

Manuela Epstein's road to Jacksons Landing

My family have been migrants for at least the three generations for which I can find information. This was a result of being dispossessed from one country to another. My grandparents arrived in Egypt at the turn of the 20th century. Alexandria was a sophisticated cosmopolitan city where most people they knew spoke at least four languages. People of all backgrounds and religions interacted easily. Life was fantastic until the 1950s when they were displaced again. Nasser came to power; Europeans and especially Jews were made unwelcome and had to leave at short notice with very few possessions.

Three months before I was born, my parents and sister arrived in Australia to the isolation and homogeneity of post war Sydney. When I started school, I was different - curly hair, strange name, parents who spoke loudly in another language, salami and dukka sandwiches for lunch.

Sydney certainly changed by the sixties, and I never considered myself other than a true Australian. My parents took a little longer to accept but eventually they realised that they had made the right decision in migrating here rather than to any of the other countries where their many relatives had gone. But there was always the longing for their easy, communal, somewhat bohemian life in Alexandria. And although I hadn't lived it, I knew of it and wished for an equivalent.

Ivor and I lived in Killara for 35 years. This beautiful area was a great place for our girls to grow up. Our house was surrounded by bush - we saw no one and heard only the birds. We were satisfied - but not effusive. We would go for walks but rarely meet anyone; we would greet our neighbours but rarely socialise; to go anywhere, we needed to drive.

Change came when our daughters moved away. We spent three months in Manhattan when our granddaughter was born. We learned the joys of not having to drive all the time, having shops and activities in walking distance and the surprising pleasures of being surrounded by other people. We looked for an alternative to Killara.

We have lived in Pyrmont since 2014 and loved it from the beginning. We have made friends and feel settled. We have joined the walking group, the history group, a cycling group, do yoga, go to community dinners. A trip to the shops isn't just a chore as we always run into neighbours. We are surrounded by interesting and interested people. The city and its attractions are within walking distance and there is always something to do. In summary - it's a great life.

The circle does a full turn and I believe I have found a community like the one my parents had to leave behind in Alexandria.

