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**“DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS.....  
TO THE HAVEN WHERE THEY WOULD BE”**

**ONGOING DIARY COLUMN (No. 3)**

**To Boldre, England from Melbourne, Australia by Freighter**

*Andrew Neaum*



*“The Mount” Tauranga*

**Friday 21 June 2013 7.25am Tauranga**

Auckland is our last stop for over two weeks until Panama. It looks grey and wet, but we will be getting off for a last trot on firm ground for a while. We are supposed to be meeting up with Peter Jeffrey. He was the Roman Catholic priest for many years in Shepparton, but we have not as yet been able to contact him by phone.

Yesterday's main event was an early morning arrival in Tauranga. We awoke to the sound of the gantries working outside our cabin windows and to a grey, wet day. We had visited Tauranga in November 2011 on a trip to the North Island from Australia in order to validate Diana's temporary Residence Permit. We stayed with Jo and David Harricks for several days, and in our hired car were able to trip around the wider district. Our visit this time is short. Getting off the ship involves squaring it with the Captain in case Customs officials have requested a word with us, and then going outside to ask a crewman in charge of the gangway to ring for a van. For safety as well as security reasons no one is allowed to walk to the security gates, no matter how close they are. Our van at Tauranga was driven by the friendliest and most courteous fellow you could ever meet, astonishingly so. He handed us down the last two gangway steps, opened the van door, gave us wet wipes to clean oil off our hands, all the while teeming with a lot of news about his family and job and so on. It turned out that he had been a local Anglican church's Vicar's Warden for eight years. He told us that towards the end of his stint as such he had arranged a trip to the Holy Land for his Vicar and wife as a gift. A better example of sweet Anglicanism would be hard to find. A truly delightful fellow and a retired policeman, his name was Bob, reminding us of another Anglican Churchwarden, retired policeman and excellent fellow called Bob, my brother in law in Cape Town.

We had eventually managed to phone David Harricks and arrange for him to come and pick us up for a walk and coffee with Emma and also by chance with Penny, over on a visit from Melbourne. He collected us at the Dock gate and we went with him to meet Emma and Penny at the most distinctive and attractive feature of Tauranga and its harbour, namely "The Mount", a green Volcanic plug with a lovely walk either to the top or around it. Last time we were here, in lovely weather, we walked to the top. This time, in a bitterly cold wind, we walked round it. A lovely walk, David talking animatedly to me all the way round. Last time we walked the Mount I was thrilled to see big freighters sail so closely past as we walked, little realising that in a couple of years I would be on one of them.

After the walk, some of it in sunshine, for the day was more squally than constantly wet and grey, we stopped for a hot chocolate, and then bade farewell to Emma and Penny, after which David took us back, calling in at Tauranga's one heritage building and complex, "The Elms", an early Anglican Mission not far from the docks, a lovely place, in the old Chapel of which Emma and Ben were married.

### **Later 21 June Auckland**

The run up to Auckland is a fairly short one. We left in mid afternoon and when we awoke were in dock. We watched two films that evening, the first a gripping thriller of John Le Carré's, set mostly in Kenya and called "The Constant Gardener". The second was an old Woody Allen classic: "Manhattan".

We have now left Auckland and all ports of call until 6,500 miles later we arrive at Balboa the Pacific port for Panama City and Canal. We also have a new Captain who tells us that we should have some fairly rough weather, about a five metre swell, but if so we are doing well. He also said that because when on leave he tends to put on weight, he won't often be at table with us.

We had a really lovely day in Auckland, shown round by Peter Jeffrey, now Rector of the one Roman Catholic Seminary in all of New Zealand. Up until a year or so ago he had been the much loved priest at St Brendan's in Shepparton. He is about 75, though doesn't look it, and the Seminary has about thirty students, almost all of them from foreign places like the Philippines, Vietnam and Korea. The Third World in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century repaying the First World for their missionaries in previous centuries. Their fervency and faith, by his account, is easily as impressive as was that of their forerunners.

Peter is a lovely man. An example of this being his gentle reluctance to tell us just how long we had kept him waiting for us on a cold, wet morning. He wished to spare us any feelings of embarrassment or need to apologise. He had read a book to prepare for a lecture while he waited and had been offered a warm place to do so by a decent Security official. He had rearranged his whole day to show us Auckland.

We made a tour of the fine Seminary, custom built, and had a coffee with the Secretary and two priest colleagues, both of them delightful, the conversation sparkling. One of them could trump our travel destinations, for he had been to the South Pole. The Seminary used to be at Dunedin on South Island. Some years ago Fr Peter had been called over to advise as how best to meet the future with a shrinking number of vocations. He had advised a move to Auckland, much to the chagrin of an

old guard. His qualification for doing this had been eight years at a seminary in Fiji, some of them as Rector. A couple of years ago he was asked to come to be Rector of the Auckland College, initially as a fill-in for a year, and now for at least another. His heart remains in Shepparton though. He was looking forward to a return in a few weeks time for a big bash to celebrate his Jubilee.

He drove us to the highest and most spectacular point in Auckland, the top of Mount Eden, where in a bitter wind we rejoiced in a view that revealed how much of the city is made up of water. It is spread round a narrow but complicated isthmus that separates the Tasman Sea from the Pacific Ocean. We then went and had a glorious and unutterably welcome break from the food of middle Europe in an Indian Restaurant. After this we went to see two religious Icon and Mosaic artists at work on a huge mosaic piece worth \$80,000 for a church in Canada. Then a hot chocolate in a lovely bay side establishment and so back to the ship, talking, talking, talking all the way.

*Fr Peter Jeffrey  
and myself on  
top of cold  
Mount Eden*



### **Saturday 22 June 2013**

We arrived back in time for dinner, but ate lightly after so good a lunch. We set sail around 8.00pm on a brightly moonlit night. We stood on the bridge, Auckland dazzlingly bright behind us and more gentle suburban lights all around the vast bay through which we made our way. The Pilot talking to the Captain mentioned the hurricane season starting and that predictions are for a bad season! The back portion of the Bridge, with its charts and screens is curtained off from the front at night. Utter darkness is required in order to see with no reflections on the glass. Even the entrance door to the Bridge shuts off the passage light as you enter.

We awoke this morning to the ship rolling from side to side far more than it has so far. Things gently slip from side to side on the shelf behind the bed. Up on the bridge we learn that the height of the swell is five metres and we have changed course to avoid worse weather, heading NE instead of ENE, for hundreds of miles. As it is we will have weather much like this for three or four days. So far no ill effects whatsoever.

For breakfast the usual muesli and then some blue cheese on brown bread. Strong coffee and grape juice. Getting back from the Bridge there were quite a few things on the floor. We have set up a crucifix and my two guinea fowl on non-slip matting on the sideboard, but one Guinea fowl and the crucifix were on the floor.

### **Sunday 23 June 2013**

The ship still rolls heavily and the sun streams through the window. All sorts of things slide around and fall off desks. The Chief Engineer, the most delightful of fellows, but whose English is a little laboured, stays on after meals a while to chat. He approves, he says of oldies like us on such an adventure and with dreams! I retorted,

“We think ourselves younger than you are.” He brought us in a hard drive with good films on it, but unfortunately my computer won’t read it. His name is Piotr, the formal version. In conversation with friends: Piotrek (my spelling, from the sound).

We watched a good English film last night, funny and poignant, called “Driving Lessons”. It is about a young man brought up repressed in a Vicarage with a dreadful Evangelically besotted mother and a far too mild father. He breaks out with the help of an aged actress brilliantly performed (Julie Walters). Needless to say I had never heard of it.

I have just opened one of the three front windows of our cabin to savour some fresh air while looking down the length of the ship. The wind, if there is one, must be from behind for there is no rush of air in.

### **Monday 24 June 2013**

We lost another hour last night. This Captain is a different character from the last. Not much given to fraternising with passengers for a start. Confident, he seems to have worked out a manner of living at sea that suits him well. His cabin door is curtained, the door always open. We came in from the deck through the heavy door next to his cabin yesterday and the door banged mightily behind us, there was a roar of protest from behind the curtain. He didn’t know it was us of course and later apologised. He is in his sixties, has presence, and a rubicund, weather beaten face, curly hair, a slight but distinct pot belly and a gravelly voice. We are told he is married to a Tongan Princess. He appears to be on the ball though and to our chagrin has picked up that I haven’t had a Yellow Fever vaccination, something required, apparently, in Panama and *de rigeur* in Colombia. He blames the travel agent for not advising us of this. Diana has had one that is up to date from previous trips abroad. I had a whole lot done before we went to Zimbabwe, but not Yellow Fever. Anyway he will consult with the Shipping Company as to what is best to do, I could have a jab in Cristobal if necessary, apparently they take effect immediately. It would have been easier and more satisfactory to have it done in Auckland.

The Chief Engineer has become a good mate and because my computer wouldn’t read his external hard drive, he has copied on to one of my large flash drives a great number of films, two of which we watched last night. The first an American Comedy called “Morning Glory” with Harrison Ford and most enjoyable, and then another American film, “Annapolis” about a prestigious Naval Officers’ Training College, also a good watch, though not critical enough of the whole, crazy, macho set up, I thought.

We went a walk up to the bow yesterday. The ship still rocks mightily from side to side, but although the walk up the long ship is underneath the deck of containers, we are still well above the waterline and so no spray is washing over the rails. It was a sunny day and very pleasant in the bow area. Most of the containers are “reefers” with a motor providing refrigeration and so noisy. Up on the bow you get away from that and enjoy the sun, looking ahead in peace. We watched two pairs of birds skimming the waves, one pair very dark brown, almost black, the other black and white, possibly a sea bird called a Cape Pigeon. There have been larger birds more distant that could well be albatross. We stayed a good half hour or more on the bow. The wind was about 24 knots, but from behind and so as we travel at 17.2 knots it was

almost still. We will probably go there again today if the sun comes more fully out. As things get warmer there are deck chairs for the smaller deck areas at our level and nearby which we might utilize eventually as well.

*Off loading the Pilot*



I notice from our post breakfast visit to the Bridge and a sheet prepared for the authorities at Panama there that there are 1,222 containers on board, of several sizes, and only 77 are empty. This morning we are about 28 degrees north and 168 east and have crossed the International Date Line. We don't admit to having crossed it till tomorrow sometime and so will experience two Tuesdays. We have passed a couple of small fishing vessels but nothing else. The sea is vast and empty.

### **Saturday evening on the 29 June.**

We are latitude 12 south and longitude 120 West. We have just eaten a good meal and at around 8.00pm will go down to the Officer's Recreation Room to celebrate the First Mate's birthday. She is a very smart Polish bird called Karolina. About David's age, she lives in Birmingham.

The air outside is warm now, but it is also blowy. We travel obliquely into a 30 knot wind at a speed of 17 knots and that certainly makes it blowy. After lunch we made our customary trip to the bow to enjoy its peace and quiet and to watch great shoals of small flying fish, break the surface and like locusts spread their wings or fins. Into a 30 knot wind some of them were airborne for 15 long seconds.

The swimming pool was filled for us this morning. Diana had a swim before breakfast. The sea temperature is about 25 degrees and so too is the pool at first. But what a footling pool! I will probably have a go eventually but am not enthusiastic. Last night we watched the lousiest film of the trip so far: "Goal 3". No plot worth talking about, an apology of a story spliced into the story of England's last World Cup. Pretty pathetic.

Otherwise life at sea makes its leisurely way. I have begun with delight the first book of "The Raj Quartet", highly recommended to me by Ray. I cannot but delight in a book which in the first few pages not only arouses my interest in a leading character, but also deals up that character's reflections of a quality and sort such as this

*....She had devoted her life, in a practical and unimportant way, to trying to prove that fear was evil because it promoted prejudice, that courage was good because it was a sign of selflessness, that ignorance was bad because fear sprang from it, that knowledge was good because the more you knew of the world's complexity the more clearly you saw the insignificance of the part you played.....*

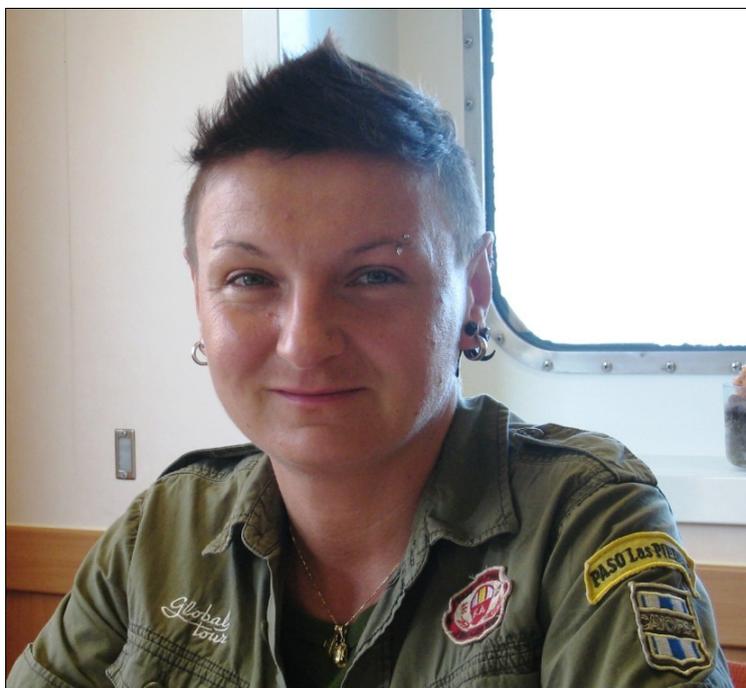
**Tuesday 25 June 2013 6.50am**

The dawn to day is over a smoother sea, though still with swell enough to rock us substantially. It was a quiet day yesterday, as should be the case now for a week or so. In the morning I polished up a section of this diary to send off to the family, which was duly done. We went a walk up the length of the ship to the bow, a trifle gingerly, for there was still a fairly heavy roll. At the bow we sat on a capstan and enjoyed relative quiet and solitude. You can't be seen from the bridge there and the noise of refrigerated containers is left behind. The greatest commotion is the sound of the sea, with the foam and fuss of blundering our way through it. In a ship such as this, the noise and fuss appears not right at the bow where the ship's great bulbous "porpoise" divides the waters, but further back where the bow evens out into the sides of the ship. It is there that the sea is noisily creamed, frothed and laced.

We had a relatively good go at Dot's diaries, but need to be more single-minded about them for a while if we are going to complete them. They comprise thousands and thousands of words and are engrossing, the more you get into them the more interesting and absorbing they become.

The drinking water on the ship is distilled sea water, and therefore, of course, contains no minerals or additives. Probably not all that good for you, but presumably in no way harmful. We watched a gripping drama from the Chief Engineer's list last night. An American film called "*Gone Baby Gone*". It was about the kidnap of a drug addict mother's little girl, directed by Ben Affleck, and posed all sorts of big moral questions as to ends not justifying means and with incidental relevance to the whole debate in Australia as to the "Stolen Generation". I am thankful that I bought in Tamworth, under Pete's direction, the little speaker for the computer. Without it we wouldn't be able to watch films on my computer, its inbuilt speakers don't work.

*Karolina: Chief Mate*



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