

Ten Pound Poms

by
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Our family had been struggling for many years, financially. The death of my husband has been hard on everyone, as it was so sudden and unexpected.

Ever since my husband passed, two years ago, it has just been me and our five beautiful children.

Each day when I look into their eyes, it reminds me of him, which is hard. And although they can be difficult sometimes, they really have been amazing these past two years.

Although it is unusual for a mother with five children to have a job during these times, my husband, Clive, was our only source of income whilst he was alive and well. This meant that if I wanted to not only support myself but also my family, I had to find a source of income. I decided to get a job as a shop assistant at the local corner store.

I met Clive at Chichester Secondary School when we were 16 years old, so once we graduated I had no reason to study at university, as I was going to be a wife and a mother. We had Charles a year after we graduated and went on to get married the following year, so my life was set out for me by the age of 20.

Although my job at the local corner store wasn't the best of jobs, it got us by. But once my youngest son grew ill, most of my income was going towards his treatment.

Every day when I was at the register, in the corner of my eyes I could see a newspaper that read *Enjoy a sunny life in a land of opportunity and earn £24 a week.*

I had always hated the English weather, always raining and cold, and come to think of it, I have always wanted to live somewhere sunny and warm. I certainly wouldn't mind living in a beautiful country like Australia.

After many conversations, the kids and I decided we were ready for change.

We packed our bags and walked through the typical English puddles to Chichester Harbour. A ship, larger than any I have seen, read *BRITANIS*.

We all reluctantly and timidly boarded the ship, one at a time. But once we were on the ship, I could feel the weight of the stress and anxiety lift off my shoulders.

My hair was blowing in the cool sea breeze. Each of the children, except one, were smiling from ear to ear. They wouldn't be able to wipe the smiles off their faces even if they tried. Charles was not smiling. In fact, a single teardrop fell from his flustered, blank face, as he looked longingly to the town he called home. As I walked toward him, he turned around, faced me, and said "Why do you never listen to me." He paused before saying "I told you I didn't want to leave and you did not listen to me."

"Look, Charles, I am only doing what I think is best for you."

Charles shook his head and chuckled. "You're not doing this for any of us. You're doing this for yourself. You are running away from your problems and forcing us to tag along with you and quite frankly, I'm sick and tired of it."

"This is a chance for a new start for all of us. And what better place to start fresh than in a new country."

"I can think of plenty better places. Thanks a lot," said Charles with tears rolling down his face.

And as he walked away, a loud acoustic sound echoed through not only the ship, but through the town, we once called home.

We arrived in Australia in a little over half the expected time, as the trip was so smooth sailing. I believe that this was a sign from Clive that I was doing the right thing. And although it didn't feel like it right now, everything was going to work out just fine.

As we stepped off the ship, the air so hot it could melt ice cream in seconds, blew onto our pale English faces.

I looked over to my eldest daughter, with the humid air blowing her chestnut hair off her face, revealing her beaming smile. Then I looked to Charles, who had a frown on his face. I tried to ignore it, as began to walk through the busy streets of Sydney, hoping for a miracle.

I have to say that I, being the negative Nelly I am, did not expect to actually make it to Australia in one piece. But here we are in Australia, with nothing but our handheld suitcases. *But where ever are we to live* I thought to myself. Of course, the children did not know or understand that we have no place to live. So I began to panick discreetly, hoping that no one would notice.

We began to walk through the main street, weaving through the large groups of people. I looked down and noticed that everyone around me was wearing thongs on their feet. I looked up and funnily enough, every single person was wearing shorts, a tank top, and thongs. I almost chuckled at this sight. It was as though I was watching a stereotypical movie. I turned to look at my daughters who were wearing tight-fitted grey dresses, with a belt around their waist. Then I turned to look at my sons who were wearing khakis and button-up shirts. My smile began to fade. I hadn't noticed until now how much we stand out from the rest of the people walking through these compact streets. My worried face likely grew more noticeable now that I was focused on how out of place we looked. I was always one who did not enjoy standing out from others.

A pickup truck suddenly braked next to us. I didn't take any notice until a nice man, with his window rolled down and his arm leaning on the door said 'You lot look lost. Let me give you a ride.'

'We will be just fine, Thank you,' I replied

Ignoring me, my eldest son replied 'We would very much love... a ride,' hesitating as I looked harshly at him.

The nice, but infuriating man, exited the truck and opened the back door. 'Climb on in,' he said.

Each of my children scrambled into the scruffy and grimy truck, piled on top of each other, leaving me standing alone in the scorching sun. The man closed the door behind the children, turned to me, and said ‘Don’t be shy, hop in the front seat next to me.’

I reluctantly ‘hopped’ into the dirty pickup truck. I turned to look at the children, who looked exhausted and relieved to be in the air-conditioned truck. I won’t lie, I probably would have passed out if I stayed in the Australian sun any longer.

‘So, where are you off to?’ the man asked.

I had no clue what ‘off to’ meant. So instead of answering his question, I stared blankly at his sunburnt face.

‘Where are you going?’ the man repeated.

‘Oh! Well, that is a very good question. We were walking through the streets, hoping to find somewhere to stay,’ I replied.

‘Well, it’s a good thing I found you then. I know this city inside out and I reckon I can find somewhere for you lot to stay in a matter of minutes,’ the man said, as he began to drive off. ‘My name’s Jack by the way.’

We only drove a few minutes up the road, before Jack pulled his truck over on the side of the road in front of a small building that read ‘Sandy’s Holiday House’.

‘Wait here one moment,’ said Jack, as he stepped out of the truck.

He walked through the double doors and towards the man at the front desk. We could hear distant yelling, coming not from the man at the front desk, but from Jack. ‘These nice Brits have paid good money to come to our country. Letting them stay here would be the nice thing to do. You don’t want people in this city to think you are ingenuine do you, Sandy?’ said Jack.

Jack walked towards the truck, opened the door, and said ‘looks like you have a place to stay for a while, whilst you settle down.’

‘I can’t thank you enough Jack. You have been more than generous,’ I said with what must have been a look of shock on my face. ‘Say thank you, children.’

An array of ‘thank yous’ echoed throughout the truck.

‘It’s not a problem at all,’ said Jack. ‘You best come and see your new home’

We said goodbye to Jack, although he ensured us that we would see him again.

We then entered the ‘holiday house’ and were guided to our 3 bedroom ‘house’, by the man at the front desk.

I placed my small suitcase on the bed and unzipped it. Inside was, of course, warm weather clothes and swimwear, but inside the suitcase was also a picture of my late husband, pictures of home, and small mementos, all of which reminded me of our small English community. A single tear fell from my face, not in sadness, but in happiness. I have loved England my whole life and I will continue to love England forevermore, but this is my new home. I turned to look at Charles, who had a rare smile on his face, as though he was finally happy to be here. But once he caught my gaze, he returned to an expressionless face. I looked back towards the suitcase and chuckled, my eyes filling with tears.

Inspiration: Yaadon Ka Dher (Bundle of Memories) (Haider 2021)

