

Podcast 86 – Waltzing Matilda

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 86 – Waltzing Matilda by Banjo Paterson

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Hi,

At the closing ceremony of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, one of the special moments was the singing of one of Australia's most famous and well-loved folk songs – Waltzing Matilda. It's a song that most Australians know. They would have sung it at school and heard it at many different ceremonies and celebrations. The lyrics were written by one of Australia's greatest poets, Banjo Paterson. In this podcast I would like to tell you a little about Banjo and his most famous lyrics put to music – Waltzing Matilda.

Andrew Barton Paterson, also known as Banjo, was born in 1864. He was brought up in outback New South Wales, where as a child he saw close up what life was like in the rural areas of Australia in the late 1800s. This was a time when people in rural Australia lived a tough life. There were many hardships and many difficulties to overcome. Australians were being shaped by the Australian landscape in ways which are quite unique and which have helped define the Australian character today. Banjo gained a love for horses and a deep understanding and appreciation for the independent and modest life of those Australians who chose to live in the outback.



Banjo Paterson, around 1890.

While he may have spent his childhood far from the cities, in his adult life he became a solicitor who lived and worked in Sydney. At the same time, he also started a writing career by submitting poems about outback life in Australia to a popular journal at that time called 'The Bulletin'. The poems seemed to capture the special characteristics of the typical Australians of that time who preferred living in rural and bush settings in Australia. They loved the simple things in life and valued independence more than wealth. Banjo's poems became very popular in the 1890s and his works were read more widely following their publication in a book in 1895. Paterson later became a war correspondent during the Second Boer War in South Africa in 1899 and on returning to Australia became a journalist. During the First World War he served as a soldier and officer. Later in life he continued his work as a writer, including publishing poems, short stories and novels, while continuing to work as a journalist. But in the

1890s, it was for his poems that Banjo became famous and so it continues today.

As a child, I can remember hearing and reading some of Banjo Paterson's famous poems at school. When I became a teacher myself, I found myself really enjoying his poems when I read them to my primary school classes. One reason is that the poems tell a story, often full of action and often with lots of humour. My favourite poem by Banjo is called 'The Man from Ironbark', which was written in 1892. It tells the humorous story of a man from a small country town called Ironbark, a long way from the city. The man from Ironbark travels to Sydney and goes to a barber shop where a flashy barber plays a practical joke on him. But the practical joke doesn't work out as planned. When read well, this poem is both exciting and funny – Banjo Paterson at his best. As a teacher, I learnt this poem by heart, and taught my entire class of 11 year old primary school students to do the same. They loved it. I can still recall the entire poem today.

Banjo wrote other famous poems such as 'The Man from Snowy River' and 'Clancy of the Overflow'. The former was made into a movie which received great success here in Australia.

However, the work for which Banjo Paterson is most famous is a song called Waltzing Matilda. Banjo wrote the lyrics to the song in 1895. It is believed they are based loosely on actual events which happened during a shearers' strike in Queensland the previous year. The tune was written by a Scotsman, James Barr, in 1818. A friend of Paterson had heard the tune played by a military band in 1894 and she played it for Paterson while he was visiting her family's cattle station in Queensland. Banjo wrote the lyrics to go with the music after hearing the tune. The lyrics tell the story of a swagman, which is a term to describe a man walking the roads and tracks of the outback, living rough and carrying all his possessions wrapped up in a blanket, known as a swag, which he carries on

his back. He camps one day by a billabong, which is a small lake which was once part of a river. The swagman steals a sheep, called a jumbuck in the song, which comes to drink at the billabong. The swagman hides the jumbuck in his tuckerbag, the bag where he keeps his food. He is then discovered by the local farmer and three policemen and, to avoid capture, he jumps into the billabong and drowns. The term Waltzing Matilda refers to walking the roads and tracks of the outback with only your swag, or Matilda, as company.

Here's the song.

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong,
Under the shade of a Coolibah tree,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled,
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billabong
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee,
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me,
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Up rode the squatter mounted on his thorough-bred
Down came the troopers One Two Three
Where's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda Waltzing Matilda
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me

Where's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker-bag
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Up jumped the swagman and sprang in to the billabong
You'll never take me alive said he,
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda Waltzing Matilda
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Banjo Paterson's place in our history will never be forgotten,
as long as Australians keep singing Waltzing Matilda. In
recognition of his importance to us, his picture is on the
Australian \$10 note.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it
in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can
send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to
hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about
yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I
will write back to you, in English of course. If you would
like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this
podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until
next time.

Rob

Podcast 86 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You may take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

appreciation = to know and understand something

avoid capture = not getting caught by the police

barber shop = a place where a man goes to get his hair cut

based loosely on = based on something, but not exactly

billy = a round metal container the size of a paint tin, which is used to boil water

boiled = to heat water up until it turns to steam

brought up = to grow from a baby to an adult, learning about life from your parents

capture = to include

career = the time from when you start your job to when you finish your job

cattle station = a very, very large farm in Australia which farms cattle

celebrations = when people are happy about something special and have a party

ceremony = a formal event where something special is celebrated

character = how a person thinks and acts

characteristics = the features

Coolibah = a type of Australian tree

correspondent = a person who reports information to other

people

define = to say what something is like

difficulties = problems

flashy = well dressed

folk = the common people

gained = to receive, to get

ghost = your spirit

glee = happiness

humour = when something is funny and we laugh

independent = when you don't need other people in order to live

jolly = happy

journal = a type of newspaper

journalist = a person who reports information about current events

landscape = the land and the climate

living rough = when you have no home and you sleep outside

lyrics = the words of a song

military = to do with the army, navy or air force

modest = simple

novels = stories which are published in books

overcome = to solve

poems = a type of writing where the words and sentences have a

special rhythm

poets = people who write poems

possessions = all the things that you own

practical joke = when you trick somebody

preferred = when something is liked

primary school = the first level of schooling, in Australia,
from age 4 to age 11

publication = when something is put into a book or newspaper
and sold to readers

recall = remember

recognition = when people know that you have done something
good

rural = areas away from the city

shearers = people who cut the wool off sheep

shoved = pushed

solicitor = a person who knows the law and can help people
with the law

squatter = an old term for a rich farmer in early Australia

strike = when workers refuse to work because they are unhappy
about something

submitting = to give something to somebody else who will make
a decision about it

taught = past tense of 'teach'

thorough-bred = a certain type of horse, normally very
expensive to buy

tough = hard

troopers = an old term in early Australia for policemen

typical = an example of something you see many times

unique = when there is nothing else like it

wealth = things which are worth a lot of money