



Ellen de Rome

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**Ellen de Rome, whose story "A Trip to Brisbane" was featured in last December's issue of *NEW DAWN*, was born at Port Kembla on the South Coast. She is a person who has seen a lot of life and has also taken her share of its knocks.**

Some years ago, she lived at La Perouse for about 2 years. Then, after the failure of her first marriage, she and her three children moved to Woodenbong. That town was new to her then and its people were all strangers when she arrived. Ellen remembers how, when she got off the bus at Woodenbong, she

nearly burst out crying from the feeling of desolation it gave her. Then a Woodenbongite, Eva Logan, took Ellen under her wing. She found accommodation for her and helped her to settle in.

Altogether Ellen lived at Woodenbong for 16 years and got married there for a second time. She remembers how strongly the people followed the old tribal ways. Relations didn't speak to one another according to the old kinship rules and there was a strong Aboriginal code which governed people's conduct. Because she had come from an area which was much more detribalized, these things were strange to her, but she soon settled in and found acceptance amongst the people.

Even though Ellen's second marriage also ended in divorce, she has happy memories of Woodenbong. She remembers the time when the local ambulance needed support. She therefore organized a ball in the township and Aborigines came from as far away as Tabulam, Baryugil, Lismore and Casino to attend it. Ellen herself remembers that she got a secondhand dress for the ball and during the night was judged "Belle of the Ball". She chuckles now, at the memory, and wonders how many Woodenbongites can remember that ball.

Ellen had six children when she decided to leave Woodenbong and come to Sydney. She remembers that she hated leaving, but felt that she had to go, to give her children a better chance to be educated. Unable to support them alone in the city however, the children went to Cootamundra and Kinchela while Ellen worked as a nurses' aide for 2 years at the Prince Henry Hospital. Then she married Eric de Rome, 15 years ago now, and brought the children back home again. Now they have all grown up and Eric and Ellen live alone at Seven Hills.

Recently Ellen returned to Woodenbong for a visit. She says that it is just as she remembers it, except for the new homes on the reserves and adds: "There seem to be more Christians there now, and most of the old people who were there when I was, have gone. People such as Auntie Beatrice Mercy, Danny Sambo, old Tommy Close and Bert Mercy." One of the youngsters reared by Auntie Beatrice, Olga Hickling of Casino, has a beautiful voice and Ellen, who has a tape of Olga singing *Gilliad* often listens to a replay of the tape.

Ellen de Rome has a lot of old friends left up Woodenbong way. She misses them and it shows when she says: "I've often invited Woodenbong friends to come and stay with me at Seven Hills. None have come so far, but I hope that they will someday."