

Good Decisions: Helen Lyne

In August 1969, at the age of 23 I dyed my (mousy) blonde hair dark brown and flew from Melbourne to Winnipeg.

There was a teacher shortage in Canada and the government was offering teachers from Commonwealth countries tax-free salaries for two years. Even *with* taxes, the bring-home pay was almost twice what I was earning in Australia. Why wouldn't I go?

I'd been on a plane once before, for a domestic flight, and knew that you had to dress up for international travel. Stockings, a red wool sheath dress and matching high-heeled shoes seemed appropriate.

Melbourne was rainy and cold when I left and I knew that Canada was a snowy and cold country so I took my umbrella and synthetic leopard-print overcoat on the plane.

Months later, I saw snow for the first time in my life. I was on a sidewalk and put up my umbrella. Passing motorists honked me derisively. In Winnipeg's below zero winter, my coat was as warm as a bikini.

Tired by 30-odd hours of flying and transits in Honolulu, Los Angeles and Vancouver, I was glad to reach my Winnipeg hotel and excited to see the sign, Hudson's Bay Company on a building across the road. I'd read up on Canadian history and knew that the company traded with the trappers and hunters who made their living in the wilderness. After a good sleep, I'd venture over and wander among piles of beaver and moose pelts.

The following day, sustained by an unusual breakfast of pancakes, bacon, blueberries, sausages and maple syrup, and wearing the one summer dress that I'd thoughtfully packed, I crossed the road and entered the Hudson's Bay

Company. What a disappointment! It was a department store, with exactly the same layout as Myers!

During my interview at the school division office, my employer told me I'd be teaching English, for which I was trained, and asked if I could take a Year 9 Canadian history class. He said the program included the exploration of Canada by hunters and trappers before the British defeated the French in 1759. The textbook was excellent and I could read it ahead of the students. Get paid to overcome my ignorance - why wouldn't I?

