

Dreams of a Life Nearly Lived – 52

Geoff Ellis

Like many families Sid's brood began to move away. There were different career opportunities now than when Sid and Jean were young. Many of the highly desirable careers that were available then no longer existed or employed far fewer people and labouring type jobs were almost a thing of the past.

However, everybody was expected to get a degree of some sort from one of the many tertiary institutions, some of which were privately owned, that had sprung up all around the country. Sid felt that trades were the most secure form of employment but Governments had dramatically reduced funding for Technical Schools and TAFE Colleges creating a real shortage of skilled labour.

Sid and Aggie thought it a tragedy that office-workers spent all day at a computer rather than meeting people face-to-face.

Their own children were still in Melbourne, but their grandchildren were spreading all over Australia and some were living overseas.

Sid and Aggie consciously kept in touch on zoom or email with those living away.

Not surprisingly, they received a heap of communications back from the wanderers.

Rex and Meg's wedding was a big deal in Rex's home neighbourhood. The Williams family were known and admired for a variety of reasons. They were wealthy dairy farmers, they were a successful sporting family and they were heavily engaged in numerous Community activities. A big crowd was expected at the church and nobody was disappointed. The Anglican Church was packed to the rafters but the overflow was able to watch proceedings on a screen set up in the adjoining hall.

As the Best Man Sid spent most of his time calming Rex and continually assuring him that he hadn't forgotten the all-important ring.

Eventually, all were in place and eagerly awaiting the arrival of the bride. With her many visits to the Williams, Meg had become quite well known in the district and this undoubtedly helped swell the numbers.

Sid, Bert and Alan, Rex's brother-in-law, were the groom's attendants while Mary, who couldn't stop beaming, was matron-of-honour, assisted by Millie, and Jean. There was some speculation over who would give the bride away, and some surprise, to discover it was Mr Wood, Megs employer.

Rev Albretson, who had married Fay Williams, was again the officiating clergyman, and he too couldn't stop smiling. A clutch of photographers waited outside to take the appropriate film of the couple, their families and friends. Typical of "the Bush Telegraph" there was talk of an English Lord and his family attending but that was probably just a rumour.

About ten minutes after the official opening an excited roar signified the arrival of the bride and her entourage. Did they arrive in a Rolls Royce? No. In a taxi? No. In a 13,500 litres milk tanker? Yes.

Many inside the church moved outside to get a look at this rather unusual mode of transport.

However, the ushers soon had everyone back inside and the paparazzi had their first photos of the soon to be Mrs Williams and her attendants.

As Meg moved down the aisle the bridal party was expanded by the addition of Annie, a tiny cousin of Rex, who made a divine flower-girl.

For a period, it seemed that most peoples' heads had been stuck on back-to-front, as they all turned so as to catch a glimpse of Meg as she walked down the aisle on the arm of a very proud Mr Wood. Meg looked fantastic, so good in fact that Sid all of a sudden thought "my sisters are almost as good looking as Jean".

The ceremony proceeded without any problems. In the absence of the Morrison Twins, some unknown young lady sang "Ave Maria" and "the Way You Look Tonight" beautifully whilst accompanying herself on the rustic organ. Not many people in the UK now heard Elspeth perform free of charge.

The register signed and, the bride well and truly kissed the crowd dispersed to freshen up before the reception in the William's big hayshed.

Around 6.30 PM the roads leading to the Williams property were a mass of moving vehicles. The cars air-conditioners were working hard as they had been in the Church. December in the "Outback" can be bloody hot.

It must have been an open invitation because more than two hundred turned up to the reception including, uninvited, several members of the Press who were allowed to join the crowd.

One of the catering firms from the nearest big town were going to have a "bumper" year after providing all the food and drink for the reception. Unknown to Jim and Liz the financial burden was being eased due to a generous donation paid into the farm's bank account.

Sir Gerry, Val and Tim had squeezed in with the Watkins. Certainly no "Keir Hardy" but they were happy to be in the company of people they were growing to love. Sid and Jean stayed with Mary and so did Elspeth who helped Mary put the finishing touches to all the dresses. These were absolutely stunning.

As soon as the guests arrived they were offered drinks and canapes whilst the presents were collected and put on tables located around the perimeter of the shed. The hard work in setting up the shed was well-rewarded. It looked brilliant with festoon lighting hanging everywhere and colourful streamers stretched across the rafters and hanging off every wall. It was brilliant.

At a bit after 7.30 PM the newly-weds turned up and, soon after that, people were invited to find a seat at one of the beautifully decorated trestle tables that formed long rows in the shed.

A team of colourfully dressed waiters commenced bringing in the first of the five courses, seafood cocktail. The other courses followed in quick succession. All were delicious but the main course or roast lamb and vegetables was the “stand-out”.

In between courses came the speeches. Most people had never met, or even heard of the toastmaster. Arthur Brown introduced himself as a “Pommy Yokel” but peoples soon realised that he was more than that. His self-deprecating humour was greatly enjoyed by his audience of mainly people employed in agricultural pursuits. He told of how he had met Rex and Meg, when they were in England and how they had kept up communication after they returned to Australia.

Sid spoke of his friendship with Rex. How they had met on the train as complete strangers, shared sandwiches and had been great friends thereafter. He referred to Rex’s determination to become a progressive modern farmer and his decision to go to Agricultural College to further this aim.

Sid spoke for a few minutes more before handing the microphone back to Arthur.

Sid thought “that’s enough memory for this Part”.