

## **David Rice – Coming to Pyrmont**

### **Fulham**

I remember a small blue stool, a wooden one with a rounded back. It was my stool. I used to sit in it as I dipped my toast soldiers into the yolk of my boiled egg. I would stand on the back of it to see out of the window to Claybrook Road, Fulham. One day my weight cracked the back of the chair, so I couldn't stand on it again. But I'd seen the street from the window. And I'd seen a funeral cortège outside one of the houses on the corner - black cars, black coats.

Mum used to take me for walks in Bishop's Park. I have photos of it.

On some evenings when Dad was studying for his accountancy exams and I was crying, she would bundle me into a pram and walk the snow-covered streets so that he could get on with his studies.

It was in Fulham that I last recall being called "Tony". The change to "David" (my second name) occurred because my paternal grandmother - a rusted-on Tory - kept saying "Oh, you've named him after Anthony Eden". This incensed my labour-leaning father, who decided to foil his domineering mother's right-wing fawning by calling me by my second name. (David Lloyd George was, of course, the founder of the welfare state.)

### **Mum**

On 29th October 1964, when I was fifteen, I was summoned to the Headmaster's office. "Fred" Jordan, the old, lanky, gruff Headmaster with the walking-stick put his arm around me and said "your father's here to see you". He led me to a room at the back of his study. There stood my father, looking shaken, with cuts & bruises around his face, and limping. He explained that after they'd dropped me off that morning for swimming training, he and my mother had driven into London and on the A13, near West Ham, an approaching car had crossed to the wrong side of the road and hit them head on. After the impact he looked at her and knew she was gone. Hit the windscreen. No seatbelts in those days.

A West Indian man called George Billey was convicted of causing death by dangerous driving. He was unlicensed and uninsured, and was banned from driving for ten years. The judge said the only reason he wasn't imprisoned was that he had seven children to support. I hope someone else taught them to drive.

### **Palmer's**

Within a year I had a wicked stepmother called Monica. She engineered me off to boarding school. Three years later she did the same with my brother Tim. Although Palmer's was a top Grammar School with an excellent academic record, my entry to the boarding house was a bad move. The regimentation didn't suit me. I'd just got wheels (a motor-scooter) and a beautiful squeeze (Sue Black) and my new-found independence was about to be shattered. I rebelled. Got into trouble. Got accused of doing all sorts of naughty things. Some of them not true.



Nevertheless, I was heavily into the local swimming club and destined to become School Swimming Captain and Champion.

The eleven-year-olds who came into the boarding house were away from home for the first time. Some were teary, some ran away. Crispin ran away several times, only to be found walking along the A13. On one occasion my mate Bill Barham announced to the Headmaster (who looked suspiciously like Adolf Hitler) that "Crispin has escaped again". The Headmaster was purple with apoplexy as he yelled at Barham "He hasn't escaped, he's run away!".

### **Accountancy**

My father suggested that I should become an Accountant. Not because he was an accountant, but because he thought that was right for me. He was correct. Similarly he had received early career advice from his own father, a humble storeman. Sam had said "Don't volunteer for the war, wait until they call you up, then they have to keep your current job for you". My father was a clerk with Cable & Wireless. He went on to become Financial Director.



## Sue

As a trendy young accountant ...

... I played squash with my flatmate Dennis Garland at St Mary's Hospital Squash Courts, Paddington. One Saturday morning we knocked on the door and a vision in a tennis-dress opened it (the door, not the tennis dress). She was the most gorgeous woman I'd ever seen. She let us in, and resumed her game with her girlfriend. After watching them play for a while we remembered what we'd come there for. We started our game, and when Sue and Val had finished they went upstairs to watch us. The rest is history.

Sue Sutherland was a real good-looker, even better than Sue Black. She was arranging a trip around Eastern Europe with her girlfriends, and I impressed on her that she should call me when she returned to London. Some months later, Dennis said "Oh, you know who's back, that girl you were going out with". Sue? Back without calling me? I immediately called her and invited her out.

Years later, when we were happily married and going through each other's diaries, I found an entry from mid-1974 that said "Shall I call Dave? Decide not." So much for being impressive.



Sue was the best thing that ever happened to me. There's not a room that she's entered that she hasn't brightened up. I've scored a pretty fantastic package there.

### **Australia**

In 1979 Freddie Laker started a price-war on international airfares. The Kangaroo route was offered at £344 return so Sue and I said "let's take a month's holiday". In the process I engineered a transfer with my employer Gillette from London to Sydney, and later to Melbourne and Auckland.

### **Sailing**

Shortly after our arrival in Australia my uncle Steve took us out on Pittwater on his sailing-yacht, a 30 ft Diamond. I famously said to Sue afterwards "I quite like sailing, but I can't imagine ever owning a boat". Within three months I owned a boat. A fourteen-foot NS14 skiff, an ideal vessel on which to learn. I caught the bug, joined Dobroyd Aquatic Club on Iron Cove and raced

regularly. On being transferred to Melbourne I moved on to keel-boats (too cold & rough for skiffs!) and haven't looked back.

## **Chris**

Our son Chris arrived in 1985, while we lived in Melbourne. A sharp and engaging young lad with a good sense of humour, he liked his parents so much that we had to downsize to Jacksons Landing to get rid of him at age 29. He lives with his partner Maddie in Newtown and we see them regularly.

## **Life is Transitory**

On a hot 1st February 1992 we visited our friends John & Lu, who had just bought a house near Newcastle. On our arrival Lu said "John's laying insulation in the attic, go & tell him to come down for lunch, Dave". I went upstairs and saw a stepladder in the bathroom, with an extension lead going up through the hole in the ceiling. "Hey John, come down for lunch" I said, to no reply. I climbed the metal stepladder and stuck my head through the hole. John was lying face down on the beams, eyes shut, a dust-mask over his mouth & nose. "Wake up, John" I said, thinking he had passed out with the heat. No response. I called for a broom and to turn the power off, then I poked him with the broom, touched him with the back of my hand, and he was hot.

I kept shouting, lifting his face out of the fibre-glass insulation, slapping him, anything to get him to wake up. I heard the siren get louder, the feet on the stairs, and I came down the ladder to let the ambo go up.

John had touched the housing of the lethally-wired extractor-fan for the toilet, and received a shock that entered his hand and exited his thigh, which was lying on the air-conditioning duct. Lying down in the attic, he couldn't be thrown off, and just suffered it until he died. If I, standing on that metal ladder with my head through the ceiling, had touched the air-conditioning duct while reaching across to touch him while the power was still on, I would have suffered the same fate. The ambo said to Sue "Your husband's a lucky man".

## **Business Travel**

I've been blessed with having seen a lot of the world at someone else's expense. With responsibility for the S.E Asia finance function of an American multi-national, I gained exposure to a wide range of cultures (and interesting corporate practices!), the overriding lesson being that "there's a whole lot of different out there". The hours and the work were demanding, but the rewards were good.

## **Retirement**

On the first working day of my retirement (if I can call it that) I joined the North Shore Gym in Pymble. I also started crewing on a yacht on Sydney Harbour on Wednesday afternoons and on Saturdays. This was magic - why had I been working all those years? (Oh, I remember why.)



## Music

There is no illicit chemical that can match the buzz that a retired Chartered Accountant gets when playing music on stage and seeing people up on the dance-floor enjoying themselves. It beats almost anything else I know (apart from ice cream, obviously).



## Pymont

Downsizing to an apartment was like retiring for a second time - the time spent maintaining and gardening was now available. Of course, this rapidly gets soaked up as local community leaders swoop on anyone with a face that looks like it can't say "No" and press-gang them into community service.

This has suited us well. We've made dozens of new friends here. My only family connection with the area is that my grandparents-in-law were married in St Bede's Church in 1909. Perhaps we'll end up there.