

The AUNT DAISY story

(7) Onward & Upward With The Brakes Off

NO welcoming red carpets unrolled for Aunt Daisy on her first American tour. She came, she saw, she went home again. Roosevelt was pumping millions of dollars into public works to revive the slumped economy. But the money turned over once, and came to a standstill. When Aunt Daisy broadcast—as she did in each town she visited—she won words of praise but no offers of cash.

It was as well that living was cheap. The proceeds from her first recipe book had paid Aunt Daisy's fare, but left her only £38 for expenses. She made the money last six weeks. In California then the daily tariff for a comfortable hotel room was one dollar fifty cents, the equivalent of 7/6.

Meals could be had in the hotel dining room, or at an adjoining café, which was cheaper. Usually Aunt Daisy chose the latter, this reflecting more on the state of her finances than the fare offered by the hotels. For example, grilled brook trout *meunière*, rasher of bacon, potatoes and peas cost 80 cents. Included in this sum (4/-) was the diner's choice from five or six appetisers, four or five soups, and sixteen desserts, besides tea or coffee (iced or hot), milk, buttermilk, cocoa, chocolate or beer.

"The self-service cafeterias were even cheaper," says Aunt Daisy, "and very super. You took your polished tray and damask napkin and your silver and chose food from stainless-steel dishes of mince, stews and various vegetables, all kept hot in steam tables. Or you ordered a grill from the waitress. I heard a lady in front of me order two rashers

of bacon, a lightly fried egg and some brown toast. The waitress called to the kitchen, 'Two strips, one fry easy, and a stack of wheat.'"

Then as later, Aunt Daisy found Americans anxious to learn. There was a need. Returning to her hotel one evening, feeling forlorn and alone, she was greeted by the hostess, a generous Irish-born girl.

"You're English, aren't you?" asked the girl kindly.

"Yes," said Aunt Daisy, "but from New Zealand."

"Why!" exclaimed the girl heartily, "I've got a cousin in Noo Zealand."

"You have!" Aunt Daisy was delighted. "What part does she live?"

"Brisbane," said the girl.

WHEN her money ran out, Aunt Daisy took the little ship Makura from San Francisco for home. She landed back in New Zealand with only £4 in her purse, but rich in new stories to tell her listeners.

Though she had rejected a Parliamentary career, Aunt Daisy could not entirely avoid the swirl of political passions in the thirties. It was the decade in which Robert Semple, Minister of Works, prematurely described the ambitious Hitler as a "mad dog"—and was forced, under protest, to apologise.

Among the less world-shaking conflicts, in Auckland, Aunt Daisy remem-

bers a meeting to protest against the fact that some Yugoslav orchardists were prevented from giving their wind-fall fruit to the poor. Likewise, unsold milk was being poured down drains. At the centre of the indignant public protests was usually to be found Uncle Scrim, of the Friendly Road Station 1ZB.

Today the outcome of this protest looks like screaming farce. Tempers ran high on the eve of the 1935 General Election, but Scrim as usual was to broadcast one of his *Man in the Street* sessions. Someone—it has never been clearly stated who—feared the broadcast might affect his party's fortunes. So, on the night of November 24, 1935, the transmission from 1ZB was jammed.

In the hullabaloo which followed, someone unearthed a transmitter likely to have caused the jamming. It was located in the Remuera workshops of the Post and Telegraph Department. There was an embarrassed spate of explanations from various political personages, and an immediate lifting of the iron curtain which had temporarily clanged down across the Friendly Road.

Soon after the election, a new Government nationalised 1ZB. The ground rules for commercial broadcasting were changed, and the polite "by courtesy" form of sponsorship abolished. Radio was to advertise products, as it does today, and charge accordingly. With a mass audience already listening to her, Aunt Daisy could add the title of radio's foremost saleswoman to the laurels

already won as radio's first lady. She began advertising in her Morning Session on Friday, October 30, 1936.

SHE was thrilled with the change. She had been wanting for ever so long to tell listeners about a lot of useful things. Here at last was the chance. She could actually name the products, and be paid for it to boot. The first advertisement almost popped from her in the excited relief from long restraint.

"How lovely it is," Aunt Daisy bubbled, "to be able to mention at last the thing I've been trying to tell you about for so long. It's Clever Mary! That's what I use for cleaning. It doesn't hurt your hands, you see?" And so she went on, bursting with news and enthusiasm. Her sales talk was irresistible. One of the studio staff, John Stannage, walked up and down clapping his hands with delight. "Listen to Aunt Daisy!" he invited all and sundry. "Isn't she marvellous?"

Success smelled sweet. Aunt Daisy is blithe to this day about her early triumphs. "One day when I was busy on the phone," she says, "I felt something being pushed into my hand. Mr Phillip Bushell himself was there, from Sydney, and he was so pleased, and he pushed into my hand this half-pound packet of tea."

At first she broadcast two sessions daily, morning and afternoon. The morning programme opened with her theme tune *Daisy Bell*, and the afternoon one with a hymn called *Consecration*. "It was beautiful," she says. "People used not to go out in the afternoon so they could hear that recording." There were some slight difficulties. "I had one brand of tea in the morning," she says, "and another in the afternoon. But I got over that—well—commonsense. Tastes differ. And I never do say anything is best. Nothing is better or best except the things that God made, like the sun and the moon and the sea and the sky."

No such commonsense compromise was possible when Aunt Daisy was asked to advertise a patent medicine. This turned out to be an old acquaintance, the weed which was said to be good for asthma and rheumatism, called by the Maoris Kumarahou. The Friendly Road had doled out sackfuls of it. Now someone was boiling the leaves and selling the liquor at 2/6 a bottle. Daisy was shocked by the price, but she did as she was told and advertised it—once. "Then I got a letter," she says. "It was from an elderly lady who said her husband was a pensioner and could barely afford two and sixpence. But he was crippled with rheumatism, and she'd buy him a bottle if I really thought it was good."

Daisy knew the medicine was kumarahou, and that the raw material cost nothing. She went to see Beaumont Sheil, the advertising manager. He

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IN HOLLYWOOD Aunt Daisy had lunch with Deanna Durbin

