

The Australian Ambassador

by
Lloyd Nelson

Brien Avery is watching the tennis finals at Roland Garras. He's mixing with the rich and famous, some are local Paris dwellers, and many are visitors to this tennis highlight. Among the party Brien is hosting, is the British Prime Minister. The President of France is also along with his famous dollybird companion. Brien's the Australian Ambassador. How he came to be here in this role is purely by chance; very much by chance.

Rewinding things a bit – Brien is away from his country based business this particular morning. He parks his car on the hardstand outside the Mount Hospital and escorts his wife up to Specialist Day Surgery, where she is to undergo a surgical procedure. She will be there until about 2pm. To avoid parking hassles in busy morning Perth, he plans to leave his car where it is and walk up to the CBD, to attend to a few matters.



They sit in the waiting room for a while and both flick through complimentary copies of the West Australian, that the Hospital strew around the waiting room. At the prices charged by this hospital, they can well afford to. Brien looks as though he should be going into a hospital ward, rather than planning a city walk. Saturday last, the visiting dermatologist at Narrogin Hospital has done a slash, burn and stitch job on some skin cancers on his face. He's now well

taped up with surgical dressings. Brien notes several reports of muggings in the city; these, he reads are quite common on Mondays when drug users will do anything to raise the dosh for a fix. 'Be alert', the police spokesman highlighting this growing problem says.

His wife gets called up to the reception counter. They attend to the paperwork and as she goes into the day ward, he takes his leave. Down on the hardstand, he has second thoughts and in view of the mugging article he read in the West, walks over to his car, springs the boot, takes out a ten inch crescent spanner which he slips into his trouser back pocket and sets out to the city along Mounts Bay footpath. It's a late September morning, a bit misty and sharp, but the sun will get through later, he thinks.

Brien is not young, he's just turned 74, but isn't showing his age. He's beautifully dressed in a conservative way; brown Rivers shoes, flannels, blue shirt, a magnificent tie and wearing a muted tone English sports jacket. It's three years since he last made this walk, when for exactly the same purpose, his wife was previously at the Mount Hospital. Being conservative, he sticks to his country life and business. He takes his working life and weekend casual and sporting life in the town he is in business in. A trip to Perth is a rarity, but he goes to Albany a bit, for a change of scene. Albany is close and easy to get to.

He walks reflectively along St Georges Tce, past the old West Australian Newspapers building. Which looks the same to his eye, as when he first saw it in the 1940's, when the Editor/Executor, McAllum Smith used to park his Rover car - WA 2, outside the building. As he walks, he reads as he

comes to the brass lettered footpath plaques set here and there along the Terrace. He realizes with a start, that many of the famous WA residents named in this Sesqui-Centenary effort are those he has actually met or shared space with at functions in the city. Not all, of course, but quite a few. It is, he reflects, perhaps later than he thinks. He reflects further that he hasn't made much of a mark in life. Little does he dream that today, events are about to overtake him and alter all this. It is probably the unusual circumstance that brings such thoughts on. In his business life, his time and thoughts are usually engrossed in the minutia of running the business.

His first port of call is at Forrest Chase, where he buys a couple of pairs of cords from Fletcher Jones. They know him there.

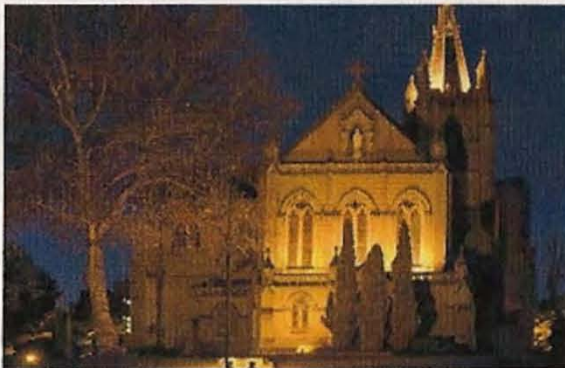
"Nice to see you, Mr Avery," the grey-haired woman says, "I sold you the shirt and the sports jacket you're wearing."

"Indeed, Mrs Rogers," he says, "you have a very good memory."

The cords are beauties and he walks over to City Arcade to a quick service mending shop and arranges to have these taken up where the shop have pinned them, on a ninety minute turnaround. He then goes next door to the Carillon Centre for coffee and a savoury croissant for brekky, followed by a trip down to the lower level of Trinity Arcade to the coin shop. Here he trades a big envelope of \$100 notes for Young Head Queen Victoria sovereigns. At this point you can buy them from the coin shop for \$240.00 cash each, and can sell them back if you want for \$220.00. Brien then rings a security service and a few minutes later, being on standby, a uniformed security guard rocks up and walks with Brien around to his bank, where, having

accessed the safe deposit area, he pays him off by cash and goes in to add today's purchases to his existing weighty collection. Brien's a skeptic, he doesn't buy shares, invest in money management schemes and such like. He invests in rentable bricks and mortar and in sovereigns, sometimes in Kruger Rand and small quarter ounce ingots. Handy stuff for retirement. It's a paperless way of investing, doesn't offer spectacular returns, but doesn't give you any worries he thinks.

Business attended to, he walks up Murray Street to Victoria Square to look at the progress of the much publicised make-over of Saint Mary's Cathedral. It's a work very much in progress. The



architects and builders have cut a 20 metre section out of the middle of the Cathedral where the 1880's section abuts the 1930's. They will join the two parts together in due course with a protruding section of

sticking out archways. They are also installing underground car parking on the hospital side. In all, it's going well, but has a way to go. He then walks down Victoria Avenue to Hay Street and ambles along to the Anglican Cathedral. He hasn't seen their remake and looks with appreciation of the new slate roof, raised flag tower and tall, Gothic spire. It's been very well done. Inside he takes a walk through the Cathedral, a casually dressed number of photographers are taking photos of the Soldiers Chapel, the most interesting part of the interior. He waits a while, while they indecisively talk and then, as he has things still to do, he walks around the chapel and reads today's page of the Regimental

Details, kept in a glass case. The leader of the photographers says,

“Excuse me.” Brien can be a tough nut when he likes. He gives the chap a hard look and waves him away. When he’s finished looking, he goes down into the body of the building and walks along to the Cathedral Avenue end, appreciating as he goes the marvelous stained glass, dark jarrah and mellow brick of this very fine small cathedral.

His next move is to Sharp’s, opposite the Town Hall, to buy a half Corona cigar. The girls in this shop, where for the past half century he had bought cigars, say, “Sorry Sir, tobacco is bad news. We’re now out of it.”

When he recovers from his shock, Brien says, “Well, where shall I go now?”, and finds himself at a new specialist cigar shop in London Court.

“What is Sir looking for?” says the wispy, but well dressed chap running the shop.

“A strong, cheap, half Corona is what I have in mind.”

The chap produces a nice smelling cigar.

“How much?” asks Brien.

“\$28.50 plus GST, Sir,” he is told.

“Too rich for me,” says Brien, “anything cheaper?”

“That’s the cheapest in the shop, Sir,” he says.

Brien laughs and walks out. He finally tracks down a Cuban cigar at the Hay Street Cellars, \$11.50. He picks up his cords and sets out for the hospital.

He gets his cigar drawing

nicely as he walks down to Mounts Bay Road. As he



passes the Parmelia, about half a dozen workers are out for a puff under an awning.

"Bad habit chaps," Brien good-naturedly says as he walks past, "best to give it up."

They do a double-take, look at the huge cigar he is puffing on, and just as good-naturedly yell back,

"You ought to talk."

As he trundles along Mounts Bay Road, he sees two men emerge onto the street from the French Consulate. One is the new Premier, in power five days back, and the other is a beautifully suited, tall man – the French Consul, it turns out. At the same time, a mid-size dark visaged man steps out from behind the trunk of a Plane tree and unlimbers a boxy pistol. He drops into shooter's stance. Without breaking step, Brien reaches for his Dowidat crescent and with arm raised, clubs the chap's gun arm. The pistol drops, goes off twice and the shooter, clutching his arm, runs up the side alley. Brien, wrench in hand is close behind him. They go up a bit and around the next bend in the alley. Brien latches onto an empty wheelie bin and in a short, quick burst, is on the heels of the shooter and bowls him over with the bin. The chap lies on the ground gasping.

"Why did you interfere?" he asks, "It was the Frog I was after, not your chap."

"Well, that's different," Brien says, "but why?"

"Ah," he says, "revenge. The Frog was minister for The French Interior when my brother Arvi Ben Bella was shot on the steps of Sacre Coeur. They kicked him out in the uproar, and now he's the French Consul here. A big comedown."



While they've been exchanging all this, the miscreant hauls out a Mannlicher pistol, left-handed from his pocket. Brien puts the wrench back in his pocket and says, "Put that out of sight." He doesn't want to argue with a chap armed with a pistol that would stop a buffalo.

"How did you plan to get away?"

"Oh, overalls, a hard hat and a clip board, through the old Emu Brewery construction site." Brien says, "Well, if you're sharp, you can still do that. Best to get that arm attended to though. Have you a medical source?"

"Of course," says the man. The chap pulls on his overalls, hard hat and clipboard – all out of his bum pack.

"Jump on the bin and get out through Bishops House to the site," Brien says, "off you go."

"Thanks, sport," the man says, and is gone like a flash. He walks back down the alley, dumping the bin as he goes and gets out onto Mounts Bay Road, but not away. The new Premier is only days into the job, so he has no real security with him. Brien takes the bull by the horns and hands him the spanner.

"Better mount it," he says, "you could have been the shortest serving premier of all time."

A few weeks later, back at work in the bush, he gets called to the phone. Over the noise of the machinery in his workroom, he takes a really major call. It's the Premier.

"I owe you so much," he says, "and I can now, if you want, repay you."

"How so, Mr Premier," Brien asks.

"Well, the Prime Minister is much appreciative of what you did, at your quickness of action, your disinclination to discuss the matter much and so on.

In short, with the untimely death of the Australian Ambassador to France last week, I have it now in my gift to offer you the job. Only short term, as he had 14 months to run. Will you do it?"

Brien has sold his business for good money only a week back and has been wondering what the hell to do in retirement. It is very timely. The Aussie tennis player wins his Roland Garras final. 'Game, set and match', the caller cries. Brien stands to applaud.

'Yes indeed,' he thinks.