

I Remember – I Remember

When I look back over Cameron's life I can remember a lot of little funny things that happened – incidents from his childhood as well as episodes that occurred when he was older – even right up nearly until the day he died. I am going to tell you a few of these things and I hope you will laugh with me too, when you read them. I recall some of them even now and I still can't help chuckling to myself when they come to mind.

I remember Cameron even as a small boy he always seemed to have had heaps of energy and was the ringleader in every bit of mischief that he and his friends got into. It was all harmless fun even if it were serious for Cameron and his mates at the time. When he played on his own he used to tell me about his best friend called "Umba Beven". I can relate to that because when I was small I lived a pretty isolated life, but I had three mates called, "Kausie," "Zaddie" and "Alex". I don't even remember where I got the names from either! But during this time in Cameron's life we were living in Papua New Guinea, and sometimes when I got home from work Cameron would be down with our New Guinea houseboy, whose name was Petros, and they would both be having deep and meaningful conversations with "Umber Beven." Cameron would say to Petros, "Yu savvy tok bilong "Umber Beven?" Petros would reply, "Yes, lik-lik masta, mi savvy tok bilong yu tupela." I can't remember what they talked about, but when it was time for tea, Cameron would come in and insist that we set a special place at the table for "Umber Beven". Cameron told me that he and "Umber Beven" had been for a ride in a helicopter that day – only he didn't use the word "helicopter" – he used the pidgin English version which was "Mixmaster bilong Jesus Christ!" Then he went on to tell me how he and "Umber Beven" had been on a bike ride together – only this time it was a "wheelie-wheel." Both of my children could speak fluent pidgin english when we lived in Papua New Guinea and even when we came to live back in Australia they often reverted back to pidgin. When the conversations with "Umber Beven" ceased, it was "OK. Yu kan sakim toktok bilong yumi", and that was the end of their talk until the next time. Sometimes there was an extra person present during these conversations, and it was none other than "Batman" and I remember that when I called Cameron for tea, I couldn't call "Cameron, it's time for tea"! No, it had to be, "Cameron, Umber Beven, Batman, it's time for tea!" He wouldn't take any notice until I got it right! As we lived in close proximity to other people, I often felt so stupid when I had to yell out, "Cameron, Umber Beven, Batman, it's time for tea!" The neighbours told me later that they always had such a great laugh over it – especially when it was tea time!

We decided to spend our first long leave from Papua New Guinea visiting my husband's parents who lived in Edinburgh. We booked on a Greek passenger ship called the "Australis" because we had never been on a long sea voyage before, and besides we had lots of time. We also thought it would be good for the kids – Shona, our daughter was 8 years of age, and Cameron was 7. It was to be an eventful trip for us all.

On the way over to the U.K. we were half way between New Zealand and Fiji when the ship caught fire. The fire was in the galley and the flames went straight up through the middle of the ship and

destroyed a number of cabins and a lot of people lost all their belongings. Fortunately no lives were lost. So for the next three days we all slept and ate our meals sitting on the top deck of the "Australis". We existed mostly on biscuits and water. This did not please Shona and Cameron one bit so when meal times came around they voiced their protest in fluent pidgin english! "Mi no laikem dispela kai kai – mi laikem em!" This meant that they did not like the food and wanted something else. I couldn't help thinking to myself at the time thank goodness we were up on the deck and not at the Captain's table! The "Australis" eventually limped into Fiji where a most passengers were flown to the U.K., but we stayed with the ship as we did not lose our belongings. The ship's company put us up in hotels in Fiji while the "Australis" was repaired. After a month or so of soaking up the sun, we set sail for the U.K., this time with no more drama. We had a great vacation over in Scotland and my husband's parents were so happy to meet their grandchildren. On the way back, (but flying this time), we spent a few days in Greece, then we went Austria to visit some friends from New Guinea, and then what I thought was the best part of the trip, we spent some time in Afghanistan.

My grandfather came from Kandahar and he had come to Australia as one of the first cameleers who had a camel train from Darwin to Adelaide. I was so very excited at last to be in Afghanistan! I had dreamed about this all my life! And it was so good for Shona and Cameron, too. Just as Scotland was my husband's side of the family, I felt that this was my side. But we reckoned without Cameron. Little boys in Afghanistan are very important and everyone we met made such a fuss of him. The Afghani people we met gave Cameron heaps of presents and spoiled him so much that he began to take advantage of the situation. For instance he would ask for ice cream for breakfast and all sorts of sweets and presents, and there was nothing we could do to stop him. He just demanded more and more, and the more he demanded the more the people gave him. It became really embarrassing. Then of course Shona was not a "happy chappie" about this either! In fact one morning when Cameron was being particularly obnoxious Shona gave him a swift kick up the backside! Well, all hell broke loose and I thought Shona was going to be murdered on the spot by Cameron's "protectors!"

Fortunately for everyone, our time in Afghanistan was drawing to a close, and so reluctantly the day arrived all too soon when we had to depart. We were all so sad, particularly Cameron, for he knew that would be the end of his being spoiled by his new found Afghani friends. They tried everything they could think of to let them have Cameron stay with them – money, presents, gold, clothes – you name it. But they saved the best for last.



On the day of our departure, one of our good friends (Mahomet), brought us a document, which looked highly legal, and asked us to sign it.

Fortunately my husband read it and guess what it contained?

OUR PERMISSION TO HAND OVER CAMERON FOR 100 CAMELS!!!

I just could not believe it! I would have signed the paper because we were in a bit of a hurry to catch the plane. (Just as well I didn't sign it!) I left the

explaining to my husband and we just managed to catch the plane in Kabul and thence on our way home to Papua New Guinea. Cameron cried most of the way home. I guess he missed his friends from Afghanistan, but the real truth was that he probably missed being the centre of attention. When we got back to Papua New Guinea I often thought about Afghanistan and the 100 camels. Where would I have put them in the first place? Then when Cameron was naughty I often thought to myself, "You bad little boy! Why don't I just send you back to Afghanistan with a tag on you reading 'C.O.D.!' pinned to your shirt!"