

SECOND LETTER
FROM THE GROUP STUDY EXCHANGE TEAM
IN AUSTRALIA

The second week of our team's experience in Australia went by quickly. The first part of the week was hectic and highly scheduled. There were three consecutive days of intensive touring and long nightly meetings. The latter half of the week we spent a lot of time just learning about Australians through talking and playing and generally living with our hosts. We have found that the real worth of the exchange program, for us, is in these "free" times we spend with our host families and their friends. I find that I learn more about Australians just eating breakfast with a family than by touring a factory. When the two year old keeps pulling the venetian blind string while you are eating and the general uproar seems just about as loud as at home, you feel more like one of the family than a "foreigner."

I was fortunate to spend one of our first free weekends with the son of one of my hosts. Stuart is a resident physician, is twenty-five, and is engaged to be married. He and his fiancée, Ginny, took me on an Australian "country" weekend retreat. It is hard to believe that I have so many lasting impressions of the people I met on that trip.

Paul and Paula were our hosts. When you ask Paul what he does for a living he tells you he is a farmer. In fact, he is what we would call a cattle rancher. Farmer means plant or animal crop here. Paul is a reserved sort of guy who looks strong and gentle at the same time. Paula, who is a registered nurse, is expecting her first child. As a young Australian couple, they stand out in my mind for several reasons. They both welcomed me as part of the family. At first, I thought that they were only being overly polite. As the weekend went on, however, I could sense that they were really sincere. This impression has come through from most of the Australians I have met. They seem very candid on any item you might discuss but sincerely interested in what you have to say on the matter. I think they would truly share all that they own with you.

Paul and Paula also left me with a feeling that there was little role conflict in their marriage. She was quite happy to "give up" nursing to devote her full attention to her family. Australians seem to be able to retain their sense of self-worth in whatever they do. Unlike many young American wives, Paula feels that rearing a family doesn't stifle her as an individual. Paul helps entertain guests and putters around in the kitchen. You can see somehow that Paula accepts this since she is pregnant but prefers that he sit down and let her do the work. This form of life did something for me. It made me take note of some real values. Their life style is simple, yet rewarding. Maybe this is escapism on my part - wanting to go back to a less mobile and more traditional way of living. Nevertheless, that's how Australia is for me - traditional, growing rapidly, but still more slowly and with a greater sense of meaning than our harried existence.

Stuart and Ginny also seemed interested that I share in their lives. As a young doctor, he has many of the concerns for health that I have. Yet I felt so at home with him and Ginny that I seldom spoke of medicine. I shared their plans for the future and their worries over a loan for a new house. We went to a rugby game and to the local pub afterwards with both teams drinking and discussing the game. Everywhere I was accepted as part of the group. Sunday was like 1950 revisited, with friends coming from all around to share an after-church dinner. It reminded me of a family reunion at Grandma's, except for the fact that the oldest person there was about thirty. I had a preconceived notion that country people would talk about crops and animals. Imagine my surprise when a 250 lb. lad wanders over and asks me what the typical American would consider the most important international ramification of the dollar re-valuation. All of these people were quite knowledgeable and well read. The weekend was a great success.

Another family that I grew quite close to in a short time included five children. The family lives in an estate house built in 1868, with lovely high, scrolled ceilings and fireplaces in every room. The Australian eastern coast where they live is a beautiful combination of white beaches, rolling green hills, and Eucalyptus forest. The first thing I did when I arrived was to walk around the place. After coal mines and sawmills, it was wonderful just to walk along with the family talking about life in this area of Australia and answering questions about Houston and America. With increasing pressures in Sydney, Ron moved his family to the country where they dairy farm, raise cattle, and have fun. The children (Grant (17), Stewart (16), Megan (13), Karen (11), and Mitchell (5)) made me feel great. They called me "sir" at first and soon Ron. I don't know why I fell for them so quickly. Perhaps I knew they were as open and warm as their neighbors all around New South Wales. All I know is that I had a strange lump in my throat when Megan, Karen, and Mitchell kissed me good-bye.

All the team members are well and are having similar experiences. I could have written about some of our travels and tours around this beautiful land, but I wanted to try to give you a feeling for the people. I have chosen only two experiences of the last week - I hope I have communicated how much they have meant for me. Strangely enough, in living in a new culture I seem to gain an increasing appreciation for all cultures - including my own. I guess that's what a group study exchange is all about!

Ron Hill

ITINERARY

Monday Inghams Enterprises - Poultry Processing
Cambelltown Civic Center - City Council
Combined Ladies Night Meeting - Camden/Cambellton

Tuesday Sheep & Beef Slaughter House
Mushroom Farm
Ambulance Service
Combined Meeting Bowral & Moss Vale Clubs

Wednesday Poultry Farm
Coal Mining Operation
Wirrimbirra Wildlife Sanctuary
Picton Rotary Club

Thursday University, Farms & Veterinary School
Camden Schools
Camden Hospital
Rotolactor Milking Operation
Free with Hosts

Friday Warragamba Dam & Reservoir
Free with Hosts

Saturday Free(Dinner at Pam & Ross Tegal's)

Sunday Free Church
Bar-B-Q (Nepean River - Vern & Joan Baldwin)
Free with Hosts

Monday Go to Milton/Ulladulla