

This is the first of a series of articles to be written for the Voice by Susan Ballinger at the request of the Kangaroo Valley Seniors'Accommodation & Support Committee

Facing retirement - a personal journey

It has been a life-changing experience moving from our beautiful farm in Kangaroo Valley to a retirement village in Berry. From being engaged in caring for a sheep stud and a large garden, I now busy myself with a pocket handkerchief-sized vegetable allotment and one chook in "Cluckingham Palace", although there is a life-sized replica of a sheep that I can see through my kitchen window in the communal park. Further, we have geographically distanced ourselves from our friends on the other side of the mountain. Shortly before we moved here I would never have dreamed of living in what our kids refer to as an old fogies' retirement village.

People ask sympathetically, "Do you miss the farm?" But the answer is a resounding, "Not on your Nelly!" "Why not?" they ask. "How can you have lived for 28 years in the beautiful Kangaroo Valley and not miss it?" There are so many reasons that it will take more than one article to explain.

I guess the most obvious reason is that the farm was becoming less relevant for us both. We had already sold off our sheep because of the long drought. Increasingly I had fleeting thoughts that my beloved, and very large, garden was a burden, rather than a joy. Now retired and in our early 70s, John and I each needed some different challenges. We wanted to be able to travel without the worry of neglected paddocks and garden. Chronic illness or frailty in one form or another would likely affect us one day, so we wanted the freedom to travel before such restrictions might occur.

We had begun to entertain the unlikely thought of living in a retirement village when we found a beauty in Berry. Brand new, architect-designed, fully detached houses designed around thermal comfort – tick! Maintained and insured by the owners – tick! Each house surrounded by private garden – tick! Overlooking sweeping parklands with many varieties of bird life – tick! No wallabies to eat the roses – tick! Walking distance to the village and train – tick! And something my city dwelling friends would never gloat over the way I do: postal and newspaper deliveries and (oh bliss) garbage collection. As we contemplated these delights I was aware that I was already betraying my Kangaroo Valley pride in self-sufficiency. Such sacrilege!

So, we sold the farm, our pride and joy of the past 28 years – eventually – and moved, still with some trepidation, to Berry. For nearly three decades we had been privileged to live in what we believe to be one of the most beautiful places on Earth. It is an experience I will always cherish – remembered with joy, but not missed. In the next article I will describe some aspects of our current life experience and how we have been able to follow the advice of a dear friend who told me that an important tool in achieving success in living is the ability to say "goodbye".

Susan Ballinger