

# Memories



The Day after his 75th Birthday, Charles Reinhard decided to look back over the years and think about what he wanted to do with the rest of his life.

He had retired from his job over ten years ago, and was now living in Florida with his first love sweetheart, Ginger, who was five years his junior. He had been married 48 years and was able to boast of four children and four grandchildren. His working life had been busy and adventurous, ranging from journalist, publisher, printer, to corporate public relations officer.

He thought about his adventures as a reporter working in the ghettos of New York, and then remembered that those adventures were tame compared to things that happened during his service in the Pacific during World War II. He wondered what it would be like in the jungle today, and what life was like in Australia today. When he mentioned this to Ginger, she reminded him that their recent inheritance made it possible for him to go back and see.

Ginger remembered Charlie's tales about mosquitoes in clouds and bugs and critters as well as snakes and other (to her) horrible creatures in both Australia and New Guinea. At that point she announced that if a trip of remembrance was planned, Charlie had better plan it without her, as she would prefer to keep the home fires burning while he had his last nostalgic fling.

Charlie had traveled extensively during his career, and Ginger was well aware that in some circumstances traveling alone was the most practical thing to do. Charlie, on the other hand, was well aware that at 75 he was not as physically able to cope with some travel situations as when he was younger.

The solution to the dilemma came easily as his 15-year-old grandson began exhibiting an interest in World War II. Jason was healthy and active, and just the one to come along with an older man and help in case it was needed.

So that was settled. Jason would be on school holiday, and it would be the winter (dry) season below the equator in July and August.

Flights were chosen and routes planned, with room for lots of leeway to go where emotion or circumstances dictated.

So the journey of discovery began. The long flight from LA to Sydney, Australia ended with a series of shorter flights to the small Queensland town of Rockhampton, their first destination. Jason was awed by the new culture in a foreign land, and Charlie marveled at how little things had changed since he was there fifty years ago.

The roads were better paved, and the hotels better equipped, but the people were pretty much the same as they had been half a century ago. It seemed that it would be an easy task to find and talk to people who remembered the town when Charlie was last there.

But Charlie's memory was not that perfect. He forgot that girls get married and change their names, and that families move around as their circumstances change. Undaunted, Charlie searched the phone book and asked shopkeepers and finally managed to locate a couple of people he had known years ago. He also contacted the children of other friends of the past, and visited the Botanical Gardens where he had been camped 50 years ago.

Instead of the run-down place it was fifty years ago, the Gardens were lush and beautiful, and all traces of the former Army camp had been obliterated. The Dunham Hotel, where his favorite pub was managed by Joe Fleet, had changed hands a few times, and was now barely operating without Joe or his barmaid Nessie.

The new currency of Australia was not nearly as romantic as the pounds, shillings and pence of his first visit, and it was disturbing to watch the "Oprah" show on Australian television.

He tried hard to locate a girl named Molly Mallone that he had known when he was last in that town, but try as he might, no one was able to offer a clue as to what had happened to her.

Even the beloved iron bridge over the Fitzroy River had been replaced by an ugly modern concrete structure, and the School of Arts where the "old Girls" hosted dances for the servicemen was boarded up. The main street of town had been converted into a tile floored mall, but the Post Office, the Criterion Hotel, and Stewarts Department store still were operating and wonderful Australian beer was still being served the thirsty traveler.

*After 10 days of pleasant nostalgia, Charlie and Jason went to the Airport to get a plane for their flight to Cairns and then to New Guinea. After they had said their farewells to the new and old friends at the airport they boarded the plane and settled in their seats waiting for take-off.*

*Charlie turned to Jason and said "I wonder what ever happened to Molly Mallone?"*

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