



One day we went into Melbourne to look at another Scottish ship, the 'Largs Bay', which like the 'Cameronia,' belonged to the Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line. This was the liner which was to take us back across three oceans and four seas to our homeland. Mum now had a calendar on the wall with each passing day to be coloured in as it elapsed.

Then it was a question of selling off almost everything we had, if we could not take it with us to England. The faithful Beatty washing machine which had come out to Australia with us was crated up to return and it stayed as a member of our family for several years more! One of Mum's friends, Queenie Pearce, used to come across and say: "The suite? Oh yes, we'll have that. And I'll have those. And that." It was good for my parents because selling things off became very easy with 'Aunty' Queenie, who decided unilaterally that she would have nearly everything we were to dispose of.

They finally "had" the car too, for 'Uncle' Tom had had driving lessons, but sadly Dad was later to receive a letter from Eric Croft reporting that the car had ended up as a "clattering ruin." It had been a good car which had

enabled us to see so many nice places in Victoria and Dad had wished for a better end for it.

The Pearce family had some interesting facets about them, starting with Tom's timidity and Queenie's usual dominance. Their son Howard was a friend of mine but we had an embarrassment one evening when he and I were walking along a path between the huts and he said something to a girl we passed. I carried on and did not listen in, but shortly after the girl and her mother turned up at our door, having heard that Howard's mother was visiting my parents at that moment. Mrs. Maxwell alleged that Howard had tried to strangle the girl! I had neither seen nor heard any such thing in the seconds when we had seen her, but the lady must have thought that he and I were in cahoots about it. Queenie stood in the open doorway letting a cold blast in, as Mum and Dad sat there in embarrassment, having nothing that they could say.

After a time of arguing in her Cockney accent, Queenie said: "Well I don't stand having arguments in other people's houses, so I'll come outside with you, if you like." Mum and Dad looked grimly at each other. Howard and I were told to go with her as well and when the argument

got nowhere, the aggrieved woman walked off shouting: "You want to get back to the slums where you come from!" to which Aunty Queenie yelled: "Come 'ere and say that!" The woman did not of course. I think that was the first time I saw grown-ups argue and I was shocked because Howard obviously must have done something silly, but I had genuinely not seen anything. My parents believed me I think, though not without some misgivings. Now the Maxwells would trust neither Howard nor me.

Our sailing had been set for 20th August 1954 but was postponed until 28th. Happy letters to Moorside report on last minute arrangements and we knew that we should be docking at Southampton about five weeks later, in early October. The concern was where we would live after arriving and how we would all cope living at '22' Moorside Road with three others there already. It had been arranged that Dad's younger brother, my Uncle Jack, would drive to meet us off the ship and take us up to his home in the English Midlands before we set off up North.

The future seemed uncertain, but what was sure was the imminent long voyage right round the earth's globe. Dad came with me on the day that I went to say goodbye to my

teachers in their lunch hour, some of them emerging while still chewing. It was hard to say goodbye to my friends but some of them would be doing what we were doing a little later on, such as the Hughans who would be returning to Birmingham. Others would stay in Australia for the rest of their lives, living and dying Down Under, raising children who would one day call themselves Australians. We could have been in their ranks, but domestic events ruled otherwise.

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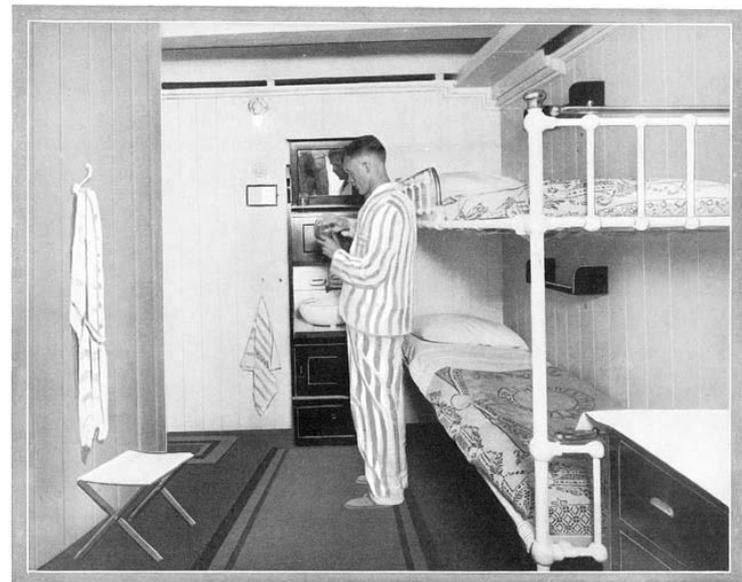


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122

