

Landi-versary



For my brother and sister and parents and me, April 14 is a special day. It is our “landi-versary”, because on April 14, 1982 we landed in Australia, at Sydney Airport, newly arrived immigrants from England.

I guess that makes me an economic migrant. Just sayin’.

I remember heat and gum trees, and big cars with weird plastic wind deflector things on the side windows. I remember strange accents and thongs (no longer “flip-flops”) so hot from the bitumen that they melted. We eventually ended up in Tasmania, and I grew up as a Tasmanian farm-boy. That’s who I am.

April 14 has always had it’s little moment of nostalgia. It’s actually become a bit more poignant since I started raising my own family. I can now appreciate the step of faith that it was for my parents. For me it was an adventure, a big birthday adventure (it being so close to my 7th). But then I didn’t have to worry about tickets and accommodation and passports and insurance and paperwork and money and... But now I know why those life-acts of casting out onto a big blue ocean of uncertainty are so important to me. Sometimes you’ve got to sail out of sight of land.



This year the whole thing takes a newer twist. Because later this year I'll be returning to England for the first time in 32 years. And I'll be taking my family with me. All of my children are older than I was when I left. We'll be seeing sights, and meeting cousins and aunties and uncles – many of whom I know about but don't really know. I'll be visiting graves of grandparents and doing a couple of memory days to old houses and schools.

The prospect moves me. I don't know why. There is a sense of "full circle" about it – recapturing whatever part of me (no matter how small) was left homeless in a no-longer-my-homeland. There is a sense of introduction about it – connecting my children in so that the family tree is not just lines on a screen or entries in a database, but relationships and legacy and some sense of mutuality in identity.

But above all, I want the experience of casting out into a place of non-comfort. It's not absolute of course. We've bought insurance, we have the world's best travel agent. And sometimes we are going to be unashamedly touristy. And we've got return tickets. We're going to other places in the world on the way there and on the way back. But the horizons will change. The languages will be different. The familiarity of our own front porch will be gone. "Other" things will become known things. TV stock shots will get flesh and blood. And hopefully my children will know the scope of reality, the finitude of human existence, and it will deepen their prayer.

I wrestle with it. This trip is a privilege and a consumption of resources. But it is also an *investment*. And the return on that investment that I want for me and mine is a deepening, not a cheapening. I want the *journey* for us. I want it to change us. So that our landing back home at the end will be a significant demarcator, a landi-versary for all that comes next.

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