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Editorial

This month I would like to share with you some thoughts I've had quite often over very many years, thoughts of both tremendous admiration and, at the same time a feeling of great sadness for a very specific group of brave people, about whom many of you, I'm, sure, may have had similar thoughts, sometimes.

I am referring to our immigrant parents, grandparents, or even earlier ancestors, who left their parents and siblings, their relations and friends, their hometowns and home-countries, to sail to a far-off land, the farthest point on the globe from their west European homes, to start a new life in a new land. I am also thinking more of those who came here before WWII. Why? Because when one thinks about those times and conditions, if one is old enough to remember, or being told first-hand by ones' parents, one realises

that from that point backwards, the further back one goes on the immigration history to New Zealand, the harder it must have been for our illustrious ancestors to leave family and homeland on a journey which, only 100 years ago, usually took three months, one way!

I well remember my journey to New Zealand in 1939, which took six weeks to reach Wellington, before the outbreak of WWII! Hence my chosen reference point of 1940 as the prime divider of times and conditions, especially as an effect on travel and immigration. For there can be no doubt in anyone's mind, that WWII, with all its' horrible destruction of life and property, was the major dividing line of the whole 20th century. Transportation and aviation took a major leap forward because of war efforts. So much so, that by the mid 1960s we could already fly to

Europe in about 30 hours. And when I arrived in New Zealand in 1939, we didn't even have an air-service to Australia.

So, consider this. How lucky are we, the presently living immigrant Kiwis, or descendants thereof, when we can nowadays fly all the way back to our old European homelands in about 25 hours, if need be, compared to what faced our forbearers who left there 100, 80 or even 65 years ago.

One can't help but feel with what heavy hearts our parents or earlier ancestors said their goodbyes to their parents and siblings and friends, knowing full well that they may never see many of them again, faced by such a long voyage back, and even in the unlikely case of being able to afford it within 10 years. And then often, there were elderly grandparents still alive, and with them it was in most cases the final goodbyes, face to face, as it was for me, even though I was only nine years old, and three of my grandparents were still alive. Within nine years they had all died, plus one aunt, my father's eldest sister.

Although my mother was able to make a return visit back to the old homeland fifteen years after arriving in New Zealand, my father never did, because of many circumstances. And by the time he could have flown by fast-jet, he had lost the will to travel far and reckoned he was too old. I'm also aware of several members of the large group of 'new' to their old homeland, even though they arrived in New Zealand 'only' 65 years earlier. It is for these of our forbearers, who never saw their old homelands again that I feel a special sadness.

Bye for this month, Paul.

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