**FEATURE NURSING ABROAD**

**Chairs on the move**

Sometimes you get an offer that you just can’t refuse. When Paul Armitage, and then his wife Sue, were offered dream posts at Sydney University they knew that someone was trying to tell them something. Charlotte Alderman reports.

Upping sticks and taking off for far-flung places is usually the prerogative of the young, who then return and ‘settle down’ to domesticity. Sue and Paul Armitage have bucked the trend, are selling up and heading for Australia.

As Sue, Deputy Chief Administrative Nursing Officer at South Glamorgan HA, explained: ‘I thought we were settled in Cardiff but suddenly it happens. Life’s like that, it’s been like it before for us’. What happened was that Paul, Senior Lecturer in Nursing Studies at the University of Wales College of Medicine, saw an advertisement in The Times Higher Education Supplement, and liked the look of it.

Six months later, in October 1992, Paul flew out to Sydney for an interview for the post of Professor of Nursing at the University of Sydney. ‘I went out to see what they were doing, and ten days in Sydney was very nice! I was impressed with what they were offering, and I had a very positive feeling that I wanted to be there. It was an opportunity to move to a new country and to move on in my career.’

Sue knew they had to take it, but at the same time she wanted something rather firmer than vague possibilities of a job for herself. That something turned up the week after Paul returned from his interview in the form of another job advertisement for another Professor of Nursing at the same university.

‘It seemed too good to be true,’ Sue recalls. ‘I almost didn’t apply because I thought “gosh, this couldn’t happen”.’ But she did, in time for the closing date just before Christmas, and then tried to forget about it. Early in the New Year she received a phone call asking her to go for interview at the end of March. The rest, as they say, is history.

Her job is, she says, ‘fairly open’ in how it might develop but because of her mix of experience she will begin to look at the clinical academic nursing units, equivalent to nursing development units here, at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

‘Because of the All Wales Research Liaison Nurse job I’ve held here,’ she said, ‘I have some ideas about what I might explore, but I feel it’s got to be relevant to what people want to do and research use in practice. I don’t want to go in with too firm an idea in case it’s not in line with what they want to do. Paul and I have discussed the opportunity of developing support for staff. They already have some structures but it will be an opportunity to provide something extra to the research they are doing.’

The impression they have of nursing in Australia in comparison with the UK is mixed. Paul says: ‘Moving nursing education into colleges, the equivalent of Project 2000 here, happened three or four years ago and, as with Britain, their polytechnics are now all universities. In many ways on the undergraduate side they are ahead – and ahead with problems as well. Many of the problems we’re grappling with here have already happened there.’

While there are not too many nurses with higher degrees, it is probably comparable to the UK, and Sue says a lot of staff are taking PhDs. ‘It will probably be part of our roles to help these people – the same as it is here.’

So are they forming part of a nursing ‘brain drain’? Paul thinks that because of the similarities of moving into higher education here, in Australia and Canada it will become much easier to move around and there will be more interchange – almost a global nursing village. Sue points out travel is now so much quicker that people come and go with relative ease, but they definitely intend to maintain links here.

**Breathing space**

Once their visas had come through, they resigned their posts and began on the practicalities of the move. ‘We’re very fortunate to have got a cottage in the hospital grounds – although we are not sure what cottage means. But it gives us a breathing space until our furniture arrives,’ says Sue.

‘There’s something cosy about being attached to a large mental hospital, although I’ve spent most of the last decade helping people to get out of them,’ Paul jokes. They will also have a week in hand when they arrive to get over the jet lag and to take their daughters sightseeing.

The fact that they’ve both been to Sydney should make the transition easier, Sue believes. But, of course, finding a house and schools for daughters Xante and Saffron will be high priorities. While Paul says there is never a ‘right time’ for such a move, neither of the girls, aged 13 and ten, have yet started examination course work.
Dream ticket: Sue and Paul Armitage get ready for the family's new life in Australia.

Sue and Paul must have a guardian angel somewhere. Not only have they both got the jobs they wanted at the same time, but they’ve also managed to sell their house — no mean achievement in the current climate. They also feel they are leaving few ‘loose ends’, uncompleted projects, behind them. Although Paul’s research has had to be handed on to Professor Bryn Davis, he hopes to use the instruments he’s devised in Australia. Leaving at the end of the academic year means he has seen a group of students through to graduation.

Sue’s term of office at the UKCC and Welsh National Board came to an end earlier this year. ‘I’d have been very regretful if I’d had to leave before finishing that,’ she says. She has also had a long association with what is now the RCN’s Research Advisory Group, latterly as vice-chair. That also came to a natural end point.

They will, of course, miss family, friends and colleagues, but hope there will be many visitors to their new Sydney base. One of Paul’s big regrets will be losing his beloved Landrover. ‘I’ve wanted one for ages and ages and finally got one a year ago. We thought about shipping it, but the cost is prohibitive.’

They are both still stunned by their good fortune and the way everything has dovetailed. But, as Sue says: ‘As you get on in your career you don’t get so many chances for adventure. If you don’t take them, they don’t come again.’

There is still one conundrum, however. It’s a riddle Sue tried out on people when their appointments were confirmed: ‘What do you call two Chairs? A settee?’