Greg Brownless. —“Confessions of a Tour Guide.”

Greg’s experience as a guide stems from the 5 years he spent as a tour manager with Contiki Tours in Europe in the 1980s. Originally from New Zealand, Greg and his wife now reside in Sydney where he conducts a Funeral Director business. Greg was not touting for business during his visit with us today.

Greg gave us a short introduction to the history of Contiki Tours, its founder John Anderson and how its operation and style has changed over the years. By the time Greg joined Contiki in the early eighties the company had grown from a “Kombi Van” in the sixties to a fleet of 120 buses and annual income of some US$150 million.

The passengers on these tours, which ranged from 10 days to 9 weeks covering Europe to Turkey, were mainly Australian and New Zealanders aged between 18-35 years old and 80% female. Greg generally commenced each tour by announcing there would be no “whinging or moaning”, ensuring the passengers knew who was “boss” and making sure there should be no silly questions.

There were many anecdotes provided by Greg such as, toilet usage throughout Europe, passenger names (“Randy”), passengers missing the bus, missing passengers, Italian Casanovas, stolen handbags and mispronunciation by locals (“shitbull”). Greg took us through a journey of eight European cities - Paris, Lyon, Cannes, Monaco, Florence, Rome, Naples and Barcelona. For each city he reminded us of the varying historical, religious and famous sites to be experienced which brought back many fond memories for your writer and all of us present.

To enhance our experience Greg played three pieces of music on the piano accordion to add flavour to “drifting by boat down the Seine”, “Notre Dame” and Isle of Capri “Funiculi Funicula”. At the end of five years touring around Europe Greg found that he had acquired no real friends in that time and so he made the decision to go back home to New Zealand.

Questions from members ranged from 1) worst moment – landslide at Lauterbrunnen; 2) Accordion on tour? – No Greg took it up after his return to NZ; 3) Were short term romances allowed – not officially but OK if discrete; 4) Where did Greg go on holidays at that time – Ireland, Egypt, Israel and a trip to Canada to chase a girl he found interesting but to no avail; 5) Did Greg’s remuneration allow for commission, kick backs or tips – generally no but stores and camp owners did look after each other; 6) Was the age criteria adhered to? – Yes; and 7) Relationship of guide to driver – generally stayed together for one year but it was important to get along.

Ray Hyslop’s vote of thanks covered economic hope and our eight-month election timeframe but importantly that Greg was able to cheer us up with his wonderful memories of Europe.