

Coffee Fuelled Nostalgia

1952 was about when my family emigrated to Aotearoa. Dad was a small business owner in Whitstable and on the council. My mother was a teacher, she'd always been a teacher, primary school children. She taught in Canterbury Cathedral during the war while dad was roaming around Egypt and Europe doing thing for the Royal Engineers.

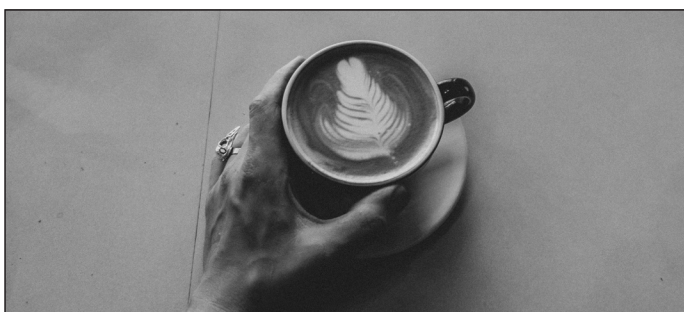
After the war a lot of people wanted to leave England and Europe and my parents were among them. They had been hard hit by the war and; "The sterling area is spending more than it is earning. We have to put that right by exporting more and importing less." Paymaster-General Lord Cherwell informed Churchill. Rationing went on and on and dad found that the post war stringent regulations and lack of available materials made it impossible to run his signage and decorating businesses.

So, he let his workers go and got a job on a ship delivering refugees to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. When the ship came around next there were always people wanting it to take them away; waiting on the wharves of Canada and Australia to go back to England. In Aotearoa; none. Everyone 'just disappeared into the bush, never to be seen again.'

Bernard Cecil Sullivan and his wife, Kathleen, packed up their five daughters and got on a ship for here. Mum learnt Maori so that she could teach in that language, glad her girls were amused and looked after by the staff and fellow passengers while she studied.

When she got to New Zealand and applied to the Education Department for work, she found it was illegal to speak Maori in the classroom, so that was another wound inflicted by her motherland on my mother, but she always chose to teach in small country schools with Maori whanau attendance. Dad, who was born in 1907, fell into real estate and loved it, driving around, exploring and meeting people. Then, Juno Grey who he worked for on the shore, asked him to move to Hamilton and start a branch there.

The family packed up, a little baby had arrived by then, and moved to a villa in Wellington Street. Dad took out a wall, built on a sunny kitchen at the back and put some french doors onto the verandas from the, now large, lounge and that was the place of many parties. Whanau and friends.



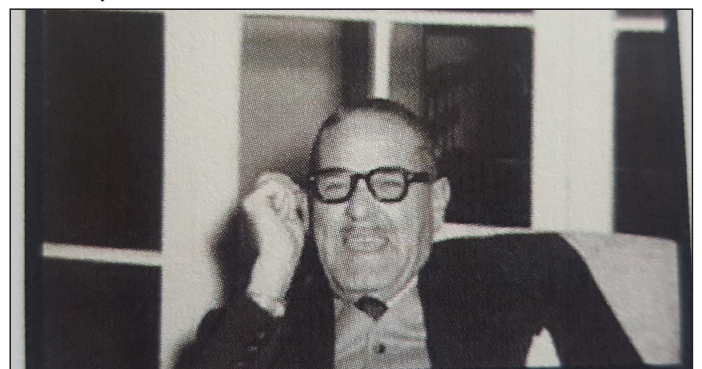
However, mum and dad had grown up in a privileged position at a lucky time where they holidayed in Europe all their young lives, and sometimes they would reminisce about the food. We ate pasta and gateaux in our house. And about the chocolate and, always, the coffee, "Ah the Italian, that place in Venice we used to go, and the French, merd! It so needs that hot milk."

Then dad found a new friend. He used to take me there sometimes at night, down a dark alleyway beside the main post office in Victoria Street. The wall of the post office towered above this young girl, an expanse of bland coloured stone blocks overpowering the tiny lane.



ABOVE: Bob's Shop

Grasping dad's hand and there, after the streetlights had been blocked out by the gloom, on the left, with no awning, was a tiny shop. Even in an eight-year old's perspective, it was small and it was jam packed with coffee. There were glass bins of the coffee, which were selling the most, a row of them with scoops along a side wall and jars climbing up behind the counter. Packets of tea were displayed everywhere, and the latest product of interest would be on the counter. The smell was intoxicating and the conversation intense. Bob and dad would natter away for hours about this nuance and that, and not always only coffee. Bob would note down the Sullivan preferences in his 'book of blends.' I would be given a chocolate or a boiled sweet and permission to go into the other room. In that room were tins of exotic lollies and packets of European chocolate and strange pipes and lighters, odd, beautiful things, souvenirs, jokes. Then dad would have his package, triple wrapped to keep in the flavour, and the walk back down the alley was always shorter.



ABOVE: Robert (Bob) Harris

Coffee was big in our house and when you were old enough you were allowed a cup, occasionally. If you were first up in the kitchen in the morning and did not turn on the fully loaded percolator, you would be in trouble. Especially if a parent, rushing out to work, did not get a cup. When Teasmade made an alarm clock which woke you up to a cup of tea, my father converted theirs so that it made coffee.

Yes, coffee was big, partly I think because it reminded my parents of their youth, and now they could buy their favourite Italian blend from Bob, so it was kept in the freezer to keep the flavour fresh.

Bob mentioned to dad one night that he was starting to get orders from other towns and from isolated farmers and was posting coffee out and dad remarked to mum, when we got home, that his old friend, Robert Harris was going places and had a bright future ahead of him.



Fiona Sullivan