

JOURNEY FROM SYDNEY TO LONDON

APRIL 1954



ON BOARD "ORSOVA"

OUTWARD BOUND

Sydney – Melbourne – Adelaide – Fremantle – Colombo – Naples – Aden – Suez Canal -
Marseilles - London

Equipped with seasick tablets, clothing, games for the boys, and lots of tears, we left the Pier in Sydney with a few relatives to see us off. Lots of paper ribbons, and waving hands. Some of Tom's relatives were there, but not Gladys and John Fearn as they were stationed in Dubbo and couldn't make it down.

I wasn't looking forward to the long sea voyage. Six weeks of mostly the high seas. There were a few stops to look forward to, while the boys and I got our sea legs. We were very disappointed when we went below. The cabins on the ship were down on "D" deck, with one cabin in the stern and the other in the bows, with the whole length of the ship separating them. This means we had to split up, with David and I sharing a cabin at one end, and Tom and Rod sharing another at the other end. David had just turned four years, and Rod was only six, and they were too young to be left alone. In the evenings, after they had been bathed and fed, we would put them to bed in the one cabin, under the Stewards care, (after paying him 10 pounds) and when we turned in for the night, we would re-group as told.

Our first stop was Melbourne. I regained my land legs here, after three days of seasickness. This became routine for me, so that I looked forward to ports to regain my balance. I really can't remember what we did very much, I remember that there was a kids play centre, and the boys enjoyed going there. There were a lot of other RAAF kids on board in total there were five RAAF families traveling. They were: Daphne and Keith Tongue, Kath and Keith Isaacs, Helen and Col Bremner, and George and Monica King. We were all unknown to each other (except for the men) at the beginning of the voyage. We all ate at the same table in the wardroom, and were served by a Steward from Goa. I remember that we were always late for dinner at night (having to attend to the children) and it became a joke on the Steward among his fellow waiters.

There was a fancy dress ball for the kids. I pinched a pillow case, cut it up and made a chef's hat and apron for David, scrounged some fish and chips on a plate to complete his costume. He walked around the circle, fascinated by all that was going on and forgetting about his fish and chips which continually ended up on the floor. He would just stop and put them back on his plate, to everyone's amusement. He won first prize in his age group.



I also got hold of some crepe paper from the ship's shop, and a marking pen, and turned Rod into a lighthouse.

The costume slipped over his head, the tube coming down to his knees. I drew bricks on the paper and cut windows in the top, so he could see where he was going. He switched a torch on and off, as he walked around. He won 1st prize in his age group too. Most everyone on board had brought costumes with them for both the kids and the adults entertainment. Daphne Tongue and I went to the Adult night as ghosts, made from sheets taken from the beds.

Before this trip, Rod had developed severe allergies, which gave him bronchitis and asthma. He had dreadful coughing fits which brought blood to his lips, and many were the nights I sat up with hot water bottles and vicks, to attempt to help him. I was hoping that the elements that caused Rod's asthma attacks, namely, grasses, pollens, dogs, cats, and anything else you could think of, would not be found at sea, and he would be spared the dreadful coughing fits. David was too young really, to realize what it was all about. Thank goodness neither of them suffered sea sickness.

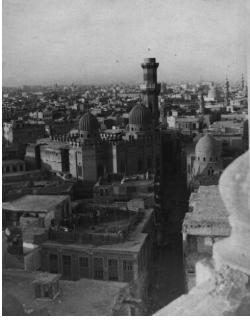
The Melbourne stop was a chance to get back on land, for a day, and then we were off again, next stop Adelaide, then across the Great Australian Bight, (not too rough fortunately) then Fremantle, then across the Indian Ocean. In the middle of the Indian Ocean, there rolled in a thick fog. Tom and I were up on deck watching a movie, sitting right under the funnel, along with everyone else. We didn't notice the fog coming in until the fog horn blasted right above us. I got such a fright. I ran as fast as I could down all those stairs to D deck to get the boys. Tom caught up with me as I was getting them out of the cabin and assured me that it was just a foghorn. He said he had never seen anyone run so fast in all his life! We stopped in Colombo, but had no money for tours, so just walked around the city. We did a tour of Pompeii from Naples, which was absolutely fascinating, but women weren't allowed into some of the rooms because of naughty scenes on the walls.

We stopped in Aden but were advised not to go ashore, as it was too dangerous. There were "bum" boats all around us in the harbour and if money was thrown overboard, they would dive for it.



I was looking forward to Cairo and perhaps seeing the Pyramids, as tours were organized. Thankfully Rod had not been sick while we were mid ocean. But I was seasick on and off, and recovered each time I got back onto land.

The Suez Canal was something out of the wonder books. Sand, sand, and more sand, and I don't know too much about it. Even tho there wasn't a cat or dog, dust or pollens in sight, here Rod developed a very bad attack of Asthma, and he and I were confined to the cabin, for the entire three day trip through the Canal. I saw glimpses through the porthole, and that was all.



We finally arrived in Cairo but there was no trip for us, as we had no money. We walked around the city close to the docks, looking at everything. Tom left his camera in one of the shops, and I remember how grateful we were when the proprietor came running down the streets to give it back to him. I vowed to see the Pyramids on our way back home in two years time. Then we went on to Marseilles. We went ashore, looking for a Chemist stop to get cough medicine for Rod as we had run out.

Of course, we didn't speak the language, so I stood in front of the Chemist himself, coughed hard, and pointed to Rod. The Chemist thought we must have been from Mars, and all I ended up was "Fisherman's Friend". Very strong medicine for a small boy. Then we saw a tram, and decided to ride to the terminal, and back to have a look around. The conductor prevented us from boarding, telling us something in French, and all the passengers joined in and finally we managed to glean the info that we were saying "Terminus" and we were already there. So we gave that away.

I don't think we stopped again until we berthed in London. Penniless. Thank goodness we were met by an RAF Officer, who handed us ten pounds to tide us over until pay was able to be organized. After we left the ship, David asked "What was the name of that town we were in Mummy ? "

On our last night at sea, we determined to be on time for dinner and surprise the Steward with a song. He wasn't even at the table, and suddenly there was a great panic behind the scenes and he came rushing out. I can't remember the song we sang to him, but we had made up appropriate words, and presented him with a sizeable tip. He was delighted with it all. Mad Australians.

END OF JOURNEY OUTBOUND.

JOURNEY FROM LONDON TO SYDNEY

NOVEMBER 1957



ON BOARD "HIMALAYA"

HOMEWARD BOUND

London - Capetown – Fremantle – Adelaide – Melbourne – Sydney.

To mark our exit from Great Britain, we hired a Rolls Royce from the local garage, complete with Driver. I can't remember their names, but they had the garage in the village Kennington, where we had lived for our stay in England. Their surname was "Mills" and Mr. Mills had never driven out of Oxfordshire, and must have been feeling adventurous, to take on the 60 mile trip to London.

He picked us up from the Cottage, and the villagers stood outside their homes and waved us goodbye. We had booked a week at the Tavistock Hotel in Tavistock Square. We had two rooms, with connecting door. During the days we rode on the double decker busses all over London, went to Petticoat Lane, went to the Tower of London, Museums, and did all the things we hadn't done on our arrival. Somewhere there is a picture of us all at Piccadilly Circus, complete with pigeons.

There was TV in the boys room, and each night they were anxious to escape up there to watch it. They were allowed to excuse themselves when they had finished their dinner, and take the lift to their room. On our last night in the Hotel, a gentleman came over to us, He said, with an American accent, "I have been watching your little boys for a week now, and I have never seen such well behaved children before. Please accept my congratulations on the way you are educating them". Of course, that was the first thing I told the boys when we returned to the rooms.

We took a train down to the dock (was it called "Tilbury"- not sure) to board the Himilaya. This time we had two adjoining cabins, I can't remember which Deck they were on, but whatever it was, I knew we had to accept it after our failure during the voyage out, to have a change of cabins.

And so I said a glad farewell to England. My hopes of seeing Cairo and the Pyramids were dashed as the Suez Canal was closed because of the war going on there. We just had a very long sea trip and were told that Durban was going to be the port of call in South Africa. I was delighted at this, as Dad was born in Durban and most of his family was still there, and it would be an opportunity to meet them.

Unfortunately the ports of call were changed, and Capetown became the only stop after London. We walked around the town, noticing the unpleasant distinction between blacks and whites, over every building and even in the parks and beaches. We did a few bus trips, and on one such trip, David piped up and said "Mum, I know the difference between Australians and South Africans. South Africans spit." This was because of a "no spitting" sign erected on the bus.

The first few days of the voyage, I was cursed with the sea sickness. Tom took me to the ships Surgeon, who gave me a course of tablets, which almost knocked me out for three days. When I woke up, I was cured.

We did the usual things, playroom for the boys, fancy dress affairs, swimming in the ships pool, ping-pong, quoits, horse racing on deck. There was one bad day when a crew member fell overboard and we turned round and searched the area where he had gone over, to no avail. There were huge trees of seaweed floating in the water, which could be mistaken for a body. And the ship rolled from side to side. It had no stabilizers, and was nicknamed the "Himarolla".

Fremantle was a delight. Stepping back on Australian soil was heaven for me. We were all starved for some good old Aussie tucker, namely garlic sausage, and I remember that we looked around for a Deli, bought a huge chunk and ate it standing out in the street.

The trip around into the Bight was horrendous. The weather was so rough ropes had to be erected for passengers to hold on to, and some had broken arms, and legs, from falls. I lay in bed at night and watched the door curtain swing up the walls, first side, shudder, shudder, then slowly up the other side, shudder, shudder. There was a screw about one inch from the ceiling, and I vowed that if the curtain swung as high as that screw, we would never recover from the roll.

We docked in Adelaide and then Melbourne, and finally were back in Sydney. There we were welcomed by Tom's rellies, my own Mum and Dad, who had driven all the way from Mackay, and Gladys and John Fearn. What a welcome that was. I am still moved by the memory of it all.

And so the trip was over. Back home. Mum and Dad had moved into our house and cleaned it up and after a week or so, drove all the way back to Mackay.

THE END