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Looking Back on Time

I was stationed at a Naval Hospital called "H.M.S. Kingseat". One of our girls had invited me to her wedding in Grimsley near Hull. As I had accepted I had asked for a weekend leave pass and duly made plans to catch the evening train from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, after changing trains I would have to change again at Doncaster and then to Hull and on to Grimsley where I would be met.

Being in the W.R.E.N.S (Women's Royal Naval Service) a week before travelling I had asked at the R.T.O. to please keep me a corner seat. As I was an Officer's Stewardess I was off duty as from 2.00pm on the Friday afternoon, so duly left the Hospital and travelling by bus to Aberdeen to catch the early evening train, got a bite to eat at the Railway Station restaurant and then checked in with the R.T.O. On being told the number of the carriage and the train getting steamed up I steadily walked along the platform to the carriage, got in and had to walk along the corridor of the carriage looking for my seat, which had been taken by a bloke in Khaki and grinning from ear to ear.

All four corner seats were taken and I had fallen instantly in love with the guy who had taken my seat (I knew too that I would follow him wherever he went). I did my best not to show him my feelings and demanded my seat. I then looked up at the luggage rack and saw a slouch hat, well Australia is a long way away so I will ignore him. He refused to give me my seat, stating that he was there first and that all was fair in love and war.

One had to be careful when travelling because if your head fell onto their shoulder while asleep it was taken as an open invitation for sex, this I did not want so with misgivings I sat down. As we travelled towards Edinburgh all the carriage started talking, some were going on leave, some were returning to their station or bases.

Aussie told us that he was from Western Australia and as I wanted to show a little indifference I had a tiny jigsaw in my small case, so got it out and tried putting it together. People started pairing off to talk and as the train rocked a piece of jigsaw landed on the carriage floor. I swooped to pick it up and so did the Aussie, and that got us talking. His name was Alfred and he was a released prisoner of war and was waiting for a ship home, all of the married men were going home first.

Alf was stationed at Eastbourne, this town being on the South East coast as the holding area for all of these guys. We caught the "Flying Scotsman" to London at Edinburgh and chugged along the way. At Leeds I went for a cup of tea and made enquiries about getting off at Doncaster and was told to alight there and catch the next train. I got my case and other gear saying goodbye to Alf and wished him well. As the train pulled out I told myself to

forget him and really not being too sure how he felt, was glad I had not revealed my feelings.

When I alighted from the train at Doncaster I was walking along the platform to catch the train to Hull, I suddenly felt 2 hands on my shoulders and looking at the owner found it was Alfred the Aussie soldier, and a voice saying "Oh I'm so glad you have come along as I thought I had lost you". I'm thinking is this really happening as I am going to a wedding, I cannot take him with me, oh gosh what will I do. I decided to take him to Grimsley and get him to wait. Audrey was to meet me and she arrived by car half an hour later. Audrey, on hearing my problem asked her Dad if Alf could come along, that Alf was an Australian and ex-P.O.W.

Audrey's Father gave permission so my next worry was how can I get a horse's shoe to give to the bride. Audrey sorted that problem out and took me to a relation who grew roses. Nine shillings and sixpence in those days was a lot of money and left me almost skint, oh dear now what to do.

After the wedding, Alf and I were taken back to Grimsley railway, we caught the first train to Doncaster where I found we could travel direct to Spewich. I phoned my parents from the railway station to get permission to take Alf home (my father had sailed to Australia several times as a Midshipman during World War I and afterwards on the "S.S. Swainby"). My parents made Alf welcome but were wary of our feelings becoming deeper, reminding me that Australia was a long way away. After something to eat and a brush up, my parents had a café and were busy so Alf and I went for a walk, first up and through a park and the old Tudor buildings caught our eye and we ended up in the shopping area. Alf wanted to give me a memento in appreciation and as "Victory in Europe" as announced, I didn't really want anything but we were outside Samuel's Jewellery shop so we ended up going inside for a little ornament.

However a cygnet ring was purchased and when I asked what finger to wear it on, the salesgirl replied, "On the third finger on the left hand", on my engagement finger. When I alerted Alf as to the meaning of it he said "Don't you ever take my ring off that finger, I'll be very hurt if you do". Oh no, what will my parents say.

Well mum hit the roof, but I reasoned with Dad, there are a lot of married guys out there Dad, spinning a lot of yarns that they are hard done by by their wives, all they really want is sex, with that ring on that finger, I can say sorry I am engaged, it will keep me safe.

They both gave in and warned once he is home he will forget you. Alf was now A.W.L so next morning, Sunday, I took Alf by bus to Ipswich railway station and said goodbye.

Once home I had to pack and leave later in the day for London on route to Aberdeen. I promised my parents that I would not put too much into meeting Alf again.

Well Alf paid several visits to Aberdeen, he told me he was in love with me so was trying to miss home going ships. In the meantime I was getting on with life. I'm very practical you see, also I was never really sure that anything would come of it, what I didn't want was a big heartbreak.

One evening I was called to the telephone, it was Alf and he proposed over the phone saying "I want to marry you before I leave". I told him he would have to ring my parents to get their permission, before I would say yes, so I gave him my home phone number and I thought surely this would put him off. Low and behold the phone rang ten minutes later it was my mother, very angry calling me wicked and ungrateful. I simply said "is it yes or no as I have not said yes." After telling mum and dad that I was in love with Alf, that yes I wanted to marry him, Mum gave her and Dad's permission to marry Alf.

A few minutes later Alf rang back for my answer, when I said yes, I was told Alf had already received permission from his Colonel and would write immediately with his plans.

I then went to the Officer on Duty to inform her that I would be needing leave to get married. I received a very stern lecture on not knowing Alf long enough, that I could get to Australia only to find that I had been dumped, my parents said the same.

Alf came up to Aberdeen so that we could travel home together, my parents had sent out to family and friends married wedding invitations, also to a friend for the loan of her white wedding dress, which duly arrived and fitted nicely. My parents had a café, which was built in Tudor style. St Margaret's church was only a short distance, a funeral was to be held just before our wedding, truly a white wedding. My parents were doing a lot of arguing so the reception was not a happy affair.

We were married on August 14th at 2.30pm, but there was a hold up at the church, the hearse through running late had not finished with the service so a messenger was sent about 500 yards to ask my father and I to wait at least 15 minutes. We knew that a sign at the Church door read "Do not throw confetti".

The car with it's white ribbons took the long route to the church, my father gave me the option of backing out at the last minute which I declined.

Alf and myself being wed, it was a lovely old fashioned service, again travelling the long route with the shoppers stopping to look at the Bride. Around midnight we all decided it was time to retire, when there was a mighty banging on the front door with a man's voice calling "Open up, open up". Dad went to the door and said "We are closed, go away or I'll call the police". Again outside the voice called "Open up Jack, I am the police, you had a wedding today and I want the first drink to celebrate peace." Peace in the Pacific had just been declared at midnight.

We put the radio on to listen while 'congratulations' and 'your health' was said. We heard celebrations going on in London and the Police said "there's a

massive crowd down at the Buttermarket", so away a few of us went. Someone called out who can sing "Waltzing Matilda" when a voiced called we have an Aussie soldier here. Alf had a lovely voice and everyone hushed as Alf finished singing, an encore was called and Alf obliged and then we left.

Alf had taken two weeks off so again was A.W.L. for one week. It was with a heavy heart that I accompanied Alf to Ipswich Railway Station and there we said "Goodbye and the best of luck, please write soon."

Alf now a married man was sent home to Australia on the next ship and had been kept in the clink for the last week in England, although he wrote to inform me of what was going on, while I had to return to my ship, all naval bases are given ship names.

I was demobbed in two or three weeks as it was not known when I would follow my husband to Australia, or how much notice we would be given. I received a marital pension for three months, until Alf was demobbed, now it was who would give me work.

My father suggested that I work for him, to work the night shift, which I duly did and was very grateful to him for helping me out. Christmas came and went and I was really longing to be on my way. In February I received a letter from London House giving me a date. I immediately wrote to my in-laws giving them the news plus a tentative date, but not to tell Alf in case it fell through, that I would write to Alf when the date was confirmed. At last, would I get to Fremantle in time for my husband's 30th birthday, as he was 9½ years older than me, I knew that we should be starting a family before he got old and cranky.

My date to be on board was March 21st 1946, I had posted a letter to Alf one week before leaving home for good. My mother came with me to see me off, over the news came a message, a D.C.3 aircraft on route to Australia has come down into the Bay of Biscay, due to bad weather, it was carrying the Royal Mail. Oh dear, my letter to Alf would it be on it, I found out later that Alf did not receive my letter.

Saying "Goodbye" to my family was hard. We travelled to Ipswich Railway Station, then to Euston, taxied across London to Waterloo Railway station, then made enquiries for the Bridal train to Southampton. It was a lovely but sad journey down and late that afternoon boarded the ship. I found my berth and then went to say a final goodbye advising my Mother to return to Waterloo on the same train that had brought us down.

I next day another train load of Brides arrived and were soon ushered onto the ship, we were all excited as we were off to join our menfolk.

My Journey and Arrival in Australia

I left Southampton, Britain on 22nd March 1946, on the "M.V. Athlone Castle" was still in troop ship condition, I was travelling into the unknown as my husband had told me very little (I guess being an ex-P.O.W in Europe, and away from home for 6 years, was probably not too sure). Oh, I had signed a paper to say that I would be pleased to travel under those conditions.

We had to pull into Gibraltar on the way to let off a very sick baby and it's mother. Some of the girls were sick as we had crossed the Bay of Biscay, but I missed one meal in the Mediterranean. Our next stop Port Said, and we were held up for 48 hours waiting for some refugees.

At last we were moving but sadly we travelled the Suez Canal in darkness and by next morning were into the Red Sea, gale winds caught the door and it slammed onto my ankle while trying to get inside the ship. A visit to the sick bay cost me 7 shillings and 6 pence just to get a bandage (I felt cheated). Thankfully my ankle was only bruised, but still very sore to walk, our journey continued on with the weather pretty fair.

We saw the odd dhow here and there and a ship about 2 miles off, no doubt full of troops on their way home. One night we passed a ship in the darkness all lit up, it was a comforting sight. Each day the Captain of the ship would tell us where we were, the weather pattern, how many days we had been at sea and counting down the days when we would see land ahead.

Aha! Land ahead, India, we had to refuel and restock on food and water after all there were 410 war brides, from memory 315 Navy personnel plus 50 refugees, a lot of food and water was needed. We were in port at Bombay and sailed on the evening tide, after watching the activities of the port workers during the day, no-one had been allowed off the ship, boy was the weather uncomfortable, hot, steamy and little breeze.

Meanwhile there were whispers of rumours, a bunch of us girls were sitting outside on the deck, idly talking of this and that, when one of the other girls came up to us and said "Hey girls, have you heard the news, it a possibility that we may be calling into Aden". "Don't be daft" said one in our midst, we are on our way to Fremantle".

After two more days at sea, it was announced that if we girls would like to gather near the foredeck at 8.00pm the Captain would show us the "Southern Cross" one of the navigational stars that all sea faring folks sailed by in the Southern Oceans.

The rumours persisted, when the Captain spoke over intercom on the persistent rumours of us visiting Aden, "it is not, I repeat not on our schedule BUT we do have a war bride in one of the cabins who has a very dear friend, being the Matron of the Aden Hospital". It was thought they would never see each other again and was a golden opportunity with the two very dear friends being reasonably close.

Matron had to invite the young lady through the P&O Shipping Line and also contact the Port Authorities in Aden. The P&O Shipping Line had to contact Aden and as drinking water was not too good at Bombay please could we fill up with good drinking water.

We were almost at the point of passing by when permission came through and we girls woke up to find we were tied up to a huge round steel buoy. But where are the wharfs as all we could see was a wide jetty and looking further a-field buildings (Govt) and shops that looked as though made of sand bricks.

We were all called to breakfast, our meals were in two sittings and when finished we girls who did not have babies or small children were allowed ashore. The Captain obtained a promise that we girls would not bring disgrace to the ship and crew (no leave for the crew), we also promised to be on board by 5.00pm or before as we were to sail by 5.30pm.

We finally got ashore in dribs and drabs as we had to transfer from ship to barge-like ferries and we palled up into small groups. There were 4 of us and we walked along the pavement looking at ornate buildings. We met a British airman, on hearing our voice he called out, who we were and where we had come from. He offered to escort us and keep us safe and make sure we boarded our ship on time. We visited shops and cafes, tasted this and that, saw museums and on the way back pointed to another ship tied up. When questioned where it was going to, replied "Oh, that is a troop ship, beware, they are on their way back home."

5.00pm and we were all on board bar one girl, we were all being counted when a ship on the move came closer with a service band playing. Yes, the men on the troop ship were all lined up jeering and booing "How dare we girls marry Australian Servicemen", the band was playing "Land of Hope and Glory" and our girls were in tears, homesick. I shook my fist at them while trying to take the girls away from the rails. "DEAD SILENCE", we had one rotable Captain on board, and the threat of a report being handed in at London on return.

The missing girl had lost her way back, but had sense to go to a policeman and was soon returned, oblivious of what had happened, we sailed soon after 5.30pm.

Then came the news that we were seven days out from Fremantle, and that land would soon be sighted. A seaman was posted aloft to keep watch for land, and sure enough the call came "LAND AHEAD", we raced upon deck and there was this faint line on the horizon.

We plugged along for a couple of more days and the land of Australia becoming clearer, and us girls getting more excited, we would be sorry to leave the dear old ship but glad to start our new lives and be with our husbands.

Another announcement, pray and hope there is not a big bang from overheated motors, as we are going full steam ahead and our ship is really too old to go at this speed but we must reach "Gauge Roads" by 5.00pm so that we can dock at night. Your men could get quite agitated if we have to spend a night in "Gauge Roads". We were anxiously watching our watches, will we make it, no we won't.

We dropped anchor at 5.15pm. The wharfies knocked off at 5.30pm, no they wouldn't unload us. "Oh boy, what have we come to?" We were urged by the Captain to go to the dining room as usual for dinner, this we did with heavy hearts as we wondered how our men were faring. Up on deck again all dressed up in our finery, looking longingly to shore and there below were one or two yachts with some husbands, yelling at us to hang on, help was on the way. Then I think it was a harbour ferry with a few more husbands and families. Just after 9.00pm that evening someone spotted the tugs coming out, were they for us? A huge sigh of relief and a big hurray when the tugboats turned towards us. It had taken us 21 days to get here from Southampton. The "Athlone Castle" had been on her way to Belfast for a refit, so not bad for the old girl, she was booked into Belfast on her return and then sent to Durban, South Africa to take up her pre-war duties of Durban to Cape Town, or so I was told but later heard she had done another run with more British War Brides.

We finally docked at F Shed, where the Passenger Terminal now stands, those departing were given priority to the rails in order to find our men. Now I scanned the faces of those below and could not find my man. I scanned again and again, there is one little bloke among a group of tall men, waving like mad with a bunch of flowers in his hand. There was his arm to the right and away went one carnation, then to the left and the loss of another flower, I said to the girl by my side, "the poor girl who is to receive that bunch of flowers will be lucky if she gets any flowers". I happened to look underneath, more promising, a slouch hat and there was the guy I was looking for, Alf could see me and knew that I had not found him in the crowd and was worried, so were my in-laws.

The announcement we were all waiting to hear "Will all departing girls go to the foredeck and collect your cabin luggage and proceed to the gang plank". After farewells and thankyou's we were grimly hanging on to the handrail as we descended the gangplank to our waiting husbands.

My in-laws were an old couple who came to welcome a strange girl into their family. They had left the old Dart themselves in 1923, my father-in-law was the farrier for the Peel Group Settlement Scheme, Group 68, to live at Karnup so knew what it was like for me.

We were guided into F Shed to collect our trunks and boxes of gear and my two green boxes of clothes were missing. Next there was a roll call, a girl had not been ticked off the list, one bride had taken one look at the travelling conditions, gathered her gear and caught the train back to London. The Captain was frantic as the bride's husband was there, I told the Captain what I

knew and suggested he see the ship's passenger lists as soon as possible before the "Athlone Castle" sailed.

We girls were called to attention and an Army Captain called for and collected the passports of the army wives, you're not going to use these to go home, you are here to stay. "What had we come to?"

Next the young Army Captain pulled himself to attention and said "youse girls, youse girls," and I thought, "blimey, which school did he go to?" "Youse girls, you are no longer British subjects, you are now Australian citizens and don't you forget it." (I was to learn the word youse was a common way of speech).

I was now midnight and an old English couple, friends of my in-laws, were waiting with their car. After a thorough search and a promise made that a search would continue until the ship sailed in the morning and home we went. I was so welcomed that for me it was like walking into home, I was so relieved.

Next morning my husband Alfred and I went from North Fremantle by bus, down to F Shed to try and find my two green boxes, they had been stacked at the bottom of huge trunks and there was not enough time to get them out before the "M.V. Athlone Castle" sailed and would be offloaded at Melbourne, oh no! there goes my nightie that I was to wear on our first night together at home.

To get a house Alf had got a job at No.4 State Saw Mill called Hakea (now just a dot on some maps). It was about 3 months later that I finally received my green boxes, the large one the Customs had broken open and tied the lid down with rope, am please to say that nothing was missing.