer at age 69). Furthermore, in a few weeks time I shall be seeing better too as I am getting my cataracts fixed up, and then I shall be able to get back on my bike and also start my tandem rides with my wife Pam again.

If anyone would like to write to me they can do so at my email address which is lcpmhall@bigpond.com I would be glad to receive your emails and I am happy to discuss the contents with you..

Now back to my history.

Previously about 5 years ago when I was 67, I left you with the news that we were going to migrate to Australia so that my dear wife Pam could look forward to a longer life. This was due to the news that with her lung problems (Bronchiectasis) she would only expect to live to about 50 in the damp United Kingdom weather.

Well I am pleased to report that the move was a gamble that paid off, because today Pam is still by my side (or behind me on the tandem) and she is now 71 years old and enjoying life to the full as a mother of 4 and a grandmother of 9.

Our last house in the United Kingdom was 'Oakdene' in Church road Stansted Mountfitchit (I love that name) and we moved there around 1968.

We went back there for a nostalgic visit about 20 years later and found that the 1/3 acre block had been developed and the woman who now lived in the original house, now modified, had paid 157,000 pounds for it and that was the house that we had sold in 1970 for 8,000 pounds.

On New Year's Eve we went to a party at a friend's house in Cambridge and when we returned home to Stansted we found that we had been burgled.

There was a broken window on the ground floor and some of the boy's toys, things like 'action men' had been stolen.

There were a cat's footprints on the window sill and the young policeman attending the crime suggested that it could have been a 'cat' burglar. His humour was wasted on us at that time and we departed.

Prior to selling up the Stansted house and renting a flat in Cambridge for a couple of weeks we proceeded to sell all of our possessions.

It is amazing what you can do when you are migrating and we sold everything we owned at that time, including the Morris 1100 car in those last weeks.

The rented flat in Cambridge was convenient as I was able to continue working at PYE TVT until the final week in January when we were due to depart by train from Cambridge station to London.

All we owned in the world then was contained in two very big zinc trunks that weighed too much, but we were allowed to take them with us as part of our 10 pound Pom trip to Australia.

My Rivetts of Leytonstone racing bike which I had decided to keep as it was a mode of transport until the very end, and some pots and pans and bed linen were sent by a ship and truck system that would get to us about 6 weeks after we got to Melbourne which was our initial destination.

Unlike some of the earlier migrants who had to endure 6 weeks on a cramped boat, we went by air and our first stop in Australia was in Sydney where half the passengers dis-embarked. That was such joy for us because there had been a family with 5 noisy kids behind us for hours. We then continued our journey to Melbourne

At that time we had 3 children namely Fenella aged 8, Martin aged 6 and Jeremy aged 3 and they were all sad at leaving their friends and schools but also excited at the prospect of a new life in Australia.

We left Cambridge railway station on a cold January day (the 15th) and it was snowing at the time, and within 24 hours we had arrived in Melbourne and at the time the temperature was 104 degrees F. which was rather a shock to the system.

We were all driven through the Melbourne suburbs in a bus to a district called Preston, and our new home comprised of one quarter of a metal Nissan hut which was designed to accommodate migrant families such as ours.

Make no mistake this was not intended to be comfortable as the 'powers that be' did not want us hanging around this place for too long.

The meals were in a mess hall and I do recall that the first meal was advertised as 'Camp Pie' which I thought sounded rather nice, however it turned out to be corned beef which was a big disappointment.

There was absolutely no air-conditioning in the huts and to get some relief from the heat we would walk to the nearby shopping mall which was air-conditioned. The kids also had a small blow up paddling pool that they had to use to cool off as they were not going top school straight away.

I won't dwell on our stay there for too long because it really was not very pleasant, other than to say that Martin caught Hepatitis B whilst we were there and we all had to have injections. And Jeremy fell off a kid's slide in the playground onto a hard surface and hurt himself rather badly.

At that time I was qualified as an electrical draftsman and so in the first week I started to look for a job and a car.

I found both and I bought the car with our savings and it was a huge Holden sedan which we kept for 5 years.

The job was on a contract basis and it paid me \$3.38 per hour and that was good money in those days (today the same job pays around \$75/hour).

The camp manager called around later that week and said there was a meeting arranged to help us migrants get some work, but I said no worries I am already working and he was impressed I think. He probably walked away muttering something about "know all pommy bastard" but I didn't really care.

Many of the inmates at the camp only intended to stay for 2 years and then go home and then they did not have to pay for the fares from the United Kingdom to Australia, but they had to pay for the trip home.

But some did get homesick and just went home anyway and they just paid the fares for both trips.

After 5 weeks of living in the cramped conditions of the hut we were allocated a flat in a block of migrant flats and it was quite new and furnished completely down to the last teaspoon.

All went well for a while, but after 6 months we decided to move to Sydney and see what that offered as the weather in Melbourne was not quite to our liking and we were still young and adventurous and we wanted to see some more of this vast country.

So we bought a small 6' x 4' box trailer and booked ahead at a caravan park in Sydney for a few weeks and we rented a caravan there.

Our first 3 years of married life were spent in a caravan in Breach Barns at Waltham Abbey, so this was no real hardship to us.

We travelled via Canberra and we all slept in our car over night, we had previously bought a camping stove etc, so the adventure began once again.

Upon our arrival in Sydney the priorities were first to find me a job and then to rent a house in the same vicinity as the job and that is what we did.

The job was a contract job working on the design of a huge mining project in Gove in the Northern Territory but the office where I worked was in a North Sydney suburb called Chatswood.

We rented a house in a district called French's Forest and it was a wooden house, but in a beautiful area and all went well for a while until I was offered a permanent job at the same company and at the time this sounded like a good position so I took it.

And so in 1970 we decided to put down some roots and buy a house in Sydney; now the area we were living in was rather posh and we couldn't afford a house there, so we looked further a field and found a group of newly built houses nearing completion in an out of town area known as Hornsby Heights.

The house we chose was constructed of brick veneer which is the method commonly used in Sydney, it has a brick exterior and a wooden frame covered with plaster board on the inside.

The area was a couple of kilometres from Hornsby which is on the railway line and also the house was on the edge of the bush and we spent 5 happy years living there.

We enjoyed camping holidays and the Sydney area has some beautiful scenery and life was wonderful.

I do recall that when we had our interview at Australia house in 1969 we asked about the wildlife in Australia i.e. snakes etc. The woman who was seeing us said she had never ever seen one.

In almost 40 years now I have only seen a couple of snakes and they were only too keen to get away from me. Where we live now there are many Kangaroos and they are a real hazard when driving at night. However contrary to what you may have been told they do not hop down the main streets over here.

We have never ever had a visit from any of Pam's relatives and I am sure they all think we live in a jungle type situation and nothing could be further from the truth.

Now back to the story.

Early in 1971 Pam found that she was pregnant again and this came as a complete surprise to everyone, the baby which was destined to be our only Australian child arrived just before Christmas and we named him Richard.

Pam came out of Hornsby hospital on Christmas day and we were invited to Christmas lunch at the house of some good friends who lived close by.

I do remember that before I left the hospital I left a large notice stuck to the window of the baby room. Pam wasn't really amused but the notice stated

'A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OF OUR BREEDERS'

So now we had 4 children comprising, 1 girl and 3 boys and life was a bit different, as the new baby was a full time job and Pam had to leave the part time position that she had been doing to earn some extra money.

Just after that, the company that I had been working for closed down as the project turned out to be a one off and they ran out of work and I had to find myself some more work to pay the mortgage.

So I took a succession of contract jobs and managed to keep the wolf from the door until 1975. I worked for several large companies in North and South Sydney and the work was quite interesting.

Prior to 1975 my father who lived in Walthamstow had been writing me some very disturbing letters and also sending us some sad audio tapes and it was quite clear that he needed us to go home for a while.

My mother had died a year earlier and, due to our lack of money, I had not been able to return for her funeral.

And so we sold the house in Sydney after a long period of having it on the market and we returned to the United Kingdom.

Once again we had sold everything we owned and thus were able to travel light again; however I still had the bike.

The rental situation in Australia is good due to the fact that many people buy a 2nd house as an investment and rent it out because that has tax advantages, in fact we had two ourselves at one time in the last 10 years.

However at that time (1975) it was very difficult to rent anything at all in the United Kingdom and we had to stay with Pam's father and her step mother in Waltham Cross for 5 weeks before we found a place in East Barnet that was suitable.

Pam's father lived in a tower block on a housing estate near Britannia Road and it was a nasty experience living like that for all that time with 4 kids and they had a crazy dog that hated us all I think.

Anyway the house we at last managed to rent was a semi-detached place in East Barnet and we found it quite by chance, it had not been lived in or rented for years and thus was filthy inside and out, but being desperate we took it.

I had never experienced East Barnet before, but it must have been a good area because there were some very posh cars parked outside some of the semis, I even saw a Rolls Royce at one house.

The next move was for me to get a job and that was also proving difficult and that Summer in London was a very hot one, but as a last resort I went to the Australian branch of the last company that I had worked for in North Sydney (Ralph M. Parsons) and I had a good reference from the Sydney branch which impressed them enough to give me a job.

And so I commenced my daily bike ride again from East Barnet to Kew Bridge via the North Circular road etc. and I did that for about a year without incident.

The main snag was that the house rent took a large part of my weekly salary so I didn't think we would stay there for very long.

What I failed to mention earlier is that, whilst we were selling the Sydney house, my dear old dad was getting his feet under the table of another woman who was the widow of one of his workmates.

So now he was much happier and not so lonely and in fact the new woman didn't want to know us, so we were... *surplus to requirements* so to speak.

My father and his new girl friend actually got married after we had returned to Australia.

I don't know why she didn't like us, but when my dad died it was almost a week before she informed us and then it was just to say that she wanted some money to bury him!

We told her that we didn't have any and to take it out of his estate; years later when my daughter called on her to ask if she had any of my dad's possessions (like his old photos and his dad's medals etc...) she said she had burnt the lot and that was that...

And so we decided to return to Australia after living in the United Kingdom for about a year. Having experienced a much better standard of living and a better way of life in Australia, I just could not settle down again, whereas Pam would have stayed if she could have done so.

In fact in later years she wished she had put her foot down and insisted on staying over there. I am really glad that she did agree to come back with me or I don't think this story would have been written.

This time, however, we were not "ten pound poms" and thus we had to find the air fares for two adults and 4 children and once again this resulted in a big drain on our meagre savings.

As we had earlier spent a lot of our money on fares back to the United Kingdom and now from the United Kingdom to Australia again etc. we found that we could not afford to return to Sydney: they had experienced a housing boom whilst we had been in the United Kingdom (the story of my life).

As it happens we had some neighbours in Sydney who were good friends then and they still are today.

I wrote to these friends, because we knew that they had relocated to Perth in Western Australia.

We went to Australia House in Earl's Court prior to our departure and we were advised that, although housing would be cheaper in Perth, there was very little work to be had for my profession. But we came here anyway and luckily I soon found a contract job working once again on a mining project and, once again, we started a new adventure. This time in the most isolated city in the world: Perth WA.

Our friends John and Ann Riolfo helped us immensely at that time and although we had only asked them to find a rental caravan for us they had in fact done two things.

First they had booked a motel for a few days for us and they had also arranged the rental on a house that we took for a while.

As usually happens when the children start school, one has to find a house in that vicinity and the kids have had many school changes over the years.

However it does not seem to have impaired them at all because apart from Fenella who is now a teacher's aide and married to a bank manager, the boys all have good positions and one is a doctor and the others are either working for degrees or already have one.

So we bought a house in the same area, and I started once again doing contracting work for various mining companies around Perth.

That was both good and bad as, although I was never out of work, I did sometimes have to live away from home for a while on mine sites etc.

Also in all that time I have always used one of my bikes to get to and from work if it was in or around Perth.

That and the fact that I compete with the West Australian Masters cycling group has helped to keep me as fit as a fiddle all these years. Except for that damned Prostate which is now a thing of the past, thank goodness.

Over the past 33 in years in Perth we have built two new houses and lived in several others and although our last house was going to be our retirement home we got itchy feet again this year, and we now live in a nice house in a semi rural district that we are very happy with.

Our only regret is that my son Jeremy met an English girl in the United Kingdom when he went over there to work for a while and 10 years ago he decided to go back there and live, he now has 3 boys and we do see them now and again either when they come over here or visa versa.

In hindsight I suppose I now feel the way my own parents must have felt when we first came over here in 1970, such is life.

However we must always look on the bright side as we do have our daughter and two sons living in Perth and we have a total of 9 grandchildren aged from one year old to 24 years old so it is not all bad.

My eldest son Martin is getting married again next month so we also have a wedding to look forward to.

We never know what is awaiting us around the corner, so my suggestion is that you live life to the full as tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life.

This is my 3rd contribution to 'memories' and to be honest I don't think it will be my last, however I may wait another few years before I write again.

Before I leave you I would like to say a few things about our adopted city of Perth.

The weather is usually perfect and we never ever get a day cold enough to produce snow. The heat does get to some people and it can get to around 40 degrees Celsius during January and February so avoid those months if you can.

Personally the heat does not worry me and I just think about the alternative of wet and cold and I enjoy it.

The creatures here rarely worry us and when one compares the numbers of humans killed on the road, the few that are killed by snakes and sharks and crocodiles you can count on one hand.

The bicycle path network is amongst the best laid out in the world and I can ride for hours without even going onto a road.

We have the Swan River, of course, and that is the jewel in the Perth crown and we often ride around the Perth bridges and enjoy the scenery immensely.

We don't have mountains but there are hilly areas and lots of national parks that can be enjoyed by one and all.

I could go on and on but why not come and see for yourselves what a wonderful place this is and at present it is a boom town with so much work available a lot of my silly old friends are being tempted to come out of retirement.

Not me though as my motto is from a fridge magnet that I bought from the National Trust. It states as follows:

**'RETIREMENT IS WHEN YOU STOP LIVING AT WORK AND
START WORKING AT LIVING'**

That's all folks for a few years anyway from Len Hall