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BY MICK SKRIDJEL

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Revvng the guts out of the "Humber Snipe"

After working at the Mensal Bluestone Quarry in Hamilton (early 60's) for several weeks, I upgraded my position and went to work with the Yugoslavian painters. We lived in caravans and we shifted from place to place. I was being paid £16 a week pus food and board. We worked 6 days a week from sun up til sun down.

I saved £300 and I went and bought myself a car. I had never sat behind a steering wheel before that. I bought a car from Riley Motors in Hamilton.

The car was a Humber Snipe and I paid £300 for it. I also gave him £20 to insure the car. At that time we were painting in Casterton and the people that I bought the car from drove the car out of Hamilton for me so that I could drive home 40 miles away.

It took me many hours to get there. The car was boiling all the time. I ran out of petrol 2 hours to Colerain. I was very happy to finally arrive home in Casterton. When I arrived home, the owner of the house asked me if I bought a car, which I said yes to and that the car was no good. I explained all the troubles that I had had coming home in the car.

He then asked me to take him for a drive to show him how I was diving, which I did. When we got onto the open road, he started laughing. When I asked him why, he said that the car had 5 gears and that I was only driving in first gear, I didn't know how to change the gears!

In Casterton, Victoria, Australia

Hand busting work in the quarries

After arriving in Hamilton from Glenthompson on foot (30 miles), I worked at Mensal Bluestone Quarry for several weeks.

My job was breaking huge bluestone rocks with a sledgehammer into smaller pieces so that they can then lift and load into a steel container which a truck picks up and take to the crusher. It was then crushed into bluestone which was used to build roads. The work was very hard. My hands were bleeding continuously.

I worked there for several weeks until the same Police Officer, who had come to visit me several times to see how I was going, told me that some of my Yugoslavian countrymen were in town and they were painting around the place and that he will come to pick me up after I finished work so that he could take me to see him. He said that painting was much easy than breaking rocks for the Quarry.

That night, I met those painters and they agreed to give me a job. I gave notice at the Quarry and I thanked the owner very much for giving me a chance to work.

In Hamilton, Victoria, Australia

The long and hard slog to Hamilton

In the early 60's, I worked in at a Brickworks in Glenthompson for approx 3 months and for all of that time, they were taking £2 a week from my pay for the blankets. As I didn't have any clothes, I bought some for myself as well as food. There was very little left afterwards for me to save. After 3 months of me working there, the credit squeeze forced the Brickworks to shut. We all lost our jobs.

I had savings of £10, no English & didn't know anybody. I started to walk towards Hamilton, which was 30 miles away. It took me 2 days to reach Hamilton & I walked through until I found a park and that's where I made my home. I slept on the bench. I tried to look for a job but where do you look?

Finally one night, the police came while I was sleeping on the bench & they took me to Hamilton Police Station. After a good while of them trying to tell me things & me not understanding a single word, they got an Italian guy in to translate for them & me. They asked me what I was doing there. I told them what had happened. They told me that there is a law in Australia called Vagrancy Law, which meant that without means of support, there's a one month imprisonment automatically. After heated discussions between several Police Officers, one Police officer took me which I believe was his home where I stayed the night.

The next day he found me a job & he took me to some Italian people where they got me a room & he paid for the first weeks rent until I earned my first weeks wages.

In Hamilton, Victoria, Australia

What Made Me Come to Australia

I decided to come to Australia from the camp in Latina when I asked 2 questions to an Australian representative whom I believe was Billy Sweden - I liked the answer to the questions. The 2 questions I asked were: Is there work in Australia for me and will I be equal with the other citizens there. Both answers to those questions were yes.

After passing all of the medical and Interpol checks, I was accepted to come to Australia.

I arrived here on 14th April 1961. We landed at the Princess Pier in Melbourne and from there we were put onto the train to Albury-Wodonga and went from there on a bus to Bonagila. In Bonagila, the camp was full. Many thousands of all different nationalities were there. Australia was experiencing credit squeeze. There were no jobs. I spent several months in Bonagila going to the office everyday and asking for a job. Finally I was called one day and was offered a job at the Glenthompson Brickworks. I accepted it immediately.

In Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

My Life Before Arriving in Australia

I was born on 1st March 1941 in Yugoslavia. I lost my parents very early on in my childhood. I grew up on my own. I worked to support myself from the age of 13 and I completed high school as well as my trade in Belgrade. I grew up in Belgrade and stayed there until I was 17.

After serving several masters I decided that I wanted a peaceful life. A life where I could work and look towards the future.

I returned to Italy for a second time as a political refugee. In a camp in Italy, the conditions were atrocious. Breakfast was a cup of coffee and nothing else. Lunch was 100grams of bread and dinner was soup. There were 25,000 of us in that camp. There were usually 2 showers working, 1 day a week for 2 hours. To wash myself and my clothes, I would bathe in the river to keep clean, even in winter.

I spent 6 months in a camp in Latina, which was approximately 80k's south of Rome. Latina was a city built by Mussolini. It was built approx 8-10k's from the beach, thinking that it would eventually expand to the sea. I'm sure that today, Latina has reached the sea. At that time, in the camp, I could have migrated anywhere in the West. America, Canada, Germany, Sweden, anywhere.

In Latina, Italy

About Author

Mick Skrijel

I was born on 1/3/1941 in Yugoslavia and moved to Australia in 1961 looking for a peaceful life. Here is my story.

Why is the website called bytestories.com?

This is a place for "byte-sized" stories and there is a 1500 character (about 250 words) limit for two main reasons. Firstly, we want you to know that "War and Peace" isn't required to leave your mark. Secondly, it takes about 2 minutes to read each story meaning you can head here whenever you want a quick (and entertaining) read.

If you would like to share a story or create your own eBook, simply head to bytestories.com, Register an account and click on the "Share a Story" button.