

Savannah Georgia U.S.A. Summer 1992

As the plane approached from the Atlantic Ocean over the east coast of America our pilot pointed out the vast area below, Cape Canaveral and the Kennedy Space Centre, we were approaching Orlando Airport. I would be visiting my Daughter Ruth who lived in Savannah Georgia, but first there were other important matters on my mind. I had been in touch with our friends from the Orlando Fire Department whom I had first met in Bedford some two years before; they had offered me overnight accommodation before continuing my Journey by train the next day. They were good to their word and met me in the airport lounge in fact they had a staff car waiting for me. Bill and Natan were based at the same fire station in Orlando.

We were pleased to meet up, I had shown them around Kempston Fire Station in the U.K. and Headquarters the Previous year and they had enjoyed their visit. During the journey to Bill's home they asked me if I would care to join them that evening, they would be attending Choir Practice. Well, this was something new and I have no singing voice, but always looking at a change from routine; my reply, "Yes I would be pleased to."

My room was comfortable and quiet; the apartment was on a small private estate with its own outdoor swimming pool. "Mick if you fancy swims please use the pool or there is a lake over there, but be careful that may have gaiters swimming around," I made my decision instantly it would be the pool. "Thanks I will have a swim in the morning."

After changing we set off to attend choir practice, things were not quite as I had expected but much to my liking and a pleasant surprise. Choir Practice was an exclusive club for all emergency services, Police Fire and Ambulance, it was for family use, and well used it was, a very pleasant evening with very nice people so pleasing to meet others in the same profession.

After a good night's sleep and a swim next morning Natan took me to the rail station. I was soon aboard the 1255 Silver Meteor to Savannah via Jacksonville, we arrived on time at 1853 and my daughter Ruth met me at the rail station. It was a pleasant journey and I enjoy train transport.

I arrived midweek, later in the evening John (Ruth's Husband) arrived home he was a cook in a local hotel. After the usual small talk about the weather John had something to discuss. "Well, this black guy at work, he's a very nice sort of chap and he keeps asking me to church, he wants us to go on Sunday." "Fine by me" says Ruth, they both looked at me. "Yes I will give it a go, how long is the service?" "It goes on all day but we don't have to stay that long." "Fine, an hour and a half is about my limit" I replied. John smiled, "He will be pleased, I will tell him in the morning."

Sunday soon arrived and John's friend was at the door at 0950 with three cars one for John and one for Ruth and me plus an escort car. At the meeting room we were given a very warm welcome by everybody, we were the only three white persons in the congregation of about 150. It was a happy clappy service with everybody taking part; we were from time to time reassured about our safety by the man in charge.

The meeting had no set service and anybody that so wished could get to their feet and speak, during which there were many interjections, "Praise the lord, yes man, amen, hallelujah." And not without the body swings to the many hymns and choruses, at one time the minister addressed us individually. Sir, have you anything you wish to share with us, have you a song in mind?" Ruth and John gave a polite, "No thank you." I knew I would be next. "You Sir, do you wish to address us?" "I wish to thank you for the invitation, and the warm welcome you have given us, I have found this a very interesting meeting, I am pleased I came to meet you." "God bless you sir."

We had been at the meeting nearly two hours, I indicated to the man that had invited us and Ruth that I wished to leave. We quietly left the building, but so did many others, "don't worry we will get you out safe." I looked around it was an area of the town that was rather run down, and no white people. Then it dawned on me, we were being guarded and all these people were our minders. We had a safe return and said goodbye to our friends. Later in the day I learned we were the only white people ever to visit this church. The above, I thought worth recording.