



*Emil - New Yorker Stater who feels at home in Oban*

On his most recent trip to Oban, he was sad to discover that two of his friends, former Bank of Scotland manageress Mary Madej and Jessie Welsh, had passed away. Emil said: 'My heartfelt sympathy goes out to their families. When I was on my holidays I would be asked to Jessie's house twice a week for Scotch broth. And although Mary had retired from the bank for some years, I will still go into the bank to see the staff - I'm no stranger to them.'

And it is not just the loss of the people which upsets Emil - he was angry when the old railway station building was demolished in 1985 to be replaced with a more modern terminal.

'I remember walking in - you'd see plants and be able to sit and have a coffee or a tea. And I was devastated when they tore down the big old clock.'

Although Emil has seen Oban change through the years, he will never forget the people who have made him feel so welcome.

His most treasured memories of his holidays include his meetings with the late Mrs Frances Shand-Kydd, mother of the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

'She was a real gem, a beautiful woman,' said

Emil. 'I used to visit her in her card shop in the 80s. I'd bring her stuff that was very American, something that was a little different for her. We corresponded for many years. I was stunned when in 1985 she gave me a private book of photographs of her and her family, which was signed.'

Another fond memory is the time Emil spent with Breckenridge's van driver Mike 'the Milk' Mulvihill, who took him to see islands around the area, including Mull and Islay, while he delivered goods.

'Through him I saw several islands; every year he took me to different places,' said the American.

Over the years Emil has made numerous friendships with people in and around Oban; Dennis Whyte who used to be at the Balmoral Hotel, Valerie and George McLeod, the Welsh family, former owner of the Oban Inn Brian Reid, Neil Armour who works at Tesco and his wife Lorna, former bartender at the Tartan Tavern Murdo Stewart, Jimmy Clark, Willie Power and many others.

'Although some of these people are long gone, the memories are nice to have,' Emil said.

And on his trips to Oban, Emil never misses a visit to the pier to see some of the CalMac ferry workers.

'I've known Alasdair Birrell, Alan and the two Davids for at least 20 years. They are part of my holiday - they see me and say 'there's Emil, he's back!,' he said.

Alasdair said: 'Seeing Emil is like seeing the first swallow that arrives after winter. We look forward to seeing him every year - we have a friendship that has lasted. He's what we call 'a Highland gentleman'.'

When his three weeks come to an end it's a sad time for Oban's frequent visitor.

'When the plane lands in the US it's all over so quickly - it's a different world,' Emil said. 'But when I'm travelling back I'll always have a little smile on my face. I've never felt like a tourist here; to feel so at home was something I never expected.'

'I save all my pennies for this trip, it's my birthday present, my Christmas present - everything. And God willing, I'll be back next year for my three weeks.'