

## Lena Bruselid's road to Pymont

My story begins in a small country town in northern Sweden. Two hundred and fifty years earlier another Swede born in Luleå left his footprints along the east coast of Australia while sailing on HMB *Endeavour* with his good friend Joseph Banks. Not in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would ever live in Pymont next door to an apartment building named after Daniel Solander from Luleå! I also arrived by boat, but unlike earlier travellers, I had a three months' tourist visa in my hand. I think I caught the travel bug when, aged three, my family suddenly relocated to the southern part of Sweden, Malmö, now famous in the *scandi noir* series, *The Bridge*.

Eventually my family moved to Stockholm, where I started trainspotting at Central Station, dreaming of boarding the Orient Express. Hearing the announcements of trains leaving for Paris, Madrid and Rome gave me a kick. After my studies at Stockholm Uni and working for a few years, I met another woman who wanted to travel. (In the 1970s it was hard to find any Swede who wanted to travel.) Ann-Charlotte had a fear of flying, but as I was a train enthusiast I cherished the idea of travelling by train and any other ground or sea transport. Her parents lived in Hong Kong, so that was to be our final destination before returning home on the Trans-Siberian railway. (She came to Australia too, and made it back to Sweden on the Trans-Siberian, while I'm still here!).

Ann-Charlotte and I set off from Stockholm Central Station at the beginning of 1974, travelling through eastern Europe on our way to Istanbul, where we caught a bus to Erzerum. From there we took a taxi to the Iranian border, and after travelling through that country, a bus to the Afghan border. Brightly painted, rickety buses took us through Afghanistan, where we first encountered men carrying weapons. We met lots of interesting people in Herat and Kabul, then took a bus through the Khyber Pass to Pakistan. After travelling through India and Malaysia we finally reached Hong Kong by boat from Singapore.

I had an uncle who worked as a cook on cargo ships. His stories of sailing the oceans fascinated me as a child. I thought I knew a bit about life on board, and suggested to Ann-Charlotte that we look up the Scandinavian Sailors' church in Hong Kong to see if we could hitch a ride on a boat to Australia. That way I got a job as a second cook on a Swedish freighter headed for Sydney.

In August 1974 I arrived in Sydney Harbour on the M/S *Milos*. After a week in Sydney I hitchhiked to Melbourne with a friend. We soon tired of Melbourne and decided to experience the 'real' Australia, so we made our way to Mount Isa. There I discovered that Mount Isa had once been a stronghold for Finnish migrants due to its mining opportunities, another unexpected Scandinavian connection. I had a wonderful year in Mount Isa, a fantastic base for exploring the outback, the fascinating natural world around it, and making many visits to interesting mining and indigenous settlements with the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which took me along as a freelance journalist.

A year later I made my way to Brisbane, and a scholarship to study for a master's degree in social planning and development at Queensland Uni. I also worked as a research assistant, and then tutored at Griffith Uni. Four years later I returned to Sydney where I had applied for a job at UTS. I met Winton at a conference at the University of Sydney. He was giving a paper on Swedish public policy, having recently returned from study leave in Stockholm. I had decided to go back to Sweden after my sojourn in Sydney: for six years I had missed speaking my native language. In the early days I could tell that a person who carried a backpack sporting the Fjällräven ('Mountain fox') logo was most likely Swedish, so I'd accost them to exchange a few

words. When a group of us went to a pub in Newtown after the conference I was surprised to discover that Winton spoke fluent Swedish. He then offered me a room in his shared house in Eastwood if I decided to take the job at UTS. And the rest is history, as they say.

Suddenly I didn't need to go back. I moved into the Eastwood house and our shared history began. Winton's research project took him back to Sweden. I left UTS. Our eldest daughter was conceived in Stockholm and nine months later born in Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Camperdown. Eighteen months later our second daughter was the last baby born at Crown Street Women's Hospital. When the girls started school we moved to Chatswood.

Between study leaves and visits to Sweden I worked at the Maritime Services Board in the equal opportunity section, and even had an unlikely but interesting stint at the Port of Sydney as an OHS officer. It was the best location, on the water at Walsh Bay in the old sandstone building that once served as a convict women's prison. In yet another of the recurring downsizes we were offered voluntary redundancies, which paid for another year in Sweden. On my return I worked for a few years at the Council on the Ageing.

In 2010, after being empty nesters for a few years, we found our niche in Pymont. I have joined Pymont Ultimo Landcare and the local book club, and made a lot of interesting friends. My neighbour Mary Frank (also a keen Landcarer) and I have started a veggie garden for our unit block. It's hard to believe that this is one of the most densely populated areas in the country and yet it has such a strong neighbourly feeling, the atmosphere of a small country town. We always meet friends and familiar faces on our daily walks around the foreshore and at the local cafés.