

Chapter 24

Touching our Roots

The highlights of the four years we spent on board the Anastasis are many. It was a special time for both Anne and myself. However, as I think of 'stepping stones' I can see not only how God was preparing me for a future ministry, but also how He was enabling us to 'touch our roots'. I shall relate some of the wonderful 'coincidences' that continued through that time.

We joined the ship in Amsterdam and were warmly welcomed by several whom we remembered from Victoria days. Among them was Odd Neilson who attended my church for the fourteen months that the ship was in dry dock, 1986. He told me that he was to be married in six weeks time when the ship arrived in Oslo, Norway, and asked if I would perform the ceremony. Naturally, I was delighted.

The wedding was to be held in Salem Pentecostal Church so, on the ship's arrival, we attended the Sunday service a week before the scheduled wedding. The pastor invited me to bring greetings to his congregation and to bring information about the Anastasis. This I did and then added, "I also bring you greetings from my mother-in-law who attended this church more than fifty years ago with her husband and two children." The pastor asked for Anne's father's name in the off-chance that someone there might remember them.

At the end of the service a lady approached Anne with the words, "I remember your mother and father, and your sister Betty and brother David. Your father has a sister Paula who presently lives in Karlskoga, Sweden, and she is my best friend. Furthermore, she is right now visiting me and is at my home just a block from this church!" Naturally, Anne was thrilled to accompany the lady after the service to meet Aunt Paula and through her, all the other relatives living in Oslo. In the next three weeks we met more than twenty-five of Anne's relatives, eating out at a different home every evening.

Before the ship left Europe for its six months in Africa, we had opportunity to visit many other friends we had known during our years in Hamm with the British Forces. It seemed that the only ones we would miss would be Lars and Marion Friedner, family friends in Stockholm. It was therefore with delight that we received an invitation to teach at a YWAM camp for their youth ministry KING'S KIDS, at Laxo, four hours south west of Stockholm. We immediately wrote to Lars and Marion telling them of our plans to drive up to see them on one of the off days during the camp, but did not receive a reply before we left the ship. We did not know that they were away on holiday the same week as our camp, and that their vacation home was just a short journey from Laxo. On the Thursday, their daughter Ingemo and her husband traveled down to visit her parents bringing with them all their recent mail, including our letter. Stopping for lunch on their journey, Ingemo recognized our names on the back of the envelope so opened it and read that we would be in Laxo at that time. She sat with open mouth for they had stopped in the center of Laxo for their break. That afternoon, Lars called us and we arranged to meet them all the next day.

Our last ministry with the Anastasis was to lead the Advance Team prior to its visit to Cardiff, Wales in September 1994. I led a team of five wonderful young people as we contacted the media, churches, businesses, schools, etc., informing and preparing them for the ship's coming. Naturally, as a local boy, I had many contacts in the churches and my schedule was full of speaking engagements. I was invited to speak at an afternoon Harvest Festival in Zoar, the Presbyterian church of my youth and Sunday School, and where my mother played the piano and is buried. As I visited her grave an elderly man approached with the words, "How on earth did a rascal like you become a pastor?" Over cucumber sandwiches and hot tea later, I was introduced to a young man, home from Madagascar where he serves as a missionary. I discovered he was the son of my first sweetheart when I was just ten years old. O, I received many canings from my headmaster in those days for writing love letters to Barbara! Later, when the ship was in dock and many ladies came on board for a women's meetings, I looked in vain to see if Barbara was among the visitors. However, a couple of days later I

was passed a note from our reception desk which read, "Dear Chaplain, Just to let you know that your first girlfriend's present boyfriend came on board today!"

A week after Zoar I was to speak at a seniors' meeting at its sister church, five miles away. As I sat in the front pew preparing my material the pastor came with an elderly lady and asked if she could sit by me as "Dolly is our oldest member and needs to sit in the front to hear". I asked if she was comfortable and then she asked me who I was. When I told her, she remarked, "O, you and I are related!" I discovered that Dolly Hallett was my mother's cousin and used to live next door in Railway Terrace, Peterston-super-Ely, the place of my mother's childhood. In fact I had turned my car around in her driveway that very afternoon as I drove around the haunts of my youth and had been to see my grandparent's old home. I promised to visit her next noonday, bringing Anne with me. We were met by Dolly and her two daughters Dorothy and Thelma who, upon seeing me, exclaimed "Oh, you're a Lovelock all right!" They then told me such wonderful stories of my mother as a young girl, stories I had never known before. They remembered their sorrow at her dying when "such a lovely young woman". I told them of the ship coming in two weeks time and added that George Thomas, Lord Tonypany, former speaker of the House of Commons and one of the most renowned men in Welsh history, would be our guest one day on board ship. "Oh, we know George well," said the sisters, "He used to come to Railway Terrace to visit his sister who lived here. We've been to his home many times."

On the day appointed, Lord Tonypany came and spent two hours or so with some of our leadership, sharing of his own faith in the Lord and encouraging us in our work. Later, as I led him down the gangplank back to his car, I asked what he remembered of Dolly Hallett and her daughters. His memories were rich but then he asked how I knew them. I told him that Dolly was my mother's cousin and that they had lived next door in Peterston. When he heard that my mother was Ethel, he shouted out, "Ethel! Are you Ethel's boy?" Evidently, he too had a very warm memory of the youngest girl in 'that large family'. (My mother was the youngest of thirteen). On the way back up the gangplank I realized that he would have been the same age as my mum - maybe she was his first sweetheart! I wonder if he received many canings for writing love letters?

It was so good to touch these roots and to receive such warm comments about mum.