

**The
Northern Rhodesian
Experience**



Geoff Mossop

“How does one explain the pull of a country? It is hard to rationalise the way in which the essence of a place buries itself deep in our hearts and minds. Maybe the seeds were planted there when we were young, as so many of the things we did throughout our younger years we were doing for the first time, making them exciting and memorable. As the years pass however, these memories fade and some are forgotten altogether, but the sights, and sounds, and smells that surrounded us during those years were gathered by our subconscious and remained buried deep within our souls, and became part of us. Perhaps it is this that bonds us to the country of our roots, and if we no longer live there, stirs within us a warm sense of nostalgia for a time and place now past.”

~ Geoff Mossop

Preface

I have often wondered whether other people have such fond memories of a life and time in a country as I do. Then one day a friend asked me what it meant to me to be a South African, which confirmed that indeed some people are interested in what bonds one to a country. So I decided to write down a few memories of my life in a country that left a profound and lasting impression on me. The country no longer exists as it once was, so this also encouraged me to tell some of the fascinating stories of a great era, and the exceptional people who left legacies that remain to this day. I owe much of my sense of appreciation for the country to my parents. It was their commitment and enthusiasm towards the many things that were happening in the country, and their patience in ensuring that I was aware of them. Today it is Zambia, but my story starts during a remarkable era when the country was called Northern Rhodesia.

Prologue

My father Norman Mossop, my mother Naomi, and my grandmother from my mother's side, Florence Wilkins, moved to Northern Rhodesia from Cape Town during 1951 when I was five, so my first real memories of life started there. I completed my schooling in Lusaka. In 1968 I married Christine McCulloch and moved from Lusaka to Ndola, a town in the north of Zambia, and the hub of the Copperbelt. We loved the country and after independence were determined to make the newly independent nation of Zambia our home. However, when it became clear to us that sectors of the new government were unravelling and the faltering economy was not receiving the attention it deserved, we decided to emigrate from Zambia and return to South Africa. In 1971 we returned to South Africa, where I felt very much a stranger, despite it being the country of my birth. (That was my first 20 years in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia).

In January 1993 I returned to Zambia on a work permit to run Nampak's interests there. Nampak is the largest manufacturer of packaging in Africa and one of the most diverse in the world. I joined Nampak in 1974 and was Managing Director of Printpak (Transvaal), in Johannesburg, when I was asked if I would consider a move to Zambia. By then I had married Daphne Macandrew. We moved to Zambia where I spent another ten years in Lusaka before I retired and moved back to South Africa. Daphne and I now live in White River, a small town close to the Kruger National Park. (That was my last 10 years in Zambia).

The 30 years that I lived in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia were among the best years of my life.

Geoff Mossop

White River, South Africa

Revised: March, 2014

Introduction

On a warm evening in 1906, a year after the gorge at the Victoria Falls had been bridged, a steam engine, belching smoke, rolled to a halt at a dusty siding called Lusaakas. Only a handful of pioneer-spirited people were there, in the heart of central Africa, to welcome the first train to reach the limit of the newly-laid railway line. Forty-five years later I would arrive with my parents at the same station, now called Lusaka. There would be no platform and the passengers would disembark by climbing down the ladder-like steps on the side of the carriages onto the ground.

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The following is a record of only a few of my memories of events that stood out, but they are representative of the many different events that were taking place in Northern Rhodesia. It was a new frontier, which attracted a breed of hardworking men and women who reaped the rewards of a generous and bountiful land.

I have called my story:

The Northern Rhodesian Experience

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Arriving In Northern Rhodesia

The novelty of the train journey did not last long. The rhythmic sound of the wheels on the tracks was endless. Only the tempo changed as the train traversed the hills and valleys. I would idly watch the grey smoke from the engine drift out over the bush and mingle among the trees before vanishing. Occasionally I would catch a glimpse of the powerful engine, steam hissing from its galloping wheels, as it took us on our journey into Africa.

I remember very little of the long journey from Cape Town, where we lived, to Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia, as I was too young at the time. I do however remember great excitement among our fellow passengers one morning. We were about to cross the Zambezi River, a milestone, and the highlight of our long journey. This was the point where we would cross into the land that was our destination and our new home. We would also have our first view of the Victoria Falls from the bridge.

As the train approached the bridge it slowed to a snail's pace and we began to hear a distant thunder and I could see the rising spray towering like smoke into a clear blue sky. I remember how my anticipation rose as the train crept forward out over the enormous gorge giving us the sensation of being suspended in mid-air. I had to stand on my toes to see out, then, through the open windows of the carriage, the air began to tremble with the thunderous roar of the mighty falls, and there they were. Coming into view through the

rainbows and swirling spray, and flanked by the sheer cliffs of the deep gorge, were the breath-taking falls. I stood in awe as I gazed at the timeless panorama unfolding in front of me. I realised I was looking at something truly phenomenal, a spectacle that dwarfed anything I had ever seen before. Stretching for over a kilometre across the mighty river was an overwhelming avalanche of water, of such unimaginable beauty, its natural grandeur seemed to pervade all within its realm. This was the spectacle, which David Livingstone on seeing for the first time, wrote: *"Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight."* The train slowly moved on, changing the view as it went, until the roar subsided and the view of the falls was gone. I had crossed the Zambezi.

Several minutes later the excitement had died down and we had resumed our journey, but as I looked out at the passing mopane bush I could still sense the presence of the mighty river.

That was my introduction to one of the Seven Wonders of the Natural World and one of the legendary rivers of Africa. It had ushered me into a land that was to become my home, a part of Africa known better from stories of exploration and adventure. I was yet to realise the pleasure it would bring, discovering the uncompromising splendour of this pristine land. A land of freshness and freedom, and a harshness that was untamed and pure. There were hills and valleys, unpeopled and still. There were great rivers, where fish eagles reigned, that would take you silently on their currents through the heart of the land, revealing glimpses of an untouched wilderness. And always there were the moods, and the sounds, and the ever-changing colours of Africa.

Early Memories of Life in Northern Rhodesia

My dad was a chartered quantity surveyor, who in 1951 moved to Northern Rhodesia to work for the government. I was five, so my first real memories of life started there. As I grew up, my perception was that men and women like my parents had moved to this fledgling country, Northern Rhodesia, primarily to make it their home, but also to build and be part of the prosperity of the development-era in that part of the world.

Cairo Road, the main road through Lusaka, was then a dirt road. It also formed part of The Great North Road, which was Cecil Rhodes' vision of a great road that would traverse the length of Africa, from Cape to Cairo. At night the town centre was so dark you would soon lose your bearings, as there were no street lights and very few of the shops' display-windows were illuminated. Woodlands, where we first lived, was a small settlement of houses nestled in a forest of Musasa trees (*Brachystegia Spiciformis*). During my young bare-foot days I always knew it was time to make my way home for my bath before dinner, when the hot African air began to cool and I smelt the wood smoke from the Rhodesian boilers and wood-burning stoves being fired up. If I missed those reminders, a while later I would hear the 'Last Post' being played by the lone bugler from the nearby military barracks, but by then I was going to be late.

It was a time when houses were being built, and dusty dirt-roads were giving way to wide tarmac roads. Telephone lines were being erected, as very few houses had phones in those days. A new post office was built and declared the tallest building in Lusaka. Then multi-storey office blocks went up and were even taller. A radio station was built, a cinema, a theatre, and then a beautiful Cathedral, which in those days gave Lusaka city status. Later, in 1960, the Queen granted a Royal Charter, making Lusaka's city status official. I remember the pride I felt now living in a city. By then my parents had bought a plot of land in a newly-opened estate, and built their own home. Half way through my primary school days the new Lusaka Boys' School was opened. By the time I was ready for senior school, the Gilbert and Jean Rennie schools had been built. These two schools boasted the most modern teaching-aids, science laboratories with the latest equipment, well stocked libraries, fully equipped gymnasiums and acres of well-manicured sports-fields. A few years later, a swimming pool complete with high diving boards, was built for the various schools, and was situated between the Lusaka Boy's School and Lusaka Girl's School.

This ongoing development was taking place throughout Northern Rhodesia. The country was growing up all around us, and we were part of it.

Beginning to appreciate the scale of what was happening

In 1951 the population of Northern Rhodesia stood at 1.7 million, of which thirty-seven thousand were white. By the mid-fifties the population had increased to 2 million, but the white population had almost doubled, and now numbered sixty-four thousand. Thousands of men and women, mainly from Britain and South Africa, and others from Europe were flocking to Northern Rhodesia. It had captured the imagination of people who wanted to be involved in the opportunities and tremendous growth that was taking place in this fledgling country. Well qualified teachers, dentists, carpenters, architects, plumbers, doctors, skilled men and women from all walks of life had come to Northern Rhodesia to make the country their home.

An advantage of our relatively small community was the cohesiveness it stimulated within the community. Apart from the usual business and recreational dynamics that play a part in bringing people together, the schools also played a significant role. As a consequence of the schools being few in number, they were relatively large, and therefore populated with a blend of children from all backgrounds. As with most children, they were uninhibited in choosing their friends. This in turn led to their parents meeting, and in many cases becoming close friends. It was this blend of backgrounds that played a part in evaporating distinctions based on class. People saw each other for who they were, and they learned to rely on each other. It was this spirit of unity among the people that played a major role in making possible the exceptional growth throughout the country.

The landscape around the towns and in the outlying areas was changing, giving way to commercial farms. Land was being cleared and put under maize and tobacco, and year after year the farms would grow larger. Cattle farms, both beef and dairy, were thriving on the ever-increasing demand of a growing population. I would often visit friends whose parents owned farms. Invariably we would end up at the work-shed, helping their father repair some bit of farming equipment. I can still see the dusty yards, with the scattered remains of a tobacco or maize crop, and the distinctive smell of dust and diesel, that will always remind me of an African farm.

The towns were also growing, with new shops opening on a regular basis. Many of the general trading stores were owned by Indians, I remember their cool dimly-lit interiors, with the mixed aromas of perfumed soaps, and paraffin, and hessian sacks filled with maize. Many of the shops and businesses were in their fledgling phases, and still being run by their founders. My father had resigned from his job with the government, and together with a business partner, had opened their own practice.

Many of the working population were relatively young ex-service men, and they found toiling to start a new business, with the prospects of a successful life, a gratifying challenge after the lost-career years of the Second World War. Their enthusiasm, and in many cases their successes, encouraged

others. During the early 1950's an average of one new business was opening every week in Lusaka alone.

Early in 1955, motivated primarily by the need for cheaper electrical energy for the Northern Rhodesia copper mines, and also to drive the general development in Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the immense Kariba Dam project was given the go-ahead. I remember my dad taking mom and me on rough dirt roads through miles of bush to show us the beginnings of Kariba. He pointed out the *Kariva* gorge, meaning 'trap' in the Tonga language, where the giant dam wall would be constructed. He described how the lake would take several years to fill, slowly stretching back as far as the eye could see, and beyond, to become the largest man-made lake on earth. I remember thinking how proud my father looked while explaining the huge project to us, and how proud I felt being a Northern Rhodesian.

Construction of the dam wall commenced in November 1956 and was completed in 1959, at a cost of £78 million, a staggering amount of money in those days. The enormous undertaking ran smoothly, apart from one major setback that brought the project to a standstill.

The creation of the reservoir was going to force the resettlement of fifty-seven thousand Tonga people, who had lived for decades along both banks of the Zambezi. They were not concerned when told they would have to leave their ancestral home and move to higher ground, as they believed it would not be possible to dam such a mighty river. They warned that *Nyaminyami*, their legendary spirit of the Zambezi, would not allow the great river to be tamed. Their warning fell on deaf ears, and construction of the dam continued. But then in March 1957, after gathering strength over the Barotse Plains, the greatest flood in living memory swept down the mighty river and through the gorge, swirling over the coffer dam and washing away huge chunks of the river's bank. The raging waters continued to rise at an alarming rate, wreaking havoc throughout the construction site. Massive earthmoving machines in the gorge were swept away like toys by the enraged river. Then parts of the coffer dam began to collapse and finally the suspension bridge that had been built across the river over the construction site, gave way to the fury of the mighty river, and was washed away. The dejected builders stood by, watching helplessly, as the relentless floodwaters tore apart their work; the Tonga's words of warning echoing in their ears.

Eventually the fury of the river started to abate and the floodwaters began to subside, allowing mopping-up operations to commence. Very little of what had been constructed remained and all the heavy plant and machinery that was in the gorge was gone.

In due course construction resumed, but a year later another great flood would again test the beginnings of the giant new wall, but this time it would hold. The wall was finally sealed in December 1958, trapping the mighty river, and the great man-made lake started to fill.

As the lake grew my friends and I would go fishing in the rising waters. I remember the sense of loss I felt looking out across the flooding Zambezi valley, knowing that all its secrets, and its ancient bush that had been home to

an abundance of wildlife for millennia, had all been doomed to a watery grave, and I would never see it again.

The lake took another four years to fill, prompting four of the six sluice gates to be opened for the first time. From my vantage point on the dam wall I stared in wonder at the thunderous torrent of water that flooded through the four massive gates and fell the hundred metres to the river below. The sound was deafening, and the unbelievable avalanche of water caused the ground to tremble beneath my feet. It was an awe-inspiring sight. As I stood taking in the enormity of the whole undertaking, I was heartened to see that the great river had not lost any of its formidable power, and at the same time, it was inspiring to think that man's ingenuity had been able to harness it. It had been a remarkable feat of engineering, creating the world's largest human-made dam.

The story of Kariba would not be complete however, without paying tribute to two extraordinary men; Rupert Fothergill and Norman Carr. These two men, together with their fearless teams worked tirelessly, often at great personal risk, saving scores of wild animals, from elephants to tortoises, lions to chameleons that had been trapped by the rising waters. It became known as "Operation Noah" and captured the world's imagination.

By volume, Kariba remains to this day, the largest man-made lake on earth.

The transformation, throughout Northern Rhodesia had been truly remarkable. Lusaka was no longer the dusty little town it once was in the early twentieth century. It had been transformed into a picturesque modern garden city. Most of the buildings were new. Many of the older ones were proudly preserved and stood as a reminder of the country's humble beginnings. Nurserymen from Kew Gardens were employed by the government nursery and were responsible for the many attractive parks and public places that adorned the city. The two court buildings, which were close to the cathedral, and overlooked the city centre a few kilometres away, were set in spacious gardens and surrounded by a variety of indigenous trees. The different seasons were marked by many of the streets and wide avenues coming alive with a blaze of colour from the Jacaranda and Flamboyant trees that lined them. Leafy residential suburbs like Woodlands, Kabulonga, Ridgeway and Rhodes Park boasted beautiful wall-free gardens, where the strong perfume of Frangipanis and many other colourful blossoms hung in the still warm air. And then, within an hour's drive of the city and surrounding farms, you could lose yourself in untouched Africa; wild, vast, and incredibly beautiful.

Most of the people who had made Northern Rhodesia their home had no thought of ever living anywhere else. The question of where I would be living in the future never entered my head. We had a strong sense of belonging. We were Northern Rhodesians. I was a Northern Rhodesian.

Someone once said, "the earth was made round so that we would not see too far down the road".

Independence

On the stroke of midnight on the 24th October 1964 at the new Independence Stadium in Lusaka, I was witness to the lowering of the Union Jack for the last time, and the raising of the new Zambian flag.

Independence came to Zambia with little commotion and I had decided that I was going to commit to the new nation, Zambia, as did many people. I knew there would be growing pains, but, fundamentally an optimist, I believed Zambia was going to continue to prosper and grow. Why shouldn't it? Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, was the second wealthiest nation in sub-Saharan Africa after South Africa. [Robert Guest - *The Shackled Continent, Chapter 6*] The country was a farmer's dream, with an abundance of fertile land, and it had a third of the region's surface water. Its copper reserves were the largest on earth outside of the Americas. The unfair distribution of wealth that took place during the years of Federation (1953 to 1963) had ended. Throughout that period Northern Rhodesia produced close to 70% of the Federation's total revenue, but was only allocated 17% of that income, with the lion's share of the balance going to Southern Rhodesia. During the mid-late 50s, the Federation, which comprised Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was the fastest growing investment centre in the world, thanks in the main to the economic power of the Northern Rhodesia copper mines.

Four years later I married Christine and moved to Ndola, a town in the north of Zambia and the railway hub of the Copperbelt. By then scores of people, mainly whites and also a few Indians, had either left the country, or were planning on leaving. Many of those who had left had returned to Britain or South Africa, with a few moving to Rhodesia. Others went further afield to countries as far away as America, Australia and New Zealand. Most of the Indians immigrated to Britain. Many of our friends were amongst those who had left, and it was sad to think that we would probably never see them again. Although the writing was on the wall, we stubbornly refused to admit things were not going as we had expected. We would make excuses for the things that were going wrong, but our enthusiasm was definitely on the wane.

The towns were beginning to look grubby. Potholes began to appear in the roads, and the verges became overgrown with the encroaching bush. Hawkers started moving into the towns and occupying the pavements, which in turn became littered with discarded papers, vegetables and fruit skins. Public buildings began to show signs of neglect. The walls were no longer painted and the floors no longer polished. Torn and grimy curtains hung half-off their rails in front of windows that no longer closed. It was as if nobody cared any more. The character of the country was changing. Thousands of people had left, and thousands more were becoming less sure of the country's future.

The following two years saw a marked deterioration in the three sectors of government that Christine and I were not prepared to see being

compromised; education, health-care and security. The world was also becoming less dependent on copper, and Zambia was not taking the necessary steps to diversify its economy. The government had no plan to ensure that the vast majority of the population had an opportunity to contribute to the economy, and hence their demands on government increased. This in turn caused the population to stray towards a culture of entitlement, which over time would lead to one of dependency, a recipe that was destined to fail. Over time we stopped making excuses for the things that were going wrong and we began to plan for our eventual departure from Zambia. Reluctantly I had come to realise that the time to leave had come; if it was once my country, it no longer was.

During the early morning hours of the 1st of January 1971, Christine and I arrived at the Chirundu Bridge en route to a new beginning in the country of my birth, South Africa. After completing border formalities, and with no idea that one day I would return, we crossed the Zambezi.

My grandmother had passed-away on the 30th of April 1963, at our home in Lusaka and was buried in the Leopard's Hill cemetery just outside Lusaka. Not long after we left Zambia my parents would leave, taking with them memories of their life in Northern Rhodesia that they would cherish for the rest of their lives. For me it was the end of an era.

Life in South Africa

Twenty odd years later Zoë, my only daughter from my marriage to Christine, was completing her studies. *Zoë would go on to qualify as a chartered accountant. She would marry Michael Needham and they would have three children; Theresa, Joseph and Patrick.* I had remarried and was living in Johannesburg.

Soon after returning to South Africa I was reminded of the word *superorganism*. It was a word coined by a biologist studying the hugely populated African termite colonies. He claimed that consciousness and intelligence resided not in the single termite, but in the colony as a whole. I was reminded of a super-organism when I saw how well the city worked, despite its size and the complexity of its infrastructure, and how the population routinely went about their daily business, seemingly unaware of the people around them. In the morning I would wake to the muffled drone of the early-birds threading their way to work on distant freeways. It was the constant background sound of the superorganism, the pulse of the city. I knew this was typical of any large city, and exciting in its own way, but I was going to have to get used to it.

During the early years after returning to South Africa most of my attention was focused on making a new life, leaving little time to think back on the life and country I had left behind. I do recall, however, a poignant moment soon after returning to Cape Town. It happened while enjoying a peaceful stroll through the Company Gardens in the bowl of the city. Among the trees and green lawns, I paused to admire a statue of Cecil John Rhodes. He was depicted standing with his arm outstretched pointing north. On the plinth were the words: *"Your hinterland is there"*.

We soon made new friends in Cape Town and I would often talk to them about our life in Northern Rhodesia. I would tell them about the country and its people, its wilderness areas and its wildlife. They would listen for a while but soon lose interest, and I could sense they had no concept of what I was trying to describe. They could not comprehend the vastness of the untouched wilderness, and the natural splendour of the mighty rivers. They could not imagine the sheer pleasure of watching elephants, buffalo and other wild animals, while drifting down the Zambezi, or the stirring beauty of a raging sunset over the warm African bush with its rich aromas of dusty parched undergrowth. I began to realise that these things that had meant so much to me, understandably meant little to them. So my initial enthusiasm for talking about the country I had left behind started to wane, and eventually I stopped talking about it altogether. But I never stopped thinking about it.

Reminiscing

Looking back over the years I lived in Northern Rhodesia I began to realise what exciting times the 50s and 60s had been. A vaccine for Polio was developed in 1952 that would save millions of lives, mainly children. I must have been among the first of millions of children around the world to have been given the little vaccine-fortified sugar-lump. In 1953, headlines around the world announced that Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay had become the first people to reach the summit of Mount Everest. I was fortunate enough to attend a presentation given by Sir Edmund Hillary, when he visited Lusaka during his tour of the commonwealth. In 1954 Roger Bannister ran the first sub-four minute mile. Air travel was slowly coming out of its infancy, making the world a smaller place.

With the arrival of the 50s came the new social and cultural demographic of the rebellious teenager. For the first time, young people had both the money and the freedom to express themselves. They wanted to be represented with their own films and their own music. This in turn gave rise to legends like Elvis Presley, and then the four lads from Liverpool who caused the greatest musical sensation the world has ever seen. Their musical genius would change popular music forever. They created a catalogue of enduring songs that left an indelible mark on the culture of the world. They were called the Beatles, and would go on to become the most celebrated and influential band in history.

Towards the end of the 60s Concorde, the world's first supersonic passenger aircraft capable of speeds in excess of Mach 2 or 2,170 kilometres per hour, flew for the first time. The magic of television was brought to our homes.

Then, on the 21st of July 1969, together with the rest of the world, we became the generation that witnessed the human race accomplish what must be its single greatest achievement of all time. A feat thought by many to be no more than an impossible dream. We watched a human set foot on another celestial body for the first time. Glued to televisions across every continent, the world held its breath as we watched Neil Armstrong slowly descend the ladder on the side of the lunar module; and then step off onto the surface of the moon. From there he could look up and see Earth in the heavens as no other man had done before him. Moments later we shared in the thrill of achievement, when, from the Sea of Tranquility on the lunar surface, we heard the static crackle of Neil Armstrong utter the now immortal words; *"That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind"*. For one glorious moment in time, the world celebrated as one. America's Apollo 11 mission had successfully landed man on the lunar surface, and then returned them safely to earth, an astonishing achievement. It was the boldest and most audacious undertaking man had ever attempted. They had accomplished what humans had only dared to dream of. The epic voyage had lasted just eight days, yet it will be remembered in the pages of history forever.

It had been a golden age of exploration and human endeavour, the likes of which may never be seen again. It was another time, it was a different world, and I realised that it would have contributed in no small way to my many fond memories of my life in Northern Rhodesia and the new Zambia.

I would also reminisce about the holidays to South Africa and Europe I had been on while living in Northern Rhodesia, and how I had become aware of the heritage that surrounded one in those countries, especially in Britain. The old landmark buildings and places where events had occurred centuries ago that had influenced the course of history. While I gloried in the magnificence of British heritage, I remember my surprise feeling that it was not my heritage, despite my English ancestry.

It was a revelation when I realised that South Africa had become a stranger to me, and that I felt far more at home with the folk, and way of life in Northern Rhodesia, than I did while visiting South Africa. Northern Rhodesia had become my home, and it was reassuring to discover that many of the people living in Northern Rhodesia felt the same way. I remember thinking at the time that the way of life in Northern Rhodesia was slowly shaping its own distinct culture. We were becoming Northern Rhodesians.

I remembered the strong will of the people who had made Northern Rhodesia their home. It may have been the pioneering spirit that had brought them to Northern Rhodesia in the first place, or it may have been the small population relative to the apparent opportunities, but so many of them, no matter who they were, or what they did, had a strong sense of direction and self-belief.

Above all I remembered the growth that had taken place throughout the country, and the ingenious thinking that had accompanied it. The inspiring story of how the Lake Tanganyika Sardine was introduced into Lake Kariba is just one example of the breadth of vision and creative thinking that the people had at the time.

- Graham Bell-Cross, a scientist with the Game and Tsetse Department, in Chilanga, just outside Lusaka, knew that the Zambezi River only supported shallow-water fish species. He realised that the vast expanse and depth of the new lake would be able to support a pelagic fish species, then alien to the Zambezi River system. He identified the Lake Tanganyika Sardine (*Limnothrissa miodon*) as the most suitable fish for the project. He also believed that once the sardine had been introduced into the deep waters of the lake, it would not migrate and inhabit the river system, as it would not be able to survive in the relatively shallow river waters. Once the lake had filled they set out to catch the sardine fry. However, this proved to be a lot more difficult than originally anticipated. Years later, Barry, Graham's son, who was about my age explained to me how he had spent almost three months on Lake Tanganyika trying to catch the illusive sardine fry. He told me how they could not even find the fry, let alone catch it. They were at their wits end, when early one morning he noticed a strange ripple effect on

the surface of the lake, close to shore, where the lake was normally like a mirror. This aroused his curiosity and on closer examination, discovered to his astonishment, that the ripples were being caused by the very sardine fry they had been searching for. He immediately realised that the deep water sardine must in fact migrate to the shallower waters to spawn. At last they were able to start catching the Lake Tanganyika Sardine. Then, using light aircraft, they transported the fry from Lake Tanganyika to Lake Kariba where the species was successfully introduced. Today, the lake yields an annual harvest of up to 25,000 tons of the little silver fish, creating an industry that employs thousands of people. It is commonly known as Kapenta, and has become a major source of protein throughout the region.

I would often reflect on how fortunate I was to have been witness to such a remarkable period in the country's history, and to have known some of the exceptional people who helped make it happen.

But I also began to think more critically about the country and its people than I had done when I had lived there. I realised that during my early years in Northern Rhodesia I was relatively young, and had not given much thought to the lives and aspirations of the local people whose country had been colonised. I assumed that they were content with their role in the economy doing unskilled, semi-skilled and in many cases skilled work. Most of them were eager to get out of their traditional villages and seek employment in the towns and cities, and they were genuinely proud of their new status. They were also among the most friendly and good-natured people in the region, so I assumed they were content. Looking back however, it is shameful to think that they were treated as inferior. They were not permitted to shop in "white shops" or visit the cinemas, swimming pools and sports facilities reserved for whites. Their children had to attend schools for black pupils only. The fact that they were good schools with dedicated teachers, mainly from Britain, did not make it right. But most frustrating of all, they had no political voice. Deep down I think most of us knew that this was wrong and immoral, but at the time it seemed easier to just not think about it. But it remained wrong, and eventually had to change.

Colonisation did however have a silver lining. It had brought with it modern medicine and education. It had also propelled the country into the twentieth century, leaving Zambia with a modern infrastructure and one of the most prosperous and wealthy economies in sub-Saharan Africa.

My Return to Zambia

Towards the end of 1992 I was asked by our chairman if I would consider a move to Zambia to run Nampak's interests there. After being granted a work permit – one of the few ways I could return – I accepted and returned to Zambia, where Daphne and I lived for the next ten years in Sunningdale, a beautiful leafy suburb of Lusaka.

I remember how my excitement rose when I heard the captain announce that we were passing over Lake Kariba and were about to start our descent en route to Lusaka International. I looked out of the port window and felt a rush of familiarity as I saw the great lake shimmering below me, with its wild bushy shoreline stretching west to the horizon. Over twenty years had passed, and I was about to arrive back in the land in which I had been raised, and I was not sure what to expect.

The aircraft slowly descended, slipping in and out of the clouds, revealing more and more of the lush green countryside. Fond memories started to trickle back as I began to recognise some of the old landmarks. I could see the Great North Road, heading towards the city on the horizon. Once alongside the city I could see Cairo Road, with its spacious middle reservation, and Independence Avenue, and Church Road heading east towards the residential suburbs, lost beneath a canopy of trees. Soon we were on our final approach, and as the aircraft slid towards the runway we passed the military air-force hangars. Sitting on the apron in front of the hangars I saw a row of Russian-made MiG fighter jets, reminding me of the years after independence when the country was making new friends.

After landing, the plane taxied back to the terminal buildings and the cabin doors were opened. As I stepped out and breathed in the warm tropical air, and saw the familiar countryside around me, I felt that deep sense of well-being one gets, arriving home after a long absence. Once again, I had crossed the Zambezi.

While I was being driven from the airport I looked out at the country I had once known so well. It felt like another lifetime and I was at the beginning of a journey into my past; but I was not expecting to see so many people. Where had they all come from? The roads and pavements were buckling under the exploding population, and there were now houses and shacks where once there were wide open green spaces.

While in South Africa I had read and heard much about Zambia, and I knew things had changed, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality that awaited me. I suppose being an optimist caused me to enhance what I had imagined Zambia would be like. Lusaka was no longer the beautiful garden city I had once known. The roads were a mess, with many of them beyond repair. It was the middle of the rainy season, so I expected to see the streets and spacious middle reservations of the avenues lined with well-manicured lawns, as they once were. But they had given way to a muddy quagmire, which would become barren and dusty once the rains stopped. The

old residential suburbs that once boasted beautiful gardens now bore testimony to years of neglect; the walls of the houses were covered with abstract patterns from peeled paint and stains. Most of the old buildings in the city were shabby and in various stages of disrepair, relics of a past glory. It was also noticeable that many of the buildings constructed more recently, were crude by comparison. The two senior schools, the Gilbert and Jean Rennies, models in their day, were no different to any of the other buildings. The once green sports fields had given way to mealies, the goal posts long gone. This, in a country where soccer is a national obsession, was a surprise. The swimming pool between the two junior schools, once a place full of life and energy, was cracked and empty, and eerily quiet. The sigh of the breeze was all I could hear as I looked across at the high diving boards, towering above the weeds, lonely and abandoned; now just a monument to an era long gone.

Daphne joined me a few months after my return and settled without much fuss. It took me a lot longer to settle. I think it was because I knew what had once been and now found it difficult to accept what Zambia had become. I was also upset by the realisation that very little remained of the life I once knew, that I could share with my family. But the greatest sadness of all was the overwhelming poverty independence had brought to a once flourishing and still potentially rich country. After a while however, old familiar sights and sounds started filtering back, and I eventually settled down.

The total population of Zambia now stood at approximately 11.5 million. About ten to fifteen thousand were other ethnic groups of which about half were expatriates. The economy was in tatters. At independence in 1964, Zambia was the second wealthiest nation in sub-Saharan Africa. Its gross domestic product per capita was greater than that of Thailand. [Thorvaldur Gylfason - *Growing Apart: Zambia and Thailand*] I found it inconceivable to think that in less than two decades the country was virtually bankrupt. A World Bank report estimated that between 1980 and 1996 Zambia had received in grants alone, not loans, a staggering \$5.944 billion. [Rakner *et al.* 2001, table 9.7 in appendix 9.5. www.worldbank.org] Some of the money had found its way into the deep pockets of greedy and corrupt politicians and businessmen, while the population became poorer and had to beg for assistance. The rest had been wasted in a futile effort to save face by propping up badly managed parastatal companies, which included the mines. The main reason for this scandalous state of affairs was that over 80% of the economy was under parastatal control, a legacy of the previous government's failed policy of nationalisation. Unemployment was over 50%, and a further problem was the size of the public sector, which accounted for 44% of total formal employment. The International Monetary Fund had placed Zambia among the world's poorest nations.

To address this, the new government committed itself to extensive economic reforms. It began to focus more on providing the legal framework and infrastructure that would allow private enterprise to run business. Most state-owned businesses, including the copper mines, were offered up for

privatization, although for political reasons the government delayed the sale of the copper mines. Commercial farmers from South Africa and Zimbabwe were being encouraged to move to Zambia in a bid to revive the agriculture sector, an initiative that appeared to be gathering momentum. Feasibility studies were undertaken in an attempt to diversify the economy and make it less dependent on copper. Exchange controls were eliminated and free market principles were endorsed. In 2000, after pressure from the donors, most of the copper mines were eventually sold to Anglo American, the company from which the mines were originally expropriated. It remains to be seen whether these reforms will be followed through yielding the long term results necessary to improve the country's economic profile and relieve the extreme poverty.

However, despite the struggling economy, life was generous to us. It was wonderful taking up old friendships with some of the few folk who had never left. We made new friends within the relatively large nucleus of expatriates, and with others who had made Zambia their home. The people with whom we mixed had different values to those we were accustomed to in Johannesburg in that they seemed less materialistic, and that powerful cohesiveness from the past was still very much in evidence. It was an adventure visiting old haunts, and exploring the many interesting places Zambia has to offer. We enjoyed spending many weekends at game camps around the country and visiting lodges on the Zambezi.

One of our favourite weekend getaways was a bush camp on the banks of the Lower Zambezi. After an hour's drive from Lusaka we would climb aboard our boat, which was moored on the Kafue River a few kilometres from its confluence with the Zambezi. The seventy-four kilometre trip down river would take just under two hours. The first part of the journey took us past thatched villages, with the usual chickens and goats, and an assortment of pawpaw, banana and mango trees dotted about. Half-naked children, playing in the sand, would stand and wave as we passed by. Further down the river the villages would begin to thin, and as we approached the tsetse fly belt, they would end altogether. These areas were never populated because of the threat of infectious disease spread by the fly to both people and their livestock. Now the game would begin to appear. For the rest of the weekend we would be surrounded by untamed Africa. Here, in this unpeopled valley, we became the visitors in a vast wilderness that belonged to some of Africa's most formidable wild animals. In front of us, startled hippo would charge off sandbars at an alarming speed, splashing water in all directions as they rushed headlong into deeper water. This would immediately prompt us to step up our vigilance as we navigated down the river. Some of the largest crocodiles I have ever seen were among the many sunbathing on sandbars and the river's edge. On either side of the river the bush became wilder and more ancient, with majestic hardwood trees reaching out above the dense undergrowth, their crowns entangled with the blood-red spray of combretum. During August and September we would pause on the river to revel in the colourful display of breeding colonies of carmine bee-eaters, nesting in

tunnels they had dug out of the river's high vertical banks. From time to time we would see impala, or bushbuck, ears twitching, as they timidly ventured down through the tangled vegetation to quench their thirst. Further on we would begin seeing elephant and buffalo on the banks of the river, or on the low flat sandy islands that started to characterise the widening river. Occasionally, lion could be seen sprawled comatose in the filigreed shade of a grove of acacia. Shortly after passing Zimbabwe's Mana Pools to the south we would reach the point where the Chongwe River flows into the Zambezi, marking the western boundary of the Lower Zambezi National Park, our home for the rest of the weekend. In a few minutes we would round a sweeping bend in the river and have our first view of the camp, unobtrusively nestled in a grove of Natal Mahoganies. The rest of the weekend would be spent enjoying the bush; perhaps fishing for the legendary tiger fish, or simply relaxing in the tranquil surroundings of the camp, while listening to the hypnotic sounds of the bush.

It is easy to romanticise about the remote splendour of the lower Zambezi and other wilderness areas, yet they are wild and dangerous places that can never be taken for granted. But it is this that is at the core of their natural charm.

We also enjoyed visiting Kariba, where I would gaze out over the vast lake, dwarfed only by the endless blue sky, and recall, with a sense of unique kinship, how I had once watched this incredible lake grow from its inception. I thought back to that glorious era and marvelled at all that had once been achieved in a relatively short period of time, and the legacies that had endured; and I would see the dozens of Kapenta rigs dotted over the lake, and wonder if the fishermen knew the story of the inspired beginnings of their current livelihoods, or whether they thought the Kapenta had always been there?

The End of Our Stay

On the 12th October 2002, ten years after my return to Zambia, Daphne and I were settled in the aircraft that was about to take us back to our home in Johannesburg. We had said our goodbyes to the many friends we had made. During our stay in Zambia I had come to realise that the Northern Rhodesia I once knew had gone forever. The course Zambia had chosen was very different. I was able to come to terms with this now, and return to South Africa with fond memories of our wonderful stay in Zambia. I also realised that although most things in Zambia had changed beyond recognition, I would always have a unique and lasting bond with the country and its peoples. My return to Zambia had also taught me that change in Africa was necessary and inevitable. Regrettably, as a result of incompetent and corrupt governance, all sub-Saharan countries, with the exception of Botswana, are today far worse-off than they were at independence. It is sobering to think that most of these countries have been independent for almost half a century, and when one considers that Japan toiled almost a century before they caught up with the West, Zambia, like the rest of Africa, has a long road ahead. However, the awareness and understanding we had gained over the past ten years living in Zambia had equipped us well for the changes taking place in South Africa, where the country's first democratic elections had been held during April 1994, with victory going to the African National Congress. It is hoped that history will one day show that South Africa, like Botswana, was an exception.

Fifteen minutes into the flight I looked out of the cabin window at the ageless panorama below me. I peered into the distance searching for a now familiar landmark, one that had become a milestone in my own life. As the endless African bush crept slowly beneath the plane it came into view. Snaking far below like a ribbon of molten lead lying heavily under a hot afternoon sun was the Zambezi, threading its way, through bush that was older than history, on its endless journey to the ocean. Lost in thought, I gazed down at the mighty river and could hear the sounds of the wilderness, breathe in the fresh pure smells of the bush, and sense the enjoyment of a chance sighting of wild animals coming down to drink from the life-giving river. It all had such a timeless quality. I thought back to my first encounter with this legendary river over half a century ago, at the Victoria Falls, when I was barely tall enough to see out of the train window. I knew then that a part of me would always remain in that land north of the Zambezi, as would that land always be a part of me. With a mixed emotion of loss, without regret, I watched it slip away below me until I could see it no more. I had crossed the Zambezi, for the last time.

Giant bruised clouds were building-up in the west. Perhaps the setting sun will set them on fire and the hot, dry day will end beneath a raging sky. I will miss it.



Postscript: I have recently learned that the school swimming pool has been repaired and once again the sparkling blue water is surrounded by manicured green lawns. Hope springs eternal.

Afterword

Do people look back on an era of their lives with such a sense of wonder as I do?

On the Great North Road, in the heart of Africa, was Northern Rhodesia. It was a young country that attracted a breed of hard-working enthusiastic men and women who, for their own reasons, were carving out a future in a bountiful land and doing it with a sense of belonging and a sense of history. The success of Northern Rhodesia was achieved through a people with a hardy frontier spirit and a sense of unity. They knew that their rewards would depend entirely on their efforts, so they worked hard and learned to compete, and it brought out the best in them. It was these fundamental qualities that made most of them survivors, and able to succeed wherever they went.

The diaspora of Northern Rhodesians scattered our small stock far and wide across the world.

I am one of them. We shared a unique, and very special time and place; a strong life that never knew harness. It was a brief, but wonderful era, and while those few who were there still live, will not be forgotten . . . the remarkable Northern Rhodesian experience.

