

The New Adventures of the Southern Man

Public Bar, next to the fireplace
Chatto Creek Tavern
Central Otago

10th September 2015

A wee Southern Man yarn, by Clyde Ranfurly

I got back to town on Tuesday after being away mustering for a week and a half. I've been a wee bit out of touch since the battery on my little transistor wireless died. I can run it off a thermocouple by twisting two bits of wire together and poking them up the horse's date, but he doesn't like it very much, and he's been a good old nag this last ten years or so, so I reckoned I'd just wait till I got to Hughey's Store in the High Street and buy a new one there.

Anyway once I got to listen to the news I discovered that apparently we're thinking about changing the flag. I'm not mad keen on the idea but it did put me in mind of a wee tale.

Back a few years ago now, me and Wally Dunstan had decided to take a break from contracting and go and do a wee bit of sightseeing. There's a whole big world out there you know, and I don't just mean north of the Waitaki. He had one of those passport things that let you get on aeroplanes and go to other places. I'd never had one; never needed one, I mean I'd been up in the topdresser with Stan Macrae a good few times, and he never asked for one. Sometimes we went right over the Black Range and back if he needed to refuel, I reckon that's a fair way, but Wally said this was different.

So I got one sorted out, had to have my photo taken, first time since school, unless you count the time after Mick Tapanui's stag do at the West's rugby club in Timaru, when me and a few of the boys got a wee bit liquored up and got a bit loose driving up Evans Street in Johnny Paerau's ute, and made a few nice little circles in Ashbury Park. The local plod took my photo after that. It had a number on the bottom of it. I asked the lady at the passport office if I could just use that one, but she reckoned it had to be more recent. Reckon she was giving me the eye. Heard later that Mick had been tapping her on the side, crafty bugger. Good job his missus never found out.

Anyway we rocked up at the big airfield in Christchurch and hopped on this bloody great big plane, I mean huge, you'd get a power of superphos in it and still have room for a mob of stock and more than a few big bales of silage if you wanted, I reckon.

There were a heap of people on it though, all heading away to the overseas place. Off to London, the other side of the world! Wally's got family over there apparently. Jammed in like bloody sardines they were, I said to Wally, we need to make a wee bit of space here, so we went to pull a couple of seats up out of the floor. But the plane people got all excited and said they didn't want that, and me and Wally got moved forward into some big seats right up the front of the plane. There weren't so many people up there, but they were mostly dressed up pretty flash, no-one apart from me and Wally had remembered their Swanndris. Some of them looked at me and Wally a bit funny, but one of the birds who was serving the drinks said something about it being better all round for everyone to put us up there, whatever that meant.

Didn't bother me, I've always liked my space, and I reckon she was giving me the eye. They brought us drinks before we took off. Stan Macrae never bloody did that. Then again his plane's a whole lot smaller. So this other bird brought us some of that fizzy wine. Never liked it. I asked her if I could have a Speights. She kind of looked at me like she didn't know what I meant; maybe she was foreign. Anyway she came back with a couple of those yellow beers that they have in Auckland. Green bottle, got a German-sort of sounding name. It wasn't the best but it was all they had, and I have to say she did look like she was trying. Nice tight skirt too, and she bent over quite well, it has to be said. Always liked that in a Sheila. Reckon she was giving me the eye.

Well, we were on that plane for bloody ages. Stan would have had to refuel I don't know how many times. I had my own wee TV in my seat, and so did Wally. Watched a couple of films. They fed us a lot, dinky little bits of tucker but often enough. After a few hours most everyone went off to sleep, including Wally, but he was pretty pissed by then. I got up for a bit of a stretch and to hang the sheriff. They've got dunnies on those planes, not very big, but quite flash. Stan Macrae'd be spewing, his plane doesn't even have an ash tray, but then again it's nowhere near as big.

So anyway the one Sheila who I was sure had been giving me the eye was still up and about, though most everyone else was nowhere to be seen. She came and sat down in the seat next to mine and we had a bit of a yarn for quite a while. Turns out she was from France, probably explains why she'd never heard of Speights. Pretty girl. Nice eyes, and like I said she bent over well.

Now these seats that me and Wally were in, turns out they folded down to make a bed. Pretty clever. Had a Valiant station wagon once that did the same thing. The French Sheila showed me how to fold the seat down...and I tell you what, without a word of a lie, she came and joined me in it. Knew I was right about her giving me the eye.

Next thing I knew it was light and people were waking up, Frenchie wasn't there, Wally was leaning over the seat next to mine and grinning. Reckon he must have known something. They brought us breakfast, fresh poached eggs, where the bloody hell do they keep chooks on an aeroplane?? Got me buggered, but I wasn't saying no.

Anyway shortly after that they came round telling people to get ready for landing. And right before we did the pilot came on over the intercom – pretty flash, those things – and told everybody there was some kind of fault and we were going to have an emergency landing! People looked a wee bit scared about that, and some of the sheilas started to have a bit of a cry. So I looked at Wally and Wally looked at me, and I said, well, we'd better do something about this, eh.

So we got up and walked up towards the front. A couple of the drinks serving sheilas tried to get us to sit down again but they were a wee bit panicky and I didn't reckon they were serious. So we got to the cockpit and I tell you what, things were pretty busy in there. There were three jokers all trying to fly that thing. Stan Macrae always managed it on his own, but I suppose he didn't have to sleep or poach eggs while he was doing it.

I gave the one joker a pat on the back and asked him what was wrong. He seemed quite stand-offish and he didn't even turn round, but he said "the landing gear won't go down," and he was stabbing away at a button on the dashboard. Boy, they have a lot of buttons in those things. Stan'd be a wee bit envious I would say.

So I said to the bloke, let me have a look at that, and I gave the button a poke. Well, it was pretty obvious what was wrong. I told him, mate, your switch is bugged, have you got a screwdriver? But he didn't, so I said what about a pocketknife or something? And Wally was looking round the cockpit and he had a bit of a laugh and said mate, they've got bloody everything else but!

But the pilot joker wasn't saying anything and he was looking a wee bit pale, so maybe his eggs weren't the freshest that morning.

Anyway then my little French mate poked her head in the cockpit, and she looked pretty worried too, and I said to her, hey love, be a darling, and go and get us a knife from the wee kitchen back there. So she came back a few moments later with a teaspoon, looking a wee bit flushed and shaky, and I thought about the night before and thought yeah, it was pretty good too, and I gave her a wee wink. I hadn't really thought of using a spoon, but I reckoned we probably didn't have a whole lot of time to muck around, so I thought, well, that'll have to do, and I jemmied the switch out of the dashboard and showed the pilot the back of it, and said look mate, there's your problem, one of the terminals is poked. Had a D-8 once that did the same thing with the hydraulic pump switches all the time, it's the vibrations ya know. I don't reckon he even knew what a D-8 was, seemed like he was more interested in looking at the runway coming up below us. Dunno why, he must have seen heaps of them.

So I pulled the wire off the bugged terminal and poked it into the other one. You have to be careful doing that, sometimes there's even more than 24 volts going through those things, and they can bite. So that must have worked pretty much right away, because another light came on and the pilot jokers got all excited and said the gear was engaging, so I reckoned the wheels were probably going to work now.

So me and Wally thought we'd best get back and sit down, because the ground was pretty close by then and there weren't any spare seats up there. Any decent topdresser's got at least one spare seat, I mean where's the bloody dog meant to sit? Reckon Stan had one up on them there.

So anyway we landed and I tell you what, when we got off the plane there was a pretty flash welcome, all sorts of reporters with cameras going off and people cheering, and waving at me and Wally, and a few sheilas popped out of the crowd and gave us kisses, and I thought, what a friendly bunch these Pommies are. Wally had a talk to a bloke with a big camera on his shoulder and a pretty looking Sheila who had a microphone. Reckon she was giving me the eye.

And we went through the customs hall and they were all smiles in there as well, and a nice West Indian lady stamped my new passport. Told her we were going to whip their arses in the cricket next time New Zealand went to Jamaica, which she looked like she thought was pretty funny. Reckon she was giving me the eye. Just as well I didn't use the old photo that the Timaru cops took.

So then Wally and me hopped in a big black cab and headed off to the pub that he'd booked for us, she was a flash place I can tell you. Must have been twenty floors high, maybe even more, and the front door was a bloody great glass thing that went round in circles. There was a big Indian joker with a turban and everything standing outside, dressed up in some kind of Army uniform except it was a sort of purple red colour. Wally said he was there to open the door for us! I told him we were going to whip his arse in the cricket too. Miserable bugger tried to nick my bag. I gave him a bloody hard look, I can tell you.

Anyway we went in and there were a couple of blokes in suits behind the bar, funny sort of pub, didn't even have a Speights tap on it.

One of them said he'd show us where our rooms were, and the other one tried to nick my bag as well! Wasn't sure how to take these Pommies, I mean the ones at the airport had been so friendly. So we got up to the room, and mate, she was flash. There was a bloody great big bed each for us, and a dunny and shower right there in the room in its own little bathroom thing, and a big TV. I turned it on and without a word of a lie, there was Wally on the TV talking to the pretty Sheila with the microphone! Couldn't see the bloke with the camera but. Still reckoned she'd been giving me the eye.

Anyway there was a French door on the one wall and I went for a look and the room had a wee balcony off it! So I had a wee look out over London, she's a bloody big town when you see her from up high. And you know, what I saw was flags everywhere, and the thing that got me, without a word of a lie, they all looked like the bit in the top left corner of our flag, except bigger.

And you know I'm thinking, and this is what reminded me of it, why would we be wanting to go thinking about changing our flag when people on the other side of the world reckon it's so good that they want to copy it?

Anyway me and Wally had a good time in Pommiland, and came home again in time for crutching, and had another plane ride and I met my wee French mate again, and I tell you what, she still bent over pretty well.

We did go back again another time, and even met the Queen, and I sorted out some car problems for her, but that's another yarn for another day.

I'm Clyde Ranfurly and I'm not much cop at writing, so I dictated this yarn to Richard Prosser. He's a wee bit better at it than me, I reckon.

Chapter Two

Dunno if I ever told you about the time me and Wally Dunstan went to the South Pole.

It was pretty late in the summer a few years ago, we'd been mustering, and Wally came into the shed one night and said he'd been listening to the wireless and heard something about a fire at the South Pole Station. I thought he meant the Invercargill Power Board, but apparently no, the Yanks have some sort of setup down on the ice, that's even further away than Bluff, if you can believe it.

Anyway, turns out the place was pretty badly bugged up, and the bloke they had down there looking after the dogs had been hurt, and wasn't in very good shape.

I asked Wally what they were farming down there, I mean as far as I knew there wasn't much apart from penguins, and you can't shear or even milk them. But he said no, they were sled dogs, which made more sense.

So the upshot was that Uncle Sam had decided they needed to get everyone out of there, and they'd put out a call for anyone who could head on down and help them with the dogs. Wally said that me and

him could probably give it a go, and I said, bloody oath, always keen to help out a man who needs a hand with his dogs. I didn't even know Wally had an Uncle Sam, but that didn't matter.

-SNIP -