

DREAMS OF A LIFE NEARLY LIVED PART 50 All Good Things.

One thing Sid, and Aggie, loved were weddings and they were getting to see quite a few. Their grandkids had reached marriageable age and together they had managed to get to quite a few. Those “tying the knot” could always rely on a good present from Sid and Aggie just as Sid and Jean had done for those who married when Jean was alive. This was not a means of buying affection, The descendants were dearly loved by Sid and Aggie and all the kids and grandkids equally loved their indulgent grandparents.

They also attended baptisms but not as many as they would have liked. “It’s a different world now”, Aggie observed, “what was right for us is of no consequence for young people of today. It is all about pleasure”. Sid partly agreed. “It seems to me that today’s young people aren’t concerned with the norms of yesterday but they are usually kind and are passionate about the environment, climate change and social issues like poverty and homelessness. They have to live in the mess that we have created.” “I can’t argue with that” was Aggie’s response.

Luckily, or perhaps by example, all of Sid and Aggie’s families had inherited their seniors value systems and they, the “oldies” were inordinately proud of these later generations.

True to Sir James word, Sid was presented with some difficult challenges. It was no great surprise that many of these issues involved delicate handling of people. On several occasions he was sent to branches to find out why they were underperforming. Almost invariably it was people related. These were often the result of poor training but in a couple of instances it resulted in managers, much to Sid’s sorrow, being invited to look for other employment. Only on one occasion did Sid and his team find any misappropriation. That was referred to the Fraud Squad.

He, Sid, often spoke to customers in an effort to resolve differences but he really liked helping customers who were having repayment problems find ways that assisted them to meet their debts.

To his surprise, one day Sir James called him to his office and advised him that for a month he would be managing a large branch at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This separated him from Jean but he got lots of rides on the World’s best- known train.

However, it was a turbulent year in the UK. Sir Gerald was very upset when Hugh Gaitskell the leader of the Labour Party died. Mr Gaitskell had done much to reunify the Labour Party. He was replaced by the formidable Harold Wilson. On the other hand, the Tories were shattered by what became known as the “Profumo Affair” where a Cabinet Minister became involved with call-girls and a Russian spy. Then the statesman-like Prime Minister Harold McMillan resigned due to serious illness and Sir Alec Douglas-Home, for whom Sir Gerry had very little time, became the PM.

In the meantime, Jean had become something of a folk-hero but was carrying a huge work-load. Teaching, netball and Church made for a very busy young lady and Sid’s absences only increased the stress levels. However, her Headmaster could see that his beautiful young Aussie was in danger of burnout and did all that he could to ease her burden. Perhaps, not surprisingly, Jean was often invited to his, or another staff member’s house for a meal, usually when Sid was away. However, Jean had a support team. The Bottomley-Browns kept a very close watch on her and,

at any sign of distress, made sure that either Val or Elspeth turned up with some idea to cheer her up. They probably would have turned up anyway.

They hadn't changed churches as Morrisons were on the other side of London but they visited each other whenever the opportunity arose. If the twins were staying over they went to Sid and Jean's Church where they were always asked to sing their solos or sublime duets. If Elspeth knew they were attending she endeavoured to turn up. So occasionally did Sir Gerald and Lady Valerie.

Sid remembered some unusual events that occurred that year. Tottenham won the European Cup while Manchester United won the FA Cup just seven years after most of the team were killed in a plane crash at Munich. One very unpopular act was The Beeching Axe where Dr Beeching, the Head of British Rail, closed many of Britain's minor rail lines, mainly in the country.

However, the year's big event was held in early December and involved a migration back to Australia. It was of course the wedding of Rex and Meg. This had been planned for some time and Sid and Jean were under "pain of death" to get back for it as Sid was to be "The Best Man".

So, in late November Sid and Jean arrived at Heathrow in time to catch the Qantas Boeing 707 to Melbourne. As was normal a large contingent turned out to see them off. Some of them would also be coming out in a few days' time, including four Bottomley-Browns.

Eventually they boarded but had no sooner sat down than a Hostess approached them saying "excuse me Sir and Madam but your seats have been changed. Please follow me."

So, they tagged along behind the "Hostie" until she stopped and said "These are your seats." I hope you find them comfortable".

"Hang on" said Sid, "These can't be our seats. These are Business Class". "It looks like you have been upgraded," smiled the hostess. "Enjoy your flight."

Sid and Jean looked at each other. Together they said "I'll bet this is Sir Gerry's doing. He can't help himself. He doesn't spend much on himself but loves helping others."

The same hostess appeared. "Would you like a glass of champagne"? Sid was going to decline but Jean said that she would, so Sid also decided to partake. "I could grow to like this high-life" said Jean. "Not if we have to pay for it", thought Sid.

They found Business Class far more relaxing than Economy and when they made the stops at Rome, Bombay, Singapore and Darwin they were very appreciative of the chance to refresh in the Qantas Lounges.

Almost thirty hours after leaving London Jean looked out the window, nudged the sleeping Sid and said, "We're home" to which Sid mumbled "good".

The plane landed, then taxied to its allotted spot where passengers were soon alighting and moving to the Terminal lounges.

"I wonder if anyone will be waiting for us" Jean pondered. She needn't have worried!