

Our Trip from England to Sydney

by May Flinter

(to whom, we do not know, but it appears to be someone she worked with in Bath, England)

Well, I thought I'd just let you know about the ship, what we did, and my impressions of the different ports of call and, of course, Australia.

We (my mother, Basil and myself) arrived at Southampton on Friday, 11 October (1946) at approximately 3:30 pm, and shared a taxi to the docks with a lovely girl of 21, called Olive Clark, who was travelling alone to Melbourne to get married (the ship was carrying a lot of English girls who had either married, or were going to marry, Australian servicemen). I mention Olive because Olive and I became like sisters during the voyage, and we all liked her so much I hope we shall always be able to keep in touch.

We had to wait in a queue for an hour to get our papers, etc. examined, and then we were on board at last. Were we excited? First of all we went to look for our baggage, and there we saw Olive and helped her find hers, and from then on, Olive was always with us, and she and I were inseparable. Incidentally, it wasn't until we were looking for our baggage that we noticed luggage labelled Cape Town, and realised that we were going that way instead of the usual route through the Suez Canal. I was delighted, as I have been through the Suez Canal, but never to Cape Town. Also, this meant that the voyage would take 8 weeks, instead of 4, which was grand.

Now I'll try to describe the ship to you. The "ASTURIAS" is a 22,000 tonner, and there were 1700 passengers and 450 crew on board, so you can imagine the size of her. She was sunk by the Germans in 1942 and subsequently refloated by the British government, and this was her first journey since being refloated, so that everything was clean and newly painted, and all the cutlery, crockery and linen, etc. was brand new, which was very nice. There were six decks, A to F. A Deck was called the Boat Deck, and that's where the 'Bridge' was, which was out of bounds to everyone except the Captain and crew. Next to it was the Deck Tennis court, where we spent most of the day playing. Also on this deck was a beautiful lounge, where they had the ship's concerts and organised games of lotto, or housey-housey, as it is sometimes called. There was also a children's nursery with lovely toys and swings and a trained nurse to look after the children, and also there was the wireless room, and plenty of room on the decks for lounging on deck chairs.

Up above A Deck there was a tiny deck near the funnel where we used to spread the rug and go to sleep or read in the sun when it was too hot to play games. Sometimes we used to play the gramophone there too and had lovely times. B Deck was the main promenade deck, and there they had all sorts of games; shuffle-board, deck quoits, table tennis, etc. It was an extremely wide and beautiful deck, and most of the people sat there in deck chairs, as it was covered over and kept cool, whereas A Deck was open to the sun. Also on B Deck was another beautiful lounge, where we used to write letters and play cards. In the lounges they served tomato juice and iced drinks at 5d (five pence) per glass.

The Bar (which sold cigarettes and served soft drinks only, as strong drinks were not allowed) was also located on B Deck, as were the Officers' Recreation Room, the Ladies' Recreation Room, the Library, and the Cinema Room, which was also used as the ballroom. There were a few cabins on B Deck, but not many. C, D and E Decks are where most of the cabins were. C Deck also contained the Purser's Office, the Canteen (which sold anything in the way of sweets, chocolates, cigarettes, tinned milk, tinned fruit, toothpaste, combs, make-up, perfume, nail varnish and all sorts) all for half as much as they cost in England. The barber and ladies' hairdresser were also located on C Deck, while the front part of C Deck contained some of the crew's quarters. The back part (stern) of the ship on the deck was as far as you could go, and we used to stand there and watch the waves lashing up in rough weather and we could see the other end (bow) of the ship come right out of the water and then go in again and almost seem to go under, and we would rock as if we were on a see-saw. It was a wonderfully exhilarating feeling and I always loved it, standing over the railing with the spray flying into our faces.

D Deck was where mummy and my cabin was, and next to us there were the crew's quarters, and we used to hear them playing the gramophone until quite late at night. It was quite fun. The engine room was also on our (D) deck, and we had a good look around the engine room one day. It was awfully hot there and it made me feel dizzy, as you had to climb up and down ladders with a sheer drop below. I didn't dare look down. Also on D Deck was the Shop, which sold the same sort of things as the Canteen did, except that it did not

sell tinned foods. Our cabin was very nicely placed next door to the ironing room, and only a few steps away from the bathrooms and showers, and just two flights of stairs down to the dining room. Basil and Olive were both on E Deck, as were Olive's and my boyfriends (all of them!). F Deck is where the two dining rooms were, and also where the troops' accommodation was. Each deck had lots of bathrooms and showers and ironing rooms, but there were so many of us that we had to book the iron two days ahead, and then could only use it for half an hour at a time. We also had to book our baths, and the only time I could fit mine in was at 6:45 every morning.

Meals were divided into two sittings; one was breakfast at 8 a.m., lunch at 12 noon and dinner at 6 p.m. The other was breakfast at 8:45 a.m., lunch at 1:00 p.m. and dinner at 7:00 p.m. We were the first sitting, and mummy, Basil, Olive and I sat together at one table, with six other people. The food was plentiful, but very badly cooked and tasteless. However, we were thrilled to be able to have as much as we wanted (after the long years of wartime England) and to have real white bread and lots of butter! Incidentally, we could buy as many chocolates as we wanted (no rationing!) and, on top of the dozens of bars we used to buy ourselves every day, our boyfriends used to buy Olive and me a box each every three days. Sweets were still rationed (to one tin per person per week) as were cigarettes (150 per person per week), the cost being five shillings for both the sweets and the cigarettes together. Wasn't that wonderfully cheap? About 4d (four pence) for 10 cigarettes. Actually, I could have had Olive's, mummy's and two other people's sweet/cigarette ration cards, but I didn't need them because I was always smoking my various boyfriend's cigarettes as they wouldn't let me smoke my own, so I was well away. I forgot to mention that we could buy any amount of soap and soap flakes, which was useful.

The cabins were not too bad. There were eight in each, and mummy and I shared a bunk (mummy had the top and I had the bottom). We were nearest the porthole, which was very nice, as it was cooler there. Nearing Cape Town, and after that until we reached Australia, we had to have the portholes closed most of the time, as the water rose so high that it would have come into the cabin, it was so rough. I thought I would be sick, but I was as right as rain the whole journey and, in fact, adored the rough weather much more than when it was calm. We were rather cramped for space in the cabin, and we were only allowed a small locker each, and there was a small wardrobe divided into four sections, and we were allowed half a section each, so that we had to keep most of our clothes in cases, as a result of which the clothes got horribly creased. However, we didn't mind, and we had a lovely group of people in our cabin, and we all got on famously.

Afternoon tea (with a bun) was served on B Deck at 3:30 p.m., but you had to stand ages in a queue, so our cabin (who had all taken it in turn to buy milk, sugar, tea and biscuits) used to make our own tea in the cabin. We always invited Olive and our boyfriends, and sometimes Basil and his friends, to tea, but Basil and his crowd didn't come more than once or twice, because they were always busy doing other things and, in fact, we very rarely saw Basil at all, except at meal times. At 6:30 every morning, the steward used to collect our tea pot, which we left just inside the door, and make the tea for us and leave it by the door, and then we used to take it in turns to serve the tea; this also happened at bedtime. I never used to have tea, but I did join in the conversation. We also used to invite another lady into the cabin (she joined us every day for afternoon tea, which we made ourselves as the steward was otherwise occupied at that time of day) and she was a fortune teller and a very uncanny person too; but more about her later.

Incidentally, the "Asturias" is supposed to be the most luxurious troopship there is, and I can well believe it. You really couldn't believe you were not in a city, except that there was water all around you.

When we eventually set sail, it was at 2 p.m. on Saturday, 12 October 1946 (Sylvia's 25th birthday) and I must admit that as we saw Southampton fade into the distance, I had quite a lump in my throat, especially as we were leaving Sylvia behind. Even now I sometimes get a longing to be back in England, especially to see all my friends again. While we sailed out, Basil took pictures of the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, which were docked near us. On the previous evening (Friday) Basil had also taken some pictures of the two "Queens" all lit up. We had some very funny looking passengers on board, and some who were really not quite sane, and also there were a great many old people who didn't like the trip a bit, but for the younger people, it was a heavenly trip. I enjoyed every moment of it. We also had quite a few distinguished personalities on board, including Ronnie James, the Empire Lightweight boxing champion who was coming out to Sydney to fight Australia's champion, Vic Patrick. Ronnie James was travelling with his wife and small son, and his manager, Johnny Phillips, a very nice person who, incidentally, called me over to him one day and before I knew what was happening, kissed me! He's training Ronnie just near us at Sydney, and he's

coming over to have dinner with us (at Elizabeth Bay) one night. They are all very charming people, and Ronnie James is most unaffected and pleasant, and used to let us watch him training and shadow boxing, and used to play games with us. Johnny Phillips was in charge of the ship's Entertainments and Sports Committee, which organised all sorts of things. The Committee arranged Deck Tennis and Quoits and Table Tennis competitions at which Basil won some money. He came first in the Men's Doubles Deck Tennis, which won him 25 shillings.

The Committee also used to run lotteries by selling tickets for you to guess the distance the ship had travelled per day, and Basil won quite a bit of money on this. Basil and mummy also won about three pounds during the trip at "housey-housey" and I won five shillings because I didn't play much. The Committee also arranged for three race meetings in the Cinema Hall, which I went to with Olive and our best boyfriends, Stan and Eric (Eric was mine). The races were great fun, and very exciting. Six passengers, carrying toy horses, ran round the course according to what they were told to do. The idea was for two people to throw dice (one each) and if the first person threw 5 and the second person threw 2, that meant that horse number five was to advance two steps. Sometimes they came to obstacles, which meant they had to start again, and it was most exciting. The betting was quite heavy, and people won and lost some money at it. I won 25 shillings altogether and Basil won quite a bit too. Stan and Eric won two pounds ten shillings each and Olive won ten shillings. Tickets were one shilling each, and it was according to what the odds were on the horses that you knew how much you had won. Stan and Eric won more because they each bought a horse for ten shillings, and their horses won, which got them twenty-five shillings straight off, plus their bettings later on. Six races were run at each meeting, and we had three meetings, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Dances were held quite often, and we had a lovely time at them, although it was very crowded. We also had quite a number of pictures, but the sound was bad. Anyway, I saw "Going my Way," "Blythe Spirit," "White Cliffs of Dover" and something else, but I can't remember now what it was called. Towards the end of the journey they organised a children's party and fancy dress ball, and also a grown-ups' fancy dress ball. It was great fun to see some of the costumes. I went as a pack of cards, wearing a white dress with cards sewn all over it and a crown of cards, and Eric went as a Mexican. Olive was Stardust, with a lovely pale blue dress and stars and moons and spangles sewn all over it, and Stan went as a pirate. Our whole cabin dressed up as various things and we all had a very happy time. One of the ladies in our cabin was very fat and jolly and had long black hair. We plaited it and put a blanket over her shoulders and a doll in the blanket, and she went as an Indian Squaw. How everyone laughed. She was so fat and looked a typical squaw, and as we all paraded around, everyone roared with laughter at her walking along with the doll bobbing up and down behind her. She was a real sport. We also had two ship's concerts, as well as a concert given by the crew, and all of them were a great success. Basil and his pals and six Canadian officers (who were going to Cape Town) dressed up as bathing belles and caused shrieks of laughter and ended up by kissing all the ship's officers and the Captain, who were in the front row, and smearing them with lipstick. It was really funny. Community singing was also organised at times, which was good fun. There was a lovely grand piano in the A Deck lounge, and Basil used to play sometimes. The ship was fitted all over with loud speakers, as there were so many passengers that it would have been impossible, without them, to contact anyone in a hurry. So, all day long, messages of importance were being announced over the loudspeakers. Also, if anybody was wanted at the Purser's office for any reason, or the doctor was needed, or anything else, people could easily be contacted. Incidentally, there was a hospital on B Deck. Sometimes they used to relay music over the loudspeakers, as well as announcing what entertainments were on for the day.

Before I tell you roughly how we spent the day, I'll tell you something about Olive. She was going to marry a Greek fellow in Melbourne, whom she knew when she was in Australia during the war. They fell in love, and as he was already married, and she 21 and he 42, her parents didn't like it, so they took her home to England, as she was only 20 then. When she was 21, her boyfriend wrote to say he was getting a divorce, and sent her the passage money, so she was going to join him. We saw him at Melbourne, and thought he looked a horrible type. Thank goodness I heard from her that things weren't what she thought they would be, and she didn't think she would marry him after all, but may come to Sydney to work, which I hope she does, as it will be marvellous to have her here. Stan (her on-board boyfriend, and a lovely person) is in love with her and she likes him a lot, and he's only 27, so I hope that they will get together in the end, as they are both lovely people. Eric, unfortunately, is married, but not happily, although he's always nice about his wife, but she never wrote to him or sent him a telegram once throughout the journey, and she didn't go to meet him, which struck me as being very funny. It's a pity about him, because we were both very fond of one another, but you never know what may yet happen.

This is generally how we spent the day. I was called by the bathroom steward at 6:45 a.m. and went for my bath. By the time I was ready for breakfast, it was 7:30, at which time I used to walk a mile around the deck, either by myself or with any of the others who got up also, but as a rule, they were all too lazy. I had breakfast at 8 a.m., and after breakfast Olive and I used to go and sunbathe on A Deck and read or sleep or listen to the gramophone. After we got friendly with the boys (Stan and Eric), which was after Cape Town, they used to join us too. At about 11 a.m., we used to go to any of the lounges and write a few letters or play cards until lunch at midday. After lunch we used to go straight up to the deck tennis court (otherwise it was so crowded you had to wait ages to get a court, as there were only two courts and everyone liked to play). We used to spend the whole afternoon there, playing and sunbathing between games when others were using the courts, and at 3:30 p.m. we retired to the cabin for tea and a chat. We were usually finished by 4:15 p.m. and used to then go on deck to play the other games (deck quoits, table tennis, etc.) until 5:15 p.m., at which time we girls got ready for dinner.

At 5 o'clock they broadcast the arrangements for the evening, and we then got dressed for whatever it was that we wanted to do (dancing, races, housey-housey, etc.). There were usually three dances a week, a race meeting a fortnight, pictures (twice a week in the evening and one matinee a week) and usually housey-housey every night unless the lounge was needed for other entertainment. Whatever entertainment we went to, it used to be over at 11 p.m. and we'd all have a cup of tea in the cabin, after which the others would go to bed while Olive, Stan, Eric and I would go for a walk and sing-song on deck, and usually stayed there, either sitting in the breeze on deck chairs or leaning over the rail. It really used to be **most** romantic, with nothing but sea and sky around you. We used to go to bed at about 2 o'clock, and I had to sneak into the cabin in the dark so as not to disturb anyone.

Now for the ports of call. We left Southampton at 2 p.m. on Saturday, 12th October (1946), and our first port of call was Las Palmas (Canary Islands), which we reached on Wednesday, 16th October (the day they hanged the war criminals and Heath). By the way, there was a super-looking fellow on board who looked like Heath, and we got on fine together, but he was too shy. Anyway, for the first stage of the journey, we palled up with five young guys who were going to Ascension Island, sent there by the British government to work for 18 months at the Cable and Wireless station there. We also palled up with Basil's friend Les, an Australian from Canberra who was returning to Australia after a six month holiday in England. Anyway, Olive and I, Basil, Les and the five other guys decided to go around Las Palmas together. We were most excited when we arrived at the dock, but we were told that we would have to wait and see whether the authorities would let us disembark, as there was typhoid fever on the island.

While we were waiting to hear whether we could disembark, we spent the time bartering with the local inhabitants on the quayside. There were dozens of them lined up on the wharf, with their wares spread out in front of them. I bought a dozen bananas and oranges, and Olive bought silk stockings (fully fashioned) at ten shillings a pair. At last we heard we could disembark, so off we trotted. We bought picture postcards at a shilling a packet of twelve (they wanted four shillings at first). I wanted a lovely bracelet and they wanted a pound for it, so I pretended I didn't want it and walked away, at which they ran after me, begging me to buy it for whatever I wanted to pay, within reason, so I gave them five shillings. I also bought a lovely pair of pearl ear-rings (for three shillings, instead of ten shillings) and we bought mummy a beautiful pale blue silk scarf as a peace offering, because we annoyed her by saying we were going off on our own instead of with her. Anyway, she went off with the others in our cabin. We got mummy's scarf for ten shillings (knocked down from twenty-five shillings) and, for a box of cigarettes, Olive got a straw beach hat and handbag to match. Cigarettes would buy anything there. Children followed us around, begging for fag ends, and we had to hide our cigarettes or we would have been mobbed.

The weather was very hot. Las Palmas is, in fact, not a very healthy place. Everything was dusty and struck me as being very dirty. Anyway, we wouldn't eat anything there. The women are very beautiful; dark and slim and very nicely dressed, but they also look as if they don't wash much. The men are awful. They hang around street corners and stare so much that they seem to look right through you. They are proper dagos, with sleek oily hair and darting shifty eyes. It wasn't safe to walk about on your own, as they hate the English. We had a look around the dock area, but didn't go into the city, as we were hungry and decided to return to the ship for tea and dinner and go to the city in the evening, which we did. The party comprised Olive, Basil, Les and myself and four of the boys who were going to Ascension, the fifth one having a girl friend to take out. Anyway, the eight of us got a taxi from the docks. All the taxis are beautiful here, as they are in Cape Town. They are Bentleys, Chryslers, Humbers and real nice cars. The taxi took us to town and back (18 miles in all)

and waited for us for two hours at The Fronton (the night club we went to) and only charged us five shillings each, which I think was very good. We had a lovely time there, and Basil danced with one of the señoritas after asking her mother's permission in deaf and dumb language. They finally understood him and let her dance, but her escort wasn't too pleased. We had to be back on board by 10 o'clock and we pulled out during the night. Incidentally, they had wonderful toeless and heelless sandals in dozens of beautiful styles at only fifteen shillings a pair, but I couldn't get any, as I didn't go with mummy, and she had all the money. Was I wild!!

Well, life continued as usual until Ascension, where we arrived on Tuesday, 22nd October. What an island! It was only a few square miles in size, and all volcanic rock. Nothing green growing there; in fact, nothing but barren soil and bare rock. Ascension is so small and rocky, the ship had to anchor quite a distance out and had to use its small boats to get those who were getting off onto shore. Of course, we couldn't get off; only those passengers who were disembarking there were able to do so. Ascension is where they first imprisoned Napoleon, but it is such a dreadful place they decided it was too bad even for him, so he was transferred to St. Helena, and everyone knows what a terrible place that is. The poor guys who were getting off there were disconsolate, especially as there were very few white people on the island, and no unmarried white girls. We were leaning over the rail waving goodbye to them and thinking how lovely and calm and green the water was, and how lovely to have a swim, when we suddenly noticed dozens of fins all over the place and realised the place was infested with sharks. We saw lots of dolphins and porpoises close to, but we only saw the shark's fins to begin with until, all of a sudden, one of the sharks came right alongside the boat. The water was so clear, you could see through it, and I can assure you it was a wonderfully interesting, though rather horrible, sight to see the shark turn over and open its ugly jaws. What teeth it had, and it was about twelve feet long. Imagine falling overboard! We all thought that some of the children might fall overboard, they were so adventurous, and there were so many close shaves but, thank goodness, nothing happened. Actually, though, five people did die on the ship, which wasn't too pleasant. They were all old people who apparently found the strain of wartime travelling too much, poor dears. Apart from them, the Purser also died.

Well, after Ascension, Olive and I palled up with some boys who were going to Cape Town, and Basil palled up with five lovely girls who were coming to Australia to get married. Eric (who, incidentally, was longing to meet me from the first day of the journey, but didn't know how to approach me) palled up with Basil, knowing he was my brother, and got him to introduce me. It was quite refreshing to have someone nice like that, who didn't like to appear to be just picking me up. Unfortunately, though, we didn't get together until the day we left Cape Town. I had been going around with another Eric, whom I didn't like very much, so I went with his pal Ted, who was a very nice lad, and we got on famously. Olive and I, Ted, Eric and three of their pals, formed a little group and we spent a lot of time playing cards (poker, sevens, solo) and I lost quite a bit of money. By the end of the journey, Olive and I were expert card players and gamblers, but only on a small scale!

On Monday, 28th October, dawned the great day of our arrival at Cape Town, by far one of the loveliest ports of call at any time. We arrived early in the morning, and it was a magnificent sight to see Cape Town's great mountain, Table Mountain. It stretches for miles, and is completely flat like a table top. Sometimes its top is covered with snow, and then they call it the "tablecloth." We saw it with and without the "tablecloth" during our two-and-a-half day stay there. I can't tell you how wild everyone went at Cape Town. It was our first real opportunity to escape from wartime England; to eat and shop to our heart's content (South Africa, like Australia, never experienced the austerity that England went through) and we all made the most of it. The first thing we did was to go to Cape Town's biggest store and order meringues and Strawberry Delight, followed by Banana Split. The menu was a mile long with good things to eat. The shops were laden with food and clothes, and the children gloried in the thousands of different assortments of sweets and chocolates. You could get everything you wanted at Cape Town, and not a single thing is rationed or in short supply, and hasn't been either during the war. I bought a lovely peasant skirt and mummy bought some nylons for seventeen shillings and sixpence. Unfortunately, I didn't think I could afford so much for stockings, which I'd ladder after wearing them about twice, so I didn't get any. On the first evening at Cape Town, one of the ladies in our cabin invited the whole cabin and Olive to dinner with her. We went to the Del Monico, the nightclub of Cape Town, and we had a gorgeous view from the balcony where we were sitting, and we could look down onto the band playing below us. We started off with a cherry brandy all round, then had hors d'oeuvres, followed by an enormous piece of steak (about two inches thick and well done) with two fried eggs on top and fried tomatoes, chips, peas and beans. I was nearly popping by then, but we carried on with an enormous ice cream with meringue, and a white lady cocktail to drink, and then coffee, and all this (including

the drinks) came to under five shillings a head. Everything is dirt cheap. We all bought fruit and biscuits and sweets to take back to the ship, and also drinks. We bought cherry brandy at six shillings and ninepence a bottle, sherry at seven shillings and sixpence, gin and whisky at three shillings a bottle each, and brandy at ten shillings a bottle. As you can imagine with it being a "dry" ship, everyone loaded themselves with drink and took it down to their cabins, and for the rest of the journey we were all having glorious drinking parties, and quite a few people got drunk.

We spent the second day eating and shopping again, and then went to lunch at another very good hotel, The Waldorf, and had a marvellous meal there for under five shillings a head. We ordered chicken salad and got nearly a whole chicken each. In the afternoon, Stan bumped into us in town and got to speaking terms, and he invited Olive and me and all our cabin to tea up in the mountains. We took a bus to the Botanical Gardens right near Table Mountain, and it was a very beautiful drive through the mountainous surroundings, and you could feel it getting colder and colder as we progressed further up the mountain. We had tea at a little tea room there, and a happy time was had by all. In the evening we went to the Del Monico for another feed, and the next morning we just had time to dash to Stuttafords for another ice-cream sundae before being on board at 11 a.m., when we left Cape Town, very reluctantly. I shall never forget the wonderful time we had there. For the rest of the journey we had as much food and drink as we required. Incidentally, I have pictures of all the members of our cabin, and Stan, Eric and Olive, and also of the Waldorf, Del Monico, Stuttafords, the Botanical Gardens and others besides, and when Basil can develop and print them, I will send you some of them, if you'd like me to.

After Cape Town we had a ten day stretch before touching land at Fremantle, our first Australian port. However, I didn't mind that, as I met Eric the day we pulled out of Cape Town and those ten days were among the happiest of my life. We had such fun together. He got me out of my silly self-conscious ways by making me play games and dance and take no notice of other people. This did me the world of good. Olive, Stan, Eric and I were a regular foursome during this time, and people thought that Olive and I were going to get married to Stan and Eric. Anyway, we just had a real lazy time until we reached Fremantle on Monday, 11th November (1946), although the weather after we left Cape Town was very rough and cold, the cold (it was really quite wintry for a few days) being due to the fact that, in order to maintain our speed (which he couldn't do in the rough seas) the Captain took the ship further south (closer to Antarctica) than the ship would normally have gone. You could tell how cold it was because previously we had seen sharks, which inhabit warm tropical waters, but after Cape Town we saw only whales, which inhabit the coldest regions. However, we played games and kept warm.

I must say we had a very bad introduction to the wonderful land of "sunny" Australia, about which all the Australians on board had been telling us all the time. When we arrived at Fremantle, it was **pouring**, and there was a terrific gale, and we heard that there was a transport and electricity strike on, so we spent about twenty minutes walking in the rain and peering into darkened shops, some of which were open and selling things by candle-light. We bought some fruit and biscuits and returned to the ship in disgust. Incidentally, the strikes are one of the really bad points about Australia. Without any exaggeration I can say that there is a threatened strike about once a week, and a real strike about once a fortnight. After we had been in Sydney about a month, we had a gas strike, and now there is a transport strike as well as meat and milk strikes, and so it goes on. However, life goes on as usual, and the strikers generally get their own way after not too long a time.

We left Fremantle early the next morning (Tuesday, 12th November) and arrived at Melbourne on Sunday, 17th November. The night before we got there, we Sydneyites gave a party to the Melbourneites, which included Olive, Stan, Eric and two of the ladies from our cabin. We had a gorgeous time. We had loads of good things to eat, and we had a sing-song and made speeches, etc. We sat on A Deck in a sheltered corner on deck chairs and rugs. The party started at 8 p.m. and broke up at about 2 a.m., and a very happy time was had by all, although it was a rather sad time too as, by this time, we had all grown so attached, after being so close to one another for nearly five weeks. After we bade a sad farewell to Olive and Stan early on Sunday morning, Eric (who had to wait overnight to catch a train to Adelaide) took mummy and me around Melbourne. It was a lovely warm and sunny day (despite dire predictions by our fellow Australian passengers that Melbourne weather was dreadful; that it was always raining there) and we had a grand time, although (being a Sunday) nearly all the shops were closed. Anyway, we had to be back on board at 3 p.m., and Eric came back with us and had a cup of tea and a final chat with me, and then he had to go off at 3:30 p.m. and he waved us off as we left at 4 p.m. Did I cry? That evening, and the rest of the voyage (that is, the next day,

Monday) I was very lonely, as all my best friends had gone, but I was busy packing, as we were due in Sydney on the Tuesday (19th November). I had a wonderful surprise at tea-time to hear my name over the loud-speakers, informing me I had a radio telegram. It was from Eric. It was such a sweet thought, as he thought I would be feeling rather lonely and miserable, and also I had mentioned to him what fun it would be to hear my name called out over the loud-speakers. That's the sort of person he was, so kind and considerate, bless him!

Well, we arrived in Sydney at 7 a.m. on Tuesday morning, and what a beautiful sight it was too, entering the harbour. They reckon, and quite rightly too, that Sydney harbour is one of the most beautiful in the world. You see, all the suburbs around the coast are built jutting right out into the harbour, and you could see the lovely houses and beautiful parks all around as you came into the harbour. We had rather a bad time at the Customs, and it took us three days to finish with the Customs authorities. Additionally, although we arrived at 7 a.m., it was not until 11:30 a.m. that we were allowed to see daddy, as the authorities wouldn't allow people onto the wharf because of a recent incident (when a lot of goods were smuggled off a big passenger ship) and they were taking no chances with us. All the people who came to meet the ship were huddled outside the gates like cattle, but eventually daddy managed to sneak into the Customs shed, and so we met. You can imagine the meeting. It was wonderful to be together at long last. Daddy hadn't changed a bit, except that he had gone grey, and sometimes wore glasses. Of course he noticed a big change in Basil and in me, not having seen us since April 1939 (seven and a half years) when Basil was twelve and I was fourteen.

Well, the first few days were nothing but parties and meeting relatives (uncles, aunts and cousins) and mummy's and daddy's friends. We met hundreds of people, all Jewish and mostly refugees from Europe, and they were really a charming lot of people. As refugees from Hitler's holocaust, these friends were strong supporters of the Zionist movement (which had been fighting, since the end of the 19th century, for a return to the "Promised Land") and since mummy's family had been living in what became Palestine (a British mandate) after the first world war, she and daddy were also staunch Zionists. These people hold meetings about once a week and, so far, I have been to four. The main objective, initially, is to raise money for the sick and homeless who had come to Palestine after being released from the Nazi concentration camps; more especially, for the children who had lost their parents. They want to build a home in the mountains for them. I mention all this because I know what the general impression of the "mean Jew" is, but believe me, what I saw at these meetings truly amazed me. At the end of the first meeting I went to (there were about a hundred of us there) everyone was invited, if they so wished, to make out a cheque for whatever amount they could afford. Without exaggeration, I can tell you that, within twenty minutes, they had collected 7000 pounds; and this happens at most of the meetings. Daddy mentioned that, in previous years (when business was better) one person alone would donate as much as 2000 pounds. And at the first meeting I went to, one person donated 1000 pounds. It makes you think, doesn't it? And funnily enough, it isn't the Australian Jews who give that much, but those who had been displaced from Europe. One thing I admire so much about them. They came to Australia with nothing, yet within a few years they had established themselves through sheer hard work and determination. Throughout their lives, mummy and daddy remained strong Zionists, but after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the emphasis turned to raising money to plant trees on the western slopes of the land.

Well, about our flat. It is a gorgeous place. We were very lucky to get it. It is not only one of the most exclusive districts in Sydney, it is also one of the best shopping centres, and a very beautiful place. We have our flat on the second floor of the building (75 Elizabeth Bay Road). It consists of a large sitting room and dining room in one, a large bedroom and a small sun room, which I use as a bedroom. Poor Basil has a put-up bed in the sitting room because, unfortunately, big flats are impossible to get in Sydney. The housing situation is much worse here than it is in England because, although there are thousands of acres of land for building on, people like to live in the city, and not too far out in the suburbs. However, we manage nicely. We have a lovely kitchen and a lovely bathroom, with a bath and shower, which is lovely. I have a bath and a shower each day, and it's gorgeous, after only having one bath a week in Bath. Everything is lovely and compact and very modern, and housework is very easy. The view from my bedroom window is absolutely gorgeous. It overlooks Rushcutters Bay and Rushcutters Park, and the water in the bay comes right up to the side of the wall below my bedroom, and while I lie in bed, I can see the sea and all the little boats dotted around, bobbing up and down with the swell of the waves (Sydney, being a harbour city, is a haven for yachting and other boating activities). On the right of my bedroom window is Rushcutters Bay park, where they play cricket, and just beyond that are the tennis courts. At night, the view of the bay from my bedroom is even more wonderful. The little boats are all lit up, the palm trees along the shoreline are swaying in the

sea breeze, and the lights of the surrounding homes and other buildings twinkle like fairyland. Basil has taken a picture of the view from my window, and I'll send it when it's developed. Although we live in a secluded cul-de-sac, we are only five minutes walk away from "the Cross" (King's Cross), the centre of Sydney's night life and one of Sydney's most famous (or should I say infamous?) shopping centres. Everybody meets everybody at the Cross. If we want to go to the city, we can get a tram from the Cross or, if we don't feel like walking to the Cross, we can take a bus which starts right outside our front door, so it's very nice and handy.

The traffic situation in Sydney is terrible. The congestion is horrendous, because there are so many people, and what with buses and trolleys running every few minutes, and trams (which run in the middle of the streets) coming one after the other, there is no room to move. In fact, the parking situation is so bad, people only use private cars for trips around the country because, if they use their cars to drive to work in the city, they are only allowed to park them for half an hour, so they drive and park their cars just outside the city and train, tram or bus to work, which seems ridiculous but nevertheless perfectly true. As I said, Sydney is built strictly on American lines. Everywhere there are modern flats and skyscraper buildings. Every few yards there are milk bars with juke boxes, like they have in America. The shops are very beautiful and full of lovely things, but most expensive. We live on fruit such as pineapple, passionfruit, water melon and other tropical fruits, as well as the ordinary fruits, such as apples, oranges, cherries, plums, apricots, peaches, etc., but fruit and vegetables are dreadfully expensive at the Cross, where we shop. It is the most expensive shopping centre of Sydney, unfortunately. By the way, for our small flat we only pay five pounds ten shillings per week rent, plus gas and electricity. It's terrific! I have quite fun, as outside my window little boats are going all day from Elizabeth Bay to Rose Bay (quite near by) with sailors and cadets from the Naval Training Centre there. I wave at them from my window, and have long conversations with them. Actually, all the places are very near one another. For instance, within twenty minutes by tram here we can go through the following suburbs: Ruchcutters Bay, Darling Point, Point Piper, Edgecliff, Double Bay, Rose Bay, Bellevue Hill and several other places until we come to the end of South Head at Watsons Bay. All the places along the bay are beautifully situated, jutting right out into the open harbour, as are all the beaches.

The Australian people are real open-air people. They go in for all sorts of sports as, of course, they have ideal weather conditions for them. Tennis is especially popular, as is sailing, and they are cricket mad. Every two minutes on the wireless, the programme is interrupted to give the latest score of Test matches, while stores which sell wirelesses have them turned on so that people in the streets can stop (and crowds do gather there) to listen to the commentary on the matches. Sydneysiders' main sporting activity, though (during the summer months) is swimming and surfing. Everyone here goes to the beach as Sydney has some of the most beautiful, sandy, beaches in the world. This explains why the Australian girls have such perfect figures. They nearly all are lovely and slender and beautifully sunburnt. They dress from one extreme to another. Even the fattest of them, on a hot day (which is nearly every day for nine months of the year) wear midriff dresses or shorts, exposing as much of themselves as they can get away with, so as to keep cool and get sunburnt. I don't mind going swimming in any of the swimming pools, which have shark nets around them, but I don't think I'll ever pluck up courage to swim at the beaches, which are all open sea.

Australia is supposed to be one of the most shark-infested places in the world, yet people still go to the beaches and swim in the open sea. Somebody is stationed on shore to keep a look out for sharks, and he rings an alarm when a shark is sighted, but recently the daily papers have, for the last fortnight, reported at least one, and often up to three, shark alarms every day at most of the beaches and, in fact, in today's paper, it said that the sharks are coming closer to the shore each day and yesterday a man was only standing waist deep in the water and was just throwing a stick into the sea for his dog to retrieve, when he felt a tug at the stick. When he pulled his hand out of the water, it was bleeding from a big gash, and as he swam for his life back to shore people saw a 9 foot shark coming after him. Also in this morning's paper it said that the water was so muddy that the look-out didn't spot the sharks and that nine of them (the largest was 13 feet) swam to within 20 yards of the shore and the rescuers, who swim out to help those who are not good swimmers, said that although they didn't know it, six of the people who were surfing when they were warned by the rescuers, were just in the act of surfing over the next wave straight into the sharks' mouths. Personally, this isn't my idea of fun, so I shall stick to the pools. Whenever they have a spare minute, the people flock to the beaches, and every day there are about 20,000 on the big beaches. In the evening, the girls are the exact reverse in the clothes they wear. Everyone wears beaded dresses with fancy frilling and fussy hats, etc. In fact, most of them wear these clothes in the afternoon and look, in my opinion, ridiculously like tuppenny happy ham-bones! However, the really nicely dressed girls are lovely.

I have been dancing at Princes, the most exclusive dance spot in Sydney (a guinea per person for the evening, without food) but I must say that, although it is very lovely there, and at the other places here, the dance floors are so tiny. The one at Princes is no bigger than the lower office of Western Counties Garage, from the steps leading to Mr. Parrott's office to the end of the room. The people here can't dance; they just shuffle along. It's terrible to watch them. Tomorrow I'm going with mummy and daddy and an aunt and uncle to Princes for a tea dance, which is only five shillings and should be quite fun. The cinemas here are beautiful, like the big London ones, and you can book seats and there is no queueing. We have been to see several good films, but the films here which are coming, I have seen ages ago in England (at least the majority of them). They come here much later than they show them in England. Unfortunately too, there are no really good theatres here. One funny thing about the cinema. They bring ice-cream and chocolates around during the programme, but you're not allowed to smoke at all. They have a ten minute interval before showing the big film, which is when those who want to smoke can retire to the smoking room for a quick smoke before the big picture starts. It's a queer idea, but it avoids the risk of fire.

Things here are slightly rationed. We are allowed six ounces of butter a week each and two pounds of sugar, which is more than enough for us. Nothing else is rationed, and yet you should hear people grumble about the rationing. It makes me wild, especially with the selection of things they have, about 16 different varieties of cheeses and meat. It's really a paradise, foodwise. The only things rationed in the clothes line are dresses and materials. Shoes and underclothes are off the ration, and also woollen clothes, but cottons are heavily rationed, a cheap cotton frock costing 13 coupons. However, both my uncles are in the clothing business (one has a factory manufacturing clothes and the other a dress shop) and most of our friends are also in the clothing business, so we don't worry about coupons. Mummy has bought me some lovely things. I've got a pink linen suit for when I start work, and also a lovely yellow cotton dress with cape sleeves (the rage here) and a white collar and brown and white patterning on it. I've also got a gorgeous silk dressy suit in brown and white, and a lovely pink dressy costume (strawberry pink) with a pattern of little chess figures in blue, green, red and white splashed over it. It is the most gorgeous and original thing. I also have a pale pink dress with black beading on it, for parties. And I am having an evening dress in turquoise, with beading on it, made for me. I also bought a white handbag, so I should be set for a while.

I am feeling very pleased with myself. Daddy has been treating me to a course of treatment at Helena Rubinstein's beauty parlour, and after only four treatments my skin has improved so much, you would hardly recognise it. I have only a few spots left, and no blackheads, and after the course is finished, my skin should be perfectly alright. So it should be, as each treatment costs a guinea. However, it's well worth it. Also, you'll be pleased to know that I am steadily losing weight all the time, and mummy spends most of her time taking in dresses for me. I hope to reduce to 9 stone, and then I shall buy myself a midriff frock and a two piece swimsuit. When we first arrived, Basil and I did nothing but eat fancy ices and cakes. There are dozens of cake shops with wonderful cakes, such a variety of cream cakes and iced cakes, and fruit and lemon meringue pies. You can't imagine how tempting it all looked to us, but now I hardly ever touch cake; it's too sickly. I only have an apple for breakfast, salad for lunch, and a cooked meal at night, with plenty of vegetables, and no eating between meals, and that's the only way to reduce, I've decided, so I shall keep it up. At first, it was very hard not to nibble between meals, but now I'm quite used to it. By the way, the shoes here are all the toeless and heelless variety, but they are not a patch on English styles, and certainly not in quality. Even the shoe-maker, who saw our English sandals, said that the English shoes were far superior.

Australians, on the whole, do not like the English, and spend all their time saying what a terrible country England is compared to Australia. However, I always stick up for England, and some of them are amazed to hear that it is quite different from what they've imagined. It makes me wild when they talk about England and yet have never been there, although I must honestly admit that Australia is a lovelier country in most ways, but not necessarily all. Of course, Australia is only a new country, but I'm quite convinced that within the next 100 years she will be far ahead of all the other countries. Given the men and material and capital, Australia would be the most wonderful place. This is the Golden Land of opportunity without a doubt, but much money will have to be spent here, and much labour will be needed for the building up process, but it will be done, I'm sure. That's why they want the immigrants here.

The weather in Sydney is most extraordinary. It is very hot now, much to my delight, but here in Sydney you can have five different types of weather in one day. Yesterday is a perfect example of that. It started off with a temperature of 90 degrees (Fahrenheit) and the air was so still and stifling, without a breath of wind, and the sun beating down very strongly until 12 o'clock. Suddenly, without any warning, the wind rose, and within

two minutes the temperature had dropped to 20 degrees, and down came great hailstones and lumps of ice (some of them as big as 8 inches across) and the sky became overcast. Within 5 minutes the ground was covered in white, like snow. It was a beautiful sight to see the hailstones strike the water in the bay, and the foam rise up. It hailed for no more than 5 minutes and then it suddenly stopped and no more than 10 minutes later, not a spot of white remained and the sun was shining and the temperature had risen. I read in today's paper that the damage done in that 5 minute hail storm amounted to over a million pounds, and more than 100 people were injured and taken to hospital. In some districts there wasn't a house that didn't have roof tiles or at least one window smashed. It's really freakish weather, but of course this only happens very occasionally. On the whole, the weather is absolutely gorgeous, that is if you like hot sunny days.

The radio programmes here are very funny. The stations have funny letters and numbers (such as 2BI, 2KY, 2FC, 2GB, etc.) instead of names. They don't have the same programmes either. Very occasionally they have a play or a talk, but mostly it is advertising the whole time. Each advertiser has 20 or 30 minutes allotted to him and they either have a serial story or else a play, dance music or records, and after each record or part of a play (some plays have weekly episodes, and these plays often go on for years; mummy was watching Blue Hills before she came to England to see us, and it was still going on, with the episode number running into the thousands, when she came back!) they talk about the advertisement. It's very funny to hear a Bing Crosby record, and then someone saying "Are you cross and irritable? Then you need Carters Liver Pills, obtainable at so-and-so in something street" and then another record, and so on. What with this and the cricket scores every few minutes, it is very strange. The news comes on three times a day. The Australians are very big gamblers, and every Saturday afternoon they flock to the yachting races and horse races, and also they run huge lotteries every day, with the first prize either a block of flats or anything upto 5000 pounds. They also have competitions of various sorts advertised in the newspapers and on the radio every few days, with prizes up to 5000 pounds and about 500 smaller consolation prizes. We hope to be able to win something some day. The newspapers here contain about 20 pages, half of which is sports news, and twice a week they enclose a comic.

I have made a lot of good friends, and last night I went to a party that lasted from 7 p.m. until 3 a.m. And do I feel tired today!! The people here are very friendly indeed, and within five minutes of meeting them you feel as though you've known them for years, which is very nice. There is so much more social life here. Undoubtedly, this is the land for young people. I have started two jobs (two days at each) but didn't feel too keen on them, so I've been doing nothing but enjoy myself, but now that the Christmas holidays and New Year are over, I am going to start work next week in earnest. Most of the offices here work Monday to Friday, with the weekends off; hours 8:30 to 5:15, and the job I hope to start is five pounds ten shillings a week to begin with. Not bad, is it? Basil is going to Sydney University to get a Science degree, which is a three year course. He's delighted, as he has always wanted to go to University, and has met a lot of the students there through a young friend, the son of one of mummy's friends. Some of mummy's and daddy's best friends have invited us to their homes, and what with all our relatives here, we are very seldom at home. There are dozens of people to visit all the time and then, of course, we have to invite them all here in turn. It's lovely. Because we don't have a car, one gentleman and his wife (their daughter is one of my best friends in Sydney) took mummy, daddy, Basil and myself for a drive around Sydney three weeks ago on a Sunday. It was a beautiful sunny day, and they have a lovely Bentley car, with a radio, which was on the whole time, and we went to the real beauty spots of Sydney. It was breathtakingly beautiful in some places. First we went to the Lane Cove National Park, with a lovely peaceful river (where people were canoeing and swimming) and a gorgeous display of native flowers. After that we went across Sydney Harbour bridge and drove to a place called Bobbin Head, at the northern edge of Sydney. It is a gorgeous place, with a lovely swimming pool and surrounded by lovely palm trees and tropical flowers, and we had a look around and had a lovely tea at the tea room, with a dance floor and a band playing there. We ended up at Manly beach, which is on the northern side of the harbour and one of the best beaches in Sydney, and we walked right along the sea front and then sat and ate ice-cream on the sand. Altogether, it was a really enjoyable day, and they have promised to take us to many other beauty spots around Sydney. Sydney's suburbs are really very lovely.

Well, I must end this long ramble or you'll never get to the end of it. I'll end up by telling you about Mrs Harris, the lady who came to our cabin for tea every day. She is a clairvoyant and, I must say, a remarkable woman. She read all our characters perfectly, and everything she told us about ourselves that had happened to us, was quite true. She even held a letter one lady had received that morning from her husband (this was while we were docked at Cape Town) and told her exactly what was in the letter. The letter was in the envelope and she had no chance to see what was in it. Anyway, she told me that, during the voyage,

someone who thought a lot of me would ask me to wear his ring for a few days and also that I would receive a present on board the ship and that my first present in Australia would be a ring, but not an engagement ring. Then she said that she could see me surrounded by water and tiny boats and palm trees with twinkling lights all round, which is an exact description of the view from my bedroom window. Also, Eric put his ring on my finger and asked me to wear it the last few days we were together, and also he gave me a lovely present he had bought at Cape Town, and the first thing I had when I got home was a lovely opal ring from daddy. According to Mrs Harris I will meet my husband-to-be on April 17th, dislike him on sight, and within nine months, fall in love with him and be engaged and married within eighteen months. She says I will have five children. I'm just going to wait and see if anything else comes true. Whatever happens, I hope I don't have five children, anyway. Of course, this is all very silly and I don't really believe in it, but it is strange that she should be so correct, and it wasn't only me, it was all the people in our cabin; Olive, Stan, Eric, Basil and about ten of his friends. Strange, isn't it?

New Year's Eve here was terrific. 60,000 people were dancing at the Cross, and sang Auld Lang Syne together at midnight. You never heard such a noise. I am glad to say that I get on very well with all my relatives, especially mummy's two brothers, David and Sim (who came to Sydney from Palestine in 1917 and opened an umbrella shop - a typically Jewish thing), their wives (Hetty and Bessie) and Sim and Bessie's two children, Shirley and Janice. Mummy's sister, aunty Clara, is also here with her husband George (whom daddy works with in the diamond business) and their two sons, Herzl (who now calls himself Harry) and Leo (who was the one who introduced us kids to smoking when we were young and still living in Penang). Harry and Leo are leaving soon; one for Java (which is where his family managed to escape from during the war) and the other to Palestine (where the rest of mummy's family live) so I don't think I shall be seeing much of them. Anyway, there are so many people here to see all the time that I won't miss them. It certainly is marvellous to be a family again, surrounded by all our relatives, after such a long separation during the war years, and my one wish now is that Sylvia and Franek and darling Tony (whom we miss more than we like to think about) will soon be able to join us to make our happiness complete.

Well, I really must end now. I do hope that you won't forget me, but write me a letter, no matter how short it is, just to let me know how you are getting on and what you are doing (as I do miss you very much, in spite of everything, and feel quite homesick for England sometimes) won't you? I haven't forgotten that I am going to send all my friends in England a little gift as a souvenir of my happy remembrances of them, but I can't do it for a couple of months yet, not until I have earned enough to get something for everyone. But never mind how long it takes, I shall send something. With best wishes for the New Year, and may it bring you and yours all the best of luck, and may all your wishes come true.

Lots of love,
May