

Africa - Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

I left Torquay to travel to Africa. My parents have been living there for several years as my father was Assistant Commissioner of Income Taxes for the East African Common Community (Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda).

I took the train from Torquay back to Bedfordshire where I stayed overnight with my aunt Edna. The next day she drove me to Heathrow airport where I boarded a Trident aircraft to take me to Dar es Salaam.

I came out of the airport with my parents into the wonderful sticky heat of East Africa. To this day I remember the sweet rotting smell of Africa and it continues to draw me back to that wonderful continent.

My parents had a house in Hill Road Oyster Bay very close to the beach. It was a large house with lots of polished wood. The household consisted of my mum Doris and Dad Ralph, the head boy (really a man) Issa, garden boy Leslie, a huge and lovely Rhodesian Ridgeback named Remy and a white cat.

Remy was a racist dog. When a white person came to the house he would greet them with a wagging tail but if a black person came he would growl and display his sharp teeth to them. My parents had inherited him and his bad habits from the previous occupant of the house, but he was a lovely dog.

Our cook and head boy Issa (I used the term boy as that was the usual word for a servant in those days although now it would be considered to be completely unacceptable) was a Muslim and wore a fez all the time. He had been well trained and he would lay the dining table with full Silver Service even if we were just having a sandwich.

One day, when my parents were out, I came back to the house unexpectedly and found Issa cooking a delicious dish which he explained was samaki curry (fish curry). He wasn't supposed to cook for himself in our kitchen and it became our secret. I always teased him about it asking why he didn't cook such lovely food for us.

The expatriate community generally considered their servants to be untrustworthy and there were stories of servants who have been dismissed subsequently stealing from the house. I guess they had nothing to lose and they would disappear upcountry to stay with a relative until the heat died down.

However, Issa was honest except for minor transgressions such as stealing all the aspirins in the house. About once a month he would come to my mother waving an empty aspirin bottle indicating that we needed to buy more. As we hardly used aspirin and the amount disappearing was far more than any normal human being could consume we assumed he was giving them to his relatives.

I used to sit outside in the cool of the early morning to read until the temperature and humidity became unbearable. Often somebody would come on a bicycle with two large panniers holding lobsters. He would bargain with my mother for 30 minutes or more about the price of the creatures. During this, he would take them out of the bags and put them on the veranda where they would crawl about. Then he would slowly put them back one by one as they closed in on an agreed price.

I went for walks along the beach where there were many lovely shells and interesting things to find.

My father had been a partner in a small accounting firm in our hometown, Dunstable, in the UK, when spurred by my mother, who always had restless feet, they decided to move to East Africa. He was on a two-year contract called a tour and I think in the end he did about 3 tours or 6 years.

He had many stories to tell. As Assistant Commissioner of Income Taxes, he had to go to Zanzibar to examine the books of companies. They were mainly run by Indians who had lived in Africa for many years and had such a tangle of companies he could not unravel their relationships. He used to complain that it was impossible to work out what was going on.

He went to Tanzania after independence, as at that time the African government wanted to replace the colonialists with skilled Europeans on short-term contracts.

Before independence there was a hierarchy with Europeans at the top then the Asians (Indians who had been brought in by the Europeans to help run the country) then the Africans at the bottom.

After independence, this all changed as another layer was put on top consisting of the African politicians.

My father recounted occasions when he talked to a politician that had not paid his taxes only to be told by the politician that he did not have enough leftover after other expenses to pay taxes.

The Africans thought that my father was crazy working in the middle of the day when it was hot rather than having a siesta. They were probably right. Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.

While my parents had been brought up as Methodists in their later years they became Quakers. On Sundays, we would go to visit the American Quakers who lived on the beach on the other side of the harbour.

We would take the Kigaboni Ferry to get there and then be driven to their house at MIFI beach. There might be a dozen of us sitting in the shade under a tree beside the lapping waves of the sea. It was very beautiful and in the way that gatherings of the Society of

Friends worship, sometimes, nobody would speak at all for about an hour. If anyone felt moved to speak they will talk about what was on their mind often giving advice to help somebody in the group with a problem. With no priest and no leaders, all have the right to speak and be listened to.

After that, we would all shake hands and have a picnic.

Not long after I arrived I got a girlfriend and also I went on safari but they are other stories

























