

Three Weeks in May

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Introduction:

My excessive carbon footprint began on Saturday the 8th of May when I participated in the Piers Courage Memorial Race Day at Goodwood. My son had been the successful bidder in the auction at the Mercy Ships London Ball the previous January. Twelve of us had an exhilarating time taking turns to drive a 200mph 2001 Ferrari 360 Spider, a 1939 Frazer Nash open sports racing car and an XK 120 TT Special Fixed Head Coupe Jaguar (fig 1). The cars were all owned by Ed, a cousin of the late Piers, who also provided food and two professional instructors.



Fig 1. Racing cars at Goodwood

The following day my wife and I flew to Vancouver where we stayed in an excellent Marriott Hotel which was also the venue for a lecture on my experiences on board the Mercy Ships. During the day we visited Granville Island and were impressed that whenever we stopped to study our map someone approached and asked if we needed help. The following morning we crossed by ferry to Vancouver Island. What a magical sail it was through the surrounding islands (fig 2).



Fig 2. The ferry to Vancouver Island

Vancouver Island

This is almost a quarter the size of England but with a total population of only just over 740,000. We were blessed by sunny weather for the whole week. The people were friendly and the senior citizens we met all seemed to be incredibly 'on the ball' – obviously a good place for retirement.

We stayed with a cousin of my wife's and met up with several friends from the past. We had lived in the same doctors' residence in Pietermaritzburg as Dr Ron and his wife in 1983 but sadly Ron who is 10 years younger than I am has developed a form of pre-senile dementia and has a mental age of about four – life is so unpredictable. We also met up with old Mercy Ships friends Gareth and his wife Ann. He was chaplain on board the *Anastasis* in the early 1990s. www.mercyships.org.uk



Fig 3. With Niki

The highlight of the visit for me was a reunion with 18-year-old Niki Tucker (fig 3) who I had helped rescue from Vert Island near the port city of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast when she was a 3-month-old premature baby weighing only 1kg. A Canadian couple Peter and Suzanne, also working on board the *Anastasis*, subsequently adopted her. We spent a delightful morning in Butchart Gardens where Niki and I shared experiences, photographing many spectacular flowers and trees (fig 4). www.mercyships.org.uk



Fig 4. Butchart Gardens

Niki graduates from school in June and is hoping to train as a baker after a gap year.

We visited the Naval docks at Esquimalt (fig 5) where the Mercy

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Fig 5. Esquimalt docks

Ship *Anastasis* (originally named the Victoria) was berthed for 18 months during 1985-86, undergoing engine repairs prior to her first outreach to the hurricane devastated city of Lorenzo Cardenas in Mexico in 1987. This was where long term maxillofacial surgeon, Dr Gary Parker, originally came on board for just a few weeks and has never left! Apparently the people of Victoria were incredibly supportive raising all the money required for the dock-yard work.



Fig 6. Home coming

Interesting sites around Victoria waterfront included 'Home coming' (fig 6) celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Navy and an amusing sign outside a church (fig 7).



Fig 7. Church notice

On our last day we went to Gareth and Ann's Church in the University area where more weddings were taking place than funerals, the average age of congregants looked

less than 30. I met one young man whose mother had worked for two years on board the *Anastasis* some 25 years ago.

Vancouver Airport – another old friend.

We left on an early morning bus from central Victoria to catch a ferry to the mainland and then on to the Airport where we stayed one night prior to our flight via Chicago to Detroit. An old friend who lived near Seattle drove two and a half hours in his Cadillac to have lunch with us. I first met Dr Ben Burgoyne in Greenville Mission Hospital in the Transkei in South Africa in 1975 when I was a final year medical student on elective. He taught me spinal anaesthesia and the use of ketamine for caesarean section. In 2003 we had visited him and his wife in their beautiful home on the banks of Lake Stevens.



Fig 8. With Ben

Ben, now a very sprightly 93 (fig 8), had only handed in his flying licence and sold his home-built plane three years before. Walking without a stick he was remarkably physically and mentally fit for his age and even discussed with me the pharmacology of his blood pressure tablets. It was such a pleasure to meet him and wife Wannie again.

Detroit

Our next stop was Detroit where I had been invited by Latvian friend Prof. Sam Perov to give two lectures at the Detroit Medical Center, Wayne State University Hospital. The first entitled "Airway Adventures in Africa" was delivered at a body clock time for me of 4am! I had forgotten that there was a three-hour time change between Vancouver and Detroit. I did just about manage to stay awake,

the audience were complimentary. I gave a second presentation later in the afternoon entitled "Complications of Obstetric Anaesthesia". The following day we left Detroit en route for London via Chicago after having visited the fascinating 'Through African Eyes' exhibition at the Detroit Institute of Art. This depicted West African art during the slavery years portraying challenging relationships with the white man.

South Africa

After six days at home recovering from jet lag and missing, due to BA industrial action, a brief trip to Scotland to attend a Mercy Ships Board Meeting, I flew out with friend Martyn, my son Duncan and his girlfriend Louisa to Durban via Johannesburg. Our Avis hire car was upgraded from a Honda Jazz to an Audi A4 Turbo at no extra charge which seemed a good deal but the Sat Nav initially directed us into the middle of a sugar cane plantation on the way to the International Conference Centre in Durban for Duncan and Martyn to complete registration for the Comrades Marathon. Duncan managed to get himself photographed with the previous year's winner, Stephen Muzhingi from Zimbabwe, who two days later won the event again in under 5½ hours. We then drove to Pietermaritzburg where Duncan had been born nearly 27 years before. In training Duncan and Martyn had together run the Paris and Rome Marathons and a few weeks before had individually completed a 40-mile run in preparation for this gruelling 56 mile event from Pietermaritzburg to Durban, billed as the 'Ultimate Human Endurance Race.'

Pietermaritzburg

From Dec 1982 - Jan 1984 I had worked as the senior medical officer in anaesthesia at Edendale Hospital, 'Easyriders' the doctors' mess and the swimming pool had now disappeared but the old braai and the squash court were still there albeit in a state of severe disrepair. I visited the theatres and intensive care unit which seemed reasonably well

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equipped and spoke to Dr Jonathan Handley the head of the Anaesthetic Department. In fact he seemed to be the only consultant, the rest of the department was staffed mainly by doctors only doing a six-month training course leading to a DA – a situation similar to that which existed in 1983.



Fig 9. Edendale Hospital

Edendale (fig 9) did not seem to have changed much over the years, the main case load still seemed to be caesarean sections and trauma including stabbed hearts. The main difference was the advent of HIV/AIDS in all its manifestations. If you are diagnosed with this condition there are Government grants available but I was informed that some poor and desperate people, usually young women, deliberately try to get themselves infected so as to obtain financial support, which is really sad.

The day before the Comrades Marathon we had a delightful al fresco lunch at a place called 'Granny Mouse's Country House'. During the 30 minutes drive from Pietermaritzburg we passed the site near Howick where Nelson Mandela was arrested on the 5th August 1962 (fig 10).



Fig 10. Mandela arrest site

The restaurant had a very 'colonial' feel, with well trained staff at our beck and call. After that we returned to the house of our hosts Neil and Lyn via a supermarket where Duncan and Martyn stocked up with bananas and various makes of isotonic drinks for their challenge the

next day. After watching on TV the final of the Super 14 Rugby Cup in which the Blue Bulls convincingly beat the Cape Town Stormers, Martyn and Duncan prepared for the following day.

Race Day

We were up at 3.30am to make sure Martyn and Duncan were well fed and watered and on time for the early start (fig 11).



Fig 11. 5 am start!

The 85th Comrades Marathon (first run in 1921) was a distance of 89.2 kilometres (56 miles) from Pietermaritzburg to Durban via the Valley of a Thousand Hills whose dramatic undulating topography would provide little respite to weary runners. The cock crowed and the gun fired at 5.30am outside the iconic red brick town hall and 20,000 runners set off. Duncan and Martyn had meticulously planned their running rate (11½ min/mile), fluid and calorie intake to make sure they were inside the cut off time of 12 hours. The route was carefully monitored and runners not reaching particular check points in time were eliminated from the race. We were able to follow their progress via the Comrades website. They completed the run in 11hrs 38mins and 52 sec. crossing the finishing line at the Sahara Stadium together with hands held aloft in celebration. 25 minutes later when I caught up with them they looked remarkably fit (fig 12) and both said they still had some gas left in the tank.

Fig12. We did it



Some other finishers were not so lucky and were being carried off on stretchers. Duncan ran the event for *Mercy Ships* and *Children with Leukaemia*, using the site www.virginmoneygiving.com He raised over £3,000. I felt very elated for them to have finished although I have to admit I was slightly jealous that I had not run with them. At almost 64 Martyn is over a year older than I am but all his life he has been a remarkable runner, including running 2000 miles for the Millennium in 1999 during which he ran a Marathon a day for 96 days from John O'Groats to Land's End and back. That night we stayed at the Royal Hotel in Durban with its mini football field in the reception (fig 13).



Fig 13. Hotel football!

The following day after visiting the impressive *uShaka Water Park* and *Aquarium* (figs 14,15) we left, with the country tuning vuvuzelas in preparation for the World Cup, and returned to the UK – what a remarkable 4 day trip.



Fig 14. Happy dolphins



Fig 15. Palette Surgeon

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Post Script –

on a plane to Faro (8th July)

The month of June included a successful week's fishing with friends on the River Avon in Scotland during which I landed two salmon and three seatrout (figs 16, 17).



Fig 16. 9lb salmon



Fig 17. 3lb Sea trout

This was followed by a four day trip to Munich and Oberammergau.

Dachau – what adjective can one use to describe this remarkable 'museum' to the memory of the horrors which were perpetrated there between 1933 and 1945 when the surviving skeletal inmates were liberated by American troops. The inscription '*never again*' in several languages on a memorial is very poignant when one remembers TV footage only a few years ago during the Balkan Conflict.



Fig 18. Cremation ovens at Dachau

I did not feel like taking many photos, those I did included the cremation ovens (fig 18) situated adjacent to the gas chambers and the pistol range used for executions (fig 19).



Fig 19. Execution range at Dachau

Among other unspeakable horrors which occurred there were medical experiments performed on human guinea pigs to investigate malarial transmission, high altitude physiology and the effects of hypothermia. Apparently all German school children now have to visit a concentration camp as part of their wider education.

The next day we went on an interesting three hour 'Third Reich' walking tour of Munich.



Fig 20. Hofbrauhaus in Munich with tour guide

This started at the famous Hofbrauhaus (fig 20) where Hitler made a infamous speech in 1923 and continued round the city visiting various streets and buildings which held particular significance for the rise and fall of the Nazism during the ensuing two decades.

Oberammergau – The *Passion Play* is a must for anyone's 'Bucket list.' It has been performed for 102 days every 10th year since 1633 to keep a pledge to God for protecting the village from a devastating bubonic plague. The remarkable six hour production, with a 3 hour break in the middle, has up to 500 performers plus horses, donkeys, sheep and even camels on stage. There was a full orchestra and a 48 strong choir all dressed in simple white gowns. There were no vacancies in the 4000 seat auditorium (fig 21).



Fig 21. Passion Play stage

The performance was in German but an English translation was provided which became unreadable, without a torch, as the night drew in. The graphic portrayal of the scourging and crucifixion of Christ was so life-like as to leave an indelible memory.

In conclusion

It is now five years since I underwent surgery and radiotherapy for carcinoma of the tongue; my surgeon has discharged me from follow up. Apart from residual side effects of radiotherapy, a dry mouth and an oral mucosa which is intolerant to alcohol concentrations greater than 5%, I am fine.

The last two months have been somewhat frenetic, but I am within 30 tier points of the 600 needed to become a BA Silver Executive Club member. Recently I have had a discussion with my clinical director and we have agreed on the number of extra sessions I need to work to compensate for additional leave taken! As I am now half retired and only work 4½ FPA's per week this is quite feasible during the holiday season.

