



G'day, G'day, Mates!

By Lynn Grigsby

Get to know the host country, international scholars are advised. This Sooner put Australia to the test and learned that the real education is outside the classroom.



"Ladies and gentlemen, we would now like to begin our boarding procedure for Continental flight number one, bound for Honolulu, Hawaii, with our final destination, Sydney, Australia." My heart was pounding as I held tightly to my passport and backpack. "Hey, Lynn, how does it feel to be leaving the mainland United States?" my American friends yelled to me.

I was selected as a Rotary International Foundation Scholar to study in Australia for one academic year, representing Rotary International, Oklahoma and above all else, the United States of America. In February 1989, I began my journey, enrolled at the Australian National University in Canberra as a graduate student studying Japanese/East-Asian studies. I packed my bags with necessities, including my camera, running shoes and a few photos from home. The rest I would obtain in The Land Down Under.

Flying over what had to be the most beautiful harbor in the world, Sydney was array with red-roofed, tiled houses and a spectacular skyline. My thoughts were a mixture of the excitement of embarking on the greatest adventure of my life and what it would be like to live in a foreign country off the beaten path of a tourist. I was not a complete novice traveler, but Australia was so remote from any place I had ever visited before!

For the first time in my life I realized how it felt to be a foreigner, and I could imagine how all the many people feel arriving in America from foreign lands. It is one thing to walk into a gathering of strangers when you are at home. But it is different in a foreign country. However, it wasn't long before the friendly Aussie "mates," with their warm smiles and rosy-red cheeks, welcomed me to their home Down Under.

From the beginning I made a pact with myself to see and experience something new and different each day and be part of every possible adventure. I found that I didn't have to search far for the things that were spe-



Lynn, "the American and Okie," determined from the first to make the most of her Australian adventure, from one side of the continent to the other.

cial to Australia and her people. While interacting with the Aussie (pronounced Ozzie) culture, I learned a lot about a country and her people who, while different from my own, share many similarities.

Surprisingly, I never had been harassed more about my Oklahoma accent than by my mates in Australia. Most Australians could not understand why my accent was different from that of other Americans they had met. I never really thought about the culture shock that I might create for the Aussies!

I don't know how many times a day I explained to my mates that yes, there are more Southern accents than mine, and many different dialects across America. Those crazy Aussies usually repeated everything I said at least twice. I tried to think of "country" terms that I knew they'd enjoy. Likewise, I got a thrill out of their lingo.

I was labeled "Lynn the American and Okie." I swapped "Hi, Ya'll" for

"G'Day"; "Shazam" for "Bloody Hell"; "Hunkie Dorie" for "No Worries, She'll Be Right, Mate"; "The Farmer and The Cowman Should Be Friends" from "Oklahoma!" for "G'Day, G'Day" by Slim Dusty — to mention a few. I learned early on that if an Aussie said "fair dinkum," he was speaking the truth. This was a genuine Australian saying that one no one used lightly.

One of the most interesting things I learned in Australia was the Australians' perception of Americans. Some ideas were based on movies like "Animal House" or on a single trip to New York City or Los Angeles. "Are all families like the Beverly Hillbillies?" they would ask. "Does everyone carry a gun?" "Didn't Ronald Reagan get elected largely because of the NRA? Wouldn't his support for increased defense spending naturally attract NRA supporters?"

Throughout the year, I found that many Australians were familiar with my home state from the famous musical "Oklahoma!" One of my most heartwarming experiences occurred when I attended the Rotary District 971 conference in Milton-Ulladulla, a coastal town in New South Wales near Sydney. During the dinner, members of my host club, the Canberra City Rotarians, rose and toasted Oklahoma. Then they sang every word of "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning" and "Oklahoma." My heart nearly skipped a beat, and tears came to my eyes. How far away from home I was, yet so near.

Outside of my studies, I tried to participate in all aspects of the Australian culture, which for me consisted largely of sporting events. I attended an Australian basketball game, where I first heard the national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair." Interestingly, no one sang, and no one placed hand over heart. I studied the blue flag, with its Union Jack in the upper corner of the hoist, the seven-pointed Commonwealth Star beneath and the five-starred Southern Cross. Saluting another country's flag was new to me, and I thought of America's patriotism. Nothing ever could replace my pride in the Stars and Stripes. However, I



felt an exciting new sense of pride as I saluted the Australian flag—a feeling I realized would be part of me forever.

Shortly after, I was listening to the radio and overheard a Canberra Cannons basketball commentator say the following: “The Cannons were playing like the Americans—brutally, with great energy and commitment—the way the Americans do everything.” “Yes, I guess so—professionally,” responded the reporter.

Australia offers many outdoor activities, and bushwalking is a favorite. To my surprise my first bushwalk was much more than just a mere hike in the woods. My mates liked to blaze their own trails, right down 70-meter mountainsides, over rocks and streams, and back up again to the mountain top, going bush all the way. Never mind snakes or the biting nettle plants!

We waded through streams, up mountainsides stacked with eucalyptus gum trees, through fields of grass above our knees, through swamps, down farmroads and bush trails, over an air strip—you name it, we bushbashed through it. I even learned to leap over a barbed-wire fence “proper.”

Studying in Australia afforded me the opportunity to compare their educational system with ours, and they are a bit different. High school consists of years 7 through 12. There are public schools, but private schools are predominant, especially in the cities. The private schools require uniforms—a blouse, skirt, knee socks and a hat for girls; slacks, coat and tie for boys. The private schools began as church schools, and as more students traveled from small country areas to cities and towns, boarding schools were established to accommodate the country children. Today, the boarding schools also are used by students with parents traveling overseas. A number of students who live on “properties” (large ranches for sheep, cattle, etc.) are educated through “school of the air,” a system using two-way radios from a central base to individual properties.

Students are not required to attend

12 years of school. For instance, in New South Wales, during year 10, they sit for their School Certificate exam, which they must pass. At that point some choose to take on an apprenticeship in carpentry, hairdressing or landscaping, and simultaneously attend a technical trade college. Others go on to complete two more years of school.

During year 12, students must sit for standardized exams according to each state’s rules. Scores determine what course or degree program a student can pursue and what university he or she will attend. Programs such as medicine and law have very com-

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petitive entry levels. Many degree programs are only three-year programs. Some students, however, choose honors, which takes an extra year. An Australian student enters a university with a predetermined career field—a good idea, perhaps, but it does place a great deal of pressure on the year 12 student. For example, if the minimum score to pursue an arts degree from a university is 350, and a student scores 348, it’s just “sheer bad luck,” as the Aussies say.

Until recently, the government subsidized all education expenses. In 1989 a graduate student tax was imposed, which is a very small proportion of the government’s total educational expenditures—approximately 1,800 Australian dollars per year per student. The students can pay up front with a 15% discount or defer payment until employed. Upon graduation, the amount each student pays is levied on his or her annual income. The tax stirred considerable controversy among the students but compared to what stu-

dents pay for an education in America, it seems relatively small.

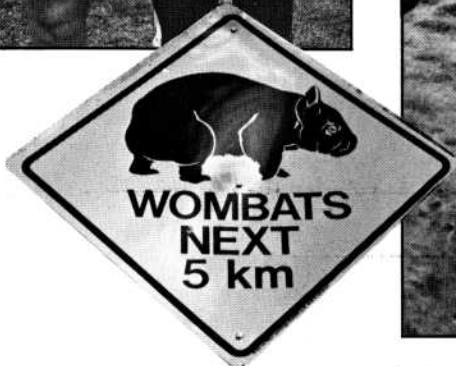
One reason I chose to live and study in Canberra was because it is the home of the nation’s capital, the Australian Capital Territory (A.C.T.)—centrally located on the east coast between Sydney and Melbourne. Compared to Washington, D.C., Canberra is small in size—only 250,000 people. But with a total population of approximately 16 million, Australia is small compared to America. Yet, the area of Australia is about the same size as the United States, excluding Alaska.

Canberra reminded me of a city that had been plopped down in the middle of wild bush country. Designed by Walter Burley Griffin, a Chicago architect, Canberra is similar to Washington, D.C. Everything is planned. Beautiful Lake Burley Griffin separates Capital Hill and the city. From Parliament House atop Capital Hill is a magnificent view of the city, Mt. Ainslie and the Australian War Memorial, the American-Australian War Memorial.

One of my goals was to work part-time for a member of Parliament so I could compare the Australian and American governments. For Senator Michael Macklyn from Queensland, I researched a series of initiatives affecting the Pacific Rim countries including the United States. I also worked for Representative Michael Wooldridge researching former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser’s medical system and the A.C.T. election system. Also, I spent a week in Wooldridge’s electorate office experiencing politics at the local level.

A member of the Commonwealth of Nations, Australia recognizes the British Queen as its titular head. Australia is governed by a constitution very similar to that of the United States. However, voting is compulsory, and a preferential system is followed—voters record a number against each candidate’s name, showing their first preference, second, etc.

The Australian Senate has 76 senators, 12 from each state of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Aus-



ABOVE: Aussie Graham Thom, left, and Oklahoman Lynn Grigsby join 30,000 other joggers from around the world in Australia's largest fun run, a 14K to Sydney's famous Bondi Beach.

TOP RIGHT: Reminders of home. Lynn is amazed when her Auckland, New Zealand, "barbie" hosts, at left, appear in aprons given them by friends from Vinita. Then Lynn observes a Rotary custom by exchanging club banners with the Bateman's Bay president.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Near Cradle Mountain in Tasmania, Lynn feeds an apple to a tassie wollaby, a small kangaroo.

BOTTOM RIGHT: American mates from Oklahoma, California and Pennsylvania bushwalk to the top of Cradle Mountain.





TOP: Lynn makes the long climb to the top of Ayers Rock, the world's largest monolith, for this view of the Outback region of the Northwest Territory.

BOTTOM: A Sooner learns the art of rousabouting and even has "a go" at sheep shearing on farmer Jack Payne's sheep property near Mansfield, Victoria.

tralia; two come from the A.C.T. and the Northern Territory. As in the U.S., senators are elected by proportional representation with each state and territory comprising one single electorate. Senators from the states are elected for six years and those from the territories for three years. A president presides over the Senate.

The House of Representatives includes 148 members elected for three years. These members belong to the more powerful of the two Houses. The party holding the majority of support

in the House forms the executive government of the Commonwealth, and their party leader becomes the prime minister. Most cabinet ministers are members of the House. The House elects a speaker who presides over the House but does not enjoy the same power as the speaker of the U.S. House.

The opportunity for a firsthand look at their government was very important to me, especially after having served as press secretary to U.S. Congressman Dave McCurdy in Washington, D.C. The cordial members of par-

liament gave me a chance to learn. I always will remember their kindness and hearing members address one another in the good old Aussie lingo, "G'Day, Mate," a greeting they take very seriously.

Near the end of my stay, Jennet Hermiston, a friend from the University, invited me to her father Andy's sheep property. This, I believe, topped all experiences I had in Australia. For it was during this two-week period that I literally learned the way of the land and her people—a vital part of Australia's past since her settlement. This was authentic Australia.

The area was about two and a half hours north of Melbourne, near the Australian high country, where cattle still are driven to graze during hot summer months. Here I understood the Australians' love for their land—so natural and untouched by today's modern society.

An average size property in northeast Victoria is about 1,000 acres; the land is very fertile. A 1,000-acre property might have 2,000-3,000 sheep. Larger sheep properties—several as large as 300,000-400,000 acres—can be found in western New South Wales. The properties in the Northern Territory, known as stations, run mostly cattle, and some are as large as 250,000 square miles. Their owners travel from one part of the station to another in helicopters. The men and women who work as station hands are known as Jackaroos and Jillaroots.

Andy's is a family-owned and operated property, where he raises Merino sheep for the production of Merino wool, the finest on the market. I let him know early on how keen I was to learn, so I was thrown into the system immediately. On my first day I learned how to properly kill a sheep. By breaking its neck, the sheep died instantly. I even got to "have a go" at punching the skin away from the sheep's body. Working with Andy was fabulous, and he gave me a go at everything: crutching sheep (cleaning the dags off their tails and cutting their toenails) and drenching (sticking gun-like instruments down their throats to feed them



a preventive worm medicine).

The shearing was the best part. Jen-net and I were hired as “rousabouts” on farmer Jack Payne’s nearby property. Basically, we were shearing-shed assistants. Being female made it a bit more difficult than I imagined. We had to prove ourselves, for three of the hardest working days I’ve ever known. My chief responsibility was throwing the fleece onto the table. I learned quickly that there is a fine art to this work. The fleece must land perfectly spread out across the table without separating into pieces. Next time I’ll remember to lift a few weights to prepare for such labor, because it was quite heavy. The shearers handled between 150-200 sheep each, per day. I calculated that I threw quite a lot of fleeces.

I learned a lot of new words and phrases. In the shed you’re either “flat out or shut out” (you’re busy-busy or you’re out the door). I learned that the “gun shearer” is a top shearer, and the shearer who “rings the shed” is the one who shears the most sheep. One of the shearers gave me several “gos” at it. I think I only cut one sheep, and he did not even need a bandaid!

Work in the shed required team cooperation, and everything moved quickly. When I got a “Top Job, Spot On,” did it sound great! By the end of the day, I was sweaty and covered from head to foot in lanolin (sheep grease from the wool). But it was the greatest dirty feeling I’ve ever had. When it was over, I felt a real sense of accomplishment and pride. I have a new appreciation for the wool industry.

It would be unfortunate to live in a foreign land and not actually see the countryside. So, at various times throughout the year I packed my backpack and set out on my walkabout to see all I could of this place of natural wonders—in my eyes, one of the last real frontiers left on earth. Australia has every terrain imaginable, from beautiful, crystal-clear oceans to mystical rain forests, to the rugged Red Center. Every little bush town has a butcher, a baker and a milkbar. Many times, the milkbar is the bus stop, the

Australian Post, the grocery store, the bank and the petrol station—all in one.

In Tasmania, my mates and I built a bonfire on the shore of a 90-mile beach. What a strange feeling to look out over the water and know that no other piece of land exists between this shoreline and South America. We even ran into a herd of wild cattle along the beach.

For five weeks, I traveled on a bus for 11,997 kilometers (approximately 7,348 miles) through the Outback territory (South Australia and the Northern Territory) and Northern Queensland. I visited Ayers Rock and the Olgas—huge rock formations in the Red Center estimated to be 450 million years old.

I learned how to scuba dive on the outer Great Barrier Reef, one of the seven wonders of the world. Few experiences in life are so magnificent. The water was a clear aquamarine. As I reached the white sandy ocean floor, the sea came alive with multi-colored fish, coral and plant life. The sun’s rays gleamed brightly through the clear water. As the fish swam by, their sparkling eyes spoke to us. As my buddy and I fed them, schools of fish appeared. On a night dive, my torch and the light from the moon brought out the rich colors of the giant clams, corals, and various sea anemones.


At Alice Springs, I had an opportunity to fly with a missionary into two Aboriginal outstations in Western Australia. Since about 1948, the Aboriginal outstations have been owned by the Australian government. Mission Aviation Fellowship transports Aborigines and flies goods and medical supplies into the outstations outside of Alice Springs. In one eight-hour day, I learned more about the Aboriginal lifestyle than I ever could hope to gain from a text. Most Aborigines do not speak much English, and to some, their lifestyle may appear primitive. However, living off the bush is the way they have survived for more than 50,000 years. There is much controversy in Australia over the westernization of the Aborigines, similar to

the plight of the American Indian.

Out of respect for the Aboriginal culture, I did not take any photographs in the outstations. However, I did take plenty of mental notes. I’ll never forget the expression on the face of a little stark-naked, three-year-old boy, carrying a bunch of bananas in one hand and with the other desperately cramming two more into his mouth, surrounded by dogs and following his brothers, sisters and mother, like the last little duckling.

Before I knew it, my time in Australia was up. Perhaps one day I will be able to repay the kindness and warmth that I was shown by the Aussies by befriending an Australian or another foreign national visiting America. This is my hope.

My goal during my year abroad was to represent America to the best of my ability, and at the same time, learn another way of life. For me, 1989 was a growing period, a time for greater international understanding and appreciation for countries outside America. In the process, I gained greater respect and admiration for my homeland. What a year it was—truly the “Year of a Lifetime!”

The pilot interrupted my thoughts: “Ladies and gentlemen, Philippine Air Flight number 102 is now on its final approach into Honolulu, Hawaii. Welcome to the United States of America!” Again, my heart was pounding. I was home! 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lynn Grigsby’s previous contributions to *Sooner Magazine* have included an account of her summer in Washington, D.C., as a 1985 Cortez A. M. Ewing congressional intern and a 1988 fact-finding report from Afghanistani refugee camps on the Pakistani border. Lynn also could have written a sequel to this article on Australia. Stopping in the Philippines on her way home, she was stranded for eight days by armed rebels attempting a coup d’etat. Determined to put her Australian courses in Japanese/East Asian studies to good use, Lynn has signed on for a year as an English teacher in Japan.