

Chapter Seven – Weddings part 1 – 30 years old



I have been to a number of weddings for both friends and family over the years as I'm sure we all have. But here I have decided to write about one of the weddings that took place abroad. The weddings in England were pretty similar overall and went according to plan. The men dressed in suits and ties, the women wore dresses or smart suits of their own. Food and drink were consumed and everyone had a lovely time before leaving to go home for the evening. The bride and groom are of course happy for the predictability, they only have one shot at getting the day right (well together anyway). Attending a wedding in a foreign country however makes for a different story. It may include some different customs and the experience is spread over a slightly longer period due to the travel.

A lot of these stories seem to begin with 'I was working at Cannon Bridge.....' and this is no different. Looking back at my late twenties this was a time in my life when I made the most of my opportunities. My open-mindedness must also have led to more invitations. People who say 'no' too many times may one day stop getting asked. I kept a positive outlook and instead of thinking 'why' I tended to think 'why not'.

Greg Horton was a Kiwi who landed in England with £10 in his pocket. He spent his first night in England sleeping on a bench in Hyde Park. England is a popular destination for Kiwis due in no small way to the language. They also all seem to know a friend (or a friend of a friend) who would be able to offer advice about work or accommodation. Greg was advised to contact the Jacobs employment agency which was run by an Australian and got a job as an electrician.

We met at Cannon Bridge and along with his friend Justin Wiki (also from New Zealand) formed a friendship. More often than not we were joined on our nights out by Gregs' girlfriend from back home, Helen Van Turnhout. After some years their off / on relationship led to a marriage proposal and I was invited to their wedding in New Zealand.

I made up my mind fairly quickly to go but did not communicate my intentions until about three or four weeks before the ceremony. I didn't see the rush to let them know but as a result I was not included as one of the ushers. They had already asked old friends and they had an even number of ushers and bridesmaids. It took twenty four hours to fly to New Zealand broken up with a one hour stop in Singapore. The stop to change planes barely gave me the opportunity to stretch my legs. I did book a three day stay in Singapore on the way back to break up the journey a little better. My lasting memory of the first twelve hour flight was the constant interruptions. Every two hours I was offered some refreshments or a hot towel or something. Sleep was impossible so I tuned in to the four films worth watching via the monitor on the seat in front of me. Unfortunately when I changed planes it was the same airline and all the films were the same!

Greg met me from the airport as Justin was working that morning. We drove to his house and I placed my things in my room. My trip would last for three weeks (including my stopover in Singapore) and the wedding was a week away when I landed. I gave Helen my wedding present which was an ornate wooden jewellery box with a red felt lining, (just the right size to carry).



Greg had arranged for us to play golf with his friends and family, we had a couple of beers in the clubhouse whilst waiting for Justin. Greg's dad pointed out that if we hit a ball near the water we were to leave it as crocodiles may lay in wait. After the game we dropped the car off and took a short walk to a friends' house for drinks. This was a little different to what I was used to (at the time), at home we would have met up in the pub. Sitting in someones' back garden drinking a can of beer didn't really feel like 'going out'. I came to realise that as well as a cultural thing this was also a money saving exercise. Work was scarce and money was tighter than when we worked in London.



The next day Greg & Helen had some arrangements to make so I went to work with Justin. He needed help fitting a burglar alarm in a house. This was a real eye opener as Kiwi methods are sometimes questionable.

He had to run some cables and decided to go outside and lift tiles off the bungalow roof. Now the tiles weren't just sitting on the roof, the corner pieces were cemented in. Disturbing them would mean water leaks sometime down the line.



The next day was more relaxing as I had to be fitted with my suit. Greg and Helen took me to the same shop that had provided the ushers attire and attempted to match. I then stayed with Justin and his girlfriend Natalie for a few days. Natalie took me to meet Justins' parents in a bar. Justin and his family are Maoris, his mum is petite whilst his dad is huge and tattooed. There were two women on the dance floor, strutting their stuff without a care in the world. I knew instinctively that one of them was Justins' mum, she was absolutely mad. His dad greeted me with a Maori kiss (he got really close grabbed me and rubbed noses). Justins' parents were the complete opposite, in fact I have never met a couple so different. His mum was an extrovert who would speak her mind, beat you at pool and out drink you. His dad however would sit quietly and observe everything that was going on.

Gregs' parents were completely different to Justins. His family was from the UK a few generations ago. I joined them once for a family dinner which consisted of a chicken and apricot stew.

A couple of days before the wedding we had a stag night and as it was midweek the bars were fairly quiet. We found tables easily enough but whenever someone went to the toilet the whole group would pick up their glasses and move around the corner to a different part of the bar (out of sight). Of course when Greg went to the toilet we left the pub altogether and watched from behind some bushes as he tried to find us in the next pub. The Kiwis always seem to have a different take on a night out. I think they get bored so they invent games to fill the time. There never seems to be any trouble, if someone gets drunk it is dealt with a minimum of fuss. I suppose the behaviour is both expected and accepted.

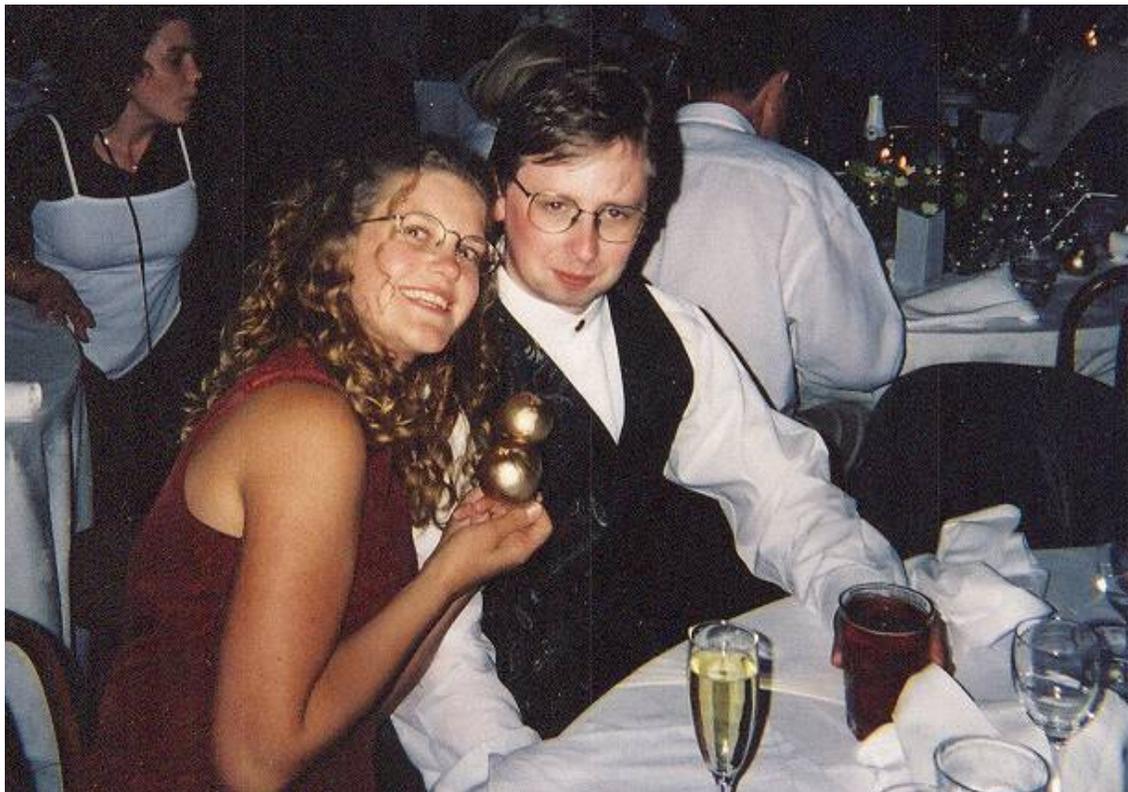
The day of the wedding arrived and the men and women got ready in different houses. We would later see a video of the women getting ready and it was a lot different to our preparations. The Americas cup (a sailing tournament) was on television and we lounged around drinking beer when we really should have been getting ready. We ordered pizza and every time the New Zealand craft tacked (turned) we had a draw on our drinks.

We waited until the last minute to get showered and changed. As we were about to leave we realised the bow ties had not been delivered. A quick phone call and arrangements were made to drop them at the park gates. The venue chosen for the ceremony was a rotunda in a local park. Fortunately the weather stayed fine all day.

When everyone was in place Helen walked through the gates accompanied by the song 'you're still the one' - by Shania Twain. It was timed to end when she arrived at the rotunda steps and was well choreographed. I still think of the wedding whenever I hear the song on the radio. Whilst the photographs were being taken I helped by carrying a tray of drinks around.

There was a problem with the first dance as the bride, groom, ushers and bridesmaids were to enter the dance floor together. Unfortunately Justin (the best man) was on the bench outside passed out. It seems when a key word was mentioned all the ushers had to down their drinks and Gregs' dad had found out the word. During his speech he incorporated the word as many times as he could (the Kiwis just can't help themselves). Fortunately help was at hand as I was dressed in similar clothes. I seamlessly took his place and the situation was quickly resolved. I felt a little sorry for my partner however, the bridesmaid was a terrified thirteen year old! She was shaking like a leaf (she is on the extreme left in the photograph on the next page).







The party broke up around 23:00 and some of us adjourned to the local casino. I am not really a big fan of casinos and gambling. I don't think I could win enough to make a difference to my life, not without risking a fortune anyway. Overall a very enjoyable day and almost everything went as planned, which is all anyone can ask.

The next day I flew from Christchurch in the South island up to Auckland in the North. I met up with a couple of other Kiwis I used to work with, Andy Mattison and Paul Gordon.



The last round of the Americas cup had just finished and New Zealand had won so there were celebrations in the harbour. Ironically Paul had just returned from a three month trip in the South island so we could have met up earlier if I had of told him.

This was the second time I had failed to give someone notice regarding my arrangements. I think this was mainly because there was a degree of uncertainty about the timing. If I make arrangements then I like to keep them wherever possible. I don't agree to meet someone and then fail to turn up at the pre - arranged time. We had a good drink in a local bar and caught up with news. I didn't really get to see much of the North Island so it may be a little unfair to compare it with the South Island. But the latter does have the reputation of being the more picturesque of the two.

I flew back to Christchurch the next day and met up with Greg and Helen once more. We drove to Kaikoura for two and a half hours of whale watching. Whales and other large aquatic creatures rarely swim close to land. The water is normally too shallow but this is not the case with Kaikoura. Not far from the shore the land drops off like an underwater cliff and becomes very deep, very quickly.

The scenery in Kaikoura is amazing, Snow-capped mountains loom high all around. As far as the trip was concerned we were told that there were no guarantees that we would see anything. But if we failed to see a whale the tour company would give 80% of our money back. We would just have to see how our luck fared on the day.

We purchased our tickets for the boat and set off at a good rate of knots towards a pre-arranged area. We first sighted some dolphins which surrounded our boat and swam alongside. I have only seen them previously on television and we were told that for every one we saw there were five below the surface.



The dolphins were very playful and seemed to enjoy the attention. Our first whale was spotted next and we manoeuvred the boat to get a little closer.



There were also other boats nearby just as crowded as ours, people snapping away with their cameras. The waves were getting quite high even on this mild day and sea sickness was taking hold of a few of the passengers. On the way back in I saw a seal flipping a small octopus up in the air.



I do give circus performers a lot less credit now as the animals are naturally playful in the wild. Instead of whale watching I could have called this section dolphin watching as we only saw three whales. After a few hours in Kaikoura it was time to leave and head back to Gregs home. Overall Christchurch was not a lot different from my home. There are a lot of English road names, the river Avon has Oxford and Cambridge terrace either side of it. The southern part of town also has areas called Addington and Sydenham.

The time passed really quickly and it was soon time to go home. We said our goodbyes and I left for the airport. I spent a quiet three days in Singapore just relaxing. I bought a camcorder but I am not sure it was any cheaper than back home. The flights were pleasant enough but twenty four hours is still a long time sitting down. The entertainment was the same once again but I tried to sleep more this time which still wasn't easy.



To Darren

Thank you so much for your lovely gift, it will look great in our bookcase.

Also a big thanks for coming such a long way for our wedding, it means so much to both of us. We loved having you visit and hope you'll come again. See you in London with love
Greg & Helen

