

Lena Akiloff, 13 Oct 2005

**RUSSIAN RISSOLES – FLATTER & TASTIER
LET'S GO AND SEE THE AUSTRALIA
WHAT A DUMP, WHAT A PLACE**

[FB06]: I think 1950. I'm sure that's JC. What for you want all these details?

[FB02]: That's Mary, that's me in the middle, and that's Levina... Mrs Bernie [Foster].

[Photo of three girls]: Levina was cooking and I was helping in the kitchen, and she was in the wards with the patients, she used to bring some food, and take the pan outside, y'know.

I haven't got that photo. I'm sure I haven't. I haven't got all these photos. I suppose maybe they was taking and didn't give us. I have only one photo of Levina, that's all.

[McNickle teaching them English]: We used to go there evening, and mosquitoes was biting us and we couldn't stand, after working such a hard day, and we didn't have any electric fan. Broken shift... ahh.

We'd been living last year in Shanghai, and when communism start they sent us Philipine Island, and we was living there in the tents, big camp, y'know, all emigrants from China. We only stay there for four months and Australia was start to asking people to come to Australia. We had a big family and all young girls. When we came here, 12th of June, 1949, they only started sending us to work, in October because there was coal strike. Everything was stopped and we was sitting in a camps. First we was in the [?] and, after, they sent us to Nelson's Bay, and then after Nelson's Bay they sent us to Greta Camp, and from Greta, we only stayed there for three weeks, and after they started... That's the first one, they need three girls, and I went, Sophia used to push me, she said "You go ask in office" she was very shy. When I went in they said they need girls, three girls; and was two of us and Mary said "If you going I'm coming with you".

We all know each other in Shanghai. Sonja she's my elder sister; and Mary the other girl, she came same city from where we were born; and she was born there too. I was born in China, yes.

My parents, they White Russians, not Soviet Russia. Like when there was Czar. They from Siberia. After revolution, was hard, and they settled to China. Actually, they run away from Russia and they settled in China like everybody else. They settled 1923 and then we moved from where I was born in 1947, and after, we stayed another city and then the American people they ask us to Shanghai and we stay in Shanghai and after we moved to Phillipine and from Phillipine we came to Australia. I did my schooling in Shanghai. But we didn't finish the school because everything was just... we left and when we came here we already signed the contract for two years to stay in one place. We couldn't go to school. And we didn't know the English that's why we have to learn English. But we didn't learn *much*. When I came to finish the contract I had to go to work and I was doing correspondent course.

We came together with parents because there was communism in China. Everybody was leaving China. We came with big boatload of people to Sydney. We didn't know where we working. I said to Sonja: "It doesn't matter. We going and that's it. If you don't want to go, well, you can stay and somebody else will come with us". Because she's very shy, y'know. She said: "Suppose maybe we better wait." I said "How long we have to wait? We been waiting already since June. Let's go and see the Australia"

We could have sayed we don't want to go to JC. And then we have to wait another... I don't know how long. So anyway I said "What's the difference where to work? We still have to work in the same place for two years. Let's go and see Australia".

First we went to Brisbane. They sent us to Brisbane from Greeter camp, and someone was... already they had the connections. When we arrived to Brisbane, someone was kind to us and introduced themselves, and then they gave us some money, and then some sandwiches, and then they said you going on this train.

A council chap was came to meet us at JC. He said "Its not that far where I'm going to take you", so he brought us to the hospital. I stayed two years.

I went to Brisbane; my mother was living in Brisbane. I stayed there for couple of weeks, and after, I came to

Sydney. I'm still here.

JC? Waah! Well, we didn't have any choice; just start to work and that's it. Matron was kind to us, she said "Better go and have a shower" and, after, Nora was kind and invite us for dinner. She was single. I was surprised when you said to me she still in JC. I couldn't... I couldn't wait till two years finish. I think I didn't stay enough... two weeks I left... I was just couldn't anymore, and I said I can't. They asked me to stay longer because no one would want to go there. And I said "No... no no no no no. I'm going; I'm going *now*".

The worst thing? The heat. Heat, flies, sandflies and mosquitoes. We couldn't sleep at night. We had a mosquitoes nets but that didn't help at all. They got through the mosquito net, y'know.

11.10: The best? ... Nothing, no.

Have I ever been back? You kidding? Naaahh. I wouldn't spend money to go to JC. Friend of ours, they went for a trip and then they went to JC and sent me a card. She said "What a dump. What a place. How could you stay there for two years?". And I said "I wouldn't have any choice". We could ask for change, but we didn't, y'know, it doesn't matter.

A year later I was cooking because Matron asked me. I remember Sonja, she said: "Cook something else. Change the menu." And I start to change the menu and everybody in hospital ask "What's that?" I used to make Russian rissoles, not the Australian round one, the flat one; flatter and much tastier. I did it my way, y'know. And then everyone liked it, y'know. I thought "That's Good" and I used to start baking cakes and all that.

[What she did in JC]: Nothing. Oh yes, we used to go to pictures, yeah. We used to go to dancing, y'know, once a month, I used to order dresses from Sydney, by catalogue, We had a great time. I used to go to dancing. Mary used to go but Sonja, no.

No, not train; air. No, not that trains, no way. Not cattle trains. Once I was going back, I went to holidays to Brisbane, and supposed to be landed in JC, and they went to Cloncurry, and I had to come back by train, an old cattle train.

What for you want all that information? You want to write a book, or what? And then who going to read all those stories?

Sonja was stay longer and she asked me to stay. I said "No way. I'm going to mother's, and after, I'll go somewhere else."

[Querying story about Mary's relatives]

Imagine if we wouldn't like there and we just pack up and went. They would have sent us back because we signed contract for two years. Doesn't matter they sent us to JC. We ended up there and that's all.

End of recording