

“Amelia, Amelia”! In a sea of Susan’s and Jane’s my mother’s heralding in from play instantly identified me.

Although disputed as impossible by my mother, my earliest memory is as a very young child of maybe two, putting something in my mouth that was instantly pushed away by her. Recollections of my childhood come to the fore when conversations take place about your life and it is interesting which images stay with you; being dressed up as a swan pushing a pram in a parade, a garment created by my grandmother, to the annual Cheese and Onion Fair attended by the French. Here they would ride their bicycles laden with onions and the air would be filled with exciting smells.

I was to spend my first twenty years surrounded by the familiar sights and sounds of Newton Abbott, a market town in Devon, UK. I worked as a Dairy Maid – long hours, lonely, often cold and oh, so many dark, early mornings. Growing up my parents had often spoken of Australia and their dreams of immigrating to the land of sun and beaches. That together with a geography teachers memories and stories of this marvellous country he had lived in, Australia, led to me making a life changing decision later in life.

After a year of marriage and at 20 years of age, my husband and I decided to pick up sticks and cross the oceans on a ship called the SS Australis as £10 POMMES. What a journey, one month at sea and a lifetime of experiences and adventures to look forward to. We landed in Sydney, where we stayed a while; however, we decided Sydney was not for us, despite the much talked about Bondi beach. We wanted to travel and explore this vast country. So, in 1973 taking on the ‘hippie’ mantel, carefree and with no worries, we started our journey in a Holden Premier, we headed across to Western Australia, where my brother had settled, and then to Darwin we drove, soaking up all the sights of this vast country.

We fell in love with Darwin; its climate and relaxed lifestyle suited us perfectly. I was expecting our first child in Christmas 1974, totally oblivious of what was to happen. Cyclone Tracey hit Darwin with such force. It is something you could never forget. I remember vividly the sounds as flying debris filled the air, landing on and in our house. Our neighbours fled their demolished homes taking shelter in our house, one of the few left standing. We all clambered to protect ourselves from the chaos happening around, me being covered with mattresses to protect my unborn child. Such was the damage to Darwin and its infrastructure I was flown to Perth on a Hercules to have the baby. There we stayed, moving to Kalgoorlie for a while before we attempted our return to Darwin in July 1975. Off down the old Gun Barrel highway we went stopping in at Alice Springs. The threat of another cyclone halted us in our tracks; so we decided to stay in the Alice.

I have immersed myself in the community over the years, been on committees and worked in many fields. Inspired and influenced by a woman called June Tuzewski, I became involved, and always busy, in early childhood education; the Toy library and Bath Street Childcare. I later worked in Special Education at Acacia Hill for many years, then Special Education at the then Alice Springs High School. Later I went to the Pilbara to teach at TAFE.

My three children and grandchildren play an integral part in my life. I share with them my love of the bush and art and craft. Together with my partner, we help at working bees to assist in the maintenance of the Larapinta Trail. We enjoy bushwalking and camping which makes make life exciting and always an adventure. I still love to travel, to keep fit, engage with others, learn new things and challenge myself. People in this community of Alice Springs are always willing to share their knowledge and skills; from timber workers at the Senior citizens to the artisans and craft people at Central Craft. Bored, I am never! I live in a place where there is always something happening. Part of life's adventure is the challenge.

I never regret leaving the UK. My parents too followed their dream emigrating to Australia in their 60’s. My grandchildren will experience a different world; however, it too will be adventurous. My advice would be to enjoy the journey and accept the challenges.