

Sam and Sid continued their exploration of the Noordam. Sid was surprised to find there were several different places where passengers could eat. There was a large dining room with white tablecloths and nice cutlery where one could eat from a prepared menu cooked by a chef. There was also a less formal meal area where hamburgers, pizza and hot-dogs were the most popular food items. This informal style of dining suited Sid but Aggie clearly fancied the idea of “dressing up” and eating in the main dining room.

Sid and Sam continued their meandering around the ship. They saw the Auditorium, where there was a different live show every night, they visited the cinema with a program of new releases and old classics to keep the passengers amused.

The Ship had a casino. “I’ll keep away from there,” Sid thought to himself. It also had a range of shops selling mainly souvenir type merchandise, naturally all made in China. On their circumnavigation of the ship they ran into Aggie who was being shown around by the other womenfolk.

By this stage Sid was feeling tired so he retired to their cabin to have a bit of a snooze and start to unpack. Their room had a small verandah attached and Sid could see himself sitting out there with a coffee and a good book.

Over the next fortnight Sid and Aggie made use of many shipboard amenities. However, they never missed a chance to go ashore.

They visited Rabaul, Honiara, Port Vila, Nuku’alofa and Apia and found them all to be of great interest but each had its individual features.

As expected the siblings had a “bit more staying power” than the near ninety-year-olds but still watched over Sid and Aggie as if they were infants.

All good things come to an end the travellers arrived back at Tullamarine to be greeted by a horde of grandkids and one great- grand-daughter.

Sid whispered to Aggie, “the boat trip was great but this welcome is many times better”.

Arthur was greatly interested in what Jim, an active farmer, planned to do in the near future. Jim didn’t think much would change. Arthur was amazed to learn that on Jim’s property they were milking more than two hundred and fifty Friesian cows at the peak time. Most of this milk was processed into butter and cheese mainly for export. He, Arthur, also learnt that the property carried a small stud beef herd and produced grain and hay for stock-feed. Jim mentioned in passing that he was a director of the nearby dairy co-operative. When Geoffrey was within listening distance he hung on every word. “This man is no dumb “cow-cocky”, he is a very successful businessman. Geoff had a million questions for Jim who was only too pleased to provide answers.

Tom was simply happy to be around Jean. Val and Elspeth were peeved that they had no visiting women to spoil. To make sure he, Tom, didn’t feel left out, they arranged a long overdue visit to the Houses-of- Parliament. This was fascinating for all of them. Their guide explained much about the processes of the houses but also told many stories, some probably true, of the peccadillos and scandals that had occurred within and without Parliament’s sandstone walls. Some surprising names were mentioned.

At the conclusion of the tour, they adjourned to the Parliamentary dining-room where Jean observed that the food hadn't improved.

It would soon be time for Tom and Bill to return to Australia but Gerry had one more surprise for them. "I'm going up to Glasgow for a couple of days would you like to come"? You don't knock back an offer like that so two days later Arthur and Gerry turned up in the Jaguar.

The two Australians climbed into the back and sat on the beautiful leather upholstery. They had no idea where they were staying and were amazed to find out that they were the guests of Lord and Lady Ashby who insisted that they be called Fred and Fiona.

Tom and Bill were further surprised when told they would be going into the highlands tomorrow. And so, the next day they piled into the Jaguar and headed to the North-East. One and a half hours later they arrived at Blair Castle, the home of the Duke of Athol.

"He is the only nobleman in Britain who is allowed to have a private army. The last Duke died childless and there is a hunt going on to find his successor. They are going many generations back to find a successor."

In the morning, they joined a guided tour through Blair Castle. This is more of a manor house than a castle and is a truly beautiful building and one of the most visited in Scotland.

However, the excitement occurred in the afternoon when the Highland Games were held. Individuals and teams from all over Scotland participated in running, caber tossing hammer throwing and tugs-of-war. All events were held in a spirit of friendship but the competition was still very fierce. Stalls selling dinks, including scotch whisky did roaring trades.

At the end of the program the two Australians, two Englishmen and one Scot piled into the "Jag" for the return trip to Glasgow. This gave the five travellers a chance to talk, without boasting, about themselves and what they believed in.

It was clear the Gerry and Fred were eager to come and visit their new Australian friends on their territory. Of course, Gerry had already invited his family and himself to Meg and Rex's wedding later in the year.

A few days later it was another trip to Heathrow this time to see off Jim and Tom. They still had difficulty in believing in much of what they had seen and done Tom and Fred had talked at length about their wartime experiences in North Africa. Tom smiled to himself when he found out that as a sergeant he outranked Fred who had only made it to corporal.

As usual a crowd turned up to see Tom and Jim head for home. What tales to tell! "We went to the Highland Games with two Lords," was told to anyone brave enough to listen.

In the meantime, Sid and Jean continued to impress all with their work ethics. So, Sid was surprised when one day when his supervisor told him to report to the General Manager.

"What have I done wrong" thought Sid to himself.

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