

LOVE, MARRIAGE, BABIES, THE WHOLE DARN THING.... EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY!

ANNA'S STORY

LOVE: Anna found love. His name was Walter. She was working behind the bar in a hotel. It was in Germany and the Second World War had ended in 1945. Walter had had a hard time. Born in 1928, Walter had been conscripted into the German Army at the age of 16 – he had no choice! When the war ended he had become a prisoner – of – war of the Americans and had been held at Dachau, a former German Concentration Camp. For Walter meeting Anna was the best thing that could have happened to him. They went to dances and had a wonderful time, even though Post War Germany was a terrible place to live. Food, clothing and money were scarce, but Walter had found a young woman who was hard working, resilient and practical. She would need these qualities now, and especially, in the future.

Because of the war, Germany needed rebuilding and Walter took various jobs in the building industry. Money was very short so they built whatever they could. But Anna had worked hard all her life too. Born in 1927, she had been fostered out as a tiny child to a kind and supportive farming family in Bavaria. Her foster brother, who was eight years older, was also from another family. They lived in the mountains of Bavaria on a farm with cows, pigs and crops such as wheat, oats and potatoes. Anna helped on the farm from a very early age but it was a very, very hard life, particularly under the Nazi Regime. Their farm produce was requisitioned for Party members with very little for themselves and the general population. Anna remembers the covert activity of shooting pigs, at night, and hiding the carcass, so there would be some fresh food for their family, and other workers sent to the farm to boost production of foodstuffs, particularly at harvest time.

Even though Anna had gone to an agricultural school to learn more about farming, the chores still had to be done. Anna pitched in and took on all the farming chores, as well as household duties. She had 6 months to go at school, then the war ended and she had to get a job. The Russians had taken over and because the farm was on land they needed for industry, they gave one hours notice for Anna's foster family to leave. After so many years working so hard to develop the land into a prosperous farm, Anna's foster father in despair, nearly took his own life. He was found, just in time, with a rope down in one of the sheds.

It was incredibly cold in the Bavarian mountains so Anna became an excellent knitter. Some farmers had sheep and because of the stringent rationing during and after the war, the raw wool could be bought, then processed, then spun on a spinning wheel before being knitted up into clothing. With clothing shortages everything was knitted; stockings, jumpers, underwear, everything, especially gloves and mittens as the farm supplied dairy products the cows had to be milked in the freezing conditions – morning and night!

Work behind the bar would have seemed easy compared to the hard, never - ending chores of a farming life, and, there was the bonus of meeting Walter!

MARRIAGE: Anna and Walter were married in 1950. They were young and ready to face a new life together. But because of shortages in post war Germany their wedding was not the lavish affair some young people have grown to expect. Money particularly was in short supply so Anna and Walter could not afford to be married in the Catholic Church. Anna's foster family had been Catholic so she would have liked to have been married in that church but it would have cost 200 marks which they didn't have. Instead they had a Registry Office marriage followed by afternoon tea with a few friends.

It was not until their daughter Irene was born in April 1954 that they had a modest wedding in a church and, her baptism!

BABIES: Anna had become pregnant a couple of times but had miscarried. She and Walter had moved to another town as Walter was following the building trade, or doing farm work. He worked incredibly hard and was never out of work, but he knew there had to be something better for his family. He made some enquiries about emigrating and spoke to Anna about the possibility of leaving Europe for either Canada or – Australia!

Life was so difficult for everyone in post war Europe, especially in Germany. With a tiny baby to consider, Anna and Walter wanted the very best for their precious daughter so they made the huge decision to migrate to one of the New World countries. What a decision – they knew no one, nor did they speak the language! But it had to be better than life in Germany under Russian domination. Anna remembered as a child how kind and friendly American prisoners - of – war had been, and how generous they had been with such luxuries as nylon stockings, chewing gum and – chocolate!

Such luxuries were virtually non existent for Anna and Walter and their friends and family. So after such a huge decision, they applied to both the Canadian and the Australian authorities, and then waited to see which country contacted them first! It was the Australians, followed a few days later by the Canadians!

Luckily Irene was such a good baby, she was never any trouble. In January 1955 when she was 9 months old, the young family packed their few belongings, farewelled their family and friends and travelled by train to Bremerhaven. They each had a suitcase, a box with some bed linen and only five pounds!

But their luck was in. After lives of such hardship, Anna, Walter and little Irene finally got to have some luxury in their lives. The ship taking them to Australia was the luxury Dutch liner, the Johanne von Oldenbarnveldt. It was the first time it had taken European immigrants to the other side of the world, and for Anna, her beloved husband Walter and beautiful baby daughter Irene, it was 6 weeks of utter luxury.

There was nothing to do! Everything was done for them – it was all First Class! Never had they enjoyed such a life or had such food, or even belated Christmas and New Years celebrations! Irene was put in the ship's childcare, but didn't like it and cried. So Anna thought, 'Why put her in there, I'm not doing anything else, why not enjoy

ourselves together as a family before the hard work starts again in Australia. What a wonderful holiday – on the way to a new life!

...THE WHOLE DARN THING

Friends asked Anna and Walter, ‘Aren’t you scared – a new country, a new language?’ But they answered ‘As long as we can get a job and work as hard as we always have, we will be alright, and so it was!’

Just off the ship in Melbourne they were organised into farm work by an enterprising but kindly employer who arranged for newly arrived European migrants to work on several of his farms. Australia after World War Two was desperate for labour and farm produce was a high priority to feed the ever increasing post war population.

Walter put as much effort into this work as he had done in Germany. But in Australia there were more opportunities to better himself and provide comfortably for his family which, after April 1959 included a tiny son named Heinz. The family was based in the Ballarat area, one of the coldest parts of Victoria, but mild compared to the mountains of Bavaria.

A simple house was provided by their Australian employer, who, like them, was not afraid of hard work, and had become so successful that he and his family lived in a beautiful home in Geelong. They could even afford to send their two children to the prestigious Geelong Grammar, the same school, attended for a while, by Prince Charles.

If, for some reason, Anna and Walter and the children had to leave one place, the ‘Boss’ always found them another. But no matter how hard they worked, it was difficult learning a new language and trying to adapt to unfamiliar ways. Poor Anna remembered the never ending work involving the cloth nappies worn by her babies, the boiling the nappies in the copper, the wringing them out and hanging them on the clothesline. Such a lot of work to keep the children warm, clean, safe, comfortable and fed while trying to work out how to shop and how to have a social life when you didn’t speak the language.

She remembered the despair and floods of tears as she tried to cope with a very unfriendly woman who had to share a clothesline with Anna, but refused to let her use her allocated space – especially with so many cloth baby nappies and children’s clothes. But the ‘Boss’ soon fixed that – he got Anna her own clothesline! Anna remembered the kindness of this man and his wife, and it was only about 10 years ago that the annual Christmas cards between the families finally ceased.

EXPECTATIONS: Anna and Walter had few expectations of their new lives. They knew they would have to work just as hard but Australia was a ‘land of opportunity’. Anna could stop work and concentrate on bringing up her two young children and Walter did not stay with farm labouring for very long. He applied for a job in ground staff at the Melbourne Airport in the suburb of Essendon and was successful. He settled into his new job and was happy and secure – but still worked very, very hard – he was even involved in shifting some of the hangars from Essendon to Tullamarine

Airport. Both Anna and Walter knew that there would be no ‘handouts’ – everything had to be worked for, but they expected that.

Walter did so well in his job that he was able to send Anna and the children back to Europe for a holiday of 3 or 4 months to see relatives and friends. It was 1963 and Anna was able to show her children, Irene and Heinz to her in-laws, their only grandparents as well as to her now aged foster parents. Life had continued to be extremely hard for those left in Germany – with the Russians in charge. But for Anna and the children they knew they were going back to Australia, a land of opportunity – and the hard working Walter.

In 1966, Anna, Walter and the children packed the car and set off for a holiday. They decided to drive from Melbourne to Queensland. When they got to Yass they decided to break the journey and visit friends in Queanbeyan who had come out on the boat with them. As well they thought they might visit the National Capital, Canberra, so they stopped in Northbourne Avenue to ask a workman how to get there. They couldn't believe it when he said they were there!

On the way back Walter thought he might ask at the Airport to see if there were any jobs available – there was! The family liked what they saw in Canberra so packed up their home in Melbourne, came back to Queanbeyan and put their name down for a government house in Canberra. They eventually got a brand new one in Higgins in 1969 – and there they stayed for thirty years! The children were educated in Queanbeyan and Canberra, got jobs, married and both are settled in Canberra not far from Anna. Grandchildren arrived and have settled in other parts of Australia. Anna is now a great grandmother!

In the cold mountains of Bavaria Anna's knitting skills kept her warm. In Australia her knitting was so fantastic she supplied a commercial outlet with high class knitted jumpers which sold for very, very high prices. Her skills were very much in demand but more importantly, Anna was able to knit wonderful baby clothes for her ever increasing precious family.

REALITY: Anna believes she has had a very lucky life. But as she reflected on her life she remembered that as she grew up she thought that, even if she had children, and she wasn't married, she would never, ever give them away. She remembered the day as if it was yesterday, as a tiny little girl her mother saying, ‘I'll be back in a minute. I'm just going to get some lollies for you. She never did, and she never came back. Anna found it very hard to forgive her. But her foster family were a wonderful supportive family, but it was never the same as your own. Anna had been born in 1927 in the Sudetenland, part of Eastern Germany, taken over by the Russians, and now part of Czechoslovakia.

Family history for Anna's family centres on Walter's family where there is a rich Bavarian history going back to Medieval times. Walter's mother had died so she didn't get to meet her Australian grandchildren when they visited Germany in the 1960s. Sadly when Anna and Walter went back together to visit Germany later in 1976, Walter's father had passed away just four weeks before they arrived. Walter had so looked forward to seeing his father again.

Walter's own health began to fail after so many long years of hard work. He was in hospital for some time as a heart specialist tried to control his angina and he also suffered from diabetes. Sadly he passed away some years ago now leaving Anna to continue the journey on her own. There are now no relatives in Germany or Melbourne. Anna's sister – in – law and brother – in – law, Walter's siblings, ceased contact when Walter passed away. However recently a distant cousin managed to track Anna down and was thrilled to be able to visit her.

But Anna says she has been so lucky with her children and grandchildren. She has made a life here and her immediate family are her people now. Her own health is failing now and it is increasingly difficult to see clearly, but memories are there, some good and some not so good. What a huge decision they made when they left the old country in 1955! But an even better decision was made by Anna in 1950 when she married Walter and started her own precious family.