

## Chapter 7 Travel

Here are a few of the more memorable events relating to people encountered whilst travelling. In recent years Margaret and I have taken to cruises. Margaret enjoys these because of the high level of service; for me, the interest is meeting people from diverse places. Some of the experiences include:

**Rio-de-Janeiro** In Carnival, I rate this the number one location to return to. I find it impossible to put into words the all-pervading atmosphere. The whole thing just oozed sensuality and two hundred drummers at one hit got your attention. At 8.0am when the last, and poorest of the poor, Samba School paraded, there was such a welling up of support that it had me, of all people, in tears. The downside of course is law and order. One night a youth tried to snatch my watch, but maybe he was attempting to get some money to buy some bread to feed his mother in the flavella. A more serious problem was on the only occasion when I left the hotel with any money in order to buy presents. I strayed from the main street, felt insecure as a press of people assembled round me and started to put my hand into my pocket containing the wallet. On feeling my hand withdrawn from the pocket I spun round to be confronted by three men. Good morning! The police were quite efficient and I then had to go to American Express for a voucher for more funds, with my passport (they gave me 98 cents to the pound!). From American Express I walked to the bank and was given a bundle of currency about twelve inches high, which I stuffed into my shirt. There was an armed guard at the door and a taxi on standby. The driver gave my shirt a lingering inquisitive glance and I was much relieved when the journey was completed without incident.

The above trip was some thirty years ago and I went with Margaret in 2012. Two ladies travelling with us had made their reservations for the Carnival on the internet which seemed a chancy thing to do but they outscored us in three ways: they had better seats, a complimentary lavatory and half a dozen condoms. The show was of course magnificent and there were

two major changes in thirty years. There were wonderful now mechanised floats but the girls were now mostly full clothed!

**Disneyland** When StJohn was about ten years old I went with him and Chris to Florida. To try and help with the age thing we took the roles that Chris was my kid brother and StJohn was Chris's son. On the overhead railway at Disneyland, I decided that StJohn should have no more sweets. His response was that if the supply was cut off he would tell Jan about Chris and his dad and the women!

On this trip we travelled to Sarasota. From the poolside Chris went to buy a beer and was gone for ages. Eventually he called me to the bar – the bar lady liked him and kept us well supplied. It was arranged that we would meet up that evening at a local disco. The said lady was nowhere to be seen but I did strike up a conversation with Kim an attractive lady who was there with her younger sister. Now I had previously helped Chris out by taking on the older sister to his chosen lady at Fort Lauderdale and he now obliged by taking young sister on the dance floor. Returning to our seats Chris had gone missing. Young sister was the subjected to the attentions of an unwelcome guy and I enquired if they would like to move on which was their clear desire. Kim drove us to another establishment, with huge stuffed marlin adorning the walls, where we chanced on two close friends. It was unreal to sit there whilst the four girls discussed how horny they all felt. This does not happen in the UK (that is to say not with me present). Not only was Kim attractive, she had a brain and was a commodity broker. She eventually drove me off and we parked close to the beach. The car had just misted up when a flashlight abruptly appeared together with a knock on the window. The state trooper enquired after the lady's wellbeing: she assured him that she was in good hands.

Chris did turn up for breakfast and I was at pains to know why he had disappeared. Whilst dancing with younger sister a chap had come up telling him there was a phone call for him.

Leaving the dance floor he found the lady from the bar, hands on hips, intimating “Look I booked you for the night”.

**Epernay** Round Table invited me to join their day visit to a champagne chateau. From the aircraft we were given a lengthy tour of the vineyards and an extended visit to the cellars. Gasping for a drink, we emerged into the sunlight into an enclosed garden and a waiter came round with a small tray of half filled glasses. This is ridiculous! After a delay we were then ushered into the Orangery and it immediately became apparent that we would not be short of a drink. Each setting had five wine glasses to accommodate a champagne to complement each of the courses (although personally I think the juice should only be imbibed before eating). The outcome was predictable: it was probably one of the top scoring drunken events even for Aylesbury Round Table.

**West Coast** Peter Burnett was a director of a building company with which I had tried to do business, without success. He telephoned to enquire what I was doing for the next couple of weeks: he had a business exploration trip booked to the West Coast of the USA and the chap who planned to go with Peter could not make it so the tickets were going free. All I would have to pay for was the accommodation. Yes, I could cancel my appointments. We found that we were very much on the same wavelength. On arriving at Los Angeles we had reserved a room at the downtown Hilton. This was a mistake. It was very run down and all we wanted to do was to have a shower, dine and move on the next day to somewhere better. We called the lift on the 8th floor: just as the doors were closing an attractive young lady arrived and Peter held the doors open for her. Once closed, she started to scream: I had not touched her, neither had Peter. Her eyes were fixed on the floor of the elevator, on a mouse, doing laps. There was only one thing an English chap could do: go down on your knees whilst Peter held her hand and invited her to mount still wearing her stiletto heels. At lobby level, the mouse shot out and Peter helped her down. The sea of Japanese awaiting the lift saw nothing amusing in this

spectacle. As for the young lady she insisted on taking us to the bar where we all enjoyed Santa Margueritas that she bought for us: things were improving. We looked at some amazing houses; so different from what we were accustomed to, but wondered if it was really necessary to have a shower that sits ten. The bathrooms were mind blowing. Being escorted round one show house at Rancho Bernardo the lady opened a door to a tiny room with a sink. Oh, a butler's pantry I said. From her reaction, I could see that that expression was going straight into the brochure. We went on to enjoy the magic of San Francisco and the Embarcadero Centre. I had never dreamed that such attractive ladies could be interested in me. This was the first occasion on which a lavatory, sorry John, talked to me.

Whilst with Barratt, Peter often took me to events in their helicopter and then, when running a division for Bellway, he invited me to a Ryder Cup match at The Belfry. Bellway had a marquee in a hospitality square the central feature of which was a flower display with well and waterfall. We had just left the tent when this golf ball arrived at Bellway's entrance: Ballesteros had rather sliced his drive. Olazabal sauntered up to survey the shot his partner had left. Off he went over the walkway, through the spinney and on to the course to the green. Suffice it to say that Ballesteros's put lipped out for the birdie, from fifteen feet.

Peter asked one quite tasty lady out to dinner: she said that she would happily have a meal "but I am not screwing this month". In our travels, when retiring to the restroom at an airport, he would point out a lady and say he expected to see me talking to her on his return. You had to comply rather than risk his scorn. Living close to Margaret's original marital home was Josie, an attractive and well placed single lady. Now Peter had done me the favour of introducing me to several ladies so I thought I should return the favour: yes, Josie would be interested in dinner with Peter. It took not many seconds to see that Peter's chances were "zero" We ended the evening with coffee at Margaret's and it was on finishing her cup that Josie realised she had lost the keys to her cottage. "No!!!" she would not

spend the night under the same roof as Peter. It was decided that the window to break was in the kitchen door. The people at the adjoining house ran the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and we decided to tape the glass before breaking it. I carried a sledgehammer in the boot of my car and applied it to the glass – it bounced off. A second stronger blow also re-bounded. Here I was before two ladies appearing to be a wimp – the third blow shattered the glass and may have taken some wood with it too. The outcome was that Josie was delivered from a dreadful fate.

**San Pedro de Alcantara** At one of the times in my life when I was available, Richard invited me to a chaps' golfing trip in Spain. I got lucky and found myself returning from Porto Banus later and later. Towards the end of the week, I was barely back in time for breakfast. The effect of all this was profound. My golf improved in leaps and bounds: Richard said I was at last keeping my head down on the shot.

**Marbella** Pre-Margaret I was on a package holiday with friends at an hotel near Marbella. The food was atrocious. I managed to persuade a waiter to lend me his jacket and went round all the tables asking what they thought of their meal. Nearly all the diners were English and, with just one exception, they all assured me that the food was excellent. The "exception" comprised an attractive couple with whom I subsequently went with my lady to stay the weekend in the UK. Not till late on the Saturday night did we grasp that a swap was in mind, which was not a satisfactory option.

**Tangiers** On a day trip to Tangiers, smoke started issuing from the stern of the vessel; alarmed, we found it was just the crew burning oily rags, on the instructions of Inspectors, for a fire drill that clearly had not been anticipated. As water was turned on, the hoses resembled garden sprinklers with just a trickle at the business end. When it came to lowering the lifeboats, some would, some would not. I do recall that just one of the engines was made to start. (on the return journey we

“stood by” a vessel in difficulty but doubt we could have offered much support). In Tangiers Richard, master salesman that he is, had some learning to do. Peggy wanted a handbag that the man retrieved from the top row, fifteen feet up. Richard started bartering and walked away several times. Eventually it became apparent that Richard was endeavouring to drive the man too low. As they failed to agree terms I well remember the words as we departed “Good morning, I have plenty of handbags but your wife has no handbag”. In the market there were the most luscious figs. Having each had one we did not want to discard the skins: our guide took them and exchanged them with a water seller for a drink. This would be his lunch.

**Plaza Hotel, New York** Travelling with Richard on our way to Los Angeles to stay with Peter Burnett for the Grand Prix, we stopped off at New York. Calling at the hotel we had booked we found the accommodation unsatisfactory and smelly. (A year later Donald Trump demolished it). Bags in hand we tried the Plaza and asked to see a room. It was opulent and with two king size beds. Returning to the reception Richard noticed a poster offering Saturday night honeymoon breaks at 40% off the regular price. In addition you got a bottle of champagne, full breakfast in the room and dinner in the Oak Room. Richard said OK we will take the honeymoon deal, which caught the assistant rather off guard. Saying he would have to speak to the manager he returned indicating that we had the honeymoon deal. At dinner we had the prime table before the mini-orchestra, lit with a chorus of candles and decorated with a garland of exotic flowers but all I had to look at was Richard. The waiter headed me off when I attempted to make a foray to another table. The adjoining Disco had an interesting title: “The Library”.

Peter was running Barratts, house builders, and in his usual style had forced a few things through. He built a show house in Sears’ store and somehow got permission to fly the only helicopter to the Grand Prix in addition to the safety one. We posed that Richard was a driver and I was his manager: it did

wonders for our cause. Fashion Island seemed to be a social hotspot: we were rather let down to find it was a traffic island.

**Passport** I think “hoist by my own petard” is the appropriate expression here. I was taking the young Linda away on holiday for the first time. Having made a secret of my age I knew she would make certain to have a peek at my passport. Now the figure “1” can be written with a tick at the top: well, I extended the tick and curved it upwards a little: she read it as “7”. All well and good I thought, having lost six years, but the passport was soon due for renewal, and the new document came back with a bar across the “1” turning it into a positive “7”. The outcome was that for the next ten years, not wishing to lie about my age, every time I filled in a departure form or immigration document I had to carefully construct each “1” in accordance with the above mentioned specification. Many “1s” appear in these documents and I certainly rued the day I went down this path. Interestingly, when I next renewed the passport with the correct figure it came back without comment.

**The Blue Train** Rosemary’s husband Jack (the magician) was completing his post with South African Travel before carving a living by trickery. Margaret and I had not been to South Africa and he organised a tour. Margaret does not travel lightly so that at Johannesburg I enquired of the porter whether there was sufficient room for her stash of bags. “Plenty”, was the reply. Indeed there was. The entrance door opened onto a vestibule with a door to the bathroom on the left: on the right a door to the Drawing room with a suite of furniture, drinks cabinet and various tables. This led on to the Bedroom, with ample wardrobes and two beds. The suite was next to the Dining car and the brass label on the entrance door proclaimed “Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Gardner”. Following a first rate meal we walked the length of the train as it chugged across the Karoo. We caught up with a rather nice German lady, from the next table at dinner and exchanged “goodnights”. On the return I asked Margaret the number of the lady’s cabin, which she told me. Just a little flick as we walked by, and the door was thrown open, with the damsel clad in her nightdress. The temperature

in our suite was around eighty but there was a frost in the air – this was Valentines’ night too.

It was during this trip that Nelson Mandela was released from prison. At dinner on the day of his freedom I remarked to the waiters that this was quite a momentous day: the response was “why is that?” The waiters liked Margaret: when the entrees arrived there was much ceremony as we awaited the removal of the covers – with a flourish they were off revealing my complete meal and Margaret’s empty plate.

We went to Soweto and could not believe the effrontery of Winnie Mandela. Right in the centre of all the tin shacks, on a gentle hill, she had built a most ostentatious bungalow with all manner of glamorous fittings.

**First cruise** The first trip I had with Margaret was one (the only one) where the seating was fixed. Good or bad, you had the same dining companions for the duration and I thought we had done moderately well. There was an American business man with a Japanese wife, a very attractive young Italian couple, the ship’s Jewish doctor and the ship’s Roman Catholic priest (they joked that if one could not sort the problem out the other could): I was very pleased with myself because I had managed to acquire the seat adjoining the Italian beauty. At the last moment the steward arrived with a ninth person for the table and he decided that she should sit between the Italian and me. Adrienne was about fifty-five years of age and came from Boston where she worked in some boring job with the Council. I think the first thing she said to me was “what does your steak taste like Gordon?” It took some time but I eventually established that she was a good sport. In an attempt to impress Margaret with my virtuosity I had brought an outfit for the fancy dress parade – some pirate gear. I was last in the parade and the compere was unable to refuse when I asked for the microphone. Having spied Adrienne in the front row I announced that I was seeking some rape and pillage and proceeded to leap from the stage, throw her to the floor and



give her a good going over. The bad news was that for days on ship's television this was repeated ad nauseum: I actually had enquiries as to whether the lady was my wife!

**Moscow** In 1988 we were in transit through Sheremetyevo airport for Tokyo: with a couple of hours to kill I picked up a brochure in the lounge for some light reading. The title was not what I expected "Warsaw Treaty Organization – Correlation of Forces In Europe – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation". My casual reading was to be an assessment of the relevant strengths, in considerable detail, of the Forces of the two organisations. The whole point of the exercise seemed to be to demonstrate that NATO was more likely to be the aggressor because it had expended more on its war machine. There was a numerical assessment in great detail, with bar charts and pie segments. Just selecting a few of the major components, Warsaw Pact was superior in just tanks with 59,470 against NATO's 30,690 but deficient in Rocket Launchers and Artillery, (71,500 to 57,000), Large Surface Ships (499 to 102) Cruise missile ships (274 to 23), combat helicopters (5270 to 2,785) and Anti-tank weapons (18,070 to 11,465). Of course all this put us in a very relaxed mood for the holiday.

**Japan** Unlike cousin Clive I had not taken a "rest and recuperation" trip from Hongkong to Tokyo whilst on National Service so this was very much a new experience. The drive from Narito airport to Ginza was just about the most congested I have ever experienced but the hotel was very "swish" with the smoothest lifts I have known. The kettle in the room had to be believed – just present the lead in proximity of the kettle and it took it. There was a three storey atrium with a trio of magnificent chandeliers but there were some quite unsightly cables. I enquired what these were for and the clerk indicated that they were to "stop the chandeliers colliding during the earthquakes". We went to the main Shinto shrine which had some steps to the side. On learning that if you ascended the steps and pulled the bellrope you could get a lady, Margaret forbade me from taking the first step on threat of a "red card". That evening we booked a trip for a meal and to see a

performance of Kabuki traditional theatre. Somehow they put us on the wrong coach and what we got was a steak cooked by two old hags with the perspiration from their faces dripping into the pan but the company was good as we sat cross legged – two Swiss United Nations doctors on a freebee. The next stop was at a Geisha party where I had to pull on the rope to help bring in the fish and then to a strip joint in the street that is known as being a very good one for business men and politicians. The girls were, of course, western. The following day we were off to Kyoto to see the magnificent gardens and cherry trees in full bloom. We had tickets on the eleventh coach of the Shinkansen (Bullet train) and stood at the spot marked “11”. Sure enough the door to carriage number eleven arrived smack on time. The conductor must have told us a dozen times that the snow capped mountain on the righthand side was Mount Fuji. The lavatories were spotlessly clean, with fresh flowers: when the attendant arrived with his trolley he would bow to the waist on entering the carriage and repeat the performance when leaving. At Kyoto we popped into a new housing development of colonial style houses for sale. They were priced sky high but had technology that we do not yet have in the UK twenty years on. In Tokyo we did a tour of the Palace grounds which feature a moat. As a Koi keeper and breeder I was much looking forward to seeing the Emperor’s fish. They were certainly very large but the quality was quite poor.

I made enquiries about the value of land in Ginza and learned that it was fetching \$5million dollars a square metre - enough I reckoned to carpet it in gold Rolexes three deep. On returning home I spoke to my broker and bought a “put” on the Nikkei. This paid for the trip.

**The Rhine** It had come to Margaret’s notice that the Captain of the vessel seemed to be on good terms with Erica, the Entertainments Officer, since she noticed him letting her hair down on the dance floor. On approaching Basel there was a lock, so small that I could not believe the ship would fit. All passengers were cleared from the upper deck, the railings and

funnel lowered and then I spied Erica and the Captain disappearing into the wheelhouse, before that too was levelled. It was a long slow lift and Erica eventually emerged, brushing herself down.

There was a coach trip to Heidelberg and the river Neckar came into view followed by the ancient bridge. The courier explained that there had been a bridge in this location since the year 1284. It had been re-built three times. During the war it had been blown up by the defenders for tactical reasons. The Americans arrived with pontoon bridges and crossed the river in two hours. It took three years to re-build the bridge!! On foot in the beautiful city we arrived at a magnificent chamber with a wine cask so big that you could dance on it. I was on stage with a rather nice young Italian lady who seemed very co-operative so gave her a fireman's lift. Whilst she was up the conversation continued and I established that she was a judge: in Italy the route to the judiciary is direct so you can be a young judge.

**Rudy Giuliani** We dined at the home of Frank and Marie Rosa in New York. Frank ran the New York City television news desk and had to find twelve minutes of New York news everyday as well as giving international coverage. I asked if he was busy on the following day. "The busiest day of the year – we have a new Mayor – do you want to come?" The following morning we arrived at City Hall with police everywhere: amazingly Frank was on the balcony and called us in. He had to leave us for an hour and handed us over to the Curator, another Frank. One of the things he showed us was a huge oil with President Washington posing against the rear of a horse: the artist did not take a shine to Washington.

Frank then ushered us into the front row of Giuliani's Press Conference. He spoke for an hour, without notes, and we were hugely impressed. He would cut the budget from \$35 billion to \$32 billion so tough; the Parks would be three per cent dirtier.

We followed this with a City helicopter tour. Two young Spanish ladies sat in front with the pilot and Margaret and I had the rear seats. At the statue of Liberty he did a right hand circuit for me to get a good view and then commenced a left hand rounding for the girls. This is where I did my hero bit. As the plane tilted to the left the lefthand double door flew open and the Spanish girls screamed. Undoing my safety belt I reached over Margaret and closed it. The following day we bumped into the same girls in Fifth Avenue and I was still flavour of the week.

**Leat Airways** Margaret and I were due to fly from Antigua to Barbados: we were warned about the chaos reigning at the airport and so arrived in very good time. We took our place in the line with some mysterious abandoned bags between us and the two couples in front. Nothing happened: the crowd grew into a mushroom and included passengers carrying their livestock. Now I am a very tolerant person but pushed far enough I break. The announcement was made for the last call for our flight. At this I lunged over the mysterious bags: as I did so, there was a tearing sound as my trousers exploded from the waist to the fly. I insisted on immediate boarding and we just caught the plane, as the steps were being removed. A week later we boarded the BA jumbo to return home. The Barbadian passenger in the adjoining seat gave me a warm smile accompanied with the words “ You are the guy with the blue underpants”.

**Jamaican croquet** We stayed at the wonderful Jamaica Inn in Jamaica in a stunning location with its own beach between two rocky outcrops. Just back from the shore was a croquet lawn and in the late afternoon I suggested to Margaret that we have a game and she agreed. It seemed that we had interfered with the daily arrangement of two longstanding guests who were accustomed to play at 4.0pm. They descended on the lawn and it was agreed that we would play in pairs. Margaret’s partner was to be Sir Mark Norman and mine was to be the Chief Executive of the Bank of Liechtenstein. I actually played some

good shots and my partner was pleased with me until I miscued and the ball hit the centre peg therefore conceding the game!

A couple of months later, we had an invitation from Sir Mark to lunch at Charlbury Manor, Oxford. There were around a dozen guests and I was seated next to some fellow called Ashley Ponsonby Smythe. I searched for ages for a topic of conversation that we could both embark on and was relieved to eventually arrive at “dogs” which got him going. Margaret found herself between the Deaf Doctor and a lady who admired Margaret’s “frock” but could not wear clothes like that because she had “wheelbarrow arms”.

Following the meal we were to play bowls on the lawn. One team comprised Sir Mark and Ashley and my partner was to be Tom, the octogenarian Brigadier. “The apple tree is out of bounds”. Both Tom and I put our bowls in the cutout round the said tree. Eventually it was my turn to play the jack so I gave it a good roll. “I say, that’s a long jack,” said Ashley and I did wonder if I had sent it too far for Tom. I was pleased with my bowl, which was quite close to the target, and Ashley matched my play. Tom was clearly concerned about the long distance and wound himself up to full speed. At the jack the bowl was still travelling at a rate of knots and raced on to disappear. “I say Tom, your are in the ha-ha” We managed to retrieve the bowl from the muddy ditch.

**Palm Dessert** At this resort we stayed at the magnificent Marriott Hotel. Here, for dinner you descend to the foyer and go to the quay where your boat exits through the electric doors and takes you to your restaurant of choice. We chose the Italian one. At dinner, the adjoining table was occupied by a large party, headed by an elderly lady in a wide brimmed black hat. On asking the young man for the bill he wanted to know our room number and name. On hearing me declare “G. Rogers” he replied that there was someone “supposed to be famous” on the next table, also called G Rogers. The penny dropped so I asked Margaret to wait till there was a lull in the conversation. I then

enquired whether I might be addressing Ginger Rogers. With an affirmative response I introduced myself and indicated that I had a bone to pick with her. I explained that, freshly arriving at school aged ten as G. Rogers, I was immediately dubbed “Ginger” and had to carry the name for eight years and it was all her fault. I departed having received a profuse apology.

**East Coast Weddings** Frank and Marie’s daughter Marie was to marry Jo, of Portuguese/Dominican descent. We had a last minute note to the effect that the wedding arrangements had been changed because Jo’s divorce had not yet come through and, instead of Church, the ceremony would be in a massive function suite. The marriage was conducted accompanied by a harpist, and a baritone sang the Lord’s Prayer. The celebrations, upstairs, were mind blowing. Around two hundred guests, all seated for dinner, with dancing to an eighteen piece band. During the interval an eight piece Dominican Band – what an experience to watch the grace and style of the Dominican guests on the dance floor. At drinks I spied a beautiful young black lady and asked Margaret’s consent that we go over and talk to her. I opened the conversation by saying that she had to be a model and she asked how I knew. A small world, but Tracy was engaged to Marie’s brother Michael and we were to attend their marriage in Philadelphia a year later.

**Marinsky Theatre St Petersburg** What a disappointment. We went to a performance of the Rites of Spring and it was rather disconcerting when all the aisles were, at the last moment, filled with seats so that rapid exit would be impossible. Then the cast appeared. Thirty two males, each armed with a chair, apparently the object of their passion. A two hours display of homosexuality does not do much for me and ninety percent of the audience sat with folded arms at its conclusion. The exception was for the orchestra, which was much acclaimed. Margaret had been sitting next to Sandy Gall, the broadcaster whom she mistook for Sandy Lyle, the golfer. He bore this confusion most amiably

**Dubell Mill and Lumber Co** David and Mary-Lane have an estate on the highest point in Maryland and we have enjoyed their hospitality on several occasions. They have a timber bungalow incorporating a garage of an eighth of an acre for his vehicles, including three Jaguars with which he wins “concourses d’elegance”. Surrounding the house is a seventy acre “lawn” – one bit of crab grass and David sprays all seventy acres. The timber business is very successful but David manages to dissipate the profits by drilling for oil in Texas, mining for diamonds in Africa and backing fishing ventures off the west coast of Africa. He tells me that they have just sunk a successful well to a depth of 3,500 feet and found both oil and gas in Texas but on extracting the drill it broke, blocking the borehole. He now has to decide whether to drill another well at a cost of \$200,000 in the hope that the drill will not fail again!

**Kansas** We stayed with Joe and Brenda Vrabel in Kansas. On the Saturday night there was a phone call from the police and their teenage daughter Danielle had been arrested concerning drugs. \$1000 dollars bail was required and the banks were shut. Luckily I had some cash and we got her released. The following day we went to a Fort on the banks of the Missouri River. Brenda seemed intrigued with the post at the centre of the yard and was at pains to describe the forms of “correction” that took place there.

**Banker’s antics** Sailing up the Amazon, Margaret found herself at dinner next to Roger, a most gregarious Director of Close Bros. Bank. He informed her that his party piece was to revolve a glass of wine 360 degrees without spilling a drop. The trick went wrong and Margaret was drenched in wine, fortunately of the white variety. At this same meal I found myself seated next to Wendy: she was CEO of some trendy organisation in LA. I had not conversed with her previously but we were aware of one another in that we had done pre-dinner laps on deck on several evenings and she clearly did not relish the fact that I was just a tiny fraction faster. She was no beauty queen and had a feisty nature: we were not in love. Late in the meal I thought it was time for manly action. I asked her to

stand and open her legs: she complied. I hoisted her over my shoulder and did a fireman's lift circuit of the dining room. She warmed to me for this.

I went fishing for piranah and the driver told us that fish sometimes jumped into the boat to avoid being eaten. Hey presto, a few minutes later a fish jumped into the vessel with a piece of his tail missing.

**Coffee** We were in Manaus waiting for a flight and Margaret wanted a cup of coffee but they did not have any. You have got no coffee in Brazil? queried Margaret. The conversation was overheard by Howard: he happened to be the man who ran the CIA in the Middle East and was in charge of the failed attempt to release the American hostages from Iran. He got to work on the coffee and Margaret was soon satisfied. (He explained that the reason the rescue attempt failed was because of conflict in the US military. The Navy insisted on using naval planes which were unsuitable for desert conditions compared with ground based machines). In June 2017 I met Ray Evans and my causal enquiry about his service life received a bountiful reply. He was an RAF pilot who clandestinely landed his Hercules aircraft in Iran without ATC permission to extract several hundred British and Commonwealth ex-pats in January 1979 at the time of the American hostage crisis. On one occasion he landed on the taxiway of Tehran airport with instruction to wait no more than four minutes for members of the SAS to board. A smelly bedraggled bunch arrived by bicycle and motorcycle within that time. Having boarded the officer, appearing in a very sorry state, said "I say old chap can we take off immediately there is a tactical (a vehicle like a land-rover with two 50 calibre machine guns or a 20mm cannon mounted on it) well on its way to intercept us!" Ray also flew missions in Iraq to extricate SAS detachments from behind the lines. I have researched this on the internet and can find no mention of the exercise which the Foreign Office have wanted to keep secret.



**Twentieth Century Fox** Cruising the Turkish coast by Seabourn I went to a lecture by a man who had been Surgeon-General to the USA. Next to me happened to sit an attractive American lady “Bert”. We talked after the lecture and I found her most amiable. Later that day, with Margaret, we met Bert with her husband Alan and arranged to have dinner. Establishing that we lived near Oxford Alan said “Inspector Morse”. Margaret said “surely you do not get that in Wyoming”. “Yes we do” was the reply, “John Thaw is a magnificent actor”. Alan intimated that he had never been to Oxford and Margaret said that sometimes there were leaflets on the lampposts seeking extras and he might even get into a programme. Two days later I was walking round a fortress with Alan when he announced that the Turks had wanted to throw him out some years ago. Enquiring why he said it was because of a film he was involved with. Asking him which film he replied “Midnight Express”. Querying how he was concerned he said he was then President of 20th Century Fox! Asking Margaret if she knew David Putnam she replied that she knew of him. David brought me a script that had been turned down by several Studios but he decided to have a go – Chariots of Fire – he was at Columbia then.

Not long after meeting Alan I learned that he joined forces with CBS and launched a website which became the standard American tool for obtaining financial information. It was sold for \$1billion: Alan had a 50% share!

**Anti Wrinkle Cream** We met an American who had just sold his company for \$35m. His business had, for one dollar 85 cents, made the cream, put it in the pot of an international “Beauty House”, and boxed and bowed it in their colours. They then marketed the product at \$80

**Thailand** I went to the Royal Thai Golf Course at Pattaya and was invited to play with three others. The green fee included the services of a lovely young Thai lady who would caddy for me and hold the parasol. One of the other players was also

Gordon: it transpired that he lived with a Thai lady whilst his wife in England had a Japanese lover but these arrangements would cease when he had made sufficient money to return home. He had a bar in Pattaya: in answer to Margaret's query he assured her that it was not a girlie pick-up bar and invited us for a drink. We arrived by Tuk-tuk and Gordon provided a drink. The penny soon dropped that this was in fact the bar/hotel to which the couple retired from the pick-up bar. Against my better judgement I allowed Margaret to take me to a transvestite show. All I remember of this is tits that did not go anywhere and huge hands. We went to the touristy elephant show and were amazed that parents would place their young children on the ground for elephants to step over them. When our turn came for a ride the elephanteer invited me to steer the animal by sitting on its neck and pushing behind the ears with my legs – not by one inch did I get the beast to deviate from his allotted path. On the other hand, Margaret travelled in utmost safety: the man was so worried about her falling off that he lost not one second in physically ensuring that she remained securely seated.

**Airplane trouble** The BA jumbo had only just left Barbados when there was a bang: the engines were throttled back and the outside lights came on: that got everyone's attention. After what seemed an age, but was probably only a couple of minutes, the pilot announced that number two engine had exploded: as a matter of routine he had closed down number one engine and there was no fire **now**. The plane was very happy on two engines. He would dump fuel and return to Barbados: would we please fill in immigration forms! Unable to use reverse thrust the very experienced Captain made a wonderful landing using the whole length of the runway. The first vehicle to get to us was the fuel tanker.

The following day we departed the holding area leaving behind the City of Oxford with a hole where number two engine should have been. It was also lacking some radio equipment and a windscreen wiper, which had been scavenged to make our substitute plane airworthy.

**Bel Air, Los Angeles** Our apartment was the ground floor one in a converted building. Joan Collins occupied the room above; she seemed to shower a lot and there was a constant stream of hatboxes. The earthquake emergency kit was a reminder that all is not perfect in LA. Rodeo Drive put the wind up me but I escaped unscathed. The out of work actor driving our hired stretched limmo had some stories to tell about the purposes to which the vehicle was put. On Oscars night such was the banging behind that he had feared for the safety of the vehicle; he had carried lady guests back to the hotel feet first. We returned from dinner with friends to the hotel entranceway complete with flunkies, overhead heaters and swans. Two lovely creatures were just emerging, when one tripped on the kerb and sprained her ankle. Gallant as ever; I did my best to get the blood flowing with a good massage. At this moment the valet driver produced her car. Obviously I had to carry her to the door. Sliding her into the seat, the cut of the dress became even lower. Sensing the intense gaze on the back of my neck I indicated that I would give her one kiss and bugger off.

**Taxi package** In Houston friends we had met on our travels took Margaret to a very dangerous frock shop. Luckily Margaret resisted but did purchase some costume jewellery; the package it came in looked “expensive”. Returning to our room Margaret realised she had left the box in the taxi which was driven by a Rastafarian. Going down to the lobby I saw the clerk. Telling him the problem I said I could recall the number of the cab and there was a reward for the driver if the package was returned. “But here it is, he has already returned it!

Continuing this thread, I was in Rome with Linda and we took a taxi to the desired piazza for lunch. Our lady taxi driver could certainly keep up with the men and we struck up a nice relationship with her. Seated outside for lunch in the pedestrianised area the penny dropped that I had left my camera in the taxi – “c’est la vie”. Shortly after this our driver arrived on foot: not knowing our destination she was scouring all the restaurants to enable her to return the camera!

**Private Detective** Embarking on a lunchtime assignment I became aware of a sports car that seemed to be following at a respectful distance – better find out if he was a tail. Having established that this was indeed the case I had to lose him – not too much of a problem when you are driving a Lotus Cortina. We did meet in Court some months later when he confirmed that I had left him standing.

**Baha Peninsula** Margaret wanted to stay at the Twin Dolphins Hotel as she had read that it was the “in” place for honeymoons, with sunshine 330 days a year. What an initial disappointment. No sunshine and the accommodation comprised drab looking bungalows spread around the grounds with nothing but sand between them. You did not even get sheets on the bed until after dinner!! In the evening the bar was empty and although the restaurant was busy no one was available for conversation. The following day I awoke early to a sunny morning; from the balcony I counted around thirty whales go by in half an hour, only one hundred yards away. At breakfast we met Anne and her daughter Kathy who in the usual American style were most hospitable and invited us to lunch at their Club in Houston since this was to be our next destination. I shall never forget the gaucho with a guitar at a restaurant in Cabo San Lucas. His musical talents were zero; he wore a nearly toothless grin (what teeth remained were black) and stuck in the end of the guitar was a note saying “tips”. It was a shame that Margaret would not let me go to the Giggling Marlin. The villa next to ours was occupied by a main stream British actor. Of course the only phone was in the hotel office and he was in front of us in the queue to use it together with his lady whom Margaret judged to be not his wife. He was clearly bothered upon hearing English voices and had gone by the morning.

**Barbados Christmas** There is something not quite right about hearing songs about chestnuts roasting on the fire when the temperature is in the eighties. There was something entirely right about a young Barbadian called Christophine doing her “woking up” dance. She invited us to the Christmas morning

service at her Church of the Lady Queen of the Universe at Black Rock where she sang in the choir. She was certainly turned out in a most fetching manner with many beads and the music, accompanied by guitar and tambourine, was catching. The most easily mannered Priest produced a sermon that was not what I was accustomed to. There were bad ladies on the island who went out just with the intention of conceiving a child. Worse than this were some easy tongued, slick hipped men who just sought a lady's favours. Then there was Joseph. He left home to return happily to a pregnant Mary. In Barbados, if this situation arose the husband would probably not be very understanding. This was followed by an instruction to kiss every lady in sight.

**Horse Racing Abroad** This firm specialises in short breaks to continental racing events and we signed up for one to Deauville. There would be an eclectic mix of customers including those who owned horses, punters and those like us just looking for a holiday with a difference. On arrival, there was an elderly and frail American lady, Kay, and I retrieved her luggage from the roundel and became her bagman. At lunch at the racecourse on the big day someone mentioned that Omar Sharif was nearby. Kay intimated that he had been a friend of a friend of hers. Margaret enquired who the friend was and it turned out to be Ava Gardner. Kay lived in London and the connection with Ava Gardner was through dogs. Kay visited her on her deathbed and she died in style drinking champagne and smoking. I enquired if Kay would like to meet Omar and she said she would so off we trotted with Margaret in tow. Omar was most courteous and his eyes lit up at the mention of Ava Gardner. It was then Margaret's turn to be introduced. As he kissed her hand Margaret's facial colour went, in an instant, from normal to pink. I then asked for advice from him saying that he was so good with ladies could he tell me where to start. Removing his dark glasses he looked at Margaret as he replied to my question to the effect that he was no good with the ladies as he did not even have a wife. We saw Kay in London a couple of times after this: she owned several horses and her favourite was "Top Banana". The

following year I was being entertained at Royal Ascot and “Top Banana” was running but the owner was not listed as Kay Griffiths. I concluded from this that she must have died because I knew she would not sell the animal. On her words I recommended the horse to the box at 7 to 1. It won handsomely so we all raised our glasses to the sky to toast the good lady.

We went to the L’Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Margaret fancied the Italian trainer of a horse at 15 to 1 and I put £20 pounds on it and, amazingly, it won (the horse I had chosen came last). So off to some fancy restaurant at the Bois de Boulogne. The tables were very well spaced out: the only one within conversation distance was occupied by a young Japanese couple. It turned out that he was a jeweller from Tokyo and he was on honeymoon. Their meal was more advanced than ours and I doubt he had seen petit fours before. He seemed intrigued by them and I asked if he would like to take them back to Tokyo. He emphatically said that he would so I advised him that he needed a doggy bag. A wave of my hand and the headwaiter was there in a flash. “Monsieur?” I explained that our friend needed a doggybag for the petit fours and, in a moment, one was provided. Into it went the confectionary, the cutlery and the condiments. The Japanese was so taken with all this that he required his bride to sit on my lap for a photograph.

For my part I was impressed with the service: that is to say until the bill arrived. A figure 3 had been moved over a column. The 300 franc bottle of Margaux (not very good – we left half) had been priced at 3000 francs. The trick was that the noughts were printed to overlap and it looked like 300. Easy come – easy go.

**Dallas** We stayed at the Mansion on Turtle Creek where the sole job of the gorgeous Texan lady Donnie was to chat to the guests at breakfast. On the second night the Manager enquired how we were getting on. I said we were having a fantastic time: just one thing surprised me; they had no New Zealand white wine available. At 6.0 that evening there was a tap on the

door and in rolled a huge trolley with flowers, cheese and biscuits and two wine coolers. Each contained a bottle of my nominated Hawkes Bay wine: one Sauvignon and one Chardonnay. Realising that the manager would endeavour to assuage any identified desire, I sent him a note of thanks for the wine with a postscript that I rather liked Donnie. The hotel service fell short in that he failed to send her up in a cake.

**Topkapi Palace Istanbul** With Americans Marve and Robin, we were touring this treasure house of jewels where the rule seemed to be – if it is not encrusted in diamonds it is not worth displaying. Before seeing this show I used to think that the Crown Jewels were quite something. Robin was wearing a fine emerald, the size of a blackbird's egg, when she came to the display of a near fist sized emerald. After one quick look she turned to her man with the words “you don't love me Marve”

**Starship Enterprise** On a trip along the coast of Turkey a lady approached me one night and asked if I would dance with her daughter. When the daughter was pointed out I said “by all means”. The music was loud and I had to enquire her name several times. Eventually I established that she was Kate Mulgrew: it seemed she had got rid of her husband as a non-performer and was looking for a new model. On returning to my seat I was surprised to be told that I had been dancing with the only female Captain of a Starship. An important client of mine was Colin Gabb, whom I knew was a “Trekkie” addict. I arranged for Kate to write a note for Colin: he pretty well kissed me when I gave it to him. Not long after this encounter she found and married her Senator.

**Concorde** Margaret and I were fortunate to be in the cockpit of Concorde when permission was given to go supersonic; to see the sun rising in the West was not an experience that I ever expected to see. On return to the cabin our fellow travellers asked what happened at the point of acceleration: they seemed to accept my assertion that Margaret had been allowed to push the button.

**Legless** We had just joined a ship in the Caribbean when there was a series of urgent announcements about a missing bag. We subsequently encountered Kenneth, owner of the bag. The Line was most embarrassed and promised to replace all missing items. “I don’t think you can do that,” said Kenneth; my tin leg is in the case.

**Diamond Dame** Maureen Thomas was wearing an enormous top quality rock and, leaving Venice, she engaged in conversation with an American who was wearing a small lapel badge. She enquired what it was for and he replied that it was for forty years service with the company. Flashing her hand she said “I got that for five years!” Introduced to the Captain as Mr. and Mrs. Thomas she retorted that he was Sir Maldwyn and she was “Dame f...ing Thomas. She did a good jitterbug on the companionway.

**Panama canal** The discotheque was in full swing whilst transitting the canal. I found myself involved in a frantic dance with a fullsome young lady who started taking things off as the music reached its crescendo, including shoes so I had to watch my step. I later established that she was granddaughter of Baron Ferdinand de-Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal and proprietor of the failed French attempt at Colon, Panama. The authorities invited her to a private viewing of the Canal museum but apparently my performance on the dance floor had not been good enough for her to extend the invitation to me. Figuratively speaking, Margaret threw a family heirloom into the Canal on this trip. The treasured necklace she placed in a tissue to protect it from all the facial potions she uses. An hour later the tissue with the necklace was mistakenly thrown in the waste bin together with the used tissues.

**Buenos Aries** At a dinner party we met Bill and Kath who lived in Buenos Aries where Bill ran British Gas. He made the mistake of inviting us to stay with him if we found ourselves out that way. Within six months we were there, staying at his lovely colonial house! Of course Margaret had to have a



handmade leather coat and I had to go to a Tango show at El Querandi - stunning. After the performance Margaret danced Tango with the lead man. Descending the steps with a smile, she answered the question about how she had enjoyed herself with an emphatic "he was so strong!" (This reminds me that as a young man I had a tango partner Daphne. On the dancefloor she would let me do anything: off the dancefloor – nothing). Also, more recently, there was a clothes show and dinner at the dreaded "Ambers" Fashion House and I found myself seated next to one of the organisers of Strictly Come Dancing who had previously been a world class dancer. We had an enormous disagreement: she was a huge supporter of European Tango – where they leap about shaking their heads saying "NO!" all the time whilst for me the Latin, and original style, is streets ahead. I have danced this in Buenos Aires, both in the street and on stage.

From Buenos Aires we caught a ship to Santiago and re-encountered David whom we had met a couple of years before when going up the Amazon. Margaret was quick to point out that he was accompanied by a different lady this time. In conversation with the damsel, I said I did not know much about David's background and she replied simply, "he is a Rockefeller!" On this trip we actually stopped at Cape Horn for the passports to be stamped. The Captain infuriated me when, in stooging around, the vessel interfered with the path of two yachts engaged in a round the world race. He actually blew his whistle at them.

**Languedoc** Long standing friends Martin and Judy Voss bought a villa at Felines Minervois and we called to see them. Unusually for the English, Martin and Judy did not seek expatriot company and integrated themselves into the French way of life. Whilst Judy prepared dinner Martin walked Margaret and I round the village. Firstly there was a quick chat with the Mayor and then Martin received a hug from a young lady well with child. Next we encountered half a dozen lads on motorcycles and it transpired that one of these was a fellow member with Martin of the local archery team. There followed

two more hugs from pregnant women but no physical contact with the older ladies to whom we were introduced. The school in the village was due to close and I do wonder if Martin was endeavouring to counter this decision. Before retirement Martin had a magnificent job: he had to travel the world making sure Guinness tasted alright.

**Safaris** We have been fortunate to have two safaris: one at Londolozi in South Africa and at several lodges in the Serengeti region. What is it about a shower in the open that makes a girl's blood rush?

Prior to the Serengeti adventure we sat opposite an American couple in a touristy restaurant as we munched our way through crocodile, snake, buffalo and goodness knows what else. I theorised that a good woman's advice was invaluable in business. "Not mine," said David. Now, I had judged Connie to be a most intelligent wife and pursued the point. "My job is the defence of America and there is no way that information goes out of the office". From Nairobi we visited the "Out of Africa" set and Margaret was all misty eyed about some old geezer called Redford. At Ngorongoro we met Erasto, a Maasai who told us of his upbringing. He was taught that if you walked to the horizon you would fall over the edge. You wore red, as the lions knew that if they took on a man in red they might not get back to the den. He then told us of the routines if threatened with attack. With ample time, break off the end of your spear, clasp it with your fist and wrap your cloak around it: as the lion pounced thrust your hand in its mouth and bring your blade down on the back of the neck. With no time to prepare, push the spear into the ground as an impaling device, thrust your forearm into the mouth and again attack the back of the neck. I was pleased to read that the Maasai are not now requiring the slaughter of a lion to prove a boy to be a warrior. We did visit a Maasai village where the inhabitants did a lot of up and down dancing. The Chief had seven wives and I must say I did not envy him too much. Apparently he was only thirty but looked sixty years of age. At Ngorongoro the 6'6" waiter called Godson wanted to buy Margaret. Starting at ten shillings

Tanzanian he got up to one hundred cows. Margaret rather floored him when she asked; if the deal went ahead what credit cards did he run? Of course the animals and birds were magnificent: one of the biggest surprises was, after a three hours game trek to the back of beyond, when we stopped at mid-day. Hidden under the acacias, a repast fit for a King set out with chairs and tables, all as prescribed by our colonial forbears. We watched a cheetah stalking a huge herd of Grants Gazelles. There was so much choice and he was so close that you thought he must succeed. What did he catch? A rabbit!

**Israel** We were taking a ship from Haifa but the bags did not arrive. Let's have a drink. Sorry no alcohol permitted – Holocaust Day (It was also the day celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the creation of the State and the whole country was bedecked with National flags). Pointing out that those on the adjoining table had drinks, we were told that they had been ordered ten minutes before, when the ban was not in place. Back to the room to the mini-bar: on television just one programme: Schindler's List. At breakfast the whistle sounded and we stood for two minutes as not unreasonably required. Our driver for the day was an Egyptian Arab called O'Dead. The way he drove you could easily find yourself in this state. He suggested a restaurant for lunch overlooking the Mount of Olives and intimated that when Robert Maxwell was buried there, he had one of the highest level and most expensive plots. He told us a story about when Moses ascended the Mount to converse with God. On his return he was asked if he spoke with God. Yes indeed, "Do you want the good news or the bad news first?" Asked for the good news he replied that he had got the Commandments reduced from twenty to ten. As for the bad news "Adultery is still in!"

We were somewhat bemused by the Stations of the Cross. Roman ground level had been excavated in this area and was around fifteen feet below the street now proposed as the road Christ was forced to march.

**Istanbul** Not wishing to be steered for tea at yet another carpet shop, we detached ourselves from the tour group and managed to survive a transit of the Grand Bazaar. Margaret cannot exist long without a coffee and we found a table three rows back from all the hullabaloo. After several minutes a local came and sat at the adjoining table. As is my way, I fell into conversation with him. An interesting man, I eventually got round to the business angle. He was a cobbler and used to have his own shop in town but he had a partner who swindled him and had to sell out. Asking what he did now, he replied that he sold carpets! That guy could work for me any day: he had invested twenty minutes and the cost of a coffee in a possible sale.

**Captain's Delight** We re-encountered two crew ladies who had both been promoted and arranged to have dinner with them. The word was that the Master had a relationship with one of the staff but, at the hairdresser, Margaret had not found the answer so I asked the direct question. The girls glanced, each at the other, and then one replied "it is me". As it so happened we had dinner with the Captain the following night and I took pains to ask extended questions about his family.

**Hot ship** After leaving the Turks and Caicos Isles we dined with two American ladies who could both smell burning: Margaret and I had colds and could smell nothing unusual. At 1.0am we were woken from a deep sleep by a series of blasts on the ship's whistle. Reaching for the light it was dead and there were no emergency lights. The ship was still in the water and there was no moon. Better get dressed! Difficult in the pitch black but Margaret somehow found a fob light and we managed. Eventually there was an announcement that there was a fire in the engine room, which the crew were tackling (the following day I spoke with one of the fire fighters: the fire was indeed very serious and insulation on the walls and ceiling was engulfed in flames). Half an hour later the Captain reported that the fire was under control and a little later that it was out: one of the four generators had disintegrated. He reported that they would now attempt to re-start one of the

surviving generators to get some lights on. In the next hour the ship trembled 21 times as the starter motor was fired without success. At the 22nd attempt a motor started and lights appeared. In the meantime The Navigator was drifting further into Guantanamo Bay. An hour or so later a second engine was started and the ship made slow way.

You will all be familiar with the problems of entering the USA: we were whisked straight through Customs and Immigration into a car: they did not want you speaking to the banks of TV cameras. It was interesting to check in at American Airlines a day late and to report that the shipping line said that yesterday's ticket would be OK. I guess that airlines are always letting ships down but the reverse is very rare.

**Partying Rabbi** Jerry was the ship's Rabbi. On the plus side he had a penchant for attractive ladies and I found myself at a dinner organised by him with the tastiest of females on board. He announced that it was his birthday and, in the usual style, the ship provided a sumptuous birthday cake. I advised him that, in April the 9th, he shared my mother-in-law's birthday. He said that it was not exactly today but it was the 15th May: ships do these things so well that he has a birthday on every trip. He went directly home but his wife, Dorothy, went back by the most contorted route on air miles carrying the assegais, carvings and local dress: this was just after 9-11. A few months later we got the call that he was coming to the UK and wanted accommodation and a meal at Le Manoir, our nearby Michelin restaurant.

**US Immigration** In the year 2005, America was making its entry systems more stringent. At Miami we had to queue for a full two hours before reaching the desk. I have no complaints about the man; in fact he was far better than the norm. Beforehand, we had been lectured about pictures and fingerprints. Margaret had her picture taken and her hand thrust into the pad for a good finger impression. I then poised my finger over the pad, to be told "we may not need to do that".

Thinking that once you had given the print it would be out of the way for future trips I said that surely everyone had to be done. “Not you!” was the answer. “Why not?” “Because you are too old.” “If you think I am harmless you should see the damage I can do on the dancefloor”. There was no way he was going to take my print. On returning home I made a mock-up White House Exemption card (displayed in this book) that I would use on future trips.

**Amsterdam Builders** Fiona was a somewhat Amazonian, strong minded and rather flash young lady who made sure you knew that she had a better suite than you did. I warmed to her as we left the quay at Amsterdam where building work was proceeding and I noticed that the builders (working at the same level) were focussing their attention on a particular balcony. It transpired that Fiona was mooning at them!

**Sterns Guide to Cruising** Stephen Stern produced a Guide Book to luxury cruising and, of course, the line gave him the principal owner’s suite. He was an interesting man and seemed to take a shine to us. He was accompanied by an attractive lady with whom he had a temporary attachment. As the voyage progressed tensions developed between them and, at dinner one night, he was so persistently obnoxious to her that I came to her defence. He decided he could not be in the same room as me for the rest of the trip.

**Princess Margaret** We met some acquaintances in Mirepoix. I knew John a little and, time on our hands, this was a chance to ask about his life. He had been born in India of a military family, joined the Army and played Polo. He is a handsome and most charming person with an enveloping sense of humour. Posted to Germany, his Colonel-in Chief was Princess Margaret who came to visit his unit. At the Ball, John was scheduled in Margaret’s card for one dance before the interval and one after. At the initial encounter Margaret enquired if he had a girlfriend and he replied positively. Asked if she was a local girl he confirmed that she was. Saying that she had heard

that the local girls were very randy, John confirmed that this was indeed the case. Dancing after the interval, Margaret intimated that they would be riding out on the following morning and John confirmed that this was indeed so, and would be his pleasure. In the event she wanted to lose the two shadowing guards and go off into the wood: John decided this might not be a good idea in the pursuit of his military career. My Margaret has her clothes altered by Kath, who used to work in the salon of Hardy Amies, dressmaker to the Queen: early on, the sisters would go to his salon to choose their wardrobes for the coming season and for fittings. Kath relates that on this particular occasion the Queen intimated that she thought Margaret's outfit was a little too tight. The response: "you look after your Empire and I will look after my wardrobe".

**Ascot/Polo** Two bonanzas in good weather. A dozen lines sprinkled with ladies. Pick the one you fancy and join the queue. Conversation could not be easier. She is either picking up winnings or interested in your knowledge of the beast she fancies. You will probably be rejected but it is always worth the effort. The other damsel strewn event is Smith's Lawn, Guards Polo Club. We have a dear American friend, Barbara, a most Anglophile lady, who comes over regularly and loves the Monarchy scene. I introduced Barbara to Colonel Belcher, the Chairman of the Club and he was charm personified telling Barbara that his wife was American. Half an hour later I was mortified to see that Barbara had him pinned to the wall and was exacting full value from her chance to meet the top man. Later, he accepted my apologies. There was a rather nice story from the Guards Polo Club Dinner at Windsor Castle in honour of Prince Philip's fifty years as President. The Queen walked round the tables chatting here and there. Talking to a lady at one of the tables her pushy partner returned and muscled in to the conversation saying that he was the lady's "consort". He then boasted that he had sold a Bank that week. The Queen turned to the lady on her right, put her hand on her shoulder and said "My My".

In the restaurant at Royal Ascot I found myself in conversation with an interesting man of good bearing. I established that for several years past he had spent time in the Directors Boardroom of the Bank of England: obviously a high flyer. He had just retired and had taken up a post with Waitrose, which made me think he might be the Finance Director. No, he worked on the tills; at the Bank he had run the catering!

**Masking tape** Harry from Chicago was most hospitable and invited us for drinks in his owner's suite. I always eventually get round to asking about business. Amongst other things he made masking tape but he realised the problem with all such tape was that it left a residue. With a colleague he then invented a "non-residual" tape. Major competitors baked his tape for hours and then demonstrated that it would stick to the reel. Eventually he pulled through and became the major supplier of masking tape in the US.

**The Treasury 2005** Chris and I were travelling to Mallorca for the board meeting of a small company there in which we have an interest. The plane was full and I was seated next to John, a most gregarious individual: conversation flowed from holidays to business to politics and eventually landed on "Europe". This brought to the fore my rooted objection to our country being subsumed to Europe with most of our laws now being generated by a body over the creation of which I have had no say nor the unaccountable gravy train that it spawned. The look on John's face told me that I had rung a bell. Clearly he was some sort of expert so I enquired what he did. The answer was that he worked for Gordon Brown. He had been an accountant to drugs companies in both the UK and America: now he was on a fixed term contract to give general business advice at the Treasury. What was his view of the Civil Servants "they have not got a clue". Asked if his advice was ever taken, he responded that his thoughts were sometimes expressed in reports to the Government "but if Tony and Gordon had had another row it would be swept under the carpet". There was a smoking room on each floor of the Treasury and just after he arrived the law was changed enabling the marriage of same-sex



individuals – the place was like a ghost ship – they were all on honeymoon! (On the Europe front Margaret sat next to James Elles the local European Member – Margaret is not easily riled but they came to blows over his view about what a good job George Bush was doing and he spent the rest of the evening talking to the person in his other hand)

**Yukon Coach** It was four miles from the suspension bridge to the railhead for the mountainside train journey back to Skagway. The lady driver told us of an experience she had the week before. On the same trip she collected her passengers (all couples) and asked if all were present: there were no dissenting voices. Arriving at the railhead she had a call to say that she had left a passenger behind. She rushed back to the bridge to find a most irate lady whom she promised to take immediately to the railhead but the train had gone. She accordingly drove all the way to Skagway feeling the woman's venom aimed at her neck. Her arrival synchronised with that of the train and passengers then who were to be ferried to the ship. The lady's husband boarded and they were clearly daggers drawn. On dismounting the man apologised to the driver but thanked her for giving him the best two hours of his whole holiday.

**Gerrards Cross Tunnel** I met a manager of Chiltern Railways and discussed the collapse of the superstructure being built over the railway for a Tesco Superstore. One minute before the failure a Birmingham bound train with four hundred passengers went through at 75 miles per hour. The London bound train was in the station and the driver held back for about fifteen seconds to allow a late passenger to board. As he moved off he thought he saw heavy rain and suddenly realised that the tunnel structure in front of him was falling in and stopped!

**Winchester Cathedral** Staying with Martin and Judy Voss, who had just moved to a village near Winchester, they suggested we visit the cathedral. Now personally I have seen enough cathedrals but my suggestion of a visit to a pub was

over-ruled and I was assured that I would get a viewing of King Arthur's Round Table. On paying to enter the holy place my enquiry about the Table got the response that I was in the wrong spot – it was at the Town Hall where admission was free! Nevertheless there was an interesting facet which I had not anticipated. In the southernmost corner was a statue to a helmeted deep sea diver by the name of William Walker. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was severe subsidence: excavations were made to arrest this but, due to the high water table they were immediately flooded. For six years Walker worked below the surface in muddy water six or more hours a day for five days a week. The problem was solved. .

**Lost anchor** Approaching Nice, for goodness knows what reason, Captain Geir-Arne Thue-Nilsen decided to exercise the port anchor in deep water. There was a quick rattle and a thud: the brake had failed and he was left with just four links of the chain attached to the ship. Fellow passengers who had been at dinner the previous night awarded me the blame for this since I had asked about disasters which had befallen him. The major one was interesting; it was at Flamingo Bay, Costa Rica when he had been repositioning the ship to give passengers a better view. In deep water the ship gave an inexplicable little shiver as he asked for “slow ahead”. Nothing happened – then “slow astern” – no response. He rang down to the engine room to enquire whether the engines were operating properly – they were. Echo sounders fore and aft showed a good depth of water. He then instructed the crew to probe with poles and they found the ship to be on an unmarked coral reef on a falling tide. Neither full ahead nor full astern shifted the vessel but full astern with bow thrusters to starboard got them off. Nothing was leaking from or into the ship and at the next port divers found that the bottom was badly mangled.

**Submarines** During the day two showdancers in Cartagena had separately asked me to dance with them in the street (Erica and Viviana) and a good day got even more interesting at dinner that night. Asking Richard Williams what his business was it transpired that he headed up the shipbuilding division of

General Dynamics – quite some responsibility. Asking what sort of ships he built he said “destroyers and submarines”, enquiring what type of submarine he indicated the nuclear variety. This prompted the question “do you mean to tell me that you say to the US navy - here is the key to your submarine – can I have the cheque please?” He said this was more or less how it went. So how much does one cost? Around \$2bn for a top of the range model. Richard helped The Duchess of Cornwall to launch Astute and was more than a little concerned with what the Navy have since done with her. He was on the Boards of Enquiry for the Three Mile Island Nuclear disaster and the Challenger Space Shuttle disintegration.

**Aircraft Carrier** At the sailaway party leaving Cambodia I fell into conversation with Chuck, an American. The Captain made an announcement that it would be rough in two hours: in response to my query Chuck said he had good sea legs which he had acquired whilst flying jets off aircraft carriers. He then volunteered that he had captained an assault aircraft carrier with 26 helicopters and 2,200 marines on board. Asking him his most interesting experience with this vessel he said that after the first Gulf War he had been instructed to proceed at full speed to Somalia to rescue the American Ambassador who was under siege. He duly did this and took on board his staff together also with the Russian Ambassador and his staff. The Russians then took photographs of their wives standing in front of helicopters and missiles until Chuck spoke to the their Ambassador saying “ look, I rescued your butt so please stop taking the pictures”. He complied.

**Red skirt** I was to take the train to London on the day of Margaret Thatcher’s funeral. My wife counselled me to stay clear from anyone wearing red – the protest colour. The train was nearly full but there was a seat adjoining a rather nice lady wearing a bright red skirt so I took the chance and received a response to my “good morning”. She was travelling to Sainsbury’s head office where she was a biologist who assessed new food products for safety. We talked all the way to Town and before long she was showing me pictures of her

young daughters on the ipad. Asking about the au pair she said that she chose them and made sure to change them every six months.

## **Caribbean Health and Safety**

In 2014 in St Maarten I joined the crew of a 12 metre Americas Cup yacht for a race. Unfortunately I did not secure the post of “primary grinder” but was allocated “main grinder”. Our skipper, Captain Morgan, asked if anyone would like a life-jacket but no one was wimp enough to ask for one. This brought the response “that is good because we do not have any!”.

## **Airline Safety**

Peter had been a BA pilot and I enquired if he had endured any critical fuel situations. He had not but he told me of a close friend who had. Having stacked for a while at Heathrow the airport was closed and he was diverted to Gatwick for another extended stack. When that too was closed his fuel situation became so dire that on being instructed to fly to Liverpool he was authorised to take a straight line across all air corridors. As the plane landed all four engines expired!

## **Oriental Power**

On a visit to Paul Getty’s Villa I enjoyed lunch with “Peter” Hsi a Chinese resident of Honolulu and an architect who designed five star hotels. Asking about his family background I was somewhat surprised with the response. His grand-father had been the first President of China from 1911 till 1916. Enquiring what sort of man he was Peter replied that he was very good: when he came to power it had been the custom to bind the feet of young girls so that they would be unable to keep up with the men. He introduced a law banning this process. Looking up President Yuan on the internet I see that he was in charge of the military during the Quing Dynasty and

that he deposed the six years old Emperor. I also learn that he arranged for the Prime Minister to be murdered and that he had nine concubines.

**Railwayman** She was a gorgeous young lady so I was always going to attempt to have dinner with her and her man. Success came in the Orkney Islands: as soon as we were seated I declared that she was obviously a model. “Why do you say that” – “well look at you!” She then confessed that she modelled for Cartier. Kevin and Lainie were to be married in their Mexican seaside house in a few months. Kevin was born the 8<sup>th</sup> of eleven children to a farming couple in Nebraska. Having initially worked on the farm he then carried out auto repairs before training to be a lawyer. He obtained a position as lawyer to a railway company running freight from Wyoming to Minneapolis and St Pauls with various branch lines. In the fullness of time he was asked to take over the running of the company. I asked if he built any railway and he gave me a very positive response saying that the opening of new lines was the way to beat the opposition. From my experience of trying to build new roads I suggested that building a new railway might be fraught with difficulties. Kevin responded by saying that knocking on the door of one rancher and talking about a railroad he got the response “take one step more and I will put a bullet between your eyes”. Kevin had a carriage converted to a luxury bedroom and boardroom where he would entertain landowners. In the fullness of time he managed to persuade the hostile owner to accept a one and a half million dollar payment for an option which he never came to exercise. He then sold the company. Returning home and checking on the internet I see that Kevin in September 2008, in the very nick of time, sold the company to Canadian Pacific for \$1.48billion!

**Sailing Family** MJ was a most powerful lady who had been in the navy and was perhaps an admiral. David was quieter and in response to my enquiry said he was a navy flier. MJ then volunteered that he had been a prisoner of war in Vietnam for eighteen months. Asking if he had to live on rice he said they only got that at the end when they were trying to fatten them up

for release. Going back to his navy career he was appointed captain of the vast aircraft carrier “Kittyhawk” with a crew of 5,300 souls – it was like being mayor he said. I knew the ship went through a hurricane and asked what it was like to sit in his chair taking that enormous machine through such a wild sea “I loved my day job “.

MJ had dogs which were staying in the “Dogwood Pet Hotel and Spa” in a luxury suite. It was the animals who checked in, the owners being rather supernumerary. Of course there is a dog boutique at the Spa.

**Queen Mary 11** Peter had just sold the newspapers that he created in Oklahoma to an Australian buyer and he told us the story about being on QM2 in a lock on the Hudson river when the ship touched a Japanese naval vessel. Distraught, the QM2 captain paid his respects to the Japanese master who received his apology in very severe fashion. After some seconds his face broke into a grin and he declared that it was a privilege to be kissed by a Queen.

**Window Cleaner** Stuart from Essex devolved his window cleaning business into a facility specialising in chandelier refurbishment and I was greatly impressed by the quality of his clientele. Not only did he deal with stately homes but he would send his guys over to clean the chandeliers at The White House three times a year (in an economy move the refurbishments have been reduced from four to three per annum). He also had a contract, at enormous price, to clean chandeliers extensively in the Middle East. {I was careful not to mention Del Boy!}

**Valentine’s Night 2018.** Cruising in the Caribbean I had some good fortune on this particular evening when the shipping line awarded me as my dinner companion Elaine Paige. We got on famously and I was surprised at some of her confidences. A notable moment was when, determined to do a grand curtsy before the Queen Mother, she found herself unable to rise; on being assisted by the QM, her majesty retorted “and I thought I

was the elderly one”. Late that evening I had the delight of taking Elaine to the very top deck for a spot of star gazing in the dark and warm. A couple of days later the ship was staging a show which included the song “Don’t Cry for me Argentina”: What trepidation for Ashlee Ricci to perform in the presence of Elaine – EP applauded enthusiastically.