

Messing About On The River

We met in the café at the Albany. Andrew from Heart and Soul was playing Caterina Vallente on an old tape deck, tinny jazz against a babble of voices. We were all catching up, having not seen each other for a while. Andrew was wearing leather trousers and jazz shoes, talking about going to a dance lesson soon. (In the end he wouldn't be able to resist coming with us, and we were glad he did!)

Daisy told me that Ron (Roseview) had lost his wife all of a sudden, had talked about staying busy, staying strong. Daisy also said that Leonora was in hospital in Lewisham on Juniper Ward on Floor 2, not saying much and very weak. Every one said they were looking forward to a day out.

In the background Caterine Vallente sang:

*The breeze and I are saying with a sigh
That you no longer care
The breeze and I are whispering goodbye
To dreams we used to share*

Jackie listened to the music. She told us she used to be good at piano, and she loved it. Then at 11 she had a stroke, and she could no longer play, that she had brain damage. Jackie said:

“But its ok I've got my smile to take me around and get me jobs”



Everyone smiled at that.

We spoke about traffic and busyness on the roads, how you have to watch out for cyclists who can “have you over.” That it is the people driving not the cars, the people are the same, driving recklessly. Jackie and Korban spoke about being hit by cyclists who just weren’t looking.

Ron came in. He spoke to me about the shock of his wife dying so suddenly four years ago. We could hear Andrew talking about his Australian friend whom he described as “very tough, they are very tough Australians” and Ron said “I don’t know about that”

We chatted about people saying that the white settlers in Australia being “petty thieves” but Ron said “not petty thieves, just poor people doing what they had to do to survive, stealing a loaf of bread to stop starving, then they got their families from deported to Australia”. We talked about people doing these epics journeys, then and now, when war and misfortune displaces people.



We listened to Caterina sing:

*Ours was a love song that seemed constant as the moon
Ending in a strange, mournful tune
And all about me, they know you have departed without me
And we wonder why, the breeze and I
The breeze and I*

We had to turn the music down to hear David introducing people to each other. We started to chat about journeys, before we'd even left on ours.

Ron: I remember me and my brother rode on our bikes under the foot tunnel, back and forth, it was exciting to know that the river was above you. Then once, we went to Portsmouth, and went on a US boat and met a navigator. I was shocked because he didn't know how to use a sexton, and I wondered what happened if the electrics go down? What would he do then? When I was 11 years old I got a golden paddle steamer down the river, from Greenwich to Southend Pier. My mum and dad loved it, but we kids were bored to tears. I looked at the engines and was impressed by the huge pistons but that was it. My Grandad would buy in old Thames Barges and chop them up for firewood. My dad went about with his goat and a cart and sold the wood. I remember firms in the local area using party boats instead of beanos (beanos = cockney, organized day trips like getting a coach trip to somewhere like Margate). But the trouble is with a boat, you can't escape. Although it's nice to see the party boats going past, with all the lights and music and people, that's right.



We all manage to get on the boat, although it is a bit of a walk and the slope because of the low tide is a bit like Alton Towers, but we settle in and get a seat, and continue our conversations about travelling.

Korban: I remember boat trips to Gravesend, and walking in the foot tunnel, and taking a picnic to have on the other side. But now it is amazing now look-I love seeing the new buildings and more fish in the river, more life.



We talked about how the Thames is now Europe's cleanest metropolitan river, and we admire what they have done with the old warehouses on the north bank.

Barbara and Daisy:

D: We have a different view now, than on a bus. I have not been on a boat in England before.

B: No, this is my first time on a boat!

D: I am scared of the water and I don't swim. But this is nice. It's wonderful to see Blackfriars Bridge, how lovely it is, to see things from this angle is a treat



We watched two people on a glass balcony looking at the view below. The boat staff called out a stop and said “ please exit at the front of the ship”. People got off.

Ron: My cousin was in the navy for 25 years: you say bow not front!

Daisy: it would be nice to do this in the summer like a little holiday

Rose: I have been on the old boats but this one is definitely better. I went 15 years ago but this is a lot calmer.

Maureen: it’s the first time I have been out for ages. You get a different view. Everything looks so beautiful on the river



Huw: Look at the Lady Bridge. Built by women in WW2



Rose: Look at the way you can point out the Shard, St Pauls!
Please can we visit St Pauls? On the bus you just see traffic and traffic lights!
Look at it!

Maureen: Yes it is lovely, but I worry about walking, I won't come again.

Maureen is embarrassed, thinks she is the only one that is struggling but I assure her she is not the only one, and that she must come again, and that the feedback is useful, we need more accessible places, and that can be sorted, can be taken into account. She is happy about this.

The boat fills up with children. They are happy and noisy and excited.

Rose: I am excited to see the buildings instead of shops



Joan: I think we used to go to Margate on a boat

Maureen: We used to get the hovercraft from Tower Bridge to Belgium! But they don't do that anymore

Joan: Look at the kids! Aren't they lovely? It reminds me of a Jewish proverb. One day an old man is being teased by some children. They tease him for being old and not walking quickly enough. The old man says to the children "Listen to me. You should not be cruel. Because I know what it is like to be young, but you do not yet know what it is like to be old"

I love to see people on their national dress. Last week I met some people from the Himalayas in the Albany! The Himalayas! The whole world comes to us in Deptford

Everyone loved the different perspective that the river trip inspired, and it was interesting what memories and thoughts it provoked. We got to the Gypsy Moth and settled at a table.



Maureen saw me with a mulled wine and said

*Through your teeth and over your gums
God bless your belly
Here it comes!*

It was lovely to see the river. I remember the dockyards, and seeing the handsome Dutchmen, and us girls making eyes at them on the boats.

During drinks and food we spoke about other trips people would like which included:

Coach trip to Brighton or Margate with cream tea

St Pauls

RAF Ducksford

Rivoli Ballroom

Westminster, Houses of Parliament

Everyone loved the day, a perfect autumn sunshine day when we chased the storm clouds and only had a splatter of rain.

