

IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

CANBERRA: SIMILARITIES YET DIFFERENCES

by Joan Robinson, Community Liaison Coordinator, High Commission, Canberra

The many, superficial similarities between the Canadian and Australian lifestyles, make it easy to forget that Australia is a foreign country and has inherent stresses and cultural differences for us. Most Canadians assimilate easily into Canberra's sprawling suburbia; however, for some it can be very difficult, especially as association with other Canadians can be infrequent. Personal welcomes, introductions and offers of assistance are usually appreciated.

During the past year, a series of informal lunchtime gatherings were held, open to all those with connections to the C.H.C. These are usually monthly, and alternate between potluck lunches and presentations on some facet of Australian life/culture/heritage. Their casual nature has led to discussions of common problems, and has resulted in our becoming a more cohesive group.

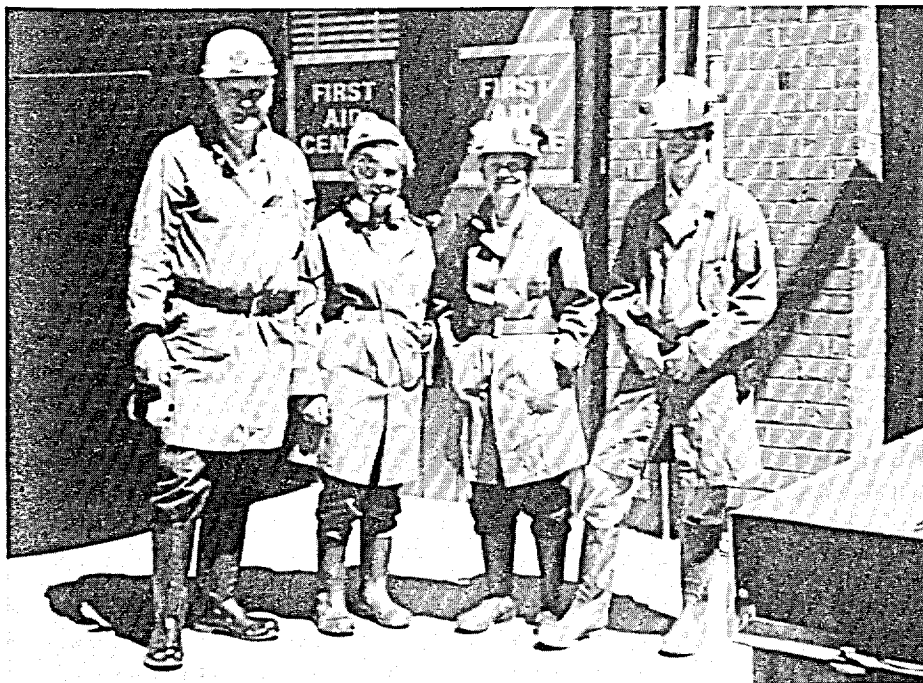
On the practical side of the Community Coordinator program, information has been gathered on such topics as domestic help, reliable health care, education, recreation, travel, professional qualifications necessary for a dependent's employment, what to expect on return to Ottawa and many others. A toy library has been established for young arrivals awaiting their effects, and a monthly newsletter is published.



"Witching Poo" (Mette Baker) welcomes punk Jason Visuntskie to her cavern in Canberra.

Future plans include a survey for assessing and enhancing the program. In addition, information to encourage spouses to use the excellent facilities in Canberra to further their education or personal skills will be offered.

Reaction to the Community Coordinator program has been positive. All members and families of the C.H.C. have been extremely supportive in their contributions of ideas, material and information. From their response, one can see that the program is worthwhile, and meets a definite need.



"Haute Couture" à l'Australienne. On a recent tour of mines in Tasmania are, left to right, Hank and Fay Armstrong, Mette and Brian Baker.

ISLAMABAD: ISLAMIC CULTURE

by Catherine Stephens, Community Coordinator.

September 85 saw the beginning of the Community Coordinator program in Islamabad. The focus initially was on newcomers to the post who sometimes find it difficult to settle into a country with a very evident Islamic culture. Welcoming functions included advance preparation and checking of staff quarters, a guided shopping tour of the local markets and help with any specific problems.

A documentation centre is continually expanding with information on hand regarding education and other items. A variety of catalogues are also available for loan. Travel information in the Coordinator's office on Pakistan and other countries in Asia is always of interest to the Canadians at post. Another type of library which should prove useful this spring and summer is our toy lending facility. It often takes a considerable length of time for shipments to arrive at this post and it will be very helpful to have some diversions for children while they wait for their own possessions to arrive.

Activities organized on a weekly basis such as a "mom and me" playgroup, tennis lessons and riding lessons for children have been initiated by the Coordinator. Assistance with job hunting is another activity. The Coordinator remains alert to positions in the community and acts as the channel of information for spousal employment openings.

Rather than duplicate the newsletter published by the Canadian women's group, communication is maintained with the Canada based staff and their families through regular memos which are sent personally to spouses to establish direct communication. In addition, a monthly social activity calendar is produced and distributed which outlines events and lessons involving Canadian personnel as well as other events of interest to the Canadian community.

A filing system, card file of useful telephone numbers and an open door policy allows the Embassy staff and families to take full advantage of what is available in the Coordinator's office even at times when she is not physically present in the Embassy.

Although only in operation for several months, the Community Coordinator program in Islamabad is now well underway and will be specifically focussing its efforts in coming months on departing and arriving staff to help ease the difficult transitions which are an unavoidable part of foreign service life.