

The Casal's Foundation

by Montserrat, Torruella Moragas (Barber, Becker)

It was a very hot 11th of January 1973 when I arrived in Melbourne from Barcelona with my Australian husband whom I met the summer of 1971 during my holiday in Italy. We married in London on 28th July 1972 after writing to each other for almost a year.

The beginnings of my Australian life were very difficult particularly because of the language as my knowledge of English was very poor, actually almost none existent. I found it very difficult to adjust to the different culture, the food and the change of hours both with the meals and shopping as they were very different to what I was accustomed to in Barcelona. Here the shops closed at 5.30 pm and on Saturdays they were only opened till 12 midday. One could go to the City on a Sunday and find it absolutely dead, hence Ava Gardner's famous words "Melbourne is the ideal city to film the end of the World" as that was the title of the film she was filming in Melbourne: The End of the World.

After three weeks of my arrival I commenced full time English classes and it was there where I discover how Melbourne can have 4 seasons of the year in one single day. On getting ready for the class in the morning as it was very cold I wore a thick woolen jumper only to find that at lunch time the temperature had risen to 40 degrees.

I worked the first two years at Bourke ACTU the Union store, where despite my lack of English I was even promoted to Credit Manager. I left work when in 1975 my daughter Kirsten was born and since my marriage ended up in divorce she is my only child. I have since remarried.

In 1985 and after 13 years in Australia I had only met one other Catalan person and therefore I was not able to practice my language. In December 1985 I was invited to a Picnic organised by 3 Catalan families amongst them the Trives and Trujillo. About 9 people including myself attended the Picnic and this gave me the idea to organize a bigger one in order to reunite de Catalan community in Melbourne.

I investigated some names and telephone numbers and bit by bit one person gave me the phone of another and after a few phone calls plus an advertisement I inserted in a newspaper I waited impatiently for the 27th April 1986 festivity of *La Moreneta* which was the date I chose for the Picnic that took place at the Harlston Park in Elsternwick, as it is a very centric and accessible place in Melbourne and where still every year the Casal celebrates the Club's Anniversary as it was there where the idea to start the Club was formed.

As the weather bureau forecasted storms and hail for the day, with the Catalan flag under my arm I reluctantly made my way to the Park with the sensation that nobody would turn up... What was my surprise when on arriving to the Park there were people

waiting already, amongst them one wearing a *barretina* the typical red Catalan hat and also Mrs Villà who at the time was almost 90 years old. The picnic was attended by about 40 people who most of them did not know each other yet. At the end of the gathering, after dancing *Sardanes* and on seeing the general enthusiasm it was proposed to start a Casal and as a nominated provisional Secretary I immediately started to organize our first activity “ St John’s day dance” for the 28th June 1986. During the dance it was decided that there was enough interest to form a Club and a date was set for our first Annual General Meeting which took place on 26th July 1986.

It has been an honour and pleasure to see the Casal grow and to be part of the Committee for about twenty years, firstly as Secretary, secondly as President and lately as Treasurer. I believe that the fact that the Club is so consolidated is not due to a individual effort but to the contribution of past and present Committees as well as from all the members that have been part of the Club as without them there would be no casal.