



THE PEOPLE YOU MEET

When we were guests of the Fremantle Sailing Club, I awoke feeling a bit old this particular morning. Too much booze or one too many stories the night before had me feeling every one of my sixty-four years and I was crawling rather lethargically round the cabin when I heard a rap on our railing. Coming up my eyes clasped onto a man my age inspecting my boat.

"Bonny wee sailing ship you have laddie," were his first words, and I smiled. I love people who like my boat, and replied, "She's stout and looks after you in a storm and that's what matters, plus she's a treat to live aboard."

"Aye, I can see that," this fellow went on, his bushy eyebrows going up and down as he ran his eye over our craft.

"You're a Scot, I can tell. My wife's a Geordie." And with that disclosure, he ambled closer.

"Aye, a bonny lad from the old country." He said when we were eyeball to eyeball.

"Been back lately?" I asked, thinking of our own trip home to England in 1999.

"Aye. Went back in 2005."

"Good flight?"

"Did nay fly, I sailed."

"You sailed back to Scotland!" I exclaimed suddenly reassessing this man. I had been more concerned with my own problems that morning as we'd been meeting so many other folk full of dreams and claims.

Curious I asked, "Did you do the Red Sea and canal?" Thinking what a silly question, but having twice traversed the Red Sea, thought I'd hear the latest.

But what I next heard wiped away every remaining concern for my aging.

"No, didn't do the canal. We rounded the Horn."

"What! You went round the Horn! How big a boat?"

"33 feet."

Reflections in a Sailor's Eyes

“And how many souls on board?”

“Just me.”

“Oh you’ve got to be kidding, you sailed solo round the horn, and ... and you must be my age.” I hesitated over the last not wanting to ruffle his feathers.

“Aye and maybe I’ve a few years on you. I first rounded the Horn when I was seventy. Rounded it again when I turned seventy five, and if my bonnie lassie will let me out again, I’ll round it again in two years time when I’m eighty.”

Somehow I knew this man was genuine, so I said nothing but slid my hand across the rail to encompass his. Looking into those warm gentle eyes, I felt the man’s lust for life pour through me and suddenly I was not the least concerned that I was 4,000 miles from my home and about to turn a mere sixty-five.

Later that same morning, when the club’s bosun bid me good day and I called him to the rail to disclose what I’d heard. He smirked and commented, “Oh so you’ve met George. Last time he rounded the Horn, he had to go aloft to fix a parted halyard and slipped and fell. His foot caught in a step loop and ripped some tendons. But George just got himself down the mast, bandaged his leg then carried on round the Horn non stop to Scotland.”

Well, since meeting George, I have never once felt the advancing years blues. And when alone on a dark watch I feel the man beside me, and together we puff out our chests, happy to still sail the sea, and with pride we look out over the inky blackness to the stars

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Australia Day at Fremantle Sailing Club