

## **MORE MIGRATION STORIES - MEN**

### **M.N.**

In year 1941 we were moved by the Germans to Regensburg, for whoever did not join Kulturbund, had to go. The Germans wanted to Germanize the Slovenian Styria, including Maribor. The whole families were taken on trucks, than trains. The farm animals and everything was taken from the people. Only one case per person was allowed, the personal things only.

After the war we wished to return to Slovenia. We came to Munich and the Americans stopped us with questions: "Which camp? Tito's or the camp of King Peter?" We went to Leopold Kasarna, the German camp. They would not let us go ahead.

At the Displaced Persons Camp I met my wife. We married in a civil ceremony. We even received a present from the International organization. There were so many bugs in the camp. They were falling down on you from the ceiling.

In the year 1946-1949 they approved me and my wife for Argentina, but not my parents, for the other children were too small. In year 1950 we could all come to Australia.

On the ship I could meet my wife during the day. In the room, where I slept, there were 150 of us. The cargo ship carried 3000 passengers.

In Australia, at Spencer Street Station, there was a rabbit. On the way to Bonegilla we have seen millions of rabbits.

At the barrack there was someone asking for my name. I went with him and I was most happy to meet my mother and my two brothers.

Everyday we went to English classes and caught up to 60 rabbits for the cook. The Australians I met, were kindhearted, happy people.

We were taken to Melbourne, to Williamstown camp, to the half-barrel tin barracks.

I was given work at Port Melbourne. I remember, how a Polish person gave me money – the pay in advance, so I could get home that day.

We were married in Australian church by a Slovenian priest. We ate powdered eggs, mixed with milk and water, and baked it, for we had no money. The United Nations Relief Appeal gave us some chocolate, cigarettes and canned meat – a 5kg food parcel.

We often thought of the friends they were left behind in Germany.

We became active in Slovenian community.

### **V.G.**

I was in a life threatening situation due to my political view I have decided to leave with my dear girlfriend. With my girlfriend, and others, we try to escape over border, which was guarded for 24 hours. There were shots fired, but the humanitarian guards were shooting at the ground. The girls had in fear dropped everything they carried. Not all of us succeeded the first time, some got caught and sent back. We returned and waited for a wet weather for the next try. In all the confusion the young girls, my girlfriend as well, were lost. I went back to get my girlfriend, and found all the girls wet and cold at the spot, where we stayed for the last three days. They have decided to report themselves to the police.

I made it over the border in a rainy night.

I wanted my girlfriend and was trying to get her over the border also. I found out that the girls were not jailed. My girlfriend was freed for a reason: as a bait for the police to catch me. In a month's time we went over the border again, back to former Yugoslavia. Two of my friends were caught. I was on my own again. I found my girlfriend. We slept over in the fallen leaves and the next day we left for the border. I was taking stone after stone from the stony Carst wall, so we would not have to climb so high. The border guard was only a metre and a half away from us. We were lucky, we were alive, even while my girlfriend was wet from fear.

For my freedom, and for freedom of my girlfriend I have illegally crosses the border three times.

We made it to Občine, where there was a center under the guidance of the United Nations organisation IRRO. My girlfriend and I got married. Via Banioli, Austria, Germany - Bremen, and with the ship Castel Bianco we arrived to Melbourne in 1951.

From Bonegilla camp the men were taken without wives' knowledge to fruit orchards at Shepparton, and women to Kyabram and some to Mooroopna hospital. Just by chance, has one of the workers visited Mooroopna. On his return, he pointed out the men whose wives he had seen there. He pointed at me, too. On my first day off I went to visit my wife. The women's living quarters were in the former morgue. With the fruit season at the end, we were transferred to army camp at Broadmeadows, but there was no work for my wife.

### **Anonymous**

I left for a new start and a better life in 1953. I walked barefoot for a long time. Once in Italy, I felt safe and reborn. In the camp, the Americans questioned me. The Catholic organization organized my documents. I traveled on the ship Toscana for 39 days, we sang for two days, so for the rest of the week we could not talk. We felt free, but afraid of not knowing where we are going. Once in Australia, I went to Bonegilla. My English lessons were with the pick and shovel.

I mix with Slovenians, so we can talk, sing and dance, read and listen to each other.

### **A.N.**

I was young and didn't want to go to compulsory army service. With some other guys we escaped to Italy. In camps we stayed for a few months. Sometimes we wished for more food. We were told, that we could sell ½ liter of blood, and the payment is good. I did it. I had money for more food. Then, soon, I went to another part of town and sold another ½ liter of blood. I should not have done it so often. I became weak, but I still obtained the approval to go with the ship to Australia.

### **Anonymous**

I walked over the mountains to Klagenfurt. The English organized everything in the Displaced Persons Camps. I was married, and returned to my wife in the then Yugoslavia. I was in jail for two years. In 1957 we escaped to Salzburg. With the ship Aurelia we traveled to Australia. I felt free. We arrived to Bonegilla camp in the dark.

I met many Slovenian people, we met and talked. We missed the language, our hometown and the people we left behind.

### **Z.N.**

I left by train, pretending to visit a friend with TB, and overnight I escaped to Trieste. It was a lovely night. I would be most embarrassed if I would get caught and sent back. In Italy, in Coroneo jail, I was 3 weeks and questioned regarding the military things, for they knew, I served the compulsory military service. For 13 months I waited in Italy. Many I knew, were returned to the then Yugoslavia. The police came at night, took them and sent them back. To Australia I traveled for 41 days with the ship Fairsea.

At first I worked in the factory, then left for the Snowy Mountain Project, at Cooma Point. I remember, that for every mile of the tunnel made, they were two men dead: some from explosions, some fell under the carriages. We tried to help them, but in vain – they were just taken away dead.

It was very cold. In year 1957, in Cabramatta there was so much snow, the cars were completely covered. There were no work inspections, except in year 1958, when the Queen Elizabeth II came.

One day we knocked down a wombat. The Australian with us said, that we can cook the wombat for two days with old leather boots, and after two days we can eat the boots, but not the wombat meat.

At Section Creek many Slovenians worked and we prepared our first *balinišče* – bowling alleys – bocce area.

At Island Band, below Mt. Kosciusko, there were many young men with no work in 1961 – 61. Many slept in churches and at Salvation Army centers. For 8 months we were taking food to them and one Slovenian burned in a barrack.

Later I worked also in Gladstone, Queensland and live now in Victoria.

### **Anonymous**

First time I crossed the border to Italy in 1956, but I was caught, someone betrayed me. Due to my youth, I was in jail for two days only. In 1959 I tried again. In Nova Gorica there were many tourists for the car races. I made over the border. I could part from my mother, before I left for Australia on a ship Aurelia.

When we crossed the Equator, there was a big celebration. We had a storm, too, and everyone was very sick.

At Fremantle, for my 21st Birthday, we bought bananas and ate them.

Pater Basil helped me from the ship and to get the job.

The Australians I first met, didn't like us, there were not friendly.

**Anonymous**

I left for a better life, together with two friends. We were frightened while crossing the border. At Glasenbach, near Salzburg, we stayed until our papers, Austrian passports, were organized. We traveled to Trieste by train and with the ship Aurelia to Australia, than to Bonegilla camp. The Australians I first met didn't want to know us - the migrants.

I felt sad and melancholic, when I heard Slovenian singing or received a letter from the home. My children are wondering, why I left for the land so far away.

**Anonymous**

I left for Australia in 1960 on a ship Aurelia. They were asking me, where I was going and I said with my 'polished' English, that to Hawthorn.

I remember most the incident while departing from the ship. The customs officer was suspicious of my padded suit. He was convinced, I was smuggling something into the country. I strongly believed, I was wearing the suit of the very best quality and style, padded across the chest and shoulders, the craftsmanship of a home tailor.

Later I joked, that not even my girlfriend had touched me all over as the customs officer did.

The homesickness passed quickly when I found job and friends.

*Compiled by Draga Gelt*