

Good morning

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to be given the opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts and feelings about what it means to be an Australian citizen.

I arrived in Australia from South Africa in 1994 and landed in Brisbane with my wife and three young boys.

It was quite a traumatic experience having to leave a place we had lived all our lives – leaving behind all our families and friends and then to arrive in a city where we knew literally no one, with no jobs and little knowledge of the culture. I am sure our experiences are not unique and many of you will have found yourself in a similar predicament.

But we decided at the outset that we were going to make the best of our newly adopted country and quickly got around to making new friends among the people around us.

To give you an example of one of the first cultural shocks we got was when we invited our landlord for “tea”. We later learnt that he came expecting a full dinner and not the cupcakes, lamingtons and pot of tea that we had laid out for him.

As more and more families arrived from our country of birth to settle here we established a network through our local Mosques and community gatherings. In the 17 years we have been here we have seen the development of a business network, a medical association, a historical society, welfare groups, a women’s association and even a weekly online newsletter called Crescents Community News (of which I happen to be the editor-in-chief). Soon it felt very much like home from home.

This gave us the confidence to create an identity for ourselves and to reach out as a group to the local community through community events like fund raisers, sporting activities and social gatherings. Only in a country that embraces multiculturalism as passionately as Australia does could we have succeeded in maintaining our identity, our religion and our culture and yet, in the end, become part of a single nation.

I have to tell you that it took a while for me to even begin to consider myself as an Aussie – in fact just about the length of time it took to qualify as an Australian citizen and more specifically the day I cast my vote for the first time in a Federal election. It was a moment I savour til today.

Coming from a country that had denied me the right to vote for all of my life here I was casting a vote for a Government that I could have a hand in bringing into power or even maybe removing from power. That was THE defining moment in my stay here when I finally felt I had become a dinky di Aussie.

So my advice to you as new citizens is to seize the opportunities that this country has to offer you, get involved in the activities of the local community, become politically aware and

make a concerted effort to meet and socialize with people outside of your own communities. Because with great opportunities also comes great responsibilities and some of these responsibilities include caring for the country you live in – its peoples and its environments. There is an old adage that says that you can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want.

They also say that much good can come out of adversity. While the recent floods have devastated many lives, it did bring the best of humanity out of all of us. It was amazing to hear stories of people just picking up a spade, putting on their gum boots and driving over to places like Oxley and Yeronga and helping out people they had never met before. It's moments like this that make you feel proud to be called an Australian.

Well from today on you can call yourself just that- an Australian.

I want to congratulate you on this momentous step in taking up the citizenship of this country and I have no doubt you will enjoy every minute of it.

Thank you and good luck!