



Anne racing over the dunes on Moreton Island

## Anne's Adventures in Oz

As she's done before when we were living in reasonable places, Sarah's mom Anne visited us this Spring (that'd be Fall for most of you). The visit was relaxed rather than hard-core touring. Activities included taking the dog to the groomers, walking around the local shopping center looking for stuff for the Halloween party; coming home via Lake Kurwongbah (a pretty Brisbane water supply), Dayboro, and Samford, for a nice drive in the country.

Went to Halloween party (Bill as an admiral, Sarah as an Indian princess, and mom as a kung fu black belt).

Drove up the coast to Eumundi for the Wednesday outdoor markets. It was raining, but there was some cover. Had a nice shop and ate hamburgers at Hungry Jack's (Burger King) on the way home.

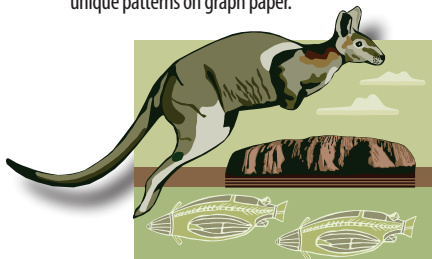
Went to the Botanical Gardens with Bill and the kids. Spent time at the Japanese Garden photographing water dragons.

Lunched with Sarah at the Mt. Coot-tha Botanical Gardens at their open air restaurant. Afterwards walked through the tropical dome and the desert area. Drove up to the top of Mt. Coot-tha for the view before coming home.

Spent an afternoon with the kids at the Koala Sanctuary on the Brisbane River. Not only saw koalas, but also fed kangaroos and emus. Emus can be scary! Enjoyed a sheepherding demonstration, especially the iconic shepherd, saw some wombats, and tried to get a cockatoo to talk to us.

Spent 3 days at Tangalooma Wild Dolphin resort, Moreton Island (3rd largest sand island in the world).

Visited the Brisbane Art Museum. Were fortunate to be there while they were overhauling the fountain system. Saw some interesting aboriginal work as well as some guy who makes unique patterns on graph paper.



AUSTRALIA

## So What Are We Doing Here, Anyway?

Well, yeah, so we thought we were going to live in Houston for years and years. It's a very nice place, all things considered, and life was going well enough...except that Bill hated his job and hated his commute.

Turns out Bechtel's Oil, Gas, & Chemicals unit (OG&C)—where Bill spent most of 2007—does business in a very different way than the other GBUs, and ultimately it wasn't a very good fit. Also, getting up at 5 in the morning to join 100,000 of his close personal friends on a 12-lane freeway streaming into the city wasn't anyone's idea of fun.

Nevertheless, Bill had every intention of just soldiering along and doing his best.

And then he got an email from someone he'd never met in Mining & Metals in Australia, asking him if he could recommend someone qualified for a short-term but highly intense assignment. He submitted a couple of consultants' names, and in sheer impulse, sent along his résumé, along with the offhand statement, "I know you'd never pay for relocation, but if you want to consider me for your long-term position, well, heck, here's my CV." Their response was uncomplicated: "When can you be here?"

Which \*was\* complicated. We had relocated to Houston less than a year before and the company frowns on expensive moves so close together. Nevertheless, OG&C was very understanding, and everything was kicked into action.



Sarah at Burrum Heads

Getting ready for an international move is always pretty painful, and this one was made worse by the uncharacteristic ineptitude of the relocation firm. Ultimately, though, we arrived in Brisbane, Australia, and eventually found a place to live with a \*great\* commute (Bill walks to the train); a job Bill really likes; and an intention (seriously!) to stay here for a good long spell—at least until we've launched the kids into college.

Despite the tremors running through world markets (and some slowdowns on some of our projects), the Mining & Metals business is doing quite well, and Australia is a really great place to live and raise children. Not perfect but still great.

So: another address (but we did just sign a new year-long lease!):

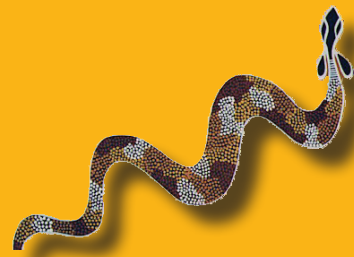
**BILL & SARAH & GWENDI & RICHIE KRITZBERG**  
82 HUXLEY AVENUE  
ALDERLEY, QLD, AUSTRALIA 4051



Gathered around the 4-wheel drive bus that took us to the sand tobogganing course



# "THE LUCKY COUNTRY"



What's the thematic heart of Australia? Is it the stark but beautiful land? Is it the contrast between lush rainforest and barren desert . . .

...often coexisting within feet of each other? Is it the aboriginal dreamtime subsumed by the British dream of empire? Is it the intense pride in martial virtues expressed by a holiday celebrating of one of history's greatest military fiascos? Is it a culture of youth that gives genuine respect almost exclusively to the aged?

I'll spare you the suspense: Australia's theme is irony. Look at the slang: "she'll be right" means things are FUBAR; the tough as nails, independent cobbler pushes to the front of the line for government handouts; the astounding, unequalled, irreplaceable Great Barrier Reef is poisoned by the tourist infrastructure that makes it accessible to the world. It's the biggest island in the world, a continent in its own right—with fewer people than Mexico City.

AUSTRALIA IS EXTREME.



## A Year Down Under

### DECEMBER

**WE ARRIVE IN AUSTRALIA**, and start looking for housing and schools. This complicated by the fact that the Internet is unbearably slow, Aussie realtors don't speak to one another or venture outside their own little 2-square kilometer territories, and local parents enroll their children in schools at least two years in advance. We have a great time with old Hong Kong friends who drop by Oz. Ultimately we find a house in the suburb of Alderley. Gwendi will attend the local state high school, and Richie a state primary school within walking distance.



Richie at the Great Barrier Reef

### JANUARY

**WE MOVE INTO** our new house. the owner agrees to rent it furnished until our shipment arrives, so we don't have to sleep on the floor. Sarah starts attending a local church and makes a new friend, Sarah. Sarah, who has 3 daughters (11, 14, and 16), invites Sarah and the kids on a trip to Stradbroke Island ("Straddie") for a last-chance-before-school-starts outing. Sarah loves Straddie and immediately plans to get Bill out there sometime. Gwendi mistakes the 11-year-old for the 14-year-old and decides they have little in common (Aussies tend to be on the tall side).

The school year starts in the last week in January. Richie likes his school. Gwendi starts at Kelvin Grove and after the first day, tells mom that classes are completely out of control. The kids jump on desks, cliques rule regions of the classroom, and students tell the first-year teacher to "shut up" (or worse). Mom says, "Give it another day." The next day isn't any better. In fact, it's beginning to sound like the later chapters of *Lord of the Flies*. By the fourth day, Gwendi is enrolled in a private girls' school, Clayfield College, where Sarah's three girls go.

### FEBRUARY

**LUCY AND RUFUS ARRIVE IN BRISBANE.** We are so glad to see them. Brisbane has traditionally hot and humid summers and 2008 sees a break in a 5-year drought. Consequently, it's hot, sticky, and rainy. They tell us the heat might break in February. It doesn't. We're glad we rented a house with a pool. That hike around the Glass House Mountains is maybe a mistake, however. Good thing we finish the day at the beach in Caboolture.

Despite escaping the chaos of Kelvin Grove, Gwendi is not entirely happy about attending an all-girls schools where the uniform is a dress (oh no!) apparently designed by Amanda Bloomer in 1890 and PE is swimming (in a green and yellow Speedo). She makes friends, however, and things get better.

### MARCH

**MARCH IS MARCH.** Bill is in Santiago, Chile, for most of the month. When he returns, we go on a tour of St. Helena Island, now a national park, formerly a maximum security prison. If the movie *Jaws* still gives you the creeps, get this: the guards at St. Helena systematically fed the sharks to keep them nearby and make sure that any prisoner trying to escape would be eaten. Wisely, the prisoners refused to go into even shallow water to assist visitors off their boats. It was the one thing they could refuse to do without getting flogged.



### APRIL

**SCHOOL IN QUEENSLAND** is virtually year-round, with significant breaks between each term (we would say *quarter*). April sees the first term break, and Sarah realizes that most people actually take some sort of holiday four times a year. Bill has heard how wonderful a place called O'Reilly's (Lamington National Park) is, so Sarah makes the arrangements. It does not disappoint, with rainforest walks, waterfalls, exotic birds, glowworms, and pademelons. Pademelons? Very small kangaroos, about the size of a domestic cat . . . extremely cute. Unfortunately, we have to leave early on the last day so Richard can attend archery class. That's okay though, 'cause he wants to go back.

Gwendi goes to a 3-day camp with the other Year 9s at Clayfield College the first week of Term 2. Although initially reluctant to go, she has a great time and comes back bubbling with stories of sunrise in the mountains and raft-building exercises.

### MAY

**A REMARKABLY LOW-KEY MONTH.** School, work, groceries . . . that kind of thing.

### JUNE

**TERM 2 ENDS.** We go on holiday to a little beach town 4 hours north of Brisbane. It's midwinter and too cool to swim, but Rufus, who goes with us, loves it. When the tide is out over the very flat beach, he runs for miles over the wet sand. We take a day trip to Fraser Island, which is one of the largest sandbars in the world. It doesn't look like a sandbar, though. It is covered with vegetation, including some very tall trees, rises to a height of maybe 500 feet, and, at the top, has "perched" lakes. A perched lake is one that is isolated above the water table by a layer of rock or sediment. The ones on Fraser Island have neither inlets nor outlets. The only water they get is what falls directly into them as rain, and, I guess, if they overflow, it just seeps through the sand.

### JULY

**WE BRING RENO HOME FROM THE RSPCA.** School starts again, we have parent-teacher conferences, things like that.

### AUGUST

**EKKA MONTH IN BRISBANE.** The Ekka is Queensland's state fair (keep in mind the state of Queensland is as big as France, Spain, and Italy combined). As in the US, they have animals, product promotion displays, and a gymkhana. The big deal is "showbags," a concept that children love and toward which adults feel ambivalent. For a cost of \$5 to \$20, you can purchase a bag of specialized "goodies" (anything from candy to spa

coupons) worth \$20 to \$80. Of course the bag itself is part of the appeal. The problem is the increase in the population of Queensland over the last 20 years. While the "showbag hall," and, for that matter the whole Ekka grounds, may once have been a pleasant place to wander around, it now competes with the streets of Hong Kong for overcrowding.

### SEPTEMBER

**RICHIE TURNS 12.** To celebrate, we go to the nearest laser tag emporium with 7 other boys from school. Yes, they have laser tag here. Also, we learn that Gwendi's art teacher has entered one of her works in a local art contest. Gwendi finds out about this when she's called to the stage one day during assembly. Apparently she won first place in her age group as well as best of show. Hooray Gwendi!

Between Term 3 and Term 4 we fly up the coast to Cairns, primarily a tourist town and a jumping off spot to see the Great Barrier Reef. Yes, we do some awesome snorkeling. We also visit a crocodile farm and take a train trip up the rainforest-covered hills to a market town and come back via the longest gondola we've ever been on.

### OCTOBER

**WE ANTICIPATE AND PREPARE FOR** a visit from Sarah's mother, who actually arrives on the 26th. Bill has to keep working and the kids have to go to school, but we manage to work some fun things in anyway, such as a ferry ride on the Brisbane river.



Gwendi's award-winning etching

### NOVEMBER

**SARAH AND HER MOM** drive up to Eumundi, known for its craft markets. They also visit Mt. Coot-tha for the view and the botanical gardens and try to swim as much as they can. The last weekend before Gramma has to go home, we all go to Moreton Island (on the far side of Moreton Bay) for a three-day weekend, even though it means taking the kids out of school. We have a nice time swimming, touring, and dolphin watching. The last day we go sand tobogganing (really), but heavy rains the night before made the slopes too slow for some.

About those rains. The thunderstorms over Brisbane on the 16–18th are terrible (and fantastic to watch from the beach on Moreton Island). Our house is not affected, but some people's roofs are torn off or their windows smashed (by the accompanying hail). There is also flooding, with small creeks swelling to maybe 10 times their normal size, and ferry services shut down due to debris floating down the Brisbane River.

Gramma has to leave on November 21. We think the visit has not been long enough, but the flight could not be changed.

### DECEMBER

**THE HOT WEATHER REALLY ROLLED IN** with a vengeance the first week of the month. Brisbane summer temperatures rarely rise above 35°C (95°F). In fact the hottest it has been this year was 34°C (93°F) on December 13, but when the mercury rises, generally so does the humidity (in the summer it ranges between 30% and 80%), so Accuweather's "realfeel" can easily be 5°C (10°F) higher than the actual temperature. Thunderstorms continue at a rate of about two a week, but they are not severe. The newspaper says we are in for a true Queensland "Blue Christmas:" hot and wet. School is out for the summer, and starts again January 27. Richie graduates primary school (Year 7) in the last week, about 18 months after having graduated elementary school (5th grade) in Texas. He claims to be completely blasé about the whole thing, but his excitement over three medals (graduation, academic achievement, and musical achievement), seems to belie his attitude.



Gwendi Being Gwendi





In a world full of tragedy and woe, it seems selfish to dwell on one's own, but we had a small tragedy in our family this year – our globetrotting kitty Lucy, who'd been with us from Romania, to Maryland, to Houston, and then to Australia, was out one night doing what cats do and was struck by a car and killed.

In one sense, we were lucky: we found her by the side of the road a few hours later and were spared endless days and weeks of not knowing her fate. But it was a shock to us all. We buried her in the garden of the house we're renting and planted a native shrub over her. So now she's a permanent part of Australia.

After a suitable period, we all agreed we had to re-cat ourselves. Down to the RSPCA (*Royal Society for the Prevention...*) we went and into the feline section. Gwendi was designated Kitten Selector and stepped into a small enclosure full of tiny hyperkinetic creatures originally abandoned in boxes in alleys, dropped off in the dead of night at the RSPCA's gates, or brought in by frantic owners who just couldn't cope.

Within seconds, one striped tabby had jumped from the box he was playing on into Gwendi's arms and begun to clamber up her chest to lick her face, tossing in a rattling purr for good measure.

That was pretty much it for selection.

And so we welcome Reno to our peripatetic band. He's going to be much bigger than Lucy, and can hold his own in a wrestling match with our dog Rufus, but he's a real sweetheart — and still purrs like a wood chipper.



## Are You Smarter Than A Queenslander?

### Aussie Slang for the New Chum

#### 1. "A bit more choke and you would have started"

- a. How can we get your car going?
- b. You just passed wind
- c. You'll never get a date with that girl

#### 2. Damper

- a. A device to deaden the noise
- b. More rainy than yesterday
- c. A kind of quickbread

#### 3. Chrissie

- a. A famous tennis player
- b. Perfume named after a model
- c. Christmas

#### 4. Dodgy

- a. Good dance moves
- b. Doubtful in some manner
- c. Criminal

#### 5. Jumper

- a. An outer garment, sweater, or sweatshirt
- b. A sleeveless dress worn with a blouse
- c. A trampoline competitor

#### 6. Tradie

- a. A purchase by barter
- b. A newspaper for a particular line of work
- c. A plumber, electrician, or the like

#### 7. Hoon

- a. A car horn
- b. A reckless teenage driver (male)
- c. A large flightless bird

#### 8. Carn

- a. Try harder!
- b. Oh pshaw!
- c. Come again?

#### 9. Barg

- a. Root beer
- b. Plants that grow in a marsh
- c. A bargain

#### 10. Mexican

- a. Someone who lives in Mexico
- b. A type of food exotic to Australia
- c. Someone who lives in New South Wales

#### 11. Tunic

- a. A sleeveless dress worn with a blouse
- b. A vest
- c. A sleeveless surcoat

#### 12. Brekkie

- a. The weekend
- b. Breakfast
- c. A famous disc jockey

#### 13. Strine

- a. A device used in fossicking
- b. The national language of Australia
- c. Stress to the system; can cause a bad back

#### 14. Rort

- a. Dig for tubers
- b. The opposite of "Lefrt"
- c. To con or cheat

#### 15. Ropeable

- a. A serious offense to social order
- b. Easily led astray
- c. A contented sheep

#### 16. Little

- a. A tidbit
- b. An obligation to an unloved relative
- c. A child under 6 years old

#### 17. "A few kangaroos loose in the top paddock"

- a. An amateur stockman
- b. Mentally deficient
- c. Jumpy; nervous

#### 18. Togs

- a. Cheap footwear
- b. Swimsuit
- c. Fancy dress

#### 19. Tuckshop

- a. A reducing salon
- b. An upholsterer
- c. School canteen or cafeteria

#### 20. Queenslander

- a. Someone who lives in Queensland
- b. A distinctive style of Australian housing
- c. A supporter of the Maroons

(answers, Page 2)

