

# A war bride and a toy pig

## A much-loved toy pig with a missing tail connects the USA to Australia, as Curator Laina Hall discovered.

It was December 1942 and Iris Adams was at a dance in Sydney. Like so many dances at the time, it was also attended by American servicemen stationed in Australia as part of the Pacific Campaign. One of them was Jim Craig, a Master Sergeant in the US Army Signal Corps. At this dance Jim had actually danced with Iris's sister, and a number of weeks later when he called their home Iris assumed it was her sister he was after. Jim, however, was looking for a date with Iris. They were married on 23 March 1943, four months after they had met. Their daughter Erin was born on 10 May 1945 in Sydney, but she did not meet her father until Erin and Iris arrived in San Francisco in early April 1946.

Between 1942 and 1946 just under one million American service personnel passed through Australia, although there were never over 200,000 at any one time. US troops were initially seen as the saviours of Australia and the Australian public were encouraged to open their hearts to troops stationed or on leave in Australia. This included organising social activities, billeting servicemen, providing entertainment and allowing them a glimpse into the Australian way of life. Through personal encounters Australians learnt about America, life-long friendships were formed and information regarding Australia was sent back to America. The impact of American servicemen on Australia during World War II is often framed as a 'friendly invasion'.

The story of American boy meets Australian girl during World War II is not an unusual one. Some 12–15,000 Australian women married Americans, and around 10,000 left home to start a new life in the United States. This 'romance' did contribute to tensions between Australian and American troops, captured in the popular saying describing Americans as 'over-paid, over-sexed and over here'.

Jim, Iris and Erin's story will be appearing in the new *Australian Journeys* gallery opening in December 2008. A key object that will be used to explore their history is a small red-and-white cotton toy pig. The toy pig, now 63 years old, belonged to Erin Craig, and has recently been donated to the National Museum of Australia. But how does the toy pig relate to the story?

Iris was one of the many war brides who decided to leave Australia to be with her American husband, although she had been hoping Jim might have decided to make Australia his home. Iris and Erin travelled to San Francisco on the SS *Lurline*, a ship which had been used during the war and was then employed to take Australian war brides to America. It was during this trip that Erin 'acquired' the pig.

To entertain mothers and children on board a competition was held to find the child with the reddest hair. Iris recalls that:

They had a contest for the baby with the reddest hair. So I took Erin out to where we were being lined up and I looked around and thought that's peculiar. All the mothers had wet their babies' heads to make their hair look darker.

Erin, at nearly 10 months, and with naturally very red hair, won the competition and was awarded the toy pig as a prize.

The toy pig is made of red-and-white spotted cotton and after many years has lost its right ear and its tail. While not in pristine condition, this tells us much about the object's history. The fact that it is homemade speaks to the imposition of restrictions during wartime, and the efforts made by organisations like the Red Cross to provide support for Australian war brides. The pig's missing ear and tail not only hint at its age, but also to the interaction with its owner over time.

Erin's pig is not only a treasured object, but creates a portal for the museum to explore the impact of the 'friendly invasion'. It certainly isn't an object that is immediately associated with the arrival of American GIs in 1940s Australia. It is not a wedding dress, a dance card from a first date, or a collection of letters between the couple. What it does allow is a new angle on the story, and an opportunity to present an individual child's experiences as a consequence of a particular historical moment.

The toy pig has been Erin's constant companion, until now. Its journey to the Museum is another part of this object's biography, its life story. In agreeing to donate her beloved pig to the Museum, Erin is making a decision to share her story, memories and, in some ways, a piece of herself.

**Laina Hall**  
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The toy pig Erin Craig won on board ship on her way to the United States. Photo: Lannon Harley